

Welcome

Pre-show - recap my burnout story.

It's not breaking news to tell you that we're overworked. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, productivity per American worker has increased by more than 400% since 1950. This means that we should be working *less than ten hours per week* to afford the standard of living a 40-hr week could purchase in 1950.

That's obviously not true.

Every industrialized country except Canada, Japan and the US gets at least 20 vacation days/year (Finland and France get a full month). And 134 countries, not including the US, have laws regulating the maximum hours we're allowed to work in a week.

Twin forces are arising from this. One glamorizes 'the grind', celebrating overwork as commitment and even glamorizing burnout.

The other side of the coin is the burgeoning self-care industry, complete with a host of self-proclaimed self-help gurus are inviting us to rage against the machine by doing things like... making our beds, brushing our teeth and going to bed without spending an hour scrolling on our phones first.

Burnout is bad. We weren't created to be cogs in a machine. We're humans. But is 'self-care' really resistance? Is our late-stage capitalistic society really so overwhelming that the only way to resist is to... go to bed on time?

Last month, Gawker published an article about just this question. In it, author Clare Coffey observes that this extreme focus on self-care, particularly in the form of what we have taken to calling 'Adulting' is, well, infantilizing:

"There is something debilitating about hearing and internalizing the message that the paralysis and malaise that seems to afflict so many is wholly externally imposed, that constrained choices are not real choices, that sending emails 16 hours a day is something only collapse of capitalism can mend." — Clare Coffey, "Failure to Cope 'Under Capitalism'"

I agree with Ms. Coffey here. Capitalism and all its working woes is not an irresistible master. But the answer to our increasingly burnout-tolerant society isn't self-care. It's Sabbath.

I know what you're thinking - wait... isn't taking a day off just self-care? Well no, actually. Sabbath is something much more intentional. It's about what you choose to do as much as what you choose not to do.

And more importantly, Sabbath has been the practice God's people have used for thousands of years to resist the logic of the Empire, whether that's Egypt, Babylon, Rome or Consumer Capitalism.

So today, we're going to explore how the Sabbath is liberating, the cost of ignoring Sabbath and why Sabbath is something we have to do together.

Message

I know a lot of Christians these days who feel like Black Sheep - the one who doesn't fit in. Not from the larger culture, but from the Church. Now that's not necessarily a new phenomenon, but when I was growing up, you felt distance from the Church because you were drifting from faith.

Today, though, a lot of the folks who are feeling this sense of isolation, of being the weird one - it's not because of weak faith. It's actually the opposite

And it's not because they're drifting or backslicing or wandering from their faith. It's actually our faithfulness to Jesus that's making us feel like outsiders to our own faith. The people who claim to represent Jesus don't actually look very much like him.

This is the experience of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah lived in the years leading up to the Exile, one of the most apocalyptic and formative events in the history of God's people. Jeremiah was born into a world in the shadow of the Babylonian Empire, and the little nation of Judah spent decades trying to figure out how to survive Babylon. They made payments to the emperor to keep him from conquering them. They entered into alliances with other nations.

This was the big point of contention, because these alliances involved adopting the other nations' gods - a sort of cultural exchange. This idolatry was a violation of the covenant between God and God's people. It was a signal that God's people didn't trust that God's way would preserve them, protect them and provide for them. The people continued to give lip service to God, but their actions showed they preferred to trust the power of the nations around them.

Sound familiar?

If you can relate, then this series is for you. We're spending a couple of months with Jeremiah, to bear witness to his faithfulness and ask what we can learn about how God is calling us as a Black Sheep church today.

We began by looking at how a prophet's work is grounded in a deep knowledge of and love for God - especially important since God's people usually ignore prophets until tragedy strikes. We saw that God hates idolatry so much because it warps us away from who God created us to be. We saw that God's love is for freedom, not shame. And last week, we heard God's call to refuse to pretend everything is fine when it very clearly is not.

Turn with us to [Jeremiah 17](#).

Today, we're continuing in the same vein we've been for a while - the reality that idolatry is as much about the lives we live as it is the prayers and songs we offer. We're getting very practical today, drilling down into the reality of our weekly rhythms. Because, according to Jeremiah, one of the most obvious signs that God's people aren't faithful is that they don't keep Sabbath.

Which... we can actually relate to.

Long gone are the days when weekly gathering for worship was the norm. Today, even many faithful church folks shoot for around once a month.

And if prioritizing gathering for worship is at such a low, how much less do we prioritize keeping a real Sabbath day?

In case you don't remember what that entails, here's the Sabbath command from the version of the 10 commandments we find in Deuteronomy:

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do.” -- Deuteronomy 5:12–14 (NLT)

No work. No one works. No slaves, no immigrants, no animals. No one.

Yeah... we don't do that. The so-called 'blue laws' that made it illegal for businesses to operate on Sundays were repealed in TX back in 1985 - largely because no one followed them anymore. Today, Sundays are as full as any other day of the week, whether it's catching up on emails, putting the finishing touches on a project for Monday, a kids' sports tournament, brunch with friends or even just sleeping in.

None of these is Sabbath.

And that's a big deal, according to Jeremiah. Let's listen in:

This is what the Lord said to me: “Go and stand in the gates of Jerusalem, first in the gate where the king goes in and out, and then in each of the other gates. Say to all the people, ‘Listen to this message from the Lord, you kings of Judah and all you people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem. This is what the Lord says: Listen to my warning! Stop carrying on your trade at Jerusalem’s gates on the Sabbath day. Do not do your work on the Sabbath, but make it a holy day. I gave this command to your ancestors, but they did not listen or obey. They stubbornly refused to pay attention or accept my discipline.

“ ‘But if you obey me, says the Lord, and do not carry on your trade at the gates or work on the Sabbath day, and if you keep it holy, then kings and their officials will go in and out of these gates forever. There will always be a descendant of David sitting on the throne here in Jerusalem. Kings and their officials will always ride in and out among the people of Judah in chariots and on horses, and this city will remain forever. And from all around Jerusalem, from

the towns of Judah and Benjamin, from the western foothills and the hill country and the Negev, the people will come with their burnt offerings and sacrifices. They will bring their grain offerings, frankincense, and thanksgiving offerings to the Lord's Temple.

“ ‘But if you do not listen to me and refuse to keep the Sabbath holy, and if on the Sabbath day you bring loads of merchandise through the gates of Jerusalem just as on other days, then I will set fire to these gates. The fire will spread to the palaces, and no one will be able to put out the roaring flames.’ ” -- Jeremiah 17:19–27(NLT)

God warns the people that they're not observing the Sabbath, and if they keep it up, they're going to be destroyed. In hindsight, we recognize Exile imagery - the Babylonian empire having burned down the city.

So to be clear, this warning is of a kind of what we've seen so far in Jeremiah: the people are not being faithful, and that faithlessness will lead to Exile. But here, the issue isn't idolatry, at least not in the form of making alliances with other kingdoms and worshiping their gods. Or is it?

Can you imagine that our inability to keep Sabbath is actually a sign of idolatry in our lives? That the reason God cares so much about Sabbath is that not keeping Sabbath is a sign something is deeply wrong in our lives?

SONG

Why is this Sabbath command so clear, so essential for Yahweh? Why, of all the commands, choose this one to highlight? Why even of the big 10 harp on the *Sabbath*!?

Because there's possibly no clearer illustration of God's way than this strange command to work only six days a week. In fact, in Deuteronomy, when Moses offers justification for the Sabbath command, it's a reminder of Israel's liberation:

Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the Lord your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the Lord your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day. -- Deuteronomy 5:15 (NLT)

Why do God's people work only six days each week? Because we're no longer slaves to Egypt's imperial aspirations. We're not the brickmakers for Pharaoh's ego anymore. And in God's economy, we're defined not by what we do or who employs us but by who we worship. We're God's children, not Pharaoh's slaves.

By Jeremiah's day, slavery in Egypt was a distant memory — almost 1,000 years in the past. Egypt was still powerful, but nowhere near as big a threat as Babylon. But it was a case of 'meet the new boss, same as the old boss.' Babylon might not have been Egypt, but they had the same imperial aspirations. Their exploitative conquest differed in degree, not in kind.

And the same was true of the nations surrounding Judah, those nations with whom Judah had allied themselves. The only reason Babylon was the bigger threat was because they had the bigger army.

So not keeping a Sabbath *then* was *still* a sign that Judah didn't trust Yahweh to protect and provide for them. It was *still* a sign that they preferred the way of Empire to the way of Yahweh.

Yahweh's people have this clear rhythm built into our lives. It's a rhythm of rest, one that demonstrates to the world around us that we don't trust the hustle or the grind, that we're not waiting for the good life to trickle down from the billionaires.

This is why Sabbath is more than an individual practice. Yes, we choose at an individual level whether we're going to keep Sabbath or not. But it's something we do *together*. It's why worshiping together has always been a priority for God's faithful people. Because we're not just a bunch of individuals who like the same music. We're a community, a new creation, a counter-culture. We're meant to live a different way *together*, in public. Church is faith out loud and Sabbath is our song.

Friends, if we want to be truly counter-cultural, if we want to be a people who offers truly good news to the world around us, one of the most radical things we can do is be really intentional about keeping a Sabbath together.

Gathering for worship. Putting away the tools of production. And learning the art of being good news together.

It's hard. Our whole culture is programmed against it. Your kids' schools and sports are programmed against it. Our jobs are programmed against it. Our entertainment is programmed against it. Even our self-care industry is programmed against Sabbath.

So before we come to the table, I want to close with a final thought from Clare Coffey, whose article kicked off this message:

"This is your life. You do not have time to wait for the revolution to begin living it. You will always be able to find someone to give you permission not to live it. But no one is coming along to live it for you." — Clare Coffey, "Failure to Cope 'Under Capitalism'"

You will always find someone who can give you permission *not* to be God's people. But what if we stopped settling for excuses and took God's liberating good news seriously?

Might we find that God is faithful to the promises God made to God's people?

Communion + Examen

A meal we share together, every week.

What does faithful Sabbath observance look like in my life?

What barriers or distractions keep me from keeping Sabbath regularly?

What's at the root of those barriers or distractions? Is this an area where I am unwittingly giving myself to an idol?

How can I keep Sabbath in the coming month?

Assignment + Blessing

What does it look like to recommit to Sabbath this month?