

“How fascinating to read a book about one of the greatest challenges of our time, written by a man who once failed miserably in the face of that challenge. In these pages, Adam Mabry gives us what we most need—a vision of rest tethered to God, rooted in the practical, and shot through with a humorous understanding of our work-addicted folly. This book is a gift!”

STEPHEN MANSFIELD, *New York Times* bestselling author;
host of the Stephen Mansfield Podcast

“This little jewel of a book made my heart sing. Like most of us, Adam Mabry has struggled with the modern tyranny of busyness. In this short book—easily readable even by the busiest—he shows the biblical principle of rest to be a gift of grace, a taste of heaven, and a counter-cultural statement of trust in our heavenly Father. An inspiring and challenging read!”

CLARE HEATH-WHYTE, author of *Old Wives’ Tales* and *Everyone a Child Should Know*

“I have to admit, it made me laugh when I heard Adam was writing a book on rest. Adam is one of the hardest-working people I know, and he seems to have endless energy—but that might be why he is the perfect person to write on this topic. He is a gifted writer with an important message for everyone—rest is a gift that God wants you to enjoy. I pray that this book inspires you to learn the art of rest.”

STEVE MURRELL, President, Every Nation Churches & Ministries;
founding pastor, Victory Church, Manila, Philippines

“In this excellent book, Adam Mabry shows us that rest for the Christian is not optional—it’s commanded for our good. After a careful handling of a biblical theology of rest, Mabry applies God’s good command in a gospel-saturated and realistic way. This book will do you good and enable you to rest well in a restless world.”

ROBIN WEEKES, Minister, Emmanuel Church, Wimbledon, UK

“In this brief book about a big problem, Adam helps us find our way back to rest in God. Highly recommended!”

ED STETZER, Billy Graham Distinguished Chair, Wheaton College, Illinois; author of *Subversive Kingdom*

“Adam Mabry is a pastor and an evangelist who cares deeply about people. His book beckons us to look to Christ’s promise to exchange the heavy burdens that vex our souls for the peace that passes all understanding.”

DR. RICE BROOCKS, co-founder, Every Nation Churches & Ministries; author of *God’s Not Dead* and *Man, Myth, Messiah*

“The modern world’s frenetic pace and anxious striving too often pervade our Christian lives and church culture. Mabry’s book is full of honest reflections, theological depth, and practical insights. Mabry does far more than provide a list of tips and rules; he reorients our desires, teaching us how to embrace rest from God’s perspective.”

LIONEL WINDSOR, faculty member at Moore College, Sydney; author of *Gospel Speech*

“Painful and freeing. Simultaneously, this book was painfully convicting because of my need for rest, but it was also joyfully freeing to uncover the path to freedom—freedom from the tyranny of the urgent, freedom from the list of to-dos, and freedom from the pressure to see myself as a human doing, instead of a human being.”

DANIEL IM, Director, Church Multiplication at NewChurches.com; author of *No Silver Bullets*; Teaching Pastor, The Fellowship, Nashville, Tennessee

“We live in a world that has forgotten how to rest, so put your feet up, relax, and let Adam Mabry refresh your memory. This is a book whose time has come.”

PHIL MOORE, Lead Pastor, Everyday Church, Wimbledon, UK; author of *Gagging Jesus*

“*The Art of Rest* was itself a welcome rest to this retired theologian living in Florida (the outro in this book will enable you to appreciate the reference). I disagree with Adam somewhat about the Fourth Commandment, but he is wonderfully right about, as he says, 96% of what the Bible says on rest. His writing is rich, clear, conversational, and vivid. It’s as if he, Adam, were right there with you as you read. And Adam calls us to a lifestyle enabled by God’s grace in Jesus, in which we can find rest in work as well as rest away from work.”

DR. JOHN FRAME, Professor of Systematic Theology & Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida

“Nobody teaches us to rest. Adam Mabry—like many others—discovered the consequences the hard way. This ‘starter in the art of rest’ explores why we find it hard to stop, and makes an urgent plea for us to discover patterns and rhythms of rest before the pace and complexity of life overwhelm us. This is a book I really wish I had read when I was starting in Christian ministry.”

MARCUS HONEYSETT, Director, Living Leadership; author of *Frutiful Leaders*

“We in the 24/7 world of the West have forgotten why—and how—to rest. As a result, we’re over-extended and sleep-deprived. Our relationships are strained, our bodies suffer stress-induced disorders, and worst of all, our worship of God is superficial. We need help. And Adam Mabry’s book is a great help. Here we get to the heart of the problem and then find very helpful recommendations for recovering the lost art of rest.”

JON BLOOM, co-founder, Desiring God; author of *Not By Sight*

“Read this to gain insight into the purpose behind the pillars of sabbath with which God architected man’s soul. If you are allergic to conviction, read this book with your favorite antihistamine close by.”

BRETT FULLER, Pastor, Grace Covenant Church, Chantilly, Virginia; North American Director, Every Nation Churches & Ministries; Chaplain, Washington Redskins

“What a refreshing book! With surprising authenticity, delightful humor, and profound biblical insight, Adam Mabry has given Christians a gift... and a gift that will last a lifetime. It's not a book you just read; it's a book to which you will refer often and that over a lifetime. I'm an old guy and just wish that I had read this book when I was younger. But still, this book is a life-changer even for an old guy 'cramming for finals.' My life is going to be richer and better because of *The Art of Rest*. Yours will be too. Read it and give it to everyone you know!”

STEVE BROWN, *New York Times* bestselling author; host of *Steve Brown, Etc.* and *Key Life*; Professor, Reformed Theological, Orlando and Knox Seminary, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

“I know this message is disruptive because it interrupts the auto-pilot default life-styles that we have taken for granted. I also know the messenger/author and what a difference practicing rest has made to him. His radical change gives me hope that leaders can lead from a place of rest, and the results are so much more sustainable.”

DR. JOSEPH UMIDI, Executive Vice President, Regent University

ADAM MABRY

THE ART OF REST



FAITH TO HIT PAUSE
IN A WORLD THAT
NEVER STOPS

The logo for The Good Book Company, featuring a stylized gray arc above the text. The text "thegoodbook" is in a lowercase, sans-serif font, and "COMPANY" is in a smaller, uppercase, sans-serif font below it.
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The Art of Rest: Faith to Hit Pause in a World That Never Stops

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*To the teachers, parents, friends,
and family who've paused to help me.
Thank you.*

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INTRO: I DON'T DO REST



When I told my wife that I'd started writing a book on rest, she laughed at me.

And it wasn't a chuckle, but a hearty belly-laugh—the laugh of someone who has just heard something hilarious and who can't quite contain how ironic and unlikely what they've just heard is.

This whole situation—me writing a book on rest—is even more ironic than Alanis Morissette's song "Ironic" being filled with situations that aren't actually ironic. There are two reasons for the laughter emanating from the other half of my marriage about the book that you're now reading: one unserious, but the other very serious indeed.

UNLIKELY MESSENGER

There used to be a regular argument in my house almost every Saturday. I'm a pastor, so Saturdays are my day off. And we'd celebrate like this...

After bringing my wife, Hope, her morning coffee, I'd ask her something like, "So, honey, what would you like to do today?"

"Oh, I don't know. Let's just be relaxed," she'd reply, quite sweetly, contentedly holding her coffee.

"OK cool," I would fire back. "So... how would you like to do that?"

"I don't know. Let's just hang out," she'd say, nonchalantly.

My heart-rate would then increase, eyebrows raised to hint at the flicker of anxiety inside.

"OK. Well, how exactly would you like to 'just hang out?'"

I'd then proceed with a list of activities which I thought were conducive to this "just hanging out" of which she spoke. We could take a walk, play a game, have a discussion... any of these. But please, PLEASE, could we have a plan for our relaxation, because the whole day could go by without us making progress on that "hanging out" task, and then we would end up failing to hit our goal of relaxing.

Looking up from her coffee, she would then say something like, "Adam, I don't know how I want to hang out. Let's just relax."

She'd smile at me, because to her what she'd just said made perfect sense. But my face would twist slightly, and frustration would well up within me, and as I replied to

her, some—well, most—of that frustration would leak out through my words and my tone... and our regularly scheduled day-off dust-up would get underway.

And that would mark the end of any relaxing.

Here's my problem.

I don't "just hang out." In fact, I don't really "just" anything. I *do*.

I'm one of those annoying people who only needs six hours of sleep, which seem to grant me a limitless supply of energy to accomplish lots of things. I derive an unusual amount of joy from checking off my to-do lists. I love to plan and strategize. I even plan when I'm going to plan and strategize, meaning that my plans have plans! Is all of this neurotic? Probably. Does it make me effective at doing? Certainly.

Before planting the church I now pastor, Hope and I went through an assessment process, involving an extensive battery of personality tests, psychometrics, and sit-downs with professional counselors. My results were all so skewed toward activity, achievement, and militant accomplishment that our counselors laughed—literally, out loud—at me.

Then they stopped laughing, and they commiserated with my poor wife.

I don't do rest. I *do do*.

So how in the world does a doer like me get a gig writing a book on rest? Here's the first reason: because if I can learn to stop, so can you.

And if I need to learn to stop, then so do you.

DOING TO DEATH

That brings me to the second reason this project generated a laugh from my wife—a much more serious one. Amid all my doing and achieving, I almost achieved an unexpected outcome: my own demise.

A few years ago, I was in the process of working myself into sickness. The church I pastor was growing fast; we had just moved into the mother of all fixer-uppers, which I was remodeling in the evenings; we had a baby that refused to sleep; we had three other kids who we were attempting to raise (or at least keep alive); we had a marriage we were trying to hold together...

And my world was falling apart.

On the outside, everything looked successful—great job, great wife, great kids, great house—and yet all of this was breaking me. Physically, I was exhausted. Spiritually, I was dry. Emotionally, I was slipping into the deepest depression of my life.

Busy.

Tired.

Anxious.

Yet, I couldn't stop. Of course I couldn't. I live in Boston, and like virtually every other Western city, non-stop work is a virtue here. Busy is compulsory. Pausing is a missed opportunity. If you're busy, you're important. If you're important, you can feel good about yourself. But at some point we get so busy that it stops feeling good.

That's what happened to me. And it almost killed me.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking. "Oh, Adam," you say, "this is simply a time-management problem. If you were a better steward of your time, this wouldn't have happened."

You can say that, but I'll say this: I'll go toe-to-toe with you, calendar to calendar. Because my calendar lays out my slots for my meals, my bedtime, my time with God, even my shower, breakfast, and a workout in the morning. Suffice it to say, I did manage my time well. Just not wisely.

So the second reason I'm writing this book is because not resting almost broke me. After a few months of 70-hour work-weeks, sleepless nights with the most sleep-resistant child we (or possibly anyone else) have yet produced, remodeling a house by myself, and launching a new church, I broke. I never actually knew that I had an end to my will to achieve. But then I achieved that, too. Depression hit hard, my faith was shaken, and—mercifully—God taught me how to rest.

So, I'm writing this book hoping you can learn to rest—how to rest and why you should and why it's great. And I'm hoping that you can start enjoying it before you reach the point of crashing like I did.

I'm writing to introduce you to—or reacquaint you with—Sabbath rest. I'm writing to sell Sabbath rest to you.

CAN'T STOP, WON'T STOP

“Sabbath rest”—it sounds positively puritanical, doesn't it? Western culture fetishizes the frenzied, rushed life. Adverts fill our screens, featuring professional, handsome up-and-comers wearing the latest trend on their way to that important meeting.

Parents rush their kids to practice to ensure the best shot for little Timmy.

Workers rush to their jobs to climb the ladder.

Mothers rush through the bedtime routine to get that well-earned break.

And if you're a Christian, then of course that just piles on another layer of things to do! You're supposed to do all the other stuff (and do it thoughtfully, intentionally, and prayerfully), and give time to church, and make sure you are witnessing to your neighbors, friends, and co-workers. You try to make time to read the Bible, get up early to pray, or stay up later than you'd like listening to someone who needs you. You try to be a better father,

husband, mother, child, friend, co-worker, mentor, mentee...

Hurried and frayed, we're not exactly the picture of heaven.

Little wonder then that when we come to Jesus, we bring along with us our need to be busy and our deep-down fear that rest means we're missing out or getting something wrong. Which is strange, because that is the complete opposite of what Jesus asks us to do:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11 v 28)

When we come to Jesus, we come to the One who accomplished more than any of us ever will, and did so with more restfulness and peace than any of us ever experience. And we come to the One who says that what characterizes a life with him is a lightening of the load and an enjoyment of rest.

So, why can't we stop? Why *won't* we stop?

I think there are two reasons, which will keep cropping up as we go through this book. First, we don't want to believe that we truly need rest; and second, we wish to outdo the other doers. We feel as though we don't have the time even to discuss rest, much less to regularly practice the art—which is exactly why we need to. (And why you score a point for picking up a book on this subject, which should please my fellow achievers no end.)

Oh, and it's because we don't really grasp what rest is. We see it as rules, when in fact rest is art.

REST IS A GIFT AND REST IS AN ART

Some of you are probably thinking as you read this, "The thing is, Adam, all you need to do is observe the Sabbath—stop working on Sunday. You've not done that very well. That's why you had problems." And, while there is something to that critique, there is much more to the art of Sabbath rest than the mere mechanics of a day off.

Then others of you are perhaps from a religious background where "the Sabbath day" was a big deal and strictly observed, and you've moved away from that. The idea of practicing regular rhythms of rest maybe sounds a bit too old-school, a bit formulaic, to you. Restrictions on cooking, chores, and work start to populate your imagination, and before you know it, you're excusing yourself from the whole enterprise—because if that's what rest is, it sounds positively draining, like the kind of thing that leaves you needing a day off, not experiencing one.

Still others of you would love to rest—if only you knew what it was. You wearily wish life felt restful, yet when you stop you feel guilty or lazy, and you worry that you're not doing the stopping right. You suspect that you'd love godly rest—if only you knew how to do it.

We need to learn the art of rest.

We need to learn to hit pause.

As we'll see, biblical rest is less rule and more rhythm—less curmudgeonly restriction and more liberating art form. It is something to be embraced and enjoyed.

Imagine, for a moment, that we're both great musicians. If I play a Bach sonata or shred a Hendrix guitar solo, and then you come along and play said sonata or guitar solo, they will sound different. Assume for a moment that we're both virtuosos, playing with supreme technical accuracy. The music will still sound different. Wonderful, but different.

I think rest is like that.

God has wired us to require rest. Yet when we try to make restrictions and regimens for our restfulness, they seem to miss the mark—like playing the sonata but missing a good handful of notes. But when we see how the story of Jesus frees us to rest and transforms how we see our rest, we get to play the song more beautifully. We don't play because we're being told to (like maybe you used to practice an instrument when you were young, with your mom or your dad standing over you with a stopwatch). We play because we love to.

True rest is a gift given to us in Christ. He is, as the writer of the book of Hebrews says, the hoped-for Sabbath rest for God's people (Hebrews 4 v 9-10), inviting all of us burnt-out achievers, weary parents, worn-down workers, and strung-out students, to come to him and

receive rest. Just like music is the gift of the composer to the player, rest is the gift of Jesus to the Christian. And, just like music must be played, rest must be practiced.

Rest is a gift. And rest is an art.

OUR WAY FORWARD

This book is my attempt to offer you a mercifully short starter in the art of rest. Because rest is a sizable theme in the Scriptures, we will journey through both Old and New Testaments to follow the contours of this theme. And because Jesus is the hero of the grand story of Scripture, he'll be the one to whom the whole practice points—the virtuoso in whom rest is embodied and with whom rest is truly enjoyed.

As you read, please remember that you're not listening to a rest expert. I'm not a sweet, gentle, older man who peacefully abides in a tumbledown ranch outside a wispy, quiet village, relaxed and refreshed and rested. No—I'm a rest failure: a natural doer who struggles to relax unless it's timetabled and synced with my calendar app. I'm a consummate achiever in a city of achievers.

But I've started to play the music. I've begun to learn the art of rest. I still miss notes, but I'm getting there. And I'd like to share the tune with you.

We'll start our rehearsal by looking at what rest actually is. With feet firmly rooted in the scriptural story, we'll then discover why rest is so important, and what it

means for our relationships. Then, we'll wrap up with a few words on how to actually practice the art of rest. And after that? Well, after that you're on your own.

Not exactly on your own, though. The God of rest is here with me as I write and with you as you read, and is waiting for you in your rest. This is his good gift to us; so let's learn to practice the art of rest.

1. A BIT OF ART HISTORY

*“I did overtime, working is such a bind,
Got some money to spend,
Living for the weekend.*

*When it gets too much, I live for the rush,
Got some money to spend,
Living for the weekend!*

*Yeah, I’ve been working all week and I’m shot,
Yeah, I’ve been working all week, for what?
Just living for the weekend.”*

Living for the Weekend, by Hard-Fi

If rest is an art, this chapter is art history.

I know, I know... You want me to tell you exactly how to take a break. “Just give me the goods!”

I get that, because I’m like that. But if we don’t take a moment to understand why we rest, then we won’t be any better when we rest. After all, if you’re anything like me, you need convincing to even take a rest as a regular part of your life, rather than an optional extra after everything else gets done (which it never does.) So we

need to learn to want to rest before we get to how to rest. Therefore this chapter will admittedly be the least practical, but possibly the most important. Why?

Because rest is different than you probably think, and more important than you've probably imagined.

WHAT IS REST EXACTLY?

If you speak to my neighbors about rest, they'll probably think you mean a vacation, long nap, or time to binge-watch their favorite show. If you're feeling daring and use the word "Sabbath," you'll likely get weird looks (at least you will in my neighborhood.) But if we let the Bible speak to us about rest, we'll see that it's much more than a day off, and much different than that quirky caricature we may have of Sabbath. Rest is different than you probably think.

Very simply, Sabbath is *a time of rest, holy to the Lord*. It is time that is given to God, to receive refreshment from God.

Cue all the questions! "What day?" "How much time?" "Do we have to call it Sabbath?" "What can I do with that time?" I'd like to ask you to suspend such questions for just a moment (well, a few chapters) so that we can consider what this fascinating and liberating concept is, and where it gets its start in Scripture. So for now, hang on to that simple definition—*Sabbath is a time of rest, holy to the Lord*.

IN THE BEGINNING, REST

Have you ever thought about what God was doing before he did anything? Prior to God bringing time, matter, angels, and everything else into being, the only being was God. Was he hurried, rash, or anxious? Or bored? Or stressed out about the ensuing creation task that ahead of him?

Jesus actually tells us the answer. He says to his Father, “You loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17 v 24). Love. Fullness. Joy. Unhurried satisfaction in the Son was perpetually pouring forth from the Father, from forever past. Prior to spinning out supernovae and cells, God the Father was loving the Son, and the Spirit. And God the Son was loving the Father and the Spirit. And God the Spirit was loving the Father and the Son.

I start here because whatever we think about rest (or anything else), we do so downstream from what we think about God. As the 20th-century pastor A.W. Tozer put it, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” If God is a hurried taskmaster constantly turning knobs and pushing buttons, frenetically refining his work, it’s hard to imagine resting with him. But if God the Father, Son, and Spirit are the very definition of love, and fundamentally relational, then the idea of resting with him becomes more than imaginable. It becomes desirable.

With lyrical poetry, the first two chapters of Genesis present the reader with God's verdict on his work: good. So good, in fact, that God, pleased with what he made, rested. He did not rest because of tiredness but because of triumph, as someone well pleased with everything that he had done:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

(Genesis 2 v 1-3)

God rested.

God didn't rest because he was exhausted, but because he was exhilarated. He had worked hard to make the world; now he was laying down the work to enjoy the world. This was the first Sabbath in the universe. The exhalation of the effort was followed with the inhalation of enjoyment, fulfillment, and satisfaction within the relationships of the Trinity.

You and I are made in the image of this God (Genesis 1 v 26-27). So part of what it means to be human is to rest like God, and rest with God. Our Sabbaths are times of rest with this loving, relational God because the first Sabbath was.