

The Habit of Rest

The Power of Spiritual Habits #4 - Pastor Stephen Combs - September 7, 2025 - Matthew 11:28-30

INTRO: Good morning church! We're beginning a new 7-week sermon series called: "The Power of Spiritual Habits." It's a study of Christian disciplines passed down from the early church. We have so far paved this wonderful balance between personal devotion (week 1) and then corporate fellowship (week 2). Then last week we spoke of the habit of service so this week we will balance that with the spiritual habit of rest.

ILL: Phones. Incredibly powerful/smart. Have to be charged. Phone represents our potential. Cable represents the habit that determines where/if we find our power.

Spiritual habits act as a conduit that connects us to the power of the Holy Spirit. We not only open up and ask the Spirit to fill us, we create habits that give Him a conduit to fill us and use us to do God's will.

Series Theme: Ephesians 4:23-24 (NLT) ²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

This starts with a receptive heart, "letting" the Spirit change you, then leads to the action of "putting on", which is an intentional habit.

NEED: Now, I know how many of you in the room are feeling. School's back, sports are back (travel ball never left), maybe work is ramping up your work load, the holidays will be here before you know it. This time of year we often feel the pressure of the rat race. So we live in a state of stress ... an overwhelmed sort of just getting by until the next weekend, the next vacation, the next glass of wine, the next night of doom scrolling, or sadly until next summer. But these "nexts" are not real rest but merely distractions.

You see, many of us are trying to numb the problem with distractions but the problems remain. True rest is not living for distractions but walking in Jesus. What if we could find rest in the midst of our work, what if we could even live, work and play out of a state of spiritual rest?

"The world and the devil would have us work even while we rest. But Jesus would have us rest even while we work." — Scott Hubbard, *Should Christians Keep the Sabbath?*, Desiring God

Trans: As we study the words of Jesus today, I believe you will be encouraged to find that Jesus offers a superior rest, a spiritual habit of resting in Him that empowers us to work and engage our families and communities.

BODY: In Matthew chapter 11, Jesus invited the crowds to find rest for their souls not in laws or rituals but in relationship with Him. When we build the habit of rest in Him, we can discover rest for our souls. How do we practice the habit of rest in Jesus? In this passage, Jesus gives us three invitations that lead us into His rest.

Read text: Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV) ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

We Can Practice the Spiritual Habit of Rest in Jesus by ...

1. Coming to Him with our Burdens.

EXP: (v.28) ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Come to me" (28) (δεῦτε, *deute*) (**imperative**) - come hither, come here; interjection, come!, come now! I believe the non-believer should hear an sweet invitation and the Believer should hear a command.

"All who labor" (28) (κοπιᾶω, *kopiaō*) - to grow weary, tired, exhausted (with toil or burdens or grief); to labor with wearisome effort, to toil

"Heavy laden" (28) (φορτίζω, *phortizō*) - to place a burden upon, to load; metaphor for to load one with a burden

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"I will give you rest" (28) (ἀναπαύω, *anapauō*) - to cause or permit one to cease from any movement or labour in order to recover and collect his strength; to give rest, refresh, to give one's self rest, take rest; to keep quiet, of calm and patient expectation

We initially wanted to title this sermon, "The habit of Sabbath." But Jesus brings to light a rest that is on a larger scale than their 1st century understanding of Sabbath. Sabbath (*Shabbat*) means "rest" or "cessation." This was something they practiced weekly as commanded in the Mosaic law but Christ calls us to a Sabbath rest in Him. Scripture teaches that we have the freedom in Christ to practice the Sabbath if we feel so led by the Spirit. The apostle Paul writes:

Colossians 2:16-17 (ESV) ¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a **Sabbath**. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Romans 14:5 (ESV) One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

"Should a Christian practice Sabbath-keeping? If a Christian feels led to do so, absolutely, yes (Romans 14:5). However, those who choose to practice Sabbath-keeping should not judge those who do not keep the Sabbath (Colossians 2:16). Further, those who do not keep the Sabbath should avoid being a stumbling block (1 Corinthians 8:9) to those who do keep the Sabbath. — www.gotquestions.org/Sabbath-keeping.html

So, we chose to teach a universal spiritual discipline that applies to all Believers. The habit of spiritual rest in Jesus since Christ calls us all into His rest.

ARG: **Lay all of your burdens at the feet of Jesus and find true rest in Him:**

Psalms 55:22 (ESV) Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you.

1 Peter 5:7 (NLT) Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

Seek this rest in Jesus, obey His call:

Hebrews 4:9-11 (ESV) ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Come and celebrate the rest we have in Christ on the Lord's Day, Sunday:

"In the Old Testament the literal physical rest of the Sabbath pointed to future rest; but since Christ has brought fulfillment in terms of salvation rest, it is the present enjoyment of this rest that acts as the foretaste of the consummation rest which is to come. In other words, it is the celebration on the Lord's Day of the rest we already have through Christ's resurrection that now anticipates and guarantees the rest that is yet to be." — Andrew Lincoln, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*

ILL: **The "Check baggage" moment at the airport.** This may say something about me, but I feel anxious when I travel until all of my baggage is checked and all of my family is seated. Coming to Jesus is like handing over the weight you were never meant to drag through the terminal.

It's insane how often we worry, toil, stress, and waste away with sleepless nights over our burdens, but delay in prayer. It's embarrassing how often prayer comes last, coming to Jesus comes last. Yet when I do, my burdens are lifted.

APP: Rest begins where striving ends; by handing over our weight to Jesus, who alone is strong enough to bear it. Friends, some of you in the room need to enter this rest for the first time. Christ's call to come is first to you in salvation and then daily in restoration. Come to Jesus first for salvation (Share the Gospel)

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Then come daily for restoration. **Identify what's weighing you down.** Name it: guilt, anxiety, work pressure, strained relationships, fear of the future. Be specific to Jesus in prayer. **Replace self-reliance with dependence.** Our default is to push harder or try to fix it ourselves. But Jesus says rest begins not with working more, but with coming to Him. Make your first move prayer, not problem-solving. Come to Him daily, not occasionally. **Come to Him together in worship.** Jesus invites not just individuals but crowds. See worship as more than a service. It's where we collectively lay down our burdens before Christ.

2. Submitting to His Will.

EXP: (v.29a) ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me

"Take my yoke" (29) (ζυγός, *zugos*) (**imperative**) - a yoke that is put on draught cattle; metaphor used of any burden or bondage; as that of slavery. Allow me to remove a lie that we have been told for much of our lives especially as Americans. The lie of autonomy (I can be my own master). To quote the famous philosopher Bob Dylan, "You're gonna serve somebody." When you believe you are serving your own interests you will find that you are truly serving the world's interests. King Solomon describes worldly effort:

Ecclesiastes 1:2-6 (NIV) ² "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." ³ What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? ⁴ Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. ⁶ The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

To me, this is one of the many beauties of Christianity; that Christ offers something better than what the world offers. Instead of a yoke of never-ending vanity and the endless pursuit of more, Christ offers a yoke of purpose and rest.

"Learn from me" (29) (μανθάνω, *manthanō*) (**imperative**) - to learn, be apprised; to increase one's knowledge, to be increased in knowledge

ARG: True rest isn't found in doing nothing, but in being yoked to the right Master:

Romans 6:22 (NLT) But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.

1 John 5:3 (ESV) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

ILL: You will never hear a sailor say, "The wind was blowing that way, but I wanted to set my sails this way." We know full well that the wind determines the actions of the sailor not the other way around. Jesus said these famous words in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42), "Not my will, but yours be done."

Some of you are sailing against the wind. You've believed the lies of this world and have determined to live out, "Not your will but mine be done." If even the Son submitted His will to the Father, how much more must we? This may sound harsh, but you will not know rest in this life.

APP: Rest doesn't come from living life my way, but from surrendering to Jesus' leadership. Nor does rest come from escaping responsibility, but from walking in the purposes of Jesus. (Here comes a minefield)

- **Surrender your marriage:** Choose God's way over my way! "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord ... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Eph. 5:22-25) Selflessness over selfishness, forgiveness over bitterness, service over score-keeping.

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- **Surrender your parenting:** Raise children according to God's Word, not cultural standards. Prioritize discipleship over grades, church over travel ball, Christlikeness over achievements. "Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4) Some of you are negotiating with your 5 yr old rather disciplining them. It is YOUR job to teach them the reality that they are sinners in need of a savior and its your job to teach them to obey and honor you which leads to obeying and honoring God. "Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them." (Pro. 13:24) Discipline must be motivated by love and aim at correction and life, not harm.
- **Surrender your work:** View work as service to Christ, not as a platform for ego or just a paycheck. "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." (Col. 3:23)
- **Surrender your life:** Bring your habits, desires, and decisions under Christ's authority. Long for time with Jesus and not the next bottle or glass, not the next day off, not the next distraction. Surrender your finances, your dating, your planning. Come under the authority of Jesus.

You will not find rest in Jesus without surrender! Submit your life to His will!

3. Trusting in His Promises.

EXP: (v.29b-30) ²⁹ ... for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

"I am gentle" (29) (πραῖος, *praos*) - gentle, mild, meek

"Lowly in heart" (29) (ταπεινός, *tapeinos*) - as a condition, lowly, of low degree; lowly in spirit, humble.

"Rest for your souls" (29) (ψυχή, *psuchē*) - life: that in which there is life, a living being, a living soul; the soul: the seat of the feelings, desires, affections, aversions (our heart, soul etc.).

"My yoke is easy" (30) (χρηστός, *chrēstos*) - useful (in manner or morals); better, easy, good(-ness), gracious, kind.

"Burden is light" (30) (ἐλαφρός, *elaphros*) - light in weight, quick, agile.

ARG: Jesus always follows through on His Word:

Psalm 145:13 (NIV) ... The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.

Rest in Jesus by trusting in Him:

"I have heard it said that, 'Waiting on God ascribes to God the glory of being all to us.' For when we tirelessly toil, as though that's what it takes to keep our ship afloat, we steal God's glory, elevating ourselves as sole providers and sustainers of all we have and are. By refusing to slow down and bring things to a halt we are telling God that He is not enough for us ... When we trust Him by resting in Him, we exalt the Lord, championing Him as all-powerful in our purposeful inactivity." - Louie Giglio, *I Am Not But I Know I Am*

ILL: There is something interesting about the words of Jesus here, "Take **my** yoke ... **my** yoke is easy." You might say that Jesus is illustrating the yoke between two oxen except in this case it is you on one side and Him on the other. I would have a lot more confidence carrying that weight knowing the Lord is with me.

APP: **Rest in His promise of acceptance.** "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) **Live from His promise of strength.** His "yoke is easy" because He provides the strength to carry what He calls us to. **Jesus promises "rest for your souls."** That's freedom from striving and anxiety. **Anchor your hope in His promise of eternal rest.** When life feels heavy, rehearse this promise: "One day, all striving will cease. Christ has secured eternal rest."

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CONCLUSION: True rest is not living for distractions but walking in Jesus. We can find rest in the midst of our work, we can live, work and play out of a state of spiritual rest. Jesus would have us rest even while we work. We Can Practice the Spiritual Habit of Rest in Jesus by:

- Coming to Jesus with our burdens.
- Submitting to His Will.
- Trusting in His promises.

Let's Pray!