**The Gift of Rest**

Genesis 1:1-5; 2:1-3

Today we conclude a four part mini-series on work. Here is the summary of what we have learned so far:

**The Truth About Work:**

1. Work is a gift not a curse
2. Work is a struggle, being redeemed
3. Work is a calling to serve

First we saw from Genesis one that **work is a gift**. It was part of the original creation and will be part of our eternal experience. Work was not a result of the fall, though it was affected by the fall. Work is a gift of God to us and through us as we serve others. But, number two, **work is a struggle**. There are thorns and thistles both literally and metaphorically. ***Yet work is being redeemed by the gospel***. Christians should approach work differently from non-Christians because we work for God’s glory, not our own and we work to serve others, not ourselves. And that is the third lesson - **work is a calling**, not a career. We discern calling in the convergence of our gifts, passions and opportunity to serve others.

Please join me again in Genesis one.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth… God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” Genesis 1:1,5

One of the very first things we learn about God is that **He works**. God is the original Creator. Isn’t it interesting that ***the Son of God came to the world as a CARPENTER***? For many years - at least 15, maybe 20 years Jesus was a simple carpenter like his Father, glorifying God by making excellent tables, chairs and other items to serve his neighbors in a small town in northern Israel. This humble, basic, blue collar work was fully pleasing to God. Jesus did this work to fulfill all righteousness - providing for his widowed Mother and his brothers and sisters, while serving the community.

Work is a good gift from God and when we work, as Jesus did, ***we reflect the glory of God*** and His love. Through our work, God blesses and serves all the people on earth. Work matters. But notice, right there in Genesis 1:5 - “there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”

Built into the Creation account is the beginning of **the rhythm of life we all know**. The sun rises and we get up. The sun sets and we go to bed. (Except you vampires who work at night.) All of life is ***a pattern of working and resting***. The cycle repeats every day, every week, every month and every year.

Isn’t it fascinating that the first thing God made was light - and when He placed the sun, moon and stars in the heavens their role was to mark time, ***to allow us to measure days, months, seasons and years?*** “There was evening, and there was morning, the first day… the second day… the third day.” Even the language of Genesis one is meant to show us the rhythm of God’s movement. Work, rest. Evening, morning, Sunrise, sunset.

**We were made to work and to rest**. Our bodies were not made to work and work and work some more. Rest is built into our daily cycle AND into the weekly cycle God designed for us.

A good friend of mine attempted **the three day challenge** in college. Have you heard of that? If you go three days without sleep you are declared legally insane. It’s a really foolish thing to try. But he and two friends wanted to try it so they pulled an all nighter and then went to class. Not a big deal. One night without sleep - doable. The second night was much harder. They had to stay together because they knew if one snuck off he would find a place to sleep.

They watched movies and every minute would say, “You awake? Yeah. You awake? Yeah.” Then, when they were all falling asleep they went outside and walked around - eventually finding the ***bones of a dead animal*** and bringing them back to the dorm really believing they had found a real treasure.

Needless to say, they did not make it through all three days. On the third day they were all so exhausted and confused that each of them kept trying to sneak away and collapse into sleep somewhere. They found one guy wedged between two mattresses in a storage closet.

They were not able to stay awake for three days straight. But they did make T-shirts that said, “Three guys. Three nights. One big secret.” To this day no one knows if the secret was just staying up, if it was the bones of the animal or if it was something else…

The point is - we do things like that in college BECAUSE they are crazy and ridiculous. We all know that **we need sleep**. If you go enough days with just 4-5 hours each night your body will eventually force you to shut down and let it recover. But do we fully appreciate how important SABBATH is for us weekly, monthly and annually? Do we build into our schedules times of REST - times to do nothing…?

Genesis one and two set up the pattern that runs through the Bible. Arguably the whole point of Genesis one and two is to establish the basis for the Sabbath. Look at Genesis 2:

“On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day… So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work…” Genesis 2:2-3

What we’ll see in Genesis 1 and 2 is three reasons to rest. Let’s dive right in.

1. **Rest is a Necessity**

“On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day.” Genesis 2:2

In six days God finished the work of creation. Six days: first forming the universe, then filling it. Finished. Complete. Very good. An untarnished world. No sin. No chaos. No death. No COVID-19. A beautiful world with two innocent people.

Create the universe. Check.

Day seven - rest. Check.

Why did God rest on the seventh day? ***Did God NEED the rest?*** Of course not. God has no limits at all. So why did God rest? Because **He knew WE would need to rest** - so He set the example in the very first week of recorded time.

God has no limits on His power, creativity or endurance. But we do - and dramatically so.

1. **Rest is a Necessity** - there are limits to what we can accomplish

“On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day.” Genesis 2:2

There are limits on what we can get done in any given day or week. And, of course, there are limits to what we can get done even in a lifetime.

Christian family, **my job is to present every one of you mature in Christ**. That’s my assignment as your pastor. Working with the elders here, the shepherds of this flock, we proclaim Christ, we lift up the cross and seek to train all of you as followers of Jesus so that when our Lord comes back we can present everyone pure and faultless, holy and righteous as a beautiful bride, joyfully prepared for our Bridegroom. That’s the job.

Every phone call, every prayer meeting, every planning meeting, every counseling session, every small group gathering, every worship service, every blog post and video - we take small steps, we try to turn the dial one more click toward righteousness, maturity, perfection in Christ. Click. Another week. Click. Another year. Click.

There are massive limits on what I can get done. And I know all of you feel that in your work as well.

* **Teachers** try to get the most out of their students - pushing them to reach their potential. But there’s only so much you can do - and at some point you have to say, “That lesson plan is good enough. I’ve called those parents four times this month, that’s all I can do for now.”
* **Dentists** - imagine! As soon as you clean our teeth, Edon, we just get them dirty again - we don’t floss - and we come back just expecting you to make that ok. Your work is never done.
* **Mechanics** - Larry, you fix our cars - or Sam, you repair an engine; or Jack, you fix one of our 19 Air Conditioners here on campus - and as soon as you do, something else breaks.

This is why we all have good job security, right? The work never ends. But we all have LIMITS to how much we can accomplish. Our work is never really done. And it won’t be until heaven. This life is a patch job. It’s all just a bandaid. It’s like our vehicles - you just keep them going - just enough to get back on the road. Check engine light? Ha! We’ve been ignoring that for a decade now!

Second reason to rest.

1. **Rest is a Command**

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” Exodus 20:8-9

This is commandment number 4 in the Big Ten. This was one of the **key distinctives** that would set Israel apart from all other nations. It was designed to help them understand the ***whole idea of HOLINESS***. It means to be different - set apart - consecrated.

By keeping one day holy, they were showing how they, as a nation, were holy.

“But the Egyptians work on Saturday! The Canaanites and Moabites work on Saturday! How are we supposed to get all of our crops in if we don’t work on Saturday too???”

Can you think of a restaurant chain that is unlike every other restaurant chain…? The founder, from the very beginning - with the explicit purpose to honor God in how he ran the business, chose to be closed on Sundays.

Yes. Chick fil-A. Ah, the room just filled with happiness and LONGING. Sorry. Closed today. But there is something special about Chick-fil-A, isn’t there? Something actually HOLY about it? (Come on, Pastor, are you serious?)

Yes. Chick-fil-A is not just amazing fried chicken. It is an experience. They hire happy, energetic, service minded young people. They train these young people to not just say, “My pleasure,” but to MEAN IT. You can feel, at any Chick-fil-A, anywhere, that it really is THEIR PLEASURE to serve you. That is an amazing cultural achievement and it comes from the commitments of Truett Cathy and his family.

Jordan Raynor tells the story in Called to Create of the year 2000 when the **Chick-fil-A Board** was having a strategy session to determine what to do about ***Boston Market***. This was their first real competition in the chicken business, and many of them were worried. Boston Market exploded onto the scene in five years, with projections and plans to quickly break 1 billion dollars in annual sales - something Chick-fil-A hadn’t done in 50 years to that point.

Different executives shared ideas to outgrow Boston Market and win the race to 1 billion dollars in sales. Truett Cathy sat quietly, just listening for most of the meeting. But then, uncharacteristically, he jumped up, slammed his fist on the table and said this. (Raynor 107)

“I am sick and tired of hearing you talk about us getting bigger. What we need to be talking about is getting better! If we get better, our customers will demand that we get bigger.” Truett Cathy, 2000

Here was a man of faith and character, who had labored for fifty years to build faith and character into his business - setting a stake in the ground that he would not compromise those convictions in the name of rapid growth.

Poetically, Boston Market pretty soon went into bankruptcy proceedings, and Chick-fil-A just happened to break 1 billion in sales that very year in 2000. Remarkably, Chick-fil-A outperforms every other fast food chain, by a long shot. One Chick-fil-A store makes more in sales than a McDonalds, Starbucks and Subway store COMBINED. (<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/320615>) Those are the biggest fast food chains in the world and it takes one of each to come close to the profit of one CFA - which is CLOSED one day every week.

Do you think God has blessed the commitment to honor Him and care for their employees at Chick-fil-A? Truett Cathy is well known for saying, “We are not in the chicken business, we are in the people business.” What a great example of a commitment to work that glorifies God by serving people! Back in Exodus we see the rationale for the Sabbath command:

1. **Rest is a Comand** - we reflect God’s image when we rest

“For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth… and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” Exodus 20:11

The reason we are called to rest one day each week is because ***it reflects GOD***. We reflect God with how we work and how we rest. We don’t just set apart a holy day each week because our bodies need it - though that is true. We keep Sunday holy because God declared it to be holy and our primary commitment is to honor and please Him.

**Pete Scazzero** is a pastor in New York City. About ten years ago he was working 100 miles per hour, leading his church to rapid growth, speaking at large national events. He was successful - on the outside. But inside his world was crumbling and his family was falling apart. His wife tried to get his attention but he was so busy and so important - and doing GOD’S work - that he didn’t hear her. He didn’t slow down enough to listen.

Until she left. She took the kids and left. Suddenly Pete’s whole world crashed down around him and it forced him to actually STOP.

That’s what Sabbath means. STOP. The book of Leviticus is full of specific instructions for what it means to keep the Sabbath. The Jews took it even further in their Rabbinic policy manuals - detailing all of the things you could and could not do on the Sabbath.

You’d think it’s pretty simple. Stop means stop, right? Stay home means stay home. Unless you can’t stay home. Unless you need toilet paper. Unless your job is essential. Unless you just feel like going out. Stay home really means… do whatever you want.

That’s how Israel was with the Sabbath. They were like, “What does STOP really mean???”

And that’s how Pete was - until his wife left and he was forced to stop. With time, counseling and reflection Pete eventually wrote the book **Emotionally Healthy Spirituality** and other resources to go along with it. I read it last year and was very impacted by it. He said taking time to slow down and stop allowed him to actual FEEL HIS FEELINGS. He realized he was actually filled with anger, bitterness and resentment - and that, more than the busyness - was killing his marriage.

But ***he couldn’t address the wounds in his soul until he STOPPED***. And then he had to learn to slow down and build new rhythms into his life. The book is a plea to recover the sabbath. Kids cover your ears for this one. Scazzero says, “A day off is a bastard sabbath.” Sorry mom. It was a calculated bad word.

I was very convicted by this when I read the book. We take a day off on Fridays. But what does “day off” mean? For me it means: 1) catch up on household projects; 2) mow the lawn; 3) pay the bills; 4) go to the store and 5) finish up the church projects I didn’t finish Monday through Thursday.

Does that sound like a SABBATH? Does that sound like STOPPING?

Probably we all need a “day off” or “half day off” to manage household duties and prepare for a full day for worship, fellowship and rest on Sunday.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/remember-the-sabbath-day-to-keep-it-holy>

This moves us into our final reason to rest.

1. **Rest is a Promise** - both present and future

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27

By Jesus’ day the religious leaders had turned the Sabbath into one of their many burdensome requirements. It was exhausting - and not at all a blessing to the average Jew. Only the most committed Pharisses could understand much less obey all of the details of the Sabbath practices that had been added to the Law.

When Jesus confronted them for ***how they practiced the Sabbath***, it wasn’t the Sabbath itself he was objecting to, but the layers of human tradition they had added to the pure Law over the generations. Jesus brought them back to the original purpose of the Sabbath which was God’s desire to BLESS His people by giving them a day of rest.

The Sabbath was God’s way of saying, “**Trust me to provide for you**. Other nations will work every day because they don’t have a God to care for them. But you do. Work six days and then STOP. Trust me to give you what you need in six days and rest in me, be with me on the Sabbath day.”

The Sabbath had become a BURDEN but it was always meant to be a BLESSING. Back in Genesis 2 we see that God BLESSED the seventh day and made it holy. It was a GIFT to His people and a promise that in HIM they would find their greatest blessing.

And **when we break the Sabbath**, isn’t it because we don’t really believe this promise? Isn’t it because we truly believe there is more happiness, more life, more satisfaction in something OTHER THAN GOD? I would devote Sunday entirely to the Lord BUT

* I have to finish up that project for work…
* I have to get some work done around the house…
* I really want to watch that racey show…
* The kids really want to go to the Beach or to Disney…
* I need to catch up on sleep since I was out so late Saturday night…

Rest is a promise of blessing IN THE LORD. The Sabbath was made FOR US - for our GOOD, as a gift - both in the present and in the future, for eternity!

1. **Rest is a Promise** - both present and future

“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.” Hebrews 4:10-11

This is **our great eternal hope** - that right now we work, we labor, we press on - but our everlasting rest is coming soon! Yes, we will have work to do in heaven, but it won’t be fraught with frustration, the thorns and thistles will be gone! Even our work for eternity will be RESTFUL. The scrambling will be over. The rat race will be finished. We will be with the Lord and we will REST in Him, forever!

Even this future promise has a present dimension to it. “Whoever has entered God’s rest HAS also rested from his works as God did from his.” The Christian works - even now - very differently from the non-Christian.

* ***We know that our work has limits*** so it’s ok for us to stop, because God’s work has no limits! God is always working, and it is our joyful privilege to join Him in that work.
* ***We never finish anything*** - not really. But God’s work IS FINISHED! When Jesus died on the cross he did not say, “It’s mostly done, now you guys patch this thing up.” He said, “IT IS FINISHED.” The work of salvation is totally accomplished. We cannot add to it or take away from it - we can REST in it! And we will rejoice in it forever!
* ***We know that we reflect God’s image*** when we work and when we rest. He blessed the seventh day and gave it to us as a gift. When we follow the divine pattern of working six days and resting one, we honor Him and represent Him before a watching world.
* ***And we know that eternal rest is coming!*** So we can persevere in the challenges and struggles of work in this world because we have a rest in the Lord right now - a peace that passes understanding - and we have a sure and blessed hope that one day we will enter our full and final rest in the Lord.

For Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”  
  
Let’s pray!

Intro communion…