

Welcome to 2017! As our teaching team was praying about possible themes for the year, we all agreed that a great theme for 2017 would be **Growth**. So here we are, **2017: The Year of Growth**.

What kind of growth are we talking about? We're talking about the kind of growth that takes us deeper with God, and that changes us from the inside out. We're talking about the kind of growth that goes beyond the superficial to the core of who we are, and then moves outward to bear fruit in the world. We're talking about the kind of growth that is **contagious** because it has such **authenticity** and **compassion** and **joy**. This is the kind of growth that helps people find their way back to God because it is rooted deeply in Him.

So welcome to **2017, the Year of Growth!**

It's all the rage right now in educational circles to talk about a **Fixed Mindset vs a Growth Mindset**. A Fixed mindset focuses on my **talents**: what I can do easily right now without much effort, it **avoids challenge**, it **takes criticism personally**, and most of all, it **fears failure**.

A **Growth Mindset** however, sees **effort, attitude, and hard work** as critical. A **Growth Mindset** welcomes criticism as an **avenue to improvement**, and embraces failure as an

**opportunity to grow**. Now I'm sure that, since I've described them that way, if I asked you, you would almost certainly say, yes, I want to have a Growth Mindset! I mean who doesn't want to grow?



But what if I also told you that growth is hard? That growth usually happens through **difficulty** and **hard, hard work**. That growth is a **long term** thing, not a quick fix. Still want to grow?

Yeah you do. Because growing deeper with God in 2017 means that you have Him in your corner; and more and more you will realize that there is nothing in this life that you (And He) can't handle. You will face the obstacles and difficulties of the year with **new strength** and see them as stepping stones to a deeper, more joyful spirit, and a bigger, more compassionate heart.

Last week we heard from **John** who talked about our **Legacy**... thinking about what we are leaving behind for the next generation. And that really got me thinking more about 2017 and I've had some great conversations with friends about that too. What will I

leave behind? A big inheritance for my kids would be nice... but what I really want to see in the rear view mirror of my life is **changed lives!** So thanks, John, for that! That was thought-provoking and encouraging!

It's January. Everyone is feeling the pressure to make New Year's Resolutions, to put new disciplines into practice, to quit bad habits and to make 2017 their healthiest and happiest year yet. People want to check items off their **bucket list**.

But how do you do all of that when you feel drained? How do you tackle your **bucket list** when your bucket is full of holes? How do you pour into others when your bucket is empty?

Can I tell you something? By the end of this past week, my bucket was empty... E\_M\_P\_T\_Y, empty. I'd come fresh off a nice Christmas vacation visiting our daughter and grandkids in Chicago... and on Monday morning, our fourth grandchild was born: Andrew Charles Becvar. He's going to be president.

So, fueled by all that happiness, I went back to school with great energy and anticipation to kick off the new year in the right direction with my students. My lessons were planned, I had motivational quotes ready to go, I was excited. Then came period 3. Period 3 is my nemesis.

Period 3 has 24 students... so it's not that big a class. And individually, I really like each one of them. They are interesting, funny, spirited human beings one on one. The problem is, when they are all together in the same room, they are monsters. It's mayhem. Period 3 is 4 classes behind all my other periods. Why? Because I have to take so much time to deal with discipline issues. Not evil stuff, just stupid kid stuff...

"Get in uniform... put away your cell phones... and your headphones... no food in the room... get your binder... Your Launch activity is in front of you! Get on it, you have 5 minutes! Genesis... did I mention getting into uniform? No, that hoodie is not uniform. I don't care if it's green. Stevo... are you wandering around for some specific reason, or just wandering around? Take a seat, dude! Rafael, get your head up please... nap time is next period. Liliana, No I don't have a pencil for you... you know they sell those at CVS! Genesis... you're getting on my last nerve, girl. Stevo... sit down! Rafael, wake up! Jamal, put that phone away or it's mine for the rest of the day! Tyrese, that is ridiculously inappropriate! Guys, you're acting like a bunch of 5 year olds! Will everybody please sit down and SHUT UP!"

Sorry. I admit I kind of lost it on them yesterday. My last nerve gave out. I was ready to give up on this class, to stop trying to find new ways to motivate the unmotivated, to tame the unruly, to get through to them that hard work matters, school matters, every choice they make matters. I was ready to give up on helping them understand that **they** matter. I was about ready to just let them go down the tubes and end up like every other kid in Lawrence... earning minimum wage at Wendy's, or Dunkin', or Market Basket.

My bucket was empty. Everything I had, had leaked out **Been there?**

Today I get to kick off our first series of 2017 which we have called “**Bucket List.**” The premise is that we’re all a bunch of holey buckets! In this series, we’ll look at spiritual disciplines that have been practiced for millennia, and learn how to plug the holes in our lives that constantly drain us.

We are holey buckets! We have leaks! We’re messy! Water goes in, water leaks out... all over the place... and that’s not all bad! A holey bucket is great for watering the plants below it... as long as it is being continually filled from above.

That’s the trick isn’t it? Being **continually filled from above.** And that leads us into our topic for today: an amazing gift that God has given to mankind as part of creation. And this is not just a nice gift... like that fruitcake you got for Christmas. This is a necessary gift... this is one you need... **it’s one I need.** This gift from God is called **The Sabbath.** So today we’re going to talk about the discipline of **keeping the Sabbath.**

***How to Keep Your Sabbath:  
the necessity of rest and relationship.***

**Sabbath** – now there’s a word we don’t hear or use much anymore, it sounds very old-fashioned; but maybe we go-go girls and go-go boys of the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to relearn this word. It comes from the Hebrew word that means **to rest from your labor.** This may become your new favorite word! We’re going to see that to fully experience the Sabbath as a gift from God involves learning what true **rest** is and the **priority** of our **relationship** with God!

Jesus said, *“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* MT 11:28-29

Before we say anything else, let those words from the lips of Jesus wash over your heart... let me read them again... perhaps you’d like to close your eyes and picture Jesus saying them to you personally. *“Come to me, you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your soul.”*

Rest for your soul. Hmm. Sounds good, doesn’t it?

A guy named Augustine lived in northern Africa in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. He had spent his first 30 years on partying, exotic religions, pursuing several useless degrees, and video games... well, no, they weren’t invented yet, but if they had been, he’d be a gamer for sure! All of this activity left him utterly weary of himself. At that low point (it always seems to be at a low point, doesn’t it?), God led him to a passage from the book of

Romans that eventually led to his conversion: *“Don’t participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, **clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ...**”* Rom 13:13-14

***Clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.*** Augustine, jaded and disillusioned as he was, opened his heart to Jesus. Immediately he experienced grace and forgiveness: the newness of Christ... and rest for his soul! Years later, reflecting on this, he wrote, in a prayer to God:

***“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find their rest in you.”*** St Augustine (386 AD)

Our Sabbath – soul rest – begins with a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Until we find our rest in Christ, anything we do is like painting a sinking ship... we’ll be looking good as we’re going down!

But the Sabbath isn’t just rest for our souls, it’s rest for our bodies too. We are created beings, and we need **rest!** You need some **rest!**

You know, if there is **one word** I’d use to describe most people today, it is **tired**. You ask people how they’re doing, and usually you get the standard New England, “Good, ‘n you?” But if you catch someone in an unguarded moment they’re likely to say, “You know what, I’m exhausted!”

Students stagger into my classroom at 8am on a Monday morning and they are tired... even after a weekend that was supposed to refresh and recharge them! Nope. Sleepy. Tired. Exhausted. Perennially and chronically tired.

And the interesting thing is, in most cases, it’s not because they’re not getting enough sleep. They’re just not **resting**.

What happens to rest-deprived people?

In 1980 an experiment was conducted: ten rats were subjected to total sleep deprivation. They were kept awake 24/7. What do you think happened?

All the rats died within 11-32 days. No anatomical cause of death was identified. They just died from lack of rest!

Rest is not an option for your body or mine! It is a necessity!

Sabbath is derived from the Hebrew verb **shabat**, meaning to stop, to cease. The Sabbath is God’s STOP sign in our go-go world!

The Sabbath first appears in Genesis at the end of God’s creation:

*“So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On **the seventh day** God had finished his work of creation, so he **rested** from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he **rested from all his work** of creation.” Gen 2:1-3*

So does God need rest? Was He tired after creating the universe? No! God has infinite power and unlimited strength. God doesn't need rest or sleep... but we do. The Sabbath was created for us! STOP! STOP working! Rest... recreate...reflect...recharge. The Sabbath was created for us. It is balanced, it is organic, and it is **sustainable**. Keeping your Sabbath will make your life sustainable.

So how is your **rest**? And by rest, I don't mean just napping... although a good nap is a beautiful thing... Rest means stopping your work, laying your burden down for a time. Rest is physical, it is mental, it is emotional, it is spiritual. It is **necessary**!

For a three-year span I worked as a bi-vocational pastor – I worked two jobs. A team of us had planted a new church in Littleton, and I preached and led worship every Sunday as well as implemented new initiatives designed to help people find their way back to God. When I wasn't doing “spiritual” work, my other job was doing carpentry work... roofing, siding, windows, bathrooms, whatever. The only ebb and flow of my life was whether I was holding a Bible or a hammer in my hand! Sabbaths were non-existent. Days of rest were few and far between. It doesn't take a genius to figure out how where that was heading. It was **unsustainable**. But I couldn't see it... I was always just doing the next thing... doing the next thing... doing, doing, doing. Until I couldn't **do** anymore. **I was done**... stick a fork in me. Done. And it took several years to recover. Years, people, years.

I learned the need for Sabbath the hard way. We are creatures. **Created ones**. Our bodies need rest. Our minds need rest. Our emotions need rest. That's why God gave us the gift of the Sabbath: the day of stopping. So how are you... at stopping? It's not easy, is it? But it's necessary... it's the way God made us.

Another aspect of resting is what we do for **recreation**. I think it's so cool that the word we use to describe fun activities that we engage in, “**recreation**,” actually points us to its own deepest meaning: **Re-creation**!

When do you feel the most alive? What activities leave you feeling refreshed, reenergized and in balance?

Is it being outdoors? Hiking, skiing, sky-diving, ice-climbing? Canoeing on a placid lake, or kayaking a raging rapids? There is something about living **unplugged** and **uninsulated** lives. Something about being out in God's creation restores our souls. Some of my most memorable God-moments have been on top of a mountain or on a beautiful forest trail. Nature reminds us that we are created beings, we are part of it all, we are dust.

Secondly, when God made us in His Image, He made us **mini-creators**! We feel that way when we are creating things. Some people create art... some music...some knit... or take photographs... or play chess... or rebuild car engines! Personally, I like to **bake bread, make sausages, and brew beer**. Doing those things re-creates me! I love all the steps of each of those activities. Take bread for example: I love the feel of the dough beneath my hands as I knead it, I love the smell of the yeasty dough and of the baking bread, I love the sight of a finished loaf... and the crackling sound it makes as it cools, and then, of course, I LOVE the taste... oh the taste! Mmm!

When I'm baking bread, making sausages, or brewing beer, I am fully engaged... I'm not worrying about school or my bank account or anything. I'm having fun! And it recharges my batteries! I am being re-created! My recreation is re-creating me! And I find this so cool! What re-creates you?!

If we take this one more step, we find that this re-creating of ourselves is a prefiguring of the new creation. As we learned at the Christmas Eve service, when Christ comes again, **He makes all things new!** And that leads us to the next aspect of the Sabbath...**Relationship**.

In Genesis, the 7<sup>th</sup> Day, the Sabbath, reminds us that all of time is God's... not just 1 day! All of creation is God's... and finds its meaning and ultimate fulfillment in Him. So we find that the purpose of the Sabbath is also to refresh our **relationship** with God, and from that, with others.

The Sabbath was tremendously important for ancient Israel. The Sabbath set Israel apart as Holy. It marked them as **God's people**, a people set apart for Him.

*"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 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. Ex 20: 8-10*

The Sabbath: a day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God...

In the Ten Commandments, this was Commandment # 4... the Hinge verse of the Ten. The first three are about our relationship with God, and the last six are about our relationships with others. The Sabbath reminds us that we are **relational creatures** who first need to be in a right relationship with God, and then in a right relationship with others in our lives.

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| 1 – no other gods                           |                        |
| 2 – no idols/images                         |                        |
| 3 – keep God's Name holy                    | <b>about God...</b>    |
| <b>4 – Sabbath: Rest &amp; Relationship</b> | <b>about you...</b>    |
| 5 – honor your parents                      |                        |
| 6 – respect human life                      |                        |
| 7 – be faithful in marriage                 |                        |
| 8 – respect the rights of others            | <b>about others...</b> |
| 9 – tell the truth                          |                        |
| 10 – be content with what you have          |                        |

It's amazing, but God seems to be very interested in having a **relationship** with us. The problem is, we human beings are more apt to want **religious rules**. Rules are easier to live by; relationships are messy.

So these Ten Commandments from God were quickly taken... studied... dissected... and expanded upon... so that by the time Jesus walked the earth, the Jewish faith was a totally **Rules-based Religion**. And one of the biggest rules was that **you couldn't "do" anything on the Sabbath**... and I mean anything!

The Talmud (rabbinical commentaries on the Law) detailed no less than 39 things that were absolutely prohibited on the Sabbath. They included...

- |                                   |                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Sowing</b>                  | 21. <b>Tying knots</b>         |
| 2. <b>Plowing</b>                 | 22. <b>Untying knots</b>       |
| 3. <b>Reaping</b>                 | 23. <b>Sewing two stitches</b> |
| 4. <b>Binding sheaves</b>         | 24. Tearing                    |
| 5. <b>Threshing</b>               | 25. Trapping                   |
| 6. <b>Winnowing</b>               | 26. Slaughtering               |
| 7. Selecting                      | 27. Flaying                    |
| 8. Grinding                       | 28. <b>Salting meat</b>        |
| 9. <b>Sifting</b>                 | 29. <b>Curing hide</b>         |
| 10. <b>Kneading</b>               | 30. <b>Scraping hide</b>       |
| 11. <b>Baking</b>                 | 31. <b>Cutting hide up</b>     |
| 12. Shearing wool                 | 32. <b>Writing two letters</b> |
| 13. Washing wool                  | 33. <b>Erasing two letters</b> |
| 14. Beating wool                  | 34. Building                   |
| 15. Dyeing wool                   | 35. Tearing a building down    |
| 16. Spinning                      | 36. Extinguishing a fire       |
| 17. Weaving                       | 37. Kindling a fire            |
| 18. <b>Making two loops</b>       | 38. Hitting with a hammer      |
| 19. <b>Weaving two threads</b>    | 39. Transporting an object.    |
| 20. <b>Separating two threads</b> |                                |

All that from "Keep the Sabbath Day holy!" Phew! But wait, there's more! These 39 rabbinical rules were expanded by their descendants into no less than  $39^2 = 1,521$  sub-rules! They had 1,521 rules about resting. Can you imagine? That's just exhausting by itself!

But resting isn't about rules... and the life God planned for us isn't about rules. It's about **relationship**... God wants your heart back!

Mark 3:1-6 *Jesus went into the synagogue and noticed a man with a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him.*

*He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.*



Can you imagine?! I mean, right in front of everybody, Jesus healed this man! Poof! Done! A miracle! Everyone was oooing and ahing! But what was the first reaction of the religious leaders? Was it “Wow... did you see that? He just healed that guy’s hand!”? Nope... “Hey, buddy, this is the Sabbath! You know the Rules: No Work! That means no Healing!” Hard to imagine, isn’t it, that these religious leaders... the people who were supposed to help people find their way back to God, were so furious that this Jesus guy had broken the rules, that they didn’t realize **Emmanuel** – God Himself was among them!

The bottom line is this: Human beings love rules, they want to see **external compliance**. That’s religion in a nutshell. But God wants your heart back. He loves you! He wants a **relationship** with you.

How do we find rest for our souls? Let’s return to a verse we looked at earlier:

*“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Our rest begins with a relationship with Jesus. What does He mean, “**Take my yoke upon you?**” A yoke was a farm implement used to harness two draft animals together so they could be used for plowing a field. A yoke was almost always used for two animals together, so when Jesus says, Take my yoke upon you, there are two messages here: 1) we must submit our wills to His (Think: Thy will be done!), and 2) He is paired up with us... side by side with us, pulling! Picture that! Redemption is about opening my heart to Christ, saying “**I’m Yours, Lord, Thy will be done!**”

And it’s about being **joined with Christ**... you’re not pulling by yourself anymore! You’re not striving and grunting and groaning and trying to survive by yourself anymore. You’ve got a Super Partner – you are yoked together with the Lord Jesus Christ! That’s rest for your soul... Christ with you... carrying your burdens with you... His infinite strength added to yours.

That starts with experiencing the redemption that Jesus bought for us through His death on the Cross and His resurrection. And it continues through **worship** – a life lived in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. Worship truly is not just a Sunday morning (or Saturday night!) thing... worship is 24/7. It’s not an event, worship is a lifestyle.

But in that midst of that lifestyle, we have these **special weekend gatherings**. These times when God’s people come to sing His praises together, to pray together, to share His Supper together, and to hear His Word together. These times of corporate worship are precious. They are a cool refreshing drink for our souls that have been so parched by the world. They are a soothing ointment to wounded hearts. **They fill my empty bucket!** These times together reconnect us with God and with one another. And we should walk away refreshed, reenergized, restored, reoriented, and ... **re-created**. That’s their purpose: to deepen our **relationship** with God and with one another.

So how’s your Sabbath? How is your rest? How is your relationship with God?



In the movie, **Bucket List**, Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman play two terminally ill men from vastly different backgrounds who find themselves in the same hospital room. Nicholson is wealthy, spoiled, and arrogant. Freeman is humble, quiet, and a Christian. Their relationship doesn't start well, but it grows deep through shared sufferings. At one point their conversation goes like this:

**Nicholson:** *I envy people who have faith. I just can't get my head around it.*

**Freeman:** *Maybe because your head's in the way.*

You know you need the Sabbath. You are a created being. Rest is not optional. Relationship with God? Some would say that's optional, but I don't think so. We will never really know ourselves until we get to know our Creator. Here are a couple of things to think about as we leave this place and time together:

### 1) How's your rest?

What is "enough work" for you? (It's never done... we all know that, but when is enough, enough?)

What do you do for recreation? How do you play?

What personal boundaries do you need to set?

What kind of sleep are you getting?

### 2) How's your relationship with God?

Have you ever opened your heart to Jesus?

Have you ever taken His yoke upon you?

How do you keep your relationship with God deep and fresh?

Along those lines, next week, Kelly will be teaching us about another spiritual discipline:

***Practicing the Presence of God***... and I can't wait, because that is not a strength in my life! I really look forward to hearing what she has to say!

Meanwhile, God bless you! He loves you so much! You have chosen make this **your Sabbath** today... you have worshiped with others, prayed with others, heard from God's Word with others. And I hope that this short time together has picked up your spirits a bit and renewed your energy a bit, so that when you get back at it tomorrow, **your bucket** won't be empty, but filled... and ready to pour out again, for the sake of others... in my case, for the sake of Period 3.

Let's pray!