

Sabbath: The Gift of Rest

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” (Gen 2:2-3)

Looking at this text one might conclude that God worked hard for six days and took a deserved rest on the seventh day. Such interpretation implies that God was tired, which is contrary to Isaiah 40:28 where it says God does not grow tired or weary. It is obvious therefore that if God’s creation before he took a day of rest is man, then man woke up and his first day on earth was a day of rest. As a pattern for Adam and Eve, they were to begin their activities from a place of rest. The two (Adam and Eve) were accepted as good without activities, similarly the day of no activity was considered holy (Exodus 20:8-11).

God incorporated rest, when he created humankind, as a process of restoration. Jesus’ discussion on Sabbath with the Pharisees in which he stated “Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27) is sometimes seen as him ruling out the fourth commandment however his practice shows the contrary.

Marva Dawn describes the practice of Sabbath as going beyond resting to ceasing, embracing and feasting. We will look at each of these components:

Ceasing: The word ‘Sabbath’ means to stop, to cease, to desist. So when God is asking us to keep the Sabbath, he is essentially giving us permission to not only cease from work, but also from the drive to accomplish and be productive. It is a place of releasing our control of trying to be God and to rest in the sovereignty of God.

Gen. 2:3

Exodus 20:6

Psalm 127:1

- What are practical ways we could cease from our work?
- What are some of the obstacles that keep us from ceasing?
- What are the gains of ceasing?

Resting: Even though physical rest is involved in the Sabbath rest, it is almost impossible to rest physically when the spirit is troubled. Resting therefore involves a spiritual rest, which means a deep-rooted awareness that we are loved, and that God is on our side to work situations out for us. Our minds can then be released from trying to figure out how things are going to turn out. Such emotional and spiritual rest would lead the soul to the place of peace that relaxes and rejuvenate the physical body. As Eugene Peterson says, “Sabbath is that uncluttered time and space in which we can distance ourselves from our own activities enough to see what God is doing.”

Gen. 2:2-3

Exodus 20:6

Sabbath: The Gift of Rest. Rest, Gratitude & Thriving. MH&M 2017, Carr and Crawford.

Psalm 46:10
Jer. 6:16
Matt. 11:28-30

- What do we learn about God's view of resting?
- What does being still and resting allow us to experience?
- What does not being still or resting rob us of?

Embracing: "It (Sabbath) gives us a reminder that we are God's people and that we are called to live distinctive lives as representatives of the kingdom of God. This is the reason why meeting together with others is integral to a Sabbath way of life." Tony Horsfall

Isa. 56:6-7
Psalm 122:1
Psalm 63:1- 2; 6-8

- What might God have for you to embrace in the midst of your Sabbath rest?
- What do you need to receive from fellowship, especially in times of stress?

Feasting: "It should be a day that includes fun and festivity, for these are some of the ways in which we can restore our souls. It is not a day for sadness but for gladness, when we experience the shalom of God – the sense of wholeness and well-being that is found when our lives are in harmony with God." Tony Horsfall

Psalm 36:8-9
Psalm 63:4-5
Phil. 4:4

- What are some creative ways you could feast and celebrate on the Sabbath?
- How might this experience be a foreshadowing of our eternal life with Him?