

Last week I tried to make a case for why God instituted the Sabbath day. We looked at the fourth commandment: *“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God, in it you shall not do any work, you or your children or your servants or your animals or your guests.”* And in **Exod.20** the historical-theological rationale is *“because in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.”* And in **Deut.5** the historical-theological rationale is *“because you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm.”*

And from those two passages, I suggested six reasons for a 7th day.

WHY WE SHOULD OBSERVE A SABBATH

1. *To rest from all your labor.* God rested, and if He rested from His work, who never grows weary, we probably need to rest from ours. That may mean sleeping, but it primarily just means *stopping*. Stop *doing* and just *be*. If God can stop and the world keeps going, surely we can stop and the world won't fall apart. God built into creation a 7th day so we could rest.

2. A second reason for a Sabbath is *to reverence the Lord as your God*. We noted that the Sabbath was given as a sign of the covenant relationship between God and His people. Sabbath-keeping is how to show and say and savor the reality that the Lord is *our God* and our God is *the Lord*. He is our treasure, He is our master, He is our provider, He is our Savior, He is the sovereign ruler of this universe, and all our hope and delight is in Him and His worth and His work not our own.

3. A third reason I suggested for a Sabbath is *to receive blessing from God*. God blessed the 7th day, meaning that He made it a *source* of blessing, so that all who stop to rest from their labor and reverence the Lord as their God receive His blessing. If you're going to be a blessing to others as God intends, you can only be that to the degree that you are receiving blessing from God. You can't give what you don't receive. You don't race through every day without stopping to eat; you don't drive your car indefinitely without stopping for gas; why would you deprive your starving soul from God when He waits to bless you if you'll stop long enough to let Him?

4. Then I said the fourth reason why God gave the Sabbath is: *to restore dignity and liberty and show mercy and charity to your fellow man*. If God commanded you *and your children and your servants and your animals and the foreigners*

living among you to stop working every 7th day, that is a huge statement about justice and mercy and dignity and liberty for all humanity and for all creation. If your leisure and prosperity come at the expense of slave labor or child labor, something's broken; if your food and clothing come at the cost of cruelty or inhumane treatment of animals you're missing the point and perverting God's design for His creation. Jesus showed that Sabbath-minded-living is filled with acts of mercy that heal and feed and restore people and value their God-given dignity and purpose. A Sabbath every week is a powerful instrument of crucifixion for the idols of greed and control that rule our hearts, and it's a simple reminder that stuff is not yours to keep, people are not yours to use, and all creation belongs to God not you.

5. A Sabbath is a day *to remember the first Sabbath and celebrate God's creative work*. "Remember the Sabbath" means remember the *first* one. Remember what God did on the first 7th day after everything He did the first six days was "very good:" He took it all in; He enjoyed it. And He commands us to do the same. The fourth commandment is a summons to stop what *we're* doing once a week and look at what God already did. Just take it all in and enjoy it. Like a work of art, His work deserves notice. His work surely outshines our work. His work makes our work *work*. And God established an extra day in the week not so we could get more work done, but

so we could stop our work and enjoy His. It's a free day to play in God's playground, and you live in Idaho – primo playground; go outside and play! Look around at God's handiwork and see and say, "It is very good; God, You are very good."

6. Finally, reason number six, God gave the Sabbath *to rejoice in your redemption*. As the Israelites were freed from their slavery to Egypt, we are freed from our slavery to sin. As the blood of the Passover Lamb protected them from the death angel, the blood of Jesus covers and cleanses us so that we escape the wrath of God. As the Sabbath was a reminder of their redemption, the Sabbath is a reminder of our redemption.

Now to really do all of that, we need to stop, don't we, we have to. And so God built into creation this rhythm of six days to work, one day to rest, reverence, receive, restore, remember, and rejoice. And if we hit all the *notes* but miss the *rests*, we make noise not music.

So God knew what He was doing when He established the Sabbath, and there are good reasons why we need it and why we should observe it. So the next question I want to focus on today is *how*. What should we do on a Sabbath day to make it all those things that God intended for it to be? But before we answer that,

let me take a minute first to answer the question of *when*. When should we observe the Sabbath?

WHEN WE SHOULD OBSERVE A SABBATH

There are those who would argue that nothing has changed; the 10 commandments were written by the finger of God and are therefore permanently binding, and Christians today should still be keeping the Sabbath every Saturday; and that the only reason the church now worships on Sunday is because of the pope's influence on Constantine who legalized Christianity in 321 and changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday; and the whole Catholic and Protestant church together is corrupt and has sold out to the antichrist.

Is that what I'm promoting? No it is not.

I am convinced that we need Sabbaths, we need rest stops, we need days alone with God, we need regularly scheduled uncluttered time and space off the grid to distance ourselves from the tyranny of the urgent, from the mundane, from having to produce, from endless activity, from the demands of people - so that we can walk and talk with God and hear Him and enjoy Him and just be His child and let Him be our Father. And just as we don't see the stars at night for all the lower and lesser lights nearer to us, and have to get away to see them, so do we have to get away from the siren voices of projects and bills

and deadlines and emergencies and needs, all of which are endless, to give our attention to the still small voice of God softly calling us to draw near to Him and behold His glory.

We need that. We need to remove our bodies from circulation so our souls can catch up. That's what I'm promoting. But I am not suggesting that we are required to keep the Jewish Sabbath every Saturday or that the Christian Sabbath is now Sunday.

Let me explain.

1. *We are not under the law, period, including the ten commandments.* “For you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom.6:14). “Christ is the end of the law to everyone who believes (Rom.10:4).” “The law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal.3:24-25).
2. *We are not under the old covenant but the new covenant.* Israel broke the old covenant. It failed because they failed. To be under that covenant is to be under all the curses of that covenant, from which Jesus redeemed us – Gal.3:13 – “*having become a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.*”

So we've been redeemed from the curses of that failed covenant (failed because of man's failure,

not God's) and the old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant which was inaugurated in Christ's blood when He died on the cross, and believers today live under the blessings and stipulations of that new covenant, which is not the law of Moses, but the law of Christ – the NT.

3. *The resurrection of Jesus did not make Sunday the new Saturday.* Yes, Jesus rose on a Sunday and yes, that became known as “the Lord’s Day,” and yes, that became the basis for Christians gathering together on Sundays, but that has absolutely nothing to do with the Sabbath. In fact, many Jewish Christians continued to observe the Sabbath in addition to gathering with believers on Sunday. But going to church on Sunday is not the Christian equivalent of keeping the Sabbath.

Christians gather together for worship and fellowship on the Lord’s Day in honor of Jesus’ resurrection, but nowhere in the NT is that spoken of as the new Sabbath or the new day or the new way to observe the Sabbath.

We’re commanded to “not forsake the assembling of ourselves together,” but there’s nothing to suggest that our assembling together has to take place on Sunday, or that it has to take place on Sunday because that’s the new Sabbath.

Here's a fourth reason why in my zeal to promote sabbaticals I'm not insisting on mandatory Sabbath-keeping:

4. *The rest intended by the Sabbath was only a shadow of the rest that is now ours in Christ.* "Christ is the *end* of the Law" means Christ is the *telos*, the *goal* toward which everything in the Law points. The law was sign, He's the reality. The law was shadow, He's the body that casts the shadow.

Col.2:16-17 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

The OT Sabbath was a shadow of Christ. God promised rest for His people and invited them to enter that rest, but they refused. And now they are deprived of that rest until they embrace Jesus as their Messiah. But **Heb.4:4** says, "*Those who have believed enter that rest.*" So if you have believed in Christ, you have entered the rest that the Sabbath could only approximate and anticipate. Now that we have the reality, the substance, the body that casts the shadow, we no longer need the shadow.

Gal.4:9 says, But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You

observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

Paul's grief over the way many Christians were being enslaved again to the requirements of the Law demonstrates his view that that in Christ we're freed from such requirements.

And then, finally, I would add that Sabbath-keeping is no longer mandatory for Christians today, either on Saturday or Sunday, because:

5. In Jesus, every day is alike the Lord's.

Rom.14:5 - One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

Some Jewish believers still saw the Sabbath as a special day and regarded it above the others; other believers saw Sunday as a special day and regarded it above the others, others viewed every day the same and regarded them all as special. And Paul says, "You're all right; do what your conscience requires and live in peace with one another because in Jesus every day is a Sabbath."

So back to the question, "When should we observe the Sabbath?" What's the answer?

- a. Don't have to ever.
- b. Any day we want.
- c. Every day we can.
- d. All the above.**

It's "d" isn't it. No day, any day, every day! Your choice. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

So you don't need to keep the Sabbath because God commands it of you or Christ requires it of you, you need to keep a Sabbath because it's good for you. Apart from any requirement of the Law, before the Law was even given, the rhythm of Sabbath-keeping was built into creation, and since we're part of God's creation, it's still a good idea. You still need to rest from all your labor, to revere the Lord as your God, to receive blessing from God, to restore dignity and liberty and show mercy and charity to your fellow man, to remember the first Sabbath and celebrate God's creative activity, and to rejoice in your redemption, but you can do that *any day*, you can do that *every day*.

Let's talk about how.

HOW WE SHOULD OBSERVE A SABBATH

The first thing I would say, without being legalistic about the day or the frequency or the duration, is that if you don't schedule Sabbath breaks, they won't happen. So you need to pick a time: once a week, once a month, once a quarter, part of a day, part of every day. But be deliberate and make it a priority and put it on the calendar and plan for it and prepare for it and don't just "wait and see." "Next Monday might work, but I'll wait

and see.” “Wait and see” guarantees that it won’t work because something else will come up.

Now you can be spontaneous, just as you can in any relationship: “Look Lord, my afternoon is completely free, You want to go for a walk?” That’s perfectly fine. But the point is, you’ve planned for that in advance – if any free time opens up unexpectedly today, tomorrow, this week, I’ve already decided what I’ll do with it, I’ll go for a walk with God. But you have to plan.

Second, I would say, don’t confuse a “day off” with taking a Sabbath. We’re not talking about a day *off* as much as we’re talking about a day *away*. Not just *off* work, but even *away* from the house and the yard and the phone and the TV. Using an occasional day off to get away and alone with God.

Third, don’t confuse Sunday with your time with the Lord. It may be, it may not be. Someone asked me, “Does Sunday count as a Sabbath?” Depends on what you do on Sunday. Depends on whether you find Sunday restful. Depends on whether you stop on Sunday or Sunday is just as busy and exhausting as every other day.

If Sunday is a day when you can really break free and enjoy the Lord, and part of your enjoyment is gathering with the saints for worship and fellowship and encouragement, and then afterwards you have time to be alone and

meditate or play or take a walk or take a ride or do something that you find physically restful and spiritually refreshing, great, Sunday's your day.

But if Sunday is crazy busy with meals and guests and activities and laundry and homework and car repairs *on top of* your preparations and responsibilities for church, then Sunday is a joyful day of *ministry* for you, a day of giving; and while it is more blessed to give than to receive, you still need a day to receive.

Now, assuming you had such a day, what would you do with it? If you had a day each week or half a day each month or an hour each day to spend with God, what would you do? What could you do that would bring real rest to your body and soul?

Turn with me to **Psalm 92**. Josh read this for us already and I just want to highlight a few things from it for you.

You'll notice first of all from the heading above the text that this was a "*Song for the Sabbath Day*." Do you see that in your translation? It's there in many of the older manuscripts. So apparently this psalm was used *on* the Sabbath as a guide *for* the Sabbath. So it's the perfect psalm for us to consider. That's exactly what we're looking for – a template for what to do, what to think about, ideas for how to spend our time on a Sabbath.

So let's look at this and let me offer some practical recommendations for what to do on a Sabbath day for maximum spiritual benefit.

You may notice also that there are three paragraphs here: vs.1-4, 5-9, and 10-15, and each paragraph suggests a particular practice. And I will summarize each one with one word.

1. Music.

Notice **vs.1** – *“It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High.”*

That's what a Sabbath is for right there. Can you think of any more appropriate activity than that? To give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to His name, which is Most High? It is always *good* to do that. It is never bad to do that. It is good because the Lord deserves to hear it, it is good because it does you good to do it, and it is good because it will do good to those who may happen to hear you doing it.

There's nothing more appropriate or more edifying or more beneficial, and so that's your basic agenda every time you Sabbath. Give thanks. Sing praises. Lose yourself in thoughts about God. *“His name”* means His character, His attributes. Focus on who He is and what He is like. Fill your mind with thoughts about the essence of God's nature and what you love about Him. But then don't keep those thoughts

to yourself, tell Him. “Give thanks *to* the Lord,” sing praises *to* His name.” It is good to do that.

Or – **vs.2** – “*To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness by night.*” Here’s a way to bracket your day. To roll out of bed in the morning saying, “Lord, your lovingkindness is everlasting,” and to pillow your head at night saying, “Lord, Your faithfulness endures to all generations.” That’s a habit, see, a routine. That’s something to *do*, something to *declare*. Not just to *know it*, but to *say it* and *sing it*.

Why is that so important? Here’s why.

When we are melancholy and discouraged or defeated in our faith, it’s not because we don’t *know* the truth. Our problem is not ignorance. Our problem is *focus*. And that’s why saying the truth and singing the truth is so important. That’s how we bring the truth in all its beauty into focus. We dig it up out of the cellar of our memory banks, dust it off and shine it up and hold it in front of our eyes and look at it and go “Oh yeah, I forgot about that; that’s pretty neat isn’t it?”

I mean for example, I *know* “God is faithful,” I know that and believe that with all my heart, but *knowing* that doesn’t stir my heart nearly as much as *singing*:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God My Father.

There is no shadow of turning with Thee.

Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not.

As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.
 Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
 Morning by morning new mercies I see.
 All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.
 Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Singing it is way more powerful than just *saying it* is way more powerful than just *knowing it*. You need to see it, then say it, then sing it, so you can savor it.

So it says *give thanks, sing praises, declare* His lovingkindness and faithfulness.

How? With accompaniment. **Vs.3** – “*With the ten-stringed lute, and with the harp; with resounding music upon the lyre.*”

These were all stringed instruments. The harp you're familiar with; they haven't changed much. The ten-stringed lute resembled a guitar or banjo with a flat sounding board on one end and a long slender and sometimes bowed neck. And the lyre was a smaller portable harp you could hold up against your body or in your lap, probably what David played for Saul, a rectangular or trapezoid-shaped instrument with two arms, joined at the top by a cross-piece, with the strings all roughly the same length.

In other words, *make music!* See and savor and say and sing and shout the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord Most High, and *enhance*

the volume of the sound and the beauty of the sound *with instruments*. Don't just say it, play it.

Or if you're like me and can't sing a lick or play any instrument, then listen to other people do it. Load up your portable electronic device with your favorite God-exalting music and songs and go some place where you can sing along at the top of your lungs without being embarrassed. Let music minister to your soul and bring the precious truths that you know up to the surface so you can treasure them anew.

And this practice is what contributes to vs.4 – *“For You, O Lord, have made me glad by what You have done, I will sing for joy at the works of Your hands.”* By letting music redirect my focus from my work to His work, what happens to my emotions? They are turned to gladness and joy. Now I'm no longer drowning in my work, I'm delighting in His.

So here's the first principle for what to do on your next Sabbath:

Jam to your favorite music until your heart is happy and rejoicing in the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord.

And if you can find time to do that every day, all the better. But that's the first word: music.

2. Meditation.

Vs.5 – *“How great are Your works, O Lord! Your thoughts (purposes) are very deep.”*

That’s the second thing – meditate as long and wide and deep as you can on the works and thoughts and purposes of God. Go deeper in your reflection on God and you’ll go higher in your praise for God. Meditate.

You ask, “What should I meditate on?”

a. Well you can mediate on the law of the Lord.

Ps.1 – *the truly blessed and happy man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.”*

Ps.119:97 – *“Oh how I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day.*

So you want to meditate on God’s word, God’s commandments. And as you do that, you are meditating on God Himself – what He is like, why He commands the things He does, what His purposes are, what’s important to Him, how He thinks.

b. Or, more generally, you can meditate on anything true.

Phil.4:8 – *“finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.”*

That could include Scripture – the truths of God’s word, or it could include art, science, history, mathematics, sports (figure skating, gymnastics, dance) – the truths of God’s world.

But notice the focus here. It seems to me that the focus in this paragraph is to meditate not specifically on God’s law or generally on just anything that is true, but to meditate deliberately on *ultimate things*.

Look at **vs.6**. **READ v.6-9**.

Now why does a believer need to meditate on that? Because believers are constantly tormented by the apparent injustices that we see all around us all the time of wicked people flourishing while righteous people are suffering. Who are these people that just seem to sprout up like grass out of nowhere and get promoted to positions you’ve been waiting patiently for for years? God, what’s wrong with You, why do you let that happen? Those who do iniquity flourish; they never get caught; they prosper; they never get sick; their cars never break down. And God says, “Don’t be stupid. If I allow them to flourish now, it is only

that they might be destroyed forevermore. Do you want their life or eternal life?"

In the pain and pandemonium of daily life we lose hope because we lose perspective: Why does evil exist and what strange providence allows it in our world and in our lives? Will justice ever finally be done? Will believers really be vindicated in the end and proven right for trusting in Jesus in a world that mocks Him and pokes fun at them? Is God in control of all things or not? And a sabbath break shakes us out of our stupor by pointing us to ultimate things: *The wicked may flourish for a season, but they will be destroyed forevermore. You, O Lord, are on high forever. Your enemies O Lord will perish. All who do iniquity will be scattered.*

So here's the second principle for how to spend your Sabbath time:

Meditate on ultimate and eternal things until your soul is satisfied that God's purposes are good and that He is for you no matter who may be against you.

Then there's a third word.

3. Metaphor.

We've mentioned already the importance of nature, going outside to play in God's playground and observe His handiwork and marvel at His genius and glory. And the benefits of that are highlighted in this final paragraph as the psalmist

finds *concrete parallels from the natural realm for abstract realities in the spiritual realm.*

Three metaphors are used here, similes to be exact.

- a. Like the wild ox – vs.10.
- b. Like the palm tree – vs.12.
- c. Like a cedar in Lebanon – vs.12.

First, in contrast to the wicked who will be scattered – vs.10 says: *“But You have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox. I have been anointed with fresh oil. And my eye has looked exultantly upon my foes, my ears hear of the evildoers who rise up against me.”*

Can you picture a wild ox out in the field thrashing around, his horns and hide glistening like they were waxed and polished, his eyes glaring down his nearest competitor, his ears twitching and turning to the sounds of hooves stomping the dirt angrily and jealously around him? The psalmist says, “That’s me. I’m that ox. I’m that bull. I’m that trophy buck. I may be surrounded by enemies, but God has exalted me, anointed me, and protected me.”

Then he mixes metaphors in vs.12, combining a reference to palm trees and the cedars of Lebanon.

READ vs.12-15.

So here’s the principle.

First we said: *Jam to your favorite music until your heart is happy and rejoicing in the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord.*

Second: *Meditate on ultimate and eternal things until your soul is satisfied that God's purposes are good and that He is for you no matter who may be against you.*

Here's the third: **Go outside and marinate in God's creation until you find a metaphor from nature to illustrate a spiritual truth that you can cling to until your next Sabbath.**

I did that on my recent Sabbath. My metaphor was kind of corny, but I'll share it with you. I was on my way back to the cabin from snowshoeing. It was late afternoon and the sun was setting. And as I approached the road up to the house, I envisioned what it's going to be like when heaven comes into view and our long journey in this life is over and we arrive in a great company battered and weary and hungry with many casualties and many memories of pain and loss and hardship and we see our home and turn to each other with tears of joy in our eyes and say, "We made it! We made it! We're here!" And I thought of the joy that day will bring and how *worth it* this will all have been. And I ended my walk and my day clinging to that mental picture and the comfort that *we are going to make it and it will have been worth it.*

I close with this one example of what a Sabbath might look like for you. This is how Eugene Peterson describes his Sabbath-keeping routine. Listen for ideas and then use your own imagination for establishing your own practice.

“Monday is my Sabbath. Nothing is scheduled for Mondays. If there are emergencies I respond, but there are surprisingly few. My wife joins me in observing the day. We make a lunch, put it in a daypack, take our binoculars, and drive anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour away, to a trailhead along a river or into the mountains. Before we begin our hike my wife reads a psalm and prays. After that prayer there is no more talking – we enter into a silence that will continue for the next two or three hours, until we stop for lunch.

“We walk leisurely, emptying ourselves, opening ourselves to what is there: fern shapes, flower fragrance, birdsong, granite outcropping, oaks and sycamores, rain, snow, sleet, wind. We have clothes for all weather and so never cancel our Sabbath-keeping for reasons of weather any more than our Sunday church-going – and for the same reason: we need our Sabbath just as much as our parishioners need theirs. When the sun or our stomachs tell us it is lunchtime, we break the silence with a prayer of blessing for the sandwiches and fruit, the river and the forest. We are free to talk now, sharing bird sightings, thoughts, observations, ideas – however much or

little we are inclined. We return home in the middle or late afternoon, putter, do odd jobs, read. After supper I usually write family letters. That's it. No Sinai thunder. No Damascus Road illuminations. No Patmos visions. A day set apart for solitude and silence. Not doing. Being there. The sanctification of time.

“We don't have any rules for preserving the sanctity of the day, only the commitment that it be set apart for being, not using. Not a day to get anything done but a day to watch and be responsive to what God has done.”

(Working the Angles, p.81)

I hope you'll find your rhythm and become Sabbath people.