



Sabbath as Resistance

A 6-Lesson Study Guide for Individuals or Groups

~ A Church Wide Study Resource of

Trinity Wellsprings Church

by Rev. Dr. Jason Carter

Because we do not rest, we lose our way.

~ Wayne Muller

It was as if a whole people were in love with the seventh day.

~ Abraham Heschel, Jewish Rabbi

We find God's will for our lives in our limitations.

~ Peter Scazzaro

To choose to live an unhurried life in our day is somewhat like
taking a vow of poverty in earlier centuries. It is scary. It is an act of faith.

~ John Ortberg

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What the Sabbath is NOT

The Sabbath is not simply a “day off”.

As Eugene Peterson once remarked, “A ‘day off’ is a bastardization of Sabbath-keeping.”

The Sabbath is not solitude and silence.

Those are distinct spiritual disciplines. The Sabbath might include those elements but cannot be reduced to them.

The Sabbath is a not private affair.

Family, friends, and the family of God can and should be involved.

The Sabbath is not a solemn endeavor.

Traditionally, there was no fasting on the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath is worth celebrating – break out a bountiful table, eat succulent food, laugh & play with friends and family.

The Sabbath: What is it?

What is the Sabbath? Think of the four Cs of the Sabbath.

def·i·ni·tion | Sabbath:

Sabbath is ceasing, celebrating, and communing with God in community.

- **Ceasing...from work.**

Your pattern of work and rest is embedded in creation. This is who you were created to be.

- **Celebrating...your redemption.**

You are not a slave to work nor the inner compulsions that drive you towards non-stop production; the Sabbath is a day to celebrate your freedom. You were liberated! You were redeemed! By Christ! You celebrate those realities in your life! You celebrate freedom, life, creation, your humanity, and the goodness of God on the Sabbath.

- **Communion...with God.**

“Come to me,” says the gentle and lowly Christ. This is a gentle invitation is to find rest for your souls as you commune with God.

- **In Community.**

Sabbath is not an individualistic pursuit but rather a communal endeavor. Celebrate the Sabbath with the family of God as well as your own family and friends.

The Sabbath is a delight. We are to delight in the Sabbath because we are to delight in God.

“Keep the Sabbath day **holy**.

Don't pursue your own interests on that day,
but **enjoy** the Sabbath

and **speak of it with delight** as the LORD's holy day.

Honor the Sabbath **in everything** you do on that day,
and don't follow your own desires or talk idly.

Then the **LORD will be your delight**.

I will give you great honor
and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob.
I, the LORD, have spoken!” ~ Isaiah 58:13-14 (NLT)

“It was as if a whole people were in love with the seventh day.” | “The Sabbath is the most precious present mankind has received from the treasure house of God.”

~ Abraham Heschel, Jewish Rabbi

The Sabbath: How Do You Do It?

How do you organize life and a weekly rhythm around Sabbath in our Modern Society?

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6 Saturday	Day 7 Sunday
Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	Home Stuff	Celebrate your Redemption (with the people of God the church) 6:00 pm Sabbath Ends
					6:00 pm Sabbath Begins	Prepare for the Week Ahead

As Ruth Haley Barton observes, “The day itself [Sabbath] is set apart, devoted completely to rest, worship, and delighting in God’s good gifts, **but the other six days of the week must be lived in such a way as to make Sabbath possible**. Paid work needs to be contained within five days a week. Household chores, shopping, and errand running need to be completed before the sabbath comes or they need to wait. Courageous decisions,” must be made about work and athletics, church and community involvement.”¹ Courageous decisions indeed!

Two temptations that working people face:

Temptation #1: The weekend becomes an undifferentiated blob which unintentionally bounces back and forth between “down time” (vegging out on the couch) and “necessary activity” (mowing the yard, doing the shopping, projects around the house) and “church activity and family/friends”. A Sabbath-rest is different.

Notice that Day 6 has a specific purpose rather than simply being an undifferentiated blob of time. Your purpose is to live in such a way as to make Sabbath possible on the 7th day. Day 6 is for mowing the grass, cleaning the house, doing the shopping – anything that you will put “on the backburner” on the Sabbath.

Temptation #2: Your work creeps over into the sixth or seventh day. If your work creeps over into the weekend, then you will be faced with one of two (unfortunate) propositions. Either you will

¹ Bold and italics added, Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2022), pp. 8.

fall behind in the ordinary-stuff-of-life kind of things (cleaning the house, necessary shopping, home projects) and always feel like you are playing “catch-up” in life **or** you will be tempted to cut out the Sabbath and thereby neglect your soul, your family, your friendships, and your faith.

Question: Why do you suggest Saturday (6:00 pm) thru Sunday evening (6:00 pm) instead of, for instance, a Sabbath on “all day Sunday”?

Answer: Sundays definitely work! Yet, for working people or families: have you ever noticed what happens to you at the end of the weekend? Your mind starts shifting back to “work mode” or “school mode” on Sunday evening: what meetings do I have tomorrow? What assignments are due this week? What challenges await me in the week to come? This is the opposite of rest! The “going back to my work or school life” is actually a big anxiety producer in many lives.

This is why “Prepare for the Week Ahead” is highlighted in YELLOW on the chart above. Anything you did not accomplish or finish (on day 6 | “Home Stuff”) can be “saved” for Sunday night. Perhaps you intentionally “save”: balancing your budget, paying the bills, or folding the laundry. Working people might also check their calendar for the week ahead, as the Sabbath has already been enjoyed!

Question: What rituals are helpful to *begin* the Sabbath day?

Answer: The Sabbath is a day set apart. If you decide to celebrate the Sabbath beginning on Saturday night: mark the “new Sabbath time” in intentional ways which distinguish the time as “different” than all other days. You can begin the Sabbath by lighting a candle, reading a scripture, saying a prayer, eating a succulent meal, and/or practicing hospitality with others to begin the Sabbath day.

If you decide to practice the Sabbath beginning on Sunday AM: mark the “new Sabbath time” by a new morning routine, getting to church early, and looking for intentional ways to show hospitality -- celebrate the day “differently” than simply a day off. **Remember: The Sabbath is ceasing, celebrating, and communing with God in community.** Therefore, celebrating the Sabbath typically tries to incorporate as many of the 4Cs as possible into the rhythm of Sabbath-keeping.

“Hey, I am already retired! Isn’t every day a Sabbath day for me?”

Ruth Haley Barton writes, “Sabbath is a gift for all ages and stages, but it will be experienced differently throughout the various seasons of our lives.”²

Most people in the workplace/marketplace do not need to be convinced that a slower pace of life is needed; many already recognize that their current speed and pace of life is unhealthy and (often) completely unsustainable. What people in the workplace need convincing of is **that the Sabbath is actually possible!**

The Sabbath seems out of reach with the modern pace of life.

The ethos of “being retired” is different. Retirees may recognize that Sabbath is actually possible now, but they often need convincing that the Sabbath is necessary for their lives.

² Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, pp. 76.

	No Need to Convince	Need Convincing
Working People	The pace of my life is too fast!	Sabbath is actually possible.
Retired People	Sabbath is actually possible.	Sabbath is actually necessary.

While a full-fledged “theology of retirement” is beyond the scope of this study, a few thoughts may help anchor our discussion of practicing the Sabbath in the age and stage of life that Americans call “retirement”. In a Gospel Coalition article entitled “Don’t Waste Your Retirement”, Jeff Haanen observes:

Baby boomers are retiring at an average of 10,000 per day; over the next 20 years, an estimated 70 million boomers will stop working. Those over age 65 are the fastest-growing age demographic in the United States.

It’s not just America, either. The world is rapidly aging.

From 2025 to 2050 the older [over age 65] population is projected to almost double to 1.6 billion globally,” the U.S. Census Bureau reported. In 2015, only 8.5 percent of the world was over 65; by 2050, that number is expected to reach 16.7 percent.³

While America is famously prone to prioritize youth and beauty, Haanen recognizes that “Scripture is replete with elders playing a critical role in redemptive history. Sarah was 90 when she miraculously gave birth to Isaac. Moses was 80 and Aaron was 83 when they confronted Pharaoh. Anna, an 84-year-old widow who devoted herself to fasting, prayer, and worship, ‘gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel’ (Luke 2:38). Far from being whisked off to desert golf courses or Caribbean cruises, elders were sought out for time-tested wisdom (Proverbs 31:23).

Gordon Smith, author of *Courage and Calling*, believes two ideas—wisdom and blessing—comprise the biblical model for fruitful living in retirement. ‘To bless is simply to affirm the other, to take particular delight and joy in the other in a nonjudgmental manner,’ he writes. Elders are called to lay down former titles and professional roles, yet take up a mantle of wisdom and affirmation for a coming generation.”⁴

Question: What does a retiree do on the Sabbath that is different than all the other days?

Answer: A retirement axiom often repeated is: “I don’t know how I fit in all that work into my life before!” Part of the (American) human condition is that busyness is often touted as a badge of honor. Retirement is no guarantee of resting in God.

For retirees, like other stages of life, the Sabbath is the perfect day “to do good” (Luke 6:9). On the Sabbath, one might put aside the normal cycle of productivity and the incessant demand for consumerism in exchange for showing “hospitality to one another” (1 Peter 4:9), reaching out to neighbors, and enjoying fellowship and friendship with the people of God. Spiritual practices like solitude and silence may be incorporated as practices which help the believer “rest in God” on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath is also the perfect day to mute

³ See Jeff Hannen, “Don’t Waste Your Retirement,” The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dont-waste-your-retirement/>.

⁴ Ibid.

the omnipresent availability of digital screens and the nonstop fascination with being entertained 24/7 to attend courageously to the often-neglected soul.

Retirees may be especially sensitive to asking the question: “Where are the pockets of relational poverty around me?” Who is suffering from loneliness or isolation that needs a visit? The Sabbath is perfect for this kind visitation or practice of hospitality.

Retirees may also be free to ask the question: “Where does mercy especially need to be practiced?” Is a friend, neighbor, or relative lost and far from God? A good Sabbath practice is to follow the practice of Jesus in offering mercy and hope on the Sabbath day to people struggling or far from God.

Finally, worshipping with God’s people to joyfully celebrate your redemption is a gift that should be experienced in community on the Sabbath day. As Hebrews 10:24-25 states, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, *not neglecting to meet together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Question: Do you suggest the same weekly rhythm of Sabbath-keeping (6:00 pm Sat – 6:00 pm Sun) as those still working in the marketplace?

Answer: Not necessarily. I can see “Sunday as my Sabbath day” being a tremendous joy and blessing for those in the retirement season of life. At the same time, perhaps there is ancient wisdom to be mined (from Israel) in keeping the Sabbath from sundown to sundown. Try it a couple of ways and see what works for you.

LESSON 1: LONGING FOR SABBATH: OUR WEARY SOULS

Resisting the Cultural Pull and Diagnosing Our Problem

Big Idea: Hurry is the Great Enemy of the Spiritual Life.

Big Question: *Can you tap into – and pay attention to – your inner **longings** for a different kind of life? A Sabbath kind of life?*

Big Scripture: Read Matthew 11:28-30

Big Key Quotes:

“To walk with Jesus is to walk with a slow, unhurried pace. Hurry is the death of prayer and only impedes our work. It never advances it.” ~ Walter Adams (Spiritual Director of C.S. Lewis)

“For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.” ~ John Ortberg

“Why am I in such a rush to become somebody I don’t even like?” ~ John Mark Comer

Big Read: *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* by John Mark Comer, pp. 1-28 (Prologue & Chapter 1 - Hurry: The Great Enemy of Spiritual Life)

10 Symptoms of Hurry Sickness

~ from *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (pp. 48-51)

Check **X** if the symptom rings true for you...

- 1. Irritability:** You get mad, frustrated, or just annoyed way too easily. Little, normal things irk you. People must tiptoe around your ongoing low-grade negativity if not anger. Word of advice from a fellow's eggshell expert: to self-diagnose don't look at how you treat a colleague or a neighbor; look at how you treat those closest to you: your spouse, children, roommate, etc.

- 2. Hypersensitivity:** All it takes is a minor comment to hurt your feelings, a grumpy email to set you off, or a little turn of events to throw you into an emotional funk and ruin your day. Minor things quickly escalate to major emotional events. Depending on your personality, this might show up as anger or nitpicky-ness or anxiety or depression or just tiredness. The point is the ordinary problems of life, this side of Eden, have a disproportionate effect on your emotional well-being and relational grace. You can't seem to roll with the punches. _____
- 3. Restlessness:** When you do try to slow down and rest, you can't relax. You give Sabbath a try, and you hate it. You read Scripture but find it boring. You have quiet time with God but can't focus your mind. You go to bed early but toss and turn with anxiety. You watch TV but simultaneously check your phone, fold laundry, and get into a spat on Twitter (okay, maybe you just answer your email). Your mind and body are hyped up on the drug of speed, and when they don't get the next dopamine fix, they shiver. _____
- 4. Workaholism (or just nonstop activity):** You just don't know when to stop. Or worse you *can't* stop. Another hour, another day, another week. Your drugs of choice are accomplishment and accumulation. These could show up as careerism or just as obsessive housecleaning and errand running. Result: you fall prey to "sunset fatigue", whereby days end you have nothing left to give to your spouse, children, or loved ones. They get the grouchy, curt, overtired you, and it's not pretty. _____
- 5. Emotional numbness:** You just don't have the capacity to *feel* another's pain. Or your own pain for that matter. Empathy is a rare feeling for you. You just don't have the time for it. You live in this kind of constant fugue. _____
- 6. Out-of-order priorities:** You feel disconnected from your identity and calling. You're always getting sucked into the tyranny of the urgent, not the important. Your life is reactive, not proactive. You're busier than ever before yet still feel like you don't have time for what really matters to you. Months often go by or *years*—or, God forbid, maybe *decades*—and you realize you still haven't gotten around to all the things you *said* were the most important in your life.

- 7. Lack of care for your body:** You don't have time for the basics: eight hours of sleep at night; daily exercise; healthy, home-cooked food; minimal stimulants; margin. You gain weight. Get sick multiple times a year. Regularly wake up tired. Don't sleep well. Live off the four horsemen of the industrialized food apocalypse: caffeine, sugar, processed carbs, and alcohol. _____
- 8. Escapist behaviors:** When we're too tired to do what's actually life-giving for our souls, we each turn to our distraction of choice: overeating, overdrinking, binge-watching Netflix, browsing social media, surfing the web, looking for porn—name your preferred cultural narcotic. Narcotics are good, healthy even, on the occasional short-term basis when they shield us from unnecessary pain; but when we abuse them to escape from reality, they eat us alive. You find yourself stuck in the negative feedback loop of socially acceptable additions. _____
- 9. Slippage of spiritual disciplines:** If you're anything like me when you get over busy, the things that are truly life-giving for your soul are the first to go rather than your first *go-to*—such as quiet time in the morning, Scripture, prayer, Sabbath, worship on Sunday, a meal with your community, and so on. Because in an ironic catch-22, the thing that makes for rest actually takes a bit of emotional energy and self-discipline. When we get over-busy, we get overtired, and when we get overtired, we don't have the energy or discipline to do what we need most for our souls. Repeat. The cycle begins to feed its own energy. So instead of life with God, we settle for life with a Netflix subscription and a glass of cheap red wine. A very poor substitute. Not because time wasted on TV is the great Satan, but we rarely get done binge-watching *anything* (or posting on social media, or overeating Five Guys burger and fries, etc.) and feel awake and alive from the soul outward, rested, refreshed, and ready for a new day. We delay the inevitable: an emotional crash. And consequently, we miss out on the life-giving sense of the with-ness of God. _____
- 10. Isolation:** You feel disconnected from God, others, and your own soul. On those rare times when you actually stop to pray (and by praying I don't mean ask God for stuff; I mean sit with God in the quiet), you're so stressed and distracted that your mind can't settle down long enough to enjoy the Father's company. Same with your friends: when you're with them, you're also with your phone or a million miles away in your mind, running down the to-do list. And even when you're alone, you come face to face with the void that is your soul and immediately run back to the familiar groove of busyness and digital distraction. _____

Okay, you do the math.

How did you score? _____ Seven out of ten? Eight?

What if We Have Forgotten One of God's Best Ideas?

~ from *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* by A.J. Swoboda

Remembering Sabbath

In 1991, a yet-to-be-identified flea market enthusiast discovered a simple picture frame to his liking. Securing the purchase, the shopper returned home only to discover an ancient document hiding inconspicuously behind the frame. Thinking little of the discovery, he continued about his life. Two years later a friend stumbled on the document and investigated its origin. The rest of history. The four-dollar frame had hidden a first-edition copy of the Declaration of Independence reported worth north of one million dollars. This accidental discovery is not isolated. There was the contractor who found \$182,000 in a bathroom wall he was remodeling. A three-dollar Chinese bowl later sold at Sotheby's for \$2.2 million—it was a treasure from the Northern Song Dynasty. Then there was that California family who stumbled on a can of ancient gold coins in their backyard valued at \$10 million.

To borrow Calvin's words from Bill Waterson's iconic comic strip, "There's treasure everywhere." Not only do treasures of gold and silver lie hidden everywhere around us, but priceless **ideas** do as well. History is the story of ideas lost and found, disappearing and reappearing time and again to the surface.

This is important, for ideas are a matter of life and death. Take slavery for example, which deems some people as inferior to others and regards people as objects to be used. Eugenics similarly witnesses to a whole set of beliefs that suggest that certain human lives are intrinsically valuable—so long as (in the case of Nazism) they are German, have blond hair and blue eyes, and do not have Down Syndrome or a disability. One cannot read Hitler's writings on the concept of *lebensraum* ("final solution") and suggest that ideas, even in seed form, are insignificant or not worth debate. In the end, the ideas of a few led to the murder of millions....The Holocaust was first conceived as a simple, inconspicuous idea--unchallenged and unquestioned by far too many.

Cultural critical and historian Howard Zinn once wrote, "We can reasonably conclude that how we think is not just mildly interesting, not just a subject for intellectual debate, but a matter of life and death." Christian philosopher Dallas Willard agrees: "We live at the mercy of our ideas."

Sometimes humanity lives its worst ideas and forgets its best ideas. In Scripture, God's people often forget the ideas of God. For instance, 2 Kings 22 tells the tale of King Josiah. Rising to power at a time when Israel had all but completely forgotten God's law and ways, Josiah sends his secretary into the Temple to do some administrative work. Seemingly by accident Shaphan discovers a number of dusty, old, unfamiliar scrolls. He discerns their identity: scrolls of the Jewish Torah! He becomes aware of the tragedy: God's people have literally forgotten God's word. In a profound act of repentance, Josiah publicly calls Israel back to God's law. Remembering is a godly act – time and again retrieving the truth of God in the present. Perhaps this is why St. Paul constantly "reminds" the early churches of the gospel of Jesus – the church is the one that so easily forgets it. God's people are indeed saved from their sins. But apparently not from a bad memory.

Have you ever wondered whether there is something **we** have forgotten? What has the church overlooked in **our** time?

What might **we** have amnesia over?

“Remember the Sabbath” (Exod. 20:8).

Sabbath is that ancient idea and practice of intentional rest that has long been discarded by much of the church and our world. Sabbath is not new. Sabbath is just new to *us*. Historically, Christians have kept some form or another of the Sabbath for two thousand years. But it has largely been forgotten by the church, which has uncritically mimicked the rhythms of the industrial and success-obsessed West. The result? Our road-weary, exhausted churches have largely failed to integrate the Sabbath into their lives as vital elements of Christian discipleship. It is not as though we do not love God—we love God deeply. We just do not know how to sit with God anymore. We have come to know Jesus only as the Lord of the harvest, forgetting that he is the Lord of the Sabbath as well. Sabbath forgetfulness is driven, so often, in the name of doing stuff *for* God rather than *being with* God...The result of our Sabbath amnesia is that we have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history.

...We must begin by remembering. If you journey into a contemporary Jewish home prepared for Sabbath, you will likely encounter two candles lit by (more often than not) the woman of the home. On Friday evening, she waves the flames from kiddush candles—setting the mood for restful intimacy—toward her face to symbolize the Sabbath entering her home. One tradition holds that these candled symbolize a room set for lovemaking. But why two candles? They represent two lists of commands, one commanding us “to remember” (Exod. 20:8) and the second “to observe” (Deut. 5:12) the Sabbath. Those two candles are a reminder, the rabbis insisted, that Sabbath observance depended on Sabbath remembrance. To *do*, one must first *remember*.

As said, contemporary Christianity has an acute case of Sabbath amnesia – we have forgotten to remember. We have become what the rabbis called *tinok shenishba*. Literally, this means “the child who was captured”. Judith Shulevitz illuminates the image of the one who forgets the Sabbath: “The rabbis [discussed] the legal implications of forgetting the Sabbath....What would the penalty for such amnesia or ignorance be? And what kind of Jew could be so oblivious to the Sabbath? Only, the rabbis thought, a Jew who had suffered extreme cultural dislocation. *Only a Jew who had been kidnapped as a child and raised by non-Jews*. For Jews, forgetting the Sabbath was akin to forgetting one’s entire identity. A Jew forgetting the Sabbath was like an Israelite who was raised by Pharaoh. While Christians are going to enter into the Sabbath in a unique way, to remember the Sabbath is to remember who we are—children born of the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. To keep a Sabbath is to give time and space on our calendar to the grace of God.⁵

⁵ A.J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018), pp. 3-5.

Questions for Small Groups or Individuals (Lesson 1)

1. **Read Matthew 11:28-30.** Dane Ortlund in *Gentle and Lowly* writes: “Matthew 11 tells us explicitly who qualifies for fellowship with Jesus: ‘all who labor and are heavy laden.’ You don’t need to unburden or collect yourself and then come to Jesus. Your very burden is what qualifies you to come. No payment is required; he says, ‘I will *give* you rest.’ His rest is gift, not transaction. Whether you are actively working hard to crowbar your life into smoothness (‘labor’) or passively finding yourself weighted down by something outside your control (‘heavy laden’), Jesus’ desire that you find rest, that you come in out of the storm, outstrips even your own.”

How does the thought strike you that Jesus desires for you to find rest even more than you desire that for yourself?

Read again Matthew 11:28-30 and sit with the passage. Anything else that God is speaking to you through the text?

~ **from *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*:**

2. Corrie ten Boom once famously stated that if the devil can’t make you sin, he’ll make you busy. Carl Jung: “Hurry is not of the devil; hurry is the devil.” The Finnish proverb quips, “God did not create hurry.”

What do you think of the following idea: “*Busyness is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life. Busyness is the greatest enemy of a life with God.*”

- Busyness makes us more prone to habitual sin.

- Busyness makes us more apt to “go with the flow” of our culture. In our busyness, we fail to evaluate and resist the prevailing secular worldview by meditating deeply on God’s counter-cultural Word.
- Busyness compounds many other challenges to living the Christian life.

As John Ortberg writes, “All my worst moments...are when I’m in a hurry.”

Think deeply about how the pace of our culture and the busyness of your life affect your (spiritual) life? What are the effects that you see in your own life?

3. Hurry and Love. John Mark Comer argues that “Hurry and love are incompatible”. That is, when you are in a hurry, it is difficult to love those around you. Your soul is sped up. Your schedule will not permit you to slow down to love. It becomes virtually impossible to connect soul-to-soul or authentic-self-to-authentic-self with another.

Comer writes: “When you are running late or in a hurry, pay attention next time how you relate to people [especially your family]. Does it look and feel like love? Or is it far more in the vein of agitation, anger, a biting comment, a rough glare?”

The Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama in *Three Mile an Hour God* argues that “*God walks ‘slowly’ because he is love...Love has a speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is slow yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love.*”

Might slowing down and Sabbath keeping actually help you obey the most important of all the commandments? Remember, you have two things to do today: Love God & Love Others!

Questions to Consider: Might Sabbath-keeping be a conduit in helping you be **transformed into love** (often regarded by the Spiritual Giants of Church History as “apex Christian spirituality”)? How does that invitation feel to your soul?

4. Hurry and Joy/Peace. John Mark Comer also argues that JOY and PEACE are incompatible with hurry (see page 24-25). Are you beginning to see the beauty of maintaining a rhythm of life that is conducive to the cultivation of the Fruit of the Spirit?

Think about his statement: “Why am I in such a rush to become somebody I don’t even like?”

If you truly did a deep dive on your life, here’s a thought: what if you actually changed your pace of life by observing the Sabbath?

Get in touch with your longings. What are your longings with regard to your own busyness and the speed of your life? At a deep level of your longings, do you feel yourself being stirred to practice new, slower, sacred rhythms of life? Why or why not?

~ from 10 Symptoms of Hurry Sickness:

5. What was your score (1 to 10)? **What did the exam tell you about your life?** Any deeper thoughts other than: “Yeah, I already knew that about my life?” (Disappointed? Experiencing regret? Overwhelmed? Grateful for healthy boundaries? Renewed hopefulness for change?)

Are you neck deep in “Hurry Sickness”? What did the exam tell you about your life?

~ from What if We Have Forgotten One of God’s Best Ideas? in *Subversive Sabbath* by A.J. Swoboda

6. A.J. Swoboda writes, “The result of our Sabbath amnesia is that we have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history.” Can you leave open the possibility that the Christian church may have forgotten (a la King Josiah re-discovering the Torah) one of God’s best ideas – the Sabbath -- for living the Christian life in a way that deeply honors God, makes space for the soul, and builds a spiritual community?

LESSON 2: CREATION AND THE SABBATH

Big Idea: You were created to rest and dwell with God.

Big Scripture: Read Genesis 1:1 – Genesis 2:3

Big Key Quotes:

- “Striking as it is, Adam and Eve’s first full day of existence was a day of rest, not work.” ~ A.J. Swoboda
- “Sabbath is the most precious present humankind has received from the treasure house of God.” ~ Abraham Heschel, Jewish rabbi & scholar
- “The only thing God deems as **qadosh** or ‘holy’ in the creation story is the Sabbath day.” ~ A.J. Swoboda
- “We find God’s will for our lives in our limitations.” ~ Peter Scazzaro

Big Assignment for the Week: *Experiment with Sabbath-keeping this week! Try an ancient spiritual practice. Try to incorporate the Four Cs: Sabbath is ceasing, celebrating, and communing with God in comunity.*

On Time

~ by Ruth Haley Barton

There have to be times in your life when you move slow,
times when you walk rather than run, settling into each step...
There have to be times when you stop and gaze admiringly at loved ones,
marveling that they have been given to you for this life...
times when hugs linger and kisses are real,
when food and drink are savored with gratitude and humility
rather than gulped down on your way to something else.
There have to be times when you read for the sheer pleasure of it,
marveling at the beauty of words
and the endless creativity in putting them together...
times when you settle into the comforts of home
and become human again.
There have to be times when you light a candle and
find the tender place inside you that loves or sorrows or sings

and you pray from that place,
times when you let yourself *feel*, when you allow the tears to come
rather than blinking them back because you don't have time to cry.
There have to be times to sink into the soft body of yourself
and love what you love simply because love itself is a grace...
times when you sit with gratitude for the good gifts of your life
that get lost and forgotten in the rush of things...
times to celebrate and play
to roll down hills
to splash in water or make leaf piles
to spread paint on paper or walls or each other.
There have to be times to sit and wait for the fullness of God
that replenishes body, mind, and soul—
if you can even stand to be so full.
There has to be time
for the fullness of time
or time is meaningless.

Big Read: *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again* by Ruth Haley Barton (Chapters 1-2; pp. 3-26). Intervarsity Press, 2022.

Questions for Small Groups or Individuals (Lesson 2)

1. **Read Genesis 1:1 – Genesis 2:3.** In *Subversive Sabbath*, A.J. Swobda writes: “The Jews were not the only religious people in the ancient world. There were others, such as the Akkadians, Egyptians, and Phoenicians, and they had their own creation stories. When one compares the biblical creation story with these other creation stories, a number of critical differences rise to the surface. For example, the biblical creation story is the only one that contends that matter—creation, people, the world, everything—is intrinsically good. In other creation stories, the world is essentially bad. Another difference is the role of women in creation. In ancient context where men, rulers, and kings alone bore God’s image, the biblical story depicts a world in which men *and* women are created in God’s image. Among patriarchal societies, no other sacred text held such a high view of women as the Hebrew Bible. Third, consider God’s invitation to rest on the seventh day. In other ancient Near Eastern creation myths, people were created for the purpose of being worked to the bone to accomplish the fiats of the gods; this was particularly the paradigm of the Egyptians. Unlike those other gods, however, Yahweh commands that humanity is to work hard *and* rest well. In no other creation narrative do the gods provide this kind of rest to creation. No other god gave a break. No other god carries the well-being of creation as close to the heart as this One. Again, imagine what first impression that would have given to the Akkadians, Egyptians, and Phoenicians about the God of the Bible and the people who worshipped him.

We worship the God who invented the weekend. This is why Biblical scholar Al Baylis contends that “Genesis 1 is one of the most remarkable put-downs ever administered.” The biblical creation account essentially served as a theological rebuttal of all the other ‘gods’ who never allowed anyone to rest. In a restless world, Yahweh *required* rest. Again, imagine what kind of first impression that would have given to an ancient person’s understanding of Yahweh. The God of Scripture not only rests himself but invites the world to rest with him.” (pp. 9-10).

Questions: What do these Creation truths tell you about Yahweh? What kind of God is He revealing Himself to be in the creation story of Genesis 1-2?

2. **Human Existence and Rest.** “Humans, made by the Triune God, were created with a need for relationship. Relational needs are not a by-product of the fall. Likewise, the need for rest, or Sabbath, is not an aftertaste of human sinfulness, unlike our chronic inability to receive rest. In fact...Sabbath is a foretaste of heaven.”

“All of this means that humans’ need for rest and sleep was not a result of sin or disobedience. Sleep does not come after, but before, the fall. In fact, we see that the first act of “deep sleep” (Hebrew: *tardemah*) is initiated by God, resulting in the creation of the woman. Sleep is a result of God’s activity, intended to take place in paradise before it was lost. Likewise, our need for Sabbath rest as well as sleep points not to our sinfulness but to the very way God has created us and thus intended for us to function. Like sleep, the day of rest comes *before* the fall. Rest was not a result of the devil’s work. As we were made to eat and breathe and walk, we were made, from the foundations of the world, to rest, or to Sabbath, in God.” ~ A.J. Swoboda, pp. 15.

The first day of existence for Adam and Eve was to rest. Think about it! The primary purpose of Adam and Eve’s first day was to dwell and abide with God. They were to celebrate the goodness of creation, the beauty of relationships, and commune with their Creator God. They had not even done any work yet! This day of rest was not a “reward” for “working hard all week”, it was a gift and foundation of human existence. Adam and Eve “wake up” on day one **resting** and **delighting** in God, which are two essential hallmarks of Sabbath-keeping.

Question: What do these truths, from the Creation story, tell you about the purpose of your life and existence?

3. *The Big Idea of this Lesson:* ***You were made to rest and dwell in God.***

Yes, this is a biblical truth which is deeply rooted in the creation narrative of Genesis. Yet, the Sabbath rest is a sign pointing not only backwards to creation but also forward to the New Heaven and New Earth. **Sabbath rest is where we are headed as believers.** The eschatological character of the Sabbath as resting in God has a decisive forward-looking element to it! The *telos* (the ultimate object or aim) of the Sabbath points forward to our resting and dwelling with God in the New Creation. As Ruth Haley Barton comments, Sabbath rest is “the goal of all existence” (pp. 25) both from the standpoint of creation and eschatologically in the future.

Read Revelation 21:1-3: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

God delights to dwell with his people:

- In Creation, God walks with Adam and Even in the garden in the cool of the day; Yahweh invites them to enter His Rest (Gen. 1-3).
- God establishes his Tabernacle in the Wilderness to dwell with his people. Exodus 40:34-35 records the glory of God filling the tent which indicates that God longs to dwell with his people.
- God promises that David’s son will build a Temple in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7), a promise at the heart of the Davidic Covenant. God will build the “House” of David so that he will have a son forever on the throne (pointing to the Messiah, Jesus). 1 Kings 8:10-11 records the glory of God again filling the Temple which superseded the tabernacle.
- In the incarnation, Jesus “tabernacles” with his people: “*And the Word became flesh and **dwelt** [literally: tabernacled] among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). In Jesus, we experience the fullness of God: “*For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*” (Col. 1:19).
- After the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, God sends the Holy Spirit to the church so that God can continue to **dwell** with his people: “*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you [plural, referring to the church] too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit*” (Eph. 2:19-22).

When you participate in a Sabbath-rest, you are both remembering that you are a creature that was designed to rest **and** you participate in an eschatological truth that, one day, you will enter into the rest of God where God will dwell with his people: “*He will dwell with them, and they will be his people*” (Rev. 21:3)

Question: How does the truth that **God delights to dwell with his people** as a central storyline of the Bible which runs from Genesis to Revelation impact how you live the Christian life? Might it re-orientate the way in which you live out your days?

4. **Taking Stock of your Restless or Restful Life.** Where are you on the spectrum of enjoying and delighting in the Sabbath-rest of God? (1-10?)

You could frame it like this:

RESTFUL

RESTLESSNESS

Margin -----	Busyness
Slowness -----	Hurry
Quiet -----	Noise
Deep Relationships -----	Isolation
Time Alone -----	Crowds
Delight -----	Distraction
Enjoyment -----	Envy
Clarity -----	Confusion
Gratitude -----	Greed
Contentment -----	Discontentment
Trust -----	Worry
Love -----	Anger, angst
Joy -----	Melancholy, sadness
Peace -----	Anxiety
Working from love -----	Working for love
Work as contribution -----	Working as accumulation & accomplishment

John Mark Comer asks: “Which list best describes you? If you resonate more with list B [restlessness]: again, zero guilt trip. Human nature and the digital age form a foreboding alliance *against* a spirit of restfulness” (pp. 149).

So what is it: What list best describes you? What does that say about your life?

5. **Practicing a Spirituality of Limitation.** Thinking again of the list above (Restful vs. Restlessness), what do you think Peter Scarrazo meant by: “*We find God’s will for our lives in our limitations.*”

Has that ever been true in your life? Why do you think limitations do not (typically) impact the way we live in the present or project our lives into the future?

6. **Sabbath as Invitation to Meet your Deepest Longings.** The Sabbath is an invitation, indeed a command, to enter rest and delight in God. Sabbath is an invitation to dwell with God and therein receive tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel writes: After six days of creation—what did the universe still lack? *Menuha*. Came the Sabbath, came *menuha*, and the universe was complete. *Menuha* which we usually render with “rest”, means here much more than withdrawal from labor and exertion, more than freedom from toil, strain or activity of any kind. *Menuha* is not a negative concept but something real and intrinsically positive...What was created on the seventh day? *Tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose*. To the biblical mind, *menuha* is the same as happiness and stillness, as peace and harmony.⁶

Question: What do you think about this invitation and command? So many people are desperately longing for tranquility, serenity, peace and repose. Do you think that Sabbath-keeping might be one way to enter into this deep longing?

7. **Assignment for the Week: Experiment with Sabbath keeping this week.** Report back to the group how you experienced the assignment and/or process the experience with those closest to you (spouse, family, friends) about the joys and difficulties of Sabbath-keeping after one time of observing the Sabbath.

⁶ As quoted by Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, pp. 18-19.

LESSON 3: THE EXODUS AND THE SABBATH

Big Idea: Resting is the posture of freedom; unceasing work and production is a symptom of slavery. *To not obey a Sabbath rest is to willingly subject yourself to slavery.*

Big Key Quote:

“If you aren’t resting, you are a slave to something.” ~ Adele Calhoun

Big Scripture: **Exodus 20:1-17** (The Ten Commandments); **Deuteronomy 5:12-15** (Sabbath – 4th Commandment | Deuteronomy Chapter 5 is the second time The 10 Commandments are repeated in the Torah)

Exodus 20:1-17:

And God spoke all these words, saying,

²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³“You shall have no other gods before me. **[1st Commandment]**

⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. **[2nd Commandment]**

⁷“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. **[3rd Commandment]**

⁸“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it 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. ¹¹For 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. **[4th Commandment]**

¹²“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. **[5th Commandment]**

¹³“You shall not murder. **[6th Commandment]**

¹⁴“You shall not commit adultery. **[7th Commandment]**

¹⁵“You shall not steal. **[8th Commandment]**

¹⁶“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. **[9th Commandment]**

¹⁷“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” **[10th Commandment]**

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹²“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵You 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 the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Big Read: Selections from Chapters 1-2 of *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* by Walter Brueggemann (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014)

Questions for Small Groups or Individuals (Lesson 3)

Open with the following prayer:

God of the covenant, we come before you carrying the weight of anxieties we often find difficult to cast aside. In a world of many competing priorities that leave us restless and unsatisfied, we yearn for Sabbath rest. Blow the freeing winds of your Spirit on us. Help us resist the gods of our culture. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

1. Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 are the two times in Scripture where the 10 Commandments are recorded as being given to the People of God.

What do you notice about the 4th Commandment in Ex. 20:8-11 and Deut. 5:12-15? In Exodus 20, the Sabbath is to be remembered because “in six days the Lord made heaven and earth” and “rested on the seventh day”. What is different about the 4th Commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12-15? On what basis is Israel commanded to keep the Sabbath day in Deut. 5?

2. Read Exodus 5:1-19. Walter Brueggemann characterizes Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt as the “gods of insatiable productivity”—“they are confiscatory gods who demand endless production and who authorize endless systems of production that are, in principle, insatiable” (pp. 2)

- “Why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!” (Exod. 5:4)
- “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But you shall require them the same quality of bricks as they have made previously” (vs. 7-8)
- “Complete your work the same daily assignment as when you were given straw.” (vs. 13)
- “You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks” (vs. 19)

Brueggemann: “It is clear that in this system there can be no Sabbath rest.”

- “There is no rest for **Pharaoh** in his supervisory capacity...there can be no rest for Pharaoh’s **supervisors** or **taskmasters**....there can be no rest for the **slaves** who must satisfy the taskmasters in order to meet Pharaoh’s demanding quotas. We can imagine, moreover, that the ‘Egyptian gods’ also never rested, because of their commitment to the aggrandizement of Pharaoh’s system...the economy reflects the splendor of the gods who legitimate the entire system.” (pp. 4-5)

REFLECT: We tend to think of Sabbath as solely rooted in Genesis 1. Yet, can you imagine the way that the Sabbath would have been received as a Divine Gift for the Jewish people? What would it have been like to celebrate the Sabbath with Israel’s history of Egyptian enslavement now in their rearview mirror? The Sabbath would have constantly reminded these former Jewish slaves about their liberation and release from the gods of insatiable production.

How do you imagine the Sabbath would have been received from God for a people previously enslaved in Egypt?

3. The Development of the Sabbath: Rooted in Creation and Redemption ~ Reflections by Jason Carter

In the Old Testament, there occurs a “progressive revelation” in the nature and character of the Sabbath for the people of God. Progressive revelation occurs throughout the Bible with many aspects of God’s character and God’s ways. In short, God does not dump all we need to know about God or even about important institutions like the Sabbath in one download, as it were, but progressively over the course of redemptive history.

Understanding the progressive revelation of the Sabbath is essential if we are to understand the complex relationship of Jesus to the Sabbath in the New Testament and why all the “Sabbath

controversies” in the four gospels almost always involve healings on the Sabbath. *It’s as if Jesus is going “out of his way” to heal precisely on the Sabbath? Why is that the case?*

Simply put, Sabbath-keeping is rooted in both creation and redemption. Sabbath-keeping has a dual basis in the Scriptures. The important beginning of the Decalogue (“*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” - Exod. 20:2) also informs Israel’s keeping of the fourth commandment (“*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*” | Exod. 20:8).

Yet, by the time we reach 4th commandment of the Decalogue, we tend to forget this important prologue to the 10 Commandments (“*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*”). Thus, most people exclusively link the Sabbath to God’s creation:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work....For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. (Exodus 20:8-11).

So easy enough. Sabbath means rest. It’s connected to God’s creation.

Yet even by Exodus 23, Moses can mention the Sabbath without mentioning any link with the original creation narrative.⁷ To the careful interpreter of the Bible, that is interesting!

The next major Old Testament passage dealing with the Sabbath occurs in Deuteronomy 5. Deuteronomy 5 is the second time that the 10 commandments are listed in the Scriptures.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15: *Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.*

In Deuteronomy 5, Moses connects the Sabbath *not* to creation (like Exodus 20) **but to the liberation and redemption of God’s people in the Exodus event**. In Deut. 5, there is no mention made of God creating the heavens and the earth in seven days. The plea is not: observe the Sabbath and rest because you should remember Genesis 2 and God’s original creation.

No, the plea is: observe the Sabbath because God **redeemed** you and **liberated** you from oppressive slavery in the Exodus event. The reason people should practice the Sabbath, in Deut. 5, is now linked even more explicitly to the Exodus event.

The progressive revelation of the Sabbath continues in Ezekiel 20:10-12 as the Sabbath is again tied to the Exodus (not simply to the original creation). In short, there is symbiotic relationship between **remembering the Sabbath** and **celebrating God’s redeeming work**:

So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. ~ Ezekiel 20:10-12

⁷ See Exodus 23:10-12.

Therefore, when we turn the pages of the Bible to the New Testament, is it any wonder that the Sabbath begins to center on Jesus? In the Gospels, in the vast majority of occurrences when the Sabbath is mentioned, the gospel writers are telling a story of a *healing* by Jesus. In other words, Jesus understood that the Sabbath healings **perfectly** fulfilled the inner logic and essence of the Sabbath in the mind of God. The Sabbath points not only to the first creation but also to the new creation because the Sabbath enacts redemption, liberation, and eternal hope – not only a “ceasing from work”. Or, to put it even better, “ceasing from work” points to the larger existential realities of redemption, liberation, and eternal hope!

Question: How does the double basis of the Sabbath (creation and redemption) help you understand more fully the Sabbath rest that God provides for his people and how we are to celebrate the Sabbath?

- 4. Slavery and Sabbath.** With regard to this intersection of the Sabbath and the Exodus event, Walter Brueggemann writes that into the Egyptian system of “hopeless weariness erupts the God of the burning bush (Exod. 3:1-6)” because “God heard the despairing fatigue of the slaves” and “resolved to liberate the slave company of Israel from that exploitative system” (pp. 5). Brueggemann contends that ancient Egypt’s exploitative socioeconomic system must be understood to fully appreciate the character of Yahweh in the Exodus Event and the Sabbath rest he provides for his people. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Do you see any parallels between Egypt’s slavery and our own modern way of life?

5. **The Effects of our Egyptian Slavery.** Modern Christians are not literally slaves in Pharaoh's Egypt. We are not endlessly making bricks without straw. However, our culture frequently subjects people to a modern form of slavery insofar as we also endlessly serve the modern "gods" of **insatiable productivity, unthinking busyness, and zealous non-stop consumerism** in our own pursuit of "the good life". What have been (some of) the results for modern man & woman in this scenario?⁸

6. What do you make of the **BIG IDEA** of this lesson?

Resting is the posture of freedom; unceasing work and production is a symptom of slavery. *To not obey a Sabbath rest is to willingly subject yourself to slavery.*

Adele Calhoun writes: *"If you aren't resting, you are a slave to something."* Do you agree or disagree with the sentiment? How might celebrating the Sabbath be a kind of resistance against slavery and part of a "regime change" against the gods of this world?

~ **From Ruth Haley Barton in *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*:**

We tend to think of sabbath as mostly about rest and replenishment—and it is!—but if that's all we emphasize, **it can come across as being rather soft**. For those who were first given the gift of sabbath, it was so much more than that: it was the sign, symbol, and lived reality of their **resistance to** and **liberation from oppression**. To fully understand the meaning of sabbath we must locate it within the Exodus narrative, within the lives of real people in a real time and place who practiced resistance to cultural realities that were enslaving them....We too are enslaved to many aspects of life in our culture and the practice of Sabbath *illuminates* our path to freedom. If we look a little closer at the sabbath in its original context we might notice that it is really a tale of resistance.

When instructions were first given for sabbath-keeping in Exodus 16, God was communicating in the strongest possible terms that God's people were now free—free from all aspects of their bondage to the Egyptians. For many years the Israelites had been captive to Pharaoh's system of endless production that was

⁸ For instance: The hyper-anxiety of our era, the frequent burnout of many, the disconnectedness from neighbor and nature, the inability to slow down for soul work. What are other affects that you notice in modern society?

legitimized by the gods Pharoah worshiped. It was a secure existence but they had no personal freedom, and especially not the freedom to take a day of rest....

When we think of sabbath only in terms of rest and replenishment, we are selling it short. In Jewish tradition, sabbath contains a strong element to resistance to the prevailing culture, and to the gods within that culture, as allegiance is proclaimed to the God who is our God. The practice of sabbath-keeping was and is an act of resistance against a culture that brainwashes us into thinking that good things come only through unceasing determination, tireless human effort, and always being plugged in. And it's not just an act of resistance against forces that are external. Our practice deepens as we recognize and resist the **internal** drivenness, self-determination, and individualism that has been planted and cultivated in us....

No matter how enslaved we've been during the week, on the sabbath we remember our true identity as free people. We remember how God has been with us, liberating us in the first place, and we find our freedom once again so we can continue to live on God's terms for us.... To practice sabbath, we need to know what we are in bondage to, what has us in its grip, and that is precisely the thing we should cease. We need to know what wears us out and what wears us down—what robs us of our joy and peace—and cease *that*, because that is exactly what God wants to free us from....

Many of us have fallen into the trap of identifying ourselves by what we *do*, but sabbath cultivates a sense of identity around who we fundamentally *are*... “We have no real access to who we really are except in God. Only when we rest in God can we find the safety, the spaciousness, and the scary freedom to be who we are, all that we are, more than we are, and less than we are.”⁹

7. Sabbath as a Soft Practice for Weaklings? After establishing the biblical and critical link between Sabbath and liberation/redemption, do you still think of Sabbath as “soft” and only for those who can't hang with the breakneck pace of our culture? Or, should Sabbath be viewed as a “strong” posture of determined disciples who attempt to take back their lives in a framework established by God?

8. Sabbath as Freedom from Internalized Pressures. Up until now, there might be a tendency for you to think of liberation and redemption in terms of **external** pressures or stressors that you need to rest and cease from during the Sabbath.

Yet, can you identify the **internal** pressures that you need freedom from (and that might be driving the external ways you live your life) which Sabbath can help keep at bay in your life?

⁹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, pp. 27-28.

Closing Prayer:

Falling Back into Reliable Goodness *(on reading Exodus 20:8-11) by Walter Bruggemann*

From the outset you called the world, “very good”!

Unlike you, we find the world a dangerous, demanding locus for our lives:

We are beset by fears of scarcity and running out.

We are visited by fears of falling behind and not measuring up.

We are occupied with rumors of war, danger, and terror.

We are frantic to protect our little places of well-being.

We are weary of achieving and accomplishing.

We are exhausted with neighbors who seem to us like competitors and threats.

In our anxiety we find the world at best bearable, but less than “very good”.

You, creator of heaven and earth!!

You are so unlike us!

You do the orderly proper business of creation, of

seedtime and harvest,

cold and heat,

summer and winter,

day and night.

You sustain the regularity of seasons, sun, moon, stars, and wind.

And then you pause in confidence.

sure that the world will hold,

unworried about scarcity,

certain about flourishing,

unbothered about the threat of chaos.

We imagine you peaceable, cherishing your good world, at leisure,

not restless, anxious, or worried.

We are so unlike you in our anxiety and fatigue.

We resolve, nevertheless, in your presence,

to be more like you,

to imitate you,

to fall back into quiet confidence and serenity.

Like you, we may trust that your world will hold.

Like you, we may enjoy the good order of your creation.

Like you, we may be at rest and unanxious.

We are so unlike you; and you are so unlike us.

And now, in this moment of honesty before you,

we promise to replicate your restfulness,

finding ourselves able to bask in your reliable goodness,

unanxious, unafraid, unbothered, unworried,

defined by your durable goodness. Amen.

LESSON 4: SABBATH & THE NEW TESTAMENT

Big Idea: “Sabbath is more than just a day; it is a way of being in the world.” ~ John Mark Comer

Big Read: *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, (Short Studies in Biblical Theology), pp. 106-128 (Chapter 5: New Creation), by Guy Prentiss Waters

Big Scripture: Mark 2:23-28

Big Question: Jesus is the fulfillment of the Sabbath in giving rest to the people of God (Matt. 11:28-30); Jesus famously indicated that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Does this mean that the Sabbath has no relevance for the Christian? Does fulfillment basically mean annulment so that the Sabbath should now be considered obsolete for the Christian or does Jesus serve to clarify Sabbath’s true meaning and purpose? These are big questions!

Five Points for a Biblical Theology of Sabbath

~ Jason Carter

First, let's remind ourselves of where we've been:

A Very Brief Summary of a Biblical Theology of Sabbath:

- 1) In the Old Testament, Sabbath had a double basis: **in creation** (Genesis 2) and in the signs of God’s liberation and **redemption** (culminating in the Exodus) which pointed to the new creation.¹⁰
- 2) In the New Testament, we are encouraged to enter into the rest provided by Jesus, above all by celebrating and rejoicing in God’s redemptive mission to liberate and redeem his children.

Second, let’s expand our understanding of the relationship Jesus had with the Sabbath day in the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). We can observe the following:

- 1) **A simple reading of the gospels tells you that Jesus goes out of his way to purposely heal on the Sabbath.** It’s like Jesus considered the Sabbath the **perfect day** to perform healings! Why is that? Commenting on Mark 1:23ff, Guy Prentiss Waters writes, “It is..not incidental that Jesus performs this miracle on the Sabbath, the day when Israel was called to remember their redemption from bondage in Egypt—his exorcism points to the redemption that he would accomplish at the cross, a redemption shadowed by Israel’s deliverance from bondage in

¹⁰ For an expansion on this point, see Lesson 3, Question #3 -- “The Development of the Sabbath: Rooted in Creation and Redemption”.

Egypt.”¹¹ The healings of Jesus on the Sabbath are to remind the people of God to look back (at the Exodus event) and look forward (to the new Exodus event of Jesus’ resurrection).

2) **Jesus had a cantankerous relationship with the Pharisees about the Sabbath day.** At its core, Jesus and the Pharisees starkly disagreed about the *purpose* of the Law of God.

Herman Ridderbos explains, “The Pharisees concentration on the external forms of religion made them blind toward the true purpose and meaning of the law: love for God and one’s neighbor.” In other words, their readiness to condemn the disciples is symptomatic of a deeper failure to grasp what the law of God is really about. Thus, this controversy is not a matter two refined and nuanced differing interpretations of a portion of God’s law—it is a matter of two altogether radically different conceptions of God’s law.”¹²

Jesus believed the Sabbath day was meant to unburden, free, and liberate the people of God. In this respect, can’t you see how Jesus is trying to restore the original intention of the Sabbath day? The legalism of the Pharisees was, in effect, having the exact opposite effect on the people. No wonder Jesus opposed the Pharisees about the Sabbath-day throughout his ministry! Can you begin to understand in a more in-depth way the famous saying of Jesus in the gospel narratives: “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:27).

3) **In the gospels, Jesus is redefining all the major symbols of Israel around his own person.** Twelve tribes of Israel? Jesus calls twelve disciples. What is the central place of worship, the place where the presence and glory of Yahweh dwells? The Temple. In the gospels, the temple is redefined around the person of Jesus as people worship Jesus on the dusty streets of Palestine (John 2:13-25).

The festivals of Israel (Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, Day of Atonement) were all fulfilled in Jesus. In the gospel of John, the Sabbath is presented like a mini-feast day that happens once a week. The question is this: since we, as Christians, do not celebrate the other Festivals of Ancient Israel, should the Sabbath get the same treatment? That is, should we simply recognize that Jesus replaces the Sabbath-day and therefore the Sabbath becomes non-binding for the Christian?

Guy Prentiss Waters explains the difference between the Sabbath and the Festivals of Israel: “These festivals will not continue to be observed by God’s people in the age of eschatological fulfillment inaugurated by Jesus’ resurrection; neither they nor the Jerusalem temple will carry over into this eschatological worship. When Jesus teaches about the Sabbath in John’s Gospel, however, he makes clear that the Sabbath continues into the age of eschatological fulfillment.” In other words, a Sabbath rest as “an eternal, festive Sabbath celebration” still awaits the Christian in heaven (“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his,” Hebrews 4:9-10).¹³

¹¹ Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), pp. 84.

¹² Waters, *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, pp. 90.

¹³ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pp. 171.

In discussing Jesus' healing at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (John 5:1-18), Waters comments, "First, [Jesus] asserts equality with God, a matter that Jesus further addresses in the remainder of the chapter (5:19-47). Second, he does not concede his opponents' claim that he was violating the Sabbath. On the contrary, he defends his activity as appropriate to the Sabbath. God had made the world in six days and rested the seventh day. But, Jesus observes, the Father is 'working until now'. This means that 'all the while the Sabbath command was in force, God was in fact working. In other words, *the Sabbath command does not mean doing nothing but doing the work of God.*' **Thus, in healing the paralytic, Jesus is doing work that is appropriate to the Sabbath day.** And in making this assertion, he thereby places himself in the same category as his heavenly Father....He is the author of that law and therefore has the authority, with his Father, to make those determinations. What Jesus does not do in this exchange is to argue, explicitly or implicitly, that the Sabbath so finds its fulfillment in him that it is set to expire imminently. On the contrary, Jesus speaks of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance that continues to bind human beings."¹⁴

4) **In summary, Jesus affirms the Sabbath day, clarifies its meaning, and affirms his own right to declare what is lawful on the Sabbath ("to do good" and "to save life", Mark 3:4).**

Guy Prentiss Waters observes three main lines of teaching of Jesus with respect to the Sabbath:

- i) **"First, Jesus both affirms the Sabbath as a divine commandment and clarifies its true meaning.** He explicitly affirms that it is a command that God gave at the creation (Mark 2:27; John 5:17); the many accounts of Jesus's presence in synagogues on the Sabbath demonstrates his commitment to honor the command by joining with God's people in corporate worship. He therefore reaffirms the primary purpose of the Sabbath, which is to draw human beings into the presence of God to worship him."
- ii) **"Second, during his earthly ministry, Jesus affirms his lordship over the Sabbath (Mark 2:28; John 5:17).** He is lord over the Sabbath as the Messianic Son of Man, and he is lord over the Sabbath as the divine lawgiver. Jesus does not abolish or abrogate the Sabbath. On the contrary he affirms his authority over it and asserts his right to declare how human beings should honor this day."¹⁵
- iii) **"Third, Jesus' teaching and ministry in relation to the Sabbath highlight an important emphasis in the Old Testament's testimony to the Sabbath – the Sabbath was a day to remember God's deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt.** Tellingly, in his inaugural sermon, given on the Sabbath, Jesus not only proclaims 'liberty to the captives' but also says that he has been 'sent...to set at liberty those who are

¹⁴ Waters, *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, pp. 93-94.

¹⁵ Jesus gives clear direction about what is permissible on the Sabbath. "First, when his disciples are accompanying him in the work of ministry and find themselves hungry on their travels on the Sabbath, Jesus defends their right to feed themselves (Mark 2:23-28). They should attend to this physical necessity of relieving hunger with an entirely clear conscience. Second, Jesus offers illustration after illustration of performing works of mercy on the Sabbath towards those in need (Mark 1:21-28; 29-31; 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; 9:1-41)," Waters, *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, pp. 97.

oppressed' (Luke 4:18). A new exodus will be given to the people of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Jesus's Sabbath miracles, therefore, purposely deliver men and women who are possessed by the devil (Mark 2:21-28; Luke 13:10-17), and who are afflicted by various illnesses and maladies (Mark 1:29-31; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; 9:1-41). They point to Jesus's mission of living, dying, and rising again in order to save sinners from sin and to bring them to eternal life."¹⁶

Third, what happens to Sabbath-keeping because of the resurrection of Jesus?

The Sabbath for the People of God in the Old Testament was celebrated on a Saturday (the seventh day of the week). Yet in the New Testament - with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ - Christians begin celebrating the Sabbath on Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the grave ("the first day of the week"). Why? Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ represents the quintessential liberation and redemption for God's people and thus the perfect day to celebrate the Sabbath.

"The first day of the week" occurs in several pivotal places in the New Testament:

- i) Jesus was raised from the dead "the first day of the week" (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-2, John 20:1-2.)
- ii) The church was gathering together to break bread "the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7).
- iii) The church gathered an offering "the first day of every week" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
- iv) Jesus visited the disciples in his post-resurrection appearances several times in the gospels on the "first day of the week" (John 20:19; 20:26; Luke 24:13-35; 24:36-43).

Fourth, what about the rest of the New Testament with respect to the Sabbath, besides the gospel narratives?

Paul indicates that the Sabbath represented a shadow in the Old Testament that pointed to Christ and is fulfilled in him: "*Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ*" (Col. 2:16-17). When people confess that being with God's people in worship on Sunday takes away from our rest, we are basically admitting that we do not understand the nature of **true rest** which is found most fully in Jesus. Jesus is the New Sabbath rest. Celebrating and participating in his redemption gives us a rest that is truly life-giving.

Another key Pauline text on the sabbath occurs in Romans 14:5: "*One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*" As Tom Schreiner observes, "Paul has no quarrel with those who desire to set aside the Sabbath as a special day, as long as they do not require it for salvation or insist that other believers agree with them."¹⁷ Yet, the critical question arises is whether Paul in Romans (and Galatians) is primarily opposing Judaizing traditions from a soteriological¹⁸ point of view. That is, dietary laws, circumcision, and the Sabbath, the Pauline logic goes, should all be **excluded** from our *theology of salvation* because we are saved by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9), through

¹⁶ For points #1-3, see Waters, *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, pp. 96-98.

¹⁷ Tom Schreiner, *Is the Sabbath still required for Christians?*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/schreiner-qa-is-the-sabbath-still-required-for-christians/>.

¹⁸ Soteriology = doctrine of salvation.

faith alone (John 3:16), in Christ alone (John 14:6) for the glory of God alone (1 Cor. 10:31). If this Pauline logic is true (and it is!), then the kind of Judaizing soteriology that makes circumcision or the Sabbath or purity laws necessary for salvation stand under a Promise-Fulfillment motif in the New Covenant and should not impinge upon our salvation.

Yet, does this **soteriological injunction** against the Sabbath the same as saying the Sabbath holds no place in the Christian life? Might there be a Christian way of “being in the world” where Jesus properly fulfills the Sabbath but where the wisdom of Sabbath-keeping is retained as an essential and vital principle for Christian living – a way of “being in the world” which reflects the whole sweep of the biblical narrative from Creation to the New Creation? Tom Schreiner argues that Sabbath-keeping is no longer “in force” for the Christian because “it was the covenant sign of the Mosaic covenant” and “it is clear that believers are no longer under the Sinai covenant”.¹⁹ Two counter-arguments: (1) this would make the Sabbath the only non-binding commandment of the 10 Commandments which is usually taught as expressing the moral will of God for all ages and for all peoples, and (2) the Sabbath *precedes* the Mosaic covenant because Sabbath is rooted in the creation narrative; the Mosaic Covenant is simply re-affirming God’s creational intentions for redeemed people at Sinai. The sabbath was given to God’s people (Adam and Eve) before the Fall and before any ceasing from work was necessary or any liberation from slavery was ever needed. In this respect, the Mosaic Covenant has ended, but the Sabbath continues. Adam and Eve were to participate in the rest of God on day one of their existence, a typological design for humanity that was God’s plan for all time.

Fifth, what else can be said about the Sabbath in the New Testament? Does Jesus fulfilling the Sabbath mean annulment so that the Sabbath is rendered obsolete for the Christian or does Jesus serve to clarify the Sabbath’s true meaning and purpose?

For more on this question, the **Big Read** for Lesson #4 occurs below: *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God* (Short Studies in Biblical Theology), pp. 106-128 (Chapter 5: New Creation), by Guy Prentiss Waters.

¹⁹ Tom Schreiner, Is the Sabbath still required for Christians?, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/schreiner-qa-is-the-sabbath-still-required-for-christians/>.

Questions for Small Groups or Individuals (Lesson 4)

1. In Lessons 1-4, we've delved into the Old and New Testaments to develop a theology of Sabbath rest. In your own words, how would you briefly summarize and describe a good "theology of the Sabbath"? (For cheaters, see "A Very Brief Summary of a Biblical Theology of Sabbath" at the beginning of Lesson 4.)

2. **Jesus had a cantankerous relationship with the Pharisees about the Sabbath day.** Jesus believed the Sabbath day was meant to unburden, free, and liberate the people of God. **Question:** In Jesus' healings on the Sabbath, what do you think Jesus was trying to say about the Sabbath to the people of his day (including the Pharisees?)

3. **Read Mark 2:23-28. The Famous Phrase.**

Jesus defends his disciples' practice of plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath by referring to a story of King David taking the bread of the presence from the Tabernacle (you might want to read 1 Samuel 21:1-9). To moderns, it seems like a strange defense. Why does Jesus refer to David's practice to defend his own disciples' actions on the Sabbath centuries later?

The famous phrase from Jesus about the Sabbath occurs in Mark 2:28: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath”. We are familiar with the phrase, but what does it actually mean?

Philip Chan writes: “We see here that as the disciples are following Jesus through a grain field, they are picking off the heads of grain for them to eat.

To this, the Pharisees are aghast and ask Jesus, a respected teacher gaining notoriety at the time: Why are you and your disciples not practicing what is not lawful to practice on the Sabbath?

Jesus then quotes a story of King David in 1 Samuel 21 of when David went into a holy temple to the temple bread. Of course, this was not lawful because David was not a priest. Yet Jesus is bringing up that story as if David is *in the right*.

The point is that even though it’s against the law for David to go into the temple, it was okay because *David was taking care of himself*. Jesus was pointing not to the letter of the law *but the spirit of the law*.

At that point Jesus explains to the Pharisees: “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

The implication is pretty awesome:

The Sabbath was made such that God intended for it to *take care of us*. God intended the day of rest would not be a burden for us, but we would embrace its practice and see its value in restoring our minds, bodies, and souls.”²⁰

Question: Jesus conceives of the Sabbath as a way that God takes care of and loves on his people. How does that strike you? What does the Sabbath say about the God you serve?

²⁰ Phil Chan, “Explaining ‘The Sabbath was made for Man’: 3 Massive Implications,” <https://phillipchan.org/the-sabbath-was-made-for-man/>.

4. Sabbath and Resurrection. Many believers only have a thimble-full picture of the implications of the resurrection. Yet the resurrection is cosmic in scope and inaugurates the dawn of the new creation! In essence, the resurrection of Jesus is like the original creation – it was a massive event of creation power! Waters writes, “...the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was an epochal event in human history. It marks the inbreaking of the age to come. the beginning of the last days, and the dawn of the new creation. As such, it transforms the worship of the people of God. They continue to observe the weekly Sabbath rest that God had appointed for all people at the creation; Hebrews confirms that the eschatological Sabbath rest remains future to them, implying the continuation of the weekly Sabbath in anticipation of that rest. But the particular day of that rest has changed. From creation to the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath fell on the seventh day of the week. This day commemorated the completion of God’s work of creation in six days. From the resurrection of Christ until his return, the Sabbath now falls on the first day of the week. This day commemorates the new creation that has dawned because of Christ’s resurrection from the dead.”²¹

(There is no question here. Just take in the massive implications of the resurrection!)

5. Guy Prentiss Waters makes the case that Paul’s allusions to the 10 Commandments in his letters signifies that these commandments are still binding for the Christian (in Romans 13:8-10 and Ephesians 6:1-3). What arguments does he make to support his view? (see pp. 121-224)

6. Read Hebrews 4:1-13. Waters writes, “Strikingly, the writer has earlier termed this hope of the Christian a “Sabbath rest” that “remains...for the people of God” (4:9). It is this future “rest” into which every believer will enter when Christ returns in glory on that ‘day’ (4:10; 10:25). As we saw earlier, calling this rest a ‘Sabbath’ rest indicates that the creation ordinance of the weekly Sabbath continues under the new covenant. It points to the eschatological life in Jesus Christ that believers have yet to experience in

²¹ Waters, *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, pp. 119-120.

full. The weekly Sabbath, then, serves to point believers to their heavenly hope so that they may strive toward it along the path of faith and good works.”

Hebrews 4 suggests that you enter into a Sabbath rest *now* looking forward to your final rest in Jesus in heaven. How does it strike you that, in celebrating the Sabbath, you are prefiguring your total and complete rest in Jesus when you get to heaven?

Who said eschatology didn't affect our lives here and now? Celebrating the Sabbath is both **backward looking** (embracing your true humanity which was made to “rest in God” as God originally intended it at creation) and **looking forward** (looking to the promise of your total and complete rest in the New Heaven and New Earth). Sabbath is being true to your being a “creature” made in the image of the resting God and living into and claiming the future promise now of resting and dwelling with God in heaven.

Question: How might you live on the Sabbath in a way that embraces creation and heaven? What would that look like for you?

LESSON 5: SABBATH & WORK

- **Big Idea: Sabbath orders the rest of your life.** *Sabbath is a practice that frees you from the inner compulsions, the competitive strivings, the incessant workaholism, the tendency towards making work an idol and has the power to free you from the non-stop “inner machinery” of the soul.*
- **Big Read:** *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* by A.J. Swoboda, pp. 25-42 (Chapter 2: Sabbath and Work)
- **Big Scripture:** Read Psalm 92.
 - Psalm 92, known as the “Psalm of the Sabbath Day,” is deeply edifying...The psalm was written to be read on the Sabbath day and was used in public worship as God’s people gathered to praise the God of Sabbath. While reading it, one is struck by the immediate presence of God. The psalm, writes Norman Wirzba, demonstrates a strong “contrast to our current stressful, exhausting, death-wielding ways”. It overflows with thankfulness, praise, a strong declaration of the love and mercy of God, rejoicing with songs and with instruments, looking on God’s works with joy, and trusting in God’s justice. As we think about what to do and not do on the Sabbath, we should be quick to realize that our question should be less about certain activities and more about how we are posturing our hearts. Psalm 92 invites us to bow low and love the God of Sabbath.

What defines work? And rest? Our hearts. Are we entering into trust and love and peace and goodness? Are we being thankful? Can we be still? Sabbath invites us into the freedom of God’s love. Hear the psalmist’s invitation: It is good to praise the Lord, and make music to your name, O Most High” (Ps. 92:1) ~ A.J. Swoboda

- **Big Listen:** Listen to Tim Keller’s Sermon entitled “Work and Rest” (which can easily be found on Youtube): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ux0_5zctrsl (Length: 41:45; Luke 6:1-11).

Questions for Small Groups or Individuals (Lesson 5)

- 1. Read Psalm 92.** Timothy Keller in *The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms* writes: “This psalm’s title is “A Song for the Sabbath Day.” To us the word ‘rest’ conveys mainly inactivity, but the main way the Biblical Sabbath day renews strength and joy is through worship. Praise is “good” (verse 1). Anything that we love or serve more than God becomes an idol that saps our strength. Idols of career or money or relationship are never satisfied. So the worship of the true God of perfect love restores and invigorates us. Verse 4 says we should find our joy in “what [God’s] hands have done” (verse 4). Christians know more about his work of salvation than did former generations. We have far more reason to sing for joy than anyone, because we are loved with the costly love of the cross.”

Why do you think Psalm 92 was selected and designed for believers to read and meditate on the Sabbath?

~ Questions from the **Big Read:** *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* by A.J. Swoboda, pp. 25-41 (Chapter 2: Sabbath and Work):

- 2. “I achieve; therefore, I am.”** Rene Descartes famous axiom “*I think; therefore, I am*” has largely been replaced in modern western society by “I achieve; therefore, I am” or “I accomplish; therefore, I am.”

“*Achievement,*” once wrote Mary Bell, “*is the alcohol of our time.*” Work is our drug, our numbing agent, escape hatch, and anesthetizing behavior. Achievement makes us feel the semblance of some glow of heightened, idolized identity where we are what we do. In this modern world, we have become addicts to doing, making, producing, and accomplishing. (Swoboda, pp. 28).

How do you see this reflected in our larger culture? In your own life?

3. Genesis 2:10 – “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” Work was a gift of God to humanity before the Fall. There was work in the Garden-Paradise. *“To care for the garden was to worship the Creator. Eden was a divine domain of work and worship, not a world of sedentary laziness or unproductivity...Work is not a mistake or a curse. Yet work becomes our curse when it becomes what we worship.”* (Swoboda, pp. 28).²²

Question: What are the rhythms of your life saying to the world around you? Do they indicate that you serve a God of grace or that you serve at the alter of workaholism? (Swoboda, pp. 42)

On the spectrum of “*work is a necessary evil*” or “*work is an all-consuming idol*”, to which direction do you tend to lean in your own life? Why do you think that is the case? And how does the biblical framework of “*To care for the garden was to worship the Creator*” help correct how you tend to view work?

4. Sabbath as Self-Care. In our modern therapeutic society, the talk of “self-care” is virtually omnipresent. From all directions, we are encouraged to engage in self-care. Yet, curiously, very few people actually “change the way they live” or “embrace a different rhythm of life”. Sabbath has not been integrated into a wholistic vision of the abundant life even though many people intuitively recognize that living at warp speed is damaging to the soul.

“...I had thought Sabbath-keeping was selfish. And I thought that if I did rest, it was a sign of weakness. Then I had the epiphany of a lifetime: I had been trying to be self-**less**. In helping everyone else, I had forgotten myself. I had become the preacher of the gospel who needed the gospel himself, Or, worse yet, I subconsciously thought God wanted me to forget about myself so I could serve others. But that is not the gospel. Jesus loves me too.....As I read the Gospels, it became clearer and clear to

²² “The very vocation God created to serve the world ceases to be an act of worship to the Creator and becomes about self-fulfillment.” (Swoboda, pp. 30). “Sabbath is God’s eternal way of helping us worship our good God and not worship the good work he has given us to do.” (Swoboda, pp. 33) “The very vocation God created to serve the world ceases to be an act of worship to the Creator and becomes about self-fulfillment.” (Swoboda, pp. 30).

me that Jesus himself was not selfless [in terms of loosing himself in not caring for his soul]. Jesus went into the mountains and prayed to the point that even his disciples could not find him. Jesus ate. Jesus drank. Jesus slept. He took care of himself. And never once was Jesus hurried from place to place, controlled by a busy schedule. Jesus lived a rhythm completely different from anyone around him. The rhythm of his life was, in itself, a prophetic act against the rhythms of the world.” (pp. 33)

How might “Sabbath as Self-Care” be viewed as a divine gift to you from your loving Heavenly Father?

How might Sabbath-keeping be a prophetic act against the worldly rhythms of our secular age? In what ways can you imagine Sabbath-keeping being restorative to your life and soul?

5. A Puzzle in Genesis 1-2. One of the puzzles of Genesis 1-2 is that the work of God creating was “finished” on the sixth day. Yet on the 7th day, God “finished” his work again.

Read Gen. 1:31-2-3: And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ²And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Gen. 1:31-2:3)

Swoboda draws out this puzzle like this: “The lesson of this paradox is beautiful: work is never actually complete without rest.” (pp. 37).

Question: Thoughts on this puzzle? How do you think rest finishes or completes work in your own life?

6. Practicing the Sabbath. “We are not to know about the Sabbath. We are to know the Sabbath.”

“We have come to find that Sabbath never just happens. In our 24/7 world, I have never once seen someone *accidentally* keep a Sabbath. Sabbath is an action of great purpose, one that demands feisty intentionality. It requires us to live in a rhythm that squarely opposes the dangerous pulse and the habits of our world. Sabbath-keeping is not just a small vignette in the Bible...it is one of the greatest themes of the Bible. Sabbath is not extra credit. It is a commandment, not a suggestion.” (Swoboda, pp. 33)

Do you feel invited to practice and experiment with Sabbath-keeping? [Keep in mind: you will have to struggle to find this rhythm; you will have to “work” (especially at first) to intentionally keep the Sabbath.]

7. The Reality of the Sabbath. One of the struggles of Sabbath-keeping is the nonstop demands of life. They must be set aside. “By experience I have learned that I rarely enter the Sabbath day with a finished to-do list. In fact, there is no such thing as a finished to do list for a pastor [and many other occupations!]. Ministry is never done. Nor is anyone’s work ever really done on the Sabbath. We rarely rest because the work is done. In fact, it often feels like there is more work at the end of the day. I normally find that I go into my Sabbath with tasks and conversations intentionally set aside for afterward.” (pp. 36)

Sabbath is celebrated “in the middle of things”. How might this important recognition help you “practice” the Sabbath?

~ Question from Tim Keller’s sermon “Work and Rest” (Luke 6:1-11; Duration: 41:45)

8. The **Big Idea** of this Lesson: **Sabbath orders the rest of your life. Sabbath is a practice that frees you from the inner compulsions, the competitive strivings, the incessant workaholism, and the tendency towards making work an idol.** Tim Keller talks about Sabbath having the power to quiet the “inner machinery” of the soul. Rabbi Abraham Heschel observes, “Every seventh day a miracle comes to pass, the resurrection of the soul.” Have you ever thought of Sabbath as having “freeing power” from the inner compulsions and competitive strivings of the soul?

LESSON 6: SABBATH AND COMMUNITY: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER IN YOUR LIFE

- **Big Idea:** The Sabbath is not an individualistic pursuit but a communal endeavor. *Sabbath was given to the community of faith, the people of God. The Sabbath is for life-giving activities which help you experience delight in God and rest for your soul as a redeemed son or daughter of God.*

- **Big Scripture:** Isaiah 58:13-14

“Keep the Sabbath day **holy**.

Don’t pursue your own interests on that day,
but **enjoy** the Sabbath

and **speak of it with delight** as the LORD’s holy day.

Honor the Sabbath **in everything** you do on that day,
and don’t follow your own desires or talk idly.

Then the LORD will be your delight.

I will give you great honor
and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor
Jacob.

I, the LORD, have spoken!” ~ Isaiah 58:13-14 (NLT)

- **Big Read:** Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest* (Chapter 8: Shaping Sabbath), pp. 95-111.

Questions for Small Groups or Individuals (Lesson 6)

- 1. A Commandment to the Community.** *“So Moses went down to the people and told them. And God spoke all these words, saying...Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”* (Exodus 19:25-20:1, 8).

The Sabbath was a commandment given to the people of God. How does the **Big Idea** of this Lesson help guide you in your practice of the Sabbath?

The Sabbath is not an individualistic pursuit but a communal endeavor.

Sabbath was given to the community of faith, the people of God. The Sabbath is for life-giving activities which help you experience delight in God and rest for your soul as a redeemed son or daughter of God.

Does that change how you think about – and practice -- the Sabbath?

- 2. The Sabbath is the perfect day to practice community.** Invite friends over for dinner to begin your Sabbath day (Saturday night at 6:00 pm?). Eat great food! Enjoy great fellowship and friendship! Invite people to break bread together over lunch after church. Invite a family or friend to walk the beach with you on the Sabbath.

If the entire community of faith knew that other people in the community are regularly striving to practice the Sabbath, how much freer would we all be to experience and embrace community? If I know another family is regularly practicing the Sabbath, does that free us all up to invite and embrace community together on the Sabbath day?

3. Sabbath is about delighting in God. Read Isaiah 58:13-14.

“Keep the Sabbath day **holy**.

Don't pursue your own interests on that day,
but **enjoy** the Sabbath

and **speak of it with delight** as the LORD's holy day.
Honor the Sabbath **in everything** you do on that day,
and don't follow your own desires or talk idly.

Then the **LORD will be your delight**.

I will give you great honor
and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor
Jacob.

I, the LORD, have spoken!” ~ Isaiah 58:13-14 (NLT)

What is Isaiah teaching about the close connection between the delighting in the Sabbath and delighting in God?

~ Questions from *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest* by Ruth Haley Barton (Chapter 8: Shaping Sabbath)

4. Sabbath as Grace: “I am a better person on the sabbath. I am not as stressed. I move slower, talk slower, and listen better. I am kinder, more patient, more loving, and more grateful – for the big things and the small things. I am more in love with my life and the people God has given me than on any other day of the week....I come back to myself and to what's most important. I sink and settle into the gifts of my life and savor them with abandon. I am really not sure how all this happens, but on the sabbath I am more at home in my humanity, more satisfied, and less driven.”

Sabbath...“is a spiritual practice that opens us to God's transforming work, enabling us to be the kind of people we want to be on this earth...Like all spiritual disciplines, sabbath-keeping is a means of grace.” (Ruth Haley Barton, pp. 95-96)

How do you think Sabbath keeping might be like receiving the grace of God in your life?

5. Sabbath as Freedom to Be Human: “One of the main things we are freed *for* on the sabbath is to simply be human – to honor the body’s need for rest, the spirit’s need for replenishment, and the soul’s need to delight itself in God for God’s own sake. It begins with the willingness to acknowledge the limits of our humanness and to live more graciously within the order of things.” “There are limits to our relational, emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities.” (Ruth Haley Barton, p. 97)

One of the hallmarks of Reformed theology is the emphasis of the distinction between the Creator and the creature. To embrace being human is to embrace being a creature. We are not to hoodwink ourselves into believing that we are equal to the Creator. “Our limits are not a surprise to God, nor are they a disappointment.” (pp. 99)

In the Sabbath, do you see God’s gift of freedom that God longs to give you? What is it? Describe it for yourself.

Ruth Haley Barton writes, “Our limits are not a surprise to God, nor are they a disappointment.” (pp. 99). Other than Sabbath-keeping, are there other ways you can practice a “Spirituality of Limits”?

6. Benevolent Exclusion. Ruth Haley Barton mentions several items to exclude from the Sabbath including Work, Buying & Selling, Worry & Emotional Stress, Technology (see pp. 101-105).

How might these be a challenge for you? How might these be beneficial to you?

7. Putting the Sabbath to Work: Ruth Haley Barton is describing some of the typical “practicalities” to think through when actually trying to practice the Sabbath.

She recommends “**establishing a regular rhythm of sabbath-keeping**...if there is any way at all to swing it” (rather than having a ‘floating sabbath’). Here’s why: “Part of the delight and restful feeling of sabbath is knowing that it is always coming in consistent intervals so we’re not having to make decisions about it every week. When Sabbath is observed on different days every week, we actually add a stressor to our lives – figuring out week by week when the Sabbath is going to be” (pp. 109).

The Carters can attest to this. Establishing a regular practice of the sabbath is one of the keys to actual Sabbath-keeping.

Have you given any thought about WHEN you might practice the Sabbath? Saturday 6:00pm – Sunday 6:00 pm? All day Sunday? What might work for you (and your family/community)?

Another practicality is to have a specific “beginning” and “end” of the Sabbath: “For the Hebrews, sabbath began on Friday night with the lighting of candles and a special meal.” What might you do to “begin” and “end” the Sabbath?

8. The Sabbath Exposes your Junk. Sabbath actually has a way of “bringing up stuff” to the surface of your life that you don’t want to deal with. All the ways you are spiritually deformed might surface during your Sabbath day because you are actually slowing down the pace of your life. On the Sabbath, you actually have time to contemplate all the things you’ve pushed down deep into your soul. I remember thinking one Sabbath: “I thought this was supposed to be fun!” Sometimes soul work is messy work.

I (Jason) remember a couple of sabbaths not too long ago of being “irked” that not all the laundry was finished in the house. So instead of resting on the Sabbath and letting the dirty clothes get washed *after* the Sabbath, I lied to myself that what I was really doing was “serving my wife”. But she insisted: “Let’s enjoy the Sabbath together.” Yet, I countered: “I’ll just do these now. No big deal.” In the end, I hurt my wife by not enjoying the day with her and by indirectly telling her – through my actions - that

our house was not up to snuff. I ruined the Sabbath day because my junk was getting exposed. My inability to turn off the “inner achievement” part of my life ruined the Sabbath. Even though I was ceasing from my regular work (ministry), I was not able to quiet the “inner achievement” part of my life and it simply got transferred to another area of my life. True, it came out in a weird way! I suddenly found myself with this inner compulsion to do the laundry at all costs to have “the perfect house”. Can anyone relate?

What should I have done instead? I might have recognized that my “achievement self” was trying to exert itself on the Sabbath in unhealthy ways. Instead, I could have heeded the Sabbath’s invitation to embrace slowness (the ability to enjoy “not producing”) and the Sabbath’s invitation to cultivate relationship (with my wife). Yet, this achievement self is at the core of my shadow self!

The point is this: Sabbath-keeping will expose your junk. You will fail many times (especially at first) in trying to keep the Sabbath. It’s not like riding a bike – because most of us have never practiced Sabbath-keeping before! So here’s my counsel: give yourself some grace as you begin to practice the Sabbath because, at least in my experience, you will often get it wrong before you get it right.

You will probably fail at Sabbath-keeping even when you are trying to keep the Sabbath. How does this realism strike you? Helpful? Challenging?

Can you try one Sabbath this month? Or maybe several times before the end of the calendar year?

Appendix 1: Muting Technology to Open the Soul to God

Are you up for the challenge of unplugging from technology on the sabbath and experiencing a new level of freedom?

Sherry Turkle, author of *Alone Together*, states in an article in the *New York Times*:

Our phones are not accessories by psychological potent devices that change not just what we do but who we are....Studies of conversation both in laboratory and in natural settings show that when two people are talking, **the mere presence of a phone on the table between them or in the periphery of their vision changes both what they talk about and the degree of connection they feel.** People keep the conversation on topics where they won't mind being interrupted. They don't feel as invested in each other. Even a silent phone disconnects us."

If you have not done so already, begin by experimenting with how you handle technology, observing the difference it makes. Notice the difference between

- going for a walk with your phone or without your phone.
- having the phone with you over lunch with a friend or leaving it in the car.
- having your phone with you on a date night or leaving it at home altogether.
- getting dressed with the TV on or off, driving with listening to the news or a podcast, or not.
- sleeping with your phone by your bed or keeping it in another room.
- having solitude with your phone nearby, in the off mode, or in another room.
- having your phone nearby while writing sermons, prepping for a meeting, or reading OR leaving it out of sight and sound until you are at a good stopping point.

What do you notice about your energy, your attention span, your presence to God and others?
Be honest. Speak to God about this.

How do you respond to the idea of a tech shabbat? Don't' rush into anything; just notice how it feels to consider this a possibility and if you feel any need or desire for this.

~ Ruth Haley Barton²³

²³ Entirely taken from Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, p. 53, 62.

Appendix 2: Sabbath and the Seasons of Life

In Ruth Haley Barton's book *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, there is an important section entitled "Sabbath and the Seasons of Life" where Barton allows different people to express, in their own voice, how they keep the Sabbath in the various seasons of life. The section is helpful because as you "peek inside" the practice of Sabbath-keeping for others, your own embrace of new habits and rhythms around the Sabbath may be strengthened. Enjoy!

As you read, be thinking: ***What does it mean for me, in my particular season and stage in life, to practice the Sabbath?***

Ruth Haley Barton: "Invariably when I speak about the sabbath someone will raise a hand and ask about the challenges of practicing sabbath in a family with young children or they might even make a statement like, "I take my sabbath on Mondays while my kids are at school." If they ask what I think about that my first response is to say that I completely understand – family life is sometimes part of what we feel weary *from* and we may be afraid that the effort required to harness a whole family to practice sabbath would take more from us than it could possibly replenish.

At the same time, I always feel slightly uncomfortable upon hearing this for the simple reason that sabbath is and always has been a practice for people to enter into with those closest to them. So while I understand why people might gravitate towards practicing sabbath while children are at school, I cannot recommend it. Instead I believe we are called to explore sharing sabbath with our families and others with whom we share our lives. Be open, curious, and experimental about how we might do this is simply another aspect of the communal nature of sabbath that warrants our attention and intention.

Of course, there are other seasons when sabbath-keeping may feel challenging for different reasons—such as seasons when we are loving and caring for aging parents and sabbath seems impossible in a completely different way. And sometimes, because of an undue emphasis on family in our churches, people who are in seasons of singleness and/or living alone can sometimes feel left out. But sabbath is a gift of God for the people of God *in all seasons of our lives* and whatever stage of the human journey we find ourselves. Remember: solitude, silence, and retreat are the practices that create space for private time with God; sabbath is a different opportunity altogether.

Sabbath as a College Student or in the Young Adult Years

Sabbath is a gift for all ages and stages, but it will be experienced differently throughout the various seasons of our lives. It is good to be open to this rather than getting stuck in assuming sabbath will look the same in every season. Jessica is a gifted young nurse practitioner and caring midwife who serves long hours in under-resourced communities. She describes her own sabbath progression through college and beyond:

When I first began practicing Sabbath, I was a sophomore in college. Sabbath practice appealed to me for three reasons. Firstly, I was increasingly aware of the toil the combination of my perfectionism and a hyper-competitive academic environment were taking on me, and I welcomed the physical and spiritual rest that Sabbath offered. Secondly, setting aside time for Sabbath rest was counter-cultural, a witness to my

overscheduled and stressed peers: Christianity offers rest, not just rules! And thirdly, “Sabbathing” as my friends and I called it, was a mark of Christian maturity, a sign of having transcended daily stressors and reached deeper trust in God. Subconsciously, taking a day off to celebrate Sabbath was something to be good at, and I have always like being good at things.

I would spend hours in prayer, wander through the parts of campus I normally rushed past on my way to class, have leisurely brunches with friends, and hide my laptop and books so I would not be tempted to work. I would also routinely stay up until two, three, or four o’clock in the morning on Saturday nights, frantically rushing to finish problems sets and essays before collapsing into bed, exhausted but proud of my effort. As much of a gift as Sabbath was in those early days – marked by succulent afternoon naps, intimate moments with friends, and precious times of prayer—I still saw it as something to earn by working hard enough all week.

Since then, I have received the Sabbath as a gift more or less openhandedly, depending on my season of life. The more I understand the Sabbath as a gift, the more I prepare myself to receive the Sabbath instead of merely clearing my schedule for twenty-four hours and hoping for the best. (Though even in the weeks I can hardly manage that, God still meets me.) I now choose a time to stop working the night before, light a candle, and physically clean my space before going to bed. I also change my sheets-both because I love the fresh detergent smell and as a sign to put away the old week and enter into rest. During the Sabbath, I typically completely shut off my laptop and phone unless I have a planned a time for a call with a loved one. As a single person and introvert working in a deeply relational and emotionally-intimate field, I am acutely aware of my need to steward both times of solitude and times of community.

My Sabbath is often bookended by community (church in the morning, and an extended call or dinner with a loved one in the evening), giving me space during the day for a solitary long run, slow reading, cooking something more complex than the weekdays allow, or just sitting quietly on the porch. I know some single people struggle with loneliness on the Sabbath, but I have actually discovered it to be a time of fullness – though the experience of intimacy with God as I rest in God, and also by being very intentional about planning for meaningful connection with loved ones. The more I let go of Sabbath-as-reward or Sabbath-as-self-care and embrace Sabbath-as-gift, the more I experience God sustaining and transforming me in it.

Sabbath with Children and Teens

One of my regrets about my own practice of sabbath is that we started it somewhat late in our family’s life when our kids were teenagers. By the time we became convinced of its importance and decided we would go for it, our kids were well established in some of their own patterns and priorities. Honestly, it didn’t feel right to impose this new discipline on them midstream just because we were feeling called to it; we did not want the sabbath to become an obligation rather than a gift, a battle rather than a delight, so I started practicing sabbath first and soon my husband joined me. This meant drawing some new boundaries as we tried not to work, shop, attend sporting events, do budgeting, scheduling, wedding planning, or have hard disciplinary conversations on the Sabbath.

One of the most difficult decisions we made had to do with traveling sports teams that played on Sundays, which was our sabbath. At the time, one of our daughters played on a traveling soccer team that held their games on Sundays. So, we made the tough choice that we would not be packing chairs, coolers, and water bottles to spend half the day on the sidelines of youth soccer games because that felt too much like business as usual versus the restful day sabbath was supposed to be. We lovingly explained our call to sabbath as we understood it and let her know she was free to make her own choice about whether to play sports on Sundays or if she could work out getting rides to and from. She did choose to play, and the rides did indeed seem to

work themselves out. That was an adjustment, to be sure, but because we supported her athletics in so many other ways, we felt fine about it—and in the end it was not really that big of a deal.

Ironically, when the same daughter went to a Christian college that adhered to the principle of not playing sports on Sundays, she experienced for herself the benefits of having one day a week when she was not defined by what she could do as a competitive athlete. As an All-American soccer player who was captain of several national championship teams, she acknowledged that she benefited from resting the competitive, hard-working part of herself and allowing other aspects of herself to emerge and flourish. How much better that she figured this out for herself through her own experience rather than us imposing it on her and risking forming within her a resentment of the Sabbath.

Of course, when we began our sabbath practice in a family full of busy teenagers there were some tense and disgruntled moments, but once our daughters began to get used to it they seemed to really enjoy the differences that were present on that day. They warmed to the fact that I was around all day and that we could talk, take walks, go on bike rides, and cook our favorite foods. They loved the fact that we could all take naps and go with the flow. They, too, began to sense and eventually articulate their need for a day to rest and experienced their own disappointment when something in their lives or ours robbed us of this important time. And it was the nicest surprise when even as teenagers, they let their bosses at their minimum wage jobs know that they could not work on Sundays.

These days it is a great joy to see them, along with their husbands, learn to love the sabbath and wrestle with it in their young families. When I get tearful about the fact that our late-in-the-game attempts at sabbath-keeping might have fallen short and robbed them of something important, they assure me that what we modeled by practicing sabbath ourselves and welcoming them to participate in whatever way they chose, instilled in them a desire to figure it out for themselves when the time was right. In fact, our oldest daughter, Charit, agreed to write about her experiences in our family and now with her young family as she and her husband, Kyle, have sought to order their lives around this life-giving practice.

It wasn't until my early thirties that I began to feel the need for a sabbath practice for myself. Up until that point, my life had been spilling over with school and work, friends, family activities, and social commitments.

It wasn't until I had lived without limits long enough to reach a place where sabbath was something I needed and desperately wanted, that I was willing to consider it. My longing for more of God sent me to seek to integrate spiritual practices that would sustain me as a young mother but also help me cultivate the quality of presence I experienced in my older spiritual friends and mentors. With two small children and one on the way, my ideas about the sabbath were quite disconnected from what was possible. Fully aware of my children's endless needs and energy, similar to the dream of the perfect family vacation: you desperately need the time away and think you have this great idea for a destination, you want to believe it's possible to go away and come back feeling restored—yet, inevitably, you come back not only tired but also ashamed to admit that you might even be disappointed.

I didn't want to set myself up for that kind of disappointment, but I also couldn't shake the longing I had for a way of life that worked. Sabbath couldn't just be for seasons when life is manageable; the sabbath seemed to be a fit for those whose life was unmanageable! I had spent years cultivating the good gifts in my life, enough hours in the day, days in the week, or weekends in the year to fit everything I was trying to squeeze into it. Our calendar was full of all the best things and yet we were still not meeting relational expectations, we were traveling most weekends, and having trouble being present in our neighborhood. Too often we were up late with friends and up early with babies, unwilling to really look at the toll it was taking. We didn't want to miss

anything, so we just kept packing it all in—unaware that what we were missing were the gifts that come from living within our human limitations.

From the depleted place I started to let myself envision a weekly rhythm that would allow me to receive the gifts of my life instead of racing to keep up with them. I needed permission to regularly care for myself and experience those moments as God's care for me. I knew I would struggle to step away from all there was to do and let go of all the unmet expectations, yet it was hard for me to believe that at the end of the week, it was enough—that I was enough. I longed for God to meet me in these places—the places where gratitude takes root, where a beautiful quality of presence can be cultivated, where we experience a deep trust in God's love and goodness for us.

So, rather than giving up on vacations and sabbaths, I decided to reframe them. Starting with how we talk about them, my husband, Kyle, and I began to articulate a vision for what was most needed and most doable. Much like shifting our thinking and expectations from having a family vacation to taking a family trip, a similar shift was necessary as we embarked on our sabbath practice. Instead of seeing it as a day of rest, we looked for ways to create a day for being. It's a sustainable shift, but in this season when my intention is to be present—to my family, to myself, to God—this shift helps us create a sabbath practice that is attainable. I asked questions like:

How can I be more present to myself, to my family, to God?

What is the work we most need a break from?

What are the individual needs of each family member that can be attended to in our sabbath practices?

How can our family enjoy our home, our yard, and each other?

What are some of the easiest ways our family can spend time together?

There can be tension between what a parent most needs, and what a child most needs, but the balance is worth finding. It is good for our children to see us more and more fully as human beings, starting at a young age. In all of our rhythms and practices, we are teaching our children how to open themselves more fully to God and the best way to show them is to live it. Our freedom in Christ will be our children's freedom in Christ. I few cannot break free from our striving and achieving and performing, how much harder will it be for our children? By prioritizing self-care in concrete ways—resting playing or creating—I honor the person God created me to be, and in doing so, I give my children permission to honor the people God has made them to be.

One of the greatest joys we have experienced is helping our three little ones discover the gift of this day for themselves. Regardless of how our week has gone, the sabbath is a weekly opportunity to see each of my children with fresh eyes. Our interactions are not about what we have to do or where we have to go but rather what we'd like to do and where we'd like to go. I notice and appreciate what they choose to do when they are alone. I am more present to their rambling stories which reveal what they care about and how they are experiencing the world. What a gift it is to see your children as they are and to encourage them to rest in that identity each week.

When our oldest son, Finn, was nine years old, we started talking to him about his personal sabbath practice and how to start experimenting with the day himself. As the pressure with school and friends and activities builds each year, we have come to see how much this little soul needs a day of rest.

Ruth Haley Barton does not give a specific instruction for celebrating the Sabbath in the retirement years (which would have been helpful). Nevertheless, each of these vignettes only offers tentative pointers rather than a failsafe blueprint for practicing the Sabbath. Each person and family will need to wrestle down Sabbath specifics in their own life. **Remember: The Sabbath is ceasing, celebrating, and communing with God in community.** Therefore, celebrating the Sabbath typically tries to incorporate as many of the 4Cs as possible into the rhythm of Sabbath-keeping.

Question: What does it mean for you, in your season and stage of life, to practice the Sabbath?

