

GETTING STARTED

Do you ever feel like there is just too much to get done and too few hours in a day to get it all done to slow down, disconnect from the world, and connect more closely with the Lord? How easy is it for you to “rest” from your work one day a week for the purpose of drawing near to God and refreshing yourself in Him?

“Sabbath is not dependent upon our readiness to stop. We do not stop when we are finished. We do not stop when we complete our phone calls, finish our project; get through this stack of messages, or complete this report that is due tomorrow. We stop because it is time to stop. Sabbath requires surrender. If we only stop when we are finished with all our work, we will never stop – because our work is never completely done. With every accomplishment there arises a new responsibility If we refuse rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it liberates us from the need to be finished We stop because there are forces larger than us that take care of the universe, and while our efforts are important, necessary, and useful, they are not (nor are we) indispensable. The galaxy will somehow manage without us for this hour, this day, and so we are invited – nay commanded – to relax, and enjoy our relative unimportance, our humble place at the table in a very large world Do not be anxious about tomorrow, Jesus said again and again. Let the work of this day be sufficient Sabbath says, Be still. Stop. There is no rush to get to the end, because we are never finished.”

- Wayne Muller, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

- What is your greatest fear in stopping for a twenty-four hour period each week?
- What might be some benefits/blessings of incorporating a Sabbath *rhythm* to your life?

DISCUSSION

The Hebrew word *sabat* means "to rest or stop or cease from work." The origin of the Sabbath goes back to Creation. After creating the heavens and the earth in six days, God "rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made" (Genesis 2:2). This doesn't mean that God was tired and needed a rest. We know that God is omnipotent, literally "all-powerful." He has all the power in the universe, He never tires, and His most arduous expenditure of energy does not diminish His power one bit.

- So, what does it mean that God *rested* on the seventh day?
- Explain how Jesus is to be our Sabbath *rest* (Hebrews 4, Matthew 11:28-30). What work are we to be *resting from* or *ceasing* when we are *in Christ*?
- What events were tied to the Sabbath remembrance in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 and how would remembering these have strengthened their faith, worship of God, and witness to the world?

“Sabbath was intended to shape our lives as liberated people. The fourth commandment calls for a day of rest – even for people who had been enslaved. The Deuteronomy reason for Sabbath-keeping is that our ancestors in Egypt went for four hundred years without a vacation (Deut 5:15). Never a day off. The consequence: they were no longer considered persons but slaves. Hands. Work units. Not persons created in the image of God but equipment for making brick and building pyramids. Humanity was defaced. Keeping the Sabbaths is meant to be an experience of the truth that you are not a “doing machine”, but a deeply loved son or daughter of God. He is not interested in simply using you to get work done; God delights in you. He provides free time once a week so that you might relish your release from all forms of oppression and slavery.”

- Peter Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

- How did the religious leaders in Jesus' day distort the Sabbath and turn into an oppressive religious ritual instead of a joyful, refreshing celebration?
- What are your thoughts about God creating us to live in this rhythm of working for six days and ceasing work on the seventh day?
- How might the truth that God doesn't want to use you, but to enjoy you, give you a renewed vision for celebrating the Sabbath principle?

The commandment to keep the Sabbath holy did not mean that the other days of the week and their activities were unholy. The Sabbath was to remind Israel that human beings were dependent on God, and that they have strong tendencies to exalt themselves and their accomplishments, to turn them into gods—to borrow an OT expression. In today's terms, we might say that our pursuits become addictions. The Sabbath enforced a day of rest and worship in the weekly cycle to keep their focus on the Lord rather than on themselves and their accomplishments. Sunday, as the Lord's Day, can help Christians set boundaries on who and what we worship and make the god of our lives.

– Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary

This commandment is the only one of the Ten not repeated in the New Testament and Paul argued against enforcing it (Romans 14:5-6; Colossians 2:16-17). The day of worship was changed in the early church to the first day of the week, in commemoration of Christ's resurrection. The temporary nature of the command regarding the Sabbath is due to the fact that it served as a "sign" of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 31:12-17). After the Mosaic Covenant was done away with there was no longer a need for its "sign." In its place Christians have the Lord's Supper as the "sign" of the New Covenant.

- The Bible Knowledge Commentary

- How might we apply the principles of the Sabbath into our daily, weekly, monthly rhythms while steering clear of oppressive legalism?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to grab hold of You today. I need You. Set me free to begin reorienting my life around You, and You alone. Help me to pay attention to and honor how you have uniquely made me. Thank You for the gift of rest.

Lord, You know how difficult it is for me to be in silence before You. At times it feels almost impossible, given the demands, distractions, and noise all around me. I invite You to lead me to a quiet place, silent before You – to a place I can hear You as Elijah did in 1 Kings 19:11-12.

Lord, I thank You that You are working even when I am sleeping. Teach me to respect the built-in rhythms of life, and to live from a place of deep rest in You.

Keeping the Sabbath, Lord, will require a lot of changes in the way I am living. Teach me, Lord, how to take the next step with this in a way that fits my unique personality and situation. Help me to trust You with all that will remain unfinished and to enjoy my humble place in Your very large world.

Lord, show me how to welcome Your presence, not only one day a week, but every day. Train me for eternity. Grant me a taste of heaven through the experience of true Sabbath rest.