

## Creating Rhythms of Pause

Jesus' source of spiritual vitality was deep communion with God the Father and following God's will in all of life. This vitality can be shared by disciples of Jesus as they center themselves in him, and feed desires and habits or practices of spiritual formation. The Practice of Pause is a weekly rhythm that God invites us into.

### *Opening Reflections*

Please spend 5 minutes in silence with Deuteronomy 5:12-15 below, writing down your observations, insights and questions. The command to keep a Sabbath includes some of the same elements as the practice of Pause, so we start with this foundational passage.

Why does God command us to keep the Sabbath? Why did God rest on the seventh day? What kind of rest does God offer us? When was the last time you experienced deep, rejuvenating rest?

#### *Deuteronomy 5:12-13*

*“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. **13** Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **14** 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 ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. **15** Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”*

### *The Rest of God*

Hebrews 4:1-10 draws a striking connection between observing Sabbath and the ultimate rest that God provides through the gospel. Verses 9-10 say, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.” It is out of the salvation we receive through Christ that we are able to “rest” from the “work” of trying to justify ourselves and earn salvation by our own effort. By appropriating this reality we are able to experience true inner rest that flows out of resting in the finished work of Christ.

Without embracing the finished work of Christ as the basis of our spiritual rest, our lives will be characterized by the need to constantly work and achieve to prove to ourselves and others that we are significant. Without understanding our security in the gospel, we are drawn to the empty promises of security offered by our careers and our credentials. Even when we “rest” (i.e. take a break), we cannot *really* rest. But Christ achieved for us ultimate status as children of God on the basis of his grace, and no amount of work that we accomplish for the rest of our lives will ever add to what Christ has already accomplished.

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30, “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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Christ’s easy yoke of grace melts away our restless striving and offers us true and lasting inner rest. This is the kind of rest that cannot be achieved by simply taking a vacation or getting away, for we cannot escape our own hearts.

In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell is a devoted Christian who represented England in the 1924 Olympics. He was so committed to observing the Sabbath on Sunday that he withdrew from the 100-meter race because the qualifying heats fell on a Sunday. Liddell rested in God and did not let his life be dictated by the pursuit of accolades. In contrast, Harold Abrahams competed in the same Olympics and desperately wanted to win a gold medal. Abrahams did not share Liddell’s faith and said, “I’m forever in pursuit and I don’t even know what I am chasing... I have ten lonely seconds to justify my existence.”

In what ways are you similar to Harold Abrahams in trying to “justify your existence”? Where have you been finding your sense of identity and security? How do your rhythms of work and Pause reflect your understanding of the gospel?

### *Inner Rest*

“We long for rest: rest not only for our bodies but for our minds and souls as well. Woven into the very fabric of our beings is a need for regular rest and recovery. God calls us to honor his design for us by living in sync with the gift of Sabbath rest.”

— Ken Shigematsu

Tim Keller elaborates on the meaning of the Sabbath in three helpful ways in order to help us find the internal rest and peace that flows out of a deeper understanding and practice of Pause.

- 1) *It is an act of liberation.* In establishing the Sabbath day, God wanted to remind the Israelites that they were no longer slaves (since slaves could not take days off). This has particular relevance for us today. In practicing Pause, we refuse to be enslaved by our culture’s expectations, our family’s desires, our company’s demands, our fears and insecurities, and our desire to prove ourselves. We don’t have to feel guilty about resting because in our rest we are reminding ourselves of our freedom in Christ and his finished work on the cross.
- 2) *It is an act of trust.* In establishing the Sabbath, God reminds us that he is working and is in control of our lives. In practicing Pause, we can also repent of our desire to be God; when we don’t rest, we are acting “godlike”. The world doesn’t slow down when we rest, and God reminds us that he doesn’t need our contributions in order to keep it moving.

We’re also reminded in our rest that God provides for us and frees us from anxious toil. In Matthew 6, Jesus exhorts us not to worry about food by giving the example of the

birds of the air that do not sow, reap, or store and yet are fed. He also tells of the flowers of the field that do not labor or spin and yet are clothed in unmatched splendor. If he cares and provides for them, how much more won't he provide for our needs?

"We work from a place of rest, rather than desperately needing rest from our work. We are human beings, not human doings."

— Ken Shigematsu

- 3) *It is a declaration of satisfaction.* In Genesis 2:1-3, God rested from his work after it was finished. This sense of completion seems so foreign to us in a culture where the work "never seems to be done". Yet it is important to consider the finished work of Christ on our behalf and remember that we don't have to accomplish anything in life to justify ourselves. At the same time, it is a helpful practice to look back on our work and see what we have been able to finish with God's help because it helps take our minds off of the work that lies ahead of us. The results are a deep contentment and gratitude for the things we've been able to accomplish.

On a scale of 1-7, what is the current condition of the inner rest in your life? Why is it difficult for you to experience rest? In what specific areas do you find it difficult to experience rest?

## *Outer Rest*

How people incorporate Pause practices and rhythms into their schedules will vary depending on life stage, vocation, temperament, and other factors. However, there are a number of general principles and guidelines to consider in the "outer" layer of rest: what Pause looks like week to week.

*How much time should be spent in Pause?* If possible, taking one day a week and a few other times a week for Pause practices is optimal. We recommend you begin with at least a three hour block, with no distractions. Scheduling monthly, quarterly, and yearly rhythms for Pause are also helpful.

### *Pause practices:*

- *Inactivity:* Time that is unplanned, unstructured, and often requires little energy. It requires ceasing from any scheduled activities that can often fill up Pause time.
- *Avocational:* Activities that you do for pleasure but that require time and energy. They include hobbies or other interests that others often do "for a living" (e.g. playing an instrument, taking a class). When choosing from these, choose activities that revive rather than drain energy.

- *Contemplative:* Activities that more directly engage our hearts including prayer, Scripture, reflection and worship. These activities allow us to develop the principles of inner rest above and also slow down our regular pace of life.
- *Recreational:* Activities that involve our bodies and are generally considered “fun” (e.g. sports, hiking). They can often be time, energy and cost intensive, so we should choose wisely and be intentional about selecting activities that are really restful.
- *Aesthetic:* Activities that involve enjoying God’s beauty in creation, whether in nature or the arts (e.g. music, drama, visual arts). Exposing ourselves to beauty can often rejuvenate us.

*Are you introverted or extroverted?* How our energy is depleted and restored in relation to others will have a bearing on how we rest. We should be slow to imitate other people’s rhythms without first understanding differences in how we are energized.

*Are you in an extremely busy season of life?* Some jobs require a few years of long hours that will make it difficult to establish a regular Pause rhythm. In these cases, it will be critical to find accountability and other rhythms of spiritual habits that can help keep us grounded. It is also important to internalize the “inner rest” principles above so that we are able to find some measure of rest even as we work. Eventually if busy seasons in our work begin to become constant, we may need to limit our career trajectory in order to be faithful. The Old Testament practice of “gleaning” is relevant. In gleaning, field owners were not allowed to harvest to the edges of their fields so that there would be grain available for others. Similarly, it is wise counsel to avoid working to the “edges of our fields” and maximizing our career trajectory at all costs.

On a scale of 1-7, how would you rate the outer rest in your life? What are some specific ways you can incorporate more or different types of outer rest into your weekly and monthly rhythms?

## *Corporate Worship and Sacraments*

Corporate worship is a part of the rhythm of Pause and is critical to our spiritual vitality and formation. During corporate worship, we are reminded of our identity as beloved children of God and receive the means of grace that counter the “secular liturgies” that (de)form us, often subconsciously. As we participate in the liturgy, confess our sins, listen to the preached Word, sing hymns, partake in the sacraments, and respond to the character of God, he works on our hearts and shapes us through each of these conduits of grace. God is the primary actor and agent of change, not us. According to Jamie Smith, the “church’s worship is a uniquely intense site of the Spirit’s transformative presence.” The Spirit works in and through the practices of corporate worship where he “meets, nourishes, transforms, and empowers” us.

### *Individual Reflection Questions*

How is Pause an expression of God's love for us?

What are some things that you can eliminate or reduce from your schedule to make room for a day of Pause and corporate worship? How can you say no to good things so you can say yes to great things?

### *Group Discussion*

What are some practical strategies to incorporate Pause that you can share with others?

How has your posture and attitude toward Pause changed?

### *Further Resources*

*Desiring the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith

*Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Marva Dawn