

## INTRODUCTION

At the start of 2020, I found myself in an exciting place and torturous one. After looking for a job in ministry for months, I finally landed on a small church in Midlothian, TX. I was to become their new youth minister on April 1st! The weeks leading up to it were filled with onboarding paperwork, dreaming, and excitement. In fact, they even wanted me to come a couple weeks early so I could be introduced to the congregation! Then I received a text from the lead pastor and my friend, Clint...

"Sorry to change things on you, but it looks like a lot of things are shutting down. We will have to introduce you in April when you officially start!"

A couple weeks went by... and then a couple more... and then a month... and suddenly, the whole world seemed to come to a standstill. People generally stopped going into work and all "normality" went to the wayside. Yet, as terrible as it was, and as much as we were mourning the loss of people we knew, loved, and/or were associated with, many people found solace in the necessity of staying home.

They finally got to slow down.

They finally got to take a breath.

They finally got to feel less robotic.

Slowly but surely, the world started to open its doors. People returned to work. Interactions edged towards normality. Church began to meet again. Businesses reengaged. And just... like... that... we began to run again.

That moment of reprieve, that breath of fresh air that was bottled in a break, that slower pace of life was swept away by the machine of our culture. And I don't know about you, but covid was hard for a lot of reasons... and so is the pace that we again find ourselves in. What is the solution? How do we not end every day empty, feeling like we were chasing the wind? Is it possible to be a Christian in a secular overwhelming city such as Dallas? The epitome of pace and striving?

Today, I want to explore the practice of Sabbath in a countercultural way - a Biblical worldview of rest that draws not only ourselves, but others, into God's presence.

## PRAYER

### OLD TESTAMENT PURPOSES OF SABBATH

Now we have to admit, the word "Sabbath" is almost exclusively a Christian word. You might have heard it in other circles, but for the most part, this term seems to be rapidly gaining popularity among believers. Not a bad thing! But where did this term come from? How was it traditionally used? Let's look at some Old Testament roots. I'm going to make an argument for the Sabbath on two fronts - for rest and for the setting apart of God's people. If you have your Bibles, let's begin by looking at Genesis 2:1-3,

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 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. 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."

We see God exemplifying from the start an attitude and practice of rest. Did God need rest? No! And yet from the start, He engaged in exemplifying this practice for us.

Time progresses and we see the likes of Noah, Abraham, and Jacob come and go. The nation of Israel is established and then taken into captivity by Egypt for 400 years. Eventually, God sends a leader, Moses, to deliver the Israelites out of their captivity. As they wander the wilderness, they end up at a place called Mount Sinai where Moses will receive God's instructions for the purity and holiness of the people of Israel. From these instructions would come ten well-known commandments, which would become known as...well... the Ten Commandments. In them, we see the Sabbath highlighted, in Exodus 20:8-11,

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Here we see the Sabbath commanded to be kept! God gives explicit instructions. Now this is among commands like, "Do not murder" and "Do not commit adultery", so God is not messing around. He even calls back to Genesis 2 and the example He set as the standard. There are two things to highlight out of this command that will be helpful for us to contextually understand the ancient Sabbath practice that will allow us to have a better grasp of how that applies today: rest and setting apart.

## REST

### 1. Rest for the people of Israel

The people of Israel were called to a "cessation of labor" for the seventh day of the week. This was exemplified by God on the seventh day of creation. This was more than physical rest, but a total rest. In fact, if you go to Israel now and observe the culture on the day of Sabbath, work generally has ceased, elevators don't work, etc. There is still a hardcore commitment to a legalistic practice of the Law in regards to the Sabbath.

There was another side to this rest that is often overlooked, but can add great context to the importance of Sabbath to the Israelite practice.

### 2. Rest for the land of Israel

There was a command that on the seventh year, the Israelites were supposed to let the land they were tilling rest itself seen in Exodus 23:10-11,

"For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard."

The Israelites, however, did not do this. Many scholars believe that this led to the 70 years of exile that the Israelites would experience; during the 490 years that they were following the Law leading up to the exile, they did not observe the seventh year of rest for the land ( $490/7 = 70$  years of exile).

This emphasizes the Lord's seriousness when it comes to the Sabbath.

There was another part to the Sabbath, and all of the Mosaic Law, that is sometimes overlooked but that I believe will give good clarity even to our Sabbath practices today: the setting apart of the Israelites.

### SET APART

Have you ever set something apart because it's special? Maybe you have a mug that gets its own spot on the shelf because it's just that good. Or when you rate your top five all-time movies, Lord of the Rings is in its own category because it's that special and set apart and it wouldn't be fair to group it with other movies. For me, I have a cluster of books on a shelf in my room, but I keep my Bible, journal and prayer book in a special spot on my dresser because I want it separated from the rest.

In Exodus 20, we see the 10 commandments, among the rest of the Mosaic Law, given to the Israelites by God through Moses. What we often forget is that a major reason for these commandments was not just to make the Israelites holy as God is holy, but to separate them from other nations for God.

**Sabbath was established for the people of Israel not only for rest, but to separate them from the world around them. It was a countercultural thing that surrounding nations would look at and gawk wondering, "Why would they take a whole day and rest? Don't they know there's work to be done?"**

You see, God chose the nation of Israel to be set apart for His glory, just like He chose you and me. And transitioning to the current day, I find it progressively hard to be different than the world around me. It sucks me in, entices me with glittering things, and wants me to partake in the fleshly pull of culture.

We are being asked to run the pace of the city around us. We are being expected to fit the longings of the nation we exist in, pursuing gratification of our flesh. And as much as those moments of gratification seem enjoyable, it always leaves us empty... wanting more... and never getting enough.

**Building habits of rest within Sabbath practices is one of the primary ways that we become countercultural to the world and point to Christ.**

Sabbath is not a command or binding, but an invitation; an invitation to rub against the grain, as the Israelites were to do, and glorify God through our daily actions and practices. It's an invitation to be a light in a dark room, to be satisfied in an unsatisfied world, to drive the speed limit in a speeding culture.

We don't do these things to get in better standing with God; we engage in these practices out of a desire to be in greater intimacy with Him. We don't do them to impress those around us, but to first and foremost draw into His presence - God will do the leading of others hearts to Himself.

### ESTABLISHING SABBATH MOMENTS

If you're anything like me, establishing Sabbath practices, or moments as I like to call them, can be simultaneously intimidating and enticing. I desperately want to increase my presence with God, stop certain things, and engage in others. What I often forget is that these moments are not only sanctifying for me, but inviting for a world that is running out of its shoes. As I'm sure the Israelites felt when being told to give their land a rest every seventh year, I find myself doubting the effectiveness of Sabbath practices - yet this is an opportunity that I get to engage with trusting the Lord, that He knows better than me and knows what is best for me.

I want to leave you with five practices, among many, that I believe help us stop and rest in the LORD. My encouragement to you is to choose one or two of them, or simply engage in some Sabbath practices with your life group.

#### **REST PRACTICES:**

##### **3. Prayer**

"When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously." -Daniel 6:10

Daniel knew that despite everything going on, he need to pray several times a day. Cheat the system - put reminders in your phone. Set a timer for five minutes. Pray in the shower and in your car. Use it to slow down, to turn your mind to God.

##### **4. Community**

"And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him." -Mark 2:15

Jesus slowed down and spent time reclining with those around Him. I love the aspect of Jesus reclining... it communicates His posture of unhurriedness. He is present with those He is with and not going anywhere. Schedules are good and needed, but jump in with some friends or neighbors one evening and just be with them.

##### **5. Identity**

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." -John 15:5

Part of our struggle and strife comes from a misplaced identity in something other than Christ. Abide in Him, find yourself in Him, and He will establish a Sabbath inside of you that can't come from anything else.

##### **6. Silence and Solitude**

"And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." -Mark 14:32

Jesus, in light of His coming crucifixion, knew the importance of being in silence and solitude with His Father. He submitted to His will and rested in knowing that God was in control.

##### **7. Ministering to the LORD**

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them,

Rest  
Sabbath

Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20, 23;  
Daniel 6:10; Mark 2, 14; John  
15; Matthew 25

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'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'" -Matthew 25:35-40

Sometimes Sabbath practices seem more active - service towards others often turns restful.

### **CHRIST, THE LORD OF THE SABBATH**

We can confidently Sabbath through these practices because we follow the one Man to ever example them perfectly: Jesus Christ. In fact, Scripture says that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Mark 2:23-28 says,

"One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

For while these Sabbath practices are sweet, the ultimate delight is found through Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. Through His perfect life, horrific death on the cross and miraculous resurrection three days later, Christ secured eternal rest for us. By following His Lordship, we are set apart from the world; not in a judgmental way, but through sanctification in the Spirit and glorification of the Father! We are different because Christ was different; we love because Christ loved; we practice Sabbath because Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Some of us in this room are being prompted to draw near to God through increased intimacy with Him - others of us in this room need to come experience this rest for the first time.

Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, invites all to experience Him. There are no standards or qualifications, no income requirement - simply a heart that repents and declares that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world and more importantly, each one of us. May we draw near to Him today, in every way.