

Eternal Rest Today: Practicing Sabbath as a Foretaste of Our Future

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- I. A Blind Date and the Goal of Human History
- II. Sabbath in the Old Testament
 - a. Sabbath tied to creation
 - i. Gen 2:1–3 (see also Ex 31:17)
 - ii. Ex 20:8–11
 - iii. Freedom *from* work—one day a week we imitate God by ceasing our labors.
 - iv. Freedom *to* rest before God—a day to focus on our relationship with him.
 - 1. Lev 23:3—on the Sabbath there is to be a holy gathering of God’s people.
 - 2. We cease our work to remember and live more fully into his ceaseless love.
 - 3. Isa 56:6–7
 - b. Sabbath tied to redemption (Deut 5:12–15)
 - i. In Exodus the grounding for the Sabbath command was God’s rest on the seventh day. In Deuteronomy its grounding was salvation from slavery in Egypt.
 - ii. Freedom *from* slavery—the Sabbath as a marker of identity.
 - iii. Freedom *to* love and serve God and others willingly as his children.
- III. Sabbath in the New Testament
 - a. Sabbath connections to creation and redemption are amplified and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who ushers in new creation with the redemption bought with his blood
 - b. Mark 2:23–28
 - i. Jesus and the disciples in a grainfield on the Sabbath.
 - ii. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”
 - iii. “So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”
 - c. Mark 3:1–5
 - i. Jesus healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath.
 - ii. The Sabbath is for “doing good.”
 - iii. Activities appropriate to the Sabbath are those that promote life and health, wholeness and restoration—in ourselves and others.

IV. Practicing Sabbath Now

a. Overall considerations

- i. Sunday as a day to press meaning into the other six days of the week.
(Gordon MacDonald)
- ii. The Sabbath is especially a day to look forward rather than a day to look backward.
- iii. Practicing Sabbath is a countercultural activity, a witness to the reign of God, not of self.
- iv. Avoiding extremes in keeping Sabbath
 1. The Frank Sinatra version
 2. The overly strict version

b. Three activities consistent with keeping Sabbath

- i. We rest from everyday work.
 1. “Sabbath-keeping presumes the daily rhythm, evening/morning—we can hardly avoid stopping our work each night, as fatigue and sleep overtake us. But the weekly rhythm demands deliberate action. Otherwise, we can go on working on the seventh day, especially if things are gaining momentum. Sabbath-keeping often feels like an interruption, an interference with our routines. It challenges assumptions we gradually build up that our daily work is indispensable in making the world go.” (Eugene Peterson, “The Pastor’s Sabbath”)
 2. “When we really believe that we have *no time to waste*—no time simply to enjoy without excuse or guilt, without having to show anything for it—then the cult of utility is utterly ascendant.” (Mark Buchanan)
 3. Some practical suggestions
- ii. We enjoy God by engaging in communal worship.
 1. Gathering for worship is a tangible outgrowth of Psalm 62:1: “My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him” (NIV).
 2. Sundays are feast days—the Sabbath is meant to be an experience of superabundance.
- iii. We embrace opportunities to do good, by showing mercy and providing replenishment to others in addition to ourselves.

V. The Eternal/Eschatological Sabbath

- a. Just as God rested from his work so will we for eternity.
- b. Heb 4:9-10—"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."
- c. "Sabbath isn't eternity, but it's close. It's a kind of precinct of heaven. A well-kept Sabbath is a dress rehearsal for things above. In finding the rest of God now, we prepare for the fullness of God one day." (Mark Buchanan)

VI. "O Lord, you who rested on the Sabbath in order to delight in your creation, may we live this day, we pray, as a day of grace in contented rest, festive play, generous hospitality, and leisurely relationship, so that we might live every day with a keen sense that, in Jesus, there is always enough. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who is our Sabbath Rest. Amen." (W. David O. Taylor, *Prayers for the Pilgrimage: A Book of Collects for All of Life*, 33).

Resources

- Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God* (best succinct biblical-theological treatment of the Sabbath)
- Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*
- Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*
- Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*