

January 29, 2023

Just Stop It

OVERVIEW OF TODAY'S STUDY

Our lives have never been fuller and faster. Everywhere you go these days you hear people wishing for a simpler life, a slower pace, and a calendar with more breathing room. It seems like everybody is frazzled and exhausted. The speed of life just continues to accelerate. We have 24/7 access to everything, and we are addicted to our smartphones. So, the big question for this week's lesson is "Does God care?" Does He care about the pace of our lives, and does he have anything to say about it?

GET READY

- In the book *Your ONE Life* read chapters 11-15 in the section called, "It's About Time!"
- How would you describe the pace of your life these days?
- What is it, that when you actually do it, replenishes you?
- When you hear the word "Sabbath", what comes to your mind?

START HERE

You have probably never heard the name Erich Brenn. But in February 1969 he appeared on the Ed Sullivan variety show. He was so popular that he would appear seven more times on the show. His claim to fame was "plate spinning."

Brenn's routine consisted of spinning five glass bowls on sticks that were four feet in length. While spinning the bowls, he would also start spinning 8 dinner plates. The idea was to keep everything spinning without letting anything crash to the ground. Just as a bowl began to wobble and look as if it would drop, Brenn would frantically run over and get it spinning again. It was both intriguing and stressful to watch.

Plate spinning is a great metaphor for how many of us live our lives. We frantically move through our week trying to keep all of the plates in our life from dropping. It can be exhilarating and exhausting at the same time.

These days, a life of balance seems like a "pipe dream", something that just isn't realistic or attainable. Maybe we should adopt the word "rhythm" as our goal. The word rhythm portrays something very different. Rhythm allows for busy seasons and the unexpected. Rhythm acknowledges that life can be intense at times and isn't always orderly.

There is a God-ordained rhythm that will allow us to live and lead from a healthy soul.

That rhythm is...

- Work... then rest
- Produce... then recover
- Go hard... then stop
- Exert energy... then replenish energy
- Empty our bucket... then fill our bucket

Noah benShea writes, “It’s the space between the notes that makes the music.” The same is true of life. We must have space (rhythm) between the notes of busyness to make life work as God designed it. Yet, we live in a world that is unfriendly to a healthy rhythm of life.

Discussion Question

What word or two would you use to describe the pace of your life over the last 3 months?

GO DEEPER

1. God created rhythm

► God hard-wired rhythm into the universe

We live in a universe defined by rhythm. Right now, you are breathing in rhythm. The average person inhales and exhales 15-16 times per minute. Your heart beats with a very predictable rhythm. When you get an EKG done, it is to measure the electrical rhythm of your heart. The tide comes in and goes out with a sense of rhythm. Much of the beauty of music is tied to rhythm. Farmers have a rhythm of planting and growing and harvesting.

In Leviticus 25 God gave the command that even the land was to be given a Sabbath every seven years. Even the physical dirt needed a break. Nothing was made to constantly produce. Everything God ever created needs rest and restoration. That includes you.

► A life of rhythm is a deliberate choice

As you well know, there is always more that can be done and needs to be done. But you can choose a rhythm that declares even though there is still more to do, you can stop to rest and restore.

Jesus regularly took time to live in the spaces between the notes. He often withdrew from the demands of life to be alone and to be with his Father, even in the midst of overwhelming needs.

In Mark 1 Jesus is in Capernaum, and he has an incredibly busy day of ministry. He is the guest preacher in the synagogue that morning. During the service that day he is confronted by demons. Not only does he preach and deal with demons, but he also heals people. After church that day, Jesus goes over to Peter’s house for lunch. While there he heals Peter’s mother-in-law. And before he wraps up his day of ministry, the Bible says they brought everybody in town who was sick and demon-possessed to Jesus’ door. So, before he puts his head on the pillow that night, he heals more people and casts out more demons. That is a full day!

Mark 1:35a (NIV) says, *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house...*

If you just read the first part of the verse you might think to yourself “Well, he is the son of God. So, he probably should get up earlier than everyone else. And he only has three years to launch this revolutionary movement called Christianity. So, he is probably heading off to another full day of preaching and healing.

But the last part of verse 35 says he *went off to a solitary place, where he prayed*. He deliberately chose a rhythm that allowed for space and quiet and time just to be with His Father.

Jesus not only embraced this for himself, but also helped the disciples embrace the idea of rhythm.

We read in Mark 6:31 (NLT) Then Jesus said, *“Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.” He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have time to eat.*

And unlike you, Jesus lived at a time in history when “slow” was built in the fabric of daily life. Think about how much slower life was in those days. When the Bible says in Mark 10:46 that they came to Jericho, it wasn’t a 15-minute car ride. It was an all-day trip spent walking along the dusty road. The lack of technology and transportation forced life to be slower. The lack of cars, planes, e-mail, and smart phones made life less frenetic. We live in a very different world; therefore, we must be even more intentional about a life of rhythm that allows for space and rest.

Discussion Question

What word or two would you use to describe the pace of your life over the last 3 months?

LIVE IT OUT

This week consider having a candid discussion with your family or with a good friend about the rhythm of your life. In your conversation, answer the following question... “What would it take for me to have a healthier rhythm of life?”

2. God gave us a practical strategy for a healthy rhythm

God has actually given us a very practical strategy for helping us live a life of rhythm. And that strategy is called Sabbath.

Discussion Questions

When you hear the word Sabbath what comes to mind? What, if anything, were you taught about Sabbath in your younger years?

Many of us grew up in churches where Sabbath was a non-issue. We might have known it was one of the Ten Commandments, but we just assumed it was one of those Old Testament things that we didn't do anymore. We would have certainly believed that the other 9 Commandments were still valid, but somehow, we were led to believe the one about Sabbath didn't count anymore.

The concept of Sabbath traces its roots all the way back to creation. After God completed the work of creating the universe, he rested on the seventh day. He moved from creation to reflection. He certainly didn't rest because he was worn out from six straight days of creating. He rested to model for us this principle of rhythm.

This seventh day, the day of rest, was so important that God blessed it and declared it holy. Did you know that the first thing the Bible ever declared holy was not an object or a place or a person, but a "time," a twenty-four-hour period called Sabbath.

► The ten commandments and Sabbath

Exodus 20:8-10a (NLT) says, *"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God"*

Notice that God does put value on work. Six days are for working hard and being productive. Unless you are working hard and being fruitful you can't really appreciate the value of God replenishing you through the practice of Sabbath.

The word Sabbath is not a particularly deep or spiritual word. It simply means to "stop" or to "cease." In verse eleven of Exodus 20, the Lord anchors the command of Sabbath in creation. God says, "In my creation of the universe I modeled for you this principle of rhythm. Work, then rest. Produce, then stop."

Exodus 20:11 (NLT) says, *For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.*

Verse eleven says that God blessed the Sabbath day. It is not just holy and sacred, it is blessed. God infused the Sabbath day with blessings.

In Deuteronomy 5 the Ten Commandments are listed again. But this time there is a subtle change when the Lord talks about Sabbath. Deuteronomy 5:15 (NLT) says, *Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the Lord your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the Lord your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.*

So, what does Sabbath keeping have to do with the Israelites being slaves in Egypt? There is actually a very powerful truth in this verse. Instead of anchoring Sabbath in creation, now the Lord anchors it in their sonship. Sabbath is meant to be a distinguishing characteristic for the people of God. One of the things that makes God's people different is they stop. They rest. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt there was no day off, no rest, no vacation, and no down time. But now, as God delivers them and they are under his rulership and not the tyranny of Pharaoh, He wants them to know that rest is part of His divine design.

I think there is an even deeper lesson God was wanting them to learn. Their value to Him was not just in what they could produce. Their value was in relationship. Let that sink in! Even when you are resting on a Sabbath, you are just as valuable to God as when you are working.

► **Jesus and Sabbath**

Some of you are saying, "OK, I get it. The Sabbath made God's Top Ten list. But what does the New Testament teach about Sabbath? In fact, it seems like Jesus is always getting in trouble for violating the Sabbath."

The Jews had gone to great lengths to try and interpret the command of Sabbath. And so, to help God out, they established all kinds of specific laws to define what was "work" and what wasn't "work". So, when you read the stories found in the gospels, Jesus wasn't really violating the spirit of Sabbath but rather all these arbitrary rules the religious leaders had established.

The book of Luke says that it was Jesus' custom to observe the Sabbath and attend the synagogue. And nowhere in the gospels do we ever read that Jesus took the 10 Commandments down to the 9 Commandments.

The primary teaching of Jesus regarding the Sabbath is in Mark 2. Jesus and his disciples were walking through the field and began to pick some heads of grain. The legalistic Pharisees see this and come unglued. "*Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?*" Mark 2:24 (NIV)

What Jesus was doing was only unlawful to the manmade laws established by the Pharisees. Jesus responds by giving them an example from the life of David and then makes this declaration, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" Mark 2:27 (NIV)

Jesus is basically saying, "God gave you the Sabbath as a gift. And you guys have totally hijacked it. You took what God intended as a blessing and you have turned it into a religious burden."

Discussion Question

In what ways is Sabbath a gift to us?

If you are hearing Sabbath as just another obligation you need to add to your schedule, you are missing the very point Jesus made in Mark 2. Sabbath is not a “have to”, it is a “get to.”

Your ONE Life and Sabbath

If you don't have a biblical and theological conviction about the practice of Sabbath, the gravitational pull towards busyness will always win. So, discover for yourself what the Bible teaches about Sabbath.

Having time to rest and restore sounded like a great idea to most of us. But Sabbath is much more than a way to make sure you get the rest you need. Sabbath is one means of God insuring that we get quality time with Him. If you are married, it's just like your relationship with your spouse. In the midst of a busy week, you may have brief conversations, check in by phone during the day, or exchange text messages. It keeps you connected but that is no substitute for unhurried, quality time together.

Psalm 46:10 has only eight words and twenty-four letters, but it stands as an indictment to contemporary life: *“BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.”*

Like Charles Spurgeon said, “Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength. It is wisdom to take an occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less.”

The Jews have a wonderful tradition that symbolizes the practical impact of Sabbath. It is called Havdalah. At the beginning of the Sabbath, you would light a candle, and that candle is a reminder that this day is different than the other six days. This is a day that is not about work and productivity, but it is about rest and relationship (with God and with others). When the 24 hours of Sabbath was completed, the Jews would take the candle and extinguish it in a cup of wine. And then they would pour a little wine from the cup into a saucer. This symbolic act was to portray the truth that if you practice Sabbath well it will spill over into the rest of your week, and you will be a better person the other six days because you practiced Sabbath on the seventh day.

As we learn to slow down (externally and internally), this incredible gift from God allows us to rest, reflect, restore, and replenish. During Sabbath God whispers, “I've got this. I've given you permission to take off the next twenty-four hours.” The core issue is about trust. Sabbath challenges me to ask the question, “Can I really trust God to handle the world... and my world?”

Sabbath keeping also helps us embrace our limits and release control. God is God and we are not. Sabbath is a weekly reminder of our place in the universe. He is the creator, and we are

the creatures. We can't do it all or carry it all. But Sabbath reminds us that we are not as indispensable as we think.

When we practice Sabbath, we find that we are more aware and attentive. Slowing down our rpm's helps us be more attentive to ourselves, to God, and to the people in our life. We notice more. We feel more grateful. Joy comes a little easier. Stress diminishes.

Sabbath can also be huge in helping us with what we talked about in the last lesson... our sense of identity. Sabbath can be instrumental in helping us to be at rest as nothing more and nothing less than being a beloved child of God. On Sabbath, you are not the business owner, the spouse, the parent, the volunteer at Oakwood, or the financial provider for your family. That is a very humbling thought. But slowly, little by little, on Sabbath we can begin to believe it is "enough" to simply be a beloved son or daughter of the Heavenly King.

3. A framework for practicing Sabbath

What does observing Sabbath look like practically in 2023? Even if you are convinced biblically and theologically, you need a game plan. With the pace of life these days, you won't drift into a weekly observance of Sabbath. Unless you put a stake in the ground, the swirl of life will keep pulling you into an unhealthy rhythm.

Discussion Question

What are some possible roadblocks to consistently practicing Sabbath?

But before we get into the nuts and bolts of observing Sabbath, it is important to clarify that Sabbath is not just another term for "day off". For the majority of us, a day off is just a different kind of work. Or worse, it's simply a day to recover and "veg out" because we are so depleted from the rigorous schedule of the week. But usually, it's the day we catch up on all the things we didn't get done during the week. But Sabbath is quite different than a day filled with chores, errands, and home projects.

Here is a framework for thinking about how you might observe Sabbath.

Discussion Question

If you had a day to do anything you wanted, what would an ideal Sabbath look like for you?

1. Prepare

There is some work involved in getting ready to not work. For most of us, our lives are pretty scheduled, and it takes some advance planning to actually carve out time for a Sabbath.

That means that there are some chores and tasks that might need to be done on other days or at different times so that you can truly observe Sabbath.

Maybe one of the most important steps in preparing for Sabbath is to put it on your calendar. More important than having Sabbath on the same day every week is having one day in seven that you observe Sabbath.

It also helps me to call it Sabbath on our calendar. That communicates something very different than just reserving it as a day off.

LIVE IT OUT

This coming week, sit down with a calendar (either paper or electronic) and do an honest evaluation of the last 60 days. Was the pace of your life out of control? Then, take a look at the next 60 days. Is there anything you need to adjust to have a healthier rhythm of life?

2. Stop

What does it look like for you to “stop” from working for 24 hours? What would that mean for your responsibilities? For your phone, email and social media?

If it drains life and energy, try to stay away from it on Sabbath. This implies that you and I need to be self-aware enough and attentive to our souls enough to know what puts life in us and what drains life out of us. For example, if you work indoors most of the time and spend a lot of time in meetings or on your computer, you might love to get outdoors on your Sabbath. Sabbath doesn't necessarily imply inactivity being passive. But it is a day where you rest and stop from “working” and having to be productive.

3. Rest

For some of us, the most spiritual thing we could do is take a nap! Or perhaps get a decent night's sleep. Certainly, the practice of Sabbath involves physical rest, but it is more than just taking a nap. It also involves “being at rest”, having a restful soul.

To take this seriously, you might need to have a discussion with your family about how your family is doing life. If every day is overscheduled and you drop into bed every night exhausted, you might desperately be in need of rest. If your kids are in half a dozen extracurricular activities, and you spend every day frenetically chauffeuring them around, you might desperately be in need of rest. If you work all the time and you're incessantly connected to your smartphone, you might desperately be in need of rest.