

I can become so frenetic I lose track of myself. Yes, myself. Busy is subtle, until it has a firm grip, then it's all-out demanding. If your calendar leaves you in a spin, be encouraged, this offering is about still waters and quiet hearts. Tell me, who doesn't long for that? As I soak in *Soul Rest*, I'm stirred to examine my bustling mindset and to lean into a kinder rhythm, a Sabbath song. I've put this book on my twice-a-year read list.

PATSY CLAIRMONT

author of *You Are More Than You Know*

Now more than ever, the world is saturated with pressure, lack of margin, "business," and noise. And so, now more than ever, a recovery of the ancient practice of Sabbath is essential. In this wonderful book, Curtis does a great job advocating for more healthy life rhythms—ones that involve dedicated, purposeful work but also unplugging to replenish. He also directs our attention away from the noise and toward the deeper rest to which Christ calls us, a rest that reminds us the essential work has already been accomplished by Him and on our behalf. I pray that many will engage Curtis' words here and that *Soul Rest* would reacquaint many with Jesus' wonderful invitation to come to *Him* for the rest we so often crave but struggle to find.

SCOTT SAULS

senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville;
author of *Befriend* and *From Weakness to Strength*

This is the kind of book that needs to not only be read but digested, absorbed, and ultimately lived. It sits with you, like a good friend, reminding you of what's really important. I loved it.

JEFF GOINS

author of *The Art of Work*

I'm grateful for men like Curtis who are making disciples in places that are hard to reach. He is taking a strong stand on the word of God in cities that need it.

FRANCIS CHAN

author of *Crazy Love*

I have been walking with CZ for a lot of years now. He is truly a friend and a brother. I can't tell you how much the message of this book is needed in today's culture. In a 24/7/365 world, we lose sight of the fact that we have been designed to regularly stop and lay everything down. In *Soul Rest*, CZ points the way to finding the true source of life.

TOBYMAC

Grammy award-winning artist, producer, and songwriter

Curtis Zackery is one of those young emerging leaders that I'm excited about. His first book, *Soul Rest*, is incredible. My first thought was to chuckle—what is a young guy starting out in the ministry doing, writing a book on rest? But the reality is: it's the exact right thing for him to do. Having pastored for more than three decades and seeing guys come and go in ministry and in life, I know that those that make it are those that know how to draw deep within and beyond themselves. For me, it was that “When will Jesus be enough?” question that realigned my life. Everyone will benefit from this book, but I encourage young aspirational leaders to read this and let it slowly soak in.

BOB ROBERTS
senior pastor of Northwood Church;
author of *Bold as Love*

Soul Rest is a book that helps us to remember and understand how we find our identity and rest in Jesus. As we move into a new paradigm of the church, we must plant the seeds of the great commission and grow in the way of the kingdom of God. We have all been created by God with dignity and have allowed sin and greed to disrupt our understanding of this. This important book helps us understand that our hearts have a longing that can only be satisfied by God. Curtis Zackery's insight on this subject makes *Soul Rest* well worth reading and highly relevant for today's church.

DR. JOHN M. PERKINS
founder and president emeritus, John & Vera Mae Perkins Foundation;
cofounder, Christian Community Development Association (CCDA)

With refreshing vulnerability and profound insight, CZ exposes his once-restless soul, one you will recognize in yourself, and gently leads us to Jesus' easy yoke.

AARON SHUST
recording artist; worship leader

CZ's work in this book is the perfect mix of utility and poetry. What you need and what you want at the same time.

PROPAGANDA
poet, activist, artist

I was in the “valley of the shadow of death” from 2014 to 2016. According to the charts and the awards, it was the biggest and most successful time of my life. According to my soul, it was the darkest and most hopeless time of my life. There were several factors that contributed to my descent into this pit of depression, including the death of a friend and my utter exhaustion from my travel schedule. But now that I am “Out of the Dark,” I know that I need to put some things in

place to ensure that I never go back there. Reading *Soul Rest: Reclaim Your Life. Return to Sabbath* by Curtis Zackery felt like a sweet whisper from God showing me the importance of true rest for my soul. To be honest, I never thought much about the importance of Sabbath. Reading CZ's personal stories made the valuable lessons he was teaching me feel less like a professor standing at a chalkboard and more like a friend sharing his story over a cup of tea. In our busy, rushed, American dream-driven society, *Soul Rest* is an important book every Jesus-follower should read.

MANDISA

Contemporary Christian recording artist

In *Soul Rest*, we are invited into a story that is raw, candid, and redemptive. Not only did I personally resonate with the tension, I found the insights fresh, buoyant, and full of hope. CZ has been my friend for many years. I've been urging him to write a book all that time. When you read it, you'll find out why.

DARREN WHITEHEAD

author of *Holy Roar* (with Chris Tomlin);
pastor of Church of the City, Nashville

There are plenty of books that tell us our lives are too busy and complex. This one actually tells us how to fix it. *Soul Rest* could not have been written at a better time. While our fast-paced lives keep getting faster, Curtis reminds us of the freedom and vibrancy that come when we rest in God and with God.

AARON IVEY

worship pastor of The Austin Stone;
author of *Steal Away Home*

Soul Rest is what the church desperately needs. God's rest rescued me from the idols of performance and turned me into a messenger of peace. I never want to go back. May the words on these pages settle deep.

REBEKAH LYONS

author of *You Are Free* and *Freefall to Fly*

Are you soul tired? If you want "more" from your rest, you need this book! Curtis Zackery opens up his heart, his life, and the word in such a way that he draws you into doing ministry out of a place of deep rest. *Soul Rest* is the journey of facing our false selves and living into our true selves in Christ so that life and ministry become a dance instead of a burden.

JR WOODWARD

national director of the V3 Church Planting Movement;
author of *Creating a Missional Culture*;
coauthor of *The Church as Movement*

This is a book everyone needs to read. Self-care is a lost art in today's world, and the Sabbath is something very few of us actually practice with intentionality. If we want to lead, we need to rest. If we want to live fulfilling lives, we need to rest. This book will refresh your heart and soul.

JARRID WILSON
pastor; author of *Love is Oxygen*

Rarely do you find a book that feels like it was written JUST for you. *Soul Rest* came at just the right time for me. Absolutely full of applicable wisdom and many insights I felt like I had never heard before. A must-read for those of us in full-time ministry!

CHRIS MCCLARNEY
worship leader, recording artist with Jesus Culture

Curtis Zackery comes alongside like a spiritual director, pastoring us towards the rest our soul desires. His careful diagnosis of the problem and practical solutions makes *Soul Rest* a must-read for anyone feeling the anxiety in a busy society.

GABE LYONS
president of Q;
author of *Good Faith*, *UnChristian* and *The Next Christians*

In *Soul Rest*, Curtis beautifully relates his story of walking through suffering and discovering rest in the midst of it. Curtis illuminates Sabbath, often misunderstood as a legalistic ritual, as a holy gift in which God comes near and works in us. With clarity, he addresses lament, holy discontent, what healthy community is, and more. I only wish I had read this book years ago.

AJ SWOBODA
pastor of Theophilus Church;
author of *Subversive Sabbath*

Soul Rest acknowledges that we are not alone in this journey and identifies that "it's ok to not be ok." This book is a much-needed reminder to take time to rest, especially our soul, which I myself ignore often. Curtis is an amazing friend, family man, and teacher.

MIKE TOMPKINS
recording artist, producer, and YouTuber

SOUL REST

RECLAIM YOUR LIFE.
RETURN TO SABBATH.

CURTIS ZACKERY



KIRKDALE PRESS



Soul Rest: Reclaim Your Life. Return to Sabbath.

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INTRODUCTION

REST FOR YOUR SOUL

On the surface, it probably seems like the last thing you need is a book to remind you of how tired and worn down you feel. And yet, somewhere deep down, you know that you are long overdue for a moment to stop and consider the condition of your heart. There are certainly enough things in this life that cause us to long for a bit of respite. Whether it's our kids' busy schedules, long hours at work, or the "always on" nature of our lives on social media, our culture is certainly not one that is restful by default. On top of all the regular day-to-day stresses, we also experience things like an emotional strain connected to financial issues, sickness in our families, or even deep fatigue from the turbulent state of our world. So much of our life requires that we keep pushing, striving, and moving forward in order to advance and never affords us the opportunity to consider the state of our soul.

We tend to think vacations will be enough to get us to the next season, only to start the countdown over again, looking forward to a time when we can possibly fulfill the dream of feeling rested. Even in those rest times, though, often we are really restless and dissatisfied with the way we rest. We want "more" from our resting. When we finally stop for a minute and consider, we realize that our need for rest goes far deeper than the surface.

What if there was hope that we could find real, true rest? What if we realized that our desire for rest goes back way further than we could imagine? What if God actually designed humanity to live and thrive from a restful place?

Spiritual fatigue is real as well, and, sadly, becoming more and more prevalent. Ministry burnout is increasingly common. With the enormous and unrealistic expectations that ministers and followers of Jesus are living under and placing on themselves in our culture, it only makes it seem like a matter of time before the other shoe drops and they give up. I often encounter people from all walks of life who identify themselves as followers of Jesus who say that they don't know if they can "do it" anymore. The "it," for many, is the ability to keep up with what is believed to be the successful Christian life. Usually, these thoughts are followed up with the confession that they are flat-out tired. What this can manifest is a growing sense of disillusionment with God and the church.

Some indicators of potentially heading toward an unhealthy place could be:

- You consistently find yourself feeling tired, and physical rest and vacation won't suffice.
- You find yourself withdrawing and increasingly turning to methods of self-medicating.
- You've become much sterner and find yourself laughing less, in general.
- You feel as though walking with and being in the presence of people—even your close friends—is draining.
- You've grown indifferent to emotional highs and lows.
- You are no longer satisfied by the things that used to produce rest and rejuvenation—they have become laborious.

This list is not exhaustive but could be a starting place to identify what might be happening. More than likely, though, if you are on your way toward burnout or spiritual fatigue, you don't need anyone to give you a list of attributes. You already know.

One of the most fundamental things that we can discover in our pursuit of God throughout the Scriptures is His desire for humanity to understand Sabbath and experience rest. Throughout the Old and New Testament, there is a thread that connects God's intention for us to pay attention to the significance of true soul rest in our lives. In this book, we will explore the ways rest and Sabbath are woven into the narrative of God's story and see how the implications of this affect our lives and our identity today. By this writing's end, you will see that our hope to find deep soul rest is one that is actually possible to be fulfilled.

I rejoice in the freedom we find when we discover our true identity, understand the gospel and practice real soul rest. I have never been more certain in my life that I am "just a beggar trying to show other beggars where the bread is." So, it is here, at the intersection of fear and faith, that I remember the words of Søren Kierkegaard: "Now, by the help of God, I shall become myself."¹

Friend, let this be your permission to stop and consider your soul's condition. Let this be your permission to find rest.

- PART 1 -

FINDING REST

CHAPTER 1

REACHING THE BOTTOM

I remember walking through the emergency room doors, thinking, “This cannot be real.” It was about two in the morning, and the waiting room was almost empty. I can remember the sterile hospital smell and the harsh fluorescent lights assaulting my senses as we walked into the building. These factors only added to the extreme unsettledness. I felt completely numb as we approached the counter to explain why we were there.

We were having a miscarriage.

It was the second time we had experienced this kind of loss. This time, we were only a few short weeks away from Christmas. We had been anticipating a joyful announcement of a little one, but now we would instead be navigating the landmines of pain in the aftermath of loss. As I sat there in the hospital, I felt utterly helpless. There was nothing I could do to alleviate the situation, as badly as I wanted to. In all actuality, I probably made the process even harder.

I handled the night of the second loss terribly. I had exhibited a sad mix of falsely positive encouragement and actions of denial to my bride. I should have been a way better listener. I should have been far more supportive in the words that I used when we engaged in the conversation about what we were going through. It was like I shifted into some Christian-autopilot mode. I was spouting out the party line of how “it

would all work out” and “it’s going to be okay,” all while not even considering whether I believed these things to be true. I could clearly feel the disconnect in our experience of what was happening, and yet I had no ability to stop it. My wife certainly felt alone and hurt by having to internally navigate this new reality alone. She was left to wonder what I must be thinking to be able to seem as though the weight of our loss was not affecting me deeply. I thought I could exert my will to carry us through the difficulties we were experiencing. But there was absolutely nothing that could wipe away the reality of the pain we were dealing with as a family.

I kept asking myself, “Why would the Lord allow this to happen?” I felt like I had been working so hard for God, only to receive this kind of treatment. We had moved across the country for Him. We had dedicated our lives to serve in ministry for Him. We had walked in purity in our relationship before marriage for Him and yet we had to suffer like this. I just didn’t understand it. Our experience with the loss was the last straw that helped to bring my discontent and unsettledness to the forefront of my life. I knew, plain and straightforward, that I couldn’t go on feeling like this and live the way that I was. Something had to change.

A few days later, as I was driving to a local coffee shop, I began feeling overwhelmed, lost, anxious, and exhausted. The crazy thing was, I couldn’t even really put my finger on why I was feeling all of this. It frustrated and confused me because I felt like I should be able to work my way out of these feelings. I was a follower of Jesus, a “good Christian guy,” and a leader in my local church. The more I tried to figure it all out, though, the more I felt like the hill that I was approaching was insurmountable. There wasn’t one thing that I could attribute my elevating discomfort to, but I certainly was aware of its growth. When I arrived at the coffee shop, I felt shaky as I stared up at the board, attempting to order. I sat down at the table and put my head in my hands. I began to assess areas of my life to see if there was simply some “blind spot” that I was missing in the flow of who I was. I didn’t think that there was any glaring or hidden sin issue that I hadn’t addressed. I had a loving wife who supported me in life and vocation. I had a job that I felt was necessary and purposeful. On the

surface, everything seemed okay. But why did it seem that I would never be able to cease the anxiety that was steadily rising?

IN MY STRENGTH

During the time that we experienced the two losses through miscarriage, we had the privilege of living in Richmond, California, a city filled with beautiful diversity, stories, and culture. Like many urban centers, though, many challenges were present in our neighborhood. In our role in ministry, we were able to participate in things like helping people find places to live, attending court cases with folks, and walking through addiction and recovery issues. We were doing the type of meaningful work and living the sort of life that I had wanted to live.

The problem was, I started to experience a bit of fatigue. Not just your regular physical fatigue, but something deeper that I wasn't able to fully identify. I was growing weary, and I didn't know the remedy. I didn't understand because in one sense I was having the time of my life, experiencing things that I had hoped to be able to experience for a long time. Initially, I shook it off, chalking it up to the idea that sometimes life and ministry are hard and you have to press through it. The more I attempted to do this, the more that I realized that this simply wasn't possible. The harder I tried, the more I was feeling exhausted in a "core of my being" type of way. The most ironic thing is that I was learning so much about the truth of the gospel and yet, I was attempting to serve Jesus in my own strength. I had great thoughts and ideas about how to serve Jesus, but I wasn't finding my source of strength in Him. The way I was working and living wasn't sustainable.

During our first year in Richmond, my wife and I began to discuss what it might look like for us to have a child. Not only had I hoped to grow our family, but I incorrectly thought this might help to alleviate some of the fatigue and unsettledness that we were feeling. We had been married for five years, and we were ready to open up the conversation about having children. Admittedly, we thought we were the ones that had control over when and where we had kids. We were sadly mistaken. I remember coming home on the day that my wife shared with me that

she was pregnant. The flood of emotions was overwhelming, and I honestly didn't know how to respond. I immediately began to feel the pending weight and responsibility of being a father, while also feeling the excitement of possibly bringing a little one into the world. We made an appointment to receive the official confirmation from the doctor. Between the time of that call and the time of the pending visit to the doctor, my wife began to realize that something was wrong. Upon arrival at the doctor, we knew that we had lost the pregnancy. Because it was such a whirlwind, I didn't know how to process my emotions. It was the first time that we had experienced anything like this. I didn't know what to do with the thoughts and feelings that were rising. There was one thing that I knew for absolute sure: I wanted to be a father. That experience deepened in me the love and desire for the thought of ever having a little one with us here on earth.

Some months passed, and we became pregnant again. Obviously, we were a bit gun shy because of our last experience, but we were hopeful this time might be different. We had an amazing doctor who allowed us to come as often as we would like throughout the process of the pregnancy. Because of the way that we can find out information at such an early stage in pregnancy nowadays, things that could potentially be problems were inconclusive. We heard so many times that something that the doctor saw could either be okay or could be a sign that something is wrong. For weeks, my wife and I would walk down a long hallway toward the doctor's office and walk back down that hallway with inconclusive results on what was happening. We were at home late one night when Monique realized that something was wrong again. It was then that we made our fateful trip to the emergency room. I will never forget what it felt like to experience this in a new city, far from anything that we had known for our whole lives, going through the unbearable pain of losing what we knew to be our child.

It turned out it wasn't just one thing that was the source of the unrest. It was everything. I slowly began to realize that I had placed unrealistic expectations on myself. The effort it took to be a "perfect Christian" began

to overwhelm every aspect of my life, and I had come to the conclusion that I couldn't find any way out.

HUSTLE MENTALITY

A lot of the language that I've heard lately in and around the American Christian subculture focuses on a hustle-hard mentality. What I mean is that there is a current message that the key to our success as Jesus followers is to work harder in our effort to make a difference for God. Our need to "grind it out for God" and always be "building for the kingdom" has created confusion around who the real Author and Builder of spiritual things is. This type of thinking can manifest itself in multiple ways. Even if it is not a direct line of teaching that tells us that we need to be earning God's pleasure with us through work, we have established a culture that measures our spirituality by our outward appearance and ability to produce measurable results. It seems as though we have become resigned to the fact that we will go, go, go, only to eventually use up all we have. I've even heard Christians justify this thought by saying that they will worry about resting when they're dead. The question is, does it have to be this way? Is this our only option as followers of Jesus? Granted, I believe that we should do all we can always to be working hard "as though unto the Lord" but be careful to consider all aspects of God's desire for us in this life. We see a great reminder of this in Psalm 127, which says, "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (v. 1).

We tend to speak as though we believe that God is the one who makes things happen, but live as though we are the most important factor in pulling it off. This results in a life in which we are unable to find rest. If we are continually in a state of unrest, we are never able to operate from the power and purpose connected to the work of Jesus. Our lives will always be filled with striving and trying to move things forward on our own plan, timeline, and strength. When we live in this way, it reflects our lack of trust that God can do the things He needs to do without us.

One of the most familiar passages of the Bible, Isaiah 40:30–31, is usually shared as an encouragement in this area, but in reality, it is a flashlight that shines on so many people’s disappointment. It says, “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted, but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” Sadly, most of us would say that doing what it takes to be in the presence of God in our view only deepens the fatigue. When our view of finding God’s pleasure is rooted in the work that we can do for Him, we are disenchanted and overwhelmed with what is meant to be encouraging and life giving.

I’ve always heard that when we’re tired, we’re more prone to make mistakes and poor decisions. This truth can manifest itself in our day-to-day lives in any field or vocation if we don’t get the rest that our bodies need. In many high-risk occupations, rest is regulated by governing organizations. I remember talking to a friend who drove a truck for a living. He spoke about the strict restrictions against making long trips without the proper rest being logged and accounted for. This process is for the safety of the driver, as well as those who are around them. If the drivers are too tired and make mistakes or poor decisions, the implications can have life-or-death consequences for them or others. My friend told me, though, that some “shady” companies don’t honestly comply with the rules. He said that they put forward the idea that they care about the driver’s health when they’re going through the hiring process, but when it comes down to it, they expect drivers to disregard the rules to accomplish ultimate goals in carrying the workload. If they are unwilling to “go the extra mile” in getting work done, they will lose their jobs.

When we are soul tired, all of these same principles hold true. There is such a high level of expectation for and from ministers and leaders, but it’s almost as though we forget that there needs to be a regulation on rest. We rarely pay attention to this in our own lives, and the expectations that we have for performance don’t lead us to believe that there can be true rest. In our lives, we do the equivalent of driving through the night on no rest to fulfill our unrealistic expectations for someone in our position.