

# The Science of the Sabbath

Good morning everyone, it's great to see all of you. If I haven't had the chance to meet you, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor in training here. If you're just joining us, we are a few weeks into our series called *Formation* where we've been talking about our habits and how they can help us look more and more like Jesus over time. Last week, Kent talked about this idea of *digital discernment* and he walked us through some of the effects of digital addiction in our lives, and specifically the effects it can have on our relationship with Jesus. He also talked specifically about the impact it can have on our ability to discern God's will in our lives. Before that, we looked at *the harm of hurry* in our lives, how the way we structure our lives as Americans actually directly interferes with our ability to find rest in God. How we need to structure our lives in such a way that we can truly rest. And today we are going to talk about what the bible says is ground zero for doing that: the Sabbath.

Now, if you've been around church much at all, odds are pretty good you've heard about the Sabbath. It's talked about all throughout scripture, the Old and New Testament, in a variety of different contexts. Some of us know the Sabbath as 'the day you go to church,' or 'the day you can't buy alcohol' (or at least, you used to not be able to and still can't in some places). But today, we're going to attempt to construct an understanding of the Sabbath from the ground up. What I want to do today is look together throughout scripture at what the Sabbath really is. I want us to have a broad view of what exactly the Sabbath encompasses according to the Bible. Usually we use a specific passage of scripture and teach out of it, but just as a heads up we'll be jumping around a bit. It's hard to get a comprehensive view of something without looking around a bit, but I think you guys can handle it. My plan is to go through and show you four main things about the Sabbath that I think will help give a clearer picture of what it truly is. Then, hopefully we'll be able to see how we can actively be seeking out and honoring the vision of Sabbath we see in the bible. So if you will, go ahead and pray with me and we'll jump in.

[pray]

The first thing I want to point out is that the Sabbath is a *day of rest*. It's not just a Sunday morning; for me personally, it can't be a Sunday morning. Yes, I get to participate in worship and celebrate God and what he's doing, but because of my role, I'm also working a lot of the day on Sunday. So my *day of rest* has to be different. We've talked before in this series about how habits change us. Our habits shape us to be certain kinds of people. And for today, I would argue ground zero in terms of habits for rest is the Sabbath: a day of the week devoted to rest. So let's talk about some realities of the Sabbath.

## The Sabbath is built into the rhythm of creation.

*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. (Genesis 2:2)*

Think for a second about what it says about the importance of rest that the creator of the world *rested*. How important must rest be for that to happen? Because here's the thing: God didn't rest because he was *tired*. God didn't *need* to rest. God resting meant he stopped creating. He saw what he made, and he said it was good. He said I don't want to do more, I don't want to change what I've made, it is good and I can rest and enjoy it. I heard someone talk about it from the viewpoint of a sculptor or an artist. A master sculptor gets to a point and knows what they have done is good, and if they take one more chunk of stone off what they've done, it wouldn't be right. Or when a skilled artist finishes a beautiful painting knowing one more stroke of the brush and it would be wrong. God saw what he made, what he created, and he rested.

God rested. You might be thinking, "*but I'm just a really driven person, I'm type A, I like to get things done and I'm sure I could improve some stuff.*" God rested. "*But I've got young kids and they're always going and going, and they always need things from me.*" God rested. "*But my job is just really demanding and I can't really seem to turn it off.*" God rested. He rested because rest matters. If you don't hear anything else I say today, hear me say: rest *matters*.

And I don't just mean it matters if you're a Christian. I mean it matters if you're a human. There's all sorts of data out there that seems to point to the fact that we were actually *made* to rest every seven days. For instance, every single society in the world runs off of a seven-day week. The last time an attempt was made to change the seven day week was in 1793 in France. It was changed to a ten-day week to increase productivity. The result? Suicide went through the roof in society. Mental illness was everywhere and productivity actually went *down*.

Other studies have found that nearly always, rates of productivity tend to drop off right around 50-55 hours per week. Which coincidentally (or not), is just about six days of work. There is virtually *no difference* in productivity between those who work 50-55 hours per week and those who work 75+ hours per week. Some of you are like "can you write me a note to take to my boss that says that on it?" But it's true.

Currently, the group of people that *leads the nation* in average life expectancy is a group of Seventh Day Adventists in Loma Linda, California. If you're unfamiliar, Seventh Day

Adventists are a denomination that takes the Sabbath very, very seriously. Seventh Day Adventists live on average *eleven years longer* than the average American does. One doctor pointed out in response that if you count up the time that should in theory be devoted to Sabbath over the average lifetime of an American, it's about *eleven years total*. His hypothesis was that for every day you Sabbath, you are literally adding that time back to your life. Even outside of this particular community, I read a study last week that showed "that long work hours are associated with adverse health as measured by several indicators, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and disability retirement." That at least implies *rest* is a vital part of human existence.

I could go on, because this stuff fascinates me. But I won't. My point is that there is all kinds of data and science out there screaming at us that our bodies were actually *made* to Sabbath. It's almost as if there were a creator God who designed our bodies to function a certain way, and when we go against that, things start to break down. I mean it's **almost** like that. We were not made to work all day every day. We were made to work hard for six days, and then rest. Work hard for six days, and then rest. It is built into the very fabric of creation.

Now, some of you might be thinking "okay, but wait—my job only asks me to work *five* days a week." "I only go to class *five* days a week." Or maybe four. Or less than that. So understand that my point isn't that we need to go out and find jobs that make us work six days a week so we can get in this sort of rhythm. The reality is that we all have work that needs doing each week outside of whatever our "job" is. Right? So we go to work (or as it is now for a lot of us, work from home in our PJ's or throw on a nice shirt if we have a virtual meeting), but we also have bills to pay, and clothes to wash, and dishes to clean, and grass to cut, and grocery shopping to do, and kids to parent, and so on and so forth. Even though you likely don't get *paid* to do any of that, it still is very much *work*. It's not-work work. I mean, some of you stay at home parents work hard for at least 50+ hours every week and the only payment you receive is more dirty diapers. That's a terrible payment.

So here I think is what the Scriptures lay out for us when it comes to practicing the Sabbath. I think it would say go to work for your five days, or four days, or three days plus a day of Zoom meetings, or whatever. And then, use another day or two to get all the other not-work work done. Stuff around the house that needs to get done. Errands that need to be run. Use another day or two for that stuff. But do all of that, so that one day a week, you can *cease* doing *all* of that. No work, no meetings, no errands to run, no cleaning, no grass cutting. Sort it out to where you have a day of the week to just *be*.

Which leads to our next point about the Sabbath, that...

## The Sabbath is meant to be noticeably different.

Take a look with me at the next verse in Genesis, chapter 2, v. 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.*

So here we read that because *God rested* on the seventh day, he designated it as *holy*. Now we've mentioned before in previous series that that word *holy* sometimes can carry connotations for people that are outside of what it means. You and I sometimes hear the word "holy" and think of phrases like "holier than thou." But Scripturally speaking, the most basic meaning of the word *holy* is just for something to be different, or distinct, or set apart. Something being holy just means it is different from other things like it.

So when God says that the Sabbath day is *holy*, he simply means that it is to be a day unlike every other day in your week. Your rhythms, your activity, your mood, your pace of life should look noticeably different on the Sabbath than the rest of your week. The rest of the week you can, and should, be committed to the work the Lord has given you. Whether you're a student, or a designer, or a warehouse manager, or an accountant, or an engineer, or whatever stage of life you're in right now, the rest of the week you can be diligently committed to your work. God worked for six days, then he *rested*. His pace was different, and on the Sabbath, your pace should be different.

On your Sabbath, **you do your best to do things that you *don't* do the rest of the week, and you *don't* do things that you *do* the rest of the week.** The word "sabbath" means "to cease." It's a day to *intentionally not do* the things you spend the rest of your week doing. **So if you spend the better part of six days a week answering emails, you should do your best to answer no emails on the Sabbath. Turn those notifications off on your phone so you're not even tempted. If you spend six days a week straightening your house non-stop because your kids and/or spouse and/or roommates mess it up, do your best to not do any house straightening on the Sabbath. Get *out of* your house so you're not inclined to, if it helps. If you spend the bulk of your week constantly around people non-stop, you may want to do something by yourself on the Sabbath. If you spend the bulk of your week alone in an office or cubicle, you may want to do something *with* other people on the Sabbath. If you spend most of your time around people, maybe intentionally spend more time alone. If most of your work is with your hands, maybe do something more mentally stimulating and less physical, or vice versa. And something else that can be incredibly helpful is creating a "do-not-do list" for your Sabbath. Sort of like a to-do list, but things to *intentionally not do* on your Sabbath.**

And your Sabbath is not going to be identical to someone else's, and that's okay. For example, if you've been coming around for a bit you know I play music here most weeks. So believe it or not, I listen to a great deal of worship music during the week. And I know a lot of people love spending time listening to worship music on their Sabbath while they read or journal or just listen and enjoy it. I'll be honest with you, my Sabbath involves very little worship music. Because I get stuck in a "work" mindset with it sometimes. Instead of resting in and enjoying it, I find myself thinking how we could do it, how we would make it work with an acoustic set, with full band, with piano, maybe parts of the song we could change or move, maybe other songs we can tag together, and that's not restful for me. So your Sabbath is meant to be a day that is distinctly different.

### **The Sabbath is a day for enjoyment and worship.**

Built into the story of creation is God saying about everything he makes that "it is good." He makes the heavens and the earth and says "it is good." He makes the land and the sea and says "it is good." He forms all aspects of nature and the world around us and says "it is good." And then, right before he begins the Sabbath day, Genesis 1, v. 31 says this:

*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

So implicit in the story of the Sabbath is that it was a day for God to *enjoy* everything he had made in the story so far. It was a day not for him to work or create, but rather to enjoy what he had already made and created. The Sabbath is a day for *enjoyment*.

This one is important because if you're not careful, the Sabbath can just become a day of "don'ts." Don't work, don't get stuff done, don't schedule things, etc. But here we receive instructions for what we *do*. We *enjoy*. So this could legitimately look different for each person in this room, but how might you incorporate *enjoyment* into your Sabbath? Maybe what you enjoy more than most anything is a good, home-cooked meal. Do *that* on your Sabbath. Maybe for you, it's more like one or two restaurants here in town that you just *love* eating at. Like every time you go eat there, you just can't get enough and it's better than you remember it. Go to that restaurant. Maybe for you, especially this time of year, *enjoyment* is just keeping your PJ's on, sitting in front of a fire, and reading a great fiction or non-fiction book. Do that.

Maybe for you it's board games. You genuinely enjoy sitting with a group of friends and playing a game for an hour or three, without having to be anywhere and being in a rush. Go for that. Maybe for you it's going on a long walk at one of our incredible parks around here. Suttree Landing right down the road, or Victor Ashe—do that. Maybe for you, it's

enjoying a bottle of your favorite wine, or a great local beer. Maybe for you it's getting together with a close friend and just sitting at a coffee shop for a couple hours with no agenda. Do that. The point is to find things that legitimately bring you joy to do, and do one or two or three of those on your Sabbath. And as you do them, allow them to create in you a deep gratitude for things and activities and people that God made. The Sabbath is for enjoyment.

Now, if you're anything like me you might be thinking, "the Sabbath is for enjoyment, and I enjoy Netflix, ergo the Sabbath is for Netflix!" We said at the beginning of this section the Sabbath is for enjoyment and what? Worship. We get to delight in God's creation, in the things he has placed in our lives as a reminder of his goodness, of his grace, of his love. We get to *enjoy* his good gifts. **James 1:17** puts it this way, you don't have to turn there, we'll put it on the screen. It says:

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights..."

So we can commune with God through enjoying the good gifts he's given us in our lives, but more than that we get to commune with him through reading and meditating on his word, in delighting in communicating with him, in reflecting on the ways he's been present in our week and in asking him to reveal himself in the week to come. All that to say, maybe Netflix isn't a great *primary* activity for you Sabbath. Sure, watch a show or two if you want. But I'll say in general, hours of TV doesn't really help you be present and in tune with the God of the universe. It has a tendency to make you absent minded. And I only say that out loud because of how badly I need to hear that in my own life too.

Now I do want to also mention, the goal here is not to burden all of you with feeling like you have to add something new to your already busy schedule. The goal is to show you the beauty of what we're invited into. We said the Sabbath is for enjoyment. Enjoyment for you here and now, yes, but also enjoyment of God himself. It's a time to enjoy him through his word, to delight in communicating with him, to rejoice in the ways you've seen him be present and moving. It is rest for our weary souls.

Really quickly, I want to address parents of young kids in the room. When I say "communing with God," it may provoke visions of blissful, meditative silence, or stillness, solitude. All of those words generally feel like antonyms to "young children." So for you parents in the room, there is some creativity that will have to come with this, and I acknowledge for certain seasons of life a whole day of communing with God may not be a reality. Maybe for you communing with God on the Sabbath is intentionally being more attentive to God's activity and God's gifts because you've slowed down the pace of your

week for that day. Maybe you set some reminders to spend some time praying and reflecting on what the Lord has done and is doing in your life. It could look like dividing the day up between you and your spouse where one of you has the kids for a bit while the other takes time to themselves to Sabbath and you can trade off during the day. Maybe it looks like calling on church family to be family and take your kids for the day or afternoon so you can take time to be with the Lord and rest. Family can work together to share burdens, and that's not exclusive to biological or marital family. Also from conversations I've had with some parents, I would say getting a babysitter for part your Sabbath is a very wise investment. I'm not talking about the whole day, obviously spending time with your kids and family is a great thing you should be doing, but incorporating a babysitter into your budget can have a huge impact on the time you spend with your spouse and time you spend with the Lord. I know people are in all kinds of situations and incorporating the rhythm of rest and Sabbath can seem too difficult, but there are solutions if we're willing to get creative.

One last thing about this before we move on. It's important to remember the purpose of this is *rest* and we just talked about how the Sabbath is for enjoyment, so I want to make sure it's very clear there may be things you enjoy that are not contributing to rest. Just because the Sabbath is for enjoyment does not mean we need to do everything we enjoy because it could very much be work. I was just talking with Kent about this this week. He very much enjoys writing sermons and listening to sermons and researching for series we're doing, which is great! Especially considering his job. But he was saying even though he enjoys those things, they are not restful. They are very much work. *Good* things that he enjoys, but they're still work. And everyone has things like this in their life. I think it's important to think critically when considering all of this, because something you enjoy and try to do on the Sabbath may actually be preventing rest.

## **The Sabbath is a reminder of who God is.**

For this one, I want us to look at a few different passages that all say similar things...

### **Leviticus 19:3:**

Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: **I am the Lord your God.**

### **Leviticus 19:30:**

You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: **I am the Lord.**

### **Ezekiel 20:20:**



...and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.'

Are you picking up on a theme here? Often, when God commands his people to observe the Sabbath, he follows it with some version of “do this because I am the Lord your God.” You should participate in the Sabbath day because of *who God is*. Now that’s interesting—what does God being God have to do with us keeping the Sabbath? How might those two things be connected to each other? It reminds us of God's authority, that he created us and life in general to function a certain way, and therefore he is the expert on how we should spend our time and our days. I think God is trying to show us that taking a Sabbath is a tangible reminder that we *are not* God. It’s a reminder that we are not ultimately in control and God is. It forces us to take a step back and say, “if I am removed from everything I normally do in the week, the world keeps spinning and God is still God.” It is a tangible reminder of where our identity truly lies. It attacks the modern notion that we are defined by the sum of our accomplishments. Sabbath is an *identity forming practice*. Like we’ve said before, all the things we’re talking about in this series are not overnight changes with overnight results. It’s an *identity forming practice*. A functional, consistent way of teaching yourself you are not what you accomplish. Your worth and value is in what was accomplished on your behalf. And Sabbath is one way we are reminded of that truth and invited to find rest in that reality.

So we know the Sabbath was built into creation. We talked about that earlier, how God incorporated it into the very fiber of what he made. And we talked about how the Sabbath is meant to be *distinctly different*, a day for enjoyment of creation and God himself, and to remind us of who God is and our standing with him as his followers. The practice of Sabbath may seem pretty straightforward, and to a certain degree it is. But something you can’t miss about this is how *intentional* it is. All of these aspects of Sabbath are intentional acts. Sabbath doesn’t just happen to you. It’s something you have to go out of your way for. *Most of my life as a follower of Jesus, any time I’ve thought about Sabbath, the only tangible rest in my mind was physical. I would think or say things like, “I’m really tired, I should sabbath.” Which roughly translates for me to, “I don’t want to go to work today. Several naps and mindless shows sound far superior” And I would proceed to reap the bounty that is Netflix and Hulu. And that’s easy for me to do, it requires literally no effort or intentionality whatsoever. Netflix just autoplays the next episode, it couldn’t possibly be less intentional. But that is not what Scripture is talking about. Is physical rest good? Absolutely, you need it to be a functioning human. But Sabbath is so much more, and so much more intentional. And hear me see loud and clear, it is not always easy. I struggle with this consistently myself. I’m constantly tempted by shows and movies, and specifically my phone like Kent was talking about last week. So I’m preaching this to myself as much as I am to any of you. Like we’ve said*



this whole series, it's about intentional habits and actions. Habits are hard to form, and some habits are even harder to break in order to make room for those other habits to be formed. It's hard. But it's worth it.

We've talked throughout this series about our practice guide. It's something we've put together to be a helpful tool to aid in the process of incorporating rest as a regular rhythm in our lives. It's not exhaustive or anything, but it's meant to provide some starting points for us as we work through our series. This week in the practice guide, we're challenged to start with a rhythm of Sabbath for five weeks in a row. The goal is to take one day every week for five weeks that you intentionally *don't* do the things you spend the rest of your week doing. I would strongly encourage everyone to go read some of the specific tips and tools for this practice as I think it will be super helpful. You might be thinking, "five weeks is a long time." And I wouldn't disagree, but the reason we want to encourage everyone to start with five consecutive weeks is because one Sabbath is not going to magically transform your life. But developing a habit of Sabbath over time very well could. And I would argue five weeks is starting to inch towards the "habit-forming" category we've been talking about. And also I think some of what Kent talked about last week is important to try to incorporate as much as possible on those Sabbath days, the need for "digital discernment" and parenting our phones (as well as other electronics).

Like I said earlier, this is something that is difficult and takes intentionality. It also takes sacrifice. Are there other things you could do with that time? Absolutely. Will there be barriers to making a habit of it? Guaranteed. But what we get to experience, that soul-level rest that comes from communing with the Father, far outweighs any of the sacrifice as this becomes a regular habit in our lives.

Now, some of you might be thinking something like, "a regular rhythm of rest and a day that's intentionally different from the rest sounds great, but my life doesn't have any regular rhythms." Or maybe "I don't think I'm allowed to intentionally not take care of my kids. There are in fact several laws specifically about that." I absolutely understand there are circumstances that make regular rhythms like this more challenging. And there are going to be times where this might take a little more creativity. For example, if you have younger children it could look like you and your spouse taking turns giving the other time and space to themselves to be able to participate in this individually. It could also look like taking a Sabbath as a family where you take everyone out of their normal habits and settings. If you tend to spend most of your time at home or inside, spend some time getting out of the house or outside together. If you're a student or have an irregular schedule, a rhythm of Sabbath on a specific day of the week may not be feasible right now, so it may take more intentional planning or week-to-week planning in order to

creatively work Sabbath in as a rhythm in your life. We say this a lot here, but it's because we think it's so important. I think this is where community can be incredibly helpful. You should include your LifeGroup this week in the discussion and pick their brain on how you could get creative with a Sabbath day and maybe even how you could all help each other in fighting for it. And again, it might be difficult. **For example, just this week my LifeGroup guys told me I needed to delete some of my favorite apps on my phone because of how much time I spend on them, and that hasn't been easy. But it has freed up a lot of time.** More broadly, I think we should all be including biblical community in the conversation as a whole and ask other followers of Jesus who see your life regularly if you are currently incorporating a Sabbath, or get their input on ways you can move towards that as a follower of Jesus.

As we've said throughout this series, it may sound odd but sometimes rest takes *effort*. But it's a beautiful, habit-forming rhythm we are invited to participate in. It's a rhythm built into creation itself where we get to participate in celebratory worship of our Heavenly Father. The Sabbath is a physical, tangible reminder of the gospel. The gospel tells us the point of life isn't just what we do, but it's what Jesus did for us. The Sabbath forces us to remember that reality by making one day about enjoying what God has made possible, and *not* getting other stuff done. We can talk all day about how we believe the gospel all we want, but the Sabbath forces us to practice it. And that's what our whole Formation series is about every year. We want to be continuously growing in our walk with Jesus and in our understanding of him as we try to become more like him. And that's what this is for. The spiritual disciplines we talk about aren't just tasks to check off your to-do list, they're habit forming practices that shape us into certain kinds of people. People who look more and more like Jesus. And that's our goal together. Let's pray to that end.