

Weekly Reflection: The Sabbath is Blessed and Holy

Have you ever given a gift to someone that you knew would be really good for them, make their life better, and add joy to their life; but they never use the gift? They just leave it sit there unused and you just know it would make their life better. The Sabbath day is a gift to humanity from God. God can only give good gifts, gifts that are for our ultimate good and joy. As we continue to talk and think about the Sabbath day my desire is that we think about the Sabbath day more from the perspective of a good gift from our good God than from the perspective of is this still a valid commandment for us today who live under the New Covenant. That the question we ask is not do I still have to take a Sabbath Day, but rather, why would I not receive this good gift that was given to me by God for my good.

The word Sabbath is a Hebrew word, and it means to cease or to stop. It's the idea of rest. You see the concept in Genesis chapter one, God creates the entire world in six days, and on the seventh day, He rests. Not to take a break because He was tired. It was because He had finished creating the heavens and the earth and now God wanted to enjoy what He made with humanity.

This seventh day rest just so happens to coincide with the first full day of humanity, that human beings began life in rest and then stepped out to work, which is a beautiful picture of the gospel. We are saved by grace through faith and then out of that salvation we work with God by God's strength. We begin with rest and then enter into work. We see this even in the way days are formulated in Genesis chapter 1, it says there was evening and there was morning one day. That the day would start in the evening. That when the sun went down, that was the beginning of the day. So, you began your day by going to bed. And then you rose, that was the middle of the day.

God had already been working. And you stepped into what God was doing and then lived out your calling in the back half of the day. Working from rest was woven into creation from the very beginning for all of us. God did all of the work of creation on the six days, and humanity enters into this by resting and enjoying God's beautiful Creation, and out of that God does give humanity some work to do, joining Him in caring for His Creation. We work out of rest, not work so we can rest and not rest so we can go do more work.

“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.” Genesis 2:3 ESV

The Sabbath is Blessed.

Notice that God blessed the seventh day. During Creation, God blesses three things, animals, humans, and the Sabbath. With the first two, animals and humans, the blessing is, life-giving, be fruitful and multiply. And then God blesses the Sabbath. It's interesting because I read a couple articles by Jewish scholars and they had a tough time with God blessing time, blessing a day. I believe this is the only time God blesses a day or time. They had a tough time understanding how time could be blessed. One article said, “Blessing goes with proliferation (increase rapidly in number) – In Priestly writing, whenever God blesses something, He makes it proliferate (Genesis 1:22, 28; 9:1; 17:16, 20; 28:3).” When God blesses, in Scripture, it conveys life-giving goodness toward that creation. He chooses to bless time so that humanity, living within it, might experience divine order, peace, and renewal. If we step into the Sabbath, receive this gift, it will increase in our lives joy, peace, trust in God, and intimacy with God. Sabbath rest refills you with creativity, vision, energy, optimism, hope, peace, clarity. Sabbath rest is life-giving. Why? Because this is more than just a day. It is a blessed day.

The Sabbath is Holy.

God blessed the seventh day and made it what? Holy. Holy means set apart for God for a special purpose. Did you know that the first time the word holy is ever used in all of the Bible is right here? And what does God make holy? Time. This would have leapt off the page if you were an original reader because the gods and the goddesses were found in space, not in time. At a temple, on a mountain, in a shrine. Genesis puts the first holy thing somewhere no one can travel to, and no one can own. A holy day cannot be captured in war, monopolized by a priesthood, restricted to those who can afford the journey, or destroyed by an invading army. It arrives for everyone, everywhere, at the same time, whether they are rich or enslaved, and it cannot be taken away. God makes a holy day. Abraham Heschel puts it this way, “the Sabbaths are our great cathedrals.” You just need to enter a day that is blessed and holy.

Exodus 16:22-30

As the story goes on, God has called a people to Himself that we know as Israel. He leads them out of slavery in Egypt and into the wilderness. The Israelites start grumbling because there is no food, so God sends manna, each morning they are to go out and collect the manna they will eat for that day. What we read in Exodus 16:22-30 are God's instructions for the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath is an act of trust in God.

Sabbath is a weakly act of trust that there is a God and He's not me. And I live off His generosity in His world, off His love where there's more than enough for all. He is the Creator, I'm the creature. He is the provider and I am the recipient. My identity is not from what I do. It's not from whether I killed it at work or not. It's not from what other people thought of me. It's not from what I own or how I dress or how cool my home is or uncool it is. John Mark Comer says this, "Sabbath is a weekly reminder that I am who I am loved by."

Sabbath is meant to help us know that God is God and we are not. It is meant to help us grow in our trust of God, that He is in control, that He will care for us, that He really does want us to just stop and enjoy Him and allow Him to care for us. This should be an extremely freeing truth that allows us to rest, not only on a Sabbath day but also all weeklong. I believe that when we work out of this Sabbath rest, it effects all 6 days we do work. We learn that we can trust God all 6 days

The Sabbath is Safe

"See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days.

Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." (Exodus 16:29 ESV) God has given you the Sabbath, therefore He also gives you bread for the Sabbath. Because God gave us the Sabbath, a day to stop, rest, delight, and worship Him; of course, He will give us everything we need so that we can stop, rest, delight and worship Him.

We should prepare for the Sabbath

"On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.'"" (Exodus 16:22-23 ESV) On the 6th day they gathered enough for the Sabbath, and they cooked it up in preparation for the next day, the Sabbath. They prepared; they were intentional. If we are going to enjoy the Sabbath, we need to trust God and prepare. Yes, God provides all that we need, but He also expects us to join Him. He will provide the manna, but you need to go out and pick it up and prepare it.

Exodus 20:8-11

A few months goes by then you get to the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

A Day to the Lord (not a day off)

The Sabbath day is not the same thing as a day off. Over and over the refrain, to the Lord, the adjective holy or set apart or special. What is a day off? It's just a day where we don't work for our employer in theory, but we still work. We run errands, we pay the bills, we mow the lawn, we work out, we see a movie, we eat out, we go shopping. A day off is when people catch up on all the stuff they still have to do at the end of the week. Eugene Peterson called this day off a bastard Sabbath. The illegitimate child of the seventh day in American culture. Just because you didn't "go to work" does not mean you have received the gift of a Sabbath day.

The Sabbath is also not just Sunday church? I do feel that for most people Sundays are the day to Sabbath and I do think that coming together as the body of Christ, as brothers and sisters in Christ to worship and enjoy

our God, our Savior is a good and necessary thing. But just because it's Sunday and you go to church doesn't mean you are practicing a Sabbath day. Sabbath is not meant to be just an escape from our life for a few hours and then come back to the same old problems half the time after not getting enough sleep that night.

The Sabbath is a holy day, a day set apart to the Lord. Sabbath means to stop from our work, to rest, to delight or enjoy God and worship Him; and how can we do this unless there is an intentionality to set the day apart to the Lord, in other words you delight in or enjoy God by thinking about Him, contemplating God, noticing God, listening to God, which all are part of and lead to worship of God. Now, when I say worship, I don't just mean all you do is sing worship songs for 24 hours or study the Bible and pray all day long. By worship, I mean that you intentionally feed your soul with beauty in order to prompt spontaneous wonder, awe, delight, gratitude, and joy in God's presence. So, yes, go to church, sing, study the Bible, pray. Just expand your list to whatever it is that will make you break out in spontaneous worship of God. Maybe it is a walk in creation, maybe it is a nap, maybe it is a delicious meal, conversation with a loved one, playing a game, reading a book, etc...

Practical Steps

Prepare. If you want to step into this good gift God has given us, you need to prepare. Maybe make a list of things, activities, responsibilities that you can get done on the day prior to your Sabbath day. Prepare in a way that will help you have this Sabbath day to stop, rest, delight in, and worship God.

If you're asking the question, "What can I do on the Sabbath day? What activities are allowed on the Sabbath day?" A practical way to help answer these questions is by asking a couple questions: Is this rest, is this worship, does it help me enjoy God, does it help me think about God, is it getting me closer to God? Any activity, because you don't literally just sit on the couch and do nothing, activity isn't bad, you ask does this bring rest to my soul, does it refresh me, does it help me enjoy God, know God, think about God; and if the answer is yes, then enjoy it guilt free. If the answer is no or kind of then I just hold off. There are literally six other days for that.

Sabbath is more of a heart posture than a list of what can I do or not do. A heart postured to stop and just delight in and enjoy God, to intentionally set apart a day to God, to notice Him in an unhurried and special way.