



Sabbath as Rhythm of Life

The practice of Sabbath is a rhythm of life that was intentionally woven into God's design for the world from the very beginning. Genesis 2 says that "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation." Not only has God called us to engage in caring for his Creation and Kingdom, but in his goodness he also set apart a time for holy rest. This is more than just physical rest, but soul rest. In the following passages, the prophet Isaiah speaks to the true spirit behind Sabbath in how God designed it. Because the people of Israel were inclined to turn Sabbath into a list of things you should or should not do, they often neglected to see Sabbath as an invaluable source of life. If hearing and obeying God's Word is the roadmap for God's people in exile, then practicing Sabbath becomes the way by which God sustains us through it. It becomes an intentional time to take the false narratives shouted at us from culture and replace them with the truths of God's redemption, grace, and compassion gently revealed in his Word, but it's also a moment to step away from the chaotic demands of everyday life and simply enjoy the presence of Christ in our lives.

Read: Isaiah 56:1-2 and 58:13-14

Questions for Reflection:

1. According to Isaiah, what are the elements of Sabbath that God cares about?
2. What are the ways in which you engage in Sabbath? How do you feel afterwards, and why is that?
3. God calls us to keep justice and do righteousness on the Sabbath – what ways, big or small, can you emphasize this as you engage Sabbatical rest?

"The transforming power of Sabbath calls us to dance and celebrate life just because we are participants in it. Sabbath is the weekly time when we can put our books down, our phones off, and our calendars shut so that we can feast and pray, play and take a nap. When we come out on the other side of Sabbath, we realize that the world has not fallen off its axis. The world keeps running because God is sustaining it not us.

The day after Sabbath when all the work is there waiting for us, we come to it less weary, less burdened, and rested."

– Rick McKinley, Faith for this Moment

Prayer:

Father, thank you for inviting me to participate in the work you're doing in this world, but also for the gift of holy rest. Open my eyes to see how valuable this is as a source of life and nourishment, and help me engage Sabbath in a way that glorifies you. Amen.



Sabbath as Rest in Christ

In the face of a face-paced, rapidly changing culture, it can be incredibly easy to get swept up in the midst of it. We're constantly being barraged with more work and the anxieties of this are often toxic and emotionally draining. Work - even meaningful work - has the potential to wear us down over time. But Jesus, who called himself the Lord of the Sabbath, invites us to experience a far greater alternative. In the Old Testament, keeping the Sabbath was the sign of Israel's covenant with God, but in the following passage Paul describes the former Sabbath as merely a shadow of Christ. Now that Jesus has fulfilled the Law, we have the opportunity to experience a Sabbath rest like never before - that is, delighting in Jesus himself. We can step away from the rat-race in full assurance that not only is rest permitted by God, but that he's calling us to rest in Him. Sabbath then becomes a way that we sit at the feet of Jesus, experience his peace and restoration, and allow him to resurrect every hollow and barren place in our lives into something beautiful.

Read: Colossians 2:6-17

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you really believe it's okay to step away from work for a day? And does your practice of the Sabbath reflect this belief?
2. Even though God no longer sends manna from the heavens to feed his people, what are ways that God makes provisions for you to enjoy Sabbath free from worry?
3. If you struggle with setting aside time each week to rest in Christ and reflect on his Word, why is that and what steps -big or small- could you take to address this?

"When despair grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."

Wendell Berry, "The Peace of Wild Things"

Prayer:

Jesus, you are my heart's desire. Convict me of the ways I have ignored you for the sake of my own prerogative. Remind me once again of your beauty and help me to step away from the noise of this world, if only for a moment, to simply sit at your feet and delight in who you are. Amen.



Sabbath as Holy Engagement

Instead of viewing Sabbath as solely a time of self-care, or simply a lack of work, a more robust understanding of practicing the Sabbath would be holy engagement in what sustains the people of God individually and together. In this sense, we practice the Sabbath for our own benefit, but also for the benefit of our brothers and sisters. We can't freely love others when our own tank is depleted, so we must make intentional efforts to replenish our spirits for the sake of the Body. But because of the diversity of God's people, engaging in Sabbath rest might look differently for everyone, and that's okay. The following passage reminds us that the Sabbath is not a one-size-fits-all practice, but that the golden thread between everyone is mercy and good will. Let us each find our own unique way to experience the rest that Jesus offers our souls, with the hope that we can then radiate the life-giving spirit of Christ outwards to others.

Read: Matthew 12:1-14

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does Jesus justify working on the Sabbath and why is that significant?
2. What are the unique ways that you connect with Jesus and delight in his presence?
3. What are the implications for viewing the Sabbath as a central practice done for the benefit of other people?

"If the devil cannot make us bad, he will make us busy."

– Corrie Ten Boom

"God's creation is a life-giving inhale for all of us, and Sabbath is the exhale."

- Shelly Miller

Prayer:

Jesus, when I don't feel like participating in Sabbath, remind me that it's not just about me. Recall to my heart all those whose lives I'm invested in, and help me to keep

their interests before my own. Help me to love the Church as much as you do and give me grace as I practice recklessly loving them in your image. Amen.



Sabbath as Communal Activity

While practicing the Sabbath starts with the individual, it's most fully expressed in the context of God's family gathered together. When we take the time to pause and reflect as a Body intricately bound together, it reminds us of our identity as the family of God. Just as baptism is the outward declaration of the inward reality of your salvation, so celebrating Sabbath together becomes a demonstration of the Church's collective identity as a people set apart to experience freedom. In the following passage, the people of God not only gathered together to read and reflect the word of God, but to share life with one another. They ate together, studied Scripture together, wept together, and rejoiced together. When we practice Sabbath with one another, specifically focused on hearing the Word of God, we grow together as a unified Body, and our love for one another deepens and strengthens.

Read: Nehemiah 8:1-12

Questions for Reflection:

1. What role did other people play in turning the collective mourning into joy?
2. What significance did studying Scripture together play in this story?
3. If you're experiencing grief, sadness, or hard times, where can you reach out to someone in the Church? Likewise, where can you lend your guidance and reassurance to help someone in need?

"Sabbath is a time when all of the other practices fold into each other in a meaningful way. Sabbath is a time when we can sit together and hear God's Word, and discern together what obeying a particular promise or command might look like. It is a time when we gather others around our table to show them hospitality, to give gifts to one another in simple generosity, to cease from work as we reflect that work is a sacred calling and resting from it keeps our vocation holy. In the same way, if we are committed to practicing Sabbath then all of the other practices tend to fall in line. Sabbath is the golden thread that God gives us to hold our faith together in a holistic way. When we practice it we are transformed by it."

– Rick McKinley, Faith for this Moment

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for your Church because I could not live a life worthy of you without their help! Bind our hearts together as we focus on you, and open my eyes to ways that I can serve, support, and encourage my brothers and sisters along the way. Amen.



Sabbath as Community Engagement

If we believe that Sabbath rest is an essential rhythm to our lives, then Sabbath not only serves for our benefit, but it offers our culture an alternative way to be in the world but not consumed by it. It's a way to witness to those around us that working and accumulating more and more doesn't necessarily equate to becoming better versions of ourselves. Because of its sacred distinctiveness, the following passage shows how fiercely the people of God protected Sabbath. They recognized its significance and power in their lives and took the necessary measures to prevent it from being trampled on. Ultimately, people notice when you choose to step away from the busy demands of life for a relationship with Jesus. They notice when you take a day for self-care or when you say no to plans because you're going to church. They might not say it right away, but they're observing how your choices to engage in Sabbatical rest are directly related to the person you are the rest of the week. And as you continue to make Sabbath a regular rhythm in your life, you will have answered their question, "Is it worth it?"

Read: Nehemiah 13:15-22

Questions for Reflection:

1. What measures do you take to ensuring that Sabbath is a central heartbeat in your weekly life?
2. How could you use the practice of Sabbath as a means to be salt and light in the community around you?

"Sabbath is not simply a pause. It is an occasion for reimagining all of social life away from coercion and competition to compassionate solidarity."

- Walter Brueggemann

"Our labor here is brief, but the reward is eternal. Do not be disturbed by the clamor of the world, which passes like a shadow. Do not let false delights of a deceptive world deceive you."

- Clare of Assisi

Prayer:

Jesus, I pray that how I practice Sabbath would be a reflection of how much I love you. Humble me during the moments I've gone astray, and use my life as a witness to those around me. May your Sabbath continue to advance your Kingdom and be a beacon shining life into darkness around me. Amen.