



**December 22, 2024**

## **All is Calm: Rest**

**Scripture:** Micah 5:2-5a

**Big Idea:** Regardless of where you are, God provides hope and peace – but you have a role to play.

**The Challenge:** We feel the constant pressure toward doing and accomplishing. Especially in the season of Christmas, this feeling of being busy is much more acute. Does it only accelerate the anxiety or a restless soul? Is it possible to experience peace? The Christian witness is Yes! We are called into a life of peace. However, that peace comes only when we allow the Holy Spirit to do the work in our soul; for that, we need to give space, time and attention through the practices of Rest.

**Pastoral Prayer for this Message:** “Lord, help us to see the areas of our lives that are frail, weak, and tired. Rather than allow us to push harder, or give us, allow us to change our gaze to you and allow you to draw us in.”

### **Questions for Discussion:**

- 1) *Hope for Isreal* – Isreal was in a state a mourning as they were in the middle of God sanctifying them through the Assyrians. Simply a tool in the hand of a loving father, the Assyrians had a purpose for a season (Micah 5:5b-6; 5:7-7; 5:10-15). He loved Israel enough that he did not want to keep them that way.
  - What are some of the real challenges you have faced in the past?
  - How did they affect your relationship with the father?
  - What are some of the current challenges you are working though?
  - What is your natural reaction to challenges: 1) to push through 2) to give up?
  - Are you missing God in those responses?
- 2) *Hope From Israel*—The Christian narrative provides hope. God not only wanted Israel to be sanctified but also to see that the world, including Israel, would know the fulfillment of everlasting peace. Jesus ascended so the Spirit could come and manifest in Israel’s lives in a new way. We are called into a Spirit-filled life that manifests the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).
  - Define Peace? How much of your life would you attribute to having peace?
  - What do John 14:27 and Psalm 62:1 show us about the life He calls us into?
  - Micah 5:4 says, “He will stand and shepherd his flock...and they will live securely...”. What does it mean to live securely? Is it synonymous with peace?
- 3) Micah 5:4 He assures us that he is our shepherd, and by default, we are then his sheep. Shepherds have two functions: to protect and to redirect.
  - What does it mean for him to protect us?
  - How does this align with the challenges that we face?
  - What does it mean for him to redirect us?
  - What heart posture do we take to him being our shepherd?

- 4) We talked about Spiritual Theology, the work of the Holy Spirit and Scripture in our lives. He sanctifies us, transforming us into Christ's image (Eph 4:24). However, we play a part in that, or role of submission and availability. We provide him the space to do that transformation work through practices that allow the work of the Holy Spirit.
- What have been some of the anchoring practices of your life?
  - What practices is He calling you into this season?

We have attached the Practice Guide for week four below. Feel free to review it and see what practices you need to consider for this season.

## **All is Calm Practices Guide**

Week Four  
Text: Micah 5:2-5a  
Practice: Rest

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*  
Matthew 11:28

Is it possible to experience peace when your circumstances are frenetic and busy? Or perhaps when an unexpected challenge, heartbreak, or fracture occurs?

The consistent Biblical witness is that yes, it is possible. Isaiah, a prophet in the Old Testament, confidently asserts, “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” Over this past month where has your mind wandered to? What are the places of fear, anxiety, worry, or stress that you carry? Where have you placed your trust?

The hope of Christianity, both in prophetic utterance, and seen most clearly in the Advent of Jesus, is that God is with us, and that peace is possible. This has been our prayer, aim, and goal this month as we have journeyed through our series *All is Calm*.

It’s difficult to fight for peace, but it is necessary in a hectic world.

To aid your journey through this month, we have written up these guides to help you practice the faith from Monday-Saturday. A 75-minute service, once a week, is not enough to provide spaces of rest and joy.

The first week we looked at the practice of reading Scripture. This is an anchoring practice for Christians as we are “people of the Book.” The second week we encouraged you to pray more intently through praying through the Lord’s Prayer and listening prayer. The third week, responding to the lavish love of God, we encouraged you to practice generosity with your time, words, talent, and treasure.

We finish off Advent, and these practice guides, with the practice of rest. Micah chapter 5 give us glorious pictures of the security provided by life with God. He says, “He will stand and shepherd his flock...and they will live securely...” and “And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land...” (Micah 5:4-5).

Amidst the challenging circumstances Israel found itself in, Micah affirms that God (in Jesus Christ) will provide security and peace.

So what is the practice of rest and why do we need to implement it?

Let’s look.

## The Practice: Rest

The practice of rest is to “honour God and my human limitations through restful rhythms.”<sup>1</sup>

John Mark Comer, in his best-selling book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* aptly asks, “Why am I in such a hurry to become someone I don’t even like?”<sup>2</sup>

What an incisive question to ask. We are in a hurry culture, where performance, success, and accomplishment are prized, and rest and margin are forgotten. As a pastor, I talk to people in all stages of life, from young emerging adults to seasoned seniors, and everyone has the same experience: “I’m busy.”

And this busyness is forming us into people who are restless, distracted, and worried. The worrying truth is that hurry is a great enemy of your spiritual life. Often, we consider vices to be our spiritual enemies. Things like lust, anger, pride, and greed. Of course these are serious malforming threats to spiritual growth, but the insidious and often forgotten enemy is the pace of your life.

John Ortberg, former pastor and theologian notes, ““For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.”<sup>3</sup>

I feel the “skimming.” It shows up in being distracted in conversations with my wife or kids. When we are in conversation, and I am elsewhere in my mind, solving a problem or planning. I feel the “skimming” when I sit down with Jesus, and the monkeys in my mind start swinging from one branch to the next (you know what I’m talking about?!). Embarrassingly I predict the length of time each line will be at the grocery store waiting to buy food so I can get out faster. This is “skimming”. It is a symptom of the hurry sickness in my soul.

The antidote to all this fast-paced, low-voltage, relationship-diluting hurry is rest. Rest is about intentionally leading your life, so it doesn’t lead you. It’s about spending time in the right way, with the right people.

John Mark Comer rightly says that “love and hurry are incompatible.”<sup>4</sup> If we want to live lives of deep love, connection, and intimacy with God and others, we must slow down and rest.

So how can you do this?

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<sup>1</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 74.

<sup>2</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 23.

## Practicing the Practice

Through the ages Christians have intentionally put time of margin and rest in their calendars. The following are the ways you can do this.

At the end of this guide is a link to a fantastic resource, *Practicing the Way*. On this site contains helpful resources on these practices and more. Please check out [www.practicingtheway.org](http://www.practicingtheway.org)!

### 1. Sabbath

While there are differing approaches to the idea of Sabbath within Christian thought, it is commanded in the Scriptures. The fourth commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work (Exodus 20:8-10).

To “sabbath” literally means to stop. In our culture it is hard to stop, and yet we are commanded to. To practice Sabbath means “to set apart one day a week for rest and worship of God.”<sup>5</sup>

If you aren’t in a regular Sabbath rhythm, the idea of this can be overwhelming. To break, stop, and rest for 24 hours straight seems almost impossible. But you can start, with an hour, or an afternoon, to stop and be with God and others.

Go for a walk, read a passage of Scripture, make a meal with people you love, play a sport with a friend – all of these are re-creating activities that give you the space you need to rest and replenish.

What life-giving and God-glorifying activity can you put in your calendar this week that will bring life and joy to you?

### 2. Silence and Solitude

Psalm 46:10 invites us to “Be still and know that I am God.” How will you be still, in able that you will know God? Without intentionality, we will not place ourselves in front of God in silence and solitude.

By practicing silence we rest from words. By practicing solitude we rest from the noise of our life.

We live in a noisy world with notifications, phone calls, and text messages. We are constantly drawn other places by technology. While technology is a good servant, it makes a terrible master.

By practicing solitude we are “choosing to be alone and to dwell on our experience of isolation from other human beings.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 42.

<sup>6</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 160.

The goal of practicing silence is to “create a context for enhancing our hearing from God in his word and responding back in prayer.”<sup>7</sup>

This is an “upstream” practice in our world. It is extremely difficult to implement these practices in your life, but the reward is worth it.

**Here are a few tips to start:**

- Put your phone away! Turn it off, put it in a drawer, or give it to a friend for a time. It will be impossible to be silent and alone with your device on you.
- Start small – sit with God for 5 minutes alone in silence. Every time you get distracted, don’t feel bad or guilty. See it as another opportunity to pursue God.
- Start and end your time with God in silence. This is an easy way to be still every day.
- Build on the practice – as you get used to being silence and alone with God, increase the time by 5 or 10 minutes.
- Go for a walk – this is a great way to be alone, and to have space to pray, listen, and be attentive to God.

### **3. Rule of Life**

A Rule of Life does not sound exciting. So why would you want to come up with a Rule of Life?

Instead of “rule”, think “trellis.” A trellis is an agricultural tool that facilitates the growth of a vine or a branch. The trellis provides the necessary support for the branch to grow. Without it, it will fall over and die.

This is what a Rule of Life is. Marjorie Thompson describes it as a “pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth.”

This is a map of your spiritual life that you get to partner with Jesus in forming. It acts as a chart of your spiritual rhythms.

Your personal rule of life is formed and reflected in your daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual spiritual rhythms and practices. These practices create space in your life for the Spirit and truth of God to transform you into people of love.

This Rule of Life will be a helpful companion for you to start 2025 with more structure and form to your spiritual life, enabling you to practice sabbath, silence, solitude, generosity, rest, fasting, and Scripture.

Spend some time, between now and the start of 2025, to map your spiritual formation rhythms through crafting a rule of life.

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<sup>7</sup> David Mathias, *Habits of Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 1.

## **Training vs. Trying**

All the practices highlighted this month are simply tools for you. They are not task masters, or rules to follow, but rather are ways to encounter Jesus.

There is a big difference between “training” and “trying.”

“Trying” these disciplines could end up in feeling like a failure: you make a goal to read the Scriptures every day, but you don’t end up doing it. You feel like a failure and don’t end up picking up your Bible for the next three months. To try and not succeed, and the feeling of guilt and failure, will not lead to a robust and close relationship with Jesus.

“Training” however, is different. Training is about making progress, little by little. Think of how one would start to train for a marathon. To think about running for 3+ hours straight is insane for someone who has never ran before. So what do you do? You get out and start by running 5 minutes straight. Then you get up the next day and run for 7 minutes. And so on.

This is how we should approach the spiritual disciplines! It’s training our soul to be with Jesus through these pathways.

May you experience Him, in increasing ways, as you train your soul for godliness!

*Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

1 Timothy 4:7-8

For extra study and support:

- *Practicing the Way* has fantastic resources on the practices mentioned this week, and the other weeks as well. Check out their website [here](https://www.practicingtheway.org/) (https://www.practicingtheway.org/).