

Sabbath

Week 2: Ceasing

Read this aloud together:

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Option: Watch “Week 2 video” (4:44) before reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWQtrwiKVvY&feature=youtu.be>

“We start with the importance of ceasing on a day set apart as holy because the name *Sabbath* comes originally from the Hebrew verb *Shabbat*, which means primarily ‘to cease or desist.’ In Exodus 31:16-17 we are told that ‘the Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant’ because it is a ‘sign between me [the LORD] and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.’ Hebrew scholars translate the last phrase as ‘he ceased and was refreshed.’ Genesis 2:2 literally says that God “ceased” [doing] the seventh day...

Sabbath ceasing [is ceasing] not only from work itself, but also from the need to accomplish and be productive, from the worry and tension that accompany our modern criterion of efficiency, [and] from our efforts to be in control of our lives as if we were God... [Sabbath practice can help us] recognize the great healing that can take place in our lives when we get into the rhythm of setting aside every seventh day all of our efforts to provide for ourselves and make our way in the world. **A great benefit of Sabbath keeping is that we learn to let God take care of us – not by becoming passive and lazy, but in the freedom of giving up our feeble attempts to be God in our own lives.”**

Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, p.3

“Obeying God’s rhythms of rest for our lives brings life not only to our spirits but also to our minds, bodies, and emotions...Sabbath is resting from striving.

How could we be so tired [when not doing physical work]? Because our work is different. So much of our work is *mind work*. Most of our tiredness is mental exhaustion. Our brains need a sabbath, especially from a content-driven culture in which we are bombarded with more ideas and information than at any other time in human history...The great irony [when we do not do physical work] is that we seem to be more tired than ever. It just so happens that the kind of exhaustion most feel today is not of a physical type but of an emotional and psychological type.

To sabbath is to put into context the things that we think are important and to remember that they are not ultimate. God is ultimate. Our emotional burdens are not.

On the sabbath...we are returning to God the responsibilities that he has given us to hold for a time, and we are returning to God, whom our ultimate responsibility is toward...[the] purpose is to guard us from carrying the world’s weight on the sabbath.

A.J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, p. 47, 54, 56, 59, 60

The invitation to sabbath rest is the invitation to reclaim our humanity, to delight, and to flourishing. Taking sabbath reminds us we are not slaves, so why do we live like we are—slaves to productivity, efficiency, to

accomplishing? Sabbath ceasing means enacting and practicing the trust that you are not God and that you are still worthy and *it will all be ok* even when you are no longer working, producing, or “being useful.” Make the sabbath a delight, Isaiah invites us.¹

“Work” is the primary thing we do to advance our own cause during the week—to make money, to make our name great, to achieve our own goals, to supply our own needs.

For some of us, work is going to class and doing homework. For others of us, work is email, meetings, projects or writing. For still others of us, we work at our play—musicians, artists, or athletes.

If you create art for your work, rest from that during sabbath. If you sit at a desk for work, move your body during sabbath.

Sabbath is about learning to say no to be able to say yes. No to non-stop striving, yes to rest and flourishing.² The Heidelberg Catechism (one of the confessions of the Reformed tradition that helps us engage the Word of God) tells that an element of our Sabbath practice is meant for us to “rest from our sin” (Q&A 103).

What happens when we stop striving and working to control the things around us? When we don’t produce results, or multitask? Consider this: when we cease trying to make or provide for ourselves in the world, we are acknowledging that it is God’s world. In imitating God in ceasing and resting, we remember that we are not God while imitating God who rested.

Some discussion questions for your group:

1. How was it with this first/early attempt to keep sabbath this past week? What went well, what was hard? What do you want to adjust for this next week?
2. What are the primary ways in which you work?
3. Do you crave rest? What would it be like to always know there *is* a rest coming up every 6 days?
4. “How might you be able to partner with God in bringing about the answer to your own prayer for rest?”³
5. What are the primary ways in which you play?
6. “Identify situations, environments, and relationships where you do not feel free to say no.”⁴
7. What is your greatest worry for the future? How are you trying to secure that future?
8. Does the impulse to produce and consume define your life?

PRACTICE: Write it down

1. **What is one thing you can cease from during your sabbath day this week?** (screens, homework, email, social media, phone, shopping, worrying, etc.)
2. **What is one way you can play this week?** (A walk outside, play with kids outside?) Write it down on a strip of paper. Keep it till next week.

Closing Prayer:

Lord of the Sabbath, it is hard for us to stop striving, to stop working, and harder still to stop worshipping work and idolizing our own efforts. We confess that our busyness often substitutes for our holiness. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to be still enough to know you. Help us to understand that the sabbath is what keeps us from unraveling, that it knits up the harried and makes us holy, that it helps to heal creation from the fall. Amen.

Closing prayer adapted from “Sabbath as Delight in Creation” www.ChristianEthics.ws

¹ Isaiah 58:13-14

² Swoboda, 45

³ Swoboda, 61.

⁴ Swoboda, 61