



Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

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Hebrews 3:7-4:13
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Rest

SERIES: *Hebrews: Jesus for Beat-Up People*

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, “They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.” As I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”’ Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, ‘As I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest,”’ although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.’ And again in this passage he said, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, 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. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And

no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 3:7-4:13).

I have one goal for today’s sermon: I want to persuade you to be rebellious. It’s my hope that this sermon will make you a more rebellious person than you currently are. I believe God wants to use today’s text to make rebels out of us.

Think about this culture we’re a part of here on the Peninsula. What’s the most countercultural thing you could do with your life here? There are aspects of our culture that we want to affirm and there are aspects we want to challenge. What’s the most significant way you could challenge, you could rebel against this culture we live in? Perhaps the most rebellious, most radical thing we can do with our lives here on the Peninsula is...rest, rest, rest.

I don’t mean taking a vacation. I don’t mean going off to Tahoe or Hawaii for a week. Most of us come back from our vacations more tired than when we left. I mean experiencing, entering into, and living a deep rest that’s built into your everyday life here on the Peninsula.

We’re in our third sermon in a series on the book of Hebrews. And what we’ve been saying every week is that Hebrews was written to a community of 1st century urban Christians who lived in a brutal, grinding, non-stop, oppressive culture that left them feeling beat-up, exhausted, and tempted to find rest and relief in the wrong places. For these people, their faith in God was at a crisis point. They were beginning to buy into what their culture was telling them—that rest was to be found in joining the majority, going along with the crowd and building a life and identity that centered on the ways of Rome, not the ways of God.

In this section of Scripture that the guys just read for us, in these 26 verses, the author of Hebrews mentions “rest” thirteen because he wants to take these Christians who are tempted to compromise and conform and he wants to change them into rebels. He wants to challenge and persuade these believers to not go the way of the majority, the way of the culture, which leads to a false sense of rest and relief, but to blaze a different trail that leads to true rest.

Now I believe we need this passage even more than the original audience. We are busy, tired people who live in arguably the busiest, most overworked, most restless culture in history. Every day we’re told that rest can only be found once we reach a certain level of

achievement and performance...once we've arrived, and we're tempted to believe that...it sounds so true. Once I get this promotion, once I make this much money, once I get this relationship, once I get to where the grass is greener, then I can rest.

But today's passage tells us something different about rest. Today's passage teaches us how to be rebels who—right now, today, on the spot—enter into, experience, and celebrate a type of rest that most people have never seen before...a deep rest that comes from God. This passage tells us three things about rest: why you need it, why you don't have it, and how to get it.

1. Rest: Why you need it.

First, rest: why you need it. Did you notice, as it was read, that this passage was extremely difficult to follow and understand? All the commentators agree that this section of Hebrews, Hebrews 3:7-4:13, is the most tightly, densely argued section of Hebrews. So if you got a little lost while this passage was read, you're not alone. Working through this passage is a bit like finding your way through a jungle. And that's because this word "rest," is being talked about on about three different levels. The author of Hebrews is quoting from several different places in the Old Testament and is working with three different definitions of rest throughout this passage. We're climbing a 3-story building today and with each level we climb we catch a deeper view of the rest God has for us.

So, to understand "*why*" rest is important, we've got to work through these different levels of rest. Here's the first two levels. We'll get to the third level, the most important level, a bit later.

The first level of rest that's talked about in this passage is The Promised Land. This first level of rest refers to a place. Our passage begins with a long quotation from Psalm 95. Now, this is significant because Psalm 95 was the call to worship for the people of Israel. It was the first Scripture reading that was read every Sabbath evening (every single week) in Jewish synagogue services. Many of the people that Hebrews was written to came from a Jewish background, so, unlike us, they would've been very familiar with the words of Psalm 95. Psalm 95 reflects upon the Exodus Story, the story of how God set his people free from slavery in Egypt and led them towards the Promised Land, yet along the way the majority of God's people failed to trust and follow God into the land of rest.

The Promised Land meant physical and social rest for the ancient Israelites. God's people, the Israelites, had been slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. They had experienced 400 years of restlessness, 400 years without rest! They were slaves. They worked every single day. They were owned by their masters, by the society of Egypt. The people of Israel, their whole identity was bound up with being a slave.

The Promised Land, rest for the Israelites, was a declaration of freedom. They could have an identity

apart from their work. They could be set free from society's identity structures, from Egyptian slavery; they could quit being slaves and experience rest. The Promised Land was a place where the Israelites could finally take a deep breath, experience physical and social rest, where they could have a new beginning.

But all this, the Promised Land, was just a shadow of the deeper rest God had for his people. Just a few paragraphs into our passage, the author of Hebrews begins to talk not about Promised Land Rest, but about a second, deeper level of rest—God's rest. This rest doesn't have to do with a certain *place*, but with a certain *relationship* between work and rest that God himself models for us.

In the weekly Sabbath synagogue services, after Psalm 95 was read to the people, the next Scripture that was read was Genesis 2:1-3. Do you remember what Genesis 2 says about rest? This is where the author of Hebrews goes next, chapter 4, v.4 he quotes from Genesis 2, "**For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.'**"

Now what kind of rest is this? What does it mean for us? We know that God doesn't get tired, yet the opening pages of our Bible tell us that God rested from his work.

Humans get tired. We have bodies that get tired, that can only do so much without rest. I tried The 100 Pushup Challenge and only got to 37! We can only do so many pushups before we have to stop and rest. But God isn't like us. God doesn't have the limitations that we have. God doesn't get tired. God doesn't need to rest.

But Hebrews and Genesis tell us that God *rested* from his work. What kind of rest is this?

When the Bible says that God "rested" from his work what it means is that God was *satisfied* with his work. After creating the world, God rested not because he was tired, but because he was satisfied with the work he had accomplished. And what Hebrews is getting at is that you and I are called to this same type of rest, this second level of rest where we are satisfied with our work and we're able to step away from it.

Rest is complex. Rest is complicated. Rest is multilayered. What we see at the outset of this passage is that there's rest and then there's deeper rest (and we're going to go even deeper once we get to the middle of this sermon). It's just like, there's sleep, and then there's deep sleep. There's sleep—7 or 8 hours with your eyes closed, but then there's a really good night's sleep—REM sleep (Rapid Eye Movement sleep) that deeply rests you and you wake up feeling restored.

Rest is fundamental to the human condition. God built rest into his creation. From the very beginning God's design was that his creatures, you and me, would rest. Rest came before the Fall, before sin. Rest isn't something we need because there is now sin in the world. And work isn't something we now *have* to do because there is sin in the world. Before sin ever

entered God's creation, God designed a world that was to operate under a rhythm of work and rest. You can't function without rest. You need to be restored *physically*. You need that deep sleep.

My junior year of college, during finals week, Chris, a guy from my dorm, tried to make it through finals week without sleep. He thought he could skip physical rest and have more time to study for his tests. Chris made it to, I think, 52 hours without sleep and then he fell apart, he couldn't function. Chris was an idiot! You need physical rest.

And, you also need to be restored *spiritually*. If you never rest, if you never stop, if your identity, if who you are is so bound up in what you do, as soon as you stop doing, your identity is gone. Are you able to stop? Are you able to put your work, your busyness, all you're "doing", all the noise, all the internal noise—are you able to put it aside and be still and rest, or is there something pretty deep that prevents you from doing that?

Rest is one of the 10 commandments. It's the 4th commandment. It's this command to rest, to stop doing, to step away from your work. What are some of the other 10 commandments? If you ignore rest, if you're part of a culture that ignores rest, that's just as dangerous, that's just as bad, as ignoring murder, adultery.

You and I are part of a culture that has a relationship to work and, therefore, to rest, that's extremely unhealthy. Let's take a look at this.

2. Rest: Why you don't have it.

Rest—we've been told why we need it. Now, rest—why don't we have it? Why do 95% of us in this room feel so restless all the time, like we can never take a deep breath and just be okay with who we are, and what we've accomplished, and where we're at in life?

Well, several reasons. This is a complex issue. There are at least five reasons and as we move through these five reasons we get deeper and deeper into why we don't have rest and deeper and deeper into the heart of today's text. There's a technological, cultural, geographical, personal, and spiritual reason why we don't have the rest that Hebrews is talking about.

First, the **technological** reason. We have technology available to us today that has radically transformed how we work. Because of technology, unlike any other era in history, your work is always *accessible*. You can always be reached on your cell phone. You can take your work home with you on your laptop. You can work from home, and your life can be one uninterrupted cycle of work.

And email! It doesn't stop. Ding, ding, ding, the email inbox is always growing. Satan invented email. Email is this technology that was created to help us better manage our time, to give us rest. But, this technological tool has become a curse. For most of us, email only creates more work. And if you have a Blackberry or an iPhone, it's even worse. No matter where you are, your work is *always* accessible—there's always a phone call to make, an email to reply to, something to do on the internet, a text message

to send. Our technology makes it almost impossible to rest. There have always been workaholics, but because of our technology, it's never been so easy to be a workaholic.

And with all of this communication and information technology, now you're competing with and comparing yourself to not just a small circle of co-workers, but to the whole world. The world is different from how it used to be. We now live in a global economy, a global world where you can compare yourself, your performance, your output and your earnings, to people in similar fields as those who live in India, China, England, or wherever.

In today's world, with today's technology, you never feel like your work is done, like it's good enough, because you're always aware of people who are doing it better than you. If we didn't have the technology that we have, this wouldn't be the case.

A few months ago my wife read a series of blog posts by a mom on the east coast, and after what she read, she felt like she wasn't doing enough as a wife and a mom. As a preacher, I don't only compare myself to the other guys who preach from this pulpit, I download to my iPod sermons from the best preachers across the globe and I compare myself to them and. And you compare me to them too!

Because of our technology, our work is always accessible and there's so much more comparison, competition, and pressure to perform.

The second reason you don't have rest is **cultural**. We live in an individualistic culture. Things didn't used to be this way. Culture used to be more community, more family oriented. Several hundred years ago, when you met somebody new, they didn't ask you, "What do you do?," they asked you, "Whose son are you? What family are you a part of?" Your identity was bound up with your family, your ancestry, your class and lineage. If you were a male, you typically went into the same line of work as your father. If your father was a baker, you became a baker. If your father was a blacksmith, you became a blacksmith.

Now, we've broken away from all that. We're free! We're individuals. Are we really free? Work, what you do, has never carried more weight. Our culture tells you that you must hack out an identity through your work, you must make a name for yourself through what you do. No wonder rest is illusive for many of us.

The third reason you don't rest is **geographical**. Look at where you live. You live in the Bay Area, you live on the Peninsula, sandwiched between San Francisco and Silicon Valley. We live in a place where these two factors of technology and individualism collide like nowhere else. The Peninsula is one of the most technologically advanced, busy locations on the planet, *and* it's one of the most individualistic, lonely, *work to carve out your own*

identity locations on the planet. People don't move here to rest; people move here to work. So if you want to rest, you've got to move!

You put all this together, the fourth reason you don't have rest is **personal**. You work to prove yourself. You don't rest because you've got something to prove. You've got an identity to build and maintain. If you took a step back from your work, from all your busyness, who would you be...would you still be you? Just like the ancient Israelites, are you a slave to society's identity structures and expectations?

Are you a slave to *society's* expectations of you? Are you trying to become someone that Bay Area culture tells you you're supposed to be? Are you a slave to *other people's* expectations? Do you not rest because you're too busy trying to prove yourself to other people? Are you a slave to *your own* expectations? Have you told yourself that you must achieve this, or accomplish that, or reach this level of performance and you never rest because you're always telling yourself that you're not there yet? How long will you live like this?

The deepest reason you don't rest is **spiritual**. You don't rest because there's a problem with your heart. Today's text tells us that the reason the Israelites failed to enter God's rest, the reason many of these 1st century Christians that Hebrews was written to were not experiencing rest, and the deepest reason you and I don't have this rest is because something is wrong with our hearts.

The word "heart" is repeated six times in this passage. Now, what does the Bible mean when it talks about the "heart?"

What this passage warns us of is becoming a person with a hard heart. In chapter 3, v.8, we're told, "**do not harden your hearts.**" What's a hard heart? A hard heart is simply an "unbelieving" heart. Chapter 3, v.12: "**Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.**" The warning is to not become a person whose heart, whose deepest driving motives, are hardened by unbelief, by lack of faith in God.

The reason the ancient Israelites never entered the Promised Land, the reason they never entered God's rest, was because they had hard, unbelieving hearts. Do you remember the story? As God led Israel through the wilderness, once they got to the edge of the Promised Land, just as they were about to enter the rest, they spotted giants in the land (tall people)...and their hearts were paralyzed, hardened, by unbelief. The Israelites focused on the giants in the land. They forgot to factor in God. The Israelites failed to believe that God was with them, that God would take care of them, that God was building an identity for them and bringing them into rest.

How's your heart? What's it going to take for you to rest? What's it going to take for you to have faith in God and be at rest with who you are?

What we need is the third level of rest that this passage talks about—deep, spiritual rest. Heart-softening

rest. Salvation rest. Gospel rest. Being at rest with who you are, not having to be so frantic and afraid and driven all the time. What this passage tells us to do is to enter this third spiritual level of rest that comes from the gospel.

Chapter 4, vv.6-10: "**Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news [gospel] failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, 'Today,' saying... 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, 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.**"

Only the gospel, only resting from your works and trusting God's work for you, can bring you true rest, rest so deep that you're okay with who you are, you're okay with where you're at in life.

What are you chasing in life? Where are you falsely thinking you're going to find rest? What is it for you? You say, "I'll be happy, I'll finally rest, once I have ___, once I get ___, once I do ___, once I accomplish ___." What is it for you?

Even life at its peak doesn't truly satisfy, doesn't deliver deep rest. You know people that seem to be living life at its peak. Whatever your version of life at its peak is, these people have it and you think they're happy, you think they've arrived. But that's not true. If you took the time to really get to know those people, to investigate their lives, you would see that there's still more, they're still chasing rest.

True rest isn't found in a certain kind of lifestyle. True rest is found in knowing and being known by God. St. Augustine said it best. 1,700 years ago he wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You."

3. Rest: How to get it.

So, how do you do it? How does your restless heart find rest in God? How do you and I get (or keep getting, keep enjoying) this deep, spiritual, gospel rest where we're at rest with who we are, where no matter how our work's going, where no matter how we're performing, where no matter our lifestyle level, where no matter how many giants might be in the land, we're okay, we're at rest? How do we get this rest that will make us stand out as rebels, as absolutely countercultural, here on our restless Peninsula? Well, three ways. Our text tells us that it takes a sword, faith, and a community to enter this rest.

First, it takes a sword to enter this rest. It's interesting, did you notice that our passage has all these nice verses about rest? This passage tells us to relax, but then our passage closes by telling us to strive and tells us about a sword that slices us open. Chapter 4, vv.11-12: "**Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so**

that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

This passage began by talking about God's voice and now it ends by talking about a sword, and what it's talking about is the same thing, the word of God. What the author is saying is that the only way to get this deep rest is for God's word to slice your hard heart open like a two-edged sword slices through human joints and bone marrow. The only way to get this deep rest is for you to posture yourself under the sword of God's word so that it can stab its way into the deepest caverns of your personality, the deepest chambers of your heart, and expose you—this sword must cut away at you, change you.

Contact with the word of God should be both painful and pleasurable, because God's word is living, it's active, it's sharp—it's a sword and it cuts you in order to change you. Do you want to change? Do you want real rest? Then you must let this sword pierce your hard heart, not once, but again and again and again.

Now, you're wondering, "is this just another application point about reading my Bible more?" Yes, yes it is. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in God. Do you want God? I love God. I want to know God more. I am a deeply restless man and the only place I find rest is in the God who created me, who saved me from my sins, and who's given me his word as a gift, to cut me and change me into a man who rests.

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You." Would you pray this line with me? If this is true, why wouldn't you want the word, the sword of God to pierce your heart, to be a part of your life, every single day?

Do you have a *time*, do you have a *place*, do you have a *plan*, for reading your Bible? For sword practice? I hope you do. If you don't, before the sun goes down tonight, write out on a piece of paper a simple time, place, and plan for handling God's word and start doing it.

The second way you get this deep rest is through faith. The reason the Israelites didn't enter rest is because they didn't have faith. Throughout the book of Hebrews, constantly, the way sin is defined is as a lack of faith. Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please him [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Faith is central to rest.

Here's a statement I really want you to hold on to. Think about this concept, burn some calories on this one: it takes a lot of faith to rest. It takes a lot of faith to stop and be still and to know that God is God, that Jesus loves you, that just as you are, you are loved and okay and will be taken care of.

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, "**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" It

takes a lot of faith to do that...that's just not how we're used to living, receiving rest for free.

Psalm 46:10: "**Be still and know that I am God.**" It takes a lot of faith to be still like that. Have you ever tried it? It's hard.

Blaise Pascal, 1670: "I have discovered that all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot sit quietly in their own room."

Where's your faith? If I were to examine your life, would I find that you've placed your faith in, that you've constructed your whole identity upon, non-stop work and activity and performance, or upon Jesus, the one who loves you as you are and gives you rest? Are you so distracted by the giants in the land that you don't have the faith to be still and rest? Ask Jesus, ask him right now, to increase your faith so that you might experience his rest.

You know why you can rest? Here's a verse to build up your faith. Hebrews 4:14, "**Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.**" Did you hear that? Jesus prays for you! Jesus is praying for you right now. He always is. That's why you can rest, that's why you can have faith to rest. Jesus knows your needs, he knows you, and while you're resting, he's praying...for you.

Enter this rest. This isn't rest just for your day off, this is rest that you can experience throughout your workday, throughout your week, in the middle of all the stress.

It takes a sword, it takes faith, *and* it takes a community to enter this rest. Hebrews 3:13 is a verse that has influenced the twenties group this past year and I trust will go on to influence the community we're forming for years to come. Look at chapter 3, v.13: "**exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.**"

This word "exhort," *parakaleo* in Greek, is the word for "preaching." You can also translate it as "counseling." What this verse is saying is that as a community of Christians it's our job to preach to and counsel one another. This isn't just a job for pastors. This is a job for the whole church body.

We have blind spots. We can spend a lot of time alone with the sword of God's word, we can exercise great faith, and still we can have blind spots that prevent us from experiencing this deep rest. These blind spots need correction.

I need, you need, a community of people who will preach at you, who will point out your blind spots, who will confront you with the truth and counsel you towards God's deep rest. Christian community is more than just hanging out.

Have you opened yourself up to this kind of community? Have you positioned yourself in a

community group or in a ministry here at CPC where you've invited people to exhort you? And it works both ways. Have you gotten over your fear of what people think about you so that you can humbly, but boldly, exhort others? You've got to make a decision. Is Hebrews 3:13 a verse you're going to obey or ignore?

This kind of community isn't easy. It takes work. But it leads to rest. And if you open your life up to this kind of community, if you have faith, and if you let God's sword cut you and change you, you'll be a rebel.

Do what nobody else is doing on the Peninsula. Rest. Right now, enter into the deep, spiritual rest that God calls you to enjoy. If you've trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, as your Rest-Giver, you can enjoy this rest *now* and you will enjoy it *forever* when God brings you into the Promised Land of rest, a land called heaven.