



"T is for Tired"

From the message series *HALT: Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired*

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I receive a lot of religious and spiritual-themed emails. *A lot. (Laughter)* From many different traditions. Some of which I am inclined to agree with, some of which not at all. Not too long ago I received an email with a subject line I didn't find very promising. See if you didn't find it very promising, either:

Are You Sinning Every Week?

(Laughter) I thought, "Okay, this is gonna be a screed! A homophobic diatribe against LGBT people. It's gonna be lambasting me for my vote in the last presidential election, whatever it might be."

Actually, it wasn't. It was an email – an honest email – from, yes, a born-again Christian church planter. He was talking about the ways in which his life had become stressful, even unmanageable, because he had not been keeping the commandment, as he understands it, of the Sabbath. He had gone weeks without taking a day off, months without taking a day off, and his mentor in ministry called him on it.

Now I wouldn't explain my experience to myself using the same language: "Am I sinning every week?" But I have to tell you, I recognized far too much of myself in this email. *Mea culpa.* Confession time. It has been weeks – if I'm honest, months – since I have taken a weekly Sabbath. I mean, I take a little time off here and there. Most often, most years – well, maybe no years – but some years, it feels like I actually take the amount of vacation I'm allotted in my contract. I don't even know where that's printed anymore. I sit just about every day in meditation and contemplative practice. But I stopped taking my day off. I stopped taking a weekly Sabbath. Now, you haven't overworked me. I have allowed myself to become overworked and stressed and tired. I have not been a good steward of my life's energy.

So I tell you this for a couple reasons. You know, confessing in front of a room of a whole bunch of people really helps with basic accountability, doesn't it? *(Laughter)*

So what I'm gonna tell you is that, in the weeks to come, I'm going to work out a day off that really does work for my schedule. And on that day, you won't be able to reach me

unless it's an emergency. You'll get an auto-reply from my email; you'll get an outgoing voice message that says I'm not available. By the way, that Sabbath won't be Sunday, so let me tell you that right off the bat. (*Laughter*)

But that's what I'm trying to do today. I'm trying to say, "I need a Sabbath." We all need a Sabbath, because really, Sabbath is just a traditional way of saying what this message series is all about: Halt. Pause. Learn to stop.

Today we get to "T is for Tired." It was preceded by "Hungry," "Angry," "Lonely." Today, T is for Tired. And this would seem to be the most obvious one, right? The one you know. Sleepy? Sleep! If we're tired, rest! But it's not really so easy in this society, is it, at all? Not anymore.

I got a great visual representation of the lengths to which many of us drive ourselves when I was watching television a number of weeks ago. In the morning, I saw a series of ads within about a half hour of each other, all for coffee, 5-Hour Energy, and Red Bull. (*Laughter*) Get up! Get going! Get moving; do stuff! A few nights later, watching television in the evening, I saw a series of ads for these: Unisom, Melatonin, Lunesta! (*Laughter*) Turn it on; turn it off. Power up; power down.

We are an under-slept society. Some of you feel that in your bones this very morning. In 2012, there were 60 million sleeping aid prescriptions written. That's up from 47 million in 2006, and those are just the sleeping prescriptions. Those aren't the substances that people are abusing to fall asleep. Those aren't all the naturalistic, homeopathic ways people are trying to fall asleep. I could read you chapter and verse, but I won't this morning, about the correlation, if not the outright causation, between poor sleeping habits and the degradation of our health and harm to our bodies. All you need to do is Google that. Google "lack of sleep" and "disease," and you'll come up with some legitimate studies about what regular lack of sleep does to us, does to our bodies and our hearts, I think, as well.

I have a friend from college who does... I'll just say he does really important things. Not that what we do is not really important. But he flies into *war zones* to help people who are warring with each other try to come to peace accords. He works at a high-level, high-stress kind of job. He helps countries that are emerging from revolutions write new constitutions. This is a guy who even when he isn't in the war zones, he is working sometimes crazy hours.

One of the best features of our friendship, especially recently, is that I really check in with him. I ask him how his life is going. I ask him how his heart is doing. I ask him how his energy is. He was telling me back when he was stateside that he had some really crazy schedule. I asked him, "How much do you think you and the people you work with sleep every night when you're going through these conferences and through this work?" And he was honest. He said, "I would guess we get about two to four hours regularly." I was kind of horrified, actually. I said – it probably wasn't helpful to him – but I said, "No wonder the world is such a screwed-up place." (*Laughter*) I mean, these are people

who literally hold the lives of other people in their hands, hold their physical destinies in their hands, and they are routinely not getting enough sleep.

It's no wonder that they are feeling depleted. I would say it's not really any wonder that many of us are feeling depleted in our lives – with our working schedules, our parenting schedules, the basic craziness, business, of living most of our lives.

I had a colleague who tweeted something I think was really wise the other day. She said, "You know, let's stop treating busy as a badge of honor." Maybe we can do that. "Let's stop treating busy as a badge of honor." Maybe that's a way we can start to get at the root of why resting is so difficult for so many of us, why simply admitting the fact that we are tired human beings is so difficult for us.

You see, I'm guilty of it. I know I'm guilty of it. I gotta stop myself when I do it. We get into these conversations. Sometimes we have them at coffee hour – and by the way, please don't tell anyone, just make up a little practice for after coffee hour today: Don't start the conversation on the basis of how busy you are.

But I know I'm part of these conversations. We get into this competitive business. "Oh my God, you're so busy, I'm so busy." We gotta be more busy, you know? And I always walk away from those conversations feeling like I've done two things: I have gotten good guilt and I have given good guilt. *(Laughter)* Because all the things that happen when you have those kinds of conversations, it just leaves me feeling even more squeezed. Even more, "Damn, I wish I had more time. I wish I could clone myself and then that clone would be tired. And that clone would clone himself and he would be even more tired," and on and on and on it goes. *(Laughter)*

Here's the thing. Human beings have worked ludicrously hard for millennia, back into pre-human history. If you would look at the continuum of human history, we would be on the outer- outer- outermost speck of that history. Most of our ancestors had the changing of the seasons, of day and night, and the schedule, as Chris talked about in our opening today, of nature itself. That was their halt. Before there was anything called Sabbath, it was just called, "It's night out. We'd better get inside." And those limits – the halt of nature.

We've become expert at transgressing those limits. Sometimes I even see it; if you remember seeing this bumper sticker, it says "No limits." Like, with a big – written angry "NO LIMITS!" ROAR! ROAR! *(Laughter)* Do it. "NO LIMITS! ROAR!" *[Audience responds]* That is the weakest-ass lion I've ever heard. *(Laughter)* All right, I'm gonna say "No limits," and you're gonna say, "ROAR." "No limits." *[Audience roars]* Awesome. Thank you. *(Laughter)*

I want people to explore our limits. I can't tell you what your limits are. One of the best things in life is about being able to transcend limits that we thought we had, finding where our edge is, and then recognizing how that edge shifts over time.

But here's the thing. That phrase "No limits?" That's a complete lie. To be a human being truly is by definition to be limited. It is to break faith when you say "No limits" with Reinhold Niebuhr, the author of The Serenity Prayer that has helped millions of people find health, healing, and wholeness. What underlaid the spiritual foundation of that Serenity Prayer is something that he said about what it is to be alive. He said to be human beings, we have to affirm one big "F" about ourselves: that we are free. We have the ability to overcome the tyranny of past action, the tyranny of precedent, and to find out new things about our lives and grow and discover.

But he said, on the other side there's another "F" that is equally important and we have to hold these in balance. The other "F" he called finitude. To be a human being, we have to recognize that our energy at a certain point is finite and we cannot do everything. To hold our freedom and our finitude in balance is a beautiful dynamic, creative gift, and so often when people fall into disease or unhealth in their life, it is because they've broken faith with one or the other.

This past week I put up a great quote by Carl Jung on my Facebook page, and I think it gets to the heart of why so many of us struggle with rest, with tiredness and admitting the fact that we're tired. The great psychologist said, "When we must deal with problems, some of us, we instinctively resist trying the way that leads through obscurity and darkness. We wish to hear of only unequivocal results and completely forget that these results can only be brought about when we have ventured into and emerged again from the darkness."

What's the primary way that most of us experience darkness in our lives? It's by allowing ourselves to sleep. But many of us – I know I've been guilty of this as well – we fear darkness and we fear inactivity, almost as if these were a kind of death. A resistance to what we can immediately cheer up or control or make into what we want it to be.

So when I think of those ads that say, "Rev the day up. Here, drink this!" and "Shut the day down. Here, swallow this pill!" And I get it, folks. I've had sleeping issues my entire life. The guy who eventually became my brother-in-law, when he was just dating my older half-sister years ago, knowing the religious ancestry that my family was, used to hear me padding around upstairs on the floorboards, not wanting to go to sleep. Another drink of water; another visit to the bathroom; another book to read. And he used to – he called me 'the wandering Jew.' (*Laughter*) I get what it's like to struggle with sleep; I really do. But to learn to halt when we're tired – to pause – means to begin to honor our life's energies. It means to learn to live in a different way: to halt with our tiredness, our basic bodily and spiritual necessity for rest.

When we learn to halt with our tiredness, we might see some unconscious understandings that we have of our lives that turn out to cause us tremendous harm. It's almost like malware playing in our brains and in our cultural environment. It's almost as if we think, many of us, we believe that we're machines. And you know, when a machine breaks, what do we do? We fix it – very often mechanically, mechanistically –

or we junk it. We throw it away.

This is such an unhealthy way to treat our lives, and it shows up when we will not allow ourselves to rest. Because I don't think we are machines. I think instead a much better understanding of what it is to be human is to understand ourselves as a relationship. As a relationship in lives with other people who are in relationship. As a relationship between body, mind, and spirit; as a relationship between our freedom and our finiteness.

When we understand ourselves as a relationship and experiencing what it is to be tired in our lives, then we can understand that in fact we don't need fixing when we're tired or worn out. And we certainly don't need to be thrown out when we're worn out. Although, to be honest, that's the way many of us treat ourselves. Sometimes, to be honest, especially – and this is the hurting part – this is the way we treat other people when they're tired – we want to throw them out. When a relationship is broken, if we maturely deal with it, we try to heal it or we grieve its passing.

This is one of the most insightful things that Jesus said: “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.” Notice the comfort comes after the mourning. I see people who drive themselves to distraction in the midst of their grief with activity and going here and doing this or doing that, and you know, sometimes that's great – to be busy and occupied when we're in deep mourning. That's why we have all these great rituals of grief.

And yet what I can see, after doing hundreds of funerals or memorial services over the years, it's the moment – the rich moment – when all the rituals are gone and we can allow ourselves to settle into our sadness, our loss, our being brokenhearted – that's the place where real mourning comes about. It very often expresses itself as being tired. It's a holy, sacred tiredness. This kind of tiredness is not weakness, although sometimes our society treats it as weakness. This kind of tiredness is wisdom. It is asking for care and attention.

I think of this character when I think about moving from a machine to being a real live human boy, a real live human being: Pinocchio. And by the way, Pinocchio is many things. It is the best archetype – think about it, folks – of male puberty. (*Laughter*) A boy who can't control himself; something in his body grows. You know what I mean? Think about it, folks. The fairy tale... Now, now they get it. (*Laughter*) All the fairy tales we tell ourselves really tell a story about what it is like to be a human being, or in this case, a male human being.

But really, Pinocchio is about that urge at a deepest level to want to be real. See, when we're a machine, we can just keep going and going and we don't wear out. But Pinocchio doesn't want to be a machine anymore. He wants to be real. He wants to love; he wants to connect.

That's why it's so important to halt when we are tired, because it allows us an

opportunity to reorder our relationship with the universe – to stop swinging, as many of us can, and I know I do much more regularly than I would wish – to swing from self-importance, “I’m the center of the universe and I am absolutely necessary!” to “I am crap!” and I diminish myself and I don’t get anything done. When we can halt, we can have a right relationship with our work and our efforts and our energies and our parenting because we can see that sleep, like breathing, like death, is the great equalizer.

I encourage you, if you are struggling with someone that you are angry with, if you are struggling with someone that you’re having that tight feeling, that tension about: imagine them sleeping. And don’t see it as an opportunity to take the shiv from out your back and say, “Ah, here’s my moment.” No, no. *(Laughter)* But see them sleeping, and understand that they sleep and they need rest just like you need rest. See if maybe that opens up a little space of peace and grace within you in the midst of hard feelings.

If I had it in my power, this is one of the things I would do. I would love to send people for a nap! *(Laughter)* I would love to carry out a little cot and put it out and say, “Here’s a nap. Here’s a cookie. Do you want a cookie? Little glass of milk? Come and take a rest.” I see so many people – I include myself in it – get so worked up, so bound up in the drama and the stuff and we worry so much. Before we can even start to get to really what’s there, I think the first thing is: can we just rest? I wish someone would follow me around, and say, “Time out, Ken. Nap time, buddy. I’m not listening to you anymore until you take a nap.” *(Laughter)*

In my family when we wouldn’t rest and needed to, we called it “the dreaded OTs.” OT stands for overtired. See, when many of us are overtired – and they are dreaded because that’s where “hungry, angry, lonely” shows up in really fierce ways. When we’re tired and we won’t let ourselves rest, all the other crap tends to come out. If we were loved as a child – and I know that not all of us were loved in the way that we deserved to be cared for – maybe we heard something like this.

*Hush little baby, don’t say a word
Momma’s gonna buy you a mockingbird...*

This is the invitation to rest. Not just to rest the body, but an invitation to intimacy with the universe. That we can rest because we are connected. What’s that other lullaby? “All Through the Night” – that promise of presence. And I know not all of us had loving parents, and so actually that’s the transition many of us need to make as we grow up. To recognize lullabies may not do it any longer for us, and so we need to find deeper spiritual food to really feed ourselves so that we can maintain that sense of presence and connection. So that we can rest. All traditions have this. In Buddhism, they talk about taking the vow with the three jewels: “I take refuge” – think of that word, “refuge” – “I take refuge in the Buddha.” The dharma: the teaching; the sangha: the community.

Kathleen Norris, who’s a contemplative Christian writer whose writing I absolutely love. She is a person who has produced massive amounts of words of wisdom and insight.

You get to the end of her beautiful book *The Cloister Walk*, about her reentry into contemplative community after leaving life as a nonstop, on-the-go, Upper West Side, New York City intellectual writer. She said at the end of all these words, at the end of all the work, at the end of the day that's left undone – and by the way, there is always work we can return to. We know that. Even if we work and work and work, there's always gonna be more... She says, the promise of her faith, as she experiences it, is finally the ability to rest in the promises. The promises that she won't be abandoned, and that there is an omnipresence that abides.

I know this from leading mindfulness groups, and I know it from having gone to a lot of yoga classes myself. I know this. Maybe some of you know this, too. *(Lies on the floor to laughter)* Ahhh. Rest pose. Savasana. Lying on the earth, connected. I'm just gonna hang out here for a little bit, all right? *(Laughter)* I don't have anything else to do. We got time. I'm resting, folks. You can get a cup of coffee or something. *(Laughter)* Or don't. Sit there and rest yourself.

(Gets up) Savasana very often is the last thing that people do at the end of a time of yoga and a practice. And it's after a lot of effort, and it's after a lot of flexing and tension and movement of the body, and still recognizing that all that great effort comes to place finally of rest. It's good to rest. It is the natural state of things after exertion to rest, and not just keep tirelessly driving ourselves.

One of my favorite articulations of this is a poem by Wendell Berry called "The Peace of Wild Things." We're just gonna play the audio right now. Close your eyes, if you would, and listen to these words.

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

"I come into the presence of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water." It's what our worship leader Chris was inviting us to do: to experience "charged full with the charge of the soul" lives. To rest perhaps in that place "in the grace of the world and am free." Grace is fundamentally not a theological concept. It is an experience of rest that is healing that makes our capacity for true rest possible because we are so not machines. It is to experience what the ancient Hebrews termed a word that we now translate as "peace" – it is "shalom." But "shalom" is not just peace between people who are warring with each other, or

countries that have been fighting with each other. Peace means that capacity for wholeness that each of us has, and who really each of us already are if we will give ourselves permission to rest.

It's like Bob Dylan, the great nature mystic, says in that line from the song we were just singing. Nature that "asks for no applause," but simply to "lay down our weary tune" and to be back in right relationship with the world that was here before us, a world that will be here after us.

During the meditation today, Chris asked us in preparation for that meditation – this awareness of breath, this awareness of that which is bigger, deeper, gives life to each and every one of us – to feel ourselves supported by the chair underneath us. Maybe that's the first time all week any of you have focused on something supporting you. This is where the capacity for rest begins and where it can take us. To recognize support; to know, whether by lullaby or true refuge or resting in the promises or finding the grace of the world or by lying on the floor, that we are and can be most fundamentally connected to this life. When we know we are connected, then we can rest.

This is why spiritual practice is one of the core values of this community. It's not just that we want people to be able to do cool contortions and be able to sit for an hour in stillness with their breath. It's not the esoteric stuff; it's that we want people to be connected because connected people have the capacity to reorder the world and to put ourselves back in right relationship with our work, our effort, our parenting, our very lives. And to say "rest" – it's not what's left over at the end of the day when we finally have to say, "Okay, we give up. No more. I cry 'Uncle.'" But in fact, rest is at the very center of what it is to be a human being. To admit this is to be able to reorder our lives. It is a revolutionary act, people. I do not lie about that. It is a revolutionary act that starts to set our world aright again.

You've noticed I've not given you too many tips, if you can't sleep at night. I mean, try loving kindness meditation. Try gentle yoga, if you want to. Try warm milk. Try a cookie. Whatever it is, you know? (*Laughter*) The point is here is find some way to be connected.

I know when I have the biggest problem sleeping it's because the world is too much with me and I've placed myself at the center of that world, and it whirs and it whirs and it whirs and it goes and it goes. I just don't admit, "Okay, there's not much more I can do right now."

It is a revolutionary act to admit that we are in need of rest when we are tired. It is to also admit that other people need it as well. This past week, I read a wonderful article called "The End of Self-Care." The writer wants to do away with this concept of self-care, not because self-care isn't good, but because it makes it an individual thing. You can say to one person, they want their self-care, but there's no structure of relationship to support a whole bunch of people who want to care for themselves deeply. And so in committing just to our own self-care without drawing ourselves out into the lives of other

people, well, you wind up like me. And you wind up not taking your Sabbath for a very long time. To recognize that we all need care; to be able to articulate this over and over and over again; to admit that we are not disposable.

At this tired time in the life of our country, and our tired politics, fighting the same battles over and over again, if I had in my power (and I don't), this is what I would love to see. I would love to see a grace-based economy. That we all have gifts. And I'm not an economist so I have no idea what a grace-based economy really means or what it would be like. But I do know it feels like we're at the end, the possible end, of driving ourselves to this point. We can't just keep going and going and going and going. I guess if we want to live that way, we could, and then we wonder why so many of us are miserable and can't sleep.

If we are relationships and not machines, if we are gifted and not garbage, if we are here and not disposable, we will affirm profoundly – not with the time leftover but right here and right now – that we rest not because we are lazy. We rest not because we are weak, we rest not because we just don't have what it takes, but we rest so that we can flourish. To rest in the grace of this universe is the place from which all other good things can come. If we're feeling burned out and we want to move to charged full, to find those ways and to cultivate those ways of getting connected, and first admitting, "Halt. I'm tired." If you want me to hold you accountable, I will. Tell me you're tired and I will say, "Please, my friends, go take a nap. Rest. Experience shalom." It is who we are, not who we're waiting to be. It is who we are, if we would only listen.

Amen, and may you live in blessing. Let's pray together.

Oh, eternity that is already in our midst, may we set to right our energies, our work, our loves, our efforts, our strivings, our aspirations, and not judge ourselves for the space that is set apart – the space in which we are nothing – literally, no thing – but instead, the quality of being that yearns to connect and to know peace and grace and rest. If we're tired, let's admit it. Let's feel it in our bodies; our minds; our hearts. Let's take that deep breath. We deserve rest.

Amen.