

# Rediscovering the Rhythm of Rest

Introduction: In Poing, Germany lives Maria Brunner who is a wife and mother of three. Since her husband is unemployed, she works long and hard to support their three young children by cleaning other people's houses. Sounds like a nearly typical family, doesn't it?

Even without a job, Mr. Brunner managed to run up a large number of parking tickets that totaled nearly \$5,000 in fines. And he also managed to keep his parking tickets a secret from his wife who is the legal owner of the car. That means she is the one who's on the hook for them and responsible to make amends for these parking tickets. But Maria can't pay the fines and unless the husband could come up with the money, she would spend three months behind bars in her town of Poing, Germany.

So the police went and arrested Maria. When they did so, the police reported something very odd about Maria, "She seemed really happy to see us... and repeatedly thanked up for arresting her." While most people taken into custody hide their faces in shame, Maria "smiled and waved as she was driven off to jail." Why in the world would Maria be so happy about being incarcerated? Maria said this: "I've had enough of scraping a living for the family... As long as I get food and a hot shower every day, I don't mind being sent to jail. I can finally get some rest and relaxation. I wonder whether any of us can relate to Maria?"

In the swirl of the kids' activities and driving them there and being there and even participating with them there, do you ever secretly wish what happened to Maria would happen to you to give you some space?

When you are unable to say "no" to another time commitment, do you ever secretly wish what happened to Maria would happen to you to force you to say "no" to that commitment?

In the mountains of work or homework to be done, do you ever secretly wish what happened to Maria would happen to you to give you an escape?

When that cell phone continues to ring, or that blackberry relentlessly buzzes, or that email insistently dings with new email to be answered, do you ever secretly wish what happened to Maria would happen to you to stop the incessant ringing, buzzing and dinging of demands?

In all honesty, I secretly wish something like that would happen sometimes. In my lesser and more frazzled moments, I want to be forced to take a break and rest. But I know that I'm not alone because the sheer amount of work and activity in life that we do as Americans has reached epidemic portions.

**Illustration** – In January 2001, *USA Today* reported on a poll about Americans and what they felt in the midst of their work and activities schedule:

- a. Need more fun: 68%
- b. Need a long vacation: 67%
- c. Often feel stressed: 66%
- d. Feel time is crunched: 60%
- e. Want less work, more play: 51%
- f. Feel pressured to succeed: 49%
- g. Feel overwhelmed: 48%

**Illustration** – In fact, in the late 1990's *PBS Online Newshour* reported that since the late 1970's the average worker has lengthened his or her work schedule by 164 hours every month and at the same time shortened vacation time by 14%. That means as of ten years ago, we've added a little more than 4, 40-hour workweeks to our schedules every month while subtracting one day for every week of vacation we get. And I suspect that those trends have continued to escalate over the last ten years.

That's not an indictment. That's just the reality of my schedule and your schedule. My schedule and your schedule are stretched because we've got more going on, more work to do, and more things to get done. We're living or we're close to living as 24-hour a day, 7-days a week sort of people.

And the result of being or becoming 24/7 sorts of people? Our health is on shakier grounds due to the stress. Our emotional nerves are razor thin because we're fried with our schedules' relentless demands. Our relationships weaken because we can't put the time needed to make them strong. Our intellects shallow because we don't have margins to think and to ponder and to understand. And our spirituality and connection with God thins because we have little room for him outside of being here on Sunday. Our schedules are stretched and that wreaks havoc on our lives and our connection with God. So here's the question for us this morning: why is that so? Why do our schedules have such an impact on our bodies, our minds, our souls and our connection with God?

The answer to that question as well as the antidote to our stretched schedules is found in the beginning, the very origins of our world. So if you have your Bible with you, I'd like you to turn with me to Genesis 1:1, a chapter that is all about beginnings and the origin of our world.

The Rhythm of Creation: Now, before we get into this whole chapter, I just want to make a bit of a disclaimer here. I know that inevitably we want to dive into all the issues surrounding the how of this section. You know, we want to dive into how the earth came into being with all of the details and charts and interaction with science. Those are some great discussions to have with one another, but I'm not going there this morning. Why? Because by far the bigger emphasis in this section is on the who rather than the how. This section centers on God and his role as the creator and the designer and the initiator of the universe. Look at what I mean in Genesis 1:1. READ GENESIS 1:1. God created the entire universe.

Maybe that whole concept makes you a bit uneasy because you don't believe that God created our world, that's okay. I would say take some time to honestly investigate and evaluate the issues involved. If want to talk about it, I love those sorts of conversations, so I would love to hang out at the café afterward and talk about it with you. But if you feel I'm too intimidating or too biased on it, just say so and I'll introduce you to other people who would love to discuss, not argue, discuss the whole issue.

But for now, I would ask you and all us here for that matter to put those issues aside for later and really listen to the central thrust about God and about how the world functions. Genesis is all about beginnings and origins, and so this chapter and section points out our truest reality and the reality we truly live in. And from just one sentence, verse 1, we're pointed to that the reality we live in is actually a creation of God. God created everything. As a creature of God, we live and breathe and walk in a creation of God that he has set up a certain way to be a certain sort of place with a certain kind of design.

To show you what I mean, I want us to listen to the whole narrative in its entirety. Listen carefully to the whole section read out loud and follow along. Here's what I want you to listen for. Listen for the rhythm. Listen for words or concepts that are repeated as a pattern. Then listen for the breaks from that repeated pattern because it's an attention getting ploy. Ready? READING OF GENESIS 1:2-2:3...

- Steve: <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.<sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning-- the first day.
- Val: <sup>6</sup> And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." <sup>7</sup> So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. <sup>8</sup> God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning-- the second day.
- Jesse: <sup>9</sup> And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. <sup>12</sup> The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning-- the third day.
- Steve: <sup>14</sup> And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. <sup>16</sup> God made two great lights-- the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup> God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup> to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning-- the fourth day.
- Val: <sup>20</sup> And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." <sup>21</sup> So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." <sup>23</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning-- the fifth day.

Jesse: <sup>24</sup> And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. <sup>25</sup> God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. <sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." <sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." <sup>29</sup> Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food." <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground-- everything that has the breath of life in it-- I give every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning-- the sixth day.

Steve: <sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. <sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Did you hear it? Did you hear the pattern, the rhythm of the story? There's the bigger and less obvious rhythm of the introduction of the ominous formlessness and emptiness and God dealing with the problems they pose. In the first part of the week, God deals with the formlessness and chaos by bringing definition and order. In the dark, murky and watery world, he act as the sovereign king and creator, bringing definition out of the chaos, by separating light from darkness and sky from sea and dry land from sea.

In the second part of the week, God deals with the emptiness and the void by filling it. As the sovereign king and creator, he fills the emptiness by bringing out plants on earth, clarifying all the light in the sky into a sun and moon, producing life in the sea and on land, and eventually creating people bearing his image. That's the larger and less obvious rhythm of the story. But then there's the smaller and more obvious rhythm of what happened each day. God speaks. It happens. When he's done with that area, God says it is good. And there is evening and morning, marking the beginning and the end of that time. Four phrases or four beats if you will in every day. That pattern happens over and over and over again, forming a sort of verbal rhythm that carries us along in it.

This is verbal music of sorts where this rhythm and beat carry this song and story forward. Each beat brings the story forward a step in the day and every four beats brings the story forward a whole day. There is this intrinsic rhythm in God's movements in creating and as his creation rhythmically responds to him. And this interchange goes on and on day one, day two, day three, day four, day five and day six with an extended portion devoted to his image bearers, people.

The Rhythm of Rest: And here's the really weird thing about the story. The story doesn't stop there. You'd think that when God was all done creating, the story would stop. The news story would end because all the action is done. But this story doesn't stop. But something and someone does stop. Remember that rhythm? That rhythm stops. That beat stops. That normal, predictable pattern is interrupted and ceases. This interruption is supposed to get our attention so that we hear the point of what is happening. God finishes the work and he simply stops. He ceases from his creative work and celebrates that work. So confident and calm is God that his creative work is done, that there are no more colors to add, no more planets and stars to place, no more details to define, no more space to fill, that he simply ceases from his creative work and revels in what he's done.

**Illustration** – God ceases so that he can revel and pause to enjoy what he's accomplished much like the experience you and I have after we've poured our energy, creativity and effort into that project at work, or that paper at school, or that house improvement project at home and we take that deep breath afterwards and say "yes."

But notice God isn't lax or derelict or absent from the universe leaving it to its own. He simply stops his work of creating that he had been doing for six days, for at the end of Genesis 2:3 it says, "he rested from all the work of *creating* that he had done." He simply ceases from his work of creating, not life with the universe and life with us. But this moment of ceasing, this moment of rest, this moment of Shabbat or Sabbath was so significant and monumental for God that he declared it holy, sacred, set apart, distinctive, special. And when he did that, he created a whole new rhythm in this narrative and for how our world works. Six days work, one day rest. Six days work, one day rest.

By doing this, God set up an intrinsic rhythm of time in the universe as Rob Bell put it. Who also said that it is a rhythm of time set apart and sacred not for purely material creatures such as animals, nor for purely spiritual creatures such as angels, but for material and spiritual creatures, people who are made in God's image as flesh and blood and spirit. Six days work, one day rest. That's the intrinsic rhythm of the universe for people. Six days work, one day rest. That's why in Mark 2:27, Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Six days work, one day rest. That's the cosmic rhythm of time that is all around us and for us.

**Illustration** – Let me use an analogy here that I heard Rob Bell use. Making really good music isn't just a matter of knowing what to play. It is a matter of knowing when to play and when not to play. That's called rhythm. Rhythm is knowing when to play and when not to play.

And God set the rhythm of time for the music of the universe with six days work, one day rest. Six days work, one day rest. This sort of rhythm. [NATE PLAYS SOLID ROCK GROOVE – PAUSE TO LISTEN]. Six days work and one day rest. That's the rhythm of time all around us and for us. But when our schedules are stretched and we've made our rhythm of time as seven days work, no rest. Seven days work, no rest. We're playing all the time without rest like this. [NATE PLAYS FRENETIC GROOVE – PAUSE TO LISTEN]. We're playing not knowing when to stop playing. Do you hear it that? It is just a wall of noise? Seven days work, no rest.

But this [NATE PLAYS ORIGINAL, SOLID ROCK GROOVE] is the God-created, cosmic rhythm of time all around us and for us, six days work, one day rest. Six days work, one day rest. So when our rhythm of time in life is this [NATE PLAYS ORIGINAL FRENETIC GROOVE], what sort of relationship do we have with the rhythm God laid down into the fabric of the world around us and for us? We're out of rhythm. We've out of harmony. We're out of sync with intrinsic rhythm of the world God placed there that's all around us and for us [NATE PLAYS ORIGINAL, SOLID ROCK GROOVE – PAUSE TO LISTEN].

When we're out of sync in our bodies, we call that sickness. When we're out of sync in our emotions, we call that dysfunction. When we're out of sync in our minds, we call that mental illness. So is it any wonder that when our schedule increases and we're playing like this [NATE PLAYS ORIGINAL FRENETIC GROOVE], that we're absolutely fried? When we're out of sync with God's place rhythm of time in the world, we suffer. Our health, our emotions, our relationships, our intellects, and our spirituality and connection with God all suffer. Maybe its so slight that we don't notice it from day to day, but as the damage accrues over long periods of time, we burnout, checkout and poop out.

[NATE STOPS DRUMMING]. Let's all thank Nate willing to help us understand this rhythm within the world for us. When our schedules are stretched and out of sync with God's created rhythm, we suffer.

Practicing a Rhythm of Rest: So let me ask us some really tough questions this morning. What kind of rhythm are you playing in life? If your life's day timer or palm pilot were a set of drums, what sort of rhythm would you hear?

Would there be an obvious groove in your schedule where you knew when to play the drum and when not to play the drum? Would your schedule groove with God's created rhythm of six days work, one day rest?

Do you normally have one day a week where you rest and cease from the work you normally do?

If you're in business, in general, do you have one day when the blackberry isn't on, the cell phone doesn't ring and the email is left unanswered?

If you're a stay-at-home parent, in general, do you have one day where the vacuuming isn't done, the groceries aren't bought and the laundry is left until another day?

If you're a student, in general, do you have one day when the paper isn't written, the book isn't read and the test isn't studied for?

In general, do you have one day a week where you cease from the work you normally do the other six days in the week?

If not, your schedule is stretched and you're out of sync with God's created rhythm. And when our schedules are stretched and out of sync with God's created rhythm, we re-sync with it by practicing a day of rest. We regularly find a day to cease from what we normally do to rest and to re-sync with that rhythm.

I can hear all of the bells and alarms going off right now in all our heads, "Wait a second. Are you telling me that I should take one day off each week? Then how in the world can I take 24 hours off with all of the stuff I have to get done?" Yes, I'm telling you and me that we all need to find a rhythm of taking one day to rest from what we normally do. We all need that rhythm of rest without getting legalistic about it or anything like that to get back in sync with God's created rhythm that is going on all around us and for us. Otherwise, we'll live out of sync and eventually suffer the consequences.

**Illustration** – And we are able to do it like every other follower of God and follower of Jesus Christ has sought to do it through the ages by trusting God. The farmer who followed Jesus and took one day of rest trusted God that God wouldn't let his crops fail in one day and God wouldn't let weeds overrun his fields in one day and God wouldn't let the harvest spoil in one day. Sure, if there were an emergency, he could tend to it and grab that day of rest later, but the normal pattern of resting required trust on the part of the farmer. It takes trust to take a day to cease and rest. But we desperately need that rhythm of rest. We all need one day and it doesn't even have to be Sunday, just one day to cease from what we normally do to rest.

Conclusion: Listen I get it. I get how tough it is to take a day to rest because I feel it and I experience it. I could work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year because we've been a church open to the public for less than one year. So there's always more that I could be doing here as your pastor.

There are always more meetings I could have with people. There is always more leadership development and team development I could be doing. There is always more strategy enhancing and communications I could be doing. There are always more books I could study for these messages and more sermons I could listen to for ideas and personal development. There's always more I could be doing. But I take one day, Monday, to rest and to cease from what I normally do. No studying for messages. No answering emails. No meetings. Not so much for religious reasons, but because I've experienced what it's like to drum frenetically in life.

There was a period of my life when I cheated and took less than a full day off. The damage wasn't immediate or even noticeable at first. But as time went on, I began to feel hollowed out inside with little to teach with, little to lead with and little to give my family. Then through a series of events, God forced me to begin to take a full day off. And I was living that rhythm, six days work, one day rest. Six days work, one day rest. I did it week after week after week for months.

Then about 8 months after I started that, I remember looking around and thinking, "Hmmm. What happened here? I don't feel so blue and melancholy and empty. I actually pretty good, pretty free. I feel free to connect with God more deeply and to do my job and calling more fully." So ever since then, I take one day to rest to stay in sync with God's created rhythm in our world. And sometimes, it is just hard because I so desperately want to do something that might get me ahead. So sometimes, on Monday when I take my day to rest, I have to pray and just tell God, "Okay God, this is an act of trust that the church won't blow up and that you'll get all you want to get done on the other days." I do it as an act of faith and trust in God that he will keep the church from crumbling, that he will give me enough ideas on the other days to be ready here on Sunday mornings, and that he will build his church with me taking one day off each week. And just look at what he's done. Last time I checked, the church hasn't crumbled. I've had enough to say on Sunday mornings, sometimes to your boredom. And God has built this church with ministry and teams extending even to Moldova, Sunday morning worship happening and the church continuing to move forward. And he's done it all, even with me taking one day off to keep my sanity.

And God will do the same thing in your life through your relationship with Jesus Christ. So live your own rhythm of rest. Stop the insanity and recover that art of knowing when to play the drum and when not to play the drum in your schedule. Practice that rhythm of rest and sync up with God's created rhythm that is ongoing all around us and for us. Trust God and live your own rhythm of rest.