

Rest for the Restless Heart
Pastor Deborah Oakley – GFC – October 2, 2022

I want to begin today by making a confession. When Covid started, I was determined to use the time to study and draw closer to God. I had the best of intentions. Instead, as each week passed by, I became increasingly more restless and spiritually lazy. I'm not proud of myself.

But one thing I did do was read a very poignant book titled "On the Road with Saint Augustine" written by James A. K. Smith. Saint Augustine was a theologian and philosopher in 354 AD. What I loved about this book is that it deals with the struggles of life that cause restlessness - yet offers biblical solutions to find the rest we all long for. For Augustine the Christian gospel was a shelter in a storm and a resting place for a restless and wayward soul.

My message today is intitled "Rest for the Restless Heart."

1. WHAT IS A RESTLESS HEART?

Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines restlessness as: Uneasiness; unquietness; a state of disturbance or agitation, either of body or mind. Some synonyms are: Anxiety, instability, worried, edginess, wandering, unpeaceful, unsettled.

However, just so you don't get the wrong idea, Christ is not offering a life without difficulties, but He does offer rest no matter how bad or difficult things get! Even the most perplexing events in life that can never be explained or understood cannot rob us of the rest we find in Christ!

So, Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines rest like this: The mind is at rest when it ceases to be disturbed or agitated. Quiet; repose; a state of reconciliation to God. A state free from motion or disturbance. I want you to notice that rest is a state free from motion. Sometimes when we were not at rest we seem to have to keep moving...we go here and there or do this or that. We use activity to try to silence our restlessness.

Our heart is on the run looking for something, anything to offer rest. It's the story of a heart on the run. It's the story of a restless and wandering heart. It's the story of mankind trying to fill the void inside with something other than God. It's the story of a heart that struggles to find rest, peace, and contentment. It's all our stories.

Some more than others, but all of us at one time or another, saved or not saved, we all have a restless heart on the run.

It might be loneliness, or a search for a companion.

It might be a quest to find yourself or fulfill your dreams.

It might be boredom with your job or your life.

It might be thrill-seeking or a need for adventure.
 It might be a hunger for something different.
 It might be a thousand other reasons, but at times, we all have a heart on the run.

We all feel like something is missing and we seek here and there trying to find what we're longing for. But guess what? Something IS missing.
 And this is one reason why we are restless.

2. WHY DO WE HAVE A RESTLESS HEART?

Hebrews 11:13-16 says:

They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Here's the thing. We are aliens and strangers on this earth. This is not our home. Heaven is where we belong. Philippians 3:20 says:

Our citizenship is in heaven.

So, were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. As long as we live on this earth there will be a war against our souls. 1 Peter 2:11 says:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

Ok, here it is - This world is not our home. We're aliens and strangers because our citizenship is in heaven. This causes a war in our souls and a restlessness in our hearts.

Part of the problem is that we think we're home. Because this is the only place we've ever known. Still, we feel pulled between two places. Which causes restlessness. So, we try to satisfy the restlessness that comes from "not at homeness" with everything we possibly can. However, this never works.

This being said...how do we find rest for our restless heart?

How do we find peace in a world where we don't belong?

How do we navigate the in-between-ness we feel?

How do we find rest in a place that's not our home as we long for the place that is our home? Romans 8:22-25 says:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits

of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Augustine: “Like an exhausted refugee, fatigued by vulnerability, what we crave is rest. You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You. The soul’s hunger for peace is a longing for a kind of rest from anxiety and frantic pursuit. It is to rest in God.”

Although our rest is in God, we seem to turn to everything but God. We’re looking for something other than what we have and we’re looking for somewhere other than where we are. Then as soon as we get what we want, we’re already looking for the next destination. We feel restless so we run, or we leave.

People leave marriages, churches, friends, jobs, houses and cars and on and on it goes. They go from marriage to marriage, church to church, friend to friend. We leave because we were looking for something or someone. We leave because we long for something else, something more. We leave to look for a piece of us that is missing. Or we hit the road to leave ourselves behind and find ourselves. We hit the road in the hope of finding what we’re looking for - or to distract ourselves from the emptiness that drove us to leave.

Here’s the problem with leaving - We can’t leave ourselves. Listen carefully to this... **Everywhere you go, there you are.** We can’t run from ourselves. For all our unrest we take ourselves wherever we go. And when we get to where we think we want to be...it seems to point to somewhere further.

For the restless hearts satisfaction with every new place is short lived. Just when you think you’ve finally arrived...that same old restlessness begins to set in... driving you to the next disappointment.
That new spouse lets you down just like the other one did.
The new church is worse than the old one.
That new friend that you thought understood you turns on you.
That new job ends up being harder than you thought.
The new expensive house or car now burdens you with payments.
The escape vacation left you depressed because it ended.

You see we think doing this and doing that or going here or going there makes life worth living. But that thing or person or place that we thought would satisfy our restless heart quickly loses its appeal.

In a sense we’re a prodigal who thinks hitting the road or the journey is our heart’s home. We think happiness is synonymous with adventure seeking, with the next experience, with leaving home and finding something better.

However, most of us know how well that turned out for the prodigal. After he squandered his money and was so hungry that he wished he could eat pig food, he began to realize he was much better off at home.

Luke 15:20 tells us he finally quit running.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

The prodigal is going home, but while he was still a long way off the father saw him. In the Greek the word “saw” means “to know.” In the KJV – it means: to be aware, to consider, and understand.

Listen, your heavenly father sees you.
He knows you.
He knows your deepest thoughts.
He knows when you rise up and when you lie down.

He understands you.
He understands your pain and disappointment.
He understands your doubts, fears, loneliness, grief and more.

He considers you.
You mean more to Him than you'll ever know.
You mean so much to Him that He sacrificed His only Son so you could be free from sin and restlessness.
Your rest is found in Him. Him and only Him.

Then we see that the father ran to his son:

...he ran to his son, (when we quit running, the Father runs to us.) threw his arms around him and kissed him.

You see, the story of the prodigal isn't just about the prodigal coming home. it's also about the father running to the prodigal. The prodigal made it home because the father ran to meet him. And He will run to meet us and give us rest for our restless hearts. Now listen to verse 21.

The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

This brings us to Point 3.

3. WHERE DO WE FIND FREEDOM FROM A RESTLESS HEART?

There it is...repentance. Freedom begins with repentance. Repentance means we turn from going one way and go the other way.

You see, Freedom is more than freedom from. It is freedom to.
 I must not only turn from my way I must also turn to God.
 I must stop blaming everyone for my restlessness and find rest in God.

Just like the prodigal we must learn that the road isn't "home," BUT the road IS leading us home. And where's home? Home is where the Father is.

It's realizing we are the prodigal who has wasted everything, exhausted our hopes of finding rest for our wandering hearts...and therefore returned home to our Father. Rest then is found when we turn from our way and do things God's way.

You see to the restless heart - freedom is being able to do whatever I want. It's an attitude that says "I know what's good for me. I decide my fate, It's my way or the highway."

Maybe we are done with denying ourselves what we want.
 Suddenly our newfound life feels fun, new, and different.
 We believe we've found the answer - Do what we want.

We think freedom is freedom from having restraints in life or doing things God's way. The problem is our so-called freedom many times becomes a prison. And until we repent of this, we'll never be free. Let me say it this way...STOP THE INSANITY!

Unfortunately for many it's not until our lives are a mess that we repent. It's not until we realize that what we thought was freedom is really enslavement. We realize that no guardrails on the road of life ended in the ditch.
 The addict with a hangover can't get out of bed and loses his or her job.
 The control freak ends up divorced, alone, and lonely.
 The selfish adult never has enough.
 Eating whatever you want ends in being overweight and health issues.
 Going wherever you want ends in bad relationships and wasted time.
 Doing whatever you want ends in excess, addiction, an unwanted pregnancy, or a lost job.

You would think we would realize the error of our way. Instead, we blame everyone but ourselves.

It my parent's fault: they were too strict or too lenient or too smothering or too distant or too indulgent or too selfish.

Or maybe it's my husband's fault. He wasn't there when I needed him, or he didn't meet my needs, or he left me for another women.

Or maybe it's my friend's fault. They betrayed me or rejected me or used me.

And ultimately, it's God's fault. He let me down.

I did everything I thought was right and God didn't come through for me. Where was God when I needed Him?

The truth however is, we have no one to blame except ourselves. We have gone our own way and until we repent and turn our restless hearts to God, we will never be free.

Then, we must also realize that will power isn't enough. We're not strong enough in ourselves. We need the power of God.

At one time or another we all have a restless heart. A lot of times this is called a mid-life crisis. When I was in my late 30's I became very restless in life. After getting saved I tried to do everything I was supposed to do. I prayed, I went to church, I read my bible, I told others about Jesus, I homeschooled my kids, I was a good wife, I submitted to Joe – well that might be a stretch...let's say I repented for not submitting to Joe.

Anyway, I did everything I thought I was supposed to do to the best of my ability. And as a result, I believed that God would do what I thought He should do for me. I remember thinking – I've done my part now God will do His part. Which really meant God would do things the way I thought He should.

So, when everything that could go wrong in my life went wrong...I found myself feeling so let down and restless. So, I hit the road – I started running from God.

First, I quit talking to God. Then I quit listening to God. I quit worshiping God. I started listening to only secular radio and hanging out with unbelievers. I was running from God. But none of this gave me the rest I was looking for. Instead, I felt even more restless.

So, I started trying to talk to God again. I started seeking Him, but I just couldn't find my way back. BUT when I was still a long way off...the Father saw me. He ran to me. He had compassion on me. And I cried my eyes out and repented.

I learned a very valuable lesson from this season in life. Nothing but my Father God will ever give rest to my restless heart.

I learned that when life falls apart...my rest is in God.
When I'm hurt and disappointed... my rest is in God.
When I'm tired and weary ...my rest is in God.
My soul finds rest in the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.

“Come to Me.” Jesus begins this impactful verse with the answer to our restless hearts. The great secret to finding the rest we long for is found in these first three words: "Come to ME!"

Jesus knows there is only one place to find rest... and it's IN HIM!
Jesus identifies no other source for rest other than "IN HIM."

He doesn't say more money will give us rest, or a person can give us rest. He doesn't say a better career will give us rest, or a better house, or a new car, or a dream come true, or a vacation, or having children (actually, having children means less rest).

There's nothing wrong with any of these things...but apart from Jesus we won't find rest for our restless heart. Rest comes from being yoked to Christ.

In Bible times a young bull was always yoked to an older stronger bull. The stronger bull would keep the younger one from straying. He would also bear most of the burden of pulling a plow. If the younger bull was tired the stronger bull would do most of the work.

This is what happens when we are yoked with Christ. We don't stray. He keeps us going in the right direction. We don't have to carry the burden of life alone. You see, we can't do it alone - We need the power of God. The second we realize this is the second we can be certain that His power is already at work in our lives.

And we're going to need God's power because freedom from a restless heart doesn't mean a life without difficulties. It means we find rest in God – even in the difficulties. No matter how bad it gets - or how perplexed we are - we find rest and contentment in God. In Philippians 4:11-13 Paul says:

For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

Have you learned the secret to rest and contentment?
It's found in God's presence and God's power!
God's power is freedom! God's power is the way out!
God's power is the power you cannot find in yourself!
God's presence and power gives rest to the restless heart!
So come unto Him and find rest for your restless heart!