

Embracing the gift of **SABBATH**

Part 1: Sabbath Patterned

DISCUSS

1. How did you find the opening discussion on the topic of Sabbath last week? Did you learn anything in particular?
2. Do you already observe the sabbath in any form? Do you experience any benefits from doing so?

READ

Genesis 2:1-3

EXPLAIN

Sabbath isn't just a day not to work, its a day to delight in the work of our hands. The Hebrew word for sabbath is shabbat, meaning to stop, cease, be complete but it can also mean celebrate. When God stopped, He didn't just cease to work, He celebrated what He had done.

DISCUSS

3. God didn't need to rest, and yet He did. We do need to rest, and often we don't. Why is this? What features of our culture lure us away from sabbathing?

4. God works six days then rests for one. In our culture, most people in paid work are required to work only five days. However the work God give us is not only our paid work - it is all the things we need to do to live (e.g. life admin, household chores, maintenance etc). What might be the advantages of ensuring we preserve a full 24 hour day each week away from all the forms of work we must do?

5. When is the best time in the week for you (and potentially your family) to take 24 hours in the week and view them as your sabbath? What might stop you?

6. Walking on the beach or the downs are obvious ways to get fresh air, exercise and appreciate for what God has made. But there are other ways to appreciate creation. How else can we enjoy the world God created on the sabbath?

7. Observing a sabbath has its challenges in every life circumstance - single, married, with children, retired, rich, poor. What are some of the challenges that might be faced by different people? How can they be overcome?

CONSIDER

Why not, as group, consider experimenting with the sabbath over the next few months? It might not work every week initially, but you might be surprised at how quickly you enjoy sabbathing - and even craving it each week! You could feed back to the group how you are getting on, and what practises you find helpful. Remember: there is no 'right' way to sabbath.

PRAY

Pray for one another as you seek to grow in understanding and living out God's ways, particularly around the sabbath.

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Part 2: Sabbath Commanded

DISCUSS

1. Have you tried sabbathing since the last conversation? How did it go? What did you notice about yourself? About God?

READ

Exodus 20:8-11

EXPLAIN

The call to observe the sabbath is one of the ten commandments. In fact, it is by far the longest command - God takes time to be clear about it. It is also the only commandment which refers right back to creation. Some have also noted that it is the only commandment not cited again in the New Testament, and therefore suggested that we should ignore it. However, while we aren't 'under' the sabbath, but it's still a great thing. If God has offered you a day's holiday each week, why wouldn't you take it? In these verses, God commands His people to take the sabbath seriously; seeing it not as an individual pursuit but a family activity.

DISCUSS

2. What does it look like for your family to sabbath? (This will of course vary hugely according to your family context. If you live alone, it is worth remembering that those who received this command originally did not necessarily live under the same roof as the others mentioned.)

EXPLAIN

God intended the sabbath to be holy. We often associate holiness with things we shouldn't do in the name of purity. But holiness is also about specialness. The sabbath is meant to be the special day in the week - the climax, not the breathing space.

DISCUSS

3. How can you connect with God on the sabbath in a way you don't over the rest of the week?

4. What benefit would a slower pace and more time devoted to Him have in your life?

5. What 'work' do you still absolutely need to do on the sabbath? (e.g. caring for kids, cooking etc.) How can you maximise the rest/fun of sabbath in light of these things?

6. What 'work' do you presently do on the sabbath that you would struggle to stop?

7. How does ceasing to work for a day each week lead to a dependence on God?

8. What internal drivers do you have that inhibit your ability to [genuinely rest](#)?

9. John Mark Comer writes, "[Underwork and overwork rob us of the capacity to enjoy God and his world. They make us less human.](#)" Is he right? Why so? Do you see either tendency in yourself?

PRAY

Pray that each of you would have a sense of the peace of God, and the freedom to truly rest as you sabbath each week.

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Part 3: Sabbath Gifted

DISCUSS

1. Have you tried sabbathing since the last conversation? How did it go? What did you notice about yourself? About God?

READ

Mark 2:23-28

EXPLAIN

In this passage, Jesus encounters Pharisees who have completely missed the point. They are spending their own sabbath policing how other people use the sabbath. Jesus dismisses their objections around harvesting grain (which wasn't forbidden in the Old Testament anyway) by recalling how David (one of their heroes) had broken convention because he and his men were in great need. Jesus uses this example to make his main point; sabbath is intended to serve us, not the other way round. It is a gift to be enjoyed; not a burden to be endured. And He goes even further, claiming that his Lordship over all things includes the sabbath.

DISCUSS

2. How could a person observe the sabbath and yet misuse it - making it about the wrong things? Have you ever done so?

3. How can you use the sabbath to serve you? Look at the list of activities below (feel free to add to the list). Which would be life-giving to you on a sabbath? Which would be life-draining?

- Exercise/sports
- Knitting
- Reading fiction
- Gardening
- Learning a language
- Playing music/singing
- Listening to music
- Watching sports
- Cooking/Eating great food
- Sleeping in
- Watching a movie
- Bird-watching
- Driving
- Walking/Getting into the countryside
- Going to bed early
- Going to a museum
- Looking at art
- Hosting friends
- Studying a subject
- Crafts
- DIY
- Fishing
- A glass of wine/beer

- Stamp collecting
- Playing games
- Writing
- Drawing/painting

4. What can you do if your spouse/family/housemate has different ideas about what is restful?

5. Who do you want to spend time with on the sabbath? Is there anyone it might be best **not** to spend time with?

6. What would you like your relationship with technology to be like on a sabbath? Do you find that hard to do healthily?

7. What would like your relationship with food and alcohol to be like on a sabbath? Is that hard for you to do healthily?

PRAY

Pray that God would lead you to do only life-giving things on your sabbath, and that your relationship with His creation would be increasingly healthy with each sabbath that passes.

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Part 4: Sabbath Restoration

DISCUSS

1. Have you tried sabbathing since the last conversation? How did it go? What did you notice about yourself? About God?

READ

Mark 3:1-6

EXPLAIN

In Jewish culture, working on the sabbath is bad - but doing so at the synagogue would be even worse. Jesus' enemies again miss the point; they want Him to 'work' on the sabbath by healing a man, so that they can criticise Him. But Jesus points out that the spirit of the sabbath is more about looking to do good than avoiding any sort of effort. For us, the temptation may be to simply spiritualise our leisure time, and spend 24 hours indulging ourselves rather than taking God's sabbath pattern seriously. While it is freeing to devote sabbath time to hobbies, interests and fun, if we over-focus on them we may miss the goal God has in mind for us.

DISCUSS

2. How might you be tempted to misuse the sabbath? (Eg, doing too much of a good thing, laziness, ignoring God).
3. What leisure activities might you be tempted to overdo on a sabbath? What are the signs that an activity has ceased to be life-giving?
4. How can we ensure that sabbath is not merely 24 hours of laziness/leisure - but is actually rest?

EXPLAIN

Traditionally, a sabbath would begin with: a celebratory dinner (with family, perhaps friends), the lighting of candles, prayer, the reading of Psalms.

A sabbath would include: some time alone in reflection and gratitude, sex (yes really, but only with your spouse!), reading scripture, worship and eating.

A sabbath would end with: lighting a candle, sharing reflections, sharing gratitude.

These are all great activities to try. The key thing is to stop working and delight in God. Alan Redpath says: "Give up the struggle and relax in the omnipotence of the Lord Jesus; look up into His lovely face and as you behold him, He will transform you into His likeness. You do the beholding - He does the transforming. There is no short-cut to holiness." Knowing God is the end goal of the sabbath.

5. Which practices are you excited to try as you sabbath?
6. What do you need to do in advance to make sure you have space to sabbath? (e.g. shopping, cleaning, cooking, dealing with email etc.)
7. How might observing the sabbath affect the rest of your week? Your life generally?

PRAY

Pray that you would find helpful sabbath practices that draw you closer to God.

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Part 5: Sabbath Freedom

DISCUSS

1. Have you tried sabbathing since the last conversation? How did it go? What did you notice about yourself? About God?

READ

Colossians 2:16
Romans 14:5

EXPLAIN

As we have seen, a 'religious' approach to sabbath is unhelpful - it is intended to be a gift. In the New Testament, we see that the early church were a bit more flexible. The Colossians verse was intended to reassure Christians that observing religious diets, festivals and holidays isn't necessary for salvation. The Romans verse is about accepting those at different stages in their faith journey - and varying convictions about the importance of different days in the calendar. Again, different perspectives on this issue are not connected to salvation, but rather reflect what life rhythms may be helpful to a person.

It is also worth noting that in the book of Acts, Paul clearly undertakes Gospel ministry on Jewish sabbaths, presumably making time to rest elsewhere in the week. So, whilst it is important to remember that we don't sabbath in order to be right with God, it remains part of a helpful rhythm of life.

DISCUSS

2. Do you think anyone (Christian or non-Christian) might 'judge' you for how you use your sabbath? How do you or would you feel?
3. Initially the novelty of sabbathing might make it feel great, but we will always have the human temptation to turn it into the wrong things. How can we keep the sabbath life-giving and meaningful, rather than religious and restrictive?
4. How would you explain sabbath to a curious, non-Christian friend?

5. When might be appropriate not to observe the sabbath?

CONSIDER

Now that we have spent a number of sessions looking at the sabbath - and trying a few things out - in your own words, what would you like your sabbath to look like? Take a few moments on your own to think or write, then share with the group.

PRAY

Spend some time prayer - that we would be a church that honours God by expressing our dependence on Him through embracing and enjoying the sabbath gift He has given us.