



Rest for the Soul

Text: Matthew 11:28-30

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We live in a fast-paced, always-on-the-go culture. And in the end, this is not good for us. It's not good for our bodies. It's not good for our emotional and mental health. It's not good for our relationships. And it's not good for our *souls*. We desperately need to recover the rhythm and the heart of Sabbath rest.

1. When is the last time you felt rested, *truly* rested?
2. What is the difference between just taking a day off and true "Sabbath rest"?
3. Read Genesis 1:1-2:3. What does the order of work and rest in the Creation account teach us about the purposes of work and rest?
4. Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What are the reasons given for partaking in Sabbath rest? How do these apply to us as New Testament believers? In other words, what do these passages teach about why *you* should practice Sabbath?
5. Read Matthew 11:28-12:8. What is the connection between Jesus' teaching in Matthew 11:28-30 and his interaction with the Pharisees in Matthew 12:1-8? How does Jesus provide the rest that our souls crave?
6. What are activities that give you life, that you never get tired of, and that help you feel closer to God and experience his rest?

Challenge: Plan your next 24-hour Sabbath period and commit to the 4 steps outlined in the Study Deeper. When will you do it? What will it look like? What needs to be arranged to make it possible? If you are married, how can you help your spouse practice Sabbath this week? If you have children, how can you train them to begin to make this a part of their life rhythms?

Prayer: Select people in the group to each read one of the following passages out loud. As each person reads, the rest of the group should sit calmly and quietly with eyes closed. Try to visualize and picture yourself in each scene. Notice what happens in your mind and your heart as you do.

- Genesis 1:1-2:3
- Psalm 23
- Revelation 21:1-7

STUDY DEEPER

4 STEPS TO A MEANINGFUL SABBATH

All work – paid and unpaid – is good, but it needs to be boundaried by the practice of Sabbath.

The problem with too many leaders is that we allow our work to trespass on every other area of life, disrupting the balanced rhythm of work and rest God created for our good.

Sabbath is a twenty-four-hour block of time in which we stop work, enjoy rest, practice delight, and contemplate God.

1. Stop. Sabbath is first and foremost a day when we cease all work – paid and unpaid. On the Sabbath we embrace our limits. We let go of the illusion that we are indispensable to the running of the world. We recognize we will never finish all our goals and projects, and that God is on the throne, managing quite well in ruling the universe without our help.

2. Rest. Once we stop, we accept God’s invitation to rest. God rested after his work of creation. Every seventh day, we are to do the same (Genesis 2:1 – 4). We engage in activities that restore and replenish us – from napping, hiking, reading, and eating good food to enjoying hobbies and playing sports.

Resting from unpaid work, however, requires advance planning. If I am to have any hope of enjoying a Sabbath rest, I need to set aside time during the week to attend to the routine tasks of life I won’t do on Sabbath – paying bills, cleaning or fixing something around the house, etc.

3. Delight. After finishing his work in creation, God pronounced it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). This was not an anemic afterthought – Oh, well, it’s nice to be done with that – but a joyful recognition and celebration of accomplishment. As part of observing Sabbath, God invites us to join in the celebration, to enjoy and delight in his creation and all the gifts he offers us in it. These innumerable gifts come to us in many forms, including people, places, and things.

As part of preparing to practice the Sabbath, one of the most important questions to consider is, “What gives me joy and delight?” This will differ for each of us, but part of the Sabbath invitation is to enjoy and delight in creation and her gifts. Geri and I both delight in the beauty and grandeur of nature – the ocean, lakes, beaches, mountains, and star-filled skies. Geri is a “foodie,” so tasting, smelling, and savoring the gift of food is a high priority for us. I delight in libraries and bookstores. Geri loves cooking a fresh meal. Through any and every means possible, on Sabbath we seek to feast on the miracle of life with our senses.

4. Contemplate. Pondering the love of God is the central focus of our Sabbaths. What makes a Sabbath a biblical Sabbath is that it is “holy to the Lord.” We are not taking time off from God; we are drawing closer to him. Sabbath is an invitation to see the invisible in the visible – to recognize the hidden ways God’s goodness is at work in our lives. It does not mean we necessarily spend the entire day in prayer or studying Scripture, though those activities may be part of a Sabbath day. Instead, contemplation means we are acutely focused on those aspects of God’s love that come to us through so many gifts from his hand. Scripture affirms that all creation declares his glory (see Psalm 19:1). On Sabbath, we intentionally look for his grandeur in everything from people, food, and art to babies, sports, hobbies, and music. In this sense,

contemplation is an extension of delight – we are intentional about looking for the evidence of God’s love in all of the things he has given us to enjoy.

I hope these four characteristics will provide a helpful framework as you begin to consider what it might mean for you to practice a meaningful observance of Sabbath, but if you ever find yourself getting too caught up in the details and logistics – which is easy to do – I encourage you to take a step back. Refocus your attention on the larger significance of Sabbath – the opportunity to experience a foretaste of eternity. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote:

Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in this world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come... The essence of the world to come is Sabbath eternal, and the seventh day in time is an example of eternity.

<https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/4-steps-to-a-meaningful-sabbath/?v=7516fd43adaa>