

Week 2: Rest Is Revolutionary

Another Sunday morning, and another frantic rush for toothbrushes and shoes and little kid Bibles. Another mad scramble for the car. Aidan, who is eight years old at the time, looks at me and says, “Daddy, Sunday is supposed to be our Sabbath; I don’t think this is what Jesus had in mind.” A snappy retort pops into my head: something about Jesus not having kids so how would he know. But I think better of it. Because Aidan’s right.

If the Sabbath is for rest, why do we orchestrate it like event planners, cramming in enough activity to fill a week of Sabbaths?

I think we do it because—whether you go to church every week, or you refuse to set foot inside of one—we all have at least one thing in common: having tried and failed repeatedly, *we have given up on real rest altogether*. And I think we’ve failed because we harbor at least *three fundamental misconceptions* about rest.

1. *We think rest is what happens when our bodies are still*. We think we are resting when we plop down in front of the television, or settle into an internet browsing session, or lounge by the pool on a Saturday afternoon. Yet, while our body is inert, our mind defies us, continuing to spin in a million directions—thinking, worrying, planning, regretting, and critiquing. We can’t rest when our minds are *itchy*.

2. *We think rest is what happens when we have less to do*. We think we will rest when Saturday rolls around and we have fewer things to do and fewer places to be. But before we know it, the morning is gone in a series of random chores and Facebook posts. And then we wonder where the time went. Rest requires more than space; it requires intentionality.

3. *We think rest is what happens when we escape reality for a time*. We literally *vacate* our reality, taking vacations to warm places with cool beaches, seeking a space where we are unavailable to the world that is pulling us in so many directions. And yet, wherever we go, there we are. We take with us our ceaselessly running minds and our phones and email and text messages and we never really become unavailable to a world that wants to spin us like a top. We think rest is a moment we create, so we waste lots of energy and money trying—and failing—to create restful moments.

Rest is not a moment to be *created*; it is an inner condition to be *cultivated*.

Shortly after Aidan made his Sabbath observation, our family vacated—a summer ritual that involves a long car ride from Chicago to the Delaware shore. Every year, we go out *of our way* to travel through central Pennsylvania, because traveling the little highway of rolling hills that winds its way through the heart of Amish country is *the most peaceful hour of our vacation*. It is peaceful because the Amish culture has ruthlessly preserved its restfulness and refuses to relinquish its slowness.

So, as we drove, we passed clothes hung on pulleys stretching from houses to barn roofs, bouncing buggies powered by the clop of hooves, houses with phone booths at the edge of the property, and children riding bikes without pedals. To the Amish, pedals are a technology with a dire consequence: *hurry*. So, instead, the children push bikes like scooters. In a sense, life is harder in Amish country. It requires sweat and discipline and intentionality.

Yet, the fruit of the labor is a kind of peacefulness that saturates the air.

For most of us already swept up in the technological river of the 21st century, the Amish way of life seems archaic, backwards, even strange. But I think we could learn a few lessons from the Amish. Because the reality is, if we want to cultivate interior lives of restfulness and slowness in our current culture, we are going to have to act in *radically counter-cultural ways*.

In a world focused on productivity and efficiency, rest is a revolution.