

What a SOUL NEEDS

We know a lot about how to care for our bodies. Our diet and exercise habits are well-informed. But what about our souls? Most problems are soul problems. Your soul is your deepest you—and God loves your deepest you. How do we take care of our souls? We need to nourish our inner lives and become people whose hearts, minds, wills and bodies are integrated and whole. This summer, we look to the middle chapters of Matthew to discover what the soul needs to find health and peace—resting in the hands of a God who loves us.

A soul needs rest! Amen! I was reading up on physical fitness, still thinking about Crossfit and Soulfit and how we know how to care for our bodies more than our souls. Anyway they say that muscles don't grow while you are working out, they grow while you are sleeping. With that information I've devised a new fitness program: Napfit. Who's in? Sign-ups are in the lobby. It's only \$100/month. Pillow included. That's like a diet my wife and mother-in-law heard about last week while we were on vacation. It starts with two eggs and bacon in the morning. "That's all I need to know." Well, I think there's more to it as the day goes on. "Nope, I just needed to hear bacon." What does it mean to bring rest to your soul? What does it mean that your soul needs rest? I don't think I'll have a hard time convincing you. I've been told props help in preaching. In fact, I've heard men in particular need props. Men can't go to church unless there's visual stimulation. What are we, second graders? So here we go. Men this is for you. When I shake up this jar I want to hear all the men in the house go "Oooh." (Jar illustration). That's our soul. This is your soul addicted to busy. Your soul needs a little time to settle, it needs rest.

Imagine a world with no rest. Imagine a world where every day is just like the last. There are no Sundays. No weekly stop to the work life. This was the ancient world. Near as we can tell, no ancient society valued rest. You worked. Today you work. Tomorrow you work. The next day you work. You work until you die. The Babylonians had one day a month, tied to the moon, when work might cease. There were festival days in various cultures tied to annual changes in season or harvest but there was no pattern of stopping each week. Then along came a people who said "Our God made everything that is. Our God created heaven and earth, seas and skies, plants and animals, men and women, and then, on the seventh day, our God rested." What? Your God rested? Was He tired or something? Our God rested and then commanded us to do the same. It's one of the Ten Commandments: "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)

And later, to explain it more: "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed." (Exodus 23:12) All of a sudden there was a people, a nation on the face of the earth among all the nations that rested on the seventh day. Not just the citizens. The slave rested. The foreigner, the refugee, the immigrant were all subject to the laws of the land and included in the protections of rest. The cows rested. The fields rested. All because God rested. Was He tired? No. God was not tired from creation. "Whew!" God the Almighty, God the All Powerful, limitless in agency, in ability in enduring strength and activity, faithful, unflagging, unfailing God was not tired. God stopped, ceased activity, and sat in holy repose over all that He had made. Your soul needs to do the same. So Jesus said this is *for you*. Sabbath was made for you. Mark 2:27, "Then [Jesus] said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.'" This was made for you.

Your soul needs rest. Not necessarily because you're tired or you're stressed or something, but in perfect health your soul needs to rest, and recover, and resume. Your soul needs a rhythm of workout and recovery. Some of us balk at this because we're pretty excited and passionate about life. We want to go, go, go! I'm with you. I'm passionate about what God has me doing! I love it. You think, "Rest?! Pastor, I came in here for an hour. That's my rest. Now I'm off!" I'm not saying you need to live a life of glum quietude, bored out of your mind, but whatever pace you are running you can't run that pace constantly. The soul is made to press toward noble ends with great conviction and then to rest and recover. We need the Sabbath patterns God created and ordained. If we are to care for our souls, we can't keep them awake and on the move 24/7! Include patterns of healthy, spiritual rest in your soul fitness plan.

Rick Warren has pastored Saddleback Church, which he planted when he was 25, for over thirty years of consistent, solid leadership. He was asked recently how he avoided the burn out that is so common to leaders who are passionately devoted to their work or cause. Warren said "One little thing I've done for thirty years now is a little thing I call, Divert Daily; Withdraw Weekly; Abandon Annually." It's okay to be passionate about what you're doing; hey, it's *important* to be passionate about what you're doing. Soul care is going to require daily diversion, just make sure you're not swamped all day; weekly withdrawal,

here's the Sabbath pattern; and annual abandonment. If your organization can't survive without you for a week or two a year where you detach completely, you haven't built a very strong organization. Get away. It's healthy. Imagine a world with no rest. No stoppage. No time to breath. Imagine! The soul needs rest.

Let's look at our passage together then. Matthew 11, Jesus teaching, says, verse 25, "At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.'" The knowledge we are seeking is knowable by little kids. What we are looking for can be found by little children. We just had Vacation Bible School this week. What an awesome moment for the church to kneel down and get eye to eye with kids and share the Good News of Jesus. They can know it! Verse 27, "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." What we are looking for is revealed by Jesus. Why can anyone get it, even little kids? Because it's Jesus who discloses the knowledge of God. It's Jesus who gives it to us. Feel simple or lost or undereducated in the things of God? Relax. You don't have to have PhD brains to get this. Jesus is going to do it, okay? Let's go on, verses 28-30, "Come to me..." Where is it found? Where will we find what we're looking for; what our soul needs? "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." There it is. That's what we need. "Rest for your souls."

Okay, let's break that down a little further. Verse 28: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Well, that sounds great! I'm in! Sign me up for Napfit. Read on! "Take my yoke upon you..." Well that sounds less great. A yoke sounds kind of worky. Isn't that the giant log you put on the shoulders of oxen and donkeys to plow fields? I was picturing more of a lounge chair by the pool kind of a thing. "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." Take a yoke, get yoked up with Jesus, and he says, "learn from me." This is rest? What I'm trying to point out is that rest in God's eyes, rest your soul needs might not be the type of rest you immediately think about. We take that word "rest" and immediately fill in all these vacation, recreation ideas we

have been trained to value and spend our money on, but this passage is saying "rest" is more about getting close to Jesus and getting all involved in Jesus' business. Ever need a vacation after your vacation? Rest doesn't equal vacation. Rest is being confident that your soul is resting, every moment, every day, even when you are busy—rest is being confident your soul rests on Jesus. You're yoked up with Him. The rhythms and patterns of rest are meant to train you to rest in Jesus every minute. They are meant to remind you where your rest and refreshment and repose, where your identity and value and purpose, where the true you really lies—in your being tied up with Jesus Christ.

Let me give you Eugene Peterson's *Message* about these verses: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." See, the last thing your soul needs, I'm guessing, is a moralistic sermon about sixteen religious things you're supposed to be doing with intense angst and dutiful religiosity otherwise your soul shrivels on the vine! Your soul needs rest. It's found in getting yoked up with Jesus and learning His moves, leaning on Him, and finding yourself moving in the "unforced rhythms of grace."

Now let me give you sixteen religious things to do. Just kidding. But let me move to practical, if you're wanting to activate something you've heard here. You know your soul needs rest. Your machinery needs time to cool off or the oil's going to burn and everything's going to lock up. It's not a legalism thing; it's an invitation, an opportunity to take a little better care of your soul. God made the Sabbath day for you. There is a raft of resources on healthy ways to practice Sabbath. Any of our pastors can point you to them, but I just want to give you three simple ideas. I like things simple so I can remember them. (1) **Stop**. That's what the word "Sabbath" means: a stopping; a ceasing. What will stop for you one day a week? Wendell Berry in his book *This Day* talks about the gift of stopping work and sitting outside somewhere beautiful. A tree isn't trying to be anything but a tree. A bunny isn't striving to get a leg up. It's just being a bunny. A rock isn't trying to be anything other than what God made it. Berry says of these creatures, "They think of us as wild, and they are right. We are the ones who are undomesticated, barbarous, unrestrained, disorderly, extravagant, and out of control. They are our natural teachers, and

we have learned too little from them.” (*This Day, Collected & New Sabbath Poems*). Sometimes we need to just stop, sit in creation and remember we are in the arms of our Creator. Stop. (2) **Pray**. This isn’t just a work stoppage. This is stopping “unto the Lord.” I’m stopping for God, to get closer to Jesus, to rest in His Spirit. Go to church. Put down the book you’ve been reading, the blogs, the magazines, and sit in Holy Scripture with the Lord. Pray all those things you meant to pray that week. This is a day for drawing close to the Lord. Then, after the **Stop**, after the **Pray**, then (3) **Fill**. Fill the day with play, with recreation, with stuff that fills you up and restores your spirit. Do something fun to connect with family and friends. Stop, Pray, Fill. Simple.

Imagine a world of no rest. Imagine a world of no Sabbath. Imagine endless labor and no recovery. Ceaseless activity and no repose. All work and no play. Imagine. It’s not hard to imagine it. We seem to be creating it again right now. Don’t we? Take a rest. Make sure your spiritual fitness plan includes healthy rhythms of rest and recovery. You have to be intentional. Time and space have to be planned, prepared, and defended. But your soul needs rest. This is a kind of protest, you know. I think about that every time I pull into Chick-fil-A on a Sunday and I’m so mad they’re closed! Oh yeah. Good for them. This is a protest. When we take a day of rest with the Lord we are saying to the world and the evil powers, I know what you’re up to. I know you don’t want God’s ways. I know you are trying to go back to a world without rest, to keep my soul disturbed and disquieted and unsettled and cloudy and confused. I know you are trying to wipe the ways of God off the face of the planet, and I’m not going to be a part of it. I stand with Jesus. He knows how to care for my soul. In him I rest. Jeremiah 6:16 says, “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”

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STUDY GUIDE

“What a Soul Needs: Rest”

Matthew 11:25-30

Start It

- The soul gets stirred up by activity and stress. The only way to let it settle is to stop and rest. But we are addicted to busy. In fact, our bodies and minds may be chemically addicted to it. We get a burst of adrenaline from stress. We get other hormones and chemicals when we have obstacles to overcome or challenges to match. Some executives and leaders are clinically addicted to these hormones. The world will run you ragged. But the way of God includes rest for your soul.

Study It

- Read Matthew 11:25-26. Is this passage saying the wise and learned don’t get to see God? What is Jesus saying is praiseworthy about the Father? If children can see the things of God, what does that say for us?
- Read Matthew 11:27. Who is in charge of revealing the things of God? Does that mean we should despair of pointing others to Jesus? What confidence can we gain from this verse?
- Read Matthew 11:28-30. Who is Jesus inviting to come near? And what does He promise? A “yoke” is an instrument for beasts of burden. Does that sound restful? Yoking up was also a way of talking about choosing a leader to teach and mentor you as a disciple. How does that apply?
- These verses are not accidentally grouped. Do you see a theme? When children seek, how do they find? When any seek, who is in charge of their finding? To whom does Jesus say we should turn? Where then does the soul find rest?

Pray It

Lord Jesus, our hearts are restless, our souls are disquieted, and we need rest. You say “Come to me,” but we hardly understand. Help us turn to You for full rest, full refreshment, full life for our souls. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Live It

Find a time to stop this week. Plan it, schedule it and defend it. Stop until you feel like you are truly resting in Jesus.