

October 11th: A Season of Routines/Waiting

My friends, welcome to our fall series, and welcome to a new season.

As we shift deeper into Fall, and all that this different phase of our year entails, we know these transitions can have a powerful impact on our spiritual lives and on our souls. Our bodies, minds, and spirits are sensitive to change—and yet change is one of the only constants in our world. So this series is an attempt to offer language, support, and encouragement for those transitions that might be occurring in our lives. As we navigate these moments together, we'll be relying on passages from Old Testament wisdom literature to guide us—these texts, stories, and sayings will hopefully speak to our needs for reassurance and clarity. Wherever you are on your faith journey, we invite you to join this conversation and space for reflection.

As we prepare for today's topic, let's take a minute to pray together.

God of Each Day, you are with us from the rising of the sun to the soft glow of the moon. You draw near to us when we wake, and when we are drifting off to sleep. You love us when we are getting ready for work, and when we are stuck in traffic. As we move through our routines and rhythms, we listen for your gentle voice. Speak to us now so that we might discern how to navigate these daily tasks with faithfulness and peace. Guide us towards habits that honor you and allow us to receive your grace. And hold us in the palm of your hands as we start another week. Amen.

There's a new trend going around on social media called "the Sunday reset," or the "seasonal reset," has anyone heard of this? If you haven't, the reset, whenever it occurs, is a ritual of returning to routine—it typically involves some kind of cleaning or decluttering, getting back into certain habits like self care or domestic labor, and setting goals for the next week or other time frame that allow the participant to stick to these routines. I've seen quite a few of these videos floating around on my For You Page and various platforms, and I've even watched a few out of curiosity.

Here's what I've learned: the underlying language of these videos leans into this idea that routines are a stabilizing force in our lives, creating a sense of predictability and comfort that allows us to navigate our personal, professional, and spiritual lives better than if we did not build these routines in our days. But is this true? Does routine actually help us stay on track?

I don't have the answers to these questions, but I do have a theory: I have a theory that there are two types of people in the world: people who love routines, and people who hate them. Let's put this to the test—how many of you love routine? And how many of you hate them?

I myself both love and hate routine. I love having structure in my days that guides me through life, but I deeply resent those structures when they feel constraining or restrictive. I love having something to fall back on when my weeks feel crazy, but I also am quick to break out of my routine when things are feeling stale. Why am I like this??

As I thought about this topic this week, here's what I came up with: Routines can be immensely positive for many of us. Routines are simply one of the ways that we can create a feeling of rhythm out of the seeming uncertainty and fears of an unknown future that can be present in our souls. Routines can be a cadence that bring meaning, reassure us that we're doing well, and ground us during times of anxiety or distress. If that's been true for you, great!

But routines can also have the opposite effect, they can create a sense of sameness that makes our days feel like an endless cycle of the same few events and activities. When viewed this way, routines can actually feel like traps, keeping us stuck or like we're in a never ending holding pattern. Routines can end up feeling like we're just in a replay of the movie Groundhog Day, where nothing ever changes and we can't escape. It can feel like we're just passing the time, waiting for the next season to start.

So what should we do if we find ourselves either yearning for or longing to break free of our daily routines? Where should we look for answers about how

to deal with these seasons of routines and potentially waiting for something to change? Well, you know what I'm going to say: let's turn to our Bibles, and see what wisdom God has for us this morning.

Our scripture passage for today comes from the Psalms, the great hymn book of our Old Testament wisdom literature. Inside these songs and prayers and poems are all of the emotions of our biblical ancestors: joy, sorrow, praise, grief, anxiety, and trust, all of those feelings and experiences are recorded in these chapters. Psalms is often a book where Christians turn for comfort, because its raw honesty and vulnerability gives us permission to be fully human during our own moments of deep need and fear.

Today's chosen Psalm is very much in that vein—it's one that our spiritual tradition has returned to time and time again when our lives feel out of our control and confusing to us. It's a popular refrain for liturgies and worship services that are focused on the sense of waiting that we often feel when we are unsure of how to move forward or follow God's call. Originally written, or at least attributed to the great king David, it gives voice to these inner emotions of uncertainty and anxiety that arise in us during seasons of anticipation.

Psalm 13 begins with these famous words: "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

I'm sure that even if you've never heard this passage before, you've probably said something similar to God. Maybe you've prayed, "God, how much longer am I going to be unemployed?" or "Jesus, how many more months will I be forced to wait for good news from my doctor?" Maybe you haven't said these exact words, but your soul has groaned, and you've begged for God to answer you, like David does in verses 3 and 4. I know that I have. I know that I've been in seasons where I've been desperate for God to finally respond with some sort of clarity or communication. I would have given anything for God to speak

to me and tell me exactly how much longer I would need to wait. I would have cried with relief to know that something would be different, and soon.

If you've ever felt the same way, you know that waiting can be a profoundly difficult experience, especially if you're like me, and patience is not your strong suit. It can feel exhausting to go through your normal schedule of getting ready for work, caring for children, paying bills, scheduling appointments, cooking meals and washing an endless stream of dishes while also sitting in the discomfort of not knowing when this season of life will end. It can be disorienting to be in this constant loop of the same activities, all while wishing for something new.

So how do we deal with this sense of waiting if we're feeling stuck in the same routines? How can we find meaning and hope in the midst of these holding patterns? What might it look like to find peace and trust in God through these seasons?

Sadly, I don't think the answer is more Sunday resets or a better morning routine with all the latest skincare products. I don't think getting serious about flossing every night or meal prepping each weekend gets us closer to the feelings of calmness and clarity that we are craving. Those might be good habits to get into, and they might bring about some level of physical wellbeing in our lives, but they might not be the spiritual solution that we're looking for.

Instead, I think there's another option, which might look similar to routines on the outside, but is actually quite different in terms of its purpose and experience. In fact, routine and this option are often used as synonyms for each other, but in my mind, they could not be more different.

And that option is the incorporation of rituals.

On the surface, a ritual might sound like more of the same repeated behaviors and structure, but here's what I think is the difference between a routine that we develop and a ritual that we enter into. Routine is often about efficiency

and systems-building ways for us to cope with overwhelming demands or growing to do lists. Routine allows us to speed things up, moving through tasks even more quickly or get through them on autopilot. Routine gives us predictable patterns so that we can give our brains permission to disengage. Routine dulls our senses and keeps us stagnant.

By contrast, ritual is about deliberate attention, slowing down, and being fully present to ourselves and God. A ritual can become part of our routine, but first, it must call us out of our frenzied pace and inner turmoil. It can become something that we do regularly, but it has to start as an opportunity to remove ourselves, even if only temporarily, from the rest of our days. Ritual asks us to engage in our lives in a more focused and tangible way—noticing how our bodies feel, articulating the emotions swirling around inside us, and processing our experiences. Ritual doesn't ask us to do more or be more productive, it invites us to do less and be more human.

Think about it this way—a ritual is an activity that brings connection and peace into our lives, they remind us that simply being alive is a blessing.

If you're having trouble thinking of a ritual that you could try or one that you already practice, it might be savoring your first sip of coffee in the morning, and watching the steam rise from the surface of your mug. It might be listening to the birds while you go out to grab the mail, enjoying their song while taking deep breaths of fresh air. Your chosen ritual could be pausing before opening your email—reminding yourself that you are more than your productivity. You could decide that each night before you go to bed, you take a few moments to reflect on what you're grateful for.

A ritual doesn't have to be some elaborate, grand thing—and sometimes it's better when it's not. A ritual that is small enough to do consistently, maybe even every day, is more impactful than a bigger one that you'll do less frequently. The more you can practice the rituals that are meaningful for you, the more pockets of peace you can find, and I know that we all need that right now. So try adding one ritual to your routine this week, and see if that makes a

difference. See if that small change can breathe new life into your daily rhythms.

I'll wrap up with this:

Our passage ends with these closing thoughts—David somehow shifts from his angst and anxiety and moves to a place of joy and contentment. He sings: “But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord’s praise, for he has been good to me.”

My friends, this is what I hope for for you, as you continue to navigate these seasons of life. I hope that as you slow down and pay attention to peaceful moments, you will connect with a part of yourself that deeply needs to be seen. I hope that rooting yourself in these rituals will reveal how profoundly you are loved by your Creator. I hope that these breaks from productivity bring you closer to God’s presence.

May your hearts rejoice, and you find rest.

Amen.