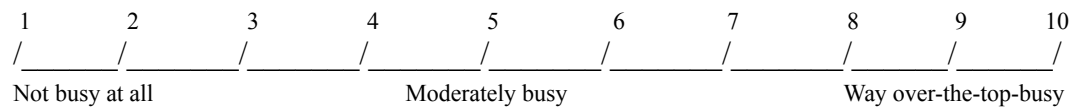


How to Keep Your Sanity in a Mad, Mad World

1. Warm-up question: Most of us get annoyed when things move slow. Jeff talked about “grocery store rage” (akin to road rage) when he encounters someone blocking an aisle. What kind of slowness most annoys you?
2. Although we often don’t like slowness, we also often don’t like the level of hurry that modern life demands. One study concluded that, compared to premodern times, the pace of human movement has increased by a factor of 100, the speed of communication by 10 million, and the pace of data transmission by 10 billion. In a world that demands so much so quickly, how do we keep our sanity? That will be our focus in November, as we explore three spiritual practices that can help us keep our balance in life. On Sunday, we began with the concept of Sabbath rest. Let’s begin by reading the first part of Sunday’s scripture, I Kings 19:1-10, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. In this passage, the demands of Elijah’s prophetic ministry were overwhelming him. In verse 10, he says, “I alone am left.” He felt like he was the only one fighting to preserve faith in the God of Israel. In verse 4, he says, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life.” Elijah was overwhelmed and exhausted, he was ready to give up. Can you relate? When in your life have you felt most overwhelmed and exhausted? How did that affect you?
 - b. Given what you’re facing in your life right now, where would you plot yourself on the following busyness scale? Say a few words about why you place yourself where you do on the scale and how that makes you feel?



3. One of the Bible’s key prescriptions for maintaining balance in life is to practice the Sabbath concept. We tend to associate Sabbath practice with the Jewish notion of devoting one full day per week to rest and renewal. But the concept of Sabbath is broader and more flexible. Jeff defined the concept as: ***Creating quiet space in our life for restful spiritual mindfulness.***
 - a. One of the Ten Commandments says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. . . . You shall not do any work [on the Sabbath]. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth . . . and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day.” Exodus 20:8. What do you think it means to say that God rests? Does that mean God gets tired? If not, why would God choose to rest?
 - b. Matthew 14:23 says, “After Jesus dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray.” Statements like this regularly recur throughout the Gospels. Jesus regularly goes off by himself to a quiet place away from everything to

- commune with God. Why? What would you guess Jesus gained from those times away? How might his life and ministry have been different without those times?
4. Practicing the Sabbath can take the form of setting aside one full day a week for rest, as the Jews do. But there are also other ways to practice the Sabbath concept in more flexible, bite-size chunks. You'll find a list of options on p. 3.
 - a. Attending Sunday worship is at the top of the list. Jeff said, "There's a reason why all three major global faiths (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) have, from their inception, organized around a once-a-week gathering for spiritual mindfulness." Why do you think that is? Why are a weekly worship services so essential to living centered lives? How does Sunday church affect you?
 - b. Dr. Tyler Vanderweele, an epidemiology professor at Harvard, spent a decade researching how regular church attendance impacts us. He concluded, "[People] who said they attended religious services frequently were 29 percent less likely to become depressed, about 50 percent less likely to divorce, and five times less likely to commit suicide than those who never attended. And, in perhaps the most striking finding of all, [people] who attended services weekly were 33 percent less likely to die during a 16-year follow-up period than people who never attended." What happens at church that could account for these results?
 - c. Thankfully, Sunday church is not the only way to practice Sabbath because seven days between Sunday services is a long time to go without additional ways to rest and renew our soul. Take a look at the list of Sabbath practices on p. 3. Which of these are most renewing for you? Is there anything you would add to the list – something that really renews your soul that's not on the list?
 - d. Do you feel you're getting enough Sabbath rest and renewal in your life right now? If not, what do you think you might want to add to your regular rhythm?
 - e. For you personally, what's the greatest obstacle to regular Sabbath practice?
 5. The second half of Sunday's scripture reading is an excellent example of the importance and benefit of practicing Sabbath rest. Read the second part of Sunday's scripture, I Kings 19:11-15, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Look again at verses 11-12, which describe the wind, earthquake, and forest fire – three dramatic, chaotic events, followed by the sound of a still, small voice, *i.e.*, God speaking out of the sheer silence. What point are these verses making?
 - b. Sunday's sermon closed with a true story about a wagon train that benefited greatly from observing the Sabbath and another story about how Beethoven's years of quiet after he became deaf contributed to his musical inspiration and genius. Martin Luther once said, "I have so much to do today, I'll never get it all done unless I spend two hours in prayer." Do you buy that? Do you believe Sabbath practice dramatically increases our balance and effectiveness in life?

Why or why not? How would you explain the benefits to someone not familiar with spiritual life?

I Kings 19:1-10, selected verses

1 King Ahab told Queen Jezebel all that Elijah had done, 2 then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "May the gods kill me if I do not take your life by this time tomorrow."

3 Elijah got up and fled for his life a day's journey into the wilderness, 4 and sat down under a solitary broom tree and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

8 Then Elijah traveled forty days into the wilderness to Mount Horeb, 9 where the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

I Kings 19:11-15, selected verses

11 God said, "Go out and stand on the mountain, for I am about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; 12 and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. 15 Then the Lord told him what to do.

Some Options for Practicing the Sabbath Concept

1. Regular Sunday church.
2. Going for a walk and talking to God.
3. Journaling.
4. Singing.
5. Reading scripture and/or a daily devotional.
6. Prayer.
7. Sitting in silence and listening for God.
8. Going to an Oasis Group.
9. Hanging out with spiritual friends and talking about the things of spiritual life.
10. Taking 30 second Sacred Pauses during your day:
 - a. Briefly sharing something about your day with God.
 - b. Or remembering a Bible verse.
 - c. Or saying something you're thankful for.

d. Or listening for something God might want to whisper to you.