

THE SABBATH: GOD'S PROVISION FOR DISCOVERY AND RECOVERY" PART 2

A pilot in British Columbia tells a story about an exercise that some pilots go through at the end of their flight training. "The student pilot gets the plane airborne, at cruising altitude. Then the instructor places a loose-fitting, thick-woven sack over the student's head, so the student can see nothing. The instructor then takes the controls and starts stunt-piloting: He loops the loop. He pushes the plane...skyward, then flips belly-up and swoops earthward. He rollicks and spirals, careens and nosedives, tailspins and wing-tilts. He gets the student utterly discombobulated. Finally, he puts the plane in a suicide dive, plucks the bag off the student's head, and hands him the controls. His job: to get the plane back under control" (quoted in Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 37-38). The exercise is fittingly called "Recovery from an Unusual Attitude."

We live in a day in which life is a lot like that training exercise. Our schedules are a whirl of ceaseless, frenetic activity. From the time our feet hit the floor in the morning until the time our heads hit the pillow at night it's go, go, go, hurry, hurry, hurry, rush to this meeting, complete that project, fulfill this assignment, finish that task, make this deadline, meet that obligation.

Someone asks us how we're doing and all we can do is sigh and say, "Busy." And it's not just our jobs which, for some of us, demand upwards of fifty, sixty hours a week. It's all the other stuff, too. The meetings—those *endless* meetings. And there's rehearsal and homework and sports and those projects around the house that are taking a lot longer than expected. There's Family Life Group and Awana and the ELLS class and the company we're hosting this weekend. There's that pile of laundry that's been sitting in the middle of the floor all week, and that leaky faucet I need to fix. And then there's the family—oh yeah, I forgot the kids have their game today, and tomorrow there's practice and piano lessons, and, oh my, they've got to be fed and I just remembered the fridge is empty, so I've got to go to the store..."

And these are just the things that we have on our calendars. This doesn't take into consideration the unplanned and unexpected things that can *really* throw us into a tailspin, like that doctor's visit that confirmed a serious health problem, the sudden death of a loved one, the abrupt loss of a job, a financial crisis, a fractured relationship...

This is life as many of us know it. And it all comes at us so hard and so fast that some of us feel a bit like that student pilot, getting dizzy and disoriented by all those maneuvers. We're suffering from emotional vertigo; we're running on adrenaline and the tank is just about empty; we've lost our bearings and it feels like we're on a collision course. May I suggest to you that some of us need help with "Recovery from an Unusual Attitude" with life itself?

This is the second of a three-part series on the Sabbath which I have entitled "The Sabbath: God's Provision for Discovery and Recovery." Last week I introduced the series by acknowledging that Sabbath is a very confusing subject for many in the Christian community today, in part because the very *idea* of Sabbath has been suffocated by our nonstop doing, going, and producing culture. What is more, there are so many strong opinions and disagreements over what Sabbath means and how it should (or should not) be observed that many have chosen to ignore the subject altogether.

But I told you that that the Sabbath was never meant to be complicated or controversial. It was never intended to be a dreaded chore or a rote ritual or a day infused

with confining rules and regulations. God gave the Sabbath as a gift for our benefit that we might flourish.

We spent most of our time last week looking at Genesis 2:1-3, where we are told that after creating the universe in six days, God rested on the seventh day from all His work. He didn't rest because He was tired or worn out; He rested for *our* benefit, not for His. We were created with a need for rest, and God was sanctioning that rest, approving that rest, blessing that rest when He Himself rested. He was expressing His generosity and goodness by giving us a day of rest as a gift. Jesus Himself said, "*Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*" (Mark 2:27).

The very first Sabbath helps us understand the reason God set apart this day as special and sacred. For the very first day of rest was Adam and Eve's first full day of life, since they were created on the sixth day. They didn't *need* to rest that day, because they hadn't done any work yet to make them tired. But they *did* need an *orientation*. They needed to get to know their Creator. They needed time with Him so they could learn who He was, who *they* were, and how much He loved them. And this points to the purpose of our existence as human beings. We were created *for* God—to be in relationship with God. The fact that God set aside the day after He created Adam and Eve as a day to spend with Him in His presence reveals *His* priority for this relationship.

Which suggests to me that Sabbath is, first and foremost, a day of discovery. It is a day on which God is poised to reveal Himself so that we can know Him better and enjoy Him more. It is a day on which we have a greater capacity to relish Him—to explore the depths of His extravagant goodness and grace, to probe the magnificence of His beauty and glory, to savor the splendor of His Holiness. I believe part of what it means that God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, is that He infused it with greater opportunity than other days to know and enjoy Him.

That first Sabbath was, in a sense, a prototype for all other Sabbaths. Six days of the week dedicated to work; one day of the week dedicated to discovery and recovery. And God *insisted* that we follow this pattern because He knows we need it to function at our optimal best. So necessary is this that God included in the Ten Commandments the command to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. It's a command because He knows our tendency to get so preoccupied with work and other stuff that we will make compromises or concessions that will inevitably make the Sabbath just like any other day, and we will forfeit the blessing as a result. He knows that if we ignore or neglect this gift there will be negative consequences for us, like exhaustion, burn-out, depression, loss of spiritual appetite, spiritual amnesia, and a host of other ills that will prevent us from living at our optimal best.

So, for our benefit, He mandated that we set it aside and make it a priority. And there is no evidence in Scripture to suggest that God feels any different now about His people observing one day of rest a week than He did when He wrote the Ten Commandments. Because this is the law of creation - He built this rhythm into the very DNA of the universe, and it stands until He says otherwise.

You might be wondering, isn't there a difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant with reference to Sabbath keeping? Wasn't Sabbath keeping an exclusively Jewish practice that became obsolete when Jesus died and rose from the dead and established His church?

Don't forget that God *first* established the Sabbath with Adam and Eve, not Moses. And that was before sin entered the world. So, like the institution of marriage, which He also

established at creation, it is transcultural and trans-covenantal. It applies to all people at all times. Yes, I am aware that there are no admonitions in the New Testament to keep the Sabbath, and some have argued on that basis that the command no longer applies to Christians. But there are no specific admonitions in the New Testament to refrain from carving idols, or that we should not take the name of the Lord in vain, or that we *should* honor our father and mother. Yet no one would dispute that those three commands from the Ten Commandments still apply today. So, the answer to the first question is “no”.

Furthermore, *Jesus* observed the Sabbath when He was on the earth. Not to the satisfaction of the Pharisees, who wanted Him and everyone else to follow their made-up rules. But Jesus certainly observed the Sabbath to *God’s* satisfaction every single Saturday that He lived on earth.

Likewise, when we read the Book of Acts, we find that the Apostles also remembered the Sabbath and kept it holy. In the early church in Jerusalem the Sabbath was a day that the Apostles would preach the gospel at the temple, because that was the day when the Jewish people would assemble to worship the Lord. When the door opened for the Gentiles to come into the faith, the Apostles still assembled with their fellow Jews wherever they gathered and used the opportunity to preach the gospel. So, the answer to the second question is also “no”.

But it raises another question. Is the seventh day of the week (Saturday) still the official day of rest? Or, to ask the question another way, is there something particularly sacred about Saturday, or does Sunday (or any other day we choose to set apart for discovery and recovery) have the Lord’s blessing?

By the way, the reason most churches in the world now meet on Sundays is not because it was necessarily the practice of the early church. We know that after Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Sunday *became* a special day for Christians, and they called it “the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10), because it was the day Jesus rose from the dead. There are also two references in the New Testament to church meetings that took place on Sunday, though they are descriptive rather than prescriptive. Sunday did not actually become an official day of rest until the Roman Emperor Constantine made it so in 321 A.D.

Prior to that, for the first three centuries of the church, Sunday was a work day in the ancient world, which meant that probably most, if not all, Christians worked on that day, even though they still considered it a special day.

But getting back to the question of whether Saturday (the seventh day that God blessed at creation) is a particularly sacred day and the true, divinely sanctioned day of rest, probably the most pertinent passage of Scripture is found in Romans 14. In Romans 14 Paul is addressing what he calls disputable matters in the church, matters on which Christians disagree, but matters that are *not* essential to the Faith. And one these matters is considering a particular day of the week *more sacred* than another—presumably Saturday or Sunday. ⁵ *“One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord” (14:5-6).*

We may be considering this passage in more detail next week, but suffice it to say that Paul is asserting that what a person thinks about days of the week, and whether one is more sacred than another, or whether they are all equally sacred, is not a moral issue—it’s not a matter of right and wrong. It is a matter of *conscience* and it is a matter of being *considerate*.

But I do think it is possible to infer from this passage that Saturday is *not* the only day

of the week that is special or sacred. Nor is Sunday. Some people legitimately view every day as equally sacred, which means that any day of the week could conceivably be a Sabbath. This also suggests that those of us who *have* to work on Saturdays or Sundays are not defying the Lord or violating His law.

Once again, six days of work and one day of rest is the rhythm of creation, and it is built into our DNA from our Creator. If we ignore or neglect to set aside a day a week for discovery and recovery, we will suffer the consequences, and the Lord will not be pleased.

That brings me to another question: What should we do or not do on the Sabbath?

Of course, that was the big question in Jesus' day, and the Pharisees especially made a big deal out of it. But Jesus did not. And when the Pharisees questioned Him about it, He replied, "The Lord desires mercy not sacrifice," which is another way of saying that God doesn't want us to get tangled up in the "shoulds" and "oughts." Rather, He wants us to enjoy the gift and benefit from it. He wants us to be refreshed, replenished, and renewed by it.

So, what can we learn from *Scripture* about what to do or not to do on the Sabbath? First, it is significant that when the Sabbath is addressed there is often an intentional emphasis on refraining or resting from work. In Genesis 2:2-3, we are told, ² *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" (Gen. 2:1-3).*

The author is intentionally redundant to emphasize about God resting from all the work He had done. Then, in Exodus 20, in the context of the Ten Commandments, Moses says, **verses 8-11**, ⁸ *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.* ⁹ *Six days you shall labor, and do all your work,* ¹⁰ *but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...* (Exodus 20:8-10).

Then, in Jeremiah 17, we read, ²¹ *Thus says the LORD: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem.* ²² *And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers" (17:21-22).*

There is one indisputable rule for the Sabbath: We are not to *work*. And what is work? Work is what we must do and what we ought to do to make life work. Work is what is necessary to make ends meet and provide for ourselves and our families.

The words *must*, *ought*, and *necessary* are key to understanding work. Mark Buchanan writes:

"Sabbath is...a reprieve from what you ought to do, even though the list of oughts is infinitely long and never done. Oughts are tyrants, noisy and surly, chronically dissatisfied. Sabbath is the day you trade places with them: they go in the salt mine, and you go out dancing. It's the one day when the only thing you must do is not do the things you must. You are given permission—issued a command, to be blunt—to turn your back on all those oughts. You get to willfully ignore the many niggling things your existence genuinely depends on—and is often hobbled beneath—so that you can turn to whatever you've put off and pushed away for lack of time, lack of room, lack of breath. You get to shuck the *have-tos* and lay hold of the *get-tos*."

The *have-tos* are the things we are required to do on the other six days of the week, which would include not only what we do for a vocation, but our household chores—the things we *must* do to make life work. But it doesn't mean we can't do anything, or that we

have to be idle. And it certainly ought not to be a day of dullness or boredom. It is a day of discovery and recovery, which means that whatever we do or experience on that day ought to facilitate greater enjoyment of God, and a restoration of our souls.

I think, in our day and age, we have to be intentional about this, we have to plan for this, or it likely will not happen.

Earlier I told you about the student pilots who must endure all those discombobulating maneuvers with a bag over her head until the instructor puts the plane in a suicide dive, plucks the bag off her head, and hands her the controls. I told you that it's called "Recovery from an Unusual Attitude."

How *does* that student pilot get the plane back under control, level it out, and then land it safely?

He must use his head. He must have the presence of mind to remember previous instructions. Because an instructor is certainly not going to put him in that kind of danger unless he's been adequately trained to respond—knowing exactly *how* to level that plane off so the freefall doesn't end in disaster.

Being prepared to respond to our frenetic schedules and ceaseless activity is every bit as necessary for our spiritual, emotional, and physical health and survival.

I would like to offer ten suggestions (not rules) for being intentional about setting aside a day of rest so that it can truly be a day of discovery and recovery. (I'm assuming that for most of you your day of rest is Sunday, though I am fully aware that some have to work on Sunday, and so another day needs to be set aside as *your* Sabbath.)

1. Be *convinced* that a weekly day of rest is necessary. If the Scriptures we have studied in the last two weeks haven't convinced you, then study some more, until you are convinced. Develop a conviction about the Sabbath if you haven't already. By the way, I'm preaching to myself, here. As one who works on Sunday, I have not always set aside an exclusive day of rest on another day of the week, and I have paid the price for it. My burn-out two years ago was primarily because I didn't a settled conviction.

2. Commit to set aside that day to the Lord. Remember, in Exodus 20 God said, "It is a Sabbath *to* the LORD your God." Resolve to be a person whose connection with the Lord and obedience to the Lord trumps any other connection or relationship or obligation. Be a person who refuses to let the culture dictate your priorities and what you do on your day off. Let the Sabbath as a day of *discovery* trump other events and activities that compete with that day for your attention and time.

3. Get all your necessary work done the day before, so that you can be unencumbered. If you burn firewood for heat, fill your wood box and chop your kindling the day before. Prepare your meals the day before, or eat food that you don't have to prepare. Do your laundry, pay your bills, water your lawn, etc. the day before.

4. Determine *how* you will become re-oriented to the Lord and things above. I spent quite a bit of time last week telling you that most of us have jobs that compel us to focus our attention on the things of this world. Because of that, we can be deceived into thinking that the things of this world are of ultimate importance. So, we need a regular re-orientation. We need to renew our minds and perspectives by spending time fixing our attention on the Lord and things above—eternal things, truly consequential things. We can do this by going to church, reading the Scriptures, reading good books, good music, good fellowship, enjoying the Lord's creation.

5. Keep your day simple and free from shoulds and oughts. This means that your

Sabbath should not be a day of getting things done. It should not be a day of hurry and clutter and worry.

6. Turn off your phone, email, and social media, and consider fasting from other forms of media, too. If the news or the newspaper causes you to fret or fills you with angst, or compels you to be focused on the things of this world, don't read it. Don't just turn on the television indiscriminately and disengage with reality. Sabbath is a day to engage with ultimate reality—the Lord and things above. By the way, if you are a sports fan, I realize that Sunday is the biggest day of the week, and television networks would like nothing more than for you spend your entire day of rest watching games. We've got to be thoughtful about this. Let's not let ESPN or FoxSports determine how we spend the Sabbath.

7. Hang out with refreshing, encouraging brothers and sisters. Don't hang out with gripers, groaner, complainers and moaners on the Sabbath. It might ruin the day. If possible, be around people who will facilitate discovery and recovery.

8. Enjoy God's good gifts. Food, ice-cream, creation, family, etc.

9. Take a nap...or not. A nap was torturous on Sundays when I was a kid. Now, a nap is a delight. A nap is refreshing and replenishing.

10. Be accountable to a brother or sister who knows how important the Sabbath is, and who loves you enough to remind you to not neglect it.

I want to remind you, these are suggestions, not rules. They are intended to stimulate your thinking about how we might be able to get the most from our day of discovery and recovery. If they are not helpful, ignore them. But I would certainly encourage you to be thoughtful about this matter, so that you can take full advantage of this wonderful gift of Sabbath.

“The Sabbath: God’s Provision for Discovery and Recovery” Part 2

Main Idea: The God who created us for himself gave us the gift of setting aside one day a week to be released from our work in order to be re-oriented and replenished in his presence

Sabbath: God’s Gracious Gift for Discovery

It re-orient us to our ultimate purpose

Connecting with the God who delights to reveal himself

Exploring and probing the depths of his character

Sabbath: God’s Simple Gift for Recovery

The seven-day rhythm of creation’s DNA

The consequences of obeying or disobeying God’s mandate

Sabbath Questions:

Is strict Sabbath observance exclusively a Jewish practice?

The timing of the first Sabbath suggests it is transcultural and trans-covenantal

The fact that it is not commanded in the New Testament is a weak argument for discontinuation

Is Saturday still the divinely sanctioned day for Sabbath?

The evolution of Sunday as the official day of rest

The implications of Romans 14

What should we do or not do on the Sabbath?

The “I desire mercy not sacrifice” principle

The one indisputable Sabbath rule—“Do not work”
What is work”

The *have-tos* vs. the *get-tos*

The necessity of intentionality in preparation

Application Questions

The Sabbath: God's Provision for Discovery and Recovery (2)

1. When Paul wrote to the Romans, some in the church believed that one day was more sacred than another, and others believed that all days were equally sacred (14:5-6). That is still true today. What factors contribute to one's view about the sacredness of certain days? What is your view? On what do you base your view?
2. What are the things you *must* do six days of the week that you "ought" to refrain from doing on your day of rest?
3. What are some things that would facilitate "discovery and recovery" on your day of rest?
4. How can you be intentional about *preparing* for "discovery and recovery" on your day of rest?