

Made for rest

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[0 : 00] Let us once again go to God. Let us ask for his help. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you have made us for your love and you continually pursue us so we might know that love.

So as we hear your voice this morning through your scriptures, help us to respond in love and shape us that we might live in the way that you've designed us to be. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen. Now let me begin this morning by asking you this question. Do you work to rest or rest to work? I suspect most of us will probably answer the former.

Perhaps many of us can identify with this graphic on the screen. Work doesn't really get you excited at all. You're already counting the days of leave that you have.

You're looking at the holiday brochures and saving up money bit by bit. all so that you can have that long-awaited travel break. But here's the thing.

[1 : 04] When the holidays roll around and you get on the plane to your dream destination, you find yourselves going through the four stages of holiday angst. Next graphic. Your first day is glorious, but before you know it, you're counting the remaining days before you have to go back to the real world.

The holiday doesn't last forever. And of course, sometimes the truth is the relationship between work and rest can be a little more complex than that.

Maybe you're like Kenny here on the screen. No relation to our elder, I'm sure. At work, you dream of holidays, but when you are on holiday, you find yourself thinking about work.

You're still stressed. You just can't switch off. And that constant push and pull in two different directions is what so often characterises life in this world, doesn't it?

Maybe you feel the push of some major project at work and the pull of some home repairs that you can't put off any longer.

[2 : 17] If you are around my age, maybe you feel the push and the pull of, you know, handling young kids and looking after your age parents. Or maybe you feel the push of needing to keep fit and the pull of showing that you've been to the latest nice, restaurant.

Oh, no wonder we need a break. But the thing is, although we take vacations to try and vacate our minds from its many worries, too often we find the vacations in themselves are vacant.

They're empty in themselves. They are the equivalent of cotton candy. They don't give pleasure that lasts. They promise rest, but they don't really give true, substantial rest.

Not the kind we long for, anyway. And if you can identify with all that, then I want you to know that the book of Genesis wants to have a word with you today.

Today, God wants you to know that that is not what he originally designed you for. You see, when God designed us, he had an aim. He had a goal.

[3 : 35] And knowing what that goal is can help us understand why this push and pull that we feel in this world affects us so deeply. And it can help us recalibrate so that we can live in line with God's design.

And so what we'll do this morning is to look first of all at the text before us, Genesis 2, verse 1 to 3. And then after that, we'll look at how this text unfolds in the rest of the Bible so as to draw out its implications for us today.

And to help us navigate our passage, I'm going to give you three Ps. So here is our first P. Purpose. The first thing we discover today is that the purpose is rest. Now, I wonder, as you read Genesis 2, verse 1 to 3 today, did you find it all a little anticlimactic?

I mean, look at what came before. There is God speaking the moon and the sun and the stars into existence. There is God filling the water with the great sea creatures and the land with great wild animals.

[4 : 51] And there is God creating nothing less than living images of himself to rule over the planet. Everything on the first six days has been dazzling and majestic.

And so when we get to Genesis 2, verse 1, our hearts begin to pump a little faster. Hey, this is the last day.

So we must be reaching the grand finale, right? And when we read Genesis 2, verse 1, the heavens and the earth were completed in all its vast array, it seems like our expectations are going to be met.

I mean, the universe has come a long way from Genesis 1, verse 1 and 2, hasn't it, when it was formless and empty? It has undergone a complete transformation.

But then, after Genesis 2, verse 1, all it just says is, oh, and God stopped.

[5 : 59] It feels like listening to an orchestra suddenly being cut off, or like watching a movie where the hero is going to do his big thing and then the credits pop up prematurely.

So maybe day 7 isn't so important after all. Maybe day 6 is the true climax of creation with its majestic picture of humanity and day 7 is just Moses wrapping things up.

But let's pay attention to the way verses 2 and 3 are structured. Now, it's probably not as obvious in our English translations, but verses 2 to 3 actually contain 4 lines.

And the first 3 lines are parallel with each line containing exactly 7 words each in the Hebrew. And if you look at this more literal translation on the screen, what do you see?

Have a look. That's right. Notice that in the middle of each line, they have the exact same phrase.

[7 : 07] The seventh day. And so the seventh day stands at the very centre of these verses. And if we keep paying attention, we begin to realise that day 7 is truly unique.

For one thing, unlike the other days, there is no let God sit, God doesn't speak. For another, this day stands on its own.

Do you remember how days 1 to 6 are all paired together? So for example, on day 1, God formed night and day, and then on day 4, God filled it with the sun and the moon.

But day 7 alone is not paired with any other day. And of course, the seventh day, verse 3 tells us, it's the only day blessed and set apart by God.

So all this tells us that day 7 is special. Yes, day 6 is important. It is when we were created and commissioned. It was important enough to spend one entire sermon looking at it last week.

[8 : 20] But day 6 is not the goal. No, day 7 is where all creation is heading towards. It is day 7 which tells us what God ultimately made us for.

And what is that goal? Well, notice what is highlighted. End of verse 2. On the seventh day, God rested from all his work.

And then in case we didn't get it, the end of verse 3 tells us again, and on this day God rested from all the work of creating that he had done. So God rests.

Now at first glance this seems strange. Why does God need to rest? Was it because he got a little tired? Were his arms beginning to ache from assembling the stars?

No, that cannot be. As the prophet Isaiah would later put it, do you not know? Have you not heard?

[9 : 28] The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary and his understanding no one can fathom.

So why did God rest? perhaps an analogy from later on in scripture might help. Throughout the Old Testament, Sabbaths were days of joy.

We usually think of them as days where you're not supposed to do stuff, but actually they're meant to be days of enjoyment. In particular, they are the days when you can enjoy eating what you planted and cultivated during the week.

In other words, Sabbath wasn't about just taking a day off. Rather, it was about enjoying the fruits of your labor.

A little example can be found in Exodus 16, verse 22 to 26. Israel there instructed to gather manna on the sixth day, extra manna, I should say, so that on the seventh day, they do no collecting, but simply get to enjoy what they've already finished collecting the day before.

[10 : 50] And God rests on day seven, not because he's exhausted, but because he's completed. Creation is all done.

And in that completion, there is satisfaction. he is enjoying the fruits of his labor. Have you ever done some DIY project?

Maybe you took some time to build some bookshelves, and it took you a while as you measured and you drilled and you hammered, but then the day finally comes when there is nothing left to do. You can put away your tools, put some books on the shelves, and just admire your handiwork. You find satisfaction in completion.

And that is what is going on here. Now, that doesn't mean, of course, that God is doing completely nothing. Rest here is not complete in activity.

[11 : 59] As Jesus himself would say later on in John 5, verse 17, God is still very much working. He is still sustaining the universe, making sure that our hearts continue beating, and the world continues spinning.

But, verse 3, God is done with this specific project. All the work of creating is done. And so, he rests.

He enjoys delights, delights, delights, relishes in the good, good world, and yes, the good, good humans whom he has made.

But now comes an especially incredible detail. Did you notice something else different about the seventh day? on all the other days, it ends with, and there was evening, and there was morning, but not this day.

It just goes on and on. You see, this day of rest does not end. God intended this day never to cease.

[13 : 17] He intended to delight in his good creation forever. He intended to delight and to relate to the human beings he had made forever.

Or put another way, God had always intended for humankind to enter into and share in his unending rest.

And that's why when we read the rest of Genesis 2, we discover a world of refreshment. They are the trees that are good for food and pleasing to the eyes.

There is the relationship between the man and the woman that is so free, so open that they can be naked with each other without any shame. That's how relaxed they feel.

And the Bible says we were made for this. The purpose is rest. We were made to rest in God as we relate to him.

[14 : 23] God God made work as a good thing.

But God didn't start by immediately putting them to work because that is not the end goal. Did you realize that the seventh day is Adam and Eve's first day of existence?

They were created on the sixth day and so their first day on earth is the seventh day. And God made sure before anything else, they were there with him, enjoying his presence as he rested and takes delight in them.

My friends, do you see how wonderful God's purposes for us are? Before we were made to work for God, we were made to be in relationship with God.

And we were made to keep being in relationship with God. Here is the amazing truth. From the very beginning, God never intended relationship with him to be a reward for our hard work.

[15 : 41] In so many cultures, we say, work hard first, then you can earn a well deserved rest. But in God's design, he says, first of all, come enter into my rest.

Come feel my delight in you. Come feel my pleasure with you. Then you can complete the task I have set before you.

Before you become productive for me, come rest in my presence. Or to use a phrase that the pastor John Piper made famous, God says, come glorify me by enjoying me forever first.

That is our purpose. How amazing that is. We were made for rest in God. We were made for his unyielding love. And the reason we can rest without any worries consuming us is because we were made to rest in this God.

You see, who is our God? According to Genesis 2 verse 1 to 3, he is a God who finishes his work.

[17 : 03] In other words, he sees things true. he gets things done. Did you notice that's what these verses keep stressing? Verse 1, the heavens and the earth in all their vast array are completed.

Or verse 2, God rests because he has finished the work he has been doing. And so we can rest secure.

We don't have to be like Kenny at the beginning, worrying while on holiday, whether this or that has been done. We don't have to be anxious because there is some uncertainty hanging in our future.

Instead, we can trust him completely because we know that God is someone who finishes what he sets out to do. In Malaysia, we know so many grand projects that got started but never got finished, don't we?

Maybe the company got sunk by the burden of debt, or overwhelmed by the complexity of the project. But our God is never ever burdened or overwhelmed.

[18:14] No matter how much we lay on him, there is never a point where he gets stressed as well. No. No matter the obstacles, no matter the complications, God says, no worries, I've got it.

His purposes, and don't forget it's his purposes, not ours, as Nathan reminded us earlier, will always be accomplished.

What a relief that must have been to Israel in the wilderness. Remember, they are the first readers of Genesis 1 and 2. And they knew God as a God who had made many promises to them to make them into a great nation, to bring them into the promised land, to a place of blessing.

But the question was, will he do it? Will he finish the job? And Moses says, be confident because your God finishes what he starts in Genesis 2 verse 1 to 3.

And we too can be confident this morning if we call ourselves Christians. We can trust his work of redemption because on the cross, Jesus cried out, it is finished.

[19:39] We can trust his work of sanctification because Paul says, he who began a good work in you will see it to completion. We can trust his work of glorification because John says in Revelation 21 that the work of making all things new is as good as done.

Because God finished his work, because God rested, that means you can enter his rest and rest with him.

without worry. But now you say, okay, Pastor Brian, that is great, I'm so excited that that's what God made us for. But wait a minute, day seven, that day of rest without end, it no longer exists, does it? I mean, I've read Genesis 3 and 4, more accurately describes my life right now than Genesis 2 verse 1 to 3.

And of course, you are right. That rest of Genesis 2 verse 1 to 3 has been interrupted. Thanks to sin, there is toil, there is curse, there is groaning.

[21:23] We know it all too well. But you see, why did Moses write Genesis 2 verse 1 to 3? It wasn't out of nostalgia for a time that we can no longer go back to.

It's because he wants to show us what God intends to restore us back to. You see, if the purpose is rest, then God promises to give us rest.

That is our second P for today, the promise of rest. And you could almost say that is what drives the rest of the Bible.

Thanks to sin, we have given up our God given privileges, but God hasn't given up. He is still determined for us to come into his presence, to enjoy him forever.

You know, take the building of the tabernacle in Exodus, for example. When it is completed, how is it described? Now, have a look on the screen, and I've used the ESV translation here to make it a little clearer.

[22:32] I hope the font is big enough, but have a quick scan. And did you notice how the language in Exodus deliberately echoes Genesis 2 verse 1 to 3 throughout?

Given that Moses wrote both, that is not accidental. By using the same language, Moses is telling us that the end goal of the tabernacle is really the same as the end goal of creation.

They are constructed with the same purpose in mind. God wants us to come into his presence and find rest in him.

rest. And that is his promise. This is his mission. And that is what we find throughout the scriptures. Remember where God is bringing Israel to in the wilderness?

He's bringing them to the promised land. And that land is repeatedly described in the Old Testament as a place of rest, a place of security, a place of refreshment.

[23:46] I've put some references on your sermon outline. That is the goal of redemption. And it is no different from the goal of creation.

God wants his people still to rest with him in relationship with him. You know, sometimes we reduce God's salvation to forgiveness, don't we?

And it is wonderfully true that when Christ saves us, we are forgiven. But actually God's salvation comes with a bigger purpose in mind. God wants nothing less than for us to be at rest, at peace, in harmony with him, and in tune with his good will, to be refreshed and restored and ready to go

serve him.

And that is why in the Ten Commandments, God sets aside the Sabbath day, as a day of rest. In Exodus 20, God says it's so that we remember God's goal in creation was ultimately to rest in him. That's where the Ten Commandments are. And in Deuteronomy 5, where the Ten Commandments are repeated, this time we are told it's so that we remember God rescued his people for rest.

[25 : 11] They are really two sides of the same coin. God has promised unending rest for us, whether that is in day seven of his initial creation, or in his act of recreation in his redemption from Egypt.

You see, God didn't give the Sabbath to help us achieve work-life balance. No, God gave the Sabbath as a sign that he is working to save his people from the restlessness of a fallen world, so that they can enjoy the comfort of his presence.

And that is why in the Old Testament, the penalties for Sabbath breaking were so severe. If you broke the Sabbath, you were basically saying to God, you don't want to be in relationship with him. But wait a minute, you say, Israel entered that place of rest, yes, but they didn't experience this rest as an eternal reality. Their rest was interrupted by more war, more fighting, and eventually exile. So where is the fulfillment of this promise? God says it comes through Jesus. As Jesus himself says, Matthew 11, verse 28, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

[26 : 48] And I hope that now that we've understood Genesis 2, verse 1 to 3 a little better, Jesus' words hit you just a little harder.

Because Jesus isn't just saying, oh, if you're a little bit tired, let me get you some nice pillows for you to be comfortable. No, he's promising something better.

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.

In other words, Jesus is saying, walk with me, work with me, and as you do so, you don't have to be afraid. I won't lay anything on you that you can't bear.

On the contrary, stay close to me, and you will experience God's promise of rest come to reality. So my friends today don't miss that rest offered by Christ.

[27 : 55] He has promised it to all who trust him. And so the very first question I have to ask today is, do you know Christ? Do you trust Christ?

Have you rested in Christ's finished work on the cross? One of my all-time favorite quotes comes from Augustine, you have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

rest. And so do you want freedom from the restlessness of your existence? Only in Christ. And God wants with all his heart for you to know that rest.

Genesis 2 tells us that was his goal from the very beginning. So believe and enter that rest. rest. But perhaps you do already believe.

If so, what then? Well, keep striving to enter that rest. That's the big point of Hebrews chapter 4 verse 1 to 11.

[29 : 18] And that's where the idea of rest gets most fully unpacked in the New Testament. And as you heard it read earlier this morning, you might have worked out that it is a bit of a complex passage, and you'll be relieved to know that we won't be doing any kind of detailed study of it this morning that can wait till the day we go through the book of Hebrews.

But here is the gist. If you believe in the good news of Jesus Christ, you have entered that rest, Hebrews 4 verse 3. It is a greater rest than even Joshua knew, chapter 4 verse 8 to 10, for it is the glorious rest of Genesis 2.

But because we are not yet in day 7, because Jesus has not yet come back, the promise of rest still stands.

Hebrews 4 verse 1. Complete eternal rest is still future. And so make every effort to enter that rest, verse 11.

in other words, keep striving to know and to hang on to that person of rest, Jesus, more and more.

[30 : 34] And while we still live in this present age, God has helped you set out some patterns of rest for us. And that takes us to our final P for today, the pattern for rest.

Now, all throughout history, Christians have looked at Genesis 2 and they've asked, if we are made for rest, and we await the final rest, how can we rest in the meantime?

Put another way, how can we practice Sabbath? And you might know that Christians have had different answers to this, and we won't get into all the various debates, but the best approach, it seems to me, is to say this, the Old Testament Sabbath laws are no longer binding on us, Jesus has come, and he is the true tabernacle that brings God's presence to us.

He brings the true rest that the Sabbath was a picture of. As Colossians chapter 2 verse 16 to 17 puts it, these, that includes the Sabbath, are a shadow of the things that were to come, the reality, however, is found in Christ.

So in him, the Sabbath laws are fulfilled, and that might be why the Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated or made much of in the New Testament.

[32 : 04] But having said that, Sabbath still offers us much wisdom by establishing patterns for rest. It models for us a way of being in this world that is in tune with God.

And so as we finish, let me suggest a couple of patterns of rest we can seek to establish to help us live the way that God wants us to. Number one, rest by remembering redemption.

And that's one of the reasons why Israel was to keep a day of rest. They were to remember God's redemption. And so should we.

Now, of course, we want to do this daily, but we all know that common problem, busyness. And here, I'm preaching to myself as much as to you.

Busyness is the spiritual equivalent of high blood pressure. It is a silent killer damaging your heart. It robs us of time with God, that we might grow a heart for God, but often we don't feel its effects until it is too late.

[33 : 25] And so we need to set aside time, not so much to have a vacation, but to rest in God. And there is wisdom perhaps in setting aside a day in particular where we intentionally make ourselves especially present to God.

God did so in keeping day seven set apart, and the Israelites did as well. After all, day after day, there are so many distractions present, aren't they?

people. A few months ago, I read about how Netflix executives are plotting their business strategy to try to consume every waking moment of our day.

They want our full attention. But resting in God is really about paying full attention to God and paying attention to what he might be seeking to do in our busy hearts.

rest. And resting in God is about pausing to breathe in his grace. You see, sometimes we are so busy because we are trying to make something of ourselves, aren't we?

[34 : 44] We keep ourselves busy because we want to matter in our work, we want to matter in our family, we want to matter in our social circles.

ourselves. But that treadmill of constantly trying to prove ourselves can be pretty exhausting. It's exhausting, isn't it, regularly wondering if people approve of your latest Insta story?

But what we need to be reminded of is that actually God doesn't need us to prove ourselves. He has already given us grace.

we were made to abide in him, not achieve for him. And so, to quote some wise words from another pastor, Sabbath is not just rest from making things, it's rest from the need to make something of ourselves.

God. And the best way to remember redemption really is simply go to church every week and worship God.

[35 : 59] My hope is that as you come to church, you will see it as a chore, something that you just need to take off that list. Rather, as you come to worship with other believers, your mindset will be, I am so glad I am here because I get to hear the gospel all over again.

I get to be reminded of the rest God has in store for me all over again. I get to remember God's work and God's purposes will always be accomplished all over again.

And as I hear all that, I get to be spiritually refreshed all over again. That's one pattern of rest we can establish.

Here's another one. Rest by learning our limitations. I'm sure, without a doubt, that there are quite a few people here who are basically type A personalities.

For you, it is go, go, go, go, all the way. And when you hear the word rest, you say, sure, nice idea, but hey, I've got a demanding job.

[37 : 06] Or, I've got three young kids. Or, I've got a long bucket list to accomplish. rest is just a nice theory that is impossible in practice.

But God says to us gently, hey, look at how this universe is built. How did I execute the biggest job of all time, the creation of this universe? I work.

And I rested. That is how I've made this world. It wasn't work the whole way. and that is how I've made you. I've made it such that life is not just work, whether it is the paid work of employment or the unpaid work of parenthood or caring.

And if you live in such a way that you never ever switch off from work, you end up destroying yourself, destroying families, even destroying societies.

rest so that you can learn you are not God. It doesn't all depend on you. You have limitations.

[38 : 21] Rest to learn to trust God more. Again, as one writer puts it, unless we trust God's sovereignty, we wouldn't dare risk Sabbath.

There is no rest if you are not convinced God is good and God is sovereign. But when you rest in God, you are declaring, God, I am small.

But you are big. And so I trust you to handle all the balls that I'm juggling. And actually, the more I rest in you, the bigger I will find you.

And that is how he designed it to be. So rest by learning our limitations, causing us to look at our unlimited God, who made the heavens and the earth in all its vast array.

Now, of course, what resting in God looks like exactly will be different for everyone. The retiree, the young parent, and the shift worker all will need to work out for themselves how they should go about it in their specific circumstances.

[39 : 33] promises. But my brothers and sisters in Christ, we were made for rest. We were made to abide in God.

And in this restless world, God promises us rest. So strive to enter that rest by running to Jesus, know his presence, and look forward to that unending day seven where we will see God face to face and delight in his presence forever.

Father, praise you so much for who you are.

Thank you that you are a God who never gets tired, never gets weary. You always accomplish your purposes, so I pray that you accomplish your purposes even this morning.

Help us to take to heart what you have to say to us. to find the rest of a relationship with you, of trusting your goodness and your grace.

[40 : 52] And I pray for any today who are especially restless, who are very tired, who are finding it difficult at the moment. May they know the rest that Jesus offers them.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.