



## WEEK 1

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### *Day 1*

# GOD CREATED REST AS A PATTERN

I AM IN AWE EVERY spring as I watch nature wake up and burst into life. Seemingly without effort, bare tree branches fill with leaves, buds, and blossoms. Yet I know this process requires important work and rest.

Unlike annual plants, which audaciously shoot up for a single season, then take a bow and fade into time, perennials bloom year after year. I witness this in my gardens when echinacea, bee balm, columbine, and yarrow send up new sprouts after long winter months. What gives the perennial such a legacy? Like a hummingbird, a perennial's longevity relies on patterns of rest and work. Throughout winter, when it seems as though the whole land is napping, a perennial's roots are gaining strength. During significant seasonal pauses, these plants draw their energy back from the performance of blooming and growing to redirect focus to their roots. Without the vital activity of rest, the plant would be unable to do its work of producing life and beauty year after year.

Rest is integral to God's design of humans as well, which is why it's an essential element of the creation narrative in Genesis 1. You'll

note that rest is not a symptom or result of a sin-struck world but a part of God's original blueprint. Before the Serpent slunk in with his lies, God established a pattern of rest. Consider the following timeline of events:

- **Day 1:** God prepared the expanse, created light, and separated it from the darkness (Genesis 1:1–5).
- **Day 2:** God created the atmosphere (vv. 6–8).
- **Day 3:** God separated the bodies of water, setting their boundaries and creating dry land. He filled the dry land with vegetation full of seeds to reproduce (vv. 9–13).
- **Day 4:** God set lights in the heavens to guide and keep time and seasons, separating day and night (vv. 14–19).
- **Day 5:** God filled the waters with creatures and the skies with birds, all capable of repopulating and filling the earth (vv. 20–23).
- **Day 6:** God created land-dwelling creatures. God then pivoted to create humankind as his companion. He gave humans dominion over the earth to look after and care for all he has made (vv. 24–31).

It is fair to say that God had a very busy six days. And then

- **Day 7:** God rested (2:2–3). And because man was with him and had not yet been given the important role of gardening and naming the animals, we can assume that man also rested with God.

We discover a pattern in this timeline: God worked, then rested, while man began with rest and then went to work. Watchman Nee, the late Chinese church leader and Bible teacher, made this observation:

The seventh day became the Sabbath of God; it was God's rest.

But what of Adam? Where did he stand in relation to that rest of God? Adam, we are told, was created on the sixth day. Clearly, then, he had no part in those first six days of work, for he came into being only at their end. God's seventh day was, in fact, Adam's first. Whereas God worked six days and then enjoyed his sabbath rest, Adam began his life with the Sabbath; for God works before he rests, while man must first enter into God's rest, and then alone can he work.<sup>1</sup>

Rest does not take away from our work but instead complements it.

Picture a perennial, such as iris, peony, or lavender, sending up fresh, tender shoots as the ground thaws. In gardening, the best time to plant a perennial is in fall or early spring. This allows the plant time to restfully establish roots before the active growing season commences. Similarly, God calls us to begin with rest *before* we work. The Hebrew calendar reflects this beautifully. In Jesus's time and for those observing Hebrew traditions, a day begins at dusk. Thus, a day starts with rest. In traditional Hebrew observance, a weekly Sabbath (Shabbat) rest begins at sunset, with a full day of rest stretching until the sun sets on the following day. A day does not begin as early birds catch the worm or insects buzz about but rather when creation is settling down to rest . . . and inviting us to do likewise.

When we start with rest, we return to the pattern in Eden.

Don't worry right now about what day you will rest on—we'll get there later in our study. For now, focus on shifting how you think about rest. What is your mindset around work and rest? Do you work hard so you can enjoy the reward of rest? Challenge yourself to reframe your perception about where rest belongs. What are some ways you can rest before you engage in work each day and week?

### *The Roots*

There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. (Hebrews 4:9–10)

Sabbath rest | σαββατισμός | *sabbatismos* | sab-bat-is-mos' | keeping Sabbath

In this particular passage, the practice of Sabbath rest is connected to the perfect rest made available through Christ and has been defined as “the blessed rest from toils and troubles looked for in the age to come by the true worshippers of God and true Christians.”<sup>2</sup>

Rested | καταπαύω | *katapauō* | kat-ap-ow'-o | cease, restrain

### *Rest & Reflect*

Following the patterns in Scripture, we'll return to the concept of Sabbath throughout this study. But for now, record your immediate reaction to and experience of observing the Sabbath.

### *Under the Microscope*

After forming Adam from the dust of the ground, we read in Genesis 2:15, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden

of Eden to work it and keep it.” The word translated as *put*, *נָתַן*, or *yānah*, can also mean “rest,” “settle down,” and “give rest to.” God settled Adam into a habitat where he could enjoy God’s rest.

Is your tendency to rush into the work in front of you? Think of Adam resting with God before he set about his work in the garden. Consider your current workload and projects. How can you practice resting before working?





## WEEK 1

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### *Day 2*

# GOD CREATED REST FOR OUR PROVISION

HOUSE SPARROWS VISIT MY YARD every day, and it's likely they are in yours also. They are a cosmopolitan species, meaning they live in most geographic regions and on every continent except Antarctica. My favorite house sparrow fact is that the oldest fossil of one was discovered in a cave near Bethlehem, close to where Jesus was born. It is likely that Jesus grew up listening to their songs, like my kids are now. Consider, then, how he used birds in his teaching (including sparrows in Matthew 10). Although Matthew 6 doesn't mention a specific species, it's feasible that house sparrows were jumping around on the ground that day, scavenging for crumbs as he spoke these words in verse 26: "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Feeding a house sparrow is no small undertaking. A house sparrow chick requires three to four thousand insects from when it hatches to when it fledges.<sup>1</sup>

Back at creation, God planned entire ecosystems with plants and

insects to provide for the tiny house sparrow chicks. We are much more valuable to God than the birds, so we can trust that he has planned even more carefully for our needs. As he fashioned the skies, seas, dry land, forests, creatures, and birds, God wasn't only planning for our needs of food and water. He was planning to provide for us through rest, as we saw yesterday in the creation narrative.

The garden of Eden was teeming with bountiful provisions. Never since has there been a space so full of things pleasing to the eye, taste buds, nose, and stomach. *Eden* can be translated as “a place of pleasure” or “abundance.” Many theologians and Bible scholars believe the garden of Eden was meant to spread and cover the earth, filling our planet with many colors, aromas, textures, and life. Eden was “a place of bounty, of gardens, of fruitful labor, and of freedom from fear or negative encounters with nature. Most importantly, it was a place where God himself rested and reigned.”<sup>2</sup>

When God calls creation to rest, he is inviting it to partake of his provisions. And the more I observe and study nature, the more convinced I am that creation often obeys God better than we do.

Of course, because God created humans in his image and for a relationship with him, our obedience matters more to him than the loyalty of birds and trees. However, we can learn important lessons from creation's innate understanding of God's provision through rest and trust. When we peer into nature's designs, we can see the original engineering plans and how God carefully set up nature to thrive. Pastor and author Dave Williams said, “Watch the animals—they have rhythms, and they're instinctive. We have to choose to practice these things, but all of creation is created to have these rhythms of engagement and withdrawal, of labor and rest, and so I think if we pay attention, God can help us.”<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps this is why, in Matthew 6, when Jesus tells the crowd not to be anxious about what they will eat or wear, he points their

attention to the birds and flowers that rely on God's provision. As we explore the layers of rest in Scripture, we can simultaneously observe how the flow of nature is encompassed by God's tender care, which includes a time of rest, and we can do likewise.

One way God provides for nature is by giving it an instinct to rest, as we've already seen in hummingbirds and perennials. Rest is a vital activity in all of creation, including us. When we forgo rest, we are not only running ourselves to exhaustion but forfeiting one of God's primary provisions for us. As a part of God's original, perfect creation, rest was meant to meet us with peace and clarity. It keeps us from dialing up our lives to an unsustainable pace. It transfers us out of a domain of chaos and frenzy and centers us in God's presence, where we remember what matters most and where God would have us invest our time and energy. How often do we ask him to give us something we think we require? It makes no sense to ask him to care for our needs only to ignore his provision of rest. Consider what you have recently asked God for. Could his readily available supply of rest be an answer to that request?

### *The Roots*

Thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel,  
 "In returning and rest you shall be saved;  
 in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."  
 (Isaiah 30:15)

Rest | נָחַת | *naḥat* | nakh'-ath | quiet, calm, patience

Quietness | שָׁקֵט | *šāqat* | shaw-kat' | to be tranquil, at peace,  
 and undisturbed

Trust | בִּטְחָה | *biṭḥā* | bit-khaw' | trusting, confidence



## God Created Rest for Our Provision

### Rest & Reflect

In the Bible verse above, underline what rest is promised to provide. How might these help you confidently rest in God's provisions?

### Under the Microscope

Study the connection between rest and abundant provisions in Psalm 65:4–13 below. As you do, follow these steps:

- In verse 4, to  *dwell*  in God's courts can be translated as "rest." Write "rest" next to  *dwell* .
- In verse 4, circle  *satisfied* , which can be translated as "plenty," "enough," "full," and even "excess."
- In verses 10–12, circle  *abundantly* ,  *bounty* ,  *overflow* , and  *abundance* . Pay attention to how God provides abundantly for creation.

## P S A L M 65 : 4 – 13

<sup>4</sup> Blessed is the one you choose and bring near,  
to dwell in your courts!

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,  
the holiness of your temple!

<sup>5</sup> By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness,  
O God of our salvation,

the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas;  
<sup>6</sup> the one who by his strength established the mountains,  
being girded with might;  
<sup>7</sup> who stills the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
the tumult of the peoples,  
<sup>8</sup> so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe  
at your signs.  
You make the going out of the morning and the evening to  
shout for joy.

<sup>9</sup> You visit the earth and water it;  
you greatly enrich it;  
the river of God is full of water;  
you provide their grain,  
for so you have prepared it.  
<sup>10</sup> You water its furrows abundantly,  
settling its ridges,  
softening it with showers,  
and blessing its growth.  
<sup>11</sup> You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.  
<sup>12</sup> The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,  
<sup>13</sup> the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy.

For further study, read Ephesians 1:3–20 and circle everything that is ours through Christ.

## *God Created Rest for Our Provision*

As you take time to rest in God's presence, reflect on the fullness of his abundant provisions. How has he provided more than enough for you?

