

Rest with God

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[0:00] Hello. I'm feeling that peace. Well, it's a joy to be back. Some of you will be like, who's that? Where's she been?

! My name's Kate, I'm one of the wardens here and I've been on a three-month sabbatical! And I'm going to share some reflections from that, Simon, towards the end of the end of that time, got in touch and said, we've got this season coming up. Kate, I'm wondering if you would share something of your sabbatical. So I'm going to share with you three things this morning.

A bit about my sabbatical invitation, as I call it, and the choices I felt I was called to make. And then we're going to think about rest, real rest. And finally, we're going to think about enough. So I would say that I had, I guess I would describe it as a God interruption at the end of last year. I'd been working for a Christian charity for seven years, off the back of working for the church for seven years, off the back of teaching. Our youngest child was turning 18. I guess it was sort of feeling like naturally a season maybe was sort of coming that might look different, but I was loving my work and I was assuming I'd be there for a bit longer. But in just one conversation, I felt a surprising yet clear sense that the 30th of April this year would be my last day working for TLG.

And the possibility of taking a sabbatical quickly emerged. I remember Pete, my husband, was in Australia and I remember texting him saying, I think I might be supposed to leave my job. And I'm wondering, Jane's laughing, just giving up work, Pete. Anyway, we agreed. Pete was amazing. He was like, I think his reply actually was, do it. Yay. So we agreed that we would put away half of my salary for the first four months of the year. We would cover a three-month sabbatical. And beyond that, those of you that know me won't be surprised to hear, I didn't plan much else. I just planned to stop. Stop working. Lay down any responsibilities that I had. Massive thanks to Emma, who stepped in to cover me as warden. Massive thanks to Alex, who just kept plowing on with the wardening. To the rest of the teams that just covered anything I was doing at church. And the only thing that was going to be my priority was my relationship with God and my family. I guess it was about pausing life. And it felt like a very simple act, but a big choice. And I was reminded of a verse from 1 Thessalonians that was really key to me when I was first called to what I felt was a calling to work for the church years ago, 14 years ago. And it's those words, he who calls you is faithful and he will do it. I felt God was saying three things. You create the conditions and I will do the rest. I am calling you into a spacious place, but you have a choice how fully you step into that. And come before me with a heart and a spirit willing to listen and just be and begin to notice what I can do with that. I'll be honest, it took time to slow down physically, emotionally, my brain, mentally. I did make some plans. I started by going on a retreat on my own, turning off my phone. I went on a couple of retreats. Pete and I planned a trip to

France, be with friends. And my plans were mainly to be more present with my family, to garden, that went really badly. Come around, have a look at our garden. To read, I had a pile of books that was probably about this high from the floor. Didn't get very far with those. And to play the piano more.

[4:49] It was kind of a love that I felt I'd lost. And I've got a whole piano blessing story from sabbatical, which I'd love to share with anyone who's interested, because I feel like God's at the heart of that.

At first, it was a joy. It was like a relief to be released from so much responsibility and deadlines. But what I quickly started to notice was that urge to start planning. What would it look like after my sabbatical? What would be next? It's not really surprising to me. I know that I have a lot of kind of, I'm old enough to know this stuff, you know, pioneering me. A lot of kind of strategic planning that I love, creativity. I'd used that a lot in the development work that I'd been doing. But God continually interrupted me with a strong sense of, no, stop. Breathe. Slow down.

And then my brain would be, up, up, no, stop. Breathe. Slow down. It felt counterintuitive, and I was having to practice a new rhythm. I felt I could trust him. And I noticed.

[6:18] I started to walk more slowly. Now, that will sound weird, but I walk fast. I started to read more slowly. I read fast. I started to savour food, natural, healthy food in a different way, to be more present in conversations. I started to actually be able to sit still and sit and be curious without the distractions of thoughts. It was like my senses were being sharpened in a really wonderful way, not overwhelmed, not over-stimulated. I came to a place of being more tuned in, I think, to God's presence, just in the everyday. I started to find my phone really irritating. I mean, I was kind of there already, but really struggling with that interruption. I was noticing so much to be thankful for. Noticing those blessings, his love for me, for us, provision, connection.

I felt like I became more present in the present. I was resting. Well, I hear you say, bully for you, Kate. That's great. Not all of us can take a three-month sabbatical, which is true. Although, I would highly recommend tuning into that God invitation and responding with a resounding yes if you sense it at all. But actually, all of us are called to live lives built on Sabbath, sabbatical principles. So that's what we're going to explore today.

I'm just going to pause for a moment. I'm wondering, as you've just started to consider this morning, what might be coming up for you. Let's just do a bit of noticing in our spirits with God's Spirit.

Amen. I wonder what comes to mind when you think of a rest. Does that mean you have to be absolutely still, flat on your back, asleep maybe? Well, in today's passage, we hear about God resting, about him blessing the seventh day, making it holy. We could maybe have it up on screen. God resting. God resting from all the work he had done, all the creating.

[9:35] Sabbath is about resting. It's about finishing our work or pausing. Sabbath literally means to stop. But God didn't rest because he was tired. He's God. He rested to enjoy, pause and enjoy the goodness of all he had created, to savour and delight in it. But I always do this if I'm working with children.

We are human. We always have a little check. I think I've said it to you before. We have a little kind of just feel of our, yep, we're definitely human, still human. We are human. And life is tiring and can be very overwhelming and exhausting. John Mark Comer explores this in his book. Anyone read this?

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry. It's like amazing. I'm just like a massive advocate for this whole exploration. He says, in our separation from God, we are driven by our desires.

And desire is something that can never be satisfied. That frustrated sense of incompleteness, of not being at rest, is the human condition. We always want more. We are restless.

And then he challenges us to do some thinking. As apprentices of Jesus, what do we do? Where do we go with all this restlessness? And Jesus is very clear? Thank you very much. Today we heard, we are called to come to him when we're restless. I'm going to read it from the message version.

[12:10] Are you tired? Are you tired? Are you worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me.

You'll recover your life. I will show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me. 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. And God literally commands us to rest, to take the Sabbath.

It's in Exodus 20. It's the one spiritual discipline that is actually a commandment. In Psalm 62, the psalmist says, my soul finds rest in God alone. I love using that as a breath prayer.

Breathing in, my soul finds rest and out in God alone. And St. Augustine, writing at the fall of the Roman Empire, said this of God, you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

[13:41] We rest, we truly find real rest when we connect with God. And Sabbath is the primary discipline by which we cultivate this connection and deepen this spirit of restfulness.

And not just one day a week, but in our lives as a whole, it is about how we live in the world.

Because when we prioritize this connection on one day of the week, we find that life becomes fuller with deeper relationships, relationships, enjoyment, gratitude, contentment. We're going to explore that a bit more in a minute.

This list, I think, could be endless. But I felt a really good summary of how life looks when we are connected with God is the description in the message version of the fruit, the evidence of God's spirit in our lives.

And Paul describes it like this. Affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity, a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people, finding ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

[15 : 36] Jesus said in Mark 2, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. I feel like he's reminding us that God created a day of rest as an incredible gift to our well-being, not as a rigid burden, an invitation to stop and delight in God and in his creation.

Sabbath is how we fill our souls back up with life. Coma says it's how our souls catch up with our bodies.

A few years ago, we used this book as one of our sermon series, and I know a lot of the home groups were looking at it as well. I don't know if any of you have read it, John Ortberg's Soul Keeping.

But I was describing to Alex what I was going to be pondering on today, and he reminded me of this at the beginning, Dallas Willard quote. Let's just think about our souls and how our souls need to catch up with our bodies.

Our soul is like a stream of water which gives strength, direction and harmony to every other area of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all we do, because our soul itself is then profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom, including nature.

[17 : 17] And all else within us is enlivened and directed by that stream. Therefore, we are in harmony with God, reality and the rest of human nature and nature at large.

The Sabbath is blessed and it is holy. And all we need to do is hear the invitation to come into this place to stop long enough to experience the gift of connection to God.

It feels like an invitation to both be more awake and more at peace. So I'm just going to pause again and just invite you to just take a moment.

What's coming up for you as we explore this this morning? Let's just have a bit of quiet. Let's just have a bit of quiet. And finally, enough.

I feel like I'm in my parenting mode. Enough, boys. That's enough. We live in a culture of more.

[18 : 52] More food, more drink, more clothes, more devices, more apps, more things, more space, more experiences. Sabbath is a way of saying enough.

In God, I have enough. I am enough. I lack nothing.

Psalms 23. I lack nothing. What I really could do with is to press pause and make some time to enjoy what I already have.

What God has already abundantly gifted us with. And enjoy it. I feel like that is contentment.

To drink deep from the well of an ordinary life. To slow down and savour the simple things.

[20 : 04] That's really interesting. Like some emotion has arisen in me. And that's because I've just remembered my ma. My beautiful ma. Who died at the age of 90.

10, 15 years ago. She never went abroad. She lived a simple life. I think hers probably was one of the richest lives I could describe to you.

She was always present. She was creative. She listened. She was kind. An ordinary life.

But it was a beautiful thing to be with her. She always had time. What does an ordinary life look like for you?

And what would it look like to slow down enough to delight and be present in that? And when we were reflecting on resting, I already sort of said, you know, when we really start to practice this Sabbath rhythm, we realize that it impacts the whole of our life.

[21 : 17] We have to slow down on the other days too. You can't go 100 miles an hour and suddenly put the brakes on and just pause for right quick 24 hours, right top up.

It's about a life-changing rhythm of spiritual restfulness and contentment. Well, where should we start then?

I'm looking around this room very aware that there's probably folks in here that have sort of got Sabbath quite nailed. I wonder if God over the years has already been up to a lot in many lives here.

It's always good, isn't it, to come back to Scripture and pause and ask God, what are you saying to me today? So perhaps your curiosity is more around being an advocate for Sabbath.

Encouraging others. I'm wondering if at the other side of the kind of little spectrum is probably where I would be more, which is, oh, it just sounds like such a great, great rhythm.

[22:28] I don't know where to start, really. A whole three-month sabbatical, that was easy. I just stopped. Stepping back into everyday life.

What does it look like? Well, Comer suggests four helpful prompts. I'd just like to say I made sure that I got more Bible quotes in than Mark Comer, because, you know, I'm probably sounding like I'm a big fan, but this book is good.

So four things he suggests. Set aside a day each week. For some of us, that might not be a Sunday. I was thinking about, Pete and I have got the pub along the road on the first Sunday of the month.

We want to be in there. It's the community market. We want to be there. I think it's got to be a different day that week of the month for me. I'm thinking about this. Secondly, clear your diary. Don't clear out the ordinary things, though. Third, turn your phone off. Feel a bit excited about that one. And fourth, invite God's Spirit to enable you to rest and worship in all that you do, to delight in him, in your family, in your friendships, in his creation, and in your own soul.

[23:55] What does a delightful day look like for you? A delightful, ordinary day. I don't imagine it does just mean sitting still or lying still.

We're going to find rest in that connection. We are sensitive beings, us humans. God gave us senses.

I think emotional overwhelm, burnout can result in us kind of shutting down, numbing our senses.

But I truly believe Sabbath rest can enliven, weaken up our senses again.

In my sabbatical, as I began to slow down and strip away some of the clutter, the distraction, I felt like I began to heal, to feel more, to feel more grounded.

I became aware of how these God-given senses were sort of tools that connected me to a deeper and sharper awareness of his presence in the everyday, of his beautiful creation, nature.

[25:13] And I can recognize that I am thirsty still. My soul is thirsty now for more of this Sabbath experience.

I want to embed it into my life. We're just sort of coming to the end, but I want to just share with you a picture I had towards the end of my sabbatical experience.

Do anyone do, as children, those pictures where you'd like to do a, you scrape off the black stuff? I think if you've got like sensory issues, it can be a little bit like, there's a foil picture underneath. I used to really like it.

I like the scraping. Now, when you do it, they're like rainbow. They're really cool. I'm not sure, Lucy. But I felt like God gave me a picture of one of those scrapey cards.

And I think I felt like the sabbatical was going to be a time where God revealed this whole new picture to me. And towards the end of it, I felt like he was saying, I'd just done one scratch.

[26:22] I'd only just scratched the surface. It's like he was saying, there's a beautiful picture, Kate, that I've got for you in this next season.

But I'm going to reveal it to you in my time. So you've got to continue this journey. And I think from all of the sort of reading and pondering, meditating I did, these words, I can't open a book at the same time, bear with.

These words from Jeremiah 6 spoke to me most. Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths.

Ask, where is the good way? And walk in it. And you will find rest for your souls. And what struck me as I read it over and over again, I've highlighted it, was kind of the instruction to stand and look and ask and walk.

And you will find rest. And although Sabbath living might feel like a challenge in our modern Western world, I'm up for that challenge.

[28:02] The word I've been left with for this season is gentle. And I'm sitting with that. And starting to notice how a Sabbath day each week can and will gently but powerfully impact the whole of my life with true, real rest and contentment.