

Joke: A boy named Carol had a particularly rough childhood because of his uncommon name. He always got a lot of teasing and abuse at school. Eventually, he overcame his hang-up and married his high-school sweetheart.

When their first child was born, he let his wife name her.

She named the baby girl "Love" inspired in the same spirit as Carol's unique name.

Unfortunately, Love grew up and endured much of the same teasing that Carol did, because of her strange name.

She came home from school one day and screamed at her dad, asking why he gave her such a stupid name.

Carol took the blame to protect his wife and apologized.

In a fit of rage, Love shot him with her dart gun and ran away.

Minutes later, Carol's wife came home and saw him lying on the ground.

"What happened?!" she asked, running to him.

He waved her closer, and whispered, "Shot through the heart, and you're to blame. Darling, you gave Love a bad name."

Question. Are you all about those New Year's resolutions?

2024 is almost behind us. In a few short days we start a New Year. We get a fresh-start with 2025, and maybe you've set some goals, maybe a financial goal, or spiritual goal. You want to read through the Bible in a year. I've done that one a couple times. Maybe pray more. All good resolutions by the way.

For me I want to read a couple books a month. And I will do my best to do what I set out to do. But truth is it seems like there's too many things to do and not enough time to do them. Or just a lot of distractions that take over. Ever feel that way?

The truth is 40% of people fall behind on their resolutions by the end of January. And by Valentine's Day you might be saying resolutions what resolution.

And I'm pretty sure that I'm not alone. As a matter of fact, Harvard Business School says that 7 out of 10 people surveyed said that their life was characterized as being busy or very busy.

Truth is I don't need Harvard to tell me that. Because I think if I were to ask 10 people how they were doing most all of them maybe 10 out of 10 would say, I'm doing great but. . .I'm busy.

And so you can imagine the difficulty in hearing what Jesus is saying when I read His words in Matthew 11, where He says this to us who are busy He says. . .

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

It's almost like He knows something about us. Like He already knows we're busy.

He then continues in verse 29

Matthew 11:29 (NIV): 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.

"I will give you rest for your souls." Man, that sounds good doesn't it?

Then He continues. . .

Matthew 11:30 (NIV): For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

I love that, Come follow me. Your life will be easy and light and you will be find rest.

There's just one problem. The problem is I don't always feel that way.

But what Jesus is doing is He's offering us an alternative to a different way of life.

One of the things I love about New Year's is a fresh start. And what Jesus is offering us is a really more of a way to start fresh and He's offering us the opportunity to that by starting rested.

And what better place to start fresh than the start of the Word of God.

Genesis 1, God says this to us. . .

Genesis 1:1–5 (NIV): In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And it goes on to day two, day three, day four, day five.

It says, God created; He saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. Then day six, it says this in verse 27.

Genesis 1:27 (NIV): So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

And after he created male and female it wasn't just good it was. .

Genesis 1:31 (NIV): God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

He saw that it was very good.

There's repetition in Genesis 1 when God created. There was evening and there was morning, there was evening, there was morning.

And I don't know if you ever thought about that phrase. Because honestly I never really saw this, or at least never gave it much thought. But notice what it says, there was evening and there was morning.

That's not how the day works. The day doesn't start in the evening, it starts in the what? In the morning.

The first thing we do in the day is we turn the alarm clock off, stumble out of bed, wash our hair, maybe you eat breakfast. I know I should they say It's the most important meal of the day. But either way we put our clothes on and we go off to work.

For us there's morning and then there's evening. That's how the day works. We get up, we go to work. And when we finish our work, then we rest.

There's morning and there's evening. But that's not what God says. He says that there's evening, then there's morning.

Why? Because God is introducing us to an alternative rhythm for our lives, a rhythm that doesn't start with work, a rhythm that starts with rest.

And some of you are going like, Ok pastor that's cool. Evening, morning, morning, evening, tomato, tomato. Who really cares?

It's all just semantics.

Well actually if you're an Israelite, you cared.

Genesis 1 was written down by Moses. Moses who was born in Egypt in Pharaoh's household who killed a man and fled, God then called him to go back to Egypt to deliver His people, the Jewish people who'd become enslaved to the Egyptians, who were enslaved to Pharaoh, to bring them out of Egypt and to take them to the promised land.

And so the first people who heard Genesis 1, the first people who would've been able to read Genesis 1, were the Israelite people. And they were either enslaved in Egypt or they were wandering around in the wilderness just after leaving slavery.

And what did their life look like when they were slaves? They literally built the empire that enslaved them. They helped make the roads that the Egyptian armies traveled on. They helped build the monuments that declared Pharaoh's greatness.

But really they didn't do anything spectacular. Honestly, what they did was they made bricks sun up to sun down. And if you're a slave, what's the only question in your life that matters?

It's when your Egyptian overseer asks you, "How many bricks did you make today?"

And in Genesis 1, God has a message to His people, and here's His message, I'm not Pharaoh, I'm different. Your life is not the life of a slave. It's going to be different because I have a different rhythm for you to live because your value is not in what you do, your value is not in how many bricks you make.

Your day is going to start with rest. Why?

Because God said to His people, I created you, I saw you in your mother's womb, and before you ever did anything, before you'd ever made one brick, I said not that you were good, but that you were very good and that you were created in my image.

So what God says is, I have a different rhythm for you to live as my people. It doesn't start with work, it starts with rest.

Rest because to rest is to trust that what God has done is enough. It's a spiritual rest when you know that you know that you know what God did was enough.

We get to wake up everyday and enjoy this thing we don't deserve, that we didn't initiate but get to relax in, rest in and simply thank God for.

The goal is to come to a truth-inspired place of knowing, not just a place of doing. Knowing what and living in what God has already accomplished will bring you rest.

Aren't you glad that thousands of years later, our lives don't look like that of the Israelites?

Aren't you glad that we don't make bricks for Pharaoh? Aren't you glad that through all of our technological advances, through all of our social progression, that our world's different?

Aren't you glad that we don't go to our phone and check our email six times an hour on Saturday in case we missed an email from our boss, missing an opportunity to make one more brick?

Aren't you glad that we don't go to social media every hour to see how many likes we have to tell us how important we are?

Aren't you glad that we don't get our value from how many things we cross off our to-do list, validating whether it was a good day or not?

And in case you haven't picked up on my sarcasm, one more.

Aren't you glad that our first question we ask a person we meet isn't , "Hey, nice to meet you. What do you do for a living? Where do you work? Or if your a pastor like me how big is your church?

In other words, how many bricks do you make?

Because let's face it the more bricks you make the more recognition you get.

And here's the crazy thing: it's not Pharaoh that makes us do it. We do it to ourselves.

You hear from your employer, I think your the person for the job, how would like like that promotion true it will take you away from your family, but you'll make more money, get a better title and feel better about yourself?

Really me, of course I would love to do that. I'm your man.

Or, I think you should sign little Johnny up for five days a week, one-on-one piano lessons? Because I see a lot of potential in him, even though he is three and a half years old, I think he can be the next Beethoven. And what do we do? Absolutely, let me sign him up.

And I'm not saying that any of those are in or of itself bad. . ,but ultimately, rest is about refusing to be moved away from the confidence you have in Jesus.

When you now what Jesus accomplished on the cross, when you know He set you free from the law of sin and death when you know that it's by His grace and not your performance you rest.

But guess what church, I still find myself asking the same questions week after week about my messages I prepare.

Questions like, What if it's not good enough? What if it doesn't connect with the people? What if you don't like it? Or worse yet what if you don't like me? What if it's not anointed enough?

Is that just me or do you ever have questions like those yourself?

Matthew 3 has a great story about Jesus.

Here's what it says.

Matthew 3:16–17 (NIV): As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

And what I love about this story in Matthew is that before Jesus performed one miracle, before he had done anything we see the Father saying, I am well pleased, I delight in You. Why?

Because God loved Him. Not God loved Him because, but rather because God loved Him.

And that makes me wonder how many of us are trying so hard to win something that's already been freely given to us?

Because if you are in Jesus Christ, if you are a follower of Jesus, the same is true for you, God loves you. Not He loves you because, but He loves you, which means that. . . God's already done list, what He's done for us, God's already done list is more important than our to-do list.

If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, here's what God has done for you. He forgave you, made you new, saved you by grace not your performance.

The whole purpose of the gospel is that as followers of Jesus we have been made perfect apart from our performance. We were made perfect by God's performance.

Here's what God has done for you before you ever get out of bed in the morning. He looked upon you before you'd done anything and said that you were very good.

God created you. He saved you. He went to the cross to pay a payment that you could not pay. He healed you. He adopted you. He comforted you. He called you. He gifted you.

And He goes before you and He is with you and in you.

God's done list, What He's done for you, is more important than your to-do list that you will do today, which means this: maybe just maybe because of God's to-done list, we can put down our to-do list just for a minute and rest, trusting that what He has done is enough.

I no longer need to strive for, work for, His approval.

The Christian life starts with rest, we work from a place of already resting.

Before we've done anything, God says this: "I have a different rhythm for your life. It's not a rhythm that starts with work. It's a rhythm that starts with rest."

Because I want you, my people, to know before you ever get out of bed in the morning, I've already done enough for you.

My grace is sufficient, my mercies are new every morning.

His done list is more important than our to-do list.

Let me however say this, I'm in no way suggesting that we don't have any work to do. But rather that rest is what prepares us to work. He created us for work. He's gifted us for it. And He's called us to it.

See here's the point. It's just that when we go to work in the morning, we don't go to the work as people who are trying to earn someone's approval. We don't go to work trying to prove to ourselves that we have value. We go to work working from God's approval.

Let me try and finish up the message today by giving you something practical and applicable but I can't do it by just saying here's step one, step two, and step three. Because honestly it may look different in your life than it does in mine.

If I could give you a step by step plan it might be something like this. Step 1, learn who you are in Christ. Step 2, wake up and be yourself. Step 3, repeat.

And if you will do that I can promise you, you will find rest for your soul.

So what is rest? Rest is whatever focuses us on the goodness of God.

Day seven, it says that God rested. The end of day six was He looked and He declared that everything was good. And on day seven, He enjoyed the goodness of His creation.

Rest is whatever focuses us on the goodness of God.

So rest can be sleep. Rest can be a worship song that focuses us on the goodness of God. Rest can be a good meal with people that we love. Rest can be spending time in God's Word. Rest can be laughing with friends. Rest can be playing disc golf with buddies. Rest can be a walk with your spouse, rest simply being reminded of God's goodness.

Rest can be prayer. Rest can be taking a camping trip with family.

Rest is whatever focuses us on the goodness of God.

It's that daily rhythm where we start with rest.

Maybe for you it's opening God's Word before you go to bed.
Maybe it's opening God's Word when you wake up.

Maybe rest is walking the dog, which you need to anyway but you're spending that time in prayer being reminded of the goodness of God.

Sometimes life is going to be busy. That's okay. Just start with rest. Putting our trust in the fact that God has already done enough for us.

Have you ever had to put on one of those fake smiles. You know the one that is forced and you have to try really hard to make it look like you really are enjoying yourself?

You see, here's the thing in 2025, we're all going to be going down the road, and life is going down that road with us. The question we get to answer is, which smile's going to be on our face?

The smile of somebody who's trying real hard? Or the smile of somebody who's trusting a big God, knowing that what God has done is already enough?

One that says I need to try real hard to perform to earn God's love or the one that rests knowing what He did is enough. One that says work harder so you can have victory, or the one just knows we work from victory not for it.

You see what Jesus is saying when He says, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest," is He's giving us an invitation, an invitation to a different rhythm of life, a rhythm of life that does not start with work, but starts with rest.

A rhythm of life that reminds us of who we are in God and what He's done for us.

Andrew Farley once said, I don't know if you ever noticed that while some Christians are running themselves ragged trying to get God to like them, others seem to believe God is already satisfied with who they are.

And church He's given us an invitation, not just to a fresh start this year, but to start fresh. And that sounds pretty good to me.

Which smile are we going have on the journey?

Show video - clean slate

Pray with me.

Heavenly Father, thank You so much as we step out into 2025, or we even just step out into our Tuesday, You are with us, You are for us, and You love us.

Father, thank You that our value is not based upon what we do, how many bricks we make, but based upon what You've already done. Help us to trust in You, to trust that what You say about me is true, and that what You say about every person listening is true.

And Father maybe this year hasn't been all we had hoped it would be and what we really need is a fresh start.

Papa if there is someone here that needs that, I thank you for the opportunity to start fresh, that we can truly have a fresh start in Jesus.

Jesus, you died so I can come into right relationship with the Father. I didn't earn that right, but in Your goodness and mercy You died so that I might be adopted into the family of God and become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Thank you

That offer that You give us for a fresh start isn't just a clean page, but it's a new life in Jesus Christ. And I'm thankful for that as well.