

4. Rest and Sabbath

I sometimes fantasize about retirement. I don't know if you do the same. Actually, I know plenty of us listening today are retired, so you can school me after I say what I'm about to say next.

But sometimes I fantasize about retirement because I imagine what it would be like to slow down. To step off the crazy roundabout that is life in 2020.

Actually, maybe not 2020. This year is something different again. But I'm thinking about the couple of years preceding this one.

Because I don't know about you, but I've noticed that the world seems to be getting busier, and years go by faster, and we never seem to disconnect. Have you noticed that, or is it just me?

And so I've fantasized about retirement. Jo and I have talked about a ranch in Montana, with nothing but big sky and time. The ranchers listening today are laughing at me, because there is never time to slow down when you have a big property. I don't even have a lawn to mow any more, and there is always more gardening to do. But let me have my fantasy!

So I imagine retirement, when I finally have time to do whatever I want to do. Now I feel like I can hear the retirees laughing at me from the other side of the screen. Because there is still the house maintenance, and the taxes, and the grand-kids, and appointments...

Does life ever slow down?

Whether you've got young kids, or grown-up kids, or no kids, a big house, a small house, pets, no pets – every day keeps rolling on just like the day before. 24 hours where the sun comes up, the sun goes down and life keeps happening. That's the way of the world.

And every life stage has the potential to be really busy. And I suspect we all look over the horizon and imagine that the next stage, that's when it will get easier. Perhaps some of you a bit further down the road have found that. But probably not for many of us...

So what do we do with our busy-ness?

Personally 'busy-ness' is something I've struggled with. I've always had busy jobs. Big jobs. And then you add being a husband, being a member of a church, playing sports, having kids and taking them to sports, and friends and... Well, you put all that together and you end up very busy!

One author I read says that we're living in the middle of a busyness epidemic.

As new technology has connected us to emails on our phones, work follows us home from the office and into the living room. Sometimes into the bedroom, if you do work in bed. During the COVID lockdowns this year, many of us have brought work into our dining rooms, and we've brought school to the kitchen table. Home is no longer separated from work. It's just one big connected mess...

And that's the thing – in 2020 we *are* constantly connected – connected to the phone, to email, to the internet, to entertainment, to distraction. We're constantly connected yet in some ways more disconnected than ever before.

We were at a restaurant recently and saw a family all sitting round the table playing on their devices and not talking to one another. Worse, the teenage kid was on an iPhone but with earphones in so that he absolutely couldn't be interrupted by something as dull as his parents talking to him...

We looked on them with pity, but I wonder if people have looked over at us at different times and had the same thoughts...

Author Kevin DeYoung says:

How many of us feel this strange mix of busyness and lifelessness? We are always engaged with our thumbs, but rarely engaged with our thoughts. We keep downloading information, but rarely get down into the depths of our hearts.

We are in the midst of a busyness epidemic. An epidemic that can overtake us if we're not careful to pay attention and to push it back.

Because as we open the Bible today, we're going to see that were ***made for more than busyness***. Made for patterns that teach us to slow down. Made for rest.

So for the next 15, 16 minutes, why don't you switch off the distractions. Plant yourself here in the room. If you're watching on your phone, consider casting the video up to the TV, because we watch for almost double the duration when we're watching on TV. But the idea is this – plant yourself here in the room. Make yourself available to God, and to what he wants to teach us. Get your heart ready to hear him speak.

Because God will speak to us today. He is going to speak into the distraction, into the busyness, into the chaos. He is going to speak a word of peace. A word of calm. A word of rest...

So if you need a moment, hit pause on the video. But get your heart ready. Get yourself comfortable. And let's give these next 15 minutes to God, and let's see what he can do with them.

Are you ready? Let's pray to get ourselves in the right frame of mind.

Our heavenly Father, we are surrounded by so many distractions. But we are here now, and we long to be in your presence, to hear you speak. Will speak to us now, breathing the breath of life into us, just like you did on the 6th day. Bring us back to you, to hear you, and to be re-made in the image that you made us for. Give us rest today as we hear your word. Amen.

This Fall we've been digging into the early chapters of Genesis, uncovering the foundations of who we are and what God has made us for.

We began with the majestic picture of God creating everything out of nothing – speaking creation into being by his words, forming and filling the universe with everything we see. The sun, the moon, the stars, the skies, the birds of the air, the oceans and everything in them, and every animal that walks upon the earth. And God said it was good.

And then after he had created everything else, God made mankind in his own image: male and female he made them, made them to rule over everything in creation; and made them for relationship, with the creator, and with one another.

With this final piece of creation in place, God looked over everything that he had made and it was **very** good. And the sixth day ended just as the first 5 had – *there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.*

The seventh day is different.

^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ 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.

By the seventh day, there is no more creating to be done. God had finished that work. And so on the seventh day he rested from all his work of creating.

I said before that I don't have a lawn to mow anymore. In almost all our previous houses, I've had lawn to mow, sometimes really big lawns to mow. But there is something satisfying about mowing. You look out over the lawn and you know it's time to mow again. I've never owned a new mower, only hand-me-downs or mowers from the side of the road. Which means that I always needed to do something to coax the machine to life – a spark plug clean if I was lucky, or if things were worse off, a carburetor rebuild and more... But once the mower is going, and once you start making lines in the long grass, there isn't much more satisfying in life. And when you're finished, just for a bit, everything looks so good. And you can just sit and enjoy it.

I feel like that was God on the 7th day. He looks back over everything he's made, he smiles, and says to himself – that's just right. It's very good. Let's just take a moment to enjoy it.

You see, on the 7th day God rested from the work of creating he had done. He didn't stop because he was tired. The omnipotent, all-powerful God doesn't get worn out. He doesn't need a lie down. He stops because it is good to stop and enjoy the fruit of your labour.

And that's the first big idea for our sermon today – **Sabbath Means Stopping.**

1. Sabbath Means Stopping

The word for 'resting from' in the original language is where we get the word 'sabbath' from. Literally God 'sabbathed' from his work of creating. That is, he ceased. He stopped.

We find ourselves in a bit of tension here, because there is something about work that is built into creation. Those first 6 days were all about God 'working', as he flung stars into space and filled the void. God was at work.

And when God created us in his image, he also made us creative like him. God created us as people who like to work, we like to **do**, we like to achieve. That is in our God-given nature.

And I think that's why God needed to teach us to stop.

On the ranch, there is always more work to be done. In the garden, there is always more work to be done. In the office, there is always more work to be done. In the home, always something else we need to clean, or wash, or pick up. Work is endless.

But when God rested from his work on the 7th day, he was teaching us something about work and rest. He was teaching us that it's ok to stop. For an hour. For a day. It's OK to stop. In fact, stopping work is good for us. It stops us from getting caught up in the busyness that is all-consuming. It stops us from getting caught up in the idea that work is everything, and that if we stop, everything will fall apart.

Because on that 7th day, God stopped creating, but he was still at work sustaining the universe – like Jesus said (in John 5:17)

“My Father is always at his work to this very day...”

God never stops making the world turn. God never stops sustaining the universe. God never stops drawing history towards the day when Jesus returns and everything is put under his feet. God never stops working at that plan. It is certain. Unshakeable. Unstoppable.

And so whatever we are working at – whether it's the kingdoms of earth, or even working for the kingdom of heaven – even then we can pause from our work regularly because God continues the work even while we rest.

It's just a month or 6 weeks since I preached on Psalm 127, all about how our work fits into God's plans. It's easy to go back and check that out – just go to the sermons tab on our website, yountvillechurch.org, and you can find the Psalms series linked there.

But coming back to Genesis 2, we learn here that it is OK to cease from our working. God gives you permission. God has built into creation the pattern of working then resting from work, just like he has built night and day so that we rest regularly.

I know as an audience we are at lots of different life stages, some working, some at home with kids, some just retired, some retired for many years. It's important to consider what sabbath looks like for you, what it looks like to cease from the busyness so that you can stop and enjoy the fruits of your labours.

So that's our first big idea – Sabbath Means Stopping.

Our second big idea is that **Sabbath Means Holiness**.

2. Sabbath Means Holiness

Most of us think of the Sabbath in the context of keeping a particular day set aside for the Lord. I know back in Australia, until 40 years ago there was never any Sunday trading, nothing was open except for churches. The Sabbath was kept holy.

All that has changed now. Sunday is one of the biggest days for shopping in Australia, and lots of kids' sport is played on Sundays – especially the representative teams, which is such an honour to be invited to, and that's why we can't make it to church for the next 10 weeks, just while the rep season is on. Unless she makes the development squad... You get the picture.

Sunday is now just a day like any other.

But if we recapture the vision of Genesis 2, we see that the Sabbath is not just about rest, but holiness. We are created for rest – for rest in the presence of God, enjoying the goodness of creation with the one who created us. That is the picture of sabbath in Genesis 2

And so how do we recreate that sabbath experience?

It has to be twofold – not just resting from work, but enjoying the blessing of the presence of God as we set ourselves apart in his service.

As Abraham Herschel put it, we need to *“turn from the world of creation, to the creation of the world.”* We need to stop creating, and turn to the creator.

Because work can easily become an idol for us, that we set on a throne above God. “This job is what makes me who I am,” we might think. “It’s what defines me. This work is what feeds me. This job is what saves me... If I don’t keep working, what will become of me?”

I think that’s one of the questions we ask in retirement. To what degree am I my work? Or can I give that part of myself over to the Lord, and enter a new period of rest and blessing where I find myself again in him? Where I learn to trust him for my daily bread, indeed for every breath that he chooses to give me. Where I learn to serve him in new ways with my new availability...

For those of us who are still in the working phase of life, how do we learn that lesson now? I’d love to think there are godly and wise older men and women in our church who can help us explore the idea, and I’m looking forward to those conversations. Because like we said earlier, we don’t want to keep looking over the horizon and imagining, I’ll have time for sabbath when I get to the next life stage. We need to establish sabbath rhythms now.

And by the way, I’m not talking about rigid, legalistic sabbath days. We can see from the Old Testament how the heart of sabbath got lost in legalism. That’s clear by the time Jesus arrived and he butted heads with the religious leaders over what he should and shouldn’t do on the sabbath. Jesus made it clear that the sabbath was about blessing, and wholeness, and true rest from religious works. It’s not about us making ourselves holy because of what we do, but remembering that God alone makes us holy.

As God said in Exodus 31:13

‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.

When we rest in God, when we stop and make time for him, when we gather with God’s people, we remind ourselves that God is more important than everything else in my life. More important than my Sunday sleep-in. More important than brunch with my relatives. More important than a kid’s birthday party, or rep soccer. The sabbath teaches us that we are made for God. Made for rest with him. And rest with his people.

I know this COVID season has messed up our regular rhythms of being together, but I want us to get back to that pattern of setting aside a regular time to be with God and his people. To find that hour in his presence, in the gathering of his people. We need to do that virtually right now, but it doesn’t make it any less real. We **are** the people of God. We **are** Yountville Community Church. We **are** worshipping this

morning as we gather in our living rooms and on our couches and with our family around us. Even if you're on your own, you are not alone. We're with you. And we're praying for you. Because we are made for this – made for God, and made for this holy gathering, made for this moment. We are right where God wants us, in this holy moment.

And that leads me into my final idea, which is that the Sabbath Means True Rest.

2. Sabbath Means True Rest

One of the distinctives of Genesis 2 is the description of the seventh day, which has no evening and no morning. It's a symbolic way of saying that the seventh day has no end – and that the goal of creation is rest.

And we'll explore next week how sin gets in the way of our enjoyment of that blessing, how it messes up both our work and our rest.

But for God's OT people, the Promised Land was held out as a place where they would experience rest from their enemies, and the blessing and presence of God. And that happened, kind of, but sin remained in God's people, just like the Canaanites remained in the land. They experienced a sort-of-Sabbath rest, but it wasn't perfect. Their 'rest' pointed forward to an even greater sabbath rest – an eternal one – where all obstacles to rest are overcome.

And that's where we meet Jesus in the NT. In Mark's gospel, one of Jesus' first acts was to heal a man on the sabbath – a guy with a shriveled hand. And the religious leaders chided Jesus for doing 'work' on the sabbath.

But what they couldn't see was Jesus giving a foretaste of the heavenly rest that he will one day bring to all of us.

Because as Jesus went about healing and casting out demons, he was giving us a window into the Sabbath rest that his death and resurrection would finally make possible. Rest from sin and its effects, rest from death and sorrow. Rest from poverty and injustice. Perfect and eternal rest enjoyed in the heavenly Promised Land, the new Garden of Eden. The New Jerusalem.

PAUSE

I don't know about you, but I'm weary from the constant changes that 2020 has thrown at us. I'm weary from thinking and rethinking my work. I'm weary from organizing and reorganizing, planning and replanning. I'm not sure what the next 3 months will bring. But I know I can rest easy in Jesus. I can leave my desk at the end of the week and trust that the Lord of the Sabbath is at work, healing lives and bringing blessing and wholeness and forgiveness here in the Napa Valley and beyond. He's doing that work in my life, and if you have your faith in Jesus, he's doing that work in your life also. Re-making and recreating us in his likeness, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is powerfully at work in us today and eternally.

The Sabbath means true rest.

There's so much more we could say, but we're out of time. You could join us at Bible study this week to dig deeper and engage with others about how we find sabbath.

But for now, why don't we come to the Lord of the Sabbath in prayer?

Jesus said:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. (Matthew 11:28-29)

Further Prayers – Charlotte Bidwell, Kids' Minister

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

Lord, thank you for teaching us from your word about sabbath rest. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see and minds that understand what your word is teaching us by your Spirit. Help us to reorientate our hearts to you, to obey you and follow you because you are our Lord.

Thank you, Father, for our Prayer Meeting on Tuesday and Friday. As brothers and sisters in Christ we are so thankful for the opportunity to gather online to read your word, to encourage each other in our faith and to pray for each other and for our community to know Christ as Lord.

We give you thanks that our local wildfires are being contained more and more day by day. We pray for those returning to their homes for rest and peace, for the Fire Fighters as they continue their work and pray that at this time in confusion and worry that you would turn people's hearts to you, that they may know you as Lord.

We pray for our upcoming election, trusting you to do your sovereign will. Help us to represent you, Lord, in the way we speak about the candidates, the policies and the process. Give us grace, patience and wisdom as we take our part in the democratic process.

We pray, Father, for our leaders with regard to the virus. We pray for those leaders making decisions at the local, state and federal level and that they would seek your wisdom. We pray for the President, and members of staff at this time for your healing.

We present all these things to you, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen