

**God Ceased
Genesis 2:1-3**

Some of you have been to our home. We live on about ½ acre with about 30 trees and a half dozen large flower beds scattered around the yard and a pool and some outdoor places to sit. Our house is about 25 years old and ever since we moved in, Jen and I have not stopped working on it. We have replaced lights inside and redone a bathroom and given our kitchen a facelift. We have painted walls and installed new floors. We've replaced all kinds of hardware and appliances. We of course have filled the walls with pictures and paintings, including a buffalo head and a print of Pancho Villa on the wall of our study. Jen loves those. On the outside I have put in hundreds of feet of low rock walls, scattered tons of boulders around the various flower beds and only the Lord Himself knows how many trees and flowers and other shrubs I have planted in the earth. I am on a first name basis with the people at the nursery. They just start adding up their kids' college fund when they see me coming. We built a covering over outdoor patio. We've laid about eight pallets of sod and painted both sides of every inch of the 150 yards of black iron fence that encircles the property.

And we're not done. There is so much more that I would like to do and this doesn't even include maintenance like mowing the lawn or raking our dead leaves which could fill a football stadium. Given more resources, there is still a laundry list of projects in my mind's eye. There is carpet to replace. Ceiling fans to install, an outdoor fireplace and a basketball hoop. I have a vision to add a little pool house and screen in a patio. I estimate even with all our improvements, we are somewhere close to half finished—maybe—at least in my vision of what could be done.

And I suspect I am not so different from many of you. When you own a home, the work is never done. There is always something to do—the problem is usually having the resources to do it.

This is a metaphor for life. Our work is never done. The scope of our labor is boundless, unlimited. Because we are innately, eternally creative. There is always something we would like to see happen or brought to completion in our life, our career, our family, our neighborhood, our city, our nation and even our world. We are always looking at this world and thinking something could be different, better, improved—be it under our own roof or half a world away.

Where does this come from?

Believe it or not, it comes from God. It is God's gift and keeping sabbath is key to mastering the world around us or being broken by our work that never ends.

The key to conquering creation is to understand that the Sabbath is the very center of time. Sabbath is our secret weapon for subduing the world because it taps into the unlimited power of God and the eternal resources of Heaven. Sabbath imports the Kingdom of God into this world.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel put it like this:

Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul.

Abraham Heschel

The First Chapter of Genesis tells the story of six days of Creation. God spoke into the dark and created light, separated the waters from the land and the sky. He hung the stars in the heaven and the sun and the moon. He made vegetation spring forth from the warm dirt and animals on sea and land and birds in the sky. And then God made human beings male and female in His image. God blessed human beings and He said be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and take charge and eat freely of everything it produces—both flora and fauna. Those were the first six days of Creation and Genesis tells us God looked at everything He made and called it “very good.”

And then on the Seventh Day God we are told:

God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Genesis 2:2-3

No sooner had God charged humanity with taking care of the earth than He established the Sabbath. Sabbath is woven into our work—inseparable. Keeping the earth without the Sabbath is impossible.

And that’s so very important because Scripture doesn’t say Creation was complete or perfect. God created and it was very good, but when God ceased from His work, creation was unfinished. There was still work to do.

I have a painting in my office. Its finished. If someone came in with oil paints and began adding to it, it would ruin the painting. If someone went the Louvre in Paris with a paintbrush to fix Mona Lisa’s smile, it would be tragedy. If Burger King or Starbucks wanted to open a franchise at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London putting their logo on the outside, there would be outrage.

Those things are complete. They are done. To add to them detracts from them. But as soon as God created humanity, He put us to work on shaping the very good but unfinished creation He made. That is why creating is the main thing we do. We are like children that Jesus has placed with toolbag in a sandbox filled with magnificent treasures.

God put humanity in this world to continue to create in His creation:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...”

Genesis 1:28

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it...Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.

Genesis 2:15, 19-20

God gave finite, limited human beings stewardship and charge over a world with infinite possibilities and needs.

This is the reason I look at my house and you look at yours and always see things to do. That is why we can look at our life and our family, our neighborhood, our city and our world and name 10,000 things we would like to see happen—from better roads—to caring for the homeless—to peace in Ukraine.

That is why we need sabbath—our scope of concern is boundless but our human resources are limited. Sabbath is our secret weapon for subduing the world.

We are all given unequal portions of creation to oversee and subdue and keep. God does not distribute power equally. But there is an amazing democracy to time. There are 365 days a year, 24 hours in a day, 60 minutes an hour, 60 seconds a minute for each of us. And the more we lean into sabbath, the better we are equipped with the resources of heaven and the power of God to shape our world.

Last week we talked last week about sabbath as a practice, a habit, a way of life that goes beyond one day. We said there is a pattern to sabbath that is integral to doing well that most basic thing God has made us to do, a thing we cannot escape doing. **(insert Sabbath cease, commune, create)**

We cease from doing to commune with God who recreates us so we can create things worth creating—Kingdom things. Remembering the Sabbath is the first commandment alluded to in Scripture. God ceased from His work creating, setting a pattern for us. In fact, the Hebrew word sabbath means to cease.

Cease—commune—create is the pattern of following Jesus. It is the way that leads to the fullness of life and gives the heavenly resources to do the work God has set us in this world to do.

Creating room for Jesus is at the heart of sabbath. Learning to cease from our work, from our struggles, our strivings and labors and trust God to provide without us lifting a finger at all is the key to managing the unlimited work we have been given in this world. When we trust God with our time, we learn to trust Him in everything else. Sabbath is the lynchpin of our practice as Christians—our secret weapon for subduing the world.

God's intent is not that Sabbath should be an afterthought, something we should do only if we are tired or need a break. Sabbath should be our first thought.

Adam and Eve experienced sabbath on the first full day of their existence. According to Genesis Chapter One, God created man male and female on day six and on the seventh day there was rest. We did not institute the Sabbath after Adam and Eve had worked six days and told them, "You've worked hard. It's time to take a break."

No, Adam and Eve's very first full day was a Sabbath.

What does this tell us?

The Sabbath is not a relief from hard work as we like to think. The Sabbath is not something we earn. The Sabbath is not a reward. The Sabbath is grace—an undeserved gift from God. Sabbath comes first, it is foundational to our creative work and to everything we do.

The Roman Emperor Constantine, as one of his first official acts after declaring the Roman Empire to be Christian decreed that Sunday should be a day of rest. The year was 321 AD:

On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest and let all workshops be closed...lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost.

And that practice of society and commerce shutting down on Sunday generally continued throughout western society until the last few decades. When I was very young, we would often travel to my grandparents on Sunday--about an hour and a half away. My Dad would always go the night before to gas up our car because very few gas stations were open on Sunday—let alone any other store.

Every Sunday on my four-mile drive to the church building I pass about five gas stations—all of them open. And of course, like any gas station today, I can get more than gas—a sandwich, donuts, a walking taco, coconut water, 27 different kinds of protein bars, an eggroll, tamale, sugar free sport drinks, a latte, a t-shirt, a hat, gloves, a stuffed animal, or even a box of wine.

Now we can do anything we want on Sunday—except maybe buy a chicken sandwich or mail a package.

Not only is making Sunday just like any other day a seismic cultural shift, it's a parable for our age.

Today we have 24/7/365 access to nearly any want, any desire, any need we have and at the same time as a society we are more stressed, unfulfilled, lonely, haggard and overwrought than previous generations who had much, much less. We have more ways to save time, entertain and distract ourselves than any people in history but most of us are perpetually busy and tired. We own more than any people ever and we are finding out it is not enough. We keep pounding the get stuff, do stuff, experience stuff, achieve stuff button to fill our soul and we are emptier and emptier inside.

Without sabbath, without intentionally ceasing, our wants never cease. The work God has given us is never done. The scope of our labor is boundless. And we are finding out this world will break us if we do cease to commune with God and allow Him to recreate us.

We have forgotten how good God's limits are.

Sabbath is about ceasing with our needs unmet, our work unfinished and allowing our Heavenly Father to restore and recreate us to fill our needs in a way that only He can.

We cease striving, to commune with God, so He can re-create us so we can create things worth creating—Kingdom things. And this is our heart's desire. Creating Kingdom things, eternal things is what we long to do.

The great Italian artist Michelangelo who kept a strict observance of the Sabbath as he carved David from a block of ruined stone cast aside in junkyard and painted the Sistine Chapel wrote this prayer and prayed it often as he went about making the greatest art the world has ever known:

Oh, make me see Thee, Lord, where'er I go!
If mortal beauty sets my soul on fire,
That flame when near to Thine must needs expire,
And I with love of only Thee shall glow.
Dear Lord, Thy help I seek against this woe,
These torments that my spirit vex and tire;
Thou only with new strength canst re-inspire
My will, my sense, my courage faint and low.

Michelangelo knew something. The first step to creating Kingdom things is to do the very last thing our souls expect. Our first step to create Kingdom things is not a step forward but a step back.

Before we close, I want to get into a little metaphysics with you this morning because I think it really helps to open an entirely new element of our understanding of sabbath. Metaphysics is simply a school thought that talks about elemental principles beyond what we can perceive through our five senses.

I want to share a metaphysical idea that has incredible application for sabbath and our ability to create Kingdom things.

The Bible teaches that God created the universe and everything we will ever see or know from absolute nothingness. In the beginning there was only God and nothing else. There were no stars, no planets, no trees, or birds, dolphins, wolves, platypuses or people.

So, to create, the Lord had to make space. He had to allow a place for creation to exist. If in the beginning it was only God, then it logically follows God had to make room for creation. You can think about it in this way. A husband and wife have a child and they must make space for that child to live—not just physical space, but time, money, emotions, activities. When you welcome new life into your world, you must make space. We must withdraw from our own wants, our own desires, our own preferences to have meaningful relationships. First Corinthians 13:5 put it this way:

Love does not insist on its own way.

And it is no different from God. This is the pattern He has established. God makes space for creation. He makes space for you and me to exist. A German theologian Jurgen Moltmann explained this:

God gives space, God makes room, God withdraws to let a non-divine reality exist with himself...This divine conferral of space provides the free and open scope for the existence, life and enduring being of those whom God creates.

God's first creative act was to withdraw to make space for a relationship with Creation in general and humanity in particular. And this is a pattern for God. The New Testament tells us that Jesus stepped back as well to create Kingdom things.

Eight times in the Gospels we are told that Jesus withdrew. And Jesus usually withdrew for a very specific reason—to make room for the Father in His life. A great example of this is something we discussed just a couple of weeks ago. When Jesus learned that His cousin John the Baptist had been killed, he tried more than once to withdraw from the crowds in order to cease from creating—creating teachings, creating miracles, creating disciples, creating the Kingdom. He withdrew and ceased so He could commune with His Father and be re-created, so He could back to creating things that are worthy to create—Kingdom things. When John’s disciples came to tell Jesus His cousin, who was a political prisoner, had been killed, we are told Jesus’ first instinct was to withdraw. Unfortunately, the crowds didn’t let Him do that.

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Matthew 13:13-14

Jesus healed and taught all day and then created enough food to feed more than 5,000 souls from two measly fish and five loaves of bread. And then He withdrew again that night to pray alone high on a hill.

Jesus had a pattern of withdrawing like that to make space for His Heavenly Father. Not only for part of a day or an entire day but occasionally He would take the disciples on extended retreats. They would withdraw for days to a place far away, to cease and commune with God. One of those places was a beautiful area called Banias in the north of Israel about 30 miles from the Sea of Galilee. Banias is wooded and very different from the rest of Israel. It looks like the Northwoods of Oregon or Maine. It sits at the bottom of snow covered Mount Hermon—the highest peak in the country. And one of its features is this waterfall. **(insert video)** Its gorgeous—a first century vacation spot.

Jesus went her with His disciples for several days to cease and commune. And Jesus took an extended Sabbath because He was getting ready to do the greatest work any human being was ever called to do. After Jesus traveled to Banias, He and the disciples all traveled to Jerusalem so He could create salvation for the entire world on the cross.

You see Jesus knew something. Jesus knew that the Sabbath is not a reward for hard work or even primarily a rest. Jesus knew that the Sabbath is foundational to God’s call to create Kingdom things and without it we can do nothing of any eternal significance.

