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*Notations added

**John
Mark
Comer**

**The
Ruthless
Elimination
of
~~Hurry~~**

**Foreword
by
John
Ortberg**

THE RUTHLESS ELIMINATION OF HURRY

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Hardcover ISBN 978-0-525-65309-7
eBook ISBN 978-0-525-65310-3

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Design by Ryan Wesley Peterson
Author photo by Ryan Garber

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Comer, John Mark, 1980- author.

Title: The ruthless elimination of hurry : how to stay emotionally healthy and spiritually alive in the chaos of the modern world / John Mark Comer.

Description: First Edition. | Colorado Springs : WaterBrook, 2019.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019002924 | ISBN 9780525653097 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780525653103 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Simplicity—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Time—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Time management—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Mental health—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4647.S48 C66 2019 | DDC 248.4/6—dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019002924>

Printed in the United States of America
2021

20 19 18 17 16 15

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For Dallas Willard—thank you.

Sabbath

I got out of bed this morning because I *wanted* something. Quite a few things, actually.

I wanted to watch the sunrise over a cup of coffee . . .

I wanted to spend time alone with God before the three-headed chaos monster (that is, Jude, Moses, and Sunday) was out of its lair and needed to feed . . .

I wanted to make my writing deadline for this book, to make a living, to put food on the table for my family . . .

My point is, I woke up with all sorts of desires, and those desires are what got me out of bed on a cold and dark winter's day.

Desire is a great motivator. It's the engine of our lives; its function is to propel us out of bed and out into the world.

But.

If at any point desire is no longer under our control and is instead driving our lives, we're in trouble. Because when you take a closer look at the dynamics of desire, you realize desire is one of those things that is never, *ever* satisfied.

As far back as 1000 BC, the Qoheleth of Ecclesiastes said:

The eye is not satisfied with seeing.¹

A more recent poet simply said:

I can't get no satisfaction.²

Same idea.

That towering intellect of the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, once asked the question, What would satisfy our desire? What would it take to feel satisfied? The answer he came up with was this: everything. We would have to experience everything and everybody and *be* experienced by everything and everybody to feel satisfied. Eat at every restaurant; travel to every country, every city, every exotic locale; experience every natural wonder; make love to every partner we could possibly desire; win every award; climb to the top of every field; own every item in the world; etc. We would have to experience it *all* to ever feel . . . okay, that's

enough. Sadly, even if we had access to unlimited funds, time and space still have a pesky way of getting in the way.

Karl Rahner, who was one of the most important Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, had this haunting line:

In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable, we learn that ultimately in this world there is no finished symphony.³

I love his word picture of an unfinished symphony. For those of us a little more lowbrow, think of a Chance The Rapper song cut off right before the end. Can you imagine it? The *argh* ? The frustrated sense of incompleteness? Of a melody unresolved? Not at rest?

That feeling *is* the human condition.

What these poets and prophets and preachers are all tapping into is the reality that *desire is infinite*. It has no limit. No point at which it's ever satisfied. The problem is, *we are finite*; we have all sorts of limits, remember? So the result is restlessness.

Or in the language of math: infinite desire – finite soul = restlessness.

We live with chronically unsatisfied desires. Like an itch that no matter how many times you scratch doesn't go away. No matter how much we see, do, buy, sell, eat, drink, experience, visit, etc., we always want more.

The question for us as apprentices of Jesus, or really as humans, is simple: What do we do with all this pent-up, unsatisfied desire? This restlessness?

[The Jesus tradition would offer this: human desire is infinite because we were made to live with God forever in his world and nothing less will ever satisfy us, so our only hope is to put desire back in its proper place on God. And to put all our other desires in their proper place *below* God. Not to detach from all desire (as in Stoicism or Buddhism), but to come to the place where we no longer need _____ to live a happy, restful life.]

One of the most famous lines of the way of Jesus post-New Testament is from Saint Augustine. Writing at the fall of the Roman Empire, the bishop of Hippo said this:

You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.⁴

More recently, Dallas Willard put it this way:

Desire is infinite partly because we were made by God, made for God, made to need God, and made to run on God. We can be satisfied only by the one who is infinite, eternal, and able to supply all our needs; we are only at home in God. When we fall away from God, the desire for the infinite remains, but it is displaced upon things that will certainly lead to destruction.⁵

Ultimately, nothing in this life, apart from God, can satisfy our desires. Tragically, we continue to chase after our desires ad

infinitem. The result? A chronic state of restlessness or, worse, angst, anger, anxiety, disillusionment, depression—all of which lead to a life of *hurry*, a life of busyness, overload, shopping, materialism, careerism, a life of more . . . which in turn makes us even *more* restless. And the cycle spirals out of control.

To make a bad problem worse, this is exacerbated by our cultural moment of digital marketing from a society built around the twin gods of accumulation and accomplishment.

Advertising is literally an attempt to monetize our restlessness. They say we see upward of four *thousand* ads a day, all designed to stoke the fire of desire in our bellies. Buy this. Do this. Eat this. Drink this. Have this. Watch this. Be this. In his book on the Sabbath, Wayne Muller opined, “It is as if we have inadvertently stumbled into some horrific wonderland.”⁶

Social media takes this problem to a whole new level as we live under the barrage of images—not just from marketing departments but from the rich and famous as well as our friends and family, all of whom curate the best moments of their lives. This ends up unintentionally playing to a core sin of the human condition that goes all the way back to the garden—envy. The greed for another person’s life and the loss of gratitude, joy, and contentment in our own.

And when our innate human restlessness collides with the digital age, the result is a culture-wide crisis of emotional unhealth and spiritual death.

So . . .

Is there a practice from the life and teachings of Jesus to mitigate against the chronic restlessness of our condition and culture and to tap into Jesus' rest for our souls? You already know the answer: *heck* yes. Many, but at the top of the list is Sabbath.

The Sabbath

The word *Sabbath* comes to us from the Hebrew *Shabbat*. The word literally means "to stop." The Sabbath is simply a day to stop: stop working, stop wanting, stop worrying, just stop.

Think of the images that come to us through lifestyle advertising—in our social media feeds or that trendy magazine on the coffee table. The couple lounging in a king-size bed over breakfast and coffee, organic linen spilling onto the floor; the photo-perfect picnic at the beach with wine, cheese, and that trendy bathing suit; a twentysomething playing guitar on the couch while watching the rain fall. Whether they are selling a new bathrobe, a down comforter, or a piece of furniture, almost all of them are images of Sabbath. Of stopping.

The marketing wing of *Blue Dot* or *Kinfolk* and *Cereal* magazines know that you ache for this kind of a stopping-rich life, but you don't have it. And they are tapping into your restlessness, hoping to cash in. The irony is, to get this feeling, you don't need to pay \$99.99 for a terry cloth bathrobe or \$69.99 for a handmade throw blanket. You just need to Sabbath, to stop. You just need to take a day of your week to slow down, breathe.

But Sabbath is more than just a day; it's a way of being in the world. It's a spirit of restfulness that comes from abiding, from living in the Father's loving presence all week long.

You could frame it like this:

Restfulness

Relentlessness

Margin _____	Busyness
Slowness _____	Hurry
Quiet _____	Noise
Deep relationships _____	Isolation
Time alone _____	Crowds
Delight _____	Distraction
Enjoyment _____	Envy
Clarity _____	Confusion
Gratitude _____	Greed
Contentment _____	Discontentment
Trust _____	Worry
Love _____	Anger, angst
Joy _____	Melancholy, sadness
Peace _____	Anxiety
Working from love _____	Working for love
Work as contribution _____	Work as accumulation and accomplishment

Which list best describes you? If you resonate more with list B, again, zero guilt trip. Human nature and the digital age form a foreboding alliance *against* a spirit of restfulness. We all struggle in this area.

No wonder the writer of Hebrews, speaking of Sabbath and its spirit of restfulness, called us to “make every effort to enter that rest.”⁷ Notice the irony of that command; we are to work hard to rest well.

There is a discipline to the Sabbath that is really hard for a lot of us. It takes a lot of intentionality: it won’t just happen to you. It takes planning and preparation. It takes self-control, the capacity to say no to a list of good things so you can say yes to the best. But Sabbath is the primary discipline, or practice, by which we cultivate the spirit of restfulness in our lives *as a whole*. The Sabbath is to a spirit of restfulness what a soccer practice is to a match or band practice is to a show. It’s how we practice, how we prepare our minds and bodies for the moments that matter most.

Walter Brueggemann has this great line: “People who keep sabbath live all seven days differently.”⁸ It’s true. Watch out for the Sabbath. It will mess with you. First it will mess with one day of your week; then it will mess with your whole life.

To clarify, Sabbath isn’t *less* than a day; it’s a whole lot more. Hence, it was woven into the fabric of Jesus’ weekly routine.

Jesus on the Sabbath

It was a lazy Saturday afternoon: hot with clear skies overhead. Jesus was hiking through a cornfield with his apprentices, like you do. It was the Sabbath, and this is one of many stories about Jesus and the seventh day. Built into Jesus’ life rhythm was a core practice—an *entire* day, every week, set aside just to slow down, to stop.

But on this particular Sabbath, Jesus got in trouble with the Pharisees. They took issue with how Jesus and his friends were celebrating the day, royally missing the heart of God behind this practice. In a loving rebuke Jesus simply said:

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.⁹

What a stunning line. Here we are, thousands of years later, reading and rereading it. Yet sadly, often *misreading* it. In context, Jesus was beating up on a legalistic, guilt-heavy religious culture that had totally missed the Father’s heart behind the command to slow down one day a week. Translation: a culture that was (in this area) the *exact opposite* of our own.

First-century Jews needed to hear the second half of that command: “The Sabbath was made for man, *not man for the Sabbath*.” They had it backward, cart before the horse and all that.

Fast-forward to the twenty-first century: we aren’t legalistic about the Sabbath—most of us don’t even practice Sabbath at all. A day off? Sure. Sunday worship? When I can. But *Sabbath*? Very few of us even know what that is, exactly.

The Sabbath isn’t a new idea; it predates Jesus by millennia. It’s just new *to us*.¹⁰

My fellow Portlander and dear friend A. J. Swoboda wrote this:

[The Sabbath] has largely been forgotten by the church, which has uncritically mimicked the rhythms of the industrial and success-obsessed West. The result? Our road-weary, exhausted churches have largely failed to integrate Sabbath into their lives as vital elements of Christian discipleship. It is not as though we do not love God—we love God deeply. We just do not know how to sit with God anymore.

He continued:

We have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history.¹¹

I would argue that twenty-first-century Americans (and, yes, to all my friends in the UK and Australia and Iceland, you too . . .) need to hear the *first* half of that command: “The Sabbath was made for man.” It was created, designed, by God himself. And it’s “for” us. A gift to enjoy from the Creator to the creation. To gratefully receive.

In his iconic one-line teaching on the Sabbath, Jesus was tapping into a practice as old as the earth itself. A practice that goes all the way back to Genesis 1.

In the beginning . . .

So the story of the Bible starts with, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” But after six days of hard work to get the universe up and running, we read the following:¹²

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.¹³

Did you catch that?

God rested.

“Yeah, I’m not really into the Sabbath. I’m an extrovert and I just like to stay busy and . . .”

God rested.

“Yeah, I get the Sabbath thing, but I work a demanding job that I love, and I just can’t make the time because . . .”

God rested.

“Yeah, but I have two little kids at home, and it’s just not really doable right now. Maybe later when . . .”

Do I need to say it again?

God rested.

And in doing so, he built a rhythm into the DNA of creation. A tempo, a syncopated beat. God worked for six, rested for one.

When we fight this work-six-days, Sabbath-one-day rhythm, we go against the grain of the universe. And to quote the

philosopher H. H. Farmer, "If you go against the grain of the universe, you get splinters."¹⁴

I've had people laugh off the call to Sabbath with a terrible cliché: "Yeah, well, the devil never takes a day off."

Ummm, last time I checked, the devil loses. Plus, he's the *devil*.

The last time a society tried to abandon the seven-day week was during the revolution in France. They switched to a ten-day workweek to up productivity. The rise of the proletariat! And? Disaster—the economy crashed, the suicide rate skyrocketed, and productivity? It went *down*. It's been proven by study after study: there is zero correlation between hurry and productivity. In fact, once you work a certain number of hours in a week, your productivity plummets. Wanna know what the number is? Fifty hours. Ironic: that's about a six-day workweek. One study found that there was zero difference in productivity between workers who logged seventy hours and those who logged fifty-five.¹⁵ Could God be speaking to us even through our bodies?

My point: This rhythm isn't the by-product of human ingenuity—the ancient version of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*—that we're free to adapt or change as we see fit for the modern era. It's the way a brilliant mind designed our souls and society to flourish and thrive.

Fight it, fight God.

Fight God, fight our own souls.

Now, what does the writer of *Genesis* mean by "rested"? Was God tired? Burned out?

As I've said, the Hebrew word *Shabbat* means "to stop." But it can also be translated "to delight." It has this dual idea of stopping and also of joying in God and our lives in his world. The Sabbath is an entire day set aside to follow God's example, to stop and delight.

To delight in the world . . .

In our lives in it . . .

And above all, in God himself.

If you're new to the Sabbath, a question to give shape to your practice is this: What could I do for twenty-four hours that would fill my soul with a deep, throbbing joy? That would make me spontaneously combust with wonder, awe, gratitude, and praise? *

Dan Allender, in his book *Sabbath*, had this to say:

The Sabbath is an invitation to enter delight. The Sabbath, when experienced as God intended, is the best day of our lives. Without question or thought, it is the best day of the week. It is the day we anticipate on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday—and the day we remember on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Sabbath is the holy time where we feast, play, dance, have sex, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk, and watch creation in its fullness. Few people are willing to enter the Sabbath and

sanctify it, to make it holy, because a full day of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone a week.¹⁶

And all this is rooted in God. He rested. He stopped. He set aside an entire day just to delight in his world.

But notice what else God did: he "blessed the seventh day and made it holy." Two things worth noting here.

First, the Sabbath is "blessed." In the Genesis story, three things are blessed by God.

To start with, God blessed the animal kingdom with an invocation: "Be fruitful and multiply."¹⁷

Then he blessed humanity the same way: "Be fruitful and multiply."¹⁸

And *then* God blessed the Sabbath.

Wait, so God blessed animals, humans, and then . . . a day?

Mmm.

What does that mean?

It means that the Sabbath—just like an animal or a human being—has the life-giving capacity to procreate. To fill the world up with more life.

Life is tiring. (Case in point, most likely you read that line and

sighed . . .) You get to the end of the week, and even if you love your job, still you're worn down on every level—emotionally, even spiritually. The Sabbath is how we fill our souls back up with life.

Recently I read a survey done by a doctor who cited the happiest people on earth. Near the top of the list was a group of Christians called Seventh-day Adventists, who are religious, literally, about the Sabbath. This doctor noted that they lived ten years longer than the average American.¹⁹ I did the math: if I Sabbath every seven days, it adds up to—wait for it—*ten years* over a lifetime. Almost exactly. So when I say the Sabbath is life giving, that's not empty rhetoric. If this study is to be believed, every day you Sabbath, you're (statistically and scientifically) likely to get back an elongated life.²⁰

From now on, I'm Sabbathing three days a week . . .

And not only will you live longer; even more importantly you'll live *better*.

So first, the Sabbath is "blessed."

• Secondly, it's "holy."

Have you ever thought about that? How a day could be called "holy"?

This would have been jarring to the original audience. In the ancient Near East, the gods were found in the world of space, not of time. They were found in a holy temple or on a holy mountain or at a holy shrine. But *this* God—the one, true

Creator God—is found not in a place but in a day. If you want to go and meet with this God, you don't have to make pilgrimage to Mecca or Varanasi or Stonehenge. You just have to set aside a day of the week to Shabbat, stop long enough to experience him.

So there is a day that is *blessed* and *holy*. A rhythm in creation. Six and one. And when we tap into this rhythm, we experience health and life.

But when we fight this rhythm—ignore it, suppress it, push past it, bully it, make excuses, look for a way to get out of it—we reap the consequences.

Consider the mind: we grow mentally lethargic, numb, uncreative, distracted, restless. Emotional unhealth becomes our new normal. Irritability, anger, cynicism, and its twin, sarcasm, overwhelm our defenses and take control of our dispositions.

Or consider the body: we get tired and worn out; our immune systems start to falter, miss a step. *Another* cold. It's like our nervous systems are trying to get our attention.

Yet we push on. Until, inevitably, we crash. Something in our minds or bodies gives out, and we end up flat on our backs. I have my story; I told most of it at the beginning of this book, but I left out the part about my being a type A workaholic, running off ambition (or what do we call it now, *drive?*), with no clue how to rest. I had a weekly day off, sure, but I spent it catching up on all the work I never got paid for (bills, the yard, etc.), as well as things like shopping and entertainment.

Sabbath wasn't even in my vocabulary, much less my vernacular. But we all come to Sabbath, voluntarily or involuntarily. Eventually the grain of the universe caught up with me, and I crashed, *hard*. My sabbatical was like playing catch-up on a decade of missed Sabbaths, come to collect with interest.

I'm guessing you have a story too.

If not, *you will*. Sabbath is coming for you, whether as delight or discipline.

Maybe that's why God eventually has to *command* the Sabbath. Does that strike you as odd? It's like commanding ice cream or live music or beach days. You would think we'd all be chomping at the bit to practice the Sabbath. But apparently there's something about the human condition that makes us want to hurry our way through life as fast as we possibly can, to rebel against the limitations of time itself. Due to our immaturity, dysfunction, and addiction, God has to command his people to do something deeply life giving—rest.