

Rest

Exodus 20:8-11

⁸Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

¹⁰But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

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In the past few weeks we have been talking about very important matters.

First is God's resurrection power that stands ready to work in us. God loves us as we are and yearns to work in us that we may enjoy the fruits of the Spirit.

We've also talked about the great needs of the world and how God uses the gifts we have to meet basic needs of those who are hurting. Many of you have been inspired to talk about your interest to do mission in our area or to be considered for a future trip. Some of you have spoken to me about some of the needs we see in our community and about what our church can do about them.

And today, we honor moms who have the job description that begins with the word: primary. Moms are often the primary

caregiver for children,
keeper of the house,
manager of the family calendar, and
one who diagnoses family needs.

These and other important matters of life depend on a person having vital energy. And that's what we'll talk about today.

I understand that if you put a frog in a pan with water and turn on the heat at a low temperature that the frog does not realize what's happening until he's cooked.

I guess that in some ways, we're like frogs. Here are parts of conversations I had THIS week:

Monday: A man said, "A colleague just told me that I'm giving a presentation to 200 people including my boss...tomorrow morning."

Wednesday: Another person said, "My office used to employ 30 people doing what our current team of 6 does...and we have more work now than we ever had!"

Thursday: "I'm tired and I'm stressed. I keep thinking that things will slow down and they're just getting busier."

Thursday night: I said to someone, “I hope you feel better soon”. She said, “I don’t know; we’re out Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights with the kids and Tuesday and Thursday evening with my husband’s work.”

Friday: Someone said, “When the end of the week comes, I’m wiped out. I just need more sleep.”

Have you ever noticed how many conversations we have about our time or about being tired?

In Seminary counseling classes we were told to pay attention to things that people repeated and people are repeating these issues.

Like frogs in water, we don’t always realize how hot the water is getting.

Sometimes it is not our schedules, but the symptoms of fatigue that let us know we’re getting boiled.

One man said to me this week, “Steve, I’ve never said it to my wife in these words, but when I begin the day at 7 a.m. and get home at 9:30 p.m. I think, ‘honey, I just don’t have energy to talk tonight.’”

Not long ago, I heard someone described as one would a horse. He looks “rode hard and put up wet”.

When we feel rode hard and put up wet, we are
impatient,
avoid people,
feel emotional,
want to play hard, or
eat more, or
just get away.

These are all symptoms that our schedule is getting hot and we could get cooked.

We’re all vulnerable to it.

Most likely we all feel it at some time.

None of us are experts at solving it.

But there’s something we can do.

It is something that our faith tradition has bequeathed to us and something that people have not only talked about but practiced and learned well.

It is so important that God saw fit to make it a commandment. It happens to be the longest commandment. It calls us to Sabbath.

The Hebrew word “Sabbath” has a simple meaning: to rest, to stop, to cease activity.

Before we rest from anything, the commandment calls us to remember the Sabbath.

Like remembering our roots before planning the family reunion, remembering the Sabbath reminds us that it has history before us.

Specifically, it began with God. God worked six days with creation and then rested.

Frankly, I don’t know how long God’s days were or what God at rest looks like. But what it says to me is that Lord of Lords, King of Kings, God of gods was not about perpetual work.

Furthermore, the creation story tells us that what God had created was good and reliable. Adam and Eve’s neighborhood was filled with provisions that made rest possible.

It was doable because God had already provided everything that was needed for their rest.

Remembering the Sabbath connects us to God’s rhythm of work and rest, and we remember that Sabbath is possible because of the generosity of God.

The commandment also tells us that the Sabbath is not just to be a stoppage in our work; it is a “Sabbath to the Lord” and is intended to nurture us in God.

Someone described Sabbath as stopping and savoring God’s love, God’s way, God’s world, and our peace in God’s care.

Marva Dawn rightly observes that it is impossible to rest if our spirits are troubled. When we return to the grace of God and know the freedom that God gives, we are rooted and oriented in such a way that we truly can rest.

While this is a Sabbath to the Lord, Jesus helped people to see that what God had in mind was not hard and fast rules. He said, “The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath.”

Sabbath is about resting in God and being renewed by God in that rest.

The basic principle is that our Sabbath is to be different from the other days of the week. It is not to be the same pace in a different place. We’re to stop what we normally do.

The stopping of our normal work gives us opportunity for spiritual, intellectual, emotional and relational rest.

Such are the ways to be renewed by God as King David spoke in the psalm.

“²You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.
³True to your word,
you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.¹

Sabbath allows us to be renewed by God, catching our breath, and, in the course of it, being set in the right direction.

In her book, Keeping the Sabbath Wholly, Marva Dawn describes what she has discovered in her life. Beyond the pattern of work and rest, she recognizes that following her Sabbath she savors the Sabbath blessing.

For about three days after her Sabbath she remembers and rejoices in her Sabbath activities.

Like looking at the pictures of a great family vacation, Dr. Dawn talks about savoring her Sabbath memories.

And then, for the remaining three days of work, she anticipates how she will spend her coming Sabbath.

In that way, the Sabbath’s one day of renewal can sustain and energize us throughout our six days of work.

Now that we remember the Sabbath in these specific ways, how is it possible?

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God calls us to Sabbath and our first task is to establish a day for our resting in God.

When Moses gave the people God’s commandments that included Sabbath, it was observed on the day we call Saturday. Their way of marking the days meant that Sabbath began at sundown on Friday evening and continued until sundown the next day.

If you think about God’s creation of the world in six days and then resting on the 7th day, Jesus’ rest was in the tomb and then raised on the eighth day or the first day of the new creation.

Soon Jesus’ followers gathered together each week on what they called “The Lord’s Day”, Sunday, to celebrate his resurrection and this start of the new creation.

For many of us, Sunday is the time in our week when we have the most flexibility and when Sabbath can be most easily observed.

Others, however, work on Sunday and will need to find another day of the week for their Sabbath rest.

¹ Eugene Peterson, Psalm 23:2-3, The Message

Remembering the spiritual principle of starting small and growing into a practice, you may need to begin to observe a part of a day as Sabbath. A morning, or evening, for example.

While our schedules can make the fourth commandment a challenge, the doing of it is as simple as it sounds.

A person who has a full schedule can leave large blocks of their Sabbath unplanned.

Someone who spends their work-week in Pittsburgh may target their Sabbath in their garden or some other part of nature.

After picking a day and some activities that will likely nurture you, it is important to prepare for the Sabbath.

I remember one day off where I had intended to have Sabbath time, but I had a bunch of errands to run. By the time I finished paying bills and getting some supplies, the Sabbath moment had been lost. It was work-week pace, just in my Sabbath space.

We prepare for the Sabbath by creating the space we need for the Sabbath.

Bills can be paid before the Sabbath.

The car can be inspected on another day.

Workers can be invited into our homes on other days.

We may only have enough in the refrigerator for the Sabbath, but we can get groceries on another day.

One person said that their family ate leftovers on the Sabbath. Another person cooked the same simple meal that their family enjoyed, "hotdogs and beans". While those may not excite your palate, you get the point: a meal must be prepared, but it can be a simple meal and it can be a meal that is more fun than work.

If you observe your Sabbath on Sunday and the kids will be going to school on Monday, do enough laundry on Friday or Saturday so that you're not distracted by dirty clothes.

This is not about new rules for the fourth commandment, but practical ways to avoid those week-day concerns that can distract our holy time.

The preparation creates the space we need for observing Sabbath.

In addition to stopping the normal work, we engage in those activities that reconnect us with God and renew us.

What have been your Sabbath moments? What has been renewing for you?

Kristine Haig has written about what nourishes different personalities.²

The linguistic person may read or journal.

The mathematical-logical person may do Bible Study.

A musical person may sing, play an instrument or listen to music.

An active person may find nurture in a walk through the woods.

One person said that they exercise daily but on their Sabbath they work at their most enjoyable pace.

Because so few of us have intentionally observed a Sabbath, its likely that we'll need to make some Sabbath discoveries. What has nurtured you?

One person spoke of inviting close friends to supper on the Sabbath.

Your frustrations in the week might point you in meaningful Sabbath directions. One person dogged by his email during the week vowed not to check it on his Sabbath.

For those living with family, Sabbath observance will involve time together: what are the family activities that you are a break from your week and bless you together?

Those who are single may incorporate time with friends or family in their Sabbath time.

Some people also observe a monthly Sabbath.

While a summer student at a hospital in Vermont, we took a Sabbath day once a month. We left the hospital. Took a book, some paper and a pen. We were asked to spend large blocks of time in quiet reflection. We broke our silence as we gathered together for lunch and closing worship. At a slower pace, we enjoyed this beautiful space and opened room for God to speak to us about our lives.

One woman I know makes monthly pilgrimages to various retreat centers. Sometimes she goes with her group from church. At other times she goes with a friend, or by herself. I think she prefers those centers that offer massages.

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It is surprising how observing the Sabbath changes the rest of our time.

² See Kristine Haig, "Multiple Intelligences and Prayer" at <http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/intelligence.pdf>

It was only about a year ago, I began to get serious about my Sabbath time. It worked out to be Monday mornings.

Not only did I look forward to that quiet time for reading, thinking and praying, I discovered was that I suddenly looked for Sabbath moments in my week.

I was less willing to live at a frantic pace and more interested to find Sabbath time in my week.

The fourth commandment is not a religious rule to appease a demanding God.

It is one of the great blessings of our loving creator who has blessed work and rest from work.

Friends, we are not frogs and we don't have to act like frogs. We can be regularly renewed in mind, body, and spirit.

We can live the rhythm of life that God intended: work and rest, spending energy and being renewed.

It is really quite simple:

Remember the Sabbath,
Prepare for it,
Rest in it, and then
Savor your memories.

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Charge – listen this week for the times you hear people talk about their busyness or their weariness. Let it remind you of God's gift of Sabbath.

Pick a Sabbath time
Prepare for it, and
Rest in God's loving-care.

READ MORE ABOUT *SABBATH*

Dawn, Marva J., Keeping the Sabbath Wholly, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1989

Jones, Timothy, The Sacred Way, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, p. 179ff

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