

## How To Be Human: Rest

A sermon preached on Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 on Sunday, July 5, 2026,  
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### I.

First, hear my confession – I got a speeding ticket yesterday.

Now, hear my excu – *justifications*. I wasn't even going *that* much over the speed limit! I wasn't being reckless, I was driving with the flow of traffic! I didn't even see the police officer in time to slam on my brakes! Those police officers were just out to meet their speeding ticket quotas on a holiday weekend! And you know what, I don't have many vices, but I do just like to drive fast, ok? Don't let me tell you I was in a hurry. I wasn't. We were headed back from a long weekend with friends, and I just got caught, plain and simple.

So after all that in a bit of a huff, I said to the rest of my family, "ok fine, I'll just set my speed at 65, and putter along the rest of the way home." As I was gazing longingly out the window at the cars passing me by – every single one, it seems – Liam pulled my mind back inside. "Wait, you mean you can tell your car what speed you want it to go, and it just ... *does it?*" That's when I introduced my kids to the wonder of cruise control! And then from the backseat, Silas hollered out, "mom, you drive too fast. You need to slow down and use that cruise control from now on."

Excuse me while I roll my eyes one more time.

### II.

Somehow I bet I'm not alone in the desire for a faster pace in this life. Can you blame us, when in a given stretch, we're expected to spend time with our loved ones and earn our keep... and also take our 10,000 steps a day, drink enough water, wash the laundry, do the dishes, take out the trash, pull

the weeds, respond to the texts, buy the groceries (extra credit if they're reasonably healthy!), keep up with our doctor's appointments, pay the bills, get the oil changed, clean out the email and the photos on our phones, fill the bird feeder, keep the tomato plants alive in this blasted heat, call the HVAC guy because of this blasted heat, take the dog to the vet and the kids to the dentist, make sure mom is taking her medicine and dad is turning off cable news at least for a bit and kids are turning off screens at least for a minute, research the candidates, recycle, compost the food scraps, go for a run, fill out the tax forms, send the thank you notes, deliver the meal to your neighbor who just had the baby, and then, you know, find a hobby, and spend time with friends, and travel the world, and read the books, and do all of this over and over and over again, such that you find yourself barreling through this life, lest you pause for a minute and let all these spinning plates crash to the ground.

Maybe you don't set your pace by your to do list, but rather by the perceived speed of your neighbors – neighbors on the internet or in real life – or the expected speed of yourself. You feel behind when they post photos of their most recent exotic trip, behind when they renovate their kitchen, behind when her face looks a little tighter or his kids look a little more successful, behind when they retire a decade before you can even consider it. You look at your life and lament where you thought you'd be by now. You feel like you're in a sinking boat, rowing through the storm that is your life, your arms wearying because it's raining, and you're scooping out bucket after bucket when more rain upon you. Or even in our country at this, our 250th year, perhaps you feel like we're off pace for where we should be. As you reflect on this July 4 weekend and take stock of where we are, you might

lament and think, “I assumed we wouldn’t be dealing with *this* – whatever the *this* is for you – in America in the Year of our Lord 2026.”

Maybe your challenge isn’t pace or expectation, but rather scale or attention. You work in an industry that is on the brink of being consumed by AI, or you’re trained in a field for a world that is laughable now to consider. Where once your human mind could generate a sound diagnosis, a line of code, a beautifully-crafted paragraph, a sprouted plant, a set of architectural drawings, now your human mind is expected to manipulate a machine to do that times a hundred, a thousand, infinity. Cruise control? In this economy, when you could be replaced in a hot minute? Who could blame you for feeling threatened in this environment?

Maybe your pace isn’t anticipating the change of the future, but rather is responding to a change in the past. Perhaps it was a pace set for you long ago – an unaddressed trauma that paralyzes you with terror of the unknown or rage simmering just below the surface, a chronic illness that forces slowness and feels like betrayal from the only body you have, that addiction that you’ve never been able to squash and that creeps in in just the weak moments. You feel like you’ve never been able to get through it, so you just gave up trying long ago and befriended bitterness instead.

Or maybe your pace is unimaginable. From technology, to politics, to war, to relationships, to business, to education, this frantic pace of change that seems to accelerate with every passing minute has us all overwhelmed at an unprecedented scale. A leading survey index shows that the overall pace of change around the world has increased by 183% over the past four years and 33% in just one year.<sup>1</sup> Which is probably why 78% of people globally say

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/pulse-of-change>

“the world is changing too quickly for me.”<sup>2</sup> It is! It’s more than we can comprehend, and certainly more than we can absorb.

Over-worked with tasks. Over-loaded with expectations. Over-extended by scale. Over-burdened with grief. A pace seemingly set for us at a scale we can hardly imagine. All of this has us limping over the thresholds of our lives, wondering if we can ever catch a break. So how are we to be human in a world where the pace is set faster than we can ever keep up with? How are we to be human in a world where the scale is set by the promise of machines and not the limits of bodies and minds? How are we to be human in a world of incessant labor, where rest feels like but a mirage?

### III.

“Come to me,” Jesus says, “you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

It’s interesting, these yokes. You see, a single yoke is an efficient tool – a wooden bar or frame, placed on one creature’s shoulders to carry heavy items on either side. Single yokes on a single set of shoulders can get a lot done – certainly a thick to do list! – never mind that those shoulders will ache all the time, and their backs will always need the morning stretch and crack to get moving. But a shared yoke joins two animals together to pull a heavy load. Farmers often would use shared yokes to pair up a more experienced animal with a newbie, one training the other in how best to pull the weight of the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://globescan.com/2024/01/25/insight-of-the-week-people-feel-overwhelmed-by-pace-of-change-in-the-world/>

plow.<sup>3</sup> The shared yoke doesn't take away the weight, it balances it. It distributes it more evenly. It matches one with another. It takes the burden and makes it "suitable" or "appropriate," both of these terms part of the Greek translation here of Jesus' burden being "easy."<sup>4</sup> It's a burden that strengthens rather than depletes, that builds up rather than tears down.

If you read these few verses carefully, you'll notice that there's no specified audience that Jesus is talking to, almost as if he is speaking through generations and time and space to whomever needs to hear it. You'll also see that Jesus doesn't say, "give me all your burdens, and I'll take them away," rather he says "bring your burdens to me, for my burden is light." He doesn't say "you'll never again bear burdens," but rather, "your labor will not be in vain. It matters to me. I see you." He doesn't say "give your yoke to me," but rather, "take my yoke upon you." And this – this burden-sharing, pace-sharing, scale-sharing with Jesus, *this*, he says, is where and how we find rest.

God knows we need the reminder. Because we're over here thinking, this is nice and all, Jesus, but we don't live in a world of yokes anymore. We live in a world of machines, of the internet and AI, of endless news from endless places with endless access to it at endless times! Of past times, farmer Wendell Berry says, "the horse set the scale. But the tractor, oh the tractor could take us to Mars."<sup>5</sup> We're way past that now, Jesus, so could you take off that speed-setter and move a little faster here? Read the room. We're drowning!

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<sup>3</sup> With gratitude to Shelley D. Best in her commentary on "Matthew 11:25-30" in *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew, Volume 1*, p301 for this description of yokes. Thanks, too, to Barbara Brown Taylor's images in "The Open Yoke," from *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew*, p21.

<sup>4</sup> "Matthew 11:25-30," *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A*, p395.

<sup>5</sup> As shared by Wendell Berry to me and my dad in a conversation around his kitchen table, October 30, 2025.

You know, I have to think God knew this, because it's why remembering the sabbath is right up there in the top ten list of commandments. Time for labor to cease and time for rest is as essential to human flourishing as anything we do. And it's what Jesus was saying too. But to him, rest doesn't look like abandonment, of numbing our minds and bodies until we can't feel a thing. Rest, to Jesus, looks like sharing. Letting Jesus join you where life is too fast, too hard, too big, too overwhelming, too much. Rest, to Jesus, looks like setting your pace and scale to his.

That's true in our secular lives, but especially true in our spiritual lives too. How often we take the yoke of following Jesus to be a heavy one, trying to earn our way into God's good graces by laboring unceasingly to receive a gift that's already been given. Barbara Brown Taylor says, "human beings have a perverse way of turning Jesus' easy yoke back into a hard one again, by driving ourselves to do, do, do more and whipping ourselves to be, be, be more when all God ever asked is that we belong to [God]!... I may believe that I live by God's grace, but I act like a scout collecting merit badges... I may believe that my life depends on God's grace, but I act like it depends on me and how many good deeds I can perform, as if every day were a talent show and God had nothing better to do than keep up with my score."<sup>6</sup>

But to his beloveds, Jesus says, "come to me." Take my yoke. Let me shoulder the weight with you. Let me balance these pressures with you. Let me give you rest right in the very place where you are laboring. Learn from my wisdom. Glean from my faithfulness. Model my gentleness and humility. Become a disciple in your rest as much as your labor. Practice it. Do it again and again. You don't have to carry this alone. You don't have to save yourself.

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, "The Open Yoke," *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew*, p19.

You can take your hand off the plow and step away from all that is exhausting you. I'm right there with you. Receive my liberation. There will you find rest.

#### IV.

So friends, I ask you to consider today: where in your life are you heavy-laden? Over-burdened? Speeding up or burning out? Where have you tried to go it alone with all you shoulder, and you need that invitation to share a yoke with Jesus? Where do you need to rest?

Too much labor, you might think to yourself? Step away, I'd encourage you, even when you think you can't. Create rhythms of care and sabbath and rest that are durable through even the hardest seasons. Let someone help you once in awhile.

Too much stimulation that leads to anxiety, you might be feeling? Put down your phone and breathe some fresh air. Bare feet on the grass. Drink some water. Maybe call your mama if you need to! Put your hands and feet on solid ground. I've told you before the advice from my former colleague, Nina, who once talked about how anxiety affects us, and how we respond. As she said, "you can be a china cup or a sponge!" A sponge lets anxiety seep into every corner, distending and disguising you so much, you have to be wrung all the way out to return to normal. A china cup, on the other hand, fills to the brim and doesn't take on any more. So when we would have particularly stressful staff meetings or hard seasons in the church's life, she'd look at the staff and just motion like she's dumping out a teacup.

Too much money or resources, overburdened by all you have? Give some money away! Unburden yourself from the storehouse of resources. Let go, so that what is weighing you down would allow others to find rest.

Too much trauma? Share about it with someone you trust. Seek out a counselor, a friend, a spiritual director that can walk this road with you.

Too much pain? Find someone else in pain, and care for them too. Say 'me too,' when a friend tells you about her suffering.

And if you hear nothing else, hear this: Jesus is with you always. Remember that shared yoke. Remember the rest that he offers, when we lie down in green pastures and are led by still waters and our souls are restored. Remember that the way to well-being is a shared path. So give up the solo yoke and the speedy pace. For there is no individual flourishing until there is mutual flourishing, so let's share it together. As Fanny Lou Hamer said, "no one's free until everyone's free." Together, let's take Jesus' yoke upon us, and let him share the load.

## V.

"Ora et labora," the Benedictine monks said long ago, bending the rhythm of their days around devotion to "praying and working." In that spirit, I shared a prayer recently called "The Nuns' 23rd Psalm." Let me end with that today, and let it be our prayer, our good news, our hope for the rhythm of life abundant.

*The Lord is my pace-setter, I shall not rush.  
He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals;  
He provides me with images of stillness, which restore my serenity.  
He leads me in ways of efficiency through calmness of mind.  
And His guidance is peace.  
Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day,  
I will not fret, for His presence is here.  
His timelessness, his all-importance will keep me in balance.  
He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity  
by anointing my mind with His oils of tranquility.*

*My cup of joyous energy overflows.  
Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours for  
I shall walk in the place of my Lord and dwell in the Lord's house forever.<sup>7</sup>*

May it be so! Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> As quoted by Marion Wright Edelman, *Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations for Our Children*, p75-76.