

## Rest & Renewal

Genesis 1:31-2:3 on July 3, 2022

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

“Good morning church!” I’ve really missed greeting you that way! It is SO great to be back with our E-Free Church Family! I’ve REALLY missed you guys! There’s nothing like worshipping with your own church family in your own home church! And you know it’s family when you come back home and the first thing you realize is that you’ve been pranked! **Here’s a picture of my office door.** I did read every single post-it and enjoyed the pictures that many of you drew. I selected just a few of the post-its to read. One said, “Hope you had an amazing time away! You were missed. Time to get back to work!” Another one said, “Welcome back PJ! Come feed us hungry sheep!” And yet another said, “Yay! You’re Back! We’re ready to learn what God taught you! We’re ready to grow and serve!” What an encouragement to me as a pastor! Praise the Lord!

My wife Debbie and I had an absolutely fantastic sabbatical over these past 3 months. We spent our first month overseas in Turkey and France. We then drove almost 6,000 miles across the good ole U.S.A. and visited the west coast of Oregon and California.

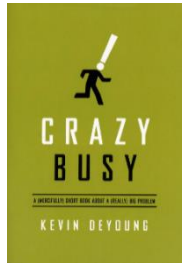
This was the part of sabbatical when we did some “truck tenting.” We spent time with our extended families and with all four of our daughters and our new son-in-law, including a week at a cabin in God’s country, Wisconsin! We also enjoyed a fair amount of staycation, working on projects around our house. We want to be sure to say “thank you” to the church! Debbie and I are immensely grateful to our church for granting us pastors a sabbatical break every 7 years. These past 3 months have been a much-needed, and much appreciated, time of Rest & Renewal – that’s why, for my first Sunday back in the pulpit, I want to talk about the God-honoring importance of setting aside time for physical rest & spiritual renewal. Next Sunday, we’ll begin a new sermon series on the book of Revelation, which was my study project over sabbatical. During one of those weeks in Turkey we visited the cities where the 7 Churches from the book of Revelation were located. I’ll be sharing a lot more about that in the weeks to come.

For today, let’s focus on Rest & Renewal. Specifically physical rest and spiritual renewal. None of us operates well in a continual state of physical exhaustion and spiritual depletion. If we allow ourselves to remain in this kind of a state for too long, then we’re foolishly ignoring God’s good plan for rest. And, frankly, nobody likes a grump! This constant depletion often means that our friends and family get the leftovers. We run on all cylinders 7 days straight, and by the time we get done with all of our work, we don’t have anything left to give. At times we may feel a little guilty



about that, but we may also feel a bit trapped by all of the things we have to do... Something has got to change!

Back in my Youth Pastor days, I was given the book, “Crazy Busy,” by Kevin DeYoung. I started reading it, but... I never finished it. Can you guess why? ...Yeah, I was just too busy! I preached on this topic about five years ago.<sup>1</sup> Some of you may remember me referring to this very book. In Kevin’s book, he lists 3 Dangers of Busyness:<sup>2</sup>



**1. Busyness can ruin our joy.** “When our lives are frantic and frenzied, we are more prone to anxiety, resentment, impatience, and irritability.”

**2. Busyness can rob our hearts.** That’s why Christian conferences and summer camps are SO good for our spiritual growth. “[Y]ou have to clear your schedule... You set aside your normal insanity for [dedicated time] to think, pray, and worship.” For quiet reflection and time alone with God.

**3. Busyness can cover up the rot in our souls.** “The greatest danger with busyness is that there may be greater dangers you never have time to consider. Busyness does not [necessarily] mean you are a faithful or fruitful Christian. It really only [guarantees] one thing: you are busy!” So, how about you: Has your busy schedule been ruining your joy, robbing your heart, or rotting your soul? If it has, then it’s a good thing that you weren’t too busy for church today! Today’s sermon is going to add one more thing to your busy schedule. Write this on your planner: “Rest & Renewal!” Take a break! Stop ALL your physical work for a little while, and make time for spiritual renewal.

**1. Our Creator designed consistent rest & renewal for His creation.** One example of this is found in Exodus 20:9-10 when the Nation of Israel was told, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.” There is a divine provision here by our Creator for the Nation of Israel. It was meant for the good of the people who worked, but also even for the animals who worked. Physical bodies need physical rest. And so do our minds and emotions. We need to sit still for a while each and EVERY week; we need to pause from our labors. This design has a particular math formula to it: 1 in 7.<sup>3</sup> It’s intended to be consistent. So not work 60 days straight and then take a week of vacation. Every 7 days should include at least one day of rest, within those 7 days.<sup>4</sup>

Exodus 16 records God’s remarkable provision of Manna and Quail. Each evening they had meat and each morning they had bread; it was lying right there on the ground. They just had to go out and pick it up, then take it home and prepare it... Except for on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, the Sabbath. God provided a double portion on the 6<sup>th</sup> day and made sure

<sup>1</sup> The sermon was titled “Rest Matters” on July 2, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2013, pp. 26-32.

<sup>3</sup> Beyond this design of 1 in 7, God also built in holidays/feasts that required rest, eating, and NOT working. Much of this tied into times for worship and prayer, but they also, always included rest.

<sup>4</sup> Not to mention the gift of darkness at night so that we can build in a sleep cycle every 24 hours.

that it didn't spoil overnight, so that there would be enough food leftover for them on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. In other words, God provided enough resources for them to be able to take a day off each week. A modern-day application of this is that we need to use whatever we can earn in 6 days, to provide for our needs over 7 days. This way we'll always have 1 day each week when we don't need to work. Put another way, living within our means should include allowing ourselves at least one day off every week.

Now, interestingly enough, Exodus 16:4 tells us that God provided a double food portion on the 6<sup>th</sup> day to *test* them and to see if they would follow His instructions. In Exodus 16:27-30 we learn that "Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out." So the people rested on the seventh day." Keep in mind, this all happened several chapters BEFORE the Sabbath officially became 1 of the 10 commandments. (We'll come back to this...) What's intriguing here is that they weren't told to spend the whole Sabbath day at the tabernacle. They were told to rest! God says, "Bear in mind that the LORD has GIVEN you the Sabbath." God wanted His people to remember that HE was the One who had given them rest; rest is one of God's good gifts for His people. Rest is directly connected to trust; resting is a way of trusting God. We receive what He has provided, and then we rest. We choose to be content with whatever He provided.

This brings to mind Matthew 6:26, 31-33, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ...So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well...." Now, some of us may be a little skeptical about this, "So, we're just supposed to wait around and trust God to dump food on us, out of thin air like a bird? That sounds like a good strategy for going hungry to me!" Well, no, not exactly. God has given us 6 days to work, and we should work hard over those 6 days.<sup>5</sup> But, once we've done what we can to make a living, God calls us to trust Him rather than worrying, rather than constantly running after more and more, all 7 days of the week. It can be difficult to trust God when things get tight financially. But God calls us to rest in His faithful provision. So let's trust God's DESIGN for consistent rest & renewal, and then let's wisely take off at least one day of our week.

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<sup>5</sup> I used to have a button that said, "Hard work never hurt anyone... but WHY take chances!?"

Not only is rest & renewal God's DESIGN, it's also important for us to recognize that... **2. Our Creator modeled rest & renewal from the very beginning.** Even as God was creating animals/men/women, God knew that we would need regular periods of rest & renewal. So, He set us an example. Genesis 2:2-3 says, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." Why would God need to rest from His work? Was God tired? I don't think so. Isaiah 40:28 declares, "...Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary...." Our Creator was MODELING rest for us. My *NIV Study Bible* note mentions that the Hebrew verb "rested" in Genesis 2:2 is the origin of the word "Sabbath."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, while eventually the Sabbath became something that was mandated as part of the covenant between God and the Nation of Israel, we find it modeled at the beginning of creation for all of humankind. In other words, we find evidence in Genesis that rest is a creation principle, not just a Jewish principle (or Hebrew principle). (I mentioned earlier that we would come back to this.) The significance that God gives to rest & renewal, is something that predates the 10 commandments and the Nation of Israel.

Just to be clear, I'm not suggesting that the Bible intends for modern-day Christ-followers to practice Old Testament Law by observing a strict Sabbath every Saturday. Colossians 2:16-17 seems pretty clear, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration OR a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."<sup>7</sup> In other words, we're not obligated to observe Saturdays in particular. However, it's still wise for us to recognize that God modeled rest from the beginning. All of God's commandments were designed for humankind's benefit and blessing.<sup>8</sup> With this benefit and blessing in mind, let's take a look at Mark 2:23-27, "One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar<sup>9</sup> the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." The Pharisees were very upset about the disciples "harvesting" on the Sabbath. But, they were missing the point. They were so caught up in the legalism of judging the behavior of others, that they were missing this incredible gift from God. The Sabbath was never meant to be a burden to people, where we stress out about all of the minutia of what

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, Exodus 20:11 quotes the first half of Genesis 2:3 but replaces the word "seventh" with "Sabbath." See *NIV Study Bible 2011*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 12 footnote on Genesis 2:3.

<sup>7</sup> See also Hebrews 3:7-4:13.

<sup>8</sup> Consider Deuteronomy 6:24, 10:12-13, Romans 15:4, and 1 John 5:3.

<sup>9</sup> "uh BIGH uh thahr" = W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 16.

counts as work and what doesn't. It was meant to be a day for lifting off the burdens of our work, a day of physical rest and recovery from the labors of life. And, it also provided for spiritual renewal, with opportunity for extended times of worshipping God and fellowshiping with other believers.<sup>10</sup>

With all of the above being said, let's be careful this morning not to get caught up in any divisive arguments over the Sabbath. Some believers still feel a strong, personal conviction about not working on Saturdays, and it's important that we show mutual respect for that conviction. Romans 14:5 gives this helpful perspective, "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind." So, there may be some who feel strongly that we should continue to practice the Sabbath every Saturday. There may be others who feel the Sabbath was moved to Sundays due to the resurrection of Christ. Still others may consider every day alike. If you're interested in studying the Sabbath issue in more depth, I'd urge you to pick up a copy of an article called "The Sabbath Question," by Pastor Emeritus Fred Martin. There are paper copies available out on the Welcome Table, and there's also a link on our website under "Watch and Read."<sup>11</sup> Frankly, the Sabbath question is not our focus today. Regardless of where each of us lands on this issue, the main point is the God-honoring importance of setting aside time for physical rest & spiritual renewal.

Consistent physical rest & spiritual renewal are vital requirements for becoming more deeply devoted followers of Jesus!<sup>12</sup> This is true for all of the reasons we've already talked about, but also because of Jesus' example. Mark 1 tells us about a crazy busy day in Jesus' life.<sup>13</sup> It's a Saturday morning that seems to begin in a fairly normal way. Jesus heads to the synagogue and begins to teach. He then casts a demon out of a man. After leaving the synagogue, he goes to Simon's house where he heals his mother-in-law of a fever. After sunset, this same day, Mark 1:32-34 says, "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons..." This was NOT a very restful time in Jesus' life. But what I want us to notice is what happens the next morning. Mark 1:35-37 tells us that, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus, who was fully human, recognized His need for time alone with God, for spiritual renewal and refreshment. He needed to find time to get away from all the

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<sup>10</sup> Consider Hebrews 10:24-25

<sup>11</sup> <https://efcbemidji.org/article/the-sabbath-question/>

<sup>12</sup> As one brother in Christ put it, "For God's Sake, Rest!" Jim Anderson is the author of the book with this title. Jim, "the Rest Doctor, and his wife Lois conduct Sabbath-rest retreats for pastoral couples and other ministry leaders. He serves as the Director of Pastoral Care with the North Central District of the Evangelical Free Church. Before returning to Minnesota he served as a senior pastor for twenty-five years at three churches. He holds Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School." (<https://www.amazon.com/Gods-Sake-Rest-James-Anderson/dp/193681207X>)

<sup>13</sup> Specifically verses 21-37.



pressures of His earthly work. Every Christ-follower needs to protect time for solitary spiritual renewal. In other words, spiritual renewal is just as important as physical renewal. There's a wonderful passage in Matthew 11:28-29 where Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." So I urge each and every one of us today, spend time with the LORD this week and find His rest for your soul.<sup>14</sup>

Let me close with 3 suggestions for REST & RENEWAL:

**1. Let others rest.** If you know that it's someone's day off, don't interrupt their rest with some work item that can wait. If you own or manage a business, make sure that you allow your employees ample opportunity to get adequate rest. Schedule life in such a way that it supports other people's need for rest.

**2. Schedule rest and renewal during your vacation.** Now, this may sound ridiculous at first, but many of you already know what I'm getting at. If you're anything like me, you pack your vacation so full of home projects or exhausting travel schedules, that you just can't wait to get back to work, where things aren't quite so hectic! On our days off, or during our vacation time, we often fail to set aside time to simply be ...and to simply be still. To sit and think and smell the roses. We often come back from vacation more exhausted than when we left!

**3. Embrace a weekly sabbath lifestyle.** Choose a consistent 24-hour period when you don't work, and then design those 24 hours to be restful and renewing: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Refill your tanks. Refresh your soul. Our bodies and souls need rest and renewal! So, do it!

Do it for your own physical health and spiritual maturity!

Do it for the sake of the people around you!

Do it for God's glory!

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<sup>14</sup> Bemidji is hands down one of the most amazing places to be on the entire planet... in the month of July! We are SO amazingly blessed to be in this little corner of paradise. So let's get out in God's amazing creation and truly reconnect with our Creator. See Bemidji featured here: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/the-15-best-small-towns-to-visit-in-2022-180980129/>