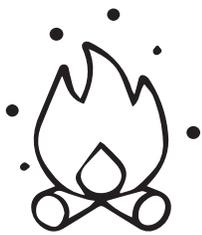


Sabbath - discipline three in our spiritual formation series

PART 2: SABBATH AS RESISTANCE

MISSIONAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Read this Overview Together



*"The mind that comes to rest is tended
In ways that it cannot intend;
Your Sabbath, Lord, thus keeps us by
Your will, not ours."
-Wendell Berry*

The practice of Sabbath is an act of resistance; it's a holy disruption. It disrupts our schedules, our striving, and if we're honest, our self-determination. It's an act of resistance against the alternate story the world tells us about who we are, what we should be doing, where our value is found, and how to live. The world tells us we are not enough, that we don't have enough, and that we are defined by what we do and what we accomplish. In *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, Pete Scazzero writes, "The culture shackles us in chains, telling us our only value is in what we achieve or produce, that we are losers unless we accomplish more--whatever it may cost us. Through this weekly practice (of Sabbath), we defy every influence that defines us either by our role or our productivity." Sabbath provides a regular call to unplug from the information (and disinformation) flow and to remember who we are and Whose we are; it's an invitation to come back into the True Story of God. The story we often forget (or have a hard time believing) in the face of the alternate version of reality the other six days of the week tell us. We see in the Sabbath command the call to be holy, to be restored, and to be empowered to live out of and in light of our identity.

In Part 1, we saw God model Sabbath in Genesis (2:1-3) and command it in Exodus (20:8-11) and again in Deuteronomy (5:12-15). If we revisit these passages we see there is a progression in the understanding of Sabbath rest. In Genesis, on the seventh day, God created rest. God stopped. And, in doing so, He revealed something very important about Himself and His character. Everything God does is holy, including stopping. God doesn't stop or rest because he's tired, but He restrains Himself because he is holy. This means stopping to rest is holy. We humans have a hard time stopping. We find it easier to stop once we've completed all of our work or if we're forced to stop. But, what if we believed the choice to restrain

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MC Discussion Continued...

ourselves, lay aside our unfinished work, and enter into a period of rest was good and holy? Sabbath rest is practiced by a holy God and it is to be practiced by the people He has set apart and called holy. Mark Buchanan writes in *The Rest of God*, "God commands that we imitate him in order to discover again that we're not him, and that we need him."

Later when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:8-11), the fourth commandment bears two unique distinctions. One, it is the longest commandment, and two, it serves as a passageway between the first three commands about God and the last six commands about humanity. "Remember the Sabbath day ..." is the bridge that asks us to meditate on who God is and how to be in relationship with Him (the first three commands) so that we can know how to be holy in our relationships with all of creation (the remaining commands).

We see here the idea that the Sabbath empowers our day-to-day life and relationships. It's where we go to be renewed, restored, and reconciled back to the truth of the bigness and sovereignty of God. Interestingly, this is the only commandment that begins with the word, "remember." It's possible God knew from the outset that this would be the hardest one for us to put into practice. We naturally revert to looking to the idols of self, productivity, culture, and comfort to give us what only God can give us; true wisdom, peace, and help. As Mark Buchanan writes, "(Sabbath) is letting go, for one day out of seven, all those parts of our identities and abilities in which we are constantly tempted to find our security and discovering afresh that we are his children and that he is our Father and shield and defender."

And, finally in Deuteronomy, "remember" the Sabbath becomes "observe" the Sabbath. As the Israelites were preparing to step into the future God had prepared for them, he commanded them to observe the Sabbath as an embodied memorial to live out their identity and freedom (as God's chosen and rescued people) and live into their purpose (a light to the nations). In this way, the practice of Sabbath was an act of resisting the cultural norms and status quo of the peoples and lands they lived amongst. A command to be and live differently. This remains true for us today. For many of us, Sabbath is an act of resistance to the enslaving idea that we need to be in control or be productive in order to be okay. The gods of our culture tell us that we are what we do, what we make, or what we accomplish. Sabbath helps us live out the freedom we have as sons and daughters of the

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MC Discussion Continued...

King; freedom from our need to be in control or to achieve great things in order to flourish. In *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer says it well: "(Sabbath) is an act of rebellion against Pharaoh and his empire. An insurgency and insurrection against the "isms" of the Western world—globalism, capitalism, materialism, all of which sound nice but quickly make slaves of the rich and the poor. Sabbath is a way to stay free and make sure you never get sucked back into slavery or, worse, become the slave driver yourself."

Sabbath is a gift for us if we choose to accept it. We let our schedules be interrupted; as well as our hearts. In the Sabbath call to be holy, restored, and empowered we embrace the interruption and pause as a chance to take a deep breath and remember who we are and Whose we are. God, in his kindness, patiently beckons us to discover that abundant life is found in Him, His ways, His rhythms, His pace.

Practicing Sabbath is resistance against going our own way and following the world's logical and practical ways of thinking and being. During Sabbath we choose to submit to God's order and rule; trusting him with our unfinished work, unearned dollars, and "wasted" time. We let the Trinity reorient our hearts. For some it will take the loving reminder of a Father, for others, the shepherding of Jesus, and others the guidance and power of the Spirit. Through the practice of Sabbath, we resist the ways our culture and the Evil One want to form us; forming us into people defined by what we do and enslaved by a false sense of control. Through Sabbath, we are formed into people who can give up control and rest in our identity as beloved sons and daughters of our good and gracious Father.

Questions for Missional Community Discussion

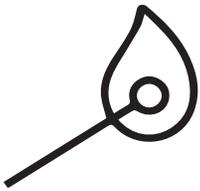
1. In general, how do you handle disruptions and interruptions in your day? Do you resist or avoid them? Do they irritate you? Do you welcome them? Why do you think this is?
2. If you already regularly practice Sabbath, or if you have just made your first attempt (or your first attempt in a while); take a moment and think about that experience. What comes to mind? What did you notice about yourself? (Whatever came to mind; encouraging, discouraging, confusing; rest assured that you're exactly where you need to be. Jesus sees you, loves you, and is near.)

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MC Discussion Continued...

3. When you think of Sabbath as resistance; what part of the idea of resistance sounds like good news to you? What part do you feel yourself resist?
4. It would be odd to hear a pastor stand up and suggest we get rid of or ignore the 4th Commandment, yet most of us are effectively doing just that. Why do you think that is (answer in terms of socially and individually)?
5. Do you believe that the practice of Sabbath is a gift to you? Why or why not?
6. Most of us have a "yeah, but ..." response when it comes to Sabbath, what's yours?
7. Take a moment to share your latest plan for how you are going to try to practice Sabbath this coming week. Or, if you're not sure you're ready yet, share that and why you think that is.



INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE: GRATITUDE AS RESISTANCE

If you are new to Sabbath rest, you may find it very disorienting for the first few times (or even months). That's okay. You may have years of conditioning that God wants to unwind or displace so that we can encounter Him in both new and familiar ways. It's often in the quiet and isolation that God does some of his best work in us. Resist the urge to forgo these moments because they are uncomfortable or bring us face-to-face with the restlessness and anxiety that our busyness keeps at bay. The first weeks (or even months) may feel disappointing or confusing. You may be expecting God to meet with you or to hear from him, but instead you may experience a bit of an "anechoic chamber" experience; where in the stillness and silence your internal noise can get overwhelmingly loud. God may seem absent, and instead of feeling his presence, you may encounter questions, pain, desire, confusion, or fears that have been stuffed or tamped down by constant activity. You may even feel like you're doing something wrong or feel guilty for "wasting time." Pay attention to what begins to surface, God hasn't left you. But he may be letting you acclimate to the practice of Sabbath. Take this opportunity to be curious about your experiences and then talk to God about it. Ask Him about the anxiety, fear, restlessness, confusion, or whatever it is you're experiencing. He will answer.

As you enter into your time of Sabbath for this week, have faith that God is inviting you into deeper holiness, freedom, and restoration to walk more confidently in your identity and agency as his beloved child. We can begin to cultivate that confidence by paying attention to our life. One way to do this is through the practice of gratitude.

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Individual Practice Continued...

Meister Eckhart, the 13th Century Christian mystic, asserted that if the only prayer we ever prayed our whole life was “Thank You,” that would be enough. Gratefulness creates a visceral experience of having enough. We can practice resistance against our consumptive, never-ceasing seeking culture by cultivating a spirit of gratitude for what we already have materially, spiritually, and relationally. When we are mindful of what we have, and give thanks for the many gifts we have overlooked or forgotten, our sense of “enough” cannot help but expand, and we soon achieve a sense of sufficiency we so desire.

On your Sabbath day, practice thanksgiving before meals, upon rising, when going to sleep, when something touches your heart, when you feel glad or surprised. Friends, family, food, color, fragrance, beauty, the earth, life itself—these are all gifts perfectly gratuitous and free for the taking. During Sabbath time we are less concerned with what is missing, focusing instead on sharing our gratefulness for what has already been given. Notice what the simple act of whispering “thanks,” (or a more formal prayers of gratitude) evokes in your mind, heart, and body. Note the frequency of your thankfulness and its cause. Consider carrying this practice into the other six days of your week.

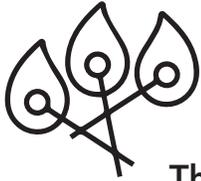


DNA GROUP OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

After you have tried a day of Sabbath, find time to meet with your DNA group and reflect together on your experience. Let the conversation go wherever God leads; here are some questions that might be helpful.

1. How is Sabbath going for you? Does it feel like a burden or a blessing? Explain.
2. On Sabbath, we stop because it is time to stop, not because we’ve finished our work. What does that feel like for you? Is it a gift or a struggle to leave the undone things undone?
3. As you engaged the practice this week, what did you notice? What were you thankful for? What was a struggle? What were you surprised by?
4. It may be too soon, but do you feel anything shifting in your desire to practice Sabbath? Do you discern any attitudes or ideas being displaced by something else? Explain.
5. When you think of Sabbath being an invitation to holiness, restoration, and empowerment, which of these are you drawn to? Why is that?
6. How do you feel about the Father? How do you think He feels about you?

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PRACTICE WITH KIDS

This section can be used by parents or missional communities to help kids be formed through the practice of Sabbath.

The Main Idea: Sabbath is an opportunity to resist the other stories we're being told all week that are counter to the True Story of the Gospel. To help your kids understand this, talk about how Sabbath is different by not being as "loud" as the rest of the week. On the Sabbath, we try to turn off the noise of other stories and come back to the True Story. One practical way to do this is to think about how to amplify God's voice on the Sabbath through limiting their use of electronics and technology. There's no need to be legalistic about it, and every family will have different ways they approach this, but the simple reality is that it can be hard to truly hear the voice of God amidst the noise technology brings into life.

Something To Do

For parents: Read (or add to your to-read list) *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* by Andy Crouch. This short book is full of practical help for families on how to navigate the ever-changing world of technology with a desire to be formed in the way of Jesus at the center.

For kids: Invite the kids to decorate a box. This box will be a home for their (and your!) electronics during a set period of time (tablets, phones, TV remotes, game controllers, etc.). Put them in the box and turn them off. Enjoy being together and have fun creating. Help your kids see themselves as revolutionaries in a world telling them to consume, consume, consume. For younger kids, this may be just a couple of hours. See how long it can take you to get up to 24 hours.

Parents, the most important way you will teach your kids is through how you model your use of technology,. Lead the way by showing you can set aside the noise to be present with your family and with God on the Sabbath.

Questions for Kids

1. How difficult is it to not be on your electronics?
2. How does stopping the noise of electronics help you?
3. How can you create rather than consume when there are no electronics?