

## FINDING REST

The thought of rest sometimes seems like a pipe dream. When I was a kid, I remember hearing about the coming “leisure” society. Increased technology would reduce the length of time we would have to work each week. By the turn of the century we would only have to work 20 hours a week, or so we were told. We would have time to read, take classes, pursue the arts. Community problems would be solved because we would volunteer our time to good causes.

It's 2010 and I don't see this utopia anywhere in sight. So, what happened? We spend more hours on our jobs than our parents did. Who has time to relax and how many of us spend quality time with God each day? It wasn't supposed to be this way.

- We never slow down, not even on Sunday.
- We don't need big front porches with rocking chairs. We'd never sit in them.

Rest cuts to the heart of our relationship with God. Remember God saying on the seventh day he rested. We certainly don't.

Most of us want more rest but with the treadmill speeding up every year, we can't seem to slow the pace.

- 2/3 of doctor visits today are stress related. If you live under constant stress you are cutting your life short. So, ironically, in our rush to do more we may actually accomplish less.
- when we're under pressure, we don't enjoy the time we spend with each other, time we should enjoy. Relationships take time to build and maintain. Time we don't have.

It's when I am rushed that I need God's strength and wisdom but that's when I am most inconsistent in my time with Him.

If we want to commit our lives to God and serve Him, prayer and Bible study should be our most important activity. But, have you ever noticed how difficult it is to stay focused? Our constant activity keeps our brains too scattered to pray over the decisions we have to make or the direction we are heading. Proverbs 19:2 warns us “...not to be hasty and miss the way, while Proverbs 14:8 says “The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways. Nearly all decisions I have regretted in my life have been made without prayer.

As Christians we are to stand out in the world, but when we are like everyone else, no one can see the impact Jesus has in our lives. When we

walk with Jesus, our potential to stand out in our world is dramatic. But when we lack rest we suffer the consequences and limit the ability of our light to shine.

When our schedules have no margin, there's no time for meeting new neighbors, no time to pause, no time to ponder and pray. We miss the daily opportunities God puts before us. Even if we did notice the opportunity, we wouldn't have time to do them. We've become like those men in the Bible who rushed past the wounded traveler on the roadside, instead of like the Samaritan who took the time to stop and care for him.

Our lives have become a weary struggle instead of a gift to enjoy. We scurry from task to task, never pausing to see if there is any good in what we're doing. Do you think maybe we need to change our ways?

God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because that was the day He rested. He set the standard for us to follow. So, why don't we?

Our restlessness is a warning that something is missing in our relationship with God.

The people who have a strong relationship with God are those who know how to rest. We lack peace when we live apart from God, but when we turn to God; he gives us rest and peace. David proclaims "My soul finds rest in God alone." Jesus promises rest. "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

- Christ promises rest while the world offers endless pursuits.
- Christ teaches us to replace our burdens with His lighter yoke; the world tells us that it is all up to us.
- When we follow Christ, we fall in step with a gentle and humble leader who never appeared to be in a hurry. When we hop on the world's bandwagon, we find life to be hurried and harsh.
- We live in an impatient world that wants instant satisfaction, yet we serve a patient, enduring eternal God.

Psalm 46:10 says "Be still and know that I am God". The wisdom of that verse is lost on our culture. Being still must happen in order for us to know the presence of God and hear His voice. We need to take our minds off worldly pursuits so we can focus on God. We need to pause to consider who God is and who we are in Christ. We also need to wait expectantly on our Lord to guide us in the direction we should go.

God isn't impressed when we're always on the go because he knows a person who never stops never grows. He promises us the abundant life here on earth. He doesn't want us just to survive but to thrive.

His provision for overcoming the weariness of life is offering us rest for the body, mind, heart and soul.

Mark 12:30 says “Love the Lord Your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”. He is talking about God’s love for us. We are to:

- honor God with our **bodies**-instruments of righteousness;
- love God with our **minds** – holding our thoughts captive to him, seeking the mind of Christ;
- Allow God to create in us a pure **heart** – the heart controls our thoughts and actions.
- Love Him with all our **soul** – love God with all of our being, with all that we are.

A. The Body - Rest for the body seems obvious, yet it’s amazing how little rest most people get. We tend to take our bodies for granted until we have a night without sleep or we become ill because we are exhausted and run down.

God knew that we would be wear ourselves out trying to fit three lifetimes of activity into one. He knows the importance of coming to a complete halt before beginning another week of activity. Hence, He created the Sabbath. Our culture differs from biblical times in that our labors are more mental than physical. Yet, the health of the mind and body are closely intertwined. No matter how mental our work may be, once our bodies go, our ability to work is goes, too.

When stress becomes your way of life, it produces an increased flow of adrenaline, which can lead to physical problems such as high cholesterol, narrowing blood vessels, plaque build up in our arteries and cancer. It will gradually destroy the body’s immune system, putting us at risk for a wide range of illnesses. These high levels are not only dangerous, but addicting. It produces a chemical change in the brain similar to that produced by drugs. Like drugs, we can get addicted to the rush of adrenaline. Our bodies require relaxation to allow the adrenaline levels to return to normal. Our bodies were not made for the pace we are living.

The average American sleeps less than 7 hours a night. We need eight to ten hours for our bodies and minds to operate at optimal levels.

Too little sleep can make us clumsy, fuzzy minded, accident prone and can kill us. I wonder how your day would change if you gradually increased

how long you sleep at night? Maybe you wouldn't be falling asleep on the sofa or your brain dead days would be few and far between.

But, sleep has become the enemy – it takes time away from our day to accomplish more, but in reality, sleep recharges and refreshes us enabling us to get more done. Psalm 127:2 says “to rise up early and stay up late toiling in our work is in vain, for God grants sleep to those he loves.”

We are to treat our bodies as God's dwelling place. We're not our own but belong to Him. “Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit”. I Cor 6:19. We may be filled with the desire to serve God, but when we ignore the needs of our bodies it will eventually interfere with our ability to accomplish those desires.

Hebrews 12:1 instructs us “to run with perseverance the race marked out for us” – meaning we need to look beyond the moment and live in such a way that we can remain strong and effective throughout our lives. We can accomplish more if we resist the urge to rush faster and slow down instead (remember the tortoise and the hare?) We try to do too much but, as we fall behind, rather than accepting the fact that we need to lighten the load, we run faster.

**B. Resting the body is easy compared to slowing the mind.** Sometimes when we try to unwind or take a nap, our minds race, reminding us of all the things we think we need to be doing.

We have to unplug from the countless to-do lists and worry swirling in our minds. We believe we have to prove our worth every day by doing, accomplishing, performing and perfecting.

Are we driven by insecurity and fear?

Have we adopted the world's perspective in place of God's?

Are we influenced by the world's shortsighted, self-centered approach to life?

It looks like it when we try to please others by doing what they say we ought to do, we become overloaded;

When we are hooked on the adrenaline lifestyle and don't want to face the consequences of stopping. Stopping allows us to think, and thinking brings out all the fears we have avoided. We keep busy so we don't have to deal with our issues. We think we can ignore them and they will go away.

I know people who never spend more than a few minutes alone. Now, it's normal to want to be with people, but it's not normal to be uncomfortable spending time alone. God is not pleased with our

distractions; but Satan loves to see people too hurried to take time for God, too hurried to give any thought to the consequences of what they are doing. God wants us to learn to really live. His Word tells us:

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him – Psalm 37:7

Be still and know that I am God Psalm 46:10

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways (Proverbs 14:8)

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:30)

And in Romans 12:2 Paul writes that “we are no longer to conform to the pattern of this world, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

When we worry about situations we cannot control, we are telling God we don't believe his Word that says “in all things God works for our good” as it states in Romans 8:28.

When we fret about changing, we show our lack of trust, disregarding God's promise to “make our paths straight when we trust Him with all our heart” (Proverbs 3:5-6). If we are carrying a heavy load of worries, it is probably because we have shortage of faith. God clearly tells us “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”Philippians 4:6-7 and 1 Peter 5:7 states “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

As in the story of Mary and Martha, Jesus wants us to first come sit at His feet and listen. Every day we have the opportunity to sit with Jesus in our homes as we pray and study His Word. We can lay our troubles and burdens at His feet and receive peace, rest and guidance for the day ahead. Stopping to rest with Jesus transforms our lives.

**C. The Heart & Soul** When we lack contentment, it's difficult to rest or pray. Discontentment is when we are not happy with who we are and don't want what we have.

Proverbs 4:23 says “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Our hearts are the core of who we are. **The heart** literally means “the inner man”. Romans 10:9-10 says that “salvation comes from confessing with our mouths and believing in our hearts that Jesus is Lord for it is with your heart that you believe and are justified.”

Proverbs 3:5 instructs us to “trust the Lord with “all your heart.”

1 Peter 1:22 encourages us to “love one another deeply, from the heart.”

The heart stores up whatever we feed our inner person – whether it be good or evil. Luke 6:45 says “for out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

Proverbs 27:19 says “As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man.” We are so concerned about our image – what others think of us – but it’s our heart that reveals who we really are behind that image.

Those burdens and hurts that weigh heavily on our heart convince us we are victims. But, a broken and hurting heart can often be filled with hatred, envy, and selfish ambition. James 3:14-16 points this out:

“But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”

Discontentment comes from a variety of sources. It can be caused by unfulfilled or unrealistic expectations, wanting what others have, ingratitude and the desire for more.

1. Expectations influence how we react to reality. When expectations are unrealistic, we have problems. Our most unrealistic expectation is that happiness and contentment come from having the circumstances of life go the way we want them to go. We want a career, financial success, a spouse who meets all our needs, children who grow up to make us proud and friends who look up to us. But, we cannot arrange the circumstances of life to meet our expectations. In John 16:33, Jesus says “In this world you will have trouble”. Unrealistic expectations can lead to unrest, poor decision making and to burnout when we struggle incessantly to achieve the impossible.

2. Then, the minute we start comparing our life with others, we’re in trouble. When we compare rather than value what we possess, we compete in a battle that cannot be won. There will always be someone better looking, richer, smarter, or more skilled than ourselves. It robs us of rest because the more we measure our significance by other people’s accomplishments, the less we’ll be content in our daily lives. Proverbs 14:30 says “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.” Envy is a synonym to the word covet. When we strongly desire someone else’s situation or possession, we covet. The 10<sup>th</sup> commandment says “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house, wife, manservant, maidservant, ox, donkey or anything that belongs to him.” Exodus 20:17.

3. And then we tend to focus on our shortcomings instead of our blessings. Instead of praising God for His provisions, we grumble about what isn't right in our lives. Whatever your life is, live it. It is not so bad. When we are ungrateful, we are telling God that His blessings aren't good enough for us and we don't like the plan He has for our lives.

4. And then, there's the desire for more. This endless pursuit of more makes contentment impossible. Many of us have a inability to accept ourselves for who we are, and have a belief that other people wouldn't like us if they really knew us, so we drive ourselves towards perfection in hopes we will feel whole.

But, when we try to fill the emptiness by improving our external circumstances, like money and things, we find that we constantly come up short and life becomes be meaningless. But, God wants to replace our restless, troubled heart with a heart filled with peace and contentment. In John 14:1 Jesus said “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me” and in Col 3:15 “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”

The world says you'll be happy when you have everything in life just the way you want it.

God says you'll be happy when you learn to be content with whatever life brings – even if it's nothing like you wanted.

God gave Paul the strength to find contentment in any situation. Phil 4:12-13.

Contentment is a learned behavior that doesn't come naturally. It takes an effort to rise above our circumstances and find peace. It starts with a grateful heart. 1 Thes 5:16-18 says “Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

### **Conclusion**

Life is 10% of what happens to us and 90% of how we react to it. When we are content it means we like who are right now, even though we strive to grow to be Christ-like.

It involves wanting what we have right now, even though we know our circumstances will change. We have to see God as a wise and loving father who knows what we need infinitely better than we do, not as a genie to do as we ask.

Just as parents know that hard work builds character in a child, God knows the struggles of everyday life build our character as well. Contentment requires us to trust God in all things.

As we reflect on our life, few things matter more than knowing that our existence has counted for something. When we believe we don't count, we feel empty inside, an emptiness created by unmet spiritual needs.

When we live independently of God, we feel the void of His absence.

King Solomon sought out every pleasure and every worthy accomplishment and concluded that "everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." Eccl 2:11. But, his father, King David concluded in Psalm 62:1 "My soul finds rest in God alone."

Only when we put aside our pride and accept God's love and guidance can we find comfort, a comfort far greater than we can find in this world.

So our rest depends greatly on whether we shoulder the burdens ourselves or share them with the One who created the world. As we follow him, He promises us the deep inner rest we crave:

Matt 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."

Christians in this country are some of the busiest, weariest people in western culture, largely because they are pursuing the things of God and the pursuits of the world. It is impossible. You cannot do it all. The world expects us to do it all, but not God.

- The world urges us to hop on a speeding treadmill of endless activity. God tells us to be still.
- The world says that to find significance we must do something to achieve fame and fortune. God is less concerned with what we do than in who we are..... and who we are becoming as we walk with Him.

We need to schedule our lives with care and wisdom and be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities God places before us, ready to alter our ways as circumstances change.

We need to have a sense of the will of God to help us find direction. As our relationship grows with God, He will begin to show us where He is

working and how He wants to use us in that work. But, it won't happen if you have no room in your life for Him!

We don't pause to let God shape our plans. That is like saying "My will be done" instead of "Thy will be done." We aren't meant to live our lives on our own we are meant to be available to let God work in His power through us.

He wants each of us to bear fruit in our lives and He promises to give us his power to do so. Our task should be to keep our attention on Him and follow his leading and nothing does that better than prayer. It's the key to unlocking God's power in your life.

Even Jesus said He could do nothing apart from His Father. John 14:31 says "I do exactly what my Father has commanded of me."

Relationships require time to develop and thrive. That is true of our relationship with God, too!

Did you know that the average prayer time is five minutes a day!!

There is nothing wrong five minute prayers, but no relationship can grow in few minutes a day. Our relationship is on shaky ground when we ignore God for our other pursuits.

If you have made a commitment to follow Jesus and you feel none of the peace or contentment that Jesus promises, maybe your prayer life is the first place to look. Prayer is a learned activity and practice makes perfect. Regular disciplined prayer is one of the most difficult exercises we can undertake but one that blesses us the most. All too often our prayers are on the run; we dump off our requests and hit the road. But look at the great people God has used mightily; they are the ones who measure their prayer time in hours each day, not minutes.

The quiet time we spend alone with God in prayer will bring us rest.

Spending time in His Word helps us mature in our faith which will strengthen our walk. Psalm 131:3 says "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." Prayer & quiet time offers us a break from the noise and rush of the world. When you are running on empty, find a quiet spot and spend and some time alone with God. That time quickly recharges your batteries and slows your mind to a pace where you can hear what God is trying to tell you.

So, what's the next step: read your Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says "All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking correcting

and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Then, meditate on God’s Word – It helps us shift our focus from the printed page to the application of the word in our daily lives. Consider his Word; think about what the passages say about God and what they say to you.

1 Thess 5:16-18 says “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Then, lift up your requests, then, wait and listen for God’s answers and instructions. – Psalm 46:10 – “Be still and know that I am God” When I am still and silent with God, He can encourage me and lift my spirit; He can convict me of what I need to do or what I need to change in my life. When I am still long enough, He can speak to my heart and mind clearly. This is the most important part of prayer for if you are in desperate need of rest; this is how you will find it. He alone can restore strength back into your body, mind, heart and soul.

God wants us to pursue Him alone. He should be our number one priority on our daily planner. He’ll provide what you need and guide you in what you need to do. As we grow in our faith, we will discover that much of what we thought we needed to do no longer holds our interest.

We are called to surrender everything for Christ, but do we? Rev. 3:20 says “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

So, the answer to finding rest is that it lies in letting Him change you. Not to try harder but rather to let Him in. James 4:8 says “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” Jesus says that He came that they may have life, and have it to the full.” The fact is we need God to show us how to love God, and our rest will follow. Will you let Him in?