

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Building Faith at Home Series - Stretched Thin: A Series on God and Money

Jeff Harrison

Receiving the Gift of Rest

Matthew 11, Mark 1-2

Introduction:

A. The importance of building faith at home

Good morning friends. And thanks to everyone who's been supporting my wife Stephanie and I as she recovers from ankle surgery. From prayers, to cards, to meals, to watching kids, to checking in on us, we're very thankful to be part of this church family. And thanks as well to Dave for the very applicable *Lessons Learned in the Wilderness* sermon series.

This morning I'm excited for us to start our new Building Faith at Home series. Building Faith at Home is one of our core values as a church. God's Word, in places like Deuteronomy chapter 6, Psalm 78, and Ephesians chapters 5 and 6, shows that home is an important place for spiritual growth. And we want all the homes of our church, whether living with others or alone, married or single, kids or no kids, to be healthy, loving, Jesus-centered homes where faith is nurtured. And so each February we bring messages designed to build faith at home. And we're helpless to do this our own, so let's pray now and ask God for help.

B. Introducing our current series

Now as I thought and prayed about matters our homes are dealing with, the issues of time and money came to mind. That many homes feel stretched thin when it comes to time, money, or both. And so we're going to spend February seeking guidance from God's Word on these important subjects, inviting God to lead our homes in His life giving ways. For the subject of time, we'll focus this morning on rest, and then next Sunday on redeeming our time.

C. Resting well is challenging and important

In a busy culture like ours, rest seemed like the best place to start. A helpful resource on the subject is pastor Kevin DeYoung's book entitled *Crazy Busy*. DeYoung starts *Crazy Busy* by noting, "I've yet to meet anyone in America who responds to the question, 'How are you?' with the reply, 'Well, for starters, I'm not very busy.' I suppose there must be some six-year-old somewhere out there who doesn't 'have anything to do' and some dear folks at the nursing home

who could use a few more interruptions, but for almost everyone in between there is a pervasive sense of being unrelentingly filled up and stressed out.”¹

It is not easy to rest well. We face challenges and opportunities that previous generations did not. We process so much information every day and have a world of information always at our fingertips, everyone can call, text, email, or message us at any time, many of our jobs can be worked on 24/7, we have nearly limitless entertainment options, we can travel relatively easily, check social media at any time, there’s tons of activities for our children, so many possessions to manage, the increasing speed at which culture changes, and on and on it goes. As Kevin DeYoung says it, “The result, then, is simple but true: because we *can* do so much, we *do* do so much. Our lives have no limits. We eat (most of) what we want, buy (most of) what we want, and say yes to (too much of) what we want.”²

This truth hit home for me a year ago. Back when my daughter Kate was two, she started making an “interesting” reply whenever I’d ask her to do something she didn’t want to. I’d say, “Kate, you need to pick up your empty yogurt tube on the ground and put it in the trash.” Now keep in mind Kate at this point is still in diapers and sleeping in a crib. Her reply to my request to pick up her yogurt tube: “Me busy.” “Me busy.” Now I wonder where she picked that up. It was probably from her mother; no definitely her mother, certainly not from her pastor father. ☺

So I need these messages too. It’s tough to rest well, but it’s important. Staring in the very first chapters of the Bible, God models the importance of rest. There in the Bible book of Genesis, God is described as creating for six days, and resting on the seventh. Then in the second book of the Bible, Exodus, God gives His people ten big commands to live by, and one is to take a weekly Sabbath, a day to focus on worshiping God and resting from labor. And interestingly, the longest of the Ten Commandments is this one on Sabbath. It’s like God’s saying here, “taking a day off each week for worship and rest is a big deal,”

Today, there is debate regarding a Christian’s exact relationship to the Old Testament Sabbath. Bible passages like Romans 14, Colossians 2, and Galatians 4 suggest we don’t have to follow all the regulations of Old Testament Sabbath. However, the New Testament shows we still need rhythms of work and rest. And because we don’t have the clear rules to follow, we need guidance on resting. And what better place to look than to Jesus. So this morning, we’ll

¹ DeYoung, Kevin, *Crazy Busy*, 11.

² *Ibid*, 24

see how Jesus models, teaches, and provides rest. If you'd got a Bible, please turn to the gospel of Mark, chapter 1; Mark chapter 1.

I. Jesus modeled rest (Mark 1)

A. Physical rest

As we look at Jesus' relationship to rest, we'll have to be selective in our coverage. But the first thing to highlight is that Jesus rested physically. During His three years of public ministry, Jesus had tons of demands, crowds of people asking for healing, seeking His teaching, wanting to join His disciples, religious leaders questioning and opposing Him, all the while traveling from place to place, always equipping His disciples along the way.

Sometimes Jesus was so busy He didn't have time to eat, and other times huge crowds would press in on Him to the point He had to escape by boat. So as we talk about rest this morning, we're not talking about selfishly avoiding all hard work or saying no to every need.

For as individuals, we're called to work for the common good and care for our families and love our neighbors. And as a church family we're called to pursue life changing, discipleship relationships with God, with each other, and with our world. So following Jesus will inevitably include challenge and sacrifice and busyness for the sake of God and others. Yet as we look to Jesus, we also see that He took time to rest.

As we read the gospels, the four books in the Bible about Jesus' life on earth, we see things like Jesus sitting at a well to rest while He sends His disciples into town to buy food (John 4) and Jesus taking a nap as His disciples sailed their boat (Mark 4). Jesus is the most incredible servant of all time, but while on earth, even He didn't do it all. At times He allowed others to do the work so He could get the rest that we all need.

Yet with so many demands on our time and electronic devices to keep us awake, it's tempting to go to bed late every night and wake up early every morning. We would be wise to follow Jesus' example of living with limits, to acknowledge that sometimes we need to go to bed early, or sleep in, or take a nap, like Jesus did. That occasionally we need to veg out or connect with loved ones and do something fun. For if we don't get needed rest and recreation, eventually it's going to cost us.

Back when I was in seminary studying to be a pastor, many students were stretched thin, just like many of us here today. In seminary many students were struggling to keep up with graduate level studies, serving many hours in the church, working jobs to pay the bills, raising

young families, living on tight budgets. So occasionally, a concerned professor would remind us that when we're tired sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is take a nap, like Jesus.

Look now with me at Mark chapter 1 as we continue to explore how Jesus worked and rested. Mark 1 is early in Jesus' public ministry, and He's in a town called Capernaum. There Jesus teaches with astonishing authority, and He casts out a demon and heals a sick woman. So word spreads, and that evening the city gathers to Him. And Jesus heals many sick people and casts out many demons. Now look at verse 35 as I read the rest of the story.

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷ and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸ And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." ³⁹ And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

So after a night of wildly successful ministry, Jesus goes off to pray, and His disciples find Him and say, "Everyone is looking for you." And with all Capernaum looking for Him, and His disciples basically telling Him to get back there to minister, Jesus sets a boundary. He tells them it's time to go to the next town. It's not that Jesus didn't care about the people looking for Him in Capernaum. Jesus made them, and loved them enough to die on a cross for them. But it wasn't the Heavenly Father's plan for Jesus to spend more time healing and teaching those specific people at that time.

Like Jesus in His earthly ministry, we are to care *about* all people, their hurts, their needs, the injustices they face, but we can only directly care *for* some people. Godly care for others often leads to prayer and other actions, and it should. Some of us may need to do more for the sake of God's kingdom, and we'll talk about redeeming our time next Sunday. But because we live with limits, godly care can't always lead to action. Otherwise we turn the good news of Jesus into bad news about how we must keep doing more and more and more to fix the world.

B. Spiritual rest

Now look back with me at verse 35. Notice that Jesus went to a desolate place to spend time with God. We need rest and recreation, but it's not enough. Here we see the importance of spiritual rest.

Throughout the gospels we see multiple times where Jesus pulls away for an extended period of prayer. And if the very Son of God wanted and needed that time away to be alone with

the Father, how much more do we? We need time alone reading His Word and responding in prayer, being rejuvenated by God's power and love. We need the spiritual rest and reorientation of life that comes from time with God.

And as we read through the gospels, we see Jesus not only communing with God alone, He also did it in community. We see Jesus keeping the custom of going to the synagogue, the worship service of His day. We see Jesus in close, honest, prayerful relationships with other believers. Jesus rested spiritually, both alone and with others. And because Jesus rested both physically and spiritually, even His hard work had a restful quality about it. For as He ministered He accomplished a lot, yet we never see Jesus frantic, running around, stressed out. Rather, even His work was filled with God's love and peace. Doesn't that sound nice?

C. A mentor's advice on resting

While I was in Dallas for seminary, my senior pastor there shared with me about a time he called his deeply respected spiritual mentor for advice. He wanted to see what the mentor advised as he took on the responsibility of pastoring a megachurch. He had his pen and pad ready to take a bunch of notes, but the mentor gave him only one piece of advice.

That advice? Rest in God in a way that frees you to ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. For with a flock of thousands, there would always be responsibilities and challenges, more could always be done. And with that comes the temptation to live with a frantic pace.

And that hurry-filled busyness would lead to less physical and spiritual rest. I don't know about you, but I see that tendency in me. That as things get busier and more stressful, it's so easy to start sleeping less, spending less time in prayer and Bible reading, decreasing church engagement, eating more fast food, no time for refreshing relationships and activities, and on and on. We allow stress and busyness to keep us from taking the physical and spiritual rest we need, resulting in decreased physical health, and an impoverished soul. A soul growing disconnected from God, decreasing in joy and in care for others, growing in resentment, looking to unhealthy places for comfort, starting to justify dangerous sinful attitudes and actions.

The costs of an impoverished soul to ourselves and our homes are huge, and these dangers are not limited to pastors. Some of us may already be living in a hectic, overly busy way where spiritual poverty has already begun to set in.

II. Jesus taught about rest (Mark 2, Matthew 11)

A. Rest is a gift

We need help from Jesus, so let's turn now to Mark chapter 2 and see Jesus' insights on rest. By Mark 2, Jesus' popularity is already rising and it's clear He's against some of what the religious leaders were teaching. So the religious leaders, including the Pharisees, begin to oppose Jesus. Please follow along with me as I read, starting in verse 23.

²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were commanded to take a Sabbath each week, a day for worshipping God and resting from their labors. The Old Testament doesn't clearly define Sabbath work, so over time the religious leaders added rules to try to clarify what activity was Sabbath violating. Rules like how far you're allowed to walk on the Sabbath. And here Jesus' disciples violate one of these added Sabbath rules. As the disciples walked through a field, they began to pluck the heads of grain, rub them between their hands to remove the husks, and then eat them. They were eating a meal, but the Pharisees viewed this as doing the work of a harvester, and thus forbidden on the Sabbath.

So the Pharisees question Jesus about His disciples, and Jesus responds with a question of His own in verses 25 and 26, saying, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry...how he ate the bread of the Presence that only the priests were to eat?"

Now David was a famous king of the Israelites who lived 1,000 years before Jesus. Before David became king, the previous king tried to hunt him down to kill him. So David and his men are on the run and starving and David asks a priest for help. The only food the priest has is ceremonial bread that the Old Testament Law said could only be eaten by a priest. Yet despite the Law, David eats the bread and gives it to his hungry men as well.

So I think Jesus is making an argument to the Pharisees here in Mark 2 that basically goes, King David, who you Pharisees esteem, actually broke the Law by eating that bread. But he broke it so that he could honor the spirit of God's Law, that feeding starving men on the run

from a bad enemy was more important than following the Law that only priests should eat ceremonial bread. And if David actually broke the Law eating that bread, then My disciples can rub some grain in their hands to eat it when hungry. That isn't even prohibited by God's Law, it only violates you Pharisee's legalistic interpretation of Sabbath.

Now look back with me at verse 27. Here Jesus tries to correct the Pharisees by explaining the spirit behind the Sabbath command. There Jesus says, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." In other words, God didn't command Sabbath so that His people could get stressed out and make a bunch of legalistic rules to make sure they didn't accidentally do work. They were not supposed to serve the Sabbath, worrying about whether rubbing grain in their hands so that they could eat it was work. No, the Sabbath was there to serve them, a gift from God.

Now some of us may laugh at the ridiculousness of the Pharisees' legalism, but they might retort back to us, okay, you may not like our rules, but do you even have a weekly rhythm of rest? Or do you often decide that you're too busy that week for prayer, church involvement, and adequate sleep?

The Bible book of Exodus, chapter 23, describes the Sabbath as a weekly opportunity for God's people to be refreshed as they worshiped God and rested. Kevin DeYoung describes it in this way, "God gave us Sabbath as a gift; it's an island of get-to in a sea of have to."³

B. Ideas to help receive the gift of rest

Now I wish I could say physical and spiritual rest comes easy, but in a busy culture like ours, we must plan and make godly choices to receive the gift. Now every one of our homes has a different set of circumstances and challenges, and thus rest will be easier for some than others and will look different for each of our homes in the various seasons of life. But I'd love for all our homes to consider a few practical ideas to create more space for us to receive the gift of rest.

First, our use of media and technology. If you had to guess, how many minutes a day do use media and technology for personal use? Doing things like using your computer, tablet, and smartphone, watching TV and movies, playing video games. Keep that number in mind. Now it is said that the average American adult can read about 250-300 words per minute.⁴ If you were

³ Ibid, 91.

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/dec/14/you-can-t-speed-read-literature>. Accessed 2/20/15.

on the low end of that average, did you know that it'd take you less than nine minutes a day to read the entire Bible in a year?⁵

Now I own a computer, TV, and smart phone, so I'm not against media and technology. We're called to live faithfully in the world, not run away from everything in it. However we want to make sure we're not spending so much time on media and technology that it robs us of the spiritual and physical rest God wants to gift us.

And it's not just the amount of time we spend on our devices, we also want to make sure our devices aren't shaping us in ways that prevent us from working and resting well. That if we get too into the habit of scanning social media feeds, clicking on various pictures and links along the way, and jumping around from website to website and app to app and watching random clips and shows and playing games and listening to podcasts and checking our email a bunch of times and sending and receiving texts throughout the day... if we do this, we're probably fatiguing our minds with too much information and even training our minds to prefer distraction.

In *Crazy Busy*, Kevin DeYoung confesses that these patterns have led him to a point where he can't seem to work more than fifteen minutes without getting the urge to check his email, glance at a blog, and get caught up on Twitter.⁶ Sound familiar to anyone else?

So perhaps your home's application is to create more space for rest and relationships by having a period each evening with no devices. And even entire days where your home uses no screens, a "screen Sabbath."⁷ And if the idea of going the whole day without looking at social media, or playing games, or checking email stresses you out, that's probably a sign that you no longer own your smartphone, that it owns you. And that it's hindering you from receiving the gift of spiritual rest that is needed for spiritual depth.

Second, our activities. Some homes participate in so many activities that it's nearly impossible to rest well. Parents, we all want to see our kids learn and grow and have great experiences. But there's a point where we've filled our time with so many practices, games, recitals, out of town trips, birthday parties, and educational opportunities that we're too busy to rest physically and spiritually. Your kids may enjoy many experiences, but they'll fail to get what they really need, a close relationship with a home and church who prioritize God and rest well. Again, each home is different, so I have no interest in trying to legislate a maximum

⁵ <http://www.howlongdoesittaketoreadthebible.com/> Accessed 2/20/15.

⁶ DeYoung, Kevin, *Crazy Busy*, 81.

⁷ Ibid, 87.

number of activities. But I will ask you to consider if the number and kinds of activities your home does sends the implicit message that physical and spiritual rest aren't that important. And this issue of overscheduling is not limited to homes with kids, today many singles and empty nesters are also tempted to fill their time with more and more and more.

Third, our possessions. Now I'm not against owning possessions, and if you came over to our house you'd see plenty of stuff. The problem with possessions is that we can reach a point where we spend so much time doing online research on them and shopping for them and taking care of them and cleaning them up and organizing them and upgrading them and remodeling them and working extra hours to pay for them that it keeps us from the gift of rest. So maybe it's time to get together a substantial donation for our upcoming youth garage sale fundraiser. Don't tell our kids, but we've brought up some stuff. And going forward, before purchasing something new we would be wise to ask ourselves the question, "Is buying this really worth it?"

For I'd love for all our homes to make more wise choices that put us in a better position to receive the gift of rest and grow into a spiritually stronger community of faith. To enjoy that "island of get-to in a sea of have to."⁸

C. Rest requires submissive faith

Interestingly that quote continues with DeYoung saying, "He [God] also offers us Sabbath as a test; it's an opportunity to trust God's work more than our own."⁹ Turn now with me to the Bible book of Matthew, chapter 11. Matthew 11. Here Jesus provides the vital insight that rest requires submissive faith. Please follow along with me as I read Matthew 11, starting in verse 28, where Jesus says:

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."

Much could be said about these verses, but the point we'll make is that deep rest requires submissive faith. As verse 28 says, first we must come to Jesus. The Pharisees of Jesus' day said to do more and more, to strive to follow God's Law and all the rules they added around it to try to please God. In contrast, Jesus invites those burdened by their sins and hardships to come to Him, to trust that Jesus can give us rest because He died for our sins and rose from the dead.

⁸ Ibid, 91.

⁹ Ibid.

Look at verse 29 with me. Next we're called to take Jesus' yoke upon us and learn from Him. To take a yoke and learn in that context meant to become a committed disciple of Jesus, to submit to His ways and rule. And when we do this, we find the soul rest that comes when we surrender to Him and learn that He is gentle and humble and gives us a yoke that fits us well.

You see, there is a soul rest that comes when we experience Jesus' assurance that our salvation does not depend on us, it depends on Jesus' work on our behalf. That the responsibility to fix all the wrongs of the world does not depend on us, that Jesus will ultimately take care of that. And so we can physically rest when we need it and can enjoy the spiritual rest that comes as we worship Jesus alone and with the church.

Conclusion:

A. Receive the gift of rest

We can rest as an act of faith because we trust Jesus' promises. And may we receive the gift of physical and spiritual rest in Jesus and encourage one another to receive it.

B. Rest deeply in Jesus as we take the Lord's Supper (*Chariots of Fire* illustration)

And I can't think of a better way to starting applying this message than to enjoy spiritual rest in the Lord's Supper. In a minute we will distribute the bread and the juice. If you do not yet know Jesus as your Savior, please let the bread and the cup pass and consider if you're ready to lay down the burden of trying to earn your way to God by good works, and instead receive from Jesus the gift of salvation. To trust that Jesus lived a perfect life in your place, on your behalf, and then died to take punishment for your sins and then displayed His victory over sin and death by rising from the dead. O, won't you come to Jesus, and receive His rest.

Now if you know Jesus as your Savior and are pursuing Him, you are welcome to participate. Because the Lord's Supper is a family meal, we wait until all have been served so we can eat and drink together at God's table. Ushers, please distribute the bread. Let's pray...

As I thought about the rest Jesus brings us through His death and resurrection, a sermon illustration I heard¹⁰ about the movie *Chariots of Fire* came to mind. The movie is based on the true story of two sprinters from the 1924 Olympics. One was named Eric, who was a Christian, and the other was Harold, who was not.

Both sprinters were working very hard to win the gold. Harold was driven by the need to prove his worth. When he's an hour away from the 100m final that will determine the gold

¹⁰ It was from a Tim Keller sermon, I think on the subject of work.

medal winner, he says that at the race, “I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I.” And thus Harold could never truly rest. There’s a discontentment and weariness to Harold’s life that came from trying to prove his worth through success.

And you will share his weariness if you look to prove your worth through work success, or the approval of others, or your economic status, or your children’s behavior, or your appearance, or your marriage quality, or your grades, or your level of morality, or your possessions, or your popularity, or your competence, or your ministry impact, or your social media presence.

In contrast, Eric, the other sprinter, runs from a place of rest in Jesus. At one point he says, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.” Now Eric had the conviction that Christians shouldn’t work on Sunday, and when the Olympic schedule is set, the 100m final is on a Sunday. And despite great pressure to sacrifice his convictions to help his country win a medal, Eric does not run the race. He was a free man. His work success did not define him, the opinions of others did not sway him, for God’s love was the defining reality of His life. And so he was able to rest.

The Lord’s Supper is a gracious reminder that because of Jesus’ work, you can rest in God’s love as the defining reality of your life. Jesus lived the perfect life you should have lived, and then He died the death should have died on the cross for your sins. He did all the work so that we can rest in Him. On the cross Jesus said, “It is finished.” It is finished, so may we rest.

Bread - This bread represents Christ’s body, broken for us. Eat it and rest in His salvation.

Pray (sit)

Cup - This cup represents Christ’s blood, spilled for us. Drink it and rest in His salvation.

Pray

Dismissal – Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.