



Introduction

Why are the easiest things to do in the world often so hard? For example, resting, simply stopping our furious pace, seems easy to accomplish. Why do our minds, when prompted to rest, often race even faster? We're wired into compulsive cycles of doing, anxiously trying to accomplish, to become, to attain our dreams. Consequently, for many, resting is a mental, emotional, and physical collapse that happens in the empty space between explosions of adrenaline and energy. God knows that our desperate need for rest extends to our emotional, spiritual, psychological as well as physical well-being.

Rest in the Lord

“O Lord, my heart is restless until it rests in you.”

- St. Augustine, from *Confessions*

The concept of “rest in the Lord” is repeated all over the biblical text yet often overlooked and ignored. The occasions of God and His prophets calling his people to rest occurs hundreds of times in the Old and New Testaments. In fact, Psalm 37:7 (NKJV) says, “*Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.*” In this passage, God refers to a spiritual rest from confusion, worry, anxiety and meaningless human effort in battling internal and spiritual enemies. In the scriptures God warns us of spiritual adversaries, acknowledging their power, as a means of protection and diffusing that power over us. Yet, God knows that our focus on the enemy, on disease, on the barriers and adversaries, on challenge is often accompanied by stress and worry. Consequently, our call to purpose, to action against adversaries is coupled with His call for cycles of regular, disciplined moments of calm, peace and reflection.

Origins of the Word

The Hebrew word for “rest” is *sabbat*, (from which we get sabbath) meaning to stop, famously depicted by God halting his task of creation. Another translation for “rest” is *nuakh*, where we get the understanding of “to abide or rest in.” Essentially “rest” means to be at peace, to be still, quiet, and calm. The phrase, rest in the Lord, translates as surrendering yourself in the presence of the Lord. The Hebrew culture particularly esteems the concept of being at peace. Their greeting, *shalom*, means, peace be unto you, and their sacred city Jerusalem, or *Yērushalayim*, often translated as Jeru *shalom*, meaning to be in possession of peace. More than happiness or even victory, their goal was to live in peaceful existence, with the presence of justice.

Isaiah 32:17 - *The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.*

God Establishes a Rest Routine

Leviticus 23:3 - *Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.*

Leviticus 25:4 - *But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.*

Number 9:18 - *At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents.*

Starting early in the Old Testament, God promised His enslaved people a Promised Land of peace, an Eden. (Exo. 33:14; Joshua 1:13-15) Yet we notice on the way to this Promised Land, God builds into their schedule a routine of sabbaths, a discipline of stops to rest and reflect both physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The visible presence of God in Exodus, (the pillar of smoke and fire,) would always halt its movement on the seventh day. In reflecting on God's greatness and protection over them, they could better face the confrontations to come with faith that God would be with them. In the narrative, the people failed to understand that resting on Sabbath meant wholly surrendering to the Lord in righteous living throughout the other six days!

Hebrews 4 – Enter His Rest

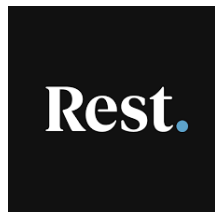
Psalms 4:8 - *In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.*

God calls for a discipline of fasting and prayer at regular intervals. Likewise, He calls for a discipline of rest, of clearing the mind in meditation and reflection on God's word. Every morning we can pray, reflect, and, getting up from our rest to break our fast, or breakfast, before beginning our daily routines. In the book of Hebrews 4, the writer examines at length the problems and benefits of entering rest in the Lord.

Hebrews 4:1-3 NLT - *“God’s promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn’t share the faith of those who listened to God. For only we who believe can enter his rest.”*

That is a tough statement, because there are many who do believe but have no rest. The challenge as believers is that our legitimate faith is affected, by our frantic stress, anxiety and worry that compromises our emotional, physical, and spiritual rest. We often have difficulty embracing the command to cast these cares upon the Lord. The power of prayer is directing our focus from the issues and problems onto the One who endows a peace beyond our understanding. Yet, we can easily be too stressed to pray or too anxious to shift our focus from the suffocating weight of our depression. So, a structured, disciplined routine of rest, emptying the mind, meditation and reflection is so important. We try to roll out these formulas for calm only when the pressure is most intense, wondering why they seem ineffective. God intended the power of the cycle, the regular routine of fasting, meditation, and prayer to become part of our discipline so it will be more effective when needed the most. The regular routine of focus on healing, which we call prayer, fasting, meditation, reflection, and focus can generate within a calm and a peace. God never promises to exempt us from trouble and storms. God promises to be with us and give us power **through** the trouble and storms.

John 16:33,34 - *I’ve told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here in this world, you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart. I have overcome the world.”*



God created rest to bless us, for our benefit, to restore us. Clearly, He considers it a gift to us. We experience true rest, peace that surpasses understanding, when we are regularly in His presence, fasting, praying, and reflecting on His word. Taking time from the business of our schedule, we must be still and silent, meditating and allowing Him to work in us. Yet, when the mind interrupts this peace, one strategy is to turn to the book of Psalms -

Psalm 4 - Call to God during the Sleepless Night

Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false god? Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him.

Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord. Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us. Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound. In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Psalm 16:1-2: 7-11) – Trust God with your Future

Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalm 23 - Allow Him to Lead You

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 127 - Give All Your Worries to Him

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.

In vain you rise early and stay up late,

toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.

Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth.

Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.

Psalm 131 - Quiet Your Soul Before God

*My heart is not proud, Lord,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.
Israel, put your hope in the Lord
both now and forevermore.*

