

D22



Practice #4 – Sabbath

We desperately need Sabbath. It is not an optional practice for New Testament believers. Even Jesus felt the need to teach on the topic of Sabbath. He said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) God made Sabbath for us!

So what is Sabbath?

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that Sabbath is a gift for us to experience:

“There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter into that rest” (Heb. 4:9-11)

Sabbath is not something we do, it is a God-given time that we enter into. And we are to make every effort to enter into Sabbath.

To explore Sabbath, let’s go right back to the beginning. In Genesis 1, we see a seven day rhythm being established by God. God created on the first six days, but what did the universe still lack? Rest. His creation was not complete without rest. God follows his creative activity with a day of rest. He did not get tired and need to rest, rather he chose to model a rhythm of life that was necessary for human flourishing.

In the creation account, the man and the woman were created on the sixth day. So, the first full day that they entered into was ... the seventh day, the Sabbath. Although God had appointed them as caretakers of all his creative work, their first day was set apart to enter into the rest of God, not into the work God had appointed them.

This was is a God-given rhythm for life. We are instructed to start the first day of the week by delighting in God’s presence, resting (being restored) in Him. Then, for the next six days, we join Him in the work that he has given us to do. Too often we think of Sabbath (if we think of Sabbath at all) as the last day of the week that we enter into deserving a rest because we have worked so hard all week long. We see Sabbath as a day to collapse into, and as a time for recovery, so that we can have the energy to go do it all over again. That is not God’s design. Sabbath is for deep rest in God (restoration) not for recovery.

Sabbath is an inseparable part of the creation rhythm. We cannot keep creating and creating and creating. God modelled a sustainable rhythm for life. For six days he created and then He rested. If we attempt to work and keep on working without a one-in-seven rhythm of rest we do terrible violence to the rhythm God set in motion. We end up with a deep weariness that is soul destroying. Jesus asked the question, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Matt. 16:26)

Author **Stephen Smith** says, “Sabbath is a reminder, every seven days, that through resting, ceasing, and unyoking ourselves from the world and work, we gain something that cannot be gained by working harder.”

We can stop work on the Sabbath because God is on the throne – the world will not fall apart if we cease to labour for 24 hours. We can trust God completely. The order set in Genesis is “There was evening and there was morning” so in Jewish tradition Sabbath begins at sundown on the sixth day and goes to sundown on the seventh day. The Christian tradition sets aside the first day of the week, Sunday (Sabbath is a Saturday on our calendars). This signifies that we can start our week by resting in what Christ has done. We do not have to work for six days to “earn” our rest. Our rest is a free gift. Sabbath was always meant to be a gift to humanity.

We ask then, “**How do I best practice Sabbath?**” Sunday is the best day to set aside for most people, but not for everyone. That you intentionally enter into Sabbath is more important than the one-in-seven day you practice it on.

Pastor and author **Pete Scazzaro** talks about four foundational qualities of biblical Sabbath keeping: Stop, Rest, Delight, Contemplate.

STOP: We have limits. We can’t go on indefinitely. Sabbath reminds us that we must stop even if we have not finished. We can stop because we trust the One who has finished. We know that we can do nothing on our own, bear no fruit unless we are connected to the vine. Sabbath helps us to embrace my limits. God is God and we are not. We stop to connect.

REST: God worked. God rested. I work. I must rest. What is rest? Rest is whatever replenishes us. Rest is anything that helps us connect with God. To truly rest we take a break from the taskmaster (whatever that is for us) and enter into God’s gift. We eliminate hurry.

DELIGHT: Sabbath is not a vacation; it is a holy day. We don’t stop spending time with God. Instead, we delight in God and all he has given us – family, friends, fun. We slow down to notice and experience the with-God-life more deeply. Sabbath helps us not forget how to play.

CONTEMPLATE: The Sabbath is “Holy to the Lord”. It is a small taste of eternity and prepares us for greater things. It gives us hope and reminds us of God’s majesty. It humbles us.

In your D22 groups, discuss how you can create a weekly rhythm of entering into God’s gift of Sabbath Rest.