

Reclaiming the Gift of Sabbath

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I. What Is the Gift of Sabbath?

A. The image of Sabbath has changed over the years. What memories, good or bad, come to mind when you hear the word? What word(s) first pops into your mind at the thought of Sabbath? [legalistic, archaic, out-of-date, indifferent to it]

B. Sabbath is both a particular day as well as an attitude; a set-apart time on the calendar as well as a mindset of the heart.

1. To have a Sabbath heart is to be still and restful, aware of God's presence, even in the midst of unrest and upheaval (Buchanan, 3-4).

2. It is "a weekly day of rest and worship. A day to cease working and relax in God's care for us. A day to stop the things that occupy our workdays and participate in activities that nurture peace, worship, relationships, celebration and thankfulness. The purpose of the Sabbath is to clear away the distractions of our lives so we can rest in God and experience God's grace in a new way" (Baab, 19).

3. A Sabbath mindset is a belief, an acknowledgement of trust in God, a letting go of the controls (Giglio, 103, 124), accepting the reality that the world can go on without us (Cordeiro, 125.) We can rest and the world won't fall apart. Sabbath is "imitating God so that we stop trying to be God" (Buchanan, 87). Busyness conjures up the conviction that "I am God. All depends on me. How will the right things happen at the right time if I'm not pushing and pulling and watching and worrying" (Buchanan, 61-62)?

C. We first find Sabbath in the Bible after creation. God initiated Sabbath after creation, before it was given as a command in the OT Law.

1. Why did God rest on the 7th day of Creation? [He didn't need it; He was modeling it for us. He was sitting back and enjoying what He had done: the order, abundance, goodness, and beauty of His creation]

2. Creation days started w/evening, with rest first, then morning. "There was evening, and there was morning – the 2nd day." While we are resting for what is to come, God is at work initiating.

D. Then Jesus came. Jesus, Who was LORD of the Sabbath, declared that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:22-28). How is the Sabbath like a gift to us from God? ["This day was made for us. God gave it to you and me for our sake, for our benefit, for our strengthening, and our replenishment...It was something God prepared long ago, inscribed into the very order of creation." (Buchanan, 219)]

II. Two Things That Keep Us From Unwrapping the Gift of Sabbath:

A. Busyness – Ask anyone how she’s doing and the standard answer has almost become “I’m so busy.” How busy are you?

1. You may have symptoms of the busy sickness: speeding up daily activities, multi-tasking, clutter, superficiality or irritation in relationships, lack of love, tension at the end of the day, escapism (Ortberg, 79-83).
2. The Chinese join two characters to form the symbol for busyness: heart, and killing. A busy life can do murder on our hearts both literally and emotionally. Another Q to ask ourselves is: *How much do I care about the things I care about?* (Buchanan, 45-48).
3. Hurry, or busyness, makes me feel important. It convinces me that all depends on me. How will things carry on if I don’t keep pushing, pulling, moving, going?
4. Jesus always had many things He was and could be doing, but if you greeted Him on the streets of Capernaum, why wouldn’t He give our standard answer, “Oh! I’m just *so* busy!”? [Hurry is a disordered heart and soul, He practiced stillness, solitude, relationship w/God the Father and disciples, rested, fell asleep in boats, had fun.]
5. How can busyness hurt our relationships w/family? God? Believers? Un-believers? How has resting or slowing down helped these relationships? When have you recently slowed down and really enjoyed an experience? How do you feel when you are not working or producing? [Extra reference: “Dangerously Tired” article.]

B. Legalism

1. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' time were sticklers for the rules they had created for Sabbath. Yet the Puritans of the 17th c. and later made the Pharisees rigid rules look like mere suggestions. In some towns you could not smile on the Sabbath and mothers were forbidden to kiss their children. Individuals were appointed to pay surprise Sunday visits in homes to see if any rules were being broken. Strict Sabbath observance cont'd in the U.S. into the early 1900's (Baab, 50). Today Jerusalem has Sabbath elevators and TP (Card 2014)]

2. God gives us very few rules about the Sabbath – to “cease work” is the main one. In what ways do we embrace rules in order to earn God's approval? In what areas of your life do you need to experience freedom and grace?

III. What the Gift of Sabbath Looks Like

A. A Refusal and a Pursuit – Is. 58:13-14. If we *refuse* to go our own way, we will *find* our joy (Buchanan, 111-112). “Cease from what is necessary. Embrace that which gives life.” (Buchanan 119)

B. The Two OT Sabbath Law Passages:

1. Dt. 5:12-15: Don't Be Slaves – We've been freed! (Buchanan, 86) So we are to cease from work and all things that enslave us, those internal taskmasters. Slaves cannot take a day off of work, but free people can. We are human *beings*, not human *doings*.

a) STOP! The Hebrew word for Sabbath means STOP (Baab, 26). “The rest of God...is not a reward for finishing. It's not a bonus for work well done. It's a sheer gift. It is a stop-work order in the midst of work that's never complete, never polished. Sabbath is not the break we're allotted at the tail end of completing all our tasks and chores...It's the rest we take smack-dab in the middle of them, without apology, without guilt, and for no better reason than God told us we could” (Buchanan, 93). If we refuse to rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die (Baab, 35, quoting Wayne Muller).

b) Have you ever been forced to stop your normal activities? What did you enjoy? What did you learn? What did you find difficult? [Our culture is now 24/7 and assigns value with production and accomplishment]

c) What things can we cease from? [shopping, cooking, exercise, managing \$, gardening, words, technology, media, machines, talking, phone calls, etc. Extra reference: see list at end of article.]

2. Ex. 20:8-11: Be Like God, imitate His example, and receive His blessing (Buchanan, 87). So we are to seek nourishment and embrace life-giving things.

a) What things can we pursue/embrace on our Sabbath? [Extra reference: see list at end of article, as well as *"Rest With Small Children"* article.]

b) These Sabbath ideas will vary between each of us, and will vary between our own seasons of life.

c) CAUTION! Remember our old nature/bent towards legalism and perfectionism. Spend more time "ceasing from" and resting, than adding activities which you will feel obligated to do. [Extra reference: *"The Gift of Rest"* article.]

IV. Seek A Healthy Rhythm of Work and Rest

A. The Paradox: A quote from C. S. Lewis says we are both necessary to God and superfluous to Him at the same time (Baab, 27). God calls us to be His hands and feet, taking care of creation, making His love known to others. Yet at the same time He can do it all without us: we are totally dependent on Him.

B. The Balance: We were not made to work all of the time, nor were we made to rest all of the time. Excess in either of these can lead us to believe we are little gods ourselves. Keeping a healthy balance helps us to realize that we are necessary to God and insignificant at the same time.

C. God values our work and wants us to value it as well. Our work, when offered up in worship back to Him, has the power to make Christ attractive, to make Him known (Buchanan, 25).

D. Sabbath is not about crashing because we worked so hard the week before and "deserve it," nor is it a day off to do nothing but get our own way and indulge our own appetites. It is a day "up" to spend remembering this paradox and that God is God and we are not, and to celebrate (Giglio, 101).

V. Reclaim the Gift of Sabbath!

A. It is a gift of grace. There's an old movie, "Bob the Butler." (Architect, Auto Dealer, Baker, Barber, Bus Driver) Eventually he started to love and be loved. On my Sabbath it's no more "Deb the _____." I am simply God's beloved. All my other identities fall off and I am just a child of God. I am loved, not because of what I do, but because of who I am in Christ – this is grace.

B. What obstacles might you face in keeping a Sabbath? [church culture that is busy on Sunday, "Advances" instead of "Retreats," judgment from others misunderstanding (mowing the lawn), inner drive/taskmasters, independent spirit, culture, pride, everything open and running and available 24/7, we ask each other "What do *you* do?"]

C. What things work for us helping us reclaim the gift of Sabbath? [Christ the LORD of the Sabbath in us, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27), Jehovah Jireh is offering it]

D. God Does Provide – Success stories:

1. Manna on the Sabbath – Ex. 16:21-26

2. American Pioneers traveling West - "Never travel on the Sabbath,' advised Joseph E. Ware in *The Emigrant's Guide to California* (1849). "Those who lay by on the Sabbath, resting themselves and their teams,' Ware added, 'would get to California 20 days sooner than those who traveled seven days a week.'" (Solberg, Issue 66).

3. Chick-fil-A founder Truett Cathy made the decision to close on Sundays when they first opened in 1946. It is their "recipe for success." "As company sales figures have consistently proven, Chick-fil-A restaurants often generate more business per square foot in six days than many other quick-service restaurants produce in seven. Chick-fil-A generated more than \$2.96 billion dollars in sales in 2008, and the chain has enjoyed sales gains for 41 consecutive years" (Chick-fil-A 2009 press release).

4. An empty nest mother's testimony: "I can see a clear difference in me before and after rest. I fell full, confident, things look brighter, I have patience, vision, more focus, and I'm not easily distracted." (Deidra Riggs, 2014 in an interview for MOPS)

E. Sabbath – your Father's gift to indulge you:

1. Stone Lamp – I created this lamp, pouring over every stone, carefully selecting and placing each one. The other day, to claim a moment of rest, I lay down and studied it, saying, “Wow!” Deidra Riggs believes that is one reason why God rested on the 7th day: He created us, then sat back and enjoyed us – Wow! (Riggs, 2014, MOPS).
2. [Sabbath] is “a day that God intended to *fuss over us*, not we over it. It was designed to protect us, pay tribute to us, coddle us, in all our created frailty...It is a father’s gift to indulge His children” (Buchanan, 220).

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Things I Could STOP Doing on My Sabbath

Busyness
Hurrying
Perfectionism
Restlessness
Anxiousness
Negative thoughts
Cravings
Initiating
Creating
Noise
Multi-tasking
Producing
Distractions
Accomplishing
Finishing things
Internal taskmasters
“Ought-to’s”
Anything on my “To-do” list
Competition
Rushing, Speeding
Keeping time w/a watch, clocks
Leisure? (can be exhausting)

Anything that feels like “Work” to me:

Life-Giving Things I Could Embrace on My Sabbath

Eat a meal *sloowly*...
Take a walk with no destination
Say "Hello" out loud to Jesus
Examine something small in nature
Seek stillness
Lower your shoulders
Unclench your jaws
Sleep in
Watch birds at a feeder
Light a candle
Be playful
Feast – treat yourself to something special
Dream
Reflect – when was I most alive this week?
Anticipate
Say "Thank You" to God
Pet your dog
Look at family photos
Listen
Look at something beautiful
Hum a song
Celebrate
Take a deep breath
Rub lotion on your feet
Let a piece of chocolate melt in your mouth
Sit back in your chair
Notice, engage all of your senses
Dance
Remember answered prayer
Ponder one of Jesus' many questions
Strengthen a relationship w/a friend or family member

What are 3 ways my Sabbath day might look different, be "set apart," from the other six days?