

IV: Observing the Sabbath

Well I don't think I even have to preach the sermon now, y'all just got the summary. I'm joking. What's up church fam, my name is Marcus Williamson and I'm Z's dad. He told me I had to say that. I'm also one of the pastors here at City Church. If you have your Bible, turn with me to **Deuteronomy 5**. For those of you who are new, we are working our way through the Ten Commandments as a church and today we will be going over commandment number four, which is keeping the Sabbath.

Now if you are new to church in general or new to following Jesus, the word Sabbath can potentially be a weird word to read or hear. We'll circle back around to a fuller explanation but essentially the Sabbath was a day of rest for the Israelites. But as we read, you'll see that this kind of rest the Lord is commanding, is altogether different than what you might think.

And today I want to try and show you the beauty, and practical helpfulness of the Sabbath. And I think we are in desperate need of it more than ever before because we live in a world that is always "on." One that never slows down. We have access to our phones 24/7.¹ We are overhurried, overbusy, and all the data would show that we are paying the price for it physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And I think in the midst of a societal situation like that, the Sabbath is an exceptionally helpful practice.

So my goal today will be to try and convince us that the Sabbath is something that is very valuable and worthy of our time in this day and age. That it's more doable than we might think and that it has the potential to change our life for the better.

So that's what we are shooting for today. Let's get it: **Deut 5:12-15**. And we're going to use the ESV translation.

12 Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.

Ok let's stop right there. So the word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word *shabbat*. Can you say *shabbat*? So *shabbat* in its most literal sense means "to stop." So the Israelites once a week would have a **stop day**, where they would refrain from work, from *Friday night to sun down Saturday night*. With the reason being that it was meant to be holy. Now, that word holy comes from the word *kadosh*. Can you say *kadosh*. So *kadosh* can be translated as being set apart, unique, categorically different from the rest, or

¹ Stats on phone usage: <https://explodingtopics.com/blog/smartphone-usage-stats>

sacred. So each week, this day, the Sabbath, was supposed to be a day where they stopped working and it was meant to stand out from the other days they worked. It was meant to be altogether different and more unique than those days.

Now this idea of having a holy, special, set apart day might sound a bit foreign to us. And for those of you who might remember, in week two, we talked about one of the concepts of morality being sanctity and degradation. Essentially, there are things that God calls holy, things he says are sacred, and because we don't necessarily think in those terms nowadays, we have made things he calls holy into more ordinary mundane things. But, like Kent said, we do have hints of things being set apart. So if you've lived in America for any amount of time, if I were to say the words December 25th I would imagine that is in fact a special day for you. Christmas is very unique and it's altogether different from most days of the year in fact. Some of us start the endless search for the perfect gift for our people pretty early. We love decorating our houses inside and out. And don't get me started on listening to Christmas music. Some of you even start preparing for its "specialness" in mid-July. Shame on you. For some of us in the room, we don't just take off that day, we take off multiple days. Some companies even give a week off to their staff because it's so different.

So this idea of something being set apart is not new, but what I want you to see is that the Sabbath was not only meant to be that but I would argue so much more than that. There were *practical* implications of the "specialness" of the Sabbath. So let's read the rest of [Deuteronomy](#), and then I want us to be able to unpack 3 distinctives for what the Sabbath is for. [Deuteronomy 5:13-15](#):

13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to [who church fam?] the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

So we've already mentioned that the Sabbath was a day to stop working. But notice here that we don't just get negative commands for the Sabbath, things not to do, we also get things *to do*. And the first one is that on the Sabbath we are to...

Remember God (Upward)

v.14 the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God

v.15 You shall remember you were a slave...and the Lord God brought you out.

So when we Sabbath, our call is to remember God on that day. Now to be sure, our call should be to remember God each and every day, but on this particular day, it should look different than the rest of the week. It makes me think about how I love texting my wife throughout the week. I love catching up on things on the fly, whether it's something about our boys or something that happens real time for her at work. Or silly stuff. But do you know what I also love, I love date nights. And I love it because that's where we can have devoted time together and get to enjoy each other's company and catch up in a more meaningful way. Alright, in a similar way, the Sabbath is meant to be a more intentional way to be with God. So at least significant portions of your Sabbath should be opportunities to 'remember God.' To be mindful of God. Now, that doesn't mean that your Sabbath has to be you sitting in front of your bible with worship music playing, sun-up to sun-down. But it certainly *shouldn't* look like being hurried doing a dozen different things or vegging out watching Netflix—because it's hard to make the case that doing those sorts of things helps you 'remember God.' *Unless you're watching the Great British Bake-off. Those are wholesome people doing the Lords work.*

Do things on your Sabbath that generate worship in you. Eat food that you really, really enjoy. Listen to music or a podcast that helps take your mind off all the things happening in your life and helps you remember who God is. Go to places here in Knoxville, or out of town, that make you thankful for God as a creator. Do things that generate life and joy in you, and not things that sap energy out of you.

So we are to *remember God* and more specifically as the passage says we are to *remember what he's done for us*. For the Israelites, it was remembering that God rescued them out of slavery from Egyptian rule. That he did it in such a way where they would never forget who it was that saved them when they needed it most.

Do you ever remember what the Lord has done for you? Do you think about how Jesus, in a similar way, rescued you from slavery to sin? How he, as the old school black pastors say, brought you from a mighty long way? Or are you a prisoner of the moment? So for me, I have a bad memory, or selective, I never know which honestly. But I tend to forget, and of the many things I forget, remembering what the Lord has done for me escapes my mind often. So one thing I have found helpful over the years has been to write down my prayer requests and the prayer requests of others in a spreadsheet. And when a prayer is answered or not, I jot it down. And so, as you can imagine, this helps me keep a somewhat accurate list of things the Lord has done not only for me, but my family, friends, coworkers, our church, work, city, and world.

And hear me say, I'm far from perfect at keeping this list up to date and or praying consistently. Sometimes the day gets ahead of me and I'm playing catch up at work and can't get to it. Sometimes, I'm lazy and don't want to deal with praying. But over the years, what I've found is that this method helps me remember not just the present but the past of what the Lord has done for me and the people around me.

Ok, for you, this might be the avenue to go. But also, if most of your job is making spreadsheets, I maybe wouldn't do this idea in a spreadsheet. Maybe do it differently. Maybe for you it looks like spending 5–10 minutes on Friday remembering your week and the things that you prayed for and how the Lord responded. Or just things you noticed the Lord working in without you praying. Maybe it's thinking through your past and how the Lord brought you out of a certain situation. If you have kids, maybe it's spending time asking what are some of the highlights from the week and then being able to redirect it so they can see how God was in those highlights. Whatever it is exactly, being able to remember God and remember what he has done for you is one of the things we should be shooting for as part of our Sabbath.

The next distinctive of Sabbath is:

Rest (Inward)

V.14 - On it you shall not do any work

We've mentioned this before, but Israel is fresh out of Egyptian captivity after living there for over 400 years, most of the time as slaves in Egypt. And when they were slaves, they worked 7 days a week. Sun up to sun down. Their productivity went to serve Pharaoh. Their identity was not as human beings, with souls and stories that matter. It was not first and foremost human beings made in the image of God. They were first and foremost chained to Pharaoh's command. Whatever he said, they did. Their humanity was simply to work and nothing more.

But God [*Amen*] enters the picture by freeing them from slavery. And he tells them: You are no longer slaves! You no longer serve an oppressive king. You're a part of my kingdom now, and in my kingdom, your worth is found in so much more than how much work you get done. In my kingdom, your worth is in who you are, and specifically who you are to me. And then in a very practical sense, God says, *"So to remind you of that, for this story to get down into your bones, here's what I want you to do. One day a week, I want you to just stop. That's right. I want you to rest. This is how you're gonna remind yourself that you are not defined by Pharaoh. How you're going to remind yourself that*

you're not defined by what you do. Once a week you're going to intentionally stop working and rest and remember who I am. You're going to remember what I've done for you. How you're now free from slavery."

Ok, whether you realize it or not, the spirit of Pharaoh is alive and well in our culture. Our culture, much like theirs, is built more on what you can accomplish than it is on who you are as a human being. It's built on this sun up sun down mentality. **Case in point: America works 184 more hours per year than the Japanese, 301 more hours per year than the French, 294 more than the UK, and 442 more hours per year than Germans. We work more hours than most countries in the world.**² And get this, workaholism is both socially acceptable and also something we tend to brag about the most here in America. The spirit of Pharaoh is indeed alive and well.

And what God is offering us is a chance to stop and breathe. To put our brains on pause. To put our work and deeds on pause. To remember that we are human beings made in God's image, apart from anything we do or don't get done. **Deuteronomy 5 tells us that one of the most practical ways to push back on the lie that we need to work is to have a day where we don't.** A day where we don't accomplish tasks. A day to resist the narrative that work is who we are. So how does this apply to you and me in the 21st century?

Well if you want your Sabbath to be a success—if you want it to be everything it can and should be—you will have to *prepare* for it. **In the Old Testament, there's a story about God providing manna—a type of bread—for the Israelites. And he tells them that on the sixth day of the week, they should gather double the amount of bread, so they don't have to gather any on the Sabbath.** The idea is that the Sabbath required some *preparation* in advance in order to pull off. And I think the same principle is at play in *us* needing to prepare well for the Sabbath.

So for most of us in the room, I would imagine, we have 2 days a week where we don't have to work like we do the other 5 days a week. **Now generally what happens on both of those days is that we probably do some form of veg'n out and kind of working. Tidying up here and there. Cutting the grass, while football is at half time. After church we try and get ready for the upcoming week. We may try and get ahead of emails, prep the kids stuff for the week, and so forth and so on. And if you approach both days "off" of work that way, what you end up with is really no actual day to rest.** So if you have 2 days off, maybe having one of those days be a "prep" day for Sabbath allows you to actually Sabbath. **If you need a babysitter on the Sabbath, that's probably something you need to**

² <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?DataSetCode=ANHRS#>

schedule earlier in the week. If you need to not do laundry or the dishes on the Sabbath (because you do that most of the rest of the week), that might require that you do extra laundry or dishes the day before. If you need to not check email on the Sabbath, that might mean you need to block out thirty or forty-five minutes the day before to wrap up any unfinished emails that need to go out. If you need to stay away from technology on the Sabbath, that probably means you need to turn off your phone before you go to sleep the night before, and put it away in a drawer where you're not tempted to pick it up first thing in the morning.

So whatever it is, you do the math: what might keep your Sabbath from being a Sabbath? **And then whatever that thing is, figure out a way to take care of it before your Sabbath starts.** A quality Sabbath is probably going to require at least some amount of preparation in advance. You don't usually *stumble into* a restful Sabbath—you *plan* for it. You *prepare* for it. I realize that's a little counterintuitive, but that's often how it works. That's really how the Scriptures say it works.

So as you prepare for the Sabbath, you should also be thinking about what to do on the Sabbath. Making a list of some of your favorite things, and then picking one or two of them to do on each Sabbath could very well be wise for you. *Maybe for you that list includes things like going for a walk in your neighborhood. Maybe that's very restful for you and possibly your whole family. Maybe you don't get to take naps throughout the week and a nap is what sounds glorious. Maybe it's taking a bath—bubbles, epsom salts, the whole deal. Going on a hike. This is one of my favorites when I get around to it. Because I always look at a computer throughout the week, going on a hike at Seven Islands with someone in LifeGroup is always refreshing to me. Maybe for you going to a coffee shop with a close friend with no time limits on when you have to leave sounds very restful. For others in the room, it might be having a slow, casual brunch at your house with several friends.* Whatever it looks like, the point is to ask what are the things that, after you do them, you feel joy, and you feel recharged—like you are re-energized to tackle whatever's next in life? Those are the types of things you want to do on your Sabbath.

The last distinctive of Sabbath we are highlighting is:

Be with God's People (Outward)

V.14 - you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.

Everyone from the leaders of Israel, to the sojourner, to the servants in the society were meant to stop working - even the livestock. Yes, even the animals got a Sabbath in God's kingdom. Sabbath had and still has a huge priority in the life of their society. And if you were to stroll through the market on a Friday while the sun was going down, everyone would be out in the streets hustling, buying last minute groceries, making sure they got what they needed while also knocking out all their errands. And then when Sabbath rolls around, the city becomes a ghost town. All the businesses are shut down—not just the Chick-Fil-As, because everyone is in their homes and synagogues resting, worshiping, and sharing meals together. See, Sabbath is not just a stop day for you, but it's also a stop day for *us*. **Somebody say: Sabbath is a stop day for us.** It's something we're called to all do, *together*.

For ancient Israel this looked like families spending time together, not working the fields, but enjoying each other's company. It looked like Israel gathering together to sit under God's word, taught by the Levitical priests. It looked like feasting, sharing meals together with people in your community. It looked like remembering God together. Encouraging one another in how the Lord worked in each of their lives that week. How he answered prayers.

So yes in our modern context applying this might mean going to church, if you choose to Sabbath on Sunday, but it's also way more than that. Yes, there was some amount of "self-care" during the Sabbath, if you want to call it that but it's also way more than that as well. The Sabbath was not meant to be about you exclusively. And self-care tends to be about, well, you right.

And there's a lot that makes self care alluring but the main thing that I think is so alluring about it is that *everyone is doing it*. There are podcasts, books, experts, tik toks that focus on it. Everyone is either doing it or daydreaming when they can do it. It's slowly becoming more and more acceptable to take mental health days at work; I think in part because people have noticed the stats on just how much work is doing to us. So the pendulum is slowly trying to swing the other direction. And hear me say, to that, I will say yes and amen. I'm glad that we are trying to attempt to address how much we are overworking in our culture. But, here's the thing, as followers of Jesus, I don't want us to confuse self care with the Sabbath. The lines can easily get blurred, because there are elements of self care that coincide with Sabbath but it is in fact not the Sabbath. *They're not the same thing*. Self care focuses only on you—only on your wants and desires. Self care only takes care of you. But the Sabbath not only takes care of you, it also takes care of the people around you. It invites you to seek out others to Sabbath with. It invites

others to seek you out and Sabbath together. It even invites you to seek your pets out to Sabbath with them.

So if you say *"on my Sabbath, I'm gonna watch college football all day,"* that's not a Sabbath. Don't get me wrong, it sounds fun, and I would love to be there watching with you, (as long as we can also watch the Gamecocks play) but it's not a Sabbath. I mean, unless you're praying for every player as you watch (and you're not—cause opposing team). There's nothing upward, nothing Godward about that. Or *"on my Sabbath, I'm gonna go shopping all day."* That's not upward either. And hear me out, your Sabbath can totally involve things that you enjoy like football, it can involve things like shopping, within reason. But if you spend an entire day doing those things, that's not a Sabbath, that's self care. And the reason it's not a Sabbath is because there's no element of *"to the Lord,"* in the language of this passage.

Now what worked great for the Israelites was that they all Sabbath'd at the same time. Generally speaking most if not all people had a similar work schedule. Which made it easy to Sabbath together. Fast forward to today and work schedules don't really allow for it as easily. But chances are, if given a little effort, you might be able to Sabbath with a good bit of people in your LifeGroup, community, or family. *So this looks like asking those in your life to pick a day to Sabbath together. Maybe every Saturday you go out to the zoo and untether yourself away from your phone, because everyone you would be worried about is already there with you. Maybe if there are enough stay at home moms in the group, maybe all the dads wrangle all the kiddos and hang out at a house and watch football while the kids play, thus freeing up all the moms to have breakfast at Wild Love and speak about the Lord and his goodness from the week. Maybe it looks like having a few people over for dinner to watch the sun go down and close out your Sabbath day with part of the purpose being to reflect and remember the Lord together.* Whatever it looks like, let's do everything we can to help our Sabbath look more and more communal than something individualistic.

When we establish this type of rhythm of life into our schedules, remembering God, resting, and being with community, I believe God will use this to breathe life into our sails. When we incorporate them into our lives it will reinforce the narrative that you are a son and daughter of the most-high and not a slave to work. That you are loved not because of what you accomplished but because of what God accomplished on your behalf.

Now, hopefully that gives you at least a working picture in your mind of the types of things a Sabbath should include. With that established, I want us to wrap up with a handful of tips on how to put the Sabbath into practice in your life. So if you want to *start*

putting it into practice, or are all of a sudden realizing you haven't fully understood what the Sabbath is, here is some guidance I'd offer to you on how to go about it.

Tip #1: Make a "to cease" list.

For my more Type A people in the room, every other day of the week, you can live by your to-do list. But on Sabbath you need a "to cease on this day" list. Remember the Sabbath is to be *holy*. It should *stand out* noticeably from the things you do every other day. So your list of what you're *not* going to do on the Sabbath matters as much if not more than what you're *going* to do. Start with the question, "what do I *normally* do, the rest of the week?" And then take *those* things, and as much as possible, make them off-limits on the Sabbath.

- If you send and receive emails constantly on the computer, cut out email and possibly computer on your Sabbath.
- If you make calls all week, make no calls unless they're absolutely necessary on the Sabbath.
- If you work with your hands all week—if you build things or fix things—do your best not to build or fix things on the Sabbath.
- If you strategize all week, do your best to do no strategizing on the Sabbath.
- One slightly more *complex* one: if you stay home and take care of your kids all week, do your best to minimize that on the Sabbath. Now obviously this one is a little more difficult. Because especially if you have small kids, you can't just lock them out in the backyard all day and go "good luck! It's my Sabbath, so don't bother me."

So you may have to get creative with this one. It may mean that whichever parent *doesn't* usually stay home with the kids during the *week*, takes them on a weekend day, so the other parent can take a Sabbath on that day. Which as a side note, **might mean that some of us parents who don't normally stay at home with the kids, need to grow in our ability to do that, so that our spouse can take a Sabbath.** I find that it is, more often than not, *dads* who need to grow in that. That one's for free. Or maybe, it looks like reallocating part of your budget to pay for a babysitter on your Sabbath, so that you can have that day.

Now, for *single parents* in our church—this is one of the ways we as a church family get to serve you. We should be offering, and you should be asking us, if some of us can take care of your kids so that you can Sabbath. Your LifeGroup should be willing and eager to step in and come alongside you in an effort to help you Sabbath. This is part of what it means for the church to function like a family. We

help one another fight for spiritual health, which includes helping one another Sabbath well.

But anyway, obviously some of us are going to have to get a little more creative with this to make it happen, but making a “to cease” list for your Sabbath could be a great place to start. Next tip...

Tip #2: Don't be surprised if it's difficult at first.

Like we stated at the top, you and I live in a society that constantly reinforces the lie that “we are what we accomplish.” So taking a day to *not* accomplish things might be really *difficult* to do at first. *You may feel the pull within you in the first hour to check your email, to get something done, to respond to that text from work. Or you might just be inclined to grab your phone within the first hour and start mindlessly scrolling.* *Because* a lot of us operate as if we are what we accomplish, that might mean our first attempts at a true Sabbath feel more like a challenge than anything else.

But listen: that's actually just proof that you do *need* the Sabbath. *Think about it this way: if a person is addicted to a substance of some sort, and they try to quit, but they have withdrawals from quitting: that's actually proof that they were indeed addicted to the substance, right? So similarly, if we go through “productivity withdrawals” when we try to Sabbath, that's actually a sign that we do have a problem that needs addressing—it may just take time to see the type of fruit we want to see from addressing it.*

So just know it may be a bit uncomfortable and a bit awkward at first. That's ok. No new rhythm or habit goes smoothly on your first try. Give it time. Don't just try it once and give up. Try it 10 times and evaluate to see if you're getting anywhere. Get a feel for it. For some of us, it might be a walk in the park. But for others, it will take some learning and unlearning. Which leads us to our last tip...

Tip #3: Start somewhere.

So technically, the Sabbath *should* be a full 24 hours: sundown to sundown, sunrise to sunrise—the goal is for it to be an entire day of ceasing from work. So if you can, do 24 hours. But maybe 24 hours just seems impossible right now. And that's okay—but *start somewhere*. If you can't find a babysitter for the whole day, find a sitter for half the day, or a few hours. // The *idea, also*, is that your Sabbath would be the same day every week, so that it creates a natural rhythm to your week. But maybe right now, you're at the mercy of when you're scheduled for work, and that varies. So maybe your Sabbath needs to be a *floating* Sabbath or the second half of one day and the first half of the next. Whatever you need to do, just start somewhere.

It doesn't have to be perfect—it doesn't have to be ideal. So don't let the need for it to be perfect keep you from doing it at all. Just start *somewhere*. Commit to join God in His holy rhythm of rest and I can promise he will bless your efforts in that over time.

So, I want to just land the plane here, on Jesus' words from [Matthew 11:28-29](#). Many of you have probably heard this passage before, but I really want us to consider what it says in light of everything we've just talked about. Take a look with me up on the screen:

[Jesus says to us] *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you [what church fam?] rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

So I need you to hear me on this: the epicenter of rest is in the person and work of Jesus. "Come to *me*," Jesus says, "and *I* will give you rest." **Step 1 to participating in the Sabbath is to bring your life—all of it—to Jesus.** And once you're there, allow *him* to structure our lives in such a way that brings rest. And not just rest to our *minds*, not just rest to our *bodies*, but rest for our *souls*. And *that* is what we're after as followers of Jesus.

But in order to do that, we have to hear what Jesus teaches us about who we are, and about what life should look like. God designed you and I to *Sabbath*. He designed us to be with him. That was his original intent. And as we say all the time, this is part of why Jesus went to the cross, to rescue us out of this mentality that we are defined by what we do. And to bring us into a place of trusting in his work and his accomplishments rather than trusting in our work and our accomplishments. We just read how God rescued the Israelites from Pharaoh and now he wants to rescue us from the spirit of Pharaoh.

And here's the thing: I'm sure we could come up with a dozen logical reasons why we can't or shouldn't Sabbath: "well I might miss something." Or "what if my job really needs me?" Or "what if something happens and people can't get in touch with me?" Or "I'm not all that tired—I don't even need to rest." All *kinds* of reasons for not doing it.

But there's one very good reason *to* Sabbath that outranks all of those reasons *not* to. **And it's that God said this is how life works best.** That God himself—who created you and I, and created *work* and the world around us and who sustains all of that—*he said* that the world will be just fine if you rest. That for 24 hours, for 6 hours, even if you can only do it for 2 hours, that the world will continue to spin. That the people around you will be fine. That God does in fact have the whole world in his hands. And you know what, *you'll* be

better off for it. So let's come to Jesus and let him teach us how to Sabbath, and we will ultimately find *rest*.

Let's pray together.