

Healthy Habits: Rest | Psalm 95

What is the last word in Psalm 95? REST

What do you think of when you think of rest?

My mind goes to a log cabin on the edge of a lake or overlooking the ocean. It must have a wood burning fireplace - and electricity so I can read books after the sun sets. No cell service, doesn't even need internet, just a quiet place for Lise and me to retreat to.

What comes to mind when you think of rest?

We have spent the month of January exploring the 95th Psalm, focusing on spiritual habits that would help us grow as believers into the people of God that bring honour to his name. We focused on studying scripture, worship, prayer and service.

This morning I want to talk about rest. It is the fifth healthy habit that we find in Psalm 95. Last week we focused on service, and how important it was to find a place of service, to use the gifts and talents God has given us to serve others. Those who have discovered the joys of serving others have also found that they have grown in their walk with the Lord. We need much of God's grace to serve others.

But what happens when a person loses the focus of why they are serving others and start to serve for the wrong reasons? Service starts by listening to God and responding to the promptings of His Spirit. But what if we start to serve others so they will like us, so we will be popular, so we get the applause of people instead of the "Well done!" of God?

It is so easy to get our eyes off of Jesus and onto our selves. And when this happens, we will find ourselves needing rest more and more, because we will be doing things in our own strength instead of the strength of the Lord.

In Psalm 95 David reminds his readers of the day when the children of Israel angered the Lord so much that He vowed they would never enter the Promised Land (the place of rest). That day the people grumbled against the Lord because they were thirsty. They expected God to be their bell hop, and jump every time they said they had a need. Instead of serving God, they wanted Him to serve them. In their selfishness they asked, "Is God really with us?"

Imagine saying that after seeing God send the plagues to Egypt, leading you through the Red Sea and watching Pharaoh's armies drown, eating manna from heaven and being protected from all your enemies. Still they questioned if God was with them.

So God said they would never enter his rest.

Rest here is a symbol of the Promised Land, Canaan. That same grumbling spirit led the people to listen to ten spies who feared entering the Promised Land, and so for forty years the people

wandered in the wilderness until that whole generation had passed away. The never were allowed to enter God's rest.

This is what David refers to in this passage.

Yet the message in this Psalm was for the people of David's day, and for us as well. God promises rest to those who put their faith in Him.

To Moses God said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." (Exodus 33:14)

Through Isaiah God said, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." (Isaiah 30:15)

Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

The message of Psalm 95:11 is that those who put their faith in God will find rest. We must not be faithless as the Israelites were, but trust God in all things.

As God's people we will learn to rest. In Mark Buchanan's book, "The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath" he suggests that the place to start to enter rest is to change the way we think. Yes, there are some people who rest too much, who do not value work or service, but there are just as many people who are too busy. Their lives are full of activity and events and work and there is little time to rest. Mark Buchanan confesses that as a pastor he once prided himself on working 40 days straight without taking a day off. It was easy to justify – there was always more to do.

But was this honouring to God? Was it honouring to the God who put within the creation narrative a day of rest, who calls the end of the story, our going to heaven to be with him for all eternity – rest. If you can follow the very complicated arguments of Hebrews 4 you will see that the writer is saying the rest we all seek is going to heaven. Yes, even the Sabbath rest was looking forward to our forever rest in the presence of Jesus.

So let me quickly speak of four ways we need to rest:

1. We need to rest from trying to earn our way to God.

So many people do not trust God when he says, "**8For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9not by works, so that no one can boast....**" (Ephesians 2:8-9)

When Jesus died on the cross of Calvary he did all that was necessary to save us from our sins and restore the relationship with God that sin had stolen from us. There is nothing we can add to that salvation. It is offered as a free gift. We either say "yes" to the offer of life through faith in Jesus, or we say "no." Maybe is a "no".

Still there are people who think that if they are good enough they will make it to heaven – without Jesus. They do good deeds, are kind, and generous to others. Sometimes they put Christians to shame, but sadly they are not working their way to heaven – they are just busy. In Isaiah 64:6 it says our righteousness (our good deeds) are like filthy rags. In other words, they do not buy our way to heaven – they are worthless for that. Yes, we should do good to others, but that is not how we get to heaven. **“Jesus is the Way, ... the only way to the Father.”**

The problem with trying to earn our way to heaven is that we do not know when we have done enough works to get in. Listen to what Jesus said to those trying so hard to work their way to heaven:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

We enter the rest of God, heaven, by putting our faith in what Jesus did for us.

2. We need to rest from trying to be God.

That may sound odd, but that is exactly what the Israelites were doing. They were giving the orders as if they were God. Many people live their lives this way, claiming a verse of scripture and demanding that God fulfill it, because he promised. The problem with that kind of thinking is that it assumes you know better than God what you need.

I would doubt that is true. I would still say God knows best...

The Pharisees tried this one with Jesus. They told Jesus he was wrong to heal a man on the Sabbath. They knew that to be so because that is how they read the Law. Jesus corrects them and says it is better to save life on the Sabbath than to take life. God knows what is best.

Friends, it is exhausting to play God, to have to rely on your own wisdom all the time and have to make all the decisions. It is true God gave us a brain to think and reason and plan. However, the true follower of God says, **“Let us worship and bow down before the Lord our Maker. He is our God and we are the people of his pasture.” “Thy will be done.”**

3. We need to rest in the presence of God.

This is the purpose of Sabbath – a day when we set everything else aside so we can focus on our relationship with God. It will include worship, and prayer, and Bible study, and fellowship. In Hebrews 4 we read of the Sabbath rest where we cease our work just as God ceased his work on the seventh day of creation.

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

As the hymn writer says, “There is a place of quiet rest: near to the heart of God.” You do not need to wait until Sunday to draw near to God. He is with you every moment of every day, so why not slow down and spend some time with Him?

You can sit and spend time alone with God, or go for a walk with God. You can feel his presence as you drive the car, or as you clean the house. It is about being aware that He is with you, as he promised, **“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)**

Brother Lawrence would say that God is all around us – anytime, anywhere, in all things and invites us to be present with him. To remind himself of this he would pause throughout his day and simply say “Hello” to remind himself that God was with him. You may want to try that.

God has much to say about rest in His Word. He knows how easy it is for us to get so busy we fail to appreciate what is really important – including God.

The Chinese join two characters to form a single pictograph for busyness: heart and killing. That unfortunately is very accurate – busyness kills the soul.

Finally, God invites all of us into the ultimate rest – heaven.

The apostle Paul describes it this way:

...7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8From now on there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day— and not only to me, but to all who crave His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

When Paul crosses the finish line – when he passes from this life to eternity – he will stop running. The race will be complete. He will rest in the presence of Jesus for eternity. We are not exactly sure what that will look like, but everything within us knows it will be wonderful!

How good are you at resting? Resting is not the same as sleeping, you know. We may sleep and not rest, and rest and not sleep. But many people miss out on a wonderful gift that God has provided for us – rest.

A song from the 70’s went like this:

Rest, the Lord is near
Refuse to fear, enjoy His love
Trust, His mighty power
Fills every hour, of all your days

Rest, the Lord is there
Lift up your prayer
For He is strong
Trust, He’ll bring release
And perfect peace, will calm your mind

Rest.