

"Life-Giving Rhythms - The Rest We Need"

Text: Matthew 11:28-30

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on January 6, 2019 by Steve Edelman

INTRODUCTION: Good morning everyone and happy New Year. We are so glad you are here with us today. Another year is over, and many of us are trying to start the New Year off right.

Let me ask you this, do you have a rhythm of being, and not just doing? In the rhythms of your day. In the rhythms of your week.

STORY: I was counseling a couple who believed they lost their connection with each other. You know how it goes, life happens, and they started to grow apart because they got out of sync. They both worked too much. They had personal difficulties. Adding the demands of raising kids, their relationship started to break down. All these things take a toll on a marriage. When digging deeper, I noticed that they were both working so hard to achieve and get personal validation from all the all the wrong things. Things like, he wanted to move up the ranks at work and she wanted finish school with honours. But, the main thing (their relationship with each other) was being ignored. I remember her saying, "I just want to feel loved." They lost their rhythm of being with God and connecting with each other. Offering some counsel, I said, "can you go back to the beginning of when you first met? What are some of the rhythms that grew your love for each other?"

Just like this couple, sometimes we get out of sync with the life-giving patterns that help stay in touch with God. Our rhythms can become more desperate than intentional. More frantic than planned. More entertainment driven, than soul satisfying. More self-seeking than life giving. We can't connect to God when we try to find personal validation from things like our achievements, our careers, our job titles, and our salary. We could be labouring or performing to achieve a certain social or economic status, to get in a friend group, (do I belong? What do I need to do to get in that group?) It could be where you are married or not. "If I had just had that guy or girl... then I would be okay." These are just some of the ways we get out of rhythm with God.

When we seek validation in the wrong things it just keeps us spiritually unavailable. This is why some Christians feel so distant and empty at times. **Busyness can cover up the hardened state of our relationship with God.** We may feel overwhelmed and we may struggle to properly bring big problems, setbacks, disappointments, and discouragements to God. As a result, we may feel alone, weary and heavy laden. **Do you have a rhythm of being with God and not just doing things?** The danger is that our relationship with Jesus can become a check-list rather than an intimate life-giving rhythm we need.

Today, I want to show us how we can experience the life-giving rhythm of being validated by Jesus and resting in Him. This happens when we position our lives for renewal in: THE RHYTHM OF LABOR; THE RHYTHM OF REST; and THE RHYTHM OF INTIMACY.

Jesus shows us how to position our lives for renewal in:

1. THE RHYTHM OF LABOR

Look with me Matthew 11:28 which says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden..." The NIV says, "come to me, all you who are **weary and burdened**..."

a) When we are weary, we need to stop laboring to find Christ

The Greek word for weary means, a state of being tired, troubled, or ready to give up. Weary describes a person who is exhausted from trying to make it on their own. Doing life on their own strength. Burdened, indicates all those who are weighted down by the difficulties of life. **'Come to me'** is an invitation to trust Jesus because he provides **rest for your soul**. Jesus is calling us to move beyond just knowing historical data about Him and into a life-giving rhythm of deeply knowing Him.

So, who is to come? Those who are:

- Overburdened with doing too much
- Seeking fleshly pleasure to find meaning
- Full of guilt because of regrets and mistakes

- Seeking a life of money and material possessions
- Heavy with loneliness
- Weary from personal or family problems
- Trying to find meaning through religious works or traditions.

In our current culture, the state of being burdened and heavy laden is often reflected in our statements like: “I am Busy. I am Tired. I need a holiday. I have to get to the next thing.”

STORY – As a father, what breaks my heart is when I know my kids are going through something difficult and they don’t come to me. I can easily sense when something is off because they are anxiously laboring in their mind. They start to break down because it’s heavy and draining. It may be that a kid was bullied, or they were bullied. Once they stop trying to work it out on their own and come to us, you see the relief. You see the beginning of rest.

When we are weary, we need to stop laboring to find Christ.

Next, when we are weary, we don’t stop laboring in our self-reliance.

b) When we are weary, we need to stop laboring in our self-reliance

Look with me at Matthew 11:28 which says, “Come to me...” *Why don’t we come to Jesus? It’s because we don’t think we need to.*

By not regularly resting with Jesus, we are saying that we know better than God! We are living a life that says, we don’t need Him!

- You try to do it all.
- You try to have it all and
- you try to be it all and you try to please everybody.
- This is the opposite of what Jesus wants to teach us.

Story: I spent a number of summers at a Young Life camp called Rockridge near Kamloops as the head counselor. Every year they would hire one male and female head counselor to deal with difficult situations with a kid, youth or staff member and to lead staff devotions in the morning. So typically, I was usually last to go to bed and early to rise. This often led to fatigue. On the first night of camp, one of our tasks was to deliver pizzas to each of the cabins right before bed. We were given an ATV or utility vehicle with a small cargo bed that we would use to carry all the items. In this case, 200 individual sized pizzas for the girls and another 200 for the boys. We would stack them about 3 to 4 feet high on the cargo bed. To save time we overloaded the cargo bed. The other head counselor would sit with the pizzas and hold them in place while the other drove the ATV. This one particular night it was late. It was a month into summer camp and my pride said we could do this faster than ever before. So, I just happen to be driving and maybe I was going too fast because there was no speedometer. I hit a big bump and the other counselor with about half pizzas flew out of the ATV. I looked back and saw her sitting on the ground with pizza all around. She was laughing and crying at the same time. Trying to salvage the pizza or picking up the pieces I realized that my pride caused this mess. And I was weary and, in a hurry.

Just like in the story, many of us are overloaded with the tasks of life because of pride and when we continue in our own strength, we make a mess of things. We may not even realize that we are self-reliant until everything falls apart.

Jesus is showing us that our misdirected efforts will leave us in a bigger mess if we don’t stop and come to Him.

Next, Jesus shows us how to position our lives for renewal through the rhythms of rest.

Jesus shows us how to position our lives for renewal in:

2. THE RHYTHM OF REST

Look with me at Matthew 11:28 which says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

So, what does the word “rest” in this passage mean? It’s not just Sunday afternoon nap. The Greek word “rest” in this passage means “**I rest you**”. Jesus is saying, “I give you **relief from toil, I refresh you, I revive**

you.” He is giving us an invitation to be revived spiritually. He is offering us a gift. When we are revived spiritually it pours into our emotional and physical life. More on that later.

When we rest with Jesus our burdens feel a little lighter. He gives you support in the task of bearing the load of life. This rest is offered to everyone and is immediately available. **This rest is closely related to our peace, security, and our well-being.**

Ultimately, this well-being starts by finding Christ who gives us the gift of resting with Him. This rest starts with knowing that you are loved by Christ. The problem is that we try to achieve our personal validation from God by doing things and not by going to Him to soak in the truth that we are loved. Yes, salvation is a one-time thing. Soaking in the truth that we are loved is an ongoing thing. He’s inviting us into an ongoing relationship that will continue to help lift our burdens as the difficulties happen in life.

I want to show you that there is a connection between resting with Christ and the rhythms God put in place at creation.

a) We need to see that God modeled a pattern of rest for us

Right from the beginning, we see this rhythm of work and rest modeled by God. God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh. Right from the beginning, God designed the world to operate in rhythms that include rest for renewal.

A. J. Swoboda says, **“There is a rhythm to the days of the creation story. There is a rhythm to God’s response to creation—God said, it was good. There are seasons. There is the coming and going of the ocean’s waves. The leaves turn. These are creations of a brilliant God. Obeying and implementing God’s rhythms of rest for our lives brings not only to our spirits but also to our minds, bodies, and emotions. We submit to those rhythms of the One who knows us better than we know ourselves.”**

This raises a question. Why did God rest? Was He tired from creating? Did He need a break? No, God rests because He gives us a good model for life. He stopped to enjoy His creation. You can’t take joy in something if you don’t stop to actually see and experience it. When we see God resting in creation, we do not see someone who is exhausted from creating the universe—no, we see a God who does not tell us to rest without doing it first. He rests and wants to enjoy rest with us.

As you keep reading the biblical text you learn that this rhythm of rest is integrated by God as a gift to us. It’s so important that God calls it the Sabbath which is a scheduled reminder that we are not what we do. Rather, we are loved by a renewing God. It was so important that the Sabbath was included as one of the Ten Commandments. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). In Ex. 16:21–30 explicit mention is made of the **Sabbath in connection with the giving of manna (the bread of life)**. The Sabbath is a gift of God, a rhythm of rest, and benefit of the people. The book of Hebrews stresses, “Make every effort to enter that rest” (Heb. 4:11). Also, in the N.T. Jesus practiced the Sabbath and so did his close followers. At the time of His death, Christians clearly observed the Sabbath, waiting until it was past to prepare His body for burial (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 23:56; Luke 24:1).

This is why the pattern of rest was built into the DNA of creation. So that we would flourish and enjoy God. Someone said, **“Sabbath and the gospel scream the same thing: we do not work to get to a place where we finally get to breathe and rest—that that is slavery.”** Rather, **we rest and breathe and enjoy God that we might enter into rest. Another way to look at it - in a busy burdened world, Yahweh modelled rest. Yahweh not only rests but invites the world to rest with Him.**

Sabbath is about: stopping, connecting, enjoying, and feasting.

Someone said, “Consider any piece of music. Music is never merely an endless stream of notes played at the same tempo; rather, there are pauses, intentional breaks, and a variety of notes. Even the Psalms have a pause—to the praise of Yahweh.”

As we have been talking about, we not only need to go to Jesus to experience rest. We also see that God modeled a pattern of rest right from the beginning so that we would continually enjoy and rest with God.

a) We need to see what resting with God is not

What we need to understand is that **rest assumes work. That is, the Bible has a word for Sabbath minus any work: laziness. Likewise, the Bible has a word for work without a Sabbath: slavery.** Rest is not truly possible without work, and work is not done appropriately without rest.

i. The Sabbath is not about the rules

In the next chapter, (Mt 12) the Pharisees start criticizing Jesus and His disciples because they are picking grain to eat because they were hungry. “They were not really resting” as they should on the Sabbath. The problem is that the Pharisees were more about the law or rules about the Sabbath than enjoying their relationship with God. with its massive list of restrictions, had become a crushing burden (cf. 23:4). We find Jesus casting out demons and healing the lame on the Sabbath. This has direct impact to our lives today. For example, if a storm hits on the Sabbath, is a farmer expected to ignore the needs of his animals? What if someone loses a family member on the Sabbath? Situations like these create a need for discernment.

The point is, that Jesus calls everyone to Himself who recognizes their empty efforts by trying to find and please God in his own resources. We will become weary when we seek to fix our life through human wisdom. **The rest Jesus offers enables us to go back to life with renewed vigor.**

ii. The Sabbath is not about a particular day

The Sabbath is a generous servant, not a tyrant master. Paul loosened up the rules even more by addressing the heart of the matter. Romans 14:5-6 says, “One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.” **The underlying principle is that we are called to be more faithful to Jesus than we are to the rules of the Sabbath.**

iii. The Sabbath is not about individualism

I would suggest that our western Christian culture doesn’t err on the side of being too rigid when practicing the Sabbath. Our rest has become more about us, than communing with God. A. J. Swoboda says, **“Rather than rest God’s way, we have replaced Sabbath with a kind of therapeutic individualism that seeks to self-entertain, self-please, and self-soothe.”**

What is the purpose of the Sabbath? For Jesus, the Sabbath is not about abiding about the rules, but abiding with God. The moment we over spiritualize it, we become legalistic. On the other hand, the moment we under spiritualize it, we are no different than the world and get out of sync with God. Someone summed it up like this: **“Is the activity in question life-giving, or is it life taking? In other words, does it bring us life, rest, hope, wholeness? Or does it drain us, pour us out, stress us, or load us down?” This is a good indication of whether or not we are taking a day to rest in Christ.**

As we have seen, Jesus shows us how to position our lives for renewal by enjoying God in a regular rhythm of rest. This gift of rest is more about communing with Jesus, than following the rules.
Jesus shows us how to position our lives for renewal in:

3. THE RHYTHM OF INTIMACY

Look with me Matthew 11:29 “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

When we are weary, we need to learn from Christ

What is a yoke? The “yoke” refers to an oxen’s yoke. We often want a hammock on a beach or to win the lottery. The yoke is a wooden collar-like instrument placed on the neck and shoulders of the oxen. The yoke represents a posture of submission and authority to Christ in all things. When worn in connection with another it

would lighten the load or burden. **The truth is that we all are yoked to something. Our calendars give us a good indication of what we are yoked to. The worries and anxieties that consume our mind. The people we are trying to impress. Or the believe that God will only accept me when I get my life together. It's all the things we keep doing to earn the approval of God and others.**

Illustration: There have been points in my life that I have tried earning the approval of my peers, professors, parents, and the in-laws. There are so many silly things that I did and thought. I remember the day when I first met my in-laws. I was nervous. I thought I needed to earn their love. Many years later, it was evident that I was just simply loved for who I was because I was part of the family.

This is what God wants us to realize. That you are simply loved because you are part of the family. You are His son or daughter. He receives and accepts you exactly how you are. His love is not dependant on how you perform or all the things that you want to achieve. Which means you don't need to do things to gain His love. When this truth sinks deep into our heart, we want to offer our best. We stop serving or performing out of this need to be validated, but out of this inner rest with the one who matters most.

This is why, Christ says His yoke is easy; His burden is light (v. 30). **Jesus invites us to take off the burdensome yoke and put on His yoke.** The word *easy* (chrestos) also means *well-fitting*. **Christ is saying that His yoke, His life and task, are what you were made for. When you put on the His yoke of His love you feel a little lighter.** When we are surrendering to Jesus, He walks with us and helps carry our burdens. Jesus does not release his disciples from burdens in this life. Illness and tragedy remain a part of this fallen world until the final renewal. But Jesus is offering us a sustaining help as he helps us carry His yoke of relationship and continually rest with Him. **It's not a religious obligation but an intimate relationship with the One who says, "Come to me" and "learn from me."**

How do we intimately and regularly learn from Christ?

We all know that intimacy is not spatial but relational. We can sit right next to a person with whom we feel *distant* and we can feel *close* to a person who is in another country. We see this in restaurants, when couples are sitting across from each other and they are not engaging because they are on their phones the entire time. There are many ingredients of intimacy, one of them is developing a deep trust. This resting in Christ on a regular basis is how we learn to deeply know and trust Him. **It's creating daily, weekly, and yearly life-giving rhythms that help us know and trust God with our difficulties.**

Last year, I was convicted that I needed to spend more time with Jesus. As a spiritual leader, I needed to rest with my Saviour because I was feeling empty by the endless tasks. A mentor challenged me to take a day of solitude and rest. At first, I laughed and thought he was crazy. Why, because I am a type A who wants to get things done. I am a doer.

And then I was convicted of my sin. I recognize that I need to schedule a longer tranquil time and space, so I can hear and discern the voice of God. "Without silence and solitude, we will never be able to fully enter into intimacy with God simply because so many other voices are contending for our attention and commitment."¹ I was moved by Basil Pennington's illustration of a pond to communicate the significance of solitude, so we can hear God.

"When you throw a stone into a pond, he said, the stone will create ripples that reach to the shore, all way around – but only if the pond is still. When the pond is quiet and still, the impact of the stone can be seen over the entire surface. But when the pond is not still, when the surface of the water is already ruffled and tossed, the splash of the stone will go undetected. Where the wind has disturbed the surface, the stone can't be disturbing. Where a storm is present, there is so much commotion already going on that no one will notice a few waves more or less as they will be lost in the frantic motion of the surface. Stillness is always the prerequisite for receptivity."²

¹ Ibid., 98.

² Ibid., 102.

It's what David was saying when he said, "Be still and Know I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

In my stillness, I was able to let the Spirit of God work and speak to my inner being. I started to see clearer what I needed to change, where I was relying on myself, and deal with some of the sin that crept into my life. I was able to give God my thoughts and deeds that have become heavy and burdensome. After resting with God, I felt lighter and more loved.

How do we receive this rest? There is only one condition: a person must simply come to Christ. **The Sabbath teaches us that we do not work to please God. Rather, we rest because God is already pleased with the work; He has accomplished in us.**

Practically, how do we actually do this? Just like in a human relationship there are rhythms that build trust and intimacy. **They could be things like: spending time together, intentionally connecting, being open and honest, and committed. Once the couple in the beginning started to focus on life-giving rhythms their love for each other came back.**

Just like in a human relationship, there things that help us grow our intimacy with God. Some people call them spiritual disciplines. They are life giving rhythms that followers of Jesus used to connect with God. They included: a day of rest, studying scripture, prayer, fasting, confession, worship, fellowship, celebration, service, generosity, solitude, and disciple-making. They are all patterns in which you can position yourself for daily and weekly renewal. They remind you that you are loved.

To be a Christian is to repattern one's entire life around Jesus Christ. **Resting with Christ is a complete positioning of our lives toward the hope and redemption of Christ's work. This is how you find rest.**

No person has gone too far for Christ to receive His rest into him. Christ will give rest to the person *struggling or despairing*. To the person who has an empty and lonely soul—no matter how intense the struggle and despair or the emptiness and loneliness.

The question is, have you experienced His rest in the middle of your difficulties? By asking for forgiveness for your sins and going to Him? He gives you rest from your mistakes because He conquered sin! Through the power of the cross, He invites us to deeply know Him. Anyone can come. Once you come you can learn and be reminded that he gives you rest for your soul. It's not simply resting with no work or endless work. It's a rhythm of refreshing one's body, mind, and spirit. It's a rest that fits one and all, for life. It's a rest that infuses a person with true purpose, meaning, and significance. It's rest that reminds us that we are not going through life's difficulties alone. It gives us encouragement and motivation for our soul. Resting in Christ positions us to live a regularly renewed life so we can undertake the God-given tasks with enthusiasm, strength, and endurance.

In this New Year, are you positioned to walk closely with our God?

CONCLUSION:

Jesus shows us how to position our lives for renewal through: THE RHYTHM OF LABOR; THE RHYTHM OF REST; and THE RHYTHM OF INTIMACY.

Are you feeling the weight of life on your shoulders? Maybe you need to go back to the pattern of what you started your relationship with Jesus and reconnect with Him. Or today, you may need to start a new life-giving rhythm for the first time. Do you have a rhythm of going to Jesus to find rest? Come and rest with Christ.