



Sabbath

Reclaiming God's Rest for Our Lives

Help! I'm Overwhelmed!

Have you ever wanted to escape? Do the burdens and demands of life feel overwhelming, but you can't possibly envision a way to lessen them? Do you feel exhausted, like 24 hours is not enough time to accomplish the work set before you? Are your relationships suffering because you live at such a fast pace and high level of activity? Or maybe you have a lot of leisure time on your hands, but still feel unrested and discontent. If you resonate with any of these sentiments, a fresh restoration of the soul is in order. Perhaps it's time to consider the discipline of Sabbath.

Isaiah 30:15-16 says *"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.' Therefore, you will flee!"* Likely, your circumstances won't allow you to just escape from the stresses of life. More importantly, throwing in the towel isn't the answer God provides. Mark Buchanan writes in *The Rest of God*, "God's solution is surprising. He offers rest. But it's a unique form of rest. It's to rest in him in the midst of our threats and our burdens" (2006). God's solution is one of total rest and dependence in Him. His solution is the Sabbath.

What is Sabbath?

When God first ordered the universe, He crafted it to include a day of rest. God Himself ceased His creative activity to rest and enjoy His completed work. He also created people to work, and for work to be a blessing. Notice in Genesis 1:28 that God's mandate to humans to have dominion over the earth came before the fall of man, before sin entered the world and work becomes a burden. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, it disrupted the beautiful rhythm of joyful, purposeful work and rest.

The Israelites felt this disruption acutely during their 400 years of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1). They had no rest and the Egyptian masters ruled them harshly. When God rescued the Israelites out of Egypt and brought them to Mt. Sinai, He imparted to them a code of ethics that reflected their new status as the chosen children of God. The Ten Commandments are an affirmation of their royal standing before God Almighty. They are an invitation to the hope, dignity, love, order, and rest of God. God's restoration for His image bearers included the fourth commandment: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy (Exodus 20:8).

Why Should I Keep Sabbath?

What does it mean to keep the Sabbath holy? For Israel, they established laws that prohibited work in order to preserve the sanctity of the day. However, over time their Sabbath laws increased and morphed into yet another system of slavery. When Jesus came to earth, He re-established true Sabbath. He healed and restored those who were broken (Buchanan 2006), and He ultimately purchased rest for our souls when He died on the cross. Jesus identified Himself as the source, the ultimate Sabbath: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for*



I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"(Matthew 11:28-30). Sabbath is God-centered. It is an entering into His arms-wide-open invitation of grace so that we might cease from our God-given work and enjoy Him.

According to the original commandment, Sabbath is to be kept "Holy." And rightly so! Imagine the first week of creation, when the earth hummed and glowed with the light of new life. For six days, a joyful cacophony of new birth erupted across the earth—the deafening chatter of the first birds, newborn rivers running down mountain slopes, innumerable creatures rambling across unpolluted earth, and perhaps most glorious of all, the bringing forth of the image of God in man and woman. Yet after all this, there is a pause. A holy silence and ceasing from the work of creation. I imagine this day to be both profoundly silent and profoundly loud. I imagine that everyone paused to honor the stillness of morning, but that by lunchtime it was a party. I can't be too sure, but I wonder if Adam and Eve played fetch with their newly-named "dog" and God taught them the game of golf on the first expanses of perfect green grass. Maybe they hiked and explored mountains for the first time, and I have no doubt they ate and enjoyed their first taste of pineapple so sweet that to us it would seem otherworldly. After that day, God released mankind into his work of ruling over the earth, and the boundaries of that holy day were set.

When we think of the first Sabbath, it inspires us to sanctify it and to avoid its desecration at all costs. It's true that the reality of sin and the harshness of the fallen world has stolen this aspect of paradise from us. But because we are God's people, He invites us to reclaim the rest that was lost, and to reconnect to heaven through it.

How do I Keep Sabbath?

So how can we remember the Sabbath and keep it holy? First, sanctify the time. Make it holy. Set aside an allotment of time each week, and guard it as holy. You might not be able to give an entire day at first. It takes time to change our rhythms. You might try a half a day, or even two hours. But what do you do during those two hours?

Some wise people have made it really simple: Pray and Play. Incorporate elements of worship into your Sabbath time. You might begin the time with a thanks-filled prayer to commit the time to God. Maybe you'll listen to worship music, read your Bible, attend a church service, or be in fellowship with other believers. Be creative, worship through artwork, music, or a walk in the woods. Then take time to play. This is different than mere leisure because it is purposeful and sanctified, or committed to God (Buchanan 2006). Because of sin, even leisure time can feel tiresome and purposeless. But holy play is restorative. Do activities that you enjoy and that restore your soul. Hike, go to a coffee shop with friends, play basketball, eat a good meal, read a book you enjoy, spend time with family.

Keeping Sabbath might seem counter-intuitive, especially in a culture that encourages us to fill every minute of our time with busyness. But when we honor this commandment of God, I truly believe miracles happen. It forms in us a value of the heart, and it restores us to our position as children of God. We learn to rest and depend on God, and to worry less about our to-do lists. A wise person once told me, "There is plenty of time for God to do His will." Sabbath reminds us of who holds time and who is really at work in our lives. I challenge you to consecrate time in your schedule for a Sabbath, and find God's timing to be sufficient. Rather than flee the crazy world that swirls around us, let's sanctify some time and find a refuge in that holy time of resting in God.

Relevant Scriptures



Genesis 2:3
Exodus 20:8
Deuteronomy 5:12-15
Isaiah 58:13-14
Mark 2
Hebrews 4:1-11

Questions for Reflection

- Why do you think God modeled the Sabbath in the first week of creation?
- How has the fallenness of the world stolen Sabbath from you?
- How would you define the term “holy”? What does it mean to “sanctify” time?
- What does it mean for you personally that Jesus is the ultimate source of Sabbath?
- What activities would you incorporate in your own personal Sabbath?

Recommended Reading

The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath by Mark Buchanan.

