

You Need A Sabbath

Well good morning everybody. If you've got a bible, turn with me to the book of **Exodus, chapter 20**. Good to be back with you this week. If you missed the update—I was **quarantining last week** after being a contact to someone who tested positive for COVID. My test came back negative and I'm symptom free, but we just wanted to play it safe last week and have me sit the Gathering out just to keep everything above board.

But on *that* note, I'm excited to be back in person with you all this Sunday as we continue on in our **Work series**. If you've missed any of the weeks so far, I would highly recommend going to our website or podcast and catching up on all of it. I'm not going to do a summary for you this morning, but the gist of the series as a *whole* is that we are learning how to view and approach our work through the lenses of the Scriptures. We're leading the story of the bible inform us on how we think about and feel about our work.

But this morning, I want to take things in a very different direction. Today, I want us to talk about how **in order to work well, we actually need a plan for intentionally resting from our work. If we are going to achieve a healthy relationship with work as followers of Jesus, we also need a healthy relationship with rest.** And my guess is that at least some of us don't currently have a healthy relationship with rest in our day to day lives.

The Japanese actually have this word—the word **Karōshi**. And roughly translated into English, *karoshi* means “death by overwork.” It's when people in their society work so hard and so often that they end up dying via stress, heart disease, or sometimes even by *starvation* due to working around the clock and not stopping to eat adequately. **So in Japan, dying from overwork is a common enough occurrence that they have come up with a specific name to describe it.**

And **before you think to yourself**, “wow, that sounds like a real problem for the *Japanese*,” you should know that *Americans* work, on average, 100 more hours per year than the average person in Japan. We work 248 more hours per year than the British, and 424 more hours than the Germans.¹ And if after hearing all *that*, you're thinking “good for us, working so hard,” that is *precisely* the problem. The problem is that often in our society, we just assume that working more hours than other people is an inherently good thing. A lot of Americans wear *workaholism* and *busyness* like they're badges of

¹ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-overworked-countries>

honor. We *prioritize* overwork, we revere it, we celebrate it—we give people *raises* because they overwork. One study found that America is the most overworked nation in the developed world,² and we experience more work stress-related illnesses than any other country.³

So my *point* is that **many of us in America could probably stand to *improve our functional understanding of rest***. And in the Bible, ground zero for understanding *rest* is something called the **Sabbath**. For work to be what it was meant to be in our lives, we need a *Sabbath*. So that's what we're covering this morning. To get things started, let's take a look at **Exodus 20**, where we are introduced to the idea of the Sabbath. Here's what it says—we'll start by looking just at v. 8 together, and then we'll need to stop to unpack a few things:

[8] *Remember the **Sabbath** day, to keep it **holy**.*

Okay. So before we go any further, we need to **define a couple of important terms** in this passage. First, let's talk about that word *holy*. One of the first things the Scriptures tell us about the Sabbath is that it should be kept **holy**. Now this word *holy* is the Hebrew word *kadesh*. And it means to set something apart, or to treat it as different than we treat everything else.

So let me give you an example to try and illustrate it. If you **came over to my house**, and we're hanging out outside (you know, to be responsible, socially distanced citizens), you might ask me if I have something to drink (especially because the heat in Knoxville right now is downright awful). And I would say yes, because I'm not a cruel person. I would tell you that I have some water, probably some lemonade, or I have a variety six pack from Elkmont Exchange, right here in Knoxville. And I'd say "go to the fridge and grab whatever you want of those—they're all fair game." But let's say that you go to get a drink, you open up the *cabinet*, and back in that cabinet, you see a bottle of Buffalo Trace—a very nice bourbon that was given to me by a member of our church family. And then *you* say to *me*, "Kent you didn't mention you had *Buffalo Trace*—why didn't you say anything about that?" I might say to you, well that's because the Buffalo Trace is *kadesh*. It's special. It's set apart. It's, at least in the *broadest* sense of the word, *holy*. It's not like the other things I offered you to drink—it is in a category of its own.

² Details [here](#).

³ <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/overworked-america/?longform=true>

That right there is a picture of what it means for something to be *holy*—it's **altogether different**. It's not like everything else, it's not ordinary—it's *set apart*. In a category all its own. So **when God talks about the Sabbath being *kadesh*—being holy—what he means is that the Sabbath should be a day in your week unlike every other day in your week**. It is to be special and unique and set apart.

And **what makes the Sabbath holy—what makes it different**—is that on this day, you cease or stop working. That's actually exactly what the word *Sabbath* means: it means, quite literally, to *stop* or to *cease* doing something. Namely, to stop *working*. Which is what the passage mentions next. So pick it back up with me in v. 9:

[9] *Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.*

So **for 6 days a week**, as our Exodus passage points out, we are to *work*. **We drive to the office, punch the clock, manage some people, corral some kids, design a building, we serve some food**. Whatever it is you do, that's what those six days are for. Now maybe you're thinking **six days?** *My job only requires me to be there five days, or four days—are you saying I should be working six days a week instead?* Well, yes and no. *No*, in that you don't need to go out and find a job that makes you work a six-day work week. But *yes*, in that there are plenty of other things we have to get done that are *work*, even though they're not a part of your "job." We mentioned in week 1 of the series that the big category of *work* also describes **things like mowing the lawn, doing the dishes, balancing a budget (for those of us that believe in that sort of thing), taking out the trash, doing the laundry**—any and all of that is still *work*. And so if you only work 4 or 5 days a week at your "job," you should use the *extra* day or two to get that *other* stuff done, that is still *work*.

But **here's the idea with the Sabbath**, and this is really important for you to grasp. The idea is that **you would do all of that stuff six days a week, so that on the seventh, you don't have to do any of it**. That's what the author of Exodus is getting across when he says "*Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath [or, a day of ceasing].*" So you might say that life in the kingdom of God, to quote the Hebrew prophet Rihanna, goes *work, work, work, work work...work*. And then *Sabbath*. *Stop. Rest*. (Rihanna almost had it right—she just needed one more "work" in there.) But the prescribed rhythm of life that God has given us is to work for six days, and *cease working* on the Sabbath.

So there should be **one day a week where you cease working**. If what you do 5 or 6 days a week is crunch numbers, you should do no number crunching on the Sabbath. If what you do 5 or 6 days a week is build things, you should build no things on the Sabbath. If what you do 5 or 6 days a week is teach kiddos, you should do no kiddo teaching on the Sabbath. ~~If what you do 5 or 6 days a week is go to meetings...you should find another job. Joking, but you should not go to meetings on the Sabbath.~~ Does that all make sense? Because **the idea behind the Sabbath is to cease. To spend one day intentionally *not doing* the things you spend the rest of your week *doing*.**

But it's **not just about *you* ceasing** on the Sabbath—it's even more than that. Pick it back up in the second half of v. 10:

On it [meaning, on the Sabbath] you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

So you aren't just to see to it that *you* have a Sabbath, but **also that your kids have a Sabbath**. That your *employees* have a Sabbath. That workers you *hire* have a Sabbath. **So the idea is that the Sabbath would be actually built into the rhythm of our communal life together.** Now, the way our society runs today, I don't think that necessarily means we should all Sabbath on the same day of the week. You can Sabbath on a Sunday, or a Saturday, or a Friday, or a Tuesday—**the day of the week matters a lot less in my opinion than what you *don't* do on that day of the week.** But I do think it means that the Sabbath should be an intentional, thought-through, prioritized part of *your* life, and if it applies, *your household's* life together.

Now here's **the reason given for *why*** we should do all of this—*why* we should Sabbath. Look at v. 11:

*[11] For in six days **the Lord** made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and **rested on the seventh day**. Therefore **the Lord** blessed the Sabbath day and **made it holy**.*

So there we have it: **the reason we Sabbath is **because God Sabbathed****. The reason we rest is because God himself *rested*. Now I do think *that* brings up an interesting idea. Because that means that *God rests*, even though *God* doesn't get tired. God has an infinite amount of energy. He doesn't *need* a day off. So to me, that seems to indicate that while there are all kinds of *physical* reasons to Sabbath (i.e. we physically need the

rest), there must be something *else* going on too. Because if it was only about us needing the *rest*, there would be no reason for God himself to participate in it.

So **what else is it?** Well for that, I want us to take a look at one other important passage about the Sabbath, this one from **Deuteronomy 5** (we'll put it on the screen here in a second). But just for context before we read it, this passage is from *after* God has led his people out of slavery in Egypt. And at this point *Moses*, the appointed leader of these people, is now unpacking for a new generation how they should conduct their lives. And right here in the middle of it is an instruction about the *Sabbath*.

But here, we're actually given **a new, additional reason** to practice the Sabbath that is different from what we read in Exodus. Take a look on the screen at **Deuteronomy 5, v. 15**:

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore (meaning, in light of God doing that on your behalf,) *the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*

Okay so *here*, the reason given for keeping the Sabbath is actually to *remember* or to **commemorate how God rescued these Israelites out of slavery** in Egypt. So there is a *connection* between the fact that they are no longer slaves, and the fact that they now rest one day a week. So what might that connection be, exactly?

Well **think about it** with me for a second. In *Egypt*, because they were slaves, the Israelites were seen as *subhuman*—as cogs in a machine—in essence, as *workhorses* and nothing else. **Their primary (and maybe only) value, at least to Pharaoh and to the society they lived in, was in the amount of work they could get done.** That's actually one of the things that makes slavery such a destructive idea: because it *dehumanizes* people: it views them only in terms of their productivity, and not as image bearers of God.

And that was the case in Egypt. The Israelites' entire existence was *defined* by their *work*. The lie that was communicated to them every single day of their lives in Egypt was the lie that they *were* no more than what they *accomplished*." The lie that they were *no more* than what they could get done.

Now, we mentioned *last* week that **we today are tempted to believe a version of that** very same lie: that **we are** what we accomplish. That our *identity* is found in our work. That our value comes from how much we get done and how well we do it. And what Deuteronomy 5 is telling us is that **one of the most practical ways to push back on that lie—one of the most helpful ways to remind yourself that it's not true—is to have a day where you don't accomplish much of anything.** It's a day to resist the narrative that work is who we are, by being *intentionally unproductive* on that particular day. **That's why we should work the Sabbath into our weekly rhythm—because it is meant to counteract a very common and very powerful lie about who we are.**

See, every time we participate in the **Sabbath, we are teaching** our minds, hearts, and bodies to believe that **we are not what we accomplish.** That we don't have to be productive to be valuable. We are forcing ourselves to remember that our identity comes from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and *not* from what we *get done*. Or *how much* we get done. Or what *type* of work we get done. And listen: it works **the other way around too—in order to allow ourselves the ability to Sabbath, we have to believe on some level in the identity given to us through the cross.** We have to believe that *that is the most important thing about us*, and nothing else. Jesus in his death has rescued you and I from defining ourselves by our work, much like he rescued the *Israelites* out of that. He has rescued us from the spiritual slavery of defining ourselves by what we do. **And to help us remember that reality, he has given us the Sabbath.** Does that make sense?

Okay. So with that foundation laid for what the Sabbath is and why we should practice it, here's what I want us to do with the *rest* of our time. I have **two important clarifications** to make about the Sabbath, and then I want to just offer you **some tips** and recommendations for starting and practicing a rhythm of Sabbath in your life. Sound good? First clarification about the Sabbath:

Clarification #1: The Sabbath is not just “a day off.”

A Sabbath is more than just a “day off.” It's not a day to **numb yourself** with TV and social media and technology. In fact, I would argue that by spending all your time off *mindlessly*, you're actually teaching yourself to believe that you have no value outside of your work. By just *checking out* on the Sabbath, you may actually be **reinforcing the lie** that “you are what you accomplish.”

So the point is **not to veg out**—the point is to *rest*. And though they sound similar, they're actually worlds apart. **The goal is that after the Sabbath, you would feel rested and**

restored and re-energized. And I don't know about you, but bingeing a TV show does not make me feel any of those things. I have never thought to myself after a full season of *Better Call Saul*, "wow, I just feel so much joy and so much clarity about who I am and who God is. I feel so rested and recharged and ready to give everything I have to my work for the next six days." After I scroll through Facebook for an hour, I don't usually come away thinking "okay, *now* I'm really excited about contributing meaningfully to the world." That's just not how those things work—that's not the effect that those things tend to have on us.

Now that said, I **don't think that means you can't** watch *any* TV on the Sabbath. Watch an episode or two, watch a movie, especially if you don't do much of that the rest of the week. But I would highly recommend keeping TV, technology, and social media to a *minimum* on the Sabbath, if not eliminating them entirely. Because a Sabbath is more than just a day off or a day to check out.

One other clarification...

Clarification #2: The Sabbath is not an excuse to avoid people or helping people.

I've heard people say before that **they can't hang out with people** in their LifeGroup "because it's their Sabbath." Now, if what they mean by that is "I have a very intentional plan for my Sabbath today, and it involves some alone time," sure—that makes sense. But if the point is that you can't ever hang out with or pour into people on your Sabbath, I would challenge that approach, on the basis of Jesus' own life.

Because **if the point of the Sabbath was to avoid all meaningful relationships, nobody ever told Jesus that.** Jesus in the gospels is nearly *always* hanging out with his disciples on the Sabbath. He's having discipling conversations with them on the Sabbath. He's having *difficult* conversations with people on the Sabbath. Jesus didn't avoid people on the Sabbath—often, quite the opposite.

I've also heard people say **they can't help others** *do things* on their Sabbath. "Well I can't help you with that project, because it's my Sabbath. I can't help you move, because it's my Sabbath." Now again, if what you mean is "I'm concerned that project might take the entire day and then I won't get to spend any of the day truly resting—that makes sense." But there's an easy way to solve that problem: say "I can help from 12:00 to 3:00—I can help during *this time frame*, but that's all."

But don't avoid *helping* people on the Sabbath. **Jesus** often *confronted* people who thought the Sabbath was a reason to not help others. His response to people who did that was to show them that they had *fundamentally misunderstood* what the Sabbath is. The point of the Sabbath is to rest—not to be selfish. Make sense?

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Okay, so now that we've clarified two things about the Sabbath, I want us to wrap up with a handful of **tips on how** to put the Sabbath into practice in your life. So if you want to *start* putting it into practice, or are all of a sudden realizing you haven't fully understood what the Sabbath is, here are some guidance I'd offer to you on how to go about it.

Tip #1: Make a "to cease" list.

For my more Type A people in the room, every other day of the week, you can live by your to-do list. But on Sabbath you need a "to cease on this day" list. Remember the Sabbath is to be *holy*. It should *stand out* noticeably from the things you do every other day. So your list of what you're *not* going to do on the Sabbath matters as much if not more than what you're *going* to do. Start with the question, "what do I *normally* do, the rest of the week?" And then take *those* things, and as much as possible, make them off-limits on the Sabbath.

- If you send and **receive emails constantly** on the computer, cut out email and possibly computer on your Sabbath.
- If you **make calls** all week, make no calls unless they're absolutely necessary on the Sabbath.
- If you work with your hands all week—if you **build things or fix things**—do your best not to build or fix things on the Sabbath.
- If you **strategize** all week, do your best to do no strategizing on the Sabbath.
- One more slightly more *complex* one: if you stay home and **take care of your kids** all week, do your best to minimize that on the Sabbath. Now obviously this one is a little more difficult. Because especially if you have small kids, you can't just like lock them out in the backyard all day and go "good luck! It's my Sabbath, so don't bother me."

So you may have to **get creative** with this one. It may mean that whichever parent *doesn't* usually stay home with the kids during the *week*, takes them on a weekend day, so the other parent can take a Sabbath on that day. Which as a side note, **might mean that some of us parents who don't normally stay at home with the kids, need to grow in our ability to do that, so that our spouse**

can take a Sabbath. I find that it is, more often than not, *dads* who need to grow in that. That one's for free. Or maybe, it looks like reallocating part of your budget to pay for a babysitter on your Sabbath, so that you can have that day.

Now, for **single parents** in our church—this is one of the ways we as a church family get to serve you. We should be offering and you should be asking us if some of us can take care of your kids so that you can get some rest. Your LifeGroup should be willing and eager to step in and come alongside you in an effort to help you Sabbath. This is part of what it means for the church to function like a family. We help one another fight for spiritual health, which includes helping one another Sabbath well.

But anyway, obviously some of us are going to have to get a little more creative with this to make it happen, but **making a “to cease” list** for your Sabbath could be a great place to start. Next tip...

Tip #2: Fill the Sabbath with some of the **best things in life.**

So once you've decided what you're *not* going to do on the Sabbath, make a running list of things you *could* do. What things do you feel full of life and recharged after you do? Keep a list of those things, and pick one or two of them to do on each Sabbath. **Go for a walk. Take a nap or a bath. Go for a hike. Go to a coffee shop with a close friend with no time limits on when you have to leave. Have a slow, casual brunch with several friends. Eat some good food. Enjoy your favorite beverage on the back porch.** The point is to ask what are the things that, after you do them, you feel joy, and you feel recharged—like you are re-energized to tackle whatever's next in life? Those are the types of things you want to do on your Sabbath.

And *most* importantly, get some good **time with the Holy Spirit** on your Sabbath. Read some in the Scriptures. Maybe every other day, you only get to read a chapter or two in the bible; on the Sabbath, consider reading an entire *book* of the bible. Spend extended amounts of time in prayer throughout the day. Remember, the Sabbath is meant to be, on some level, *Godward*. It's a Sabbath “to the Lord,” so your Sabbath should include some intentional *Godward* time. Next tip, #3:

Tip #3: **Prepare in advance.**

So I know I called this one a “tip,” but this one is about as close to *required* as a tip can be. If you want your Sabbath to be a success—if you want it to be everything it can and

should be—you will have to *prepare* for it. In the Old Testament, there's a story about God providing manna—a type of bread—for the Israelites. And he tells them that on the *sixth* day of the week, they should gather *double* the amount of bread, so they don't have to gather *any* on the Sabbath. The idea is that the Sabbath required some *preparation in advance in order to pull off*. And I think the same principle is at play in *us* needing to prepare well for the Sabbath.

If you need a **babysitter** on the Sabbath, that's probably something you need to schedule earlier in the week. If you need to not do **laundry or the dishes** on the Sabbath (because you do that most of the rest of the week), that might require that you do extra laundry or dishes the day before. If you need to **not check email** on the Sabbath, that might mean you need to block out thirty or forty-five minutes the day before to wrap up any unfinished emails that need to go out. If you need to stay **away from technology** on the Sabbath, that probably means you need to turn off your phone before you go to sleep the night before, and stow it away in a drawer where you're not tempted to pick it up first thing in the morning.

So whatever it is, you do the math: what is it that often keeps your Sabbath from being restful? And then whatever that thing is, figure out a way to take care of it before your Sabbath starts. A quality Sabbath is probably going to require at least some amount of preparation in advance. You don't usually *stumble into* a restful Sabbath—you *plan* for it. You *prepare* for it. Next one...

Tip #4: Don't be surprised if it's difficult at first.

You and I **live in a society that reinforces constantly** the lie that “we are what we accomplish.” So taking a day to *not* accomplish things might be really *difficult* to do at first. You may feel the pull within you in the first hour to check your email, to get something done, to respond to that text from work. Or you might just be inclined to grab your phone within the first hour and start mindlessly scrolling. *Because* a lot of us operate as if we are what we accomplish, that might mean our first attempts at a true Sabbath feel more like a challenge than anything else.

But listen: **that's** actually just **proof** that you do *need* the Sabbath. Think about it this way: if a person is addicted to a substance of some sort, and they try to quit, but they have withdrawals from quitting: that's actually proof that they were indeed addicted to the substance, right? So similarly, if we go through “productivity withdrawals” when we try to Sabbath, that's actually a sign that we do have a problem that needs addressing—it may just take time to see the type of fruit we want to see from addressing it.

So just know it **may be a bit uncomfortable** and a bit awkward at first. That's ok. No new rhythm or habit goes smoothly on your first try. Give it time. Don't just try it once and give up. Try it 10 times and evaluate to see if you're getting anywhere. Get a feel for it. For some of us, it might be a walk in the park. But for others, it will take some learning and unlearning. Which leads us to our last tip...

Tip #5: Start somewhere.

So **technically**, the Sabbath *should* be a full 24 hours: sundown to sundown, sunrise to sunrise—the goal is for it to be an entire day of ceasing from work. So if you can, do 24 hours. But maybe 24 hours just seems impossible right now. And that's okay—but *start somewhere*. If you can't find a babysitter for the whole day, find a sitter for half the day, or a few hours. // The *idea, also*, is also that your Sabbath would be the same day every week, so that it creates a natural rhythm to your week. But maybe right now, you're at the mercy of when you're scheduled for work, and that varies. So maybe your Sabbath needs to be a *floating* Sabbath or the second half of one day and the first half of the next. Whatever you need to do, just start somewhere.

It **doesn't have to be perfect**—it doesn't have to be ideal. So don't let the need for it to be perfect keep you from doing it at all. Just start *somewhere*. Commit to join God in His holy rhythm of rest and I can promise he will bless your efforts in that over time.

So, I want to just **land the plane here**, on Jesus' words from **Matthew 11:28-29**. Many of you have probably heard this passage before, but I really want us to consider what it says in light of everything we've just talked about. Take a look with me up on the screen:

[Jesus says to us] *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you [what?] rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

So I need you to hear me on this: the **epicenter of rest** is in the person and work of Jesus. "Come to *me*," Jesus says, "and *I* will give you rest." Step 1 to participating in the Sabbath is to bring your life—all of it—to Jesus. And once you're there, allow *him* to structure our lives in such a way that brings rest. And not just rest to our *minds*, not just rest to our *bodies*, but rest to our *souls*. And that's what we're after as followers of Jesus.

But **in order to do that**, we have to hear what Jesus teaches us about who we are, and about what life should look like. **If we rebel against God's rhythm for work and rest,**

we will eventually suffer the consequences of that. It makes me think about our daughter, Norah. She's right over a year old now, so she takes two naps every day—one in the morning, and one in the afternoon. But lately, she has started *fighting* her naps a little bit more. And the more she *fight*s her naps the more cranky, the more mad, the more exhausted she becomes. Everything gets worse when she doesn't nap. And I'm sure from her perspective, there's lots going on the world and she doesn't want to miss out on that by going down for her nap. But the thing is she was *designed* to nap.

And God designed **you and I to Sabbath**. When we *don't* Sabbath, we get cranky, we burn out, we begin to *care* about the *wrong* things and care way *too little* about the *right* things. We start to believe lies about who we are and who God is. And here's the thing: with us too, I'm sure we could come up with a **dozen logical reasons** why we can't or shouldn't Sabbath: "well I might miss something." Or "what if my job really needs me?" Or "what if something happens and people can't get in touch with me?" Or "I'm not all that tired—I don't even need to rest." All *kinds* of reasons for not doing it.

But there's **one very good reason to** Sabbath that outranks all of those reasons *not* to. And it's *that God said this is how life works best*. That God himself—who created you and I, and created *work* and the world around us and who sustains all of that—*he said* that that world will be just fine if you rest. And *you'll* be better off for it too. So let's come to Jesus and let him teach us how to Sabbath, and we will ultimately find *rest*.

Let's pray together.