

# Intimacy: Strive to Enter His Rest

by Stewart Ruch

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of striving for Sabbath rest through intentional time with God and understanding the significance of sacrifice in the Christian life.*

**Duration:** 22:28

**Scripture:** Genesis 1, Genesis 2:2, Exodus 3:14, Exodus 20:8-11, Psalm 121:4, Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 4:9

**Topics:** "Intimacy"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Eric Little, a Scottish runner in the 1920s. The focus is not on Little's athletic achievements, but on what he sacrificed for his faith. Little, a devout Scottish Presbyterian, refused to run in the Olympics on a Sunday, which was considered the Lord's day. Despite facing criticism and pressure from the International Olympic Committee and his own country, Little stood firm in his decision to prioritize his faith over his athletic pursuits. The sermon emphasizes the importance of enduring faith and the need to prioritize our relationship with God over worldly achievements.

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## Transcript

I think it's safe to say that certainly one of the very favorite movies of my family, without question, my without question favorite movie would be the 1981 Oscar award winning film, the movie Chariots of Fire. And it's really, you don't even have to have seen it to understand why it's gotta be one of the greatest movies ever made. It has three constituent elements that form greatness.

Number one, it's filmed in England. It's a movie about England. Why is it that all things English are so fascinating to us Americans too? It involves a great deal of running.

Probably the greatest sport. And third, it displays a profound picture of radical, devoted Christian faith. The story is the story, a true story about a man named Eric Little, a Scottish runner in the 1920s.

Eric Little had an uncommon gift. He was a sprinter. His event was actually the 100 meters.

But what makes the story memorable is not actually Eric Little's athletic prowess. There have been hundreds of thousands of formidable athletes throughout this last century that no movie has been made about and that we don't remember. What's actually memorable about Eric Little is not so much what he gained, but what he gave up.

It's not so much what he accomplished, but it's what he sacrificed. If you've seen the movie, you may remember that a few days before he is to run in the Olympics in the 100 meter trial, he is informed that his heat is going to be run on a Sunday. As a Scottish Presbyterian of that era, Sunday was the Lord's Day.

It was understood as a day of Sabbath rest in which one could not do something like run an event. And so Little declines. The actual story is better than that.

Eric Little actually discovered that his heat would be run on a Sunday eight months prior to the actual event. He had eight months to ponder his decision. He had eight months once he decided to actually have the scorn of the International Olympic Committee.

But worse than that, the scorn of Scotland heaped upon him as people wrote him letters begging him for the glory of Scotland, begging him for their tiny nation to please run, that Scotland could be known for the nation of Eric Little. And against the IOC and against the Scottish people, Eric Little said, No, I cannot run. It is a day of Sabbath rest.

And he refused. Not only did he refuse to run that heat, but he then made a most unusual decision. He made a decision to move out of the 100 meters and to actually run the 400 meters and to try and qualify for that event.

Now, at that time, some runners do that now. It's still extremely rare. But at that time, that would not be unlike today, a pro golfer saying, you know, I think next season I might give up golf and just try to play quarterback with the Chicago Bears.

Nobody made that translation. Nobody made that crossover. But Little did train.

He did qualify in a 400 meter heat that wasn't run on a Sunday. He not only won the gold medal in the 400 meters, but he established a world record. But again, that's not what we're talking about Eric Little tonight.

Can you name any other 1924 Paris Olympics gold medalist? Of course not. None of us can. We remember Little because he gave up something extraordinary to gain someone, Jesus, who is essential.

I'm still amazed in the western suburbs how Lent is a cultural topic of conversation. People still talk about it. Portillo still serves fish sandwiches specifically for those who are giving up other meats.

How giving up a burger and having a fried fish sandwich is a sacrifice. I'm not exactly sure, but that's kind of how it works in the Portillo's theology. But I was in my Starbucks where I am all the time, and I heard two baristas talking to each other.

And I've listened to talk to each other for quite a long time and not once in all the years that I've listened to them chat. Have they ever had one religious overtone to their conversation? But I heard one saying to the other three weeks ago, planning in advance, mind you. So what are you going to give up for Lent? And it was a kind of sort of spiritual athleticism, almost as he was saying, I'm running a 10K.

Can you run farther? And I realized it is kind of almost one upmanship around Lent. How often I've entered that to myself. I've kind of looked at the Lent.

That's OK. What did I give up last year? Well, that was pretty hard. What would be harder this year? Like what even more challenging? OK, last year I gave up black tea.

How about this year? I give up coffee. I'm going to give up coffee for 46 days. I'm not going to drink coffee. I'll even pull the bag out and smell it and put it away. I'm a spiritual athlete. Oh, but when Easter day comes, I get up.

Three coffees on Easter Monday. And we kind of one up ourselves, spiritually challenge ourselves. Lent, let's give it up.

Don't give up something that way this year. Don't be beguiled by spiritual athleticism. Don't give up something extraordinary.

Because you want to gain Him who is essential. To enter into Lent is to enter into a larger biblical concept. That is known as the Sabbath rest.

We first hear of the Sabbath rest, which is really what the heart of Lent is. We first hear of the Sabbath and the Sabbath rest in Genesis chapter 2, verse 2. That chapter and that verse in chapter 2 follows on Genesis 1 where we've seen God create. We've seen God speak into reality light.

He's spoken into reality earth. He's spoken into reality fish and fowl and man and woman. This kind of glorious, glorious accession of creation one day upon another.

And then in a twist that unless we're too familiar with the story should always surprise us. We read that on the seventh day it said God ceased. God, literally the word there is abstained from His work.

He rested. God rested on the seventh day. What does that mean? Really, how does God rest? The Bible says He neither sleeps nor slumbers.

Certainly God isn't napping. Certainly God isn't disengaging and kind of having a day on His own. As scholars have interpreted that passage and studied the original language around that passage, very likely what's happening there when it says that God rests is it is saying that God is with God's self.

That God is present to God's self. That the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are with one another. They were resting.

They were present. They were actually not disengaged, but fully engaged. Just being God.

It sets up what God will say later when asked who He is. I am that I am. And the I am that I am is the heart of the Sabbath rest.

And humanity is taught to imitate God in that way. It's given a commandment that says, Obey the Sabbath. Live a Sabbath rest.

This is part of how one who lives in God lives their lives. So I want to answer two questions tonight. One, what is a Sabbath rest? What is the Sabbath rest for us? And two, why don't most of us live Sabbath? Why don't most of us strive for a Sabbath rest? What is the Sabbath rest? We see this in Hebrews chapter three and chapter four.

Indeed, we're told that a Sabbath rest still remains. There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. Whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from His works as God did from His.

So if God resting is God being with God, then our rest is that being with the Lord. It is being present to the presence of the Lord. It is realizing that all has already been accomplished.

The work is already done. Yes, the work of creation. But the work of re-creation in the cross and the resurrection.

And we rest because God has done it. And we're just with God. We're present to Him.

We're living in Him. And we set apart specific time within the reality of our week to be with Him. There was a great phrase when I was growing up.

I don't hear it around here. This is when I grew up in Indiana. But people would say and talk about keeping someone company.

For example, my grandmother, if I was going to run an errand and kind of hoping to have some time on myself, she'd always say, well, Stuart, let me come with you so I can keep you company. Or she'd say to one of us, I'm going to be home all afternoon and I'd rather not be alone. Could you just come over and keep me company? Another way that would translate is let's go have a visit.

You didn't visit with an agenda. You didn't visit so you could, as we like to say, move the ball down the field or get something accomplished. You just visited.

You talked about the weather because you just wanted to be together. You kept company. And that's like Sabbath rest.

But with God. You keep company with God. When was the last time you were just with Jesus? Just with Him? Now, it's good to go to Him and ask Him for things.

We're taught to do that. It's good to go to Him and try to move the spiritual ball down the field in your life and in other places. It's good to intercede with Jesus.

But it's also essential that you rest with Him. Engage His presence. Keep company with Him as you drive.

Keep company with Him on a walk. Keep company with Him in a decided 15 minutes of absolute silence, whatever it might be. That's the heart of the Sabbath rest.

So if God rests and if we're commanded to rest and if a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God, then why is it that most of us do not Sabbath rest? What keeps us, not necessarily even striving for it, but perhaps even avoiding it? Why? Well, one reason, I think, is that we don't actually believe in Sabbath rest. We don't believe that it's still important. We don't believe that it really matters.

If we think about these things biblically, perhaps we do think that it was of an Old Testament time and not for a New Testament season. It may be that we look at the Sabbath rest as kind of a quaint notion or something that was actually somewhat legalistic, which in Eric Little's case might have been the case. And so we say, I don't really believe that Sabbath really matters anymore.

Perhaps we don't enter into Sabbath rest because we have basically made a kind of life vow that we will hardly ever say no to anything we want to do, or even more so, we won't say no to what someone else wants us to do. We've actually decided that one of the worst things we can do is disappoint someone who is hoping or depending or wanting something from us. And so we just never say no.

And so our times are filled with all of our yeses, but they're actually secondary yeses. We never make a primary no to make a primary yes to being with the Lord, to Sabbath time. As the Jewish people developed their Sabbath, it meant that they said no to one thing after another, critical things, important things, productivity things.

They wouldn't work for a whole year sometime in an agrarian society. They would say no and no and no, that they could say yes to being with God. My family, we learned this in the last year yet again.

While it's easier when the children are younger to have that Sabbath family time together, we have to be creative because I do spend my day on Sunday, the Lord's day, highly engaged and not with my family. So we look for another time and we found that we couldn't find another time. Another time didn't just naturally exist in the life of our family, but to have several hours together as a family engaging and being with one another and with God.

And we finally figured out that everyone in the family was going to have to give something up, say no to something that they all wanted to do, including Catherine and me, so that we could be with each other. What a gift, having done so for the last several months, that has been to our family. But many of us, we don't want to say no.

For others of us, we've never been taught or we've forgotten that the Christian life is never described as a sprint, but actually as a marathon. The writer of Hebrews alludes to this. He says, holding on in verse 14 of chapter 3, we hold our original confidence to the end, that there is an enduring quality, a long term, long run quality.

But most of us, we sprint. We think this is Sabbath. I'm resting.

And we call that rest. Oh yeah, I work hard and I rest. Sabbath rest is not recovery.

Sabbath rest is recreating. Re-creational. Life is not to be lived as one sprint after another, but actually a very long marathon with the necessary water breaks along the way that allow you to get to the finish line.

And those water breaks are Sabbath rest times where you nourish yourself in the living water of the very presence of God himself. Perhaps you've forgotten, perhaps no one's ever taught you that the Christian life is a long marathon punctuated regularly by Sabbath rest. That's how you endure to the end.

Finally, one of our pastors in a staff meeting recently prayed, as he prayed for a Christian community and all Christian communities, for our agnosticism. Agnosticism is a kind of unbelief, a kind of not believing. And when he prayed that, I was convicted in my own heart of the way in which I often am a pragmatic prayer agnostic.

I have an unbelieving heart about different matters in prayer, as the writer of Hebrews says. I don't really believe that prayer matters profoundly. I don't really believe that prayer brings me into the immediate living presence of God.

I don't really believe it. And I pragmatically am agnostic about it. And therefore, I don't strive to enter a Sabbath rest.

So how do we strive? Let me give a very specific application, particularly for our resurrection community, but for any of you who are visiting in the area as well, but especially for resurrection. I want to encourage

you to strive this Lent to enter that rest. We just passed 50 days in our 100 day, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week prayer odyssey.

They were calling Prayer 100. And I was given a report on Prayer 100 and get an idea of how many of us are engaging in that. And the number that I was given for those of us who have signed up for an hour prayer slot or come to prayer meetings is about 25% of our church.

25%. Now, let's assume that some of us do what I do at times to just show up. So let's say that number instead of 25% is actually 35%.

Two years ago, we had a major growth theory here at Resurrection. It was around generosity. And we put in front of ourselves and the community the desire and the goal to become so worldly irresponsible with our money because we were so kingdom responsive.

And you became a profoundly generous church. You exceeded everyone's expectations of who you could be as a generous people. And we addressed that growth area and we grew in the Lord as the people of God.

But that number of 25% to me is a diagnostic number. It tells me that we don't know how to Sabbath rest as a people yet. We don't understand it.

Because that number is way too low. We don't value yet the critical nature of an hour with the Lord as the people of God. I think we'll grow.

I think we can become a deeply prayerful people. But we're not there yet. And so for the rest of this length, and this is not because I want to make this program succeed.

This is not a program. And I really, I've done this too long. I don't care about programs.

I don't. I care about us having a Sabbath rest. I care about you entering into the immediate presence of the Lord.

As a people, together at this time. So what I'd love you to do, if you're going to give anything up, give up something extraordinary like your time. Give up an hour.

Give up an hour a week for the next five weeks. Give up as many hours as you can. Fill in the prayer slots.

Be in that chapel. Come whether you planned or not planned ahead of time. Give an hour.

I would much rather you give up time to Sabbath rest than that you give up coffee or chocolate or red meat. That would be far more valuable as a Lenten fast. And a Lenten time because your fast will become a feast.

And you will be with the Lord and in His presence. Resting like He has rested. Fulfilling the Sabbath rest that remains for today.

It looks as simple as this. Plan a half day. Plan a half day.

Start with a breakfast. Mom, let Dad do this. Dad, let Mom do this.

Plan a breakfast. Come here. Have an hour walk in the marsh.

Get an hour in the prayer chapel. And then have lunch with another Christian who always encourages you to live with Jesus. That's a half day.

A day of Sabbath rest. Let us strive to enter the Sabbath rest. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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