

Power in a Pause - 1 Kings 19

WHITE NOISE.

Has the noise of life served like white noise to drown out the voice of God?

Has our frenetic pace turned us into sleepwalkers spiritually?

Romans 13:11 reads - *But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day to day obligations that you lose track of time and doze off, oblivious to God*

Can our busy lifestyle paradoxically lull us to sleep spiritually?

Can the cultures cry to grind and get ahead cripple our spiritual growth?

Matthew 13:22 reads: *"but the worries and distractions of the world and the superficial pleasures and delight of riches choke the word, and it yields no fruit"*

"Busy" in Chinese comes from the root of two words – "heart" and "killing."

"If the Devil can't stop you, he'll get behind you and push."

How do we push back, lest we burn out, doze off, or get choked out?

From the life of Elijah and the greater context of the Bible tonight, there's three big picture ideas to rethink and reframe, and then a handful of practices we can walk in right now to reclaim rest.

RETHINK PACE... specifically the pace of my life.

It sounds counter intuitive at first: but **sustainability** is found when you don't try to **sustain** the same pace. We have to take purposeful pauses. Intentional timeouts.

In **1 Kings 19** Elijah was coming off a highlight reel flurry of activity. GOOD activity. Elijah was clearly burnt out, probably experiencing depression, and possibly genuinely suicidal. He prayerfully asks for God to take his life. End it. Put him out of his misery. (verse 4)

For some anxiety or depression is clinical and a fixture in our lives we treat and wrestle with, but for others it's something we experience when we arrive at moments like Elijah or Moses I want to focus on the latter and ask the question – what gets us to this point of burnout that's so bad that we feel these depressed ruminations?

And recently I watched a Ted Talk from a woman who surveyed leaders with a focus on rest. *53% of the leaders interviewed don't factor rest into their schedules.*

Psalms 46:10 - **BE STILL and know that I am God.**

Proverbs 1:33 in the MSG version: **First pay attention to me. And then relax. Now you can take it easy – you're in good hands.**

Elijah knew how to go fast. He had to learn to slow down.

If we don't slow down we'll eventually break down, which is far more painful.

God – “what are you doing here?” Being a wonderful counselor and allowing Elijah to pour out

Saundra Dalton Smith: **“Rest is the most underused chemical free, safe and effective, alternative therapy available to us.”**

RETHINK BOREDOM

We think boredom is bad.

Boredom was just a pejorative label placed in recent history by the rich and aristocratic on something incredibly good: an absence of outside stimulation that allows for inner reflection.

We think boredom is bad and desire to keep it at arms length.

We need to learn to embrace boredom again.

“Creative people need time to sit around and do nothing.”

Periods of doing nothing help us DO better.

Boredom can boost our productivity.

But all of these studies share our culture's focus and obsession with productivity

We would do well to remember Abraham Heschel's words:

“Man is not a beast of burden, and [rest] is not for the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of his work... it is not an interlude but the climax of living.”

We don't rest by simply unplugging from work, but also by plugging into God.

DAVID's productive boredom as shepherd vs. his sinful boredom as king.

In Psalm 51, David's cry of repentance, he states: ***“Create in me a pure heart”***

RETHINK PURITY

Matthew 5:8 - **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”**

It's worth asking - ***what if purity is speaking as much to the clarity as the cleanliness of our hearts and minds?*** Not just about what's unclean, but also keeping ourselves uncluttered.

Because purity can speak to what is **clear** vs. what is **cloudy**

Joe McNally, an award winning photographer for national geographic, one dropped this gem of a quote I've never shook, simply put by him - ***“Busyness is the enemy of clarity.”***

As we give in to the culture's call to grind and stay busy and distracted, we can forfeit clarity for cloudiness.

But we need to pursue many forms of rest beyond mere physical rest in sleep:
Spiritual rest. Mental rest. Emotional rest. Social rest. Sensory rest. ...All beyond physical rest.

I pause at the end of the day to paint. It's mental rest. It's sensory rest. It's social rest.
Painting forces me to pay attention to ONE thing.

In it I experience what psychologists call the ***FLOW STATE***, which they define as *a positive mental state experienced when you're completely absorbed, focused, and involved in an activity.*

In relation to what we're talking about tonight – **it's your mind running pure** – uncluttered from distractions. And studies show that the more you do this, the happier you'll be.

The question is – *how often do we give that kind of undistracted attention to God?*

It's telling that in the same sermon where Jesus makes the promise that the pure will SEE God, he goes on to seemingly instruct his disciples on how:

Matthew 6:6 – *go into your room, close the door... and pray to your father who is UNSEEN... then your Father who SEES what is done in secret, will reward you.*

QUESTIONS WE HAVE TO PAUSE AND ASK:

*Could it be that God feels distant not because he's distant, but because you're distracted?
Does your day to day life look like that of somebody that wants to hear from God?
Are you "dozing off" spiritually?*

If the answer is yes – I'm living a distracted, rushed life full of white noise.

OR if you're on the edge of burnout, worn thin...

PRACTICAL STEPS TO APPLY TODAY MOVING FORWARD

SCHEDULE REST

Elijah naps... twice!

God DID it in Genesis.

Upon completing creation what did God point to and declare as holy? A mountain? A planet?

No the time spent resting. The day of rest. The 7th day, the Sabbath rest he calls **HOLY**.

What's the first thing in Scripture that God calls holy? That ACT of rest.

A space away from doing, people pleasing, performing, controlling, or competing.

Jesus did it in the Gospels.

Luke 5:16 - *But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray [in seclusion].*

"often" is key here. It means it was routine. Part of his life's schedule.

The goal – schedule a weekly Sabbath.

We don't all get 24 consecutive hours to pull a Sabbath. Find pockets of rest regardless.

What can you do?

Because God commanded it. God modeled it. God created us with a need for it. Schedule it.

SPEND TIME IN NATURE

God sent a frazzled Elijah out into nature on a hike. Hiking has also been found by Stanford studies to reduce stress, calm anxiety, and reduce the risk of depression.

Habbakuk 2:20 reads: *“The Lord is His holy temple. Let all the Earth be silent before him.”* –

We'd do well to apply the advice of Van Gogh – *“find things beautiful as much as you can, most people find too little beautiful.”*

In fact when sending one painting to his brother Theo he said in an accompanying letter:

“Looking at this picture ought to rest the brain.”

Beauty can do that. And God's creation is full of it. So get out in it.

Find and build an appetite for beauty again. In that you'll find God.

PRACTICE SILENCE

Psalm 4:4 – Search your hearts and be silent.

It's helpful to consider in reverse order – because until you're silent and press pause on doing, it's hard to search your heart.

“Take time for stillness or you'll make time for illness.”

We can't just spend all our time trying to understand and master the world.

We need to take time turning inward to understand and master ourselves.

And we have to turn our ears toward God again.

Too often it's **“listen Lord, your servant is speaking.”**

When I need to echo Samuel's words: **“speak Lord, your servant is listening.”**

The same way you should find time for rest weekly,

You should find time for silence daily.

Like Elijah, we'll often find God there.

LIMIT SCREEN TIME

Distractions aren't a new issue, and the distraction free life is a pipe dream.

The answer is discipline and distraction management.

Our phones steal our productive pauses and serve up derailing distractions.

As a result they can be white noise- the fire, wind, and rain-- that drowns out the voice of God.

T. David Gordon, a professor of Religion at Grove City College, wrote: “*The Scriptures commend meditation on God’s Word and reflecting on truths, which require a certain affinity for solitude. If the digital world trains people to find solitude itself off-putting, then they can’t have much quality time with God.*”

Again – technology isn’t the source of the problem, our inability to pause is a tale as old as time. But tools can become tyrants.

Schedule times to go without screens on your sabbath, before bed, when you wake up, etc...

Again we have to ask - could it be we feel drained and God feels distant because we’re simply distracted and undisciplined?

“Jesus take the wheel”

Just as importantly - Jesus wants us to take our foot off the gas.

*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.*