

OVERVIEW

In the previous discussion we explored the biblical foundations of the Sabbath and discovered that God's command to rest on the seventh day was not intended to become a list of restrictions governing what we can and cannot do, but rather:

- A restorative complement to the work we do the other six days of the week
- An opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the work we've done
- An expression of freedom from the slave-like hold work often has on our lives

This discussion examines the heart issues that keep us from experiencing Sabbath rest and offers 5 practical principles to guide your practice. Aim for practical application by encouraging your group to put their ideas into action.

DISCUSSION

Getting started: Thoughts on the Sabbath since we last met? (Does it seem totally unrealistic to do in your current stage of life? Is it appealing?)

Read Exodus 20:8-11. What do you observe about the scope of this commandment? (i.e. How broadly does it affect the lives of the Israelites and their community?)

Notice, that although this is one of the Ten Commandments, it's more than just a rule to be followed—the Sabbath was a fundamental principle that ordered the Israelite's lives. Imagine how they must have stood out from neighboring cultures by setting aside a day of rest every week, or how refreshing it must have been to rest after years of forced labor in Egypt. Practicing the Sabbath reflected their identity as God's people.

What our struggle to rest reveals about our hearts:

1. **Work can become a form of slavery.** Anyone who cannot rest from work is a slave—to the need for success, to materialism, to the expectations of others, or our employer's demands. Modern-day demands will control you if you are not intentional about seeking Sabbath rest.
2. **Practicing the Sabbath reveals the inner turmoil that keeps our souls from resting.** We may be haunted by issues that underlie our work – the need to prove ourselves, to gain a sense of worth and identity, to prevent the shame of disappointing others.
3. **Choosing to rest demonstrates trust in God's provision.** We rest in Christ's finished work for our salvation (Hebrews 4:1-10), not our ability to save ourselves. Author Tim Keller reminds his readers: "God appointed the Sabbath to remind us that he is working and resting."

To practice Sabbath is a disciplined and faithful way to remember that you are not the one who keeps the world running, who provides for your family, not even the one who keeps your work projects moving forward.”

Only when we understand God’s love and provision will we be able to walk away from our vocational work and truly rest.

- Which of these struggles most resonates with you?
- Why do you find it challenging to make Sabbath rest a regular part of your life?
- What example of work/rest, delight, trust would you like to set for your children, colleagues, or employees?

“But if we can experience gospel-rest in our hearts, if we can be free from the need to earn our salvation through our work, we will have a deep reservoir of refreshment that continually rejuvenates us, restores our perspective, and renews our passion...It is important that you learn to speak this truth to yourself with a note of triumph—otherwise you will feel guilty for taking time off, or you will be unable to truly unplug.”

- Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*

APPLICATION

5 Principles for Sabbath Rest: Sabbath is commonly defined as a 24-hour period in which you step away from work in whatever form it takes (graduate students—refrain from studying, office worker—don’t check your email or take work-related phone calls). How could you integrate these principles into your own life? Share your ideas with the group.

1. **Make time for worship:** Carve out some alone time to reflect on your week and connect with God. This may take the form of corporate worship with your local church.
2. **Pursue delight:** Take a nap, enjoy a relaxing meal, do something recreational or creative that contrasts what you do in your daily work.
3. **Unplug from your technology:** Seriously! You may feel removed from the outside world, but that’s the goal—and the secret to true refreshment.
4. **Recognize that various stages of life practice Sabbath differently:** Parents of young children may find it difficult to take 24-hours off from the daily work of raising kids, but you can strive to preserve the spirit of Sabbath. For example, begin a habit of afternoon quiet time for the entire family, take a nap, spend time playing together.
5. **Prepare for your Sabbath:** A truly restful Sabbath requires intentionality. Plan ahead to make the day special and to keep outside pressures from invading your time. Graciously clarify your availability to friends or colleagues.