

In the 1960s expert testimony was given to a Senate subcommittee about time management. It was believed that because of advances of technology that in twenty years or so that Americans would have an overabundance of free time. What would we do with all our extra time? The experts testified we would have to drastically cut back on the number of hours we worked per week, how many weeks per year we worked, or else we would have to start retiring several years sooner. Now let me ask, how many of you are struggling with what to do with all your free time?

If there is one thing you could say about most Americans in general is that we are busy. We are always on the go. We have places to be, people to see, things to do, and not enough time to do it in. Our agendas are crammed, calendars crowded, and nerves frazzled. We have too many irons in too many fires, and we get burned out.

We lie to ourselves. We pretend there is an end in sight, but there isn't. "If I could do just a little more. If I could just get up to date and back on schedule. Just a little more. Just a few more weeks. Just one more year, but like a mirage of water on a hot summer highway, it stays off in the distance and never gets any closer.

There was a man in his mid-thirties who had a wife and two children. He was holding down a full-time job and he had a little side hustle that made some extra money. On top of that, he was completing his graduate degree. As a Christian he was also involved in his local church teaching a young adult Sunday School class. Every Sunday morning he looked worn out and haggard. Finally, one Sunday he confessed with little exaggeration, "Friends, I'm tired. I think I've been tired since the eighth grade."

He's not alone. According to the National Sleep Foundation 72% of us feel exhausted multiple days per week.¹ We're tired because we don't get enough sleep. We're tired because we work too much. We're tired because of the stressful demands of life.

Rest in Creation

This is a problem that not only did God anticipate, He provided a solution as ancient as creation itself. This solution is rest.

We read in Genesis 2:2-3

And 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. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Do we think God rested because He was tired? God was like, "Whew, I'm pooped. I need to kick back, have a cold one, and watch the game. God didn't rest on the seventh day, because He needed to. He rested, because we need to. He was setting a pattern for creation. He was

modeling an example for us. We aren't made to live life on a treadmill set two notches higher than we can keep pace with.

This rhythm of work and woven into creation itself. The sun rises and the sun sets. Animals sleep and hibernate. There are cycles of seasons. Trees bud in the spring and lose their leaves in the fall and plants blossom in April and lie dormant in the winter. Nature's bounty happens in a cycle that includes rest.

Rest in the Law

God wanted to make sure this point wasn't missed by His people. For the Israelites, every seventh day, every Saturday was to be a day of rest worship – physical renewal and spiritual renewal. Of the Ten Commandments, the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath is longest of them all. And yet it is the commandment we feel most free to ignore.

The word Sabbath means rest. This principle of rest went well beyond every seven days. Every seventh year was to be a year of rest for the land and the people resting from the work of harvest. The land was to lay fallow– that is it was to be left unplanted. It was to have a Sabbath from the constant planting, tilling, and harvesting.

Science tells us that this is an effective means of sustainable land management, and it was practiced for thousands of years. Modern agriculture has largely abandoned the practice of letting the soil rest through the use of chemicals and technology. After all, land that isn't planted doesn't turn a profit. But this has turned organic, living soil into lifeless dirt that requires ever more potent chemicals and amendments to grow anything.

Today, though, farmers and scientists are rediscovering the value of giving the land a rest. Potassium and phosphorus rise to the soil surface. It increases levels of carbon, nitrogen, and organic matter naturally. The biodiversity of the soil improves, and fallow fields, when replanted produce much higher yields.

Another rest that God built into the ancient calendar was called the year of Jubilee. Every 50 years debts were cancelled, and property went back to the original owners. Everyone who because of poverty had sold themselves into slavery was to be given their freedom. It gave society a rest from the crushing burden of mounting debt and wealth inequality. It was an economic Sabbath that was a reset button for the whole nation.

Religion Ruins Rest

These are all things God provided for His people– to protect them and to serve them. It was a benefit. It was a blessing. Of course, human religion has a way of twisting things– to take a good idea, a useful spiritual principle, something helpful and warp it into something harmful. Religion turns tools into weapons, and this is exactly what Jewish religious leaders did to the Sabbath. Religion ruined the God-given gift of rest.

They made all sorts of regulations that mutated this promise of rest into a burden. We talked a few weeks ago about all the rules the Pharisees followed when it came to the Sabbath, so I don't want to go over all that again, but to give you just an idea: you couldn't tie or loosen a knot on the Sabbath. That was work. You couldn't sew more than one stitch. You couldn't write more than a single letter. Only lifesaving medical care was allowed, so that you couldn't reset a broken bone or do anything to alleviate excruciating pain.

The Dead Sea Scrolls dating from the time of Jesus reveal other stringent Sabbath regulations. You couldn't carry children, help an animal give birth, or even rescue an animal fallen into a pit.

Jesus on Rest

All of this is in the background of what happens with Jesus and His disciples in Mark 2.

²³ One Sabbath [Jesus] was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

The religious leaders are complaining that Jesus and His disciples are breaking all the rules. To be very clear, they are not violating anything God said about the Sabbath, only the rules of the religious leaders. And they're breaking two of those Sabbath rules. First, they are traveling. Basically, anything over a half mile was considered a journey and that was work. Secondly, by eating grain from the field, they were guilty of harvesting.

Well, Jesus isn't buying what they're selling. He tells them about a time when David and his men were allowed to eat consecrated bread from the tabernacle. It was against the rules, but an exception was made because they were starving. Now if David was allowed to do this, then how much more is Jesus, who is much greater than David, permitted the same freedom? Jesus builds on this precedent and concludes with this statement in verses 27 and 28, and this is our Core Verse this morning.

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

Jesus makes two basic points here. First, people weren't made to serve Sabbath rules. The Sabbath was created to help us. The Sabbath was to bless humanity and benefit our well-being. It was never intended as a burdensome yoke. It was to give and guard life.

Number two. Jesus is greater than the Sabbath. What the Pharisees didn't get was they were talking to the One who made the Sabbath to begin with. Sabbath rest was His idea. Who are they to tell Him what He can and can't do on the Sabbath?

Now, we no longer have the Sabbath as a matter of religious law. We are not Old Testament Jews living under the Old Covenant. We aren't expected to keep Saturday as the Sabbath. Jesus is very clear in Matthew 5:17 that he fulfills the law. The apostle Paul in Romans 6 declares we

no longer live under the requirements of the law, but instead we live under the freedom of God's grace.

Some of us were raised with the idea of Sunday as a sort of Christian Sabbath. If you're old enough, you even remember when most states had what were called blue laws, which protected Sunday as a Christian Sabbath. Stores didn't open on Sunday. You couldn't buy alcohol on a Sunday. In some states, you still can't buy a car on a Sunday. When we lived in Illinois, we loved car shopping on Sunday afternoons because there were no salesmen to bother you.

As good of an idea as a day of rest is, there is no passage in the New Testament that says Sunday has replaced Saturday as the Sabbath, or that we are required to observe a particular day as the Sabbath. In fact, the earliest Churches we see in the book of Acts worshipped not on Sunday, but on Saturday. However, as the church grew, and more non-Jews or Gentiles became followers of Jesus, Christians increasingly worshipped on Sundays. They did this for one reason, Jesus rose on the first day of the week.

We may not be under a law that requires us to observe a particular day as the Sabbath, but what we need to understand is that the principles of rest, of physical and spiritual renewal is still there. If we peel back the legal requirements of the Old Testament Sabbath, I believe we find there a timeless principle that still has great value today. We need regular and consistent periods of rest and spiritual refreshing.

Four Benefits of Rest

So, let me give you four benefits of Sabbath-like rest. The first two are protective; they guard us against two dangers that threaten us. The last two are provisionary; they open the door to blessings of intimacy with God.

A. Guard Against Materialism

Number one, Sabbath rest guards against materialism. We fight the constant urge to get just a little more. We find our working more and more to get just a little more. When we do this we begin to focus on stuff and money. If I just put in a few more hours today we can afford to get that car, go on that vacation, add on that room. We work a little more so that we can add to our collection of earthly trinkets.

Sabbath rest reminds us that there is more to life than stuff and money. We need a break from our constant pursuit of these things to give our hearts to better things. Explorer Admiral Richard E. Byrd wrote in his diary from his 1933 winter spent alone at the South Pole, "I am learning that a man can live profoundly without masses of things."

We are to work for our needs and our wants, in fact, the Bible says that we are to work hard. But never is our work, or the stuff works gets us, to become a god, an idol. We need a regular

rest and worship to renew ourselves, and to give attention to deeper things. Regular times of refreshing guard our hearts against materialism.

B. Guard Against Workaholism

Secondly, Sabbath rest guards against workaholism. Many of us have an obsession with working. We must always be busy. We work over breakfast; we work through lunch, and often through dinner. There is always one more email to read, one more phone call to take, one more critical trip to the office that can't wait until Monday. Just one more report. One more project. And with our smartphones and laptops we can take our work with us literally anywhere.

It isn't just materialism and greed that drives this. We place so much of our value as people in our work. Men are especially susceptible to this. It happens to women too, but men so often find their identity in their work. This first thing guys ask when they meet another guy, "So, what do you do for a living?" Your identity, your value, your worth as a person gets wrapped up in work. As a result, if we're not working, we might feel unimportant, unneeded, and worthless. But Sabbath rest reminds us that we are more than our work.

There is a difference between being a hard worker and a workaholic. Here's a little test. Do you have a hard time making it through a family meal without checking your phone? Sometimes we're hard on younger people for not being able to put down their Instagram, but the inability to put down your work can be just as bad. Do you miss a lot of your children's events because of work obligations? Do you have few friends or social life outside of work relationships? Do you have a hard time letting coworkers do a project? You have to be there to help? Do you regularly eat at your desk? Do you have tons of vacation days rolled over? These things can all be a sign that you're a workaholic and you need to build some Sabbath into your life.

Dorothy Bass writes in *Receiving the Day*, "To keep the Sabbath is to exercise one's freedom, to declare oneself to be neither a tool to be employed ... nor a beast to be burdened."

In Ex. 23:12 the Israelites are told that the Sabbath is needed for a time of refreshing. Refreshing meant to breathe, like we mean by a breath of fresh air. This refreshing is needed even during the busy crunch times. God specified in Ex. 34:21 that even during the harvest they were to observe the Sabbath. Even during the busiest and most demanding of time, they were to take time to rest and enjoy God.

When we don't set aside this time, the cost is much more in the long run: stress, depression, emotional collapse, nervous breakdown, psychological problems, and even disease can result. Our schedules have become a cruel tyrant. We have placed too much value on some things, and forgotten the value of others. Like sitting on the porch with a glass of lemonade, talking to a neighbor, a good book, or relaxing in a steaming hot bath. In the context of a week of hard work, these can be Godly things. As Max Lucado says, "Sometimes the most godly thing we could do is take a day off."

C. Enjoy God

Thirdly Sabbath-like rest enables us to enjoy God. The Sabbath allows us to take our focus off earthly things and enjoy intimacy with God. Ex. 31:13 says that one purpose of the Sabbath was “so that you may know I am the LORD.” Is. 58:13-14 encourages the Israelites to delight in the Sabbath so they will find their joy in the Lord.

It's obvious from these passages that one of God's purposes in the Sabbath was spiritual nourishment. A day off doesn't just mean water skiing, golf, tennis, or working on a project. It should also mean a Bible, worship and praise, a powerful sermon, and a good Christian book.

D. Trust God

A final benefit of Sabbath rest is that it teaches us to trust God. When we work every day to get by on our own it can keep us from relying upon God, but when we are willing to set those concerns aside for a day, we remember that we are ultimately in God's hands. We learn to depend on Him to sustain us. We can, as 1 Peter 5:6 and 7 says, *humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and cast all your anxiety on him because He cares for you.*

By taking a regular break from our earthly work we actively keep greed and materialism from taking over the throne of our hearts; we declare in faith that God is in control, God can provide for my needs according to His riches in glory. When we hurry, scurry, and worry through life at a workaholic pace we are betraying a lack of trust in God. We are saying I don't think God can carry me through. I have to do it all myself. However, when we rest from our work we remind ourselves we can rest in God.

CONCLUSION:

We have seen this morning that God has woven into the very fabric of creation a need for regular and periodic rest and refreshing. God even modeled this himself, when He rested after 6 days of creation. For the O.T. Jews this need was codified into a legal requirement to dutifully be obeyed. God did this to protect and provide for them. N.T. Christians have no such religious rule to obey, but this principle of rest and spiritual refreshing still has great value for us. We need rest from our earthly labor to guard our hearts against materialism and workaholism, and to enjoy God and trust Him.

A Sabbath lifestyle is a celebration that God's rest can free us from the cacophony of our own busyness. Spiritual rest creates a silent space to hear our God.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sleep-newzzz/202003/why-are-americans-always-sleepy>