

The summer Olympics are coming to an end tonight after two weeks of competition, so I decided to include them in my message today and the one last week. Today is the second of a two part series called Olympic Spirit. Last week's message was "Living Within Our Limits". I taught about embracing our limits in order to allow God to be limitless for us. A copy of the sermon is available on your way out if you'd like to see what I said last week, or you can watch it on our Youtube channel or Facebook page. Just a reminder that Sunday services are recorded then uploaded by 6 p.m. Sunday evenings.

Today's message is "Working from rest". We know the phrase resting from work, which is usually how we live our lives. We work, work, work and then when we can't work any more we plop down - maybe collapse is a better word - unable to work anymore - and we call that rest. And it doesn't really work.

It makes me think of the new sport included for the 1st time this year in the Olympics called 3x3 basketball - otherwise known as 3 on 3 - three people play against 3 other people. Truthfully I don't know much about basketball, but it's my understanding they shortened the normal 5 on 5 basketball schedule in the Olympics to make room for this new sport 3x3 (or 3 on 3). Why did they add 3x3?

What I've read and heard is that it's a strategy of the International Olympic Committee to catch the attention of a younger audience whose attention span mirrors the VERY fast pace of this game.

3x3 is played on a basketball half court so baskets are made quickly. The games are either 10 minutes in length or whichever team makes 21 points first. And this new sport has risen to prominence in the news cycle this past week, because the women's 3x3 team won the gold medal. Some even think the IOC is trying to phase out the 5 on 5 sport in favor of 3x3 instead. Faster is better, right? That's the culture we're living in.

The American Psychological Association - every year since 2007 has taken a major survey across the US and published its findings in a report called "Stress in America". It reports how people are responding to stressors, both mentally and physically. Not surprisingly, every year the stats keep going up. They look at people who are, what they call, outside diagnosable mental

disorders and experience things like: trouble sleeping, feeling angry and irritable, fatigue or having recurring headaches - things that show stress.

This is a phrase they recorded from their respondents, "I have too much stress to manage my stress." Can anyone relate?

Not surprisingly 2020 recorded even higher numbers. Especially in the Generation Z group of people - young adults ages 18-23 - they experienced adulthood at a time when the future seemed even more uncertain than ever. They reported the highest levels of stress, on average, 6.1 out of 10, which was significantly higher than all other generations, which on average was 5 out of 10. Doesn't seem much higher, but the whole point is a lot.

With all this in mind the APA issued this statement in their 202 report, "Due to an unusual combination of factors in society and the persistent drumbeat of a crisis that shows no sign of abating, we are facing a national mental health crisis that could yield serious health and social consequences for years to come."<sup>1</sup>

Could it be that God is speaking to us today through sources like the APA - encouraging us to consider how we live our lives? Not only those of us already choosing to follow Christ, but to the whole world? If so, are any of us listening?

Biblical scholars believe it was around the 13th to 16th century BCE that one of the most simple statements of how to live our lives was written - the ten commandments. Today I'm going to say a little about the 4th commandment, which Steve read for us today from Deuteronomy 5 - "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy."

Did you know that this is the longest commandment? It takes up over a third of the whole 10 commandments. Every orthodox Jew, who's sabbath keeping goes back thirty five hundred years, will tell you that you can't keep the other nine commandments if you don't keep the 4th one about Sabbath. It's that critically important.

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<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association, 2020, *Stress in America 2020*, <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/report-October>

Karl Barth says that the sabbath commandment actually explains the other nine commandments.

I'll share that, personally, when Covid hit in March 2020 I had just started reading and studying about sabbath keeping for myself. Before that I hadn't really spent any time really, thinking about or practicing sabbath keeping. I'm guessing that the same for the majority of us here? We know the commandments and this one in particular, but we believe and were taught that keeping sabbath is not really a Christian experience. That it's more of a Jewish tradition. That for us Christians, because we have life by the grace of God in Christ Jesus and not by following the law, that this was a "law" we weren't expected to follow.

But early in 2020 one of the leaders in my former congregation had just given me a great book, "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry" by John Mark Comer. I had just begun to read it and other sources and truly understand sabbath keeping as a Christian.

Reading what Comer had to say, slowly the idea of keeping sabbath grew like a fire in my heart and I began to understand the joy and rest this concept has to offer. As Abraham Heschel the great hasidic scholar says, "It's a sanctuary in time."

All through history for the Jews, keeping this commandment was and is a sign of what makes God's people different from the rest of the world that they set aside 24 hours and devote it to rest. It's a sign to the world that they are in a relationship with the living God. No other people group in the world practices sabbath keeping. And you might not know it yet, but there's been a really big resurgence in Christianity to practice sabbath keeping as a really powerful way to be in relationship with our living God.

But what does it mean, really, to observe the sabbath day and keep it holy?

The word sabbath comes from the Hebrew "Shabbat" which literally means to rest. So I would first of all say that this commandment implores us to make time to rest. It's not just a day off from paid employment - a day to get all of our other chores or errands done rather than get our paid work accomplished. It's not just a day off. Rather - sabbath keeping is truly about making time to do what is restful and brings refreshment to you.

The things that help us relax are so individual and unique. If you aren't thinking about this already, please now consider for yourself, silently, two ways that you experience true rest. Please, think about that silently for 8 seconds. Later, if you are willing, write those two ideas down and also share them with someone you trust. Then between now and next Sunday, make a plan for yourself to take time to experience those two things.

I hope right now you are still thinking about, maybe even dreaming about those two ideas. That you can envision yourself enjoying them and feel a small sense of delight even just thinking about them. If that's happening for you - that feeling of joy from the thing that helps you feel rested, that is a teeny, tiny experience of sabbath keeping. Now let yourself expand that notion to a whole, continuous 24 hours. That is what sabbath keeping is about - rest and delight.

Now I know we have seasons of life and that certain seasons bring more obstacles than others to the practice of sabbath keeping. The responsibility of taking care of other people definitely creates more difficulty in practicing sabbath keeping. But I also know that these obstacles don't make it impossible, just more difficult to practice. Rather than 24 hours - can you create half an hour of rest, or an hour, or maybe a little more?

Let me be vulnerable, hopefully without too much judgement and say that one of the ways I really experience rest is watching a movie. I really enjoy movies and being drawn into a good story with a beginning, middle and end. TV shows or episodes that continue a story don't really do it for me. If I can carve out time to watch a whole movie - not by staying awake late and losing sleep - but during my regular waking hours, creating time to be drawn into a story - there is just something in that that really helps me let go and recharge a little.

In my research for this message, I heard in a podcast that the Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps and his teammates have a specific way of recharging between practices. When they were at altitude camps they would go to the nearest Walmart, buy a 50 inch TV and an Xbox and in between practices sit around together in their rooms playing Call of Duty. Unfortunately, they also confessed to just returning the

equipment after their camp was done, so I don't recommend that, but there is another example of rest and how Olympic athletes aren't very different from the rest of us.

You'll be hearing me say more about this topic of sabbath keeping in other messages down the road. There is so much to be said about this one element of following God in this world. But I hope and pray you have heard something today that has piqued your interest and helped you consider how God is speaking into your life today, this Sunday August 8 to you individually and how much God loves you and wants the very best for you, which includes health and rest.  
May it be so.