

PART 1 - SABBATH OVERVIEW

READING*

*Adapted from Pete Scazzerro's *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*

Sabbath provides for us now the rhythm for an entire reorientation of our lives around the living God. On Sabbaths we imitate God by stopping our work and resting.

Keeping the command to Sabbath is both countercultural and extremely difficult in our everyday lives. It cuts to the core of our spirituality, the core of our convictions, the core of our faith, and the core of our lifestyles.

Like most, I always considered it an optional extra, not something absolutely essential to discipleship. But, living in a fallen world is much like being in a blizzard. Without the Sabbath, we easily find ourselves lost and unsure of the larger picture of God and our lives.

Keeping the Sabbath in Scripture is a commandment — right next to refraining from lying, murdering, and committing adultery. Sabbath is a gift from God we are invited to receive. Israel lived as slaves in Egypt for over four hundred years. They never had a day off. They were treated as tools of production to make pyramids. They were “doing” machines. They worked seven days a week all year long. Imagine how deeply ingrained activism and overwork must have been for them! They had never observed or experienced a rhythm of work and rest. They had neither permission nor the choice to do so. Living meant performing tasks, with one day blurring into the next.

When God called Israel out of Egypt, he affirmed they were sacred human beings made in his image. He then showed them how to live according to their God-given nature. In effect, God said, “It may feel awkward at first, but as a fish is created to live in water, I created you to live according to this design.”

God worked. We are to work. God rested. We are to rest. After completing his work of creating the heavens and earth, God rested on the seventh day. It was the climax of God's week in Genesis 1:1-2:4, and it is to be the climax of ours.

Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Moses proclaimed further that the very act of ceasing from work in the midst of all the surrounding nations was a sign of their liberation by God (see Deuteronomy 5:13ff). By the very act of refusing to succumb to the enormous pressure of Western culture around us, we too serve as a sign of a free people. We have been called out of a world trying to prove its worth and value by what it does or possesses. We are deeply loved by God for who we, not for what we do.

The Sabbath calls us to build the doing of nothing into our schedules each week. Nothing measurable is accomplished. By the world's standards it is inefficient, unproductive, and useless. As theologian Leonard Doohan stated, "To fail to see the value of simply being with God and 'doing nothing' is to miss the heart of Christianity."

The Sabbath was always a hallmark of the Jews throughout their history. This one act, perhaps more than any other, kept them from the pressure of the powerful cultures that have sought to assimilate them. For this reason it is often said that, for 3,500 years, the Sabbath has kept the Jews more than Jews have kept the Sabbath.

This is certainly not the case with Christians living in the twenty-first century. Sabbath, when lived, is our means as the people of God to bear witness to the way we understand life, its rhythms, its gifts, its meaning, and its ultimate purpose in God. Observing the Sabbath, we affirm: "God is the center and source of our lives. He is the beginning, the middle and the end of our existence."

Eugene Peterson points out even though Sabbath has been one of the most abused and distorted practices of the Christian life, we cannot do

without it. "Sabbath is not primarily about us or how it benefits us; it is about God and how God forms us. . . . I don't see any way out of it; if we are going to live appropriately in the creation we must keep the Sabbath."

The movement of STOP, REST, DELIGHT, AND WORSHIP are counter cultural practices that distinguish a "day off" from a biblical Sabbath. A secular Sabbath is to replenish our energies and make us more effective the other six days. A "day off" produces positive results but is, in Eugene Peterson's words, "a bastard Sabbath." We will use these movements as we develop a biblical framework for Sabbath that fits your particular life season, calling, and personality.

Summary of the article above and Adam's Sabbath Sermon (Sept 17):

- Sabbath is the weekly practice of setting aside a day to stop, rest, delight, and worship.
- Sabbath is a rhythm of resistance that makes space for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did.

DISCUSSION

- What stood out to you from this reading/from Sunday's sermon on Sabbath?
- How is the biblical practice of Sabbath different from our culture's view of a weekend or a day off?
- What is your experience with the practice of Sabbath?
- What makes Sabbath hard to engage? What are some of the barriers

PART 2 - STOPPING

READING

The most literal meaning of the Hebrew verb shabbat is "to stop." To sabbath is, at its most basic, to stop, to cease, to be done. **Sabbath is a day of "stopping."**

Yet most of us can't stop until we are finished whatever it is we think we need to do. We need to complete our projects and term papers, answer our e-mails, return all phone messages, complete the balancing of our check books to pay our bills, finish cleaning the house. There's always one more goal to be reached before stopping.

On Sabbath we embrace our limits. God is God. He is indispensable. I am his creature. The world continues working fine when I stop.

We think, Maybe I will stop when our children grow into adults and are on their own, when I have enough saved to buy our first home, when I retire and . . . The list goes on.

We stop on Sabbaths because God is on the throne, assuring us the world will not fall apart if we cease our activities. Life on this side of heaven is an unfinished symphony. We accomplish one goal and then immediately are confronted with new opportunities and challenges. But ultimately we will die with countless unfinished projects and goals. That's okay. God is at work taking care of the universe. He manages quite well without us having to run things. When we are sleeping, he is working. So he commands us to relax, to enjoy the fact that we are not in charge of his world, that even when we die, the world will continue on nicely without us. Every Sabbath reminds us to "be still and know that [He] is God" (Psalm 46:10) and to stop worrying about tomorrow (see Matthew 6:25-33). The core spiritual issue in stopping revolves around trust. Will God take care of us and our concerns if we obey him by stopping to keep the Sabbath?

The story is told of a wagon train of Christians traveling on its way from St. Louis to Oregon. They observed the habit of stopping for the Sabbath during the autumn but as winter approached the group began to panic in fear they would not reach their destination before the snows began. A number of members of the group proposed they should quit the practice of stopping for the Sabbath and travel seven days a week. This caused an argument in the community until it was finally decided to divide the wagon train into two groups. One group would observe the Sabbath day as before and not travel. The other would press on. Which group arrived in Oregon first? Of course—the ones who kept the Sabbath.

Both the people and their horses were so rested by their Sabbath observance they could travel much more efficiently the other six days.

When I trust God and obey his commands, he provides. Jesus takes our loaves and fishes that we offer him, even though they are insufficient to feed the multitudes, and somehow miraculously and invisibly multiplies them. We can trust him enough to stop.

OUR 1ST SABBATH PRACTICE

Pick a time to stop working and try sabbath in the next 2 weeks.

One of the great dangers of faithfully observing Sabbath is legalism. What about nurses, doctors, police officers, and others who must work on Sundays? Jesus observed Sabbath but he also healed the sick and preached sermons on that day. What might be work for you may be different for someone else. Some people will have to choose another day besides Saturday or Sunday if it is to be a day without work.

The apostle Paul seemed to think one day would do as well as another (see Romans 14:1-17). What is important is to select a time period and protect it!

Step One:

Pick a time to stop working and try sabbath.. There are three basic options.

- 1. The Christian Sabbath on Sunday, which is a good option for many of us since it's also our day of worship.*
- 2. The traditional Sabbath from sundown on Friday night to the same time on Saturday.*
- 3. The midweek Sabbath for those with non-traditional work schedules.*

If an entire day is too much for you, that's fine. Start where you are. We recommend you set aside a three-to-four hour time period, either after our gathering on Sunday or on a weekend night, turn off your phone, and just stop. If at all possible, get into a rhythm with Sabbath on the same day each week. Your body will "memorize" the day, begin to anticipate it in the days before, and live off its energy and joy in the days after. In biblical theology, the day begins at sundown, not sunrise as in the modern mindset. By the end of the week, many of us are too exhausted to really enjoy our Sabbath. For that reason, we recommend you begin at night, if at all possible.

A few things to remember:

- 1) Start where you are, not where you "should" be. If a full 24 hours is too much, start with a half day; if that's too much, start with a few hours.*
- 2) You get out what you put in. The more fully you give yourself to this Practice, the more life-changing it will be. The more you just dabble with it, the more shortcuts you take, the less of an effect it will have on your transformation.*

3) *Remember the J-curve. Experts on learning tell us that whenever we set out to master a new skill, it tends to follow a J-shaped curve; we tend to get worse before we get better. If you currently enjoy your Sunday routine or day off, don't be surprised if your first few Sabbaths are awkward and difficult. Just stay with the practice; you will come around.*

DISCUSSION:

- How does the invitation to stop sound to you?
 - What are some things we might need to *stop* or say "no" to in order to say "yes" to sabbath?
 - Practically, when do you think you want to try Sabbathing in your week?
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GOSPEL IDENTITY

Leaders can facilitate any necessary follow up conversations about committing to gospel identities and establishing roles. Visit the last Community Guide for details.

PART 4 - WRAP UP (10 MINS)

Quick overview of the next few weeks

- Week of 9/25 - Huddles: Sabbath Reflection
- Week of 10/2 - FREE NIGHT
- Week of 10/9 - Huddles
- Week of 10/16 - Community

Brainstorm how you'll share your free night on week of 10/2.