

Are you tired? Burnt out? Desperate for some relief? Have you ever said to yourself, "There has to be another way"? This sermon series is for you. We're leaning into Jesus' powerful words in Matthew 11 and seeking the rest, ease, and relief that can only be found in him. Join us for all five weeks of Rhythms—a sermon series looking at the ancient but ever-relevant practices and themes of Sabbath, slowing down, simplicity, silence & solitude, and living a spirit-led life.

It's good to be back! My thanks to our pastor for inviting me to bring a good word (or two) from this Good Book. I count it nothing less than a sincere privilege to teach on this day, in this place, from this book to you—my church family. Here is my prayer for each one of us: *when the child of God looks in the Word of God and finds the Son of God, he or she is changed by the Spirit of God into the image of God for the glory of God.*

This morning, we begin a journey into the Word looking for good and godly rhythms. Imagine that. Dan asked me—of all people—to preach on rhythm, and I am a person who has no rhythm whatsoever!

Years ago, Al Irwin was an elder at The Creek. Al and his wife, Margaret, lived in Big Run off Thompson Road, a block or two from our house. Al and Margaret loved to dance, and dance they did. Moreover, they wanted Leah and me to dance along with them, so they gave us dance lessons week after week. They would open the door to their garage, crank up the stereo and there we would be—dancing away to the recorded music of the big bands of yesteryear—and hating every moment of it. People were walking and driving by, gawking at the two people who obviously could not dance. What made matters worse, Al and Margaret were clandestinely preparing us for a dancing debut! They took us on a Friday evening to a big ballroom dinner dance in the heart of downtown Indy. Leah wore a formal, floor length dress and I had on a suit and tie. The moment came when Al and Margaret pulled us to the dance floor, and in front of God and the judges from Dancing with the Stars, Leah said to me, "Say those three words I love to hear." I asked, "What? You want me to say, 'I love you'" "No, not those words. Say, 'One, two, three; one, two, three.'" Now that we are in Club Med (that would be Medicare), the three words Leah wants to hear are, "Let's eat out."

How about you? A well-known commercial years ago asked the question, "Got milk?" We are not asking that question today, so much as we are asking, "Got rhythm?" I'm not speaking of the rhythm associated with dancing, but with *living*. Music has various rhythms; some are faster and some are slower. This morning, I—like you—need a rhythm in life that is slower, much slower.

Context before Content

When a nation is birthed, one of the first tasks undertaken is the writing of laws. For example, when the United States of America came to be, our founders wrote the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other governing documents as a foundation for our country. Similarly, when the Israelites were rescued from slavery in Egypt and God birthed them as a nation, He gave them laws on which to build their country.

Hoosier native David Letterman made famous his “Top Ten List” on his late-night television show. However, his was not the original, nor most famous list. God had a top ten list long before David Letterman. His list is commonly known as the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20, God’s top ten list includes commands such as “don’t murder anyone or steal anything, don’t lie and don’t commit adultery.” If someone breaks one or more of these particular commands, their jobs or marriages could come to an end, and they could even end up in prison for a time. When God gave these commands to His people, they were to help them live good, godly lives. Observing, practicing, and obeying these commands would bring the Israelites health and vitality and add balance to their lives, and not only to their lives, but to our lives as well.

Back in December, I heard a sermon by a preacher I respect and admire. He said, “Whatever captures our hearts shapes our lives.” Do you remember when Dan Hamel shared that with us? I remember it to this day. If we allow God’s commandments to capture our hearts, they will shape our lives—particularly, the fourth commandment.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 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. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

Of all the ten commandments, this one is the longest. In other words, God had more to say about resting one day a week than He had to say about lying, stealing or murder. About one third of the content of these commandments—that are foundational to living a healthy, good, godly life—is about rest, the rhythm of slowing down and stopping. Moreover, this is the only commandment of ten that is a spiritual discipline! God’s top ten list says nothing about praying or reading the Bible. A spiritual discipline is a practice that moves us into a deeper, healthier relationship with God.

The word “Sabbath” in Hebrew is the word *Shabbat* and it means “to stop, to cease.” God commanded His people then—and now—to stop doing what we are doing the other six days in a week, and then to literally rest on a seventh day. The sixth command is, “don’t murder anyone,” but if we keep working seven days a week, week after week, we will kill ourselves! We will grow weak physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually!

As hard as I tried to get some of that dancing rhythm, I never did. However, when it comes to this resting rhythm, I can get it—that is, IF I want it. The same is true for you. This rhythm of rest is within our reach, but we must want it if we are to get it. To understand this, it is as simple as A-B-C.

A for ADMIT

We must remember that this is a command of God, and a command is meant to be obeyed. God’s top ten list is not a list of suggestions or options. I need to ADMIT that this is all too often a sin

that I commit before God. Before I will STOP one day a week and develop a true, recurring rhythm of rest, I must ADMIT that I have sinned, that this command of God has “not captured my heart, while work and more has shaped my life.”

On Sunday, April 24, 2016, another entry was made in the Guinness Book of World Records. Tim Peake ran the London Marathon in a record 3 hours, 35 minutes, 21 seconds. You might be thinking that is certainly no record, but it is because Tim Peake ran and completed the 26.2-mile race 250 miles above planet earth on the International Space Station. An astronaut for Great Britain, Peake was often asked by Mission Control, “Hey, Tim, how’s your heart?” We need to ask one another, “How’s your heart?” We aren’t referring to cardiac muscle deep within our chests. If you were to have asked me that question last November, my response would have been, “Not so good.”

Throughout all of 2021, I was on the go—and proverbially in overdrive. It may be that going to the dentist or doing your taxes sends you into orbit. For me, it’s a simple question. When someone asks me, “How’s retirement? Are you keeping busy?” I know it’s a simple, innocent question, but it sends me into orbit. Why? Because I struggle with pride, specifically the pride I take in being busy—and all in the name of doing ministry. I guess I made mention of how busy I was because my grandson Benaiah decided to give me a unique Christmas present. I have my first official “tour” t-shirt. I wear this like it’s a medal on my chest or a plaque on the wall, resulting in a break from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day.

How’s your heart? Being a “doctor,” allow me to ask you a few “cardiac health exam” questions that can indicate our spiritual heart health when it comes to stopping.

- Do you live with a never-ending to do list and enjoy checking things off that list?
- Do you have to be first in line—at the store or stop light?
- Do you multi-task—talk on the phone, text, and read emails all at once?
- Do you dislike waiting—for any reason, for anyone, for anything?
- Do you interrupt people—talking over them, finishing their sentences for them?

So then, how’s your heart? Would it appear that like me, you have a struggle with having a rhythm of rest in your daily life, week by week?

Here’s one more thought on this letter A for Admit. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, and Moses repeated the commands of God to a new, younger generation. In Exodus 20:8, the word “remember” the Sabbath means to bring to mind, to not forget. Yet in Deuteronomy 5:12, we read, “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you.” Some forty years later, just before the Israelites moved into the Promised Land, Moses repeated his earlier sermons, and instead of the Hebrew word for “remember,” Moses chose a different word, the one for “observe,” as in keep or practice. We “observe” the holidays. We enjoy practicing, keeping Thanksgiving and Christmas well. Don’t simply call this commandment into mind remembering it, but actually keep it, practice it, live it out. Why did Moses use a different word?

The younger Israelites who moved into the Promised Land were a generation who never knew the slavery of Egypt. Their parents and grandparents were slaves who worked tirelessly because of Pharaoh's relentless lust for more. Their generation could now enjoy a new rhythm of life in a new land. They could observe this one day—the Sabbath day—stopping what they would normally do to rest and remember God's goodness to them. On the other hand, they could become like Pharaoh and have a lust for more.

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Deuteronomy 8:10-14)

How is life for us in the USA? Our culture always wants more, and more is never enough: more house, more clothes, more fun, more food and drink, more travel, more devices, more money to feed the beast of more. For me, it's more ministry. We keep working because we keep wanting and then we can't stop worrying about what we have and do.

We resist rest. We fail to stop. Observing, remembering, obeying God's command to STOP is similar to saying ENOUGH! In the Torah, buying and selling on the Sabbath was forbidden. What if we refused to buy one more thing on that one day a week? What if we said ENOUGH on our Sabbath—one day a week on which we remembered God's goodness, His provision in life? What if we would simply sit in His presence, content with what we already have, telling Him thank you, not asking Him for more?

A—let's readily and honestly ADMIT that we struggle with rest.

B for BETTER

There is a better way to live and it is in the BLESSING of the Sabbath day. The fourth command to "remember the Sabbath day" included words from the opening pages of creation: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:11). Let's check out the first mention of the Sabbath.

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all of 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. (Genesis 1:31 – 2:2)

Did God need a nap that He was so exhausted from working? Is that what it means in the statement? Not at all! We immediately associate rest with being tired and exhausted, so we

assume that God became tired and needed rest. Isaiah 40:28 declares, "He will not grow tired or weary..." Psalm 121:4 states, "...(God) will neither slumber nor sleep." God did not rest because He needed sleep. God did not rest in the sense that He became refreshed and revived, but He sat in repose. God looked at and enjoyed His completed work. God rested to establish a rhythm of life—*Shabbat*. God finished His work and He stopped His work to enjoy what His work produced.

Having been made in His image (Genesis 1:26), we are to do the same. We work for six days and rest for a day, stopping to enjoy the work of our hands. This is like a person planting a garden and then eating its produce or picking its flowers. This is a person painting a picture, building a table, etc., and then enjoying what has been made. The rhythm is work six days and rest for a day. That's 1 for 6. Be on the run for six days, then stop and sit for one. That is not rocket science or advanced math. Even I can figure out the numbers.

There's something more in this creation account about day seven. God *blessed* the day. That should stand out to us. In Genesis 1-2, God blessed only three things, and the word "blessed" means that God "put His favor" on three specific things:

- 1) Creatures He had made: In reference to fish of the sea and birds of the air, we read that "God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas and let the birds increase on the earth'" (Gen 1:22).
- 2) Humankind He had made: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Gen 1:28).
- 3) The Sabbath Day: "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" (Gen 2:2).

God "put His favor" on creatures and on Adam and Eve, that they would be fruitful and multiply; they would reproduce, bringing life. Then God "put His favor" on a day, the Sabbath Day, that it would bring life, and it does when we rest. When we stop one day out of seven, and we rest from the work of our hands, we experience life—and more life.

Just before COVID-19 swept the world, a study was released that caught the attention of many (<https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/25/health/longevity-blue-zone-wellness/index.html>). Loma Linda, California, a city of 21,000 people, is one of the five original "blue zones" of the world where people live the longest and are the healthiest. The article reported that people in Loma Linda live 8-10 years longer than the average American. Why? Loma Linda has one of the highest concentrations of people who belong to the Seventh-Day Adventist faith—people who intentionally rest and worship on the seventh day of the week (that being Saturday), and who pursue a healthy lifestyle.

Think with me. If the engine of our car is not running well and the timing of the engine seems off, we get a tune up. We take care of our car, wanting it to last longer. If our heart doesn't seem to be beating well, if an arrhythmia (i.e., irregular heartbeat) is suspected, we get a check-up,

wanting to live longer. The human body is the temple of the Spirit; God abides in us. When we surrender our lives to Jesus and we are immersed, the Holy Spirit takes up residency in us. “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

One way that we honor God with our bodies is by obeying God’s command to observe a Sabbath day: Shabbat—just stop! God has—and will continue to—put His favor on that day. It’s a B—BETTER way to live.

A—let’s ADMIT we need this holy, godly rhythm in our lives. After all, it’s a B—BETTER way to live. So, we have a...

C for CHOICE

We have a choice to make. Will we, or will we not, choose to stop? Will you and I make a choice to stop—just one day a week—to rest and remember. God enjoyed His finished work of creation. We can stop on this day of the week and remember the finished work of JESUS on the cross! We stop what we normally do on six other days and use this one day differently, to think of and thank Jesus for His finished work of saving your life and mine from the pit of hell.

What a choice it is, to obey this command of God to rest. It’s a command to sleep in, and then take a nap later in the day. Enjoy a sunrise or a sunset. Hold a baby and gaze at the miracle of life in your hands. Listen for the sound of birds singing at dawn. See the movement of the wind in the trees. Notice the changing of the season, and thereby the tilting of the earth. Veg in front of the TV, go for a walk or hike or a run, enjoy a game of golf, go fishing, bake a cake on Saturday then admire the cake on Sunday—and eat it! When I was a kid growing up, we would go to church on Sunday, and after Sunday dinner, we would load up into the family station wagon and go for about a 1-2 hour drive (gas was 20 cents a gallon) and we would always stop for ice cream. In the Johnson home, a serving size of ice cream is when you hear the spoon hit the bottom of the container. Stop and eat ice cream. What’s so hard about choosing to obey this command that God takes seriously? After all, “This is love for God: to obey His commands and His commands are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

A few years back, I was driving from home to work here at the church. It was back when I had a Jeep Cherokee and I had the top down on a sunny, summer day. I was driving south on Franklin Road and right in front of the library at the railroad tracks, I was pulled over by a police officer. As he walked up from his car, I already had my license and registration in my extended hand out the window. He walked up and took them, looked at me and said, “Pastor Gary?” I looked at him and said, “Officer David?” “Pastor, do you know how fast you were going?” “David, do you know how long it’s been since I’ve seen you at church?” Let me just say that the fine officer let me off without getting a ticket, but he told me to slow down.

Why is it so hard to slow down? I am not talking about the speed of a car so much as the speed of life. Why do we struggle with making a choice to STOP and rest? There’s a “triple A” reason: Accumulation, Accomplishment, Acknowledgements. We live in a state of perpetual

restlessness—needing to accumulate more, to stack one accomplishment atop of another, all in hopes that we will earn someone’s acknowledgement. We never stop working. We speed through every day with places to go, people to see and things to do, zooming towards a head-on collision with collapse.

You and I will never make C—the Choice to live in a B—better way until we A—admit that we need to repent of this sin. The word “repent” is “metanoia,” a compound word. Meta means change and noia means mind. Put the two together and repentance is changing the mind. We must change the way we THINK about the Sabbath before we change the way we live when it comes to the Sabbath. We will make the right choice when we think in the right way about this one day on which God has put His favor.

CHALLENGE

“Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).

Jesus honored the Sabbath by observing it, by obeying this command and as His follower, I must do the same. “Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

Join me in looking at the calendar each week and picking a day for stopping. For many, that day will be Sunday. For those who must work on Sunday, pick a different day to stop working and wanting and worrying. On that day, simply rest and reflect on how great the Father’s love is for you and for me. Let this slower rhythm of life capture your heart, and when it does, I promise you, it will shape your life.

Nike penned a phrase that swept the world: “Just do it.” When it comes to this command of God, just do it. STOP.