

Brandon Pasion: Well, hello there, all listeners of CPC Together. Today is a very special episode where we interviewed Dr. A.J. Swoboda. But before we get into that really quickly, I just wanna remind you of a couple things. One we are starting next week, our, our sermon series around attentiveness and specifically around Sabbath. And if that doesn't excite you, if you're not excited for that, I'm not blaming you. I was in that same boat for a little bit until I heard A.J. talk about it, and it totally got my heart engaged. And so that's my, my hope and my prayer for you after you listen to this podcast. So we're gonna be doing that series now for five weeks, starting on March.

And then also on April 2nd, we did this last year with the silence and solitude thing. And I really, really want you to join us this year. And we had almost a hundred people practicing on a Sunday afternoon. Silence and solitude together. A little bit of teaching time, a little bit of table time, but time mostly to practice this together and to figure out how we do that. And we're gonna do that again starting on April 2nd. The next week is Easter, so we'll take a, a break on Easter and then we'll continue the next four weeks. If you want to be a part of that, now's the time. Go on cpc.org/events and look for the practice labs. Sign up for that. I promise you will not regret it. If you want to get serious about this, you really want to integrate this stuff into your life. You will be so much more successful if you do it in a community.

Honestly the conversation that we had with A.J. Was so good. I want him to come down here and hang with us. But just a little bit about him. He's a pastor. He's a professor. He's a writer. For nearly 10 years, he served a, as a college pastor on the campus of the University of Oregon. And then for another decade he planted and pastored a church in urban Portland called Theophilus. And that's continuing to worship Today. Currently he's the associate professor of bible theology and world Christianity at Bushnell University.

He also leads a Doctor of Ministry program around the Holy Spirit and leadership at Fuller, and has taught at Multnomah University, London School of Theology, life Pacific and Southeastern University. He's the real deal guys. He's the author of 10 books, including Redeeming How We Talk After. And the award-winning and what we're basing a lot of this conversation on subversive sabbath sabbath. As well, he's the co-host of Slow Theology podcast with New Testament scholar Nijay Gupta, and that reaches thousands each week. He loves Jesus deeply. You're gonna see that he's been married to Quinn for 18 years and is the proud father of one son, Elliot. They live and they work on an urban farm now in Eugene, Oregon. I hope you love this conversation as much as I did and now, A.J. Swoboda.

Amen. Well, A.J., we feel so honored again to be here with you and that you would take the time and hang out with us.

AJ Swoboda: Yeah, you guys, well, first of all, Any church community that's willing to talk about the Sabbath is on to good things. So good job you guys. And yeah, we, we all love going faster and getting to do more, but in, in our moment in history oddly I've found slowing down actually makes us more productive.

In fact, it's a little bit like driving down the road and, you know, when you're driving down the road and you're in the fast lane and everybody else does in the fast lane, the way to go faster is you get in the slow lane. So I, I'm really proud of you guys for slowing, for getting in the slow lane. Because ultimately in our world, the slow lane, I'll get you where you're supposed to go better than the fast lane.

Brandon Pasion: Yeah. I actually heard a talk that you gave pre-pandemic. So, I'm wondering if some of, some of this has shifted, but we talked about how sometimes people. where busy and tired, almost like this badge of honor. Or at the very least, it's kind of like this default, like, how you doing? Oh, I'm just busy. I'm exhausted. And you had mentioned in this talk that, you know, the last time you remember, you know, like actually slowing down as a society was 9/11. We all kind of took a moment and breathed. And then I looked at the, the date of the talk and realized, oh, that was before we were all forced to be quiet for, for a year. But I'm just curious you know, it wasn't always, you kind of mentioned it wasn't always like that In our culture, our culture really has shifted. And you use this Vietnam War vets versus World War II War vets. I was wondering if you could kind of go into that a little bit.

AJ Swoboda: My, I have four grandfathers that fought in World War II. Two of whom- one, Rudy, was a Seabee, so his job was to- his job was to build these huge strips in the middle of the South Pacific on these islands. My grandpa Frank, was actually an airplane pilot who flew prisoners around World War II. He was actually my grandpa. Frank actually was the one who flew Himmler, who was Hitler's right hand guy to the Nuremberg Trials.

Brandon Pasion: Wow.

AJ Swoboda: My Grandpa Tex was drafted to play for the Chicago Bulls, and then the week after Pearl Harbor happened and he gave up his dream to play in the NBA to go and fight in, in, in the war. So I have some, you know, some, some history of my grandfathers fought in World War II. number of years ago.

I was. with a, a friend in Virginia who was a fourth generation military kid. His great-great-grandparents, his great-grandparents, his grandparents, him and his, and he, that's, I guess that's five generations. We're all military guys, and we were sitting in the back of his his, his backyard we're having a barbecue.

And he said, I had just given a talk on, on Sabbath. And he says, you know, there's real, there's something really interesting about about military history and I, I'm all intrigued on, you know, weird, an weird anecdotes from history in, I said, tell me the story. And he goes, well, when you look at World War II and Vietnam, And you look at the vets who fought in these two wars, there, there are really two completely different stories.

So the, when you look at the veterans from World War II and the veterans from Vietnam, the, the, the health and wellbeing of these two generations is so fundamentally different. And in World War II, right when the men came home from the war you know, very low suicide rates

high you know, birth rates very low abuse or at least reported abuse rates, spousal abuse rates, depression, super low drug abuse, super low.

And, and of course, you know, when the men came home, there was literally, I mean, Culture was, it was, it was like evil had been defeated and our entire culture was excited. We have a whole generation of people named after that excitement. They're baby boomers. So basically just, it was a really fun time and then Vietnam.

When you look at Vietnam, very different story. And that is that when the, the, the pe the the men came back from Vietnam, very high suicide rates, highest heroin epidemic in American history depression. My stepfather was a part of the larger Vietnam arena. And says he remembers flying home and having people spit on him in the airport for his service. Totally different story. And, and I'm sitting in the backyard of this guy in Virginia and he says, you want to know the. And I was super intrigued, you know, because war is always horrible. War is never awesome. And I said, well, yeah, I'd love to. What's that is interesting. What's the difference?

And he said, military historians have one theory. It's their kind of one working theory behind the difference. And that is that the difference is how the men came home. When you look at Vietnam, what the men came home from the war, what did they do? They flew home. So they got planes, they flew home. I mean, imagine fighting the Viet Cong and in two days you're back in your living room holding your baby. Can you imagine? I mean, that's just insane that, that transition. And he says, but there's of course one m.A.J. Or difference in World War II, and that is that the men did not fly home after World War II. What do they do? They got in boats and sat in the middle of the Atlantic and Pacific for like three months.

And when you sit, you know, in a boat for three months with men that you just fought in a war with, what do you do? You grieve, you weep, you process. You cry, you tell your story and I'm sitting in the backyard and I'm like, oh my gosh, I'd never thought about this. Yeah. The difference is that literally one generation was given no time to process and one was given time to process. Both wars were equally horrific. When he shared that with me it dawned on me that that was not only a really interesting historical anecdote, it is maybe the most poignant metaphor for our moment in time. It is not that there is more suffering now. It is not that there's more pain now. It's not that the world is more sinful now. It's so we don't have any time to process anything. And the result is we go from one thing to the next without ever we just fly to the next thing. We never process. Yeah. And the result is honestly, dis it's destroying our souls. It's destroying our kids. There's a generation of kids killing themselves over this stuff.

It's killing us. And, and if the church does not recapture the essence and heart of the Sabbath I, I fear that the price tag is gonna be very high for a long time.

Kevin Sneed: Yeah. That's so good. I mean, good in the, in sense of reflection, not the, the issue itself, but, you know, I've been thinking through, even as you were talking there, I was reminded, you know, I've been trying to practice Sabbath with my wife and now two daughters for, gosh, going on like six, seven years. And one of the biggest gifts that I never foresaw when I started that was the very, like, the structure of it of just every seven days you bump into it, like

whether you want it or not, it just comes. And there's something about that, I think in your book, you call it the one in seven rhythm. When you're, and you're kind of dancing around the, or not dancing around, but just kind of saying it, the day itself is, is a little bit secondary to the very purpose of that principle of, of just one day in seven resting. And I'm wondering if you could just reflect a little bit about that. Maybe the tension, like when I, when I talk about that structure of Sabbath, of just when you place it and kind of put your, your kind of flag in the ground and just say, this is the day I'm gonna do it, whether I things are ready or not.

Like in the same way that those coming home from World War II, they didn't necessarily choose to reflect in the middle of the ocean and have that time to grieve and mourn, and it just was by the very structure of them having to get home. That's how that operated. So I'm wondering if you can just reflect on how that, as you've been practicing Sabbath, like what did, what did that look like as you were cultivating that quote structure and that discipline to it? Like how did that aid in the process, was that easy, challenging? Like what did, what did you kind of experience in that? Yeah.

AJ Swoboda: I, I, I can't remember who it. Who, who said it? So I'm, I'm be, this is my way of attributing it to somebody else so that I don't get tagged for plagiarism. But I heard somebody once say that, you know, the awesome brilliance of the Sabbath is that we are, we are always, at least, we are no more than six days a day away from a day of rest.

Yeah. And, and that it's is always like, it's, you know, and, and by the way when you look at a Jewish calendar, even read the gospels, you'll notice that the only day that's actually mentioned by. So, so, the only day that has an actual name is the Sabbath Day. Every other day is just called another day.

So it's the first day, second day, first day of the week. The Sabbath is the only name day because every other day it's just another day. But the Sabbath is the name day. In fact, when you read the Old Testament, you'll, you'll notice that the kings are always referenced in terms of their, their, their previous predecessor.

So they're referenced like the King who came after the King. And Old Testament scholars actually think that that is a critique of Israel, that their time was structured after the people in power rather than their, how close it was to the next Sabbath year. And so it's a, it's a built, built in critique that they Interesting that they had not obeyed this.

Yeah, when you go, the structure, structure is really interesting when you go to Genesis one and two is that a really great Old Testament commentary about Gordon Wenham on the book of Genesis that is second to none, where he deals with this idea of the structured nature of the days. And so what God does is he creates days.

There are seven days, six of which he creates, and then there are two dimensions to each day. There's the day where God creates the space, and then God fills the space. And even when he does create, there's this essence of separation. He's, he's, he's creating and then separating. So, one one academic that I've, I've read a good deal of talks about the architecture of time that

God has structured time as an art, as an architect, the way that a builder would build a building, right?

That, that it's not a movable structure. It's a, it's a hardened structure. And you can see this, it's fascinating. You can see this in the way God creates for example, the stars. So when you look at the creation of the stars in Genesis in the chapter, in Genesis one it makes a comment that, you know, the stars were made before humans were, and yet when the stars were made, when the lights and the star are made, Genesis says that they were made to mark days and seasons and times of celebration.

Humans haven't, haven't even been made yet. The idea is God has literally put the stars in the sky to create a cosmos of celebration before we even exist, the celebrating precedes us. Yeah, right? Yeah. The, the, the, the, the liturgy comes before the humans do. Humans don't make the liturgy. Humans enter into the structure of God.

Yeah. Yeah. And so the, the fact that Adam and Eve are made on day six, and this is the structure by the way, the timing, this is so powerful. The man and the woman are made on day six on the same day as the land animals. So land animals are created the first part, and then humans on the second part of day six.

And then day seven is the day of rest. . Utterly. I mean, it is to, to the modern reader. We don't pick up on this, but if you were Adam and Eve, the man and the woman, and you were created on day six, what day is the day of rest? Day seven. . What was their first day of existence? Yeah. Yeah. Rest. . They begin their existence by not working.

Wow. Now, a social scientist would say that you and I create, we have first impressions within our first 100th of a millisecond. We, our first impression is made that quick, the first impression of humanity that they would've gotten of God. . Is that he is not Pharaoh, he is not a slave owner. . , he is a God who structures rest.

I mean, and you push me. I'd say that's the first image of the gospel in the Bible. and that we, we do not begin by working and then getting rest, which by the way is the, that's, that's a genetically modified gospel. Yeah. Yeah. The true gospel is we begin with rest and out of that rest, then we enter the structure of work. But the structure matters. Yeah. You begin with rest and then work. Yeah.

Kevin Sneed: Could you, I want to chase that a little bit further cause I think that's such a, and, and you, you do so in your book too, but that tension between, we, we tend to as, as modern Westerners, particularly in a space like the Bay Area, that's just so fast. We think of Sabbath as a reward for the working, the six days. But what I think is so beautiful about what we said is the very structure we see it in Genesis with, with, as you were saying, that the first act for Adam and Eve, it flips that, like, talk a little more about how Sabbath isn't a reward for working, but rather it's, it's the inverse of that. Like, I, I don't know if you could expand on that a little bit. I think that's beautiful.

AJ Swoboda: On that a little bit. It gets people, well, I, I get, this is odd, you know, when, when you do, you know, I, my book *Subversive Sabbath* came out, I wanna say four years ago or something like that, which has given me a lot of time to, you know, when you write something, you, you get out there and, and, and, and you have to, a, you have to deal with what people think about what you said, , which is, which is both good and bad, both good and bad but, you know, I, I've had a lot of opportunities to, to share on the Sabbath, and then I would say one of the most repeated questions that I get is what are the benefits of Sabbath? Like, what, what do I get out of it?

Now the e the very, the very way that's asked. Is such a, again, to go to the, the cultural thing you made, it's a Western pragmatism that says, I will do something if I benefit from it. Yeah. . . So I, I'm gonna, I'm gonna do something if it rewards me, if I get something out of it. . . And so when I'm asked that question, I will not answer the question because when we do the things of God in order to get the benefits of God, we have missed the point.

Yeah. Yeah. We do not obey to get, we obey because the reward of obedience is obedience. . . The reward for obedience is that we are actually being faithful to God. You want benefits to Sabbath keeping? It's insane. You know who the, you know who the healthiest religion in the entire world is? It's the seventh Avenue who I would argue do seventh, who do Sabbath legalistically.

They do it frankly, harshly. They require it to be Saturday. I don't, I don't, I I actually disagree with the way they do the Sabbath, but guess what? They live on average seven years longer than anybody else. That's wild. They also don't Yeah. Seven years , which, you know, which, which makes sense. Could contribute.

Yeah. That may have a, an element to it, but the reality is you want, I'll give you benefits, but if you're doing the Sabbath for the benefits, that's not following Jesus. You're chasing the goodies. Yeah. The reward of the Sabbath is God. . , it is not to give you, Six more days of work. It's not to give you seven more years of life.

Yeah. It's not to charge up. So you can be really effective this week. The reward of Sabbath is God. Yeah. . Yeah. If you need a bigger reward than that, I would reevaluate your discipleship to Jesus. . Wow. If God is not a big enough reward for you . . So we often see the Sabbath as a reward for work.

. What happens to the man in the Garden of Eden? God told him exactly what would happen. You would, as a result of your disobedience, you would turn to the ground and you would turn your identity into your work and you would work the ground and it would make thorns and thistles for you. What happens to humanity after sin is we trade off having an intimate relationship with the Lord of the harvest for worshiping the harvest. . We have made work our God. . And the goal, the, that, the, the most insidious lie we can believe is that our truest identity is found in the work that we do. The Sabbath is the eternal reminder that our work is not our God and that we are in God's love, even when we don't work.

You know, you know, who knows the love of God in the deepest way. The paraplegic who cannot work, who cannot structure their life around what they do. They must rest in God's love for them.

Brandon Pasion: Yeah. I, I just think it like Jesus connection with children in the same manner, right? Yeah. Like that vulnerability.

They can't, they don't really have much to offer the world other than their existence. Right. And yet that's where Jesus finds and, and kind of that vulnerability is where he points to.

AJ Swoboda: Nobody would ever say, I love my neighbor because of the benefits. Nobody would ever say, why would we do that to ourselves?

I don't murder people for benefits, you know? No. Yeah.

Brandon Pasion: A.J. I was sitting with my girls a couple nights ago. I have two young girls 14 and, and eight, and I was, I was curious thinking about this podcast. I was curious how many of the 10 commandments they actually knew. And so I was like, Hey, tell me what the 10 Commandments are.

They're like, we don't know. I was like, well, what do you think they are? So, you know, they got murder. They got, I think they got what they, they said like no swearing, you know, and that kind of thing. And Sabbath did not enter the, the equation at all. And I think it is, and you've talked about this, that it's maybe one of the under-emphasized commandments.

Could you talk about that a little bit? It's, you also say how that's the only one that starts with, remember.

AJ Swoboda: Yeah. Yeah. But thank you for sharing that horrible story about your kids and, and I would imagine that as a parent that actually pricks your heart a little bit cuz you, you, you go like, my gosh, I have a responsibility to help my kids. Yeah. I failed . Yeah. No, and I'm not, I'm not pointing that out. You, I'm glad that you self-identified that.

You're, you're, you're, you're not a failure, you, but you do live in a moment in time when the church has largely forgotten this commitment. And you, you would rarely find a church, I don't know any churches that have forgotten the don't murder commitment. You know, like you, you're never gonna run into a church that just like, for hundreds of years has forgotten the whole don't commit adultery commitment.

Because the reality is we really do believe in nine of the commitments. . . , and then one is kind of extra credit if we get around to it . And, you know, on an, on an Exegenical Bible nerd level, I just don't know how we've gotten off of interesting. Like, I don't know how we've gotten to the point where we think like nine of these matter, but one is like so old, you know, old, old Testa.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, and it is odd to me that, that that would be, but, but you know, it's, you, you know, you know why we Sabbath, which is the, the fourth commitment because God does

it. It's, it's, we're not name one of the religion where God enters rest. I mean, that is an astounding concept that God enters rest.

And by the way, he doesn't do it because he needs it. He does it because he's a good parent. And he knows that we will only do it if we see he, him do it. What does he do on day seven of creation? He stops and he rests. You know, the, the whole, for example, God is the best parent. He's, cuz he never does anything.

That the, the whole, the only one, the jealousy one is really interesting to me cuz God says it's a final command commitment. You shall not be jealous. And yet earlier in the 10 Commandments, he says, but I'm a jealous God. . So why does God get to be jealous? But we can't. And the reality is God is always jealous for things that are his and we're always jealous for things that are not ours.

. Right. So, but, but the Sabbath one is beautiful because God himself did it. And I remember years ago, this, this was when, when I was writing the book I decided to preach on the Sabbath for our church. Because our church was tired as a church plant. And we'd started this church in Portland called Theophilus.

It's going to this day. It's incredible. Great church. And we I I could tell the church was tired cuz church planting's hard. And so I did a sermon series on the Sabbath, which is what you do in your pastor. You do a sermon series when there's a problem in the church. . So I did a sermon series on the Sabbath and it was amazing.

I have preached on every other commitment. I have preached on things that have upset people. Yeah. Right. I've preached on sexuality, , I've preached on politics. I've preached on polyamory. I've preached a sermon on marijuana once in Portland. Wow. I have preached on things that have made people mad. Okay.

I preached for four weeks on the Sabbath and we never had more people leave the church. Wow. And it was fascinating, the two groups of people interesting that like lock locked arms in anger at, at this two groups you would never expect business owners and moms. It's like the only time in HU human history these two groups have come together to protest

And they were like this idea. And I was with our elders and we were talking about cuz the elders wanted to meet. And I was sitting with the elders and it dawned on me, I was sitting, this is one of the worst epiphanies I've ever had as a pastor, dawned on me that as a pastor, if I broke nine of these commitments, if I committed adultery, I'd lose my job.

If I stole money from the church, I'd lose my job. If I committed murder, I would, I would definitely lose my job. . It dawned me that if I com, if I broke nine of these commitments, , these people would fire me. . But if I don't take a day of rest, these people are gonna give me a raise. . . And it was the first time in my life I s it, it dawned on me.

. We have gotten to a point in history where we literally incentivize and celebrate Yeah. And give raises to people who break a commitment. . How in the world did we get to a place where we

thought we knew better than God? Yeah. Now, does this mean we can't eat bacon? No. I eat a lot of bacon. And in the Old Testament commitment, it's messy.

And there are things that are tic that, that do not continue and things that do continue. But Jesus honored the. And he honored it so much that in Matthew, when he is describing coming back, he says, pray for when I come back. This is Matthew, I think 17. He says, pray when I come back, pray for pregnant, wo pre pregnant women for people on their roofs.

And then he says, pray that it does not happen on the Sabbath. Yeah. . He makes a comment about returning in the Sabbath happening. Yeah. It was fascinating is Jesus assumes that by the time he comes back, the Sabbath will still be going. Oh, interesting. Yeah. Yeah. So it, I, I find it compelling that not only Jesus honored it, but he said, listen, when I come back, pray it doesn't happen on the Sabbath.

Kevin Sneed: Yeah. Yeah. So would you place you know, cause I, I can hear questions coming from our people as we approach this topic around like, is it binding? You know, which, which I'm wondering, like, my first thought is it feels like maybe the wrong impulse, the wrong question to even ask in that sense. But how would you address someone that's like, it's an Old Testament thing. Is it a binding command for us as New Testament believers?

AJ Swoboda: Yep. It is amazing to me that we immediately go to seeing the Sabbath Day as a rule rather than a gift. . That we are all of a sudden like, oh, this is some rule we've gotta do. And I would ask, are we going to apply that same skepticism to our theology of sexuality? Are we gonna apply that same skepticism to loving the neighbor?

Are we gonna apply that same skepticism towards loving God? This one is the only one that we kind of squint our eyes at and we're like is that one? Like, should we still be doing that , that skepticism? Where does that come from? And I suspect it comes from a lingering fear that we are creating a workspace theology. Or that we're just simply retweeting Old Testament law and blending the two together. If, if you are worried about that, let us be very clear. You are not saved because you Sabbath. You are saved by Jesus. The cross and the resurrection of Christ, his atoning blood saves you nothing else.

Are we saved because we're baptized? No. But should we still get baptized? Yes. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That's good. Are we saved by Sabbath? No. Should we still Sabbath? Yes. Yeah. So that fear that it's legalism, it's the greatest flipping gift in the world. Yeah. . We automatically go like, it's just a rule. Imagine somebody coming to you and say, you get a day off a week. Well, I don't wanna do your rule. Yeah. How weird is that? It's a gift. Enjoy the gift. Yeah. Oh, that's good.

Brandon Pasion: A.J., why the outrage? Like at your church you mentioned that if you're willing to share it, I, I'm curious, you know, you said business and mom's linked arms, like what? Love that image. Yeah. What is the, what was the outrage?

Why, why police

AJ Swoboda: protest? Yeah. , it seems

Brandon Pasion: like such a weird thing to get, to get mad about.

AJ Swoboda: Yeah. Here's why. Cuz this commitment actually affects our lives. Mm. And, and those people knew, business owners knew. . And we had really rich people in our church who knew that if they as Christians took this commitment seriously, it affects the bottom line.

. Yeah. Because they recognize that if my Sabbath becomes somebody else's slavery that's not Sabbath and that it costs something to honor people's wellbeing. You know, I, I have all sorts of political feelings about all sorts of things, but I'm gonna give credit to Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby that lose billions of dollars.

. Yeah. To shut down a day a week so people can be with their families. . They are willing to pay a very heavy price to honor people's integrity and dignity. . . And that, I mean, behind that, by the way, is a principle. If you're a person in power, you need to recognize there is a direct relationship between power and rest.

And that is that when a person in power does not rest, they do not give rest away. . , there is a reason Pharaoh looks at Israel and calls them wicked servants, lazy servants. It's called projection. When you project on somebody your own thing, he was the lazy one, unwilling to give them rest.

And I would say, moms, how in the world do you hear God say, take a day of rest and simultaneously be told and care for these children? And it creates it creates dissonance because the reality is being a mom and being a dad and caring for a baby, it's really hard to rest. And I, I wanna say to the moms and the dads in the room, God knows it and he, he gives a ton of grace.

And that's why Sabbath and community is so important to have people around who compete with the kids for a little bit. So you can go rest. the Sabbath is good news for parents. It's hard to do, but it's good news. I don't know one parent that wouldn't kill for a day of rest a week, . So I, I suspect to your question, I suspect Brandon, that for those two groups of people, and for all of us, the Sabbath commitment represents something that actually transforms the structure of our week, and that it violates our self-centeredness.

And it, it says that our schedule isn't centered on ourselves. It's centered on God. And that's, that's hard. I, I, you know, when Moses, I've always thought about this. When Moses goes up the mountain, it comes back down. When he comes back down Israel's worshiping a golden. And that's, that's a really interesting thing that's happened because they have just been freed from slavery and now they're creating their own God for themselves.

But Moses, when he comes down, the worship is going golden calf. That that is why we don't like to rest. That's why I, as a pastor, pastors don't like to rest or take sabbaticals because we're terrified about what's gonna happen when we're gone. Because if, if I go up on the mountain and then come back down and, and everybody's worshiping a golden calf, then I was a bad leader or worse yet, we come back down the mountain, everybody's still worshiping God and I'm not as important as I thought I was.

Mm. Either way. Either way. The Sabbath it is really difficult. I'll put it this way. It is really difficult to simultaneously honor the Sabbath and be a narcissist at the same time because God is no longer your center or you are no longer your center. God is your center. Yeah.

Brandon Pasion: And in a culture that, you know, we carry a device in our front run pocket that essentially.

Is forming us constantly to be narcissist, little tiny narcissist. Like maybe that recovery of Sabbath is exactly what we need and why we reject it.

AJ Swoboda: Yep. That's good. That's good. Yeah. Yeah. To, to add. To add to that, I mean, I, I've heard a number of people talk about this. I talk about it in a different way.

I've heard Andy Crouch mention it. I'm not, I'm not the only person that said this, and I don't know who said it first. I of course think I did, but I don't know who did. But this idea, we'll give you credit. Yeah. I don't know who it was that said it first, but you know, when it is not a mistake. I, I'm highly convinced that when the people who, you know, invented these iPhones developed them, they did it in such a way that when you turn your iPhone off it flashes a, an apple with a bite taken out of it.

. Like you're back in the Garden of Eden and you've been eating from the wrong tree all week long. Yeah. I mean, the tree of knowledge. Of good and evil. And in a lot of ways we have replaced the presence of God . With these devices. And it's killing us. It's killing us. I have a theory, I was just in a meeting this morning and I said it out loud and I, one of our, one of our faculty here at the university at Bush University that I teach at agreed with me.

So I, I think I'm right. And that is that I, I al I can almost bet that if you were to look at global Christianity across the world, 4 billion people, however many people, all the Christians. All the Christians in the world, I can bet you bet the church is dwindling and dying in places where people have iPhones and it is growing and expanding in places where people.

. Wow. I'll bet you anything.

Brandon Pasion: Yeah, there's a dissertation waiting to be written on that. That's fascinating. , you, you know the Apple's listening to you right now, right, A.J.? Yeah. Yeah. It's terrible.

AJ Swoboda: Terrible. Which by the way, yeah, you're making me more nervous preaching in Silicon Valley when you look at all the Omnis, right?

Omnis, omnipresence all the Omnis, , what is this? It is a human attempt to be omnipotent, to be all knowing. . . It is a human attempt to be all omni, all powerful. Omni or omni all knowing omni, all powerful omni omnipresent that I can be in multiple places at once. This is the most subtle attempt at you and I being like God, in the demonic sense, we are already like God, we are creating the image of God.

Yeah. , but the serpent tells us that if you eat from the tree of knowledge of good evil, you will be like, God, in the demonic sense. Yeah. You will take on all the omnis. It's terrifying. And it is listening to me, and it's listening to all of us. Yeah. And, and it should now we're in a whole new area, but it's, it should terrify.

Yeah.

Brandon Pasion: did you read just came to mind, Jonathan h Heights article in the Atlantic. Gosh, I don't know when that was, but I think it was titled something like, why the Last 10 Years of American History has Been Uniquely Stupid or something like that. And he, he essentially makes the jump from, from social media as the new Tower of Babel, and he makes the exact point you're making where it's, we're trying to become God and it's, it's as close as we've ever maybe gotten in some ways of, of usurping that position.

AJ Swoboda: Yep. I don't know who it was, it was some comedian that said said, you know, if you, if you. If you woke up in the morning, if somebody you knew that you loved woke up in the morning and the first thing that they did was picked up a bottle of Jack Daniels and started drinking, what would you call them?

You call 'em an alcoholic. If somebody woke up in the morning and started sniffing hair, you know, whatever. Drugs, sniff heroin. I don't even know if you can do that. , what's cocaine doing? Heroin. What would you call that person? You call him a drug addict. If the first thing we did when we woke up is looked at porn, what would we do?

We'd call that a porn addict. So what do we call it when the first thing we do is we look at our phone. . .

Brandon Pasion: Yeah. We call it normal, unfortunately. Yeah. ,

AJ Swoboda: millennial. . Yeah, millennial . Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Rachel chimes in with the comment of the session. . Yeah. Why is it that that's the one addiction that we don't call an addiction?

It's weird.

Brandon Pasion: Yeah. Interesting. interesting. As we come kind of a little bit, I wanna turn a corner and get us a little more practical too in, in thinking through what this, what this can look like on the ground. And I'd love first though, to, to talk about you know, Eugene Peterson has that great line, I think it was in a Christianity Today article where he talks about the Day off as a Bastard Sabbath and the distinction between a day off and Sabbath.

I'd love for you to talk about the differences there. Cuz for, for people practicing at first, they, they tend to think of it as just like, oh yeah, I'd love another Saturday in the day and just a day off. But talk about the difference between the, the quote bastard Sabbath of a day off and an actual Sabbath day of rest.

AJ Swoboda: Yeah. So, we, we if you were to do go at some point I'd invite people in the church to do this. Go, go get a concordance which is a book that covers it, has all the, all the, the words in the Bible. Get, get online, find an online concordance, and do a word search on the Bible for this word. Look up the word vacation, and you'll, you'll be shocked to find that that is a completely non-biblical category.

I'll give you another example of a non-biblical category. Retirement. It's not found anywhere in the Bible. In fact, the only thing close to retire is called death. That is the, the closest thing that we have to retirement. Bible. Nothing else. Yeah. Vacation found nowhere in the Bible. Is that, does that mean vacation is wrong?

No, it's just not a biblical category. So what happens when we go on vacation? Well, I can tell you what happens with me. I come back exhausted. . Every time I don't come back from vacation full of life. I don't come back happy. I don't come back grateful. We walked around for five days at Disneyland, wondering the last four days, what are we doing here?

I, I come back tired. from these vacations. Vacations are awesome, but they're not God's design. . God's design is that one day, every single week we stop and we rest. You know, we breathe. And when you, when you breathe, take a deep breath and you are constantly breathing in and out. I want you to imagine that you said, you know what?

I don't need to breathe. I'm just gonna take one really big breath every 60 seconds. . How well would that work with your body? Yeah, you would probably not be very good at exercise. And you probably would die real quick because you're not created to not breathe all the time. You're created to have a breath in, out, in, out.

What is a day off for Eugene Peterson in his book, in his article, confessions of a Sabbath Breaker, which is an awesome old article that he wrote in Christianity Today. He says, A day off is a day where we are at home, but we're thinking about work. So it's the day where we're like spatially at home, but emotionally, spiritually, and cognitively.

We are somewhere else. That is what this, by the way, allows us to do, is that we can be interesting at home and be somewhere else. Yeah. And what that does is it, it's hypocrisy is what it is because you are no longer now one person in one place. Y y part of you is here. Part of you is there, part of you here is, part of you is there.

You may be at home, but I gotta tell you, your kids know that you're lying to them. . Because when you're sitting at that dining room table pretending like you're present and you're texting under the table, they're not idiots. They know what you're doing. They know that you're being deceptive. And by the way, you're modeling for them what they're going to do for you when you're old and need somebody to be in the room with you.

So you want your kids to be present to you when you're old and dying. Be present to them when they're young and vibrant. Be present to them, model for them. But a day off is just a day where we are at home, but we're really somewhere else. And Eugene Peterson calls out a Bastard Sabbath. It's not a, it's not a true Sabbath.

A true Sabbath is when you actually shut down and you are really in one place at one time and are authentic. You are a holistic, integrated human being at a, at a time space continuum where you are present to God and the people around you. You know, this, this is

when, when you I've, unfortunately, I'm, you know, I'm a pastor. My son's a pk. I was a pastor for the better part of 20 years. I'm now an academic, but unfortunately I have the privilege of serving a lot of Christian students at my university. And I say unfortunately in the sense that a lot of my students are PKs.

. And there, there is a generation of PKs that hate the church because they see the church as having stolen their parents from them. . . And we, we often forget that the people that pay the greatest price for our sin, Carl Yung once said that the the greatest threat to a child is the unli lived live of their, the unli unlived life of their parent.

Our children pay the price for our sin. We say that we don't believe in child sacrifice. We, we build our churches on it. We build our lives on it. Wow. And the result is that the kids pay the biggest price. And you, you, you, you, you wanna love children, you wanna, you wanna love the least of these, put your phone down one day a week.

. , because that, that is, that is loving the least of these. And by the way, your children are the least of these. . I am gonna need a moment to recover from that. I know. . Yeah. I say, I say that. Friends and brothers. It's true though. And sister. True. Yeah. I say that with as many fingers pointing back to me.

I, I violate the Sabbath with great consistency and when I do I repent and I confess, but my son has had too many days where I was not really in the room and I confess that I name it, I name my sin because my, my son is made in the image of God my phone is not. And that I have given my attention to a device over somebody made in the image of God and I that should grieve our hearts should cause us to weed and repent.

. Yeah. A.J., in your book you talk a lot about preparation for Sabbath and you said that Godly rest in a 24 7 world is never accidental and can only come and we've gone out of our way to prepare for it. Yes. So what does this preparation for Sabbath look like and what kind of intentionality might it require to Yeah.

To be prepared for Sabbath to take that day off. Yeah. That's the thing. I have never, two things. I've never heard anybody ever say, I've never ever, ever, ever heard somebody say, I used to Sabbath and I've never ever heard somebody say I accidentally Sabbath. Once you start doing it, you can't undo it.

And then, yeah, when you do do it, you really have to be intentional. And that in includes things like, Putting on auto text responses to people that are texting you. It includes putting your phone in another room, literally turning it off. It includes telling people that are closest to you, I'm unavailable on this day, or you're just not gonna be able to get ahold of me.

So communicate to me. Other days you have to go out of your, you go in the Jewish tradition, you do all sorts of things. You, you cook all your food the day before. You sweep the kitchen of all the yeast. You get the food for the animals, and you put it aside. You do all the prep work so that on the day of rest you can have a day of rest.

And it's ironic. It's ironic how much work rest requires. Because, because it, it is insanely challenging to prepare for a whole day to be with God and the people around you. And so here, here's what I would say. I would say take a couple hours in our family. We Sabbath on Saturday, not for any theological reason.

In fact, I would argue that day does not matter. Do I think it would be ideal for us to all rest on the same day? Of course I do, but I do not see that in scripture. I think it would be ideal and be awesome, but it's not the world that we live in a day of rest every week Paul says, you know, some people think one day's sacred.

Some people think another day's sacred, but whatever you do, do it unto the Lord. And I think that's the principle, is that whatever day it is for you, that you do it under the Lord, and that the day before you take a couple hours and you do a couple things. You do your bills, you mow your lawn. You guys in San Francisco don't have lawns, but whatever you do, you do you get an avocado test, avocado.

Yeah. You go, you get whatever things you need to get done. So number one, you have a couple hours to get ready. And here's the second thing. Do not go into the Sabbath with everything finished. Mm, do not finish everything. And here's why. It's like getting a new car. When you have a brand new car and it's perfect, you spend all your time neurotically, keeping it clean, , and when you go into the Sabbath with everything done, you have to keep things up to keep it done.

When you read Genesis one and two, it is God. It is God who finishes the Sabbath. It is not humans who finish the Sabbath. I would encourage you have something that is undone when you go into the Sabbath so that you can release your. Wow. So I have a couple hours to get ready and don't finish everything. God finishes. You don't.

Kevin Sneed: Yeah, that's good. Maybe just two. I wanna be respectful of your time here and just two things to kind of close. Maybe if you could just really quickly, you know, you talk, there's a great section of your book where you talk about how Sabbath in particular is one of those practices we need almost like a Sabbath mentor, like someone to imitate as we go into it cuz it can be so foreign.

So I'd love just a real quick rundown of what your Sabbath looks like. And then lastly, just as a follow up to, and this will be our kind of final question, is just what advice would you give us as a church community attempting to integrate Sabbath as a community? And as we kind of embark on, you know, we're gonna be hopefully practicing this intentionally for six months and, and I'm, I'm hopeful I'm with you that once you Sabbath you don't go back.

That was certainly my experience. It took a while to get into the rhythm. It took a while, but once I got there, I can't imagine not having that rhythm. So, so anyway, those two questions. First, again, run us through your, what your Sabbath looks like, and then second, what advice would you give us as a church trying to integrate this.

AJ Swoboda: I love the fact that you brought up the Sabbath mentor idea. Most of us, this idea is so foreign, it's like, I don't even know where to start. I'm gonna give you three names of people that are just remarkable models for this that I would recommend. Number one is Matthew Sleeth. He's an emergency room doctor who got saved. And he wrote a book called 24/6 which is in an incredible book on, on, on Sabbath. Another model is Pete Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Leaders and Emotionally Healthy Leader Podcast. He talks about the Sabbath all the time. And the third person that I would, I would invite you to listen to is a guy. I've got him on my shelf here. Well, lemme think here. Who's the third person? I'd say Alan Paddling is the third person I'd say. Alan Paddling. He wrote a, a book about hurry and he and he, in that book, he talks about the practicalities of slowing down. So a couple people to listen to there.

So, our Sabbath is really simple. Friday evening, I come home I turn my phone off, my family lights a Sabbath candle. We sing a little song to each other. It's a nerdy old Jewish song called the Shabbat Shalom. And you sing it and you name everybody in your family. So you go Shabbat Shalom to Elliot, Shabbat Shalom to Quinn, Shabbat Shalom to A.J. We've got chickens, so you Shabbat Shalom to the chickens. We've got a dog named Diggory, Shabbat Shalom to Diggory. We Shabbat everybody, everybody gets Sabbath piece. Okay, that evening we have a big meal. A big meal. There's delight, there's fat, there's sugar, there's enjoyment, and there is life, and there's dessert.

And we watch a movie together, that evening we go to bed, we wake up in the morning, no alarms, and nobody makes their bed in the morning.

Rachel Almeida: Mm. Amen. Amen.

AJ Swoboda: Get up and we make, every Saturday morning, we have the same liturgy we do every morning. And that is that we get up, we make bacon, coffee, eggs, and the biggest pancakes you've ever seen. And we take my son and I, we get in the kitchen. My wife and I, we make the most unbelievable pancakes you've ever had in your life. And my son. You, you should, it was so cute. You watch my son pour maple syrup on this thing. I mean, he just like, just liked, I mean, it's like maple syrup with a little pancake and he just like gorgeous on these things.

And the reason we do the pancakes, it's text, it's a theological, there is an old Jewish tradition that says on the morning of the Sabbath, the father is to get up before the rest of the family and is to get every child in the family a spoon of honey. And the reason is so that the children never forget the sweetness of God's rest.

Now, whether this is an ancient tradition, but it's brilliant neuroscience because it turns out we learn most the things that we taste. Yeah. And we, I, I want to encourage you. Find something fat, sweet and delicious to eat on the Sabbath because here's what's gonna happen. Your body will begin to remember the day because of that sweetness.

. , we finish? Yeah, that's good. My son in the afternoon on Sabbath gets to play a little video games watching movie. His mother and his father take a nap, . And the nap includes a locked door. And I'll tell you it is best nap of the week, and I know it sounds silly, but the truth is the Sabbath for marriage too.

And by the way, the Sabbath is also for single people. And if you're single, that doesn't mean that you should feel any sense of shame to be with people that you love. It's a day of delight. It's a day of joy. I love that. It's a day of friendship. We eat good food. We're. And I will tell you 15 years of practicing the Sabbath, it is the closest thing to the Garden of Eden I've ever experienced.

It's not perfect. It is good. There's no such thing as perfection in the Garden of Eden. It is simply called good. And it is good. There's no perfect Sabbath. It's only a good Sabbath. . Yeah, that's a Sabbath. do you as a church need to embrace this?

It may surprise you. I know that there's somebody in the room who's thinking the Sabbath is gonna take away from the witness of the gospel. We're gonna stop sharing the gospel. We're gonna become weak. We're not gonna preach. And I want to tell you right now, in the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, the church, that Sabbath is the church that preaches Jesus the best.

Because in a world of burnout, the rest of God is the, is the one thing we know how to bring. . I want, you know what I want, I want the next great awakening to happen. But the next great awakening will not happen until the church first learns how to rest. And when we first learn how to rest, folks, we are gonna be the one group of people that people can come into us a gathering and look around the room and go like, this is a people at peace.

I gotta tell you, in a frantic world that preaches the gospel, . You know, Jesus preaches to the woman at the well. Now read that story again. When Jesus preaches to the woman at the well, and John, the whole story is set up by one thing Jesus does. One thing, he sits, he sits by the well. And it is because he sits that he can see the woman.

You wanna preach the gospel, take a day and sit, you'll start seeing things a totally different way. This is, this is something we need to not just do. It's something friends we do because the gospel matters and we are called to preach it with all of our hearts and to a tired world. The gospel is the one thing that says, settle down, sit and enjoy some rest.

Brandon Pasion: A.J, thank you. Thank you so much, man. We so appreciate you being here with us. And I know I'm gonna need some time to just process a lot of what you just said, cuz that's just so, so good and so, so counter in so many ways to, to the way that we frantically live our lives. So thank you for spending the time with us today and I hope this won't be the last that,

that we talk with you and maybe we can catch you up on our journey as we go and tell you how we're doing six months down the road. But again, thank you so much and for the amazing convers.

AJ Swoboda: Oh, awesome. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you guys for having me.

Rachel Almeida: Thank you A. J.

Brandon Pasion: See you later.

Man. That was- when he went into that section of being present with our kids and, you know, they know when you're not there. That hit me pretty hard. Yeah. Yeah. Pretty amazing conversation. What, what, what stuck out to you guys?

Kevin Sneed: Well, I, I was just thinking on that same topic when he was talking about that, that presence with the kid, with kids and you know, I was thinking like, gosh, I've been there. There's a, it's something that, that recently actually is I've, I've been, you know, I've been trying Sabbath for many years, but I feel like I've drifted recently.

And, and trying to figure out exactly why. And so we're, Lindsay and I are trying to work on tightening up some of those things. But it's been interesting as I've drifted in it, I have found myself more tired in my Sabbath practice, which rather than leaning in and kind of stepping further into rest and whatnot, I have found myself more distracted during my Sabbath and not present with the girls as much as I should be.

Whether it's escaping away onto you know, e even if it is breaking some of my rules around like my phone and technology or burying myself in a show or something, like, it's been interesting. So I, I always hit really hard with. as well. And it's caused me, and I think this is maybe the beauty of that, the way he was speaking of it as a structure is like it's caused me to reevaluate the other six days and say, okay, why am I so exhausted coming to this?

There's, there's some sort of rhythm of unhealth that's leading me even to not be able to rest cuz I'm too tired to rest in some ways. And so, I don't know. I'm with you Brandon, like that that whole piece he talked about was such a convicting, you know, section, but yet something I think so, so needed. But anyway, that's what was sticking out in my mind.

Rachel Almeida: Yeah. Yeah. It's like, even though I'm not a parent, I still like have family to be present to at home or friends to be present to or God. And yeah, it can be a struggle I think to, to have to redefine rest in a way of sometimes even realizing how selfish I can be with it and realizing, yeah, like even in that, of wanting to kind of shut down. It's not, it's different from a day off and there's still like, there's a gift to being present with God and with people and it's to be enjoyed. And even when he was talking about like delighting with his son or with their family, like sharing a meal and getting excited there is... literally with the honey, but like there is a sweetness to it. And the more that I see it as something to be enjoyed rather than- and I don't think it's a task, but I think something to be present to people unto to God. It is a unique opportunity. And a gift.

Kevin Sneed: Yeah. It was funny as he was talking about his son pouring syrup on his pancakes. We've, we've shifted from donuts to pancakes or we kinda oscillate between the two now and ours. And I, I was totally convicted cuz I tell Maddie to like stop pouring syrup on her pancakes and now I'm like, no, I gotta let her just dump it, man. Like, Hey, that's good. That's enough. I'm like, I just gotta, yeah. Let it, let it rain syrup, man. I gotta, I gotta ease up on it.

I loved the way he talked about that how our kind of western pragmatic mind immediately goes to Sabbath as a rule versus a gift.

Yeah. And I think, man, like what a posture change to approach Sabbath. I think as we kind of, for many of us begin this for the first time, there's always that tension of what isn't isn't a Sabbath. And we get kind of anxious about, can I do this? Can I not do this? And I love that, that, that posture to say, no, no, like, don't approach it from that sort of legalist mindset. That's, that's such a new phenomenon in kinda the way we. Thinking and, and, you know, the spiritual life but rather enter it in as a gift. Like, I just thought that was a beautiful comment and, and section he made. I don't know if you guys have any thoughts on that.

Brandon Pasion: Well, I'll tell you that in this, in this whole conversation about Sabbath and, and we started this as a staff a little while ago, you know, I'm, I'm looking at, you know, my schedule and trying to figure out our family and what day we can protect, and it, it just seems like, oh man, I'm, how am I gonna do this?

And, and I think, I don't know if I would've ever said I was thinking of it as a rule but I wasn't thinking of it as a gift. And what, what this, what this has done in, in this conversation and, and even reframing that thought for me is honestly, it's, it's made me excited to go on this journey. , and I know it's not gonna be perfect, and I know there's Grayson and all that kind of stuff, but it's made me excited to, to do the work and the necessary pruning in our family to make this something of a rhythm, because yeah, I believe it. I believe that it's, it's a gift and it's a gift that we so desperately need. So I'm excited. .

Kevin Sneed: Yeah, that's good. Rachel, how about you, like, as you've been starting to practice it, that, that tension between rule or gift, like how have you been wrestling with that?

Rachel Almeida: Well, this might be a poor example, but a couple weeks ago I watched the movie yesterday with one of my cousins. And-

Kevin Sneed: yeah, my girls love, love that movie,

Rachel Almeida: Yeah, it's good. I can imagine why they like it too. But yeah.

Brandon Pasion: I think before when I-

Kevin Sneed: it's terrifying to show them.

Rachel Almeida: Yeah. . Yeah. When I approached like Sabbath for the first time and started to practice it, part of my personality is like, oh my gosh, how do I do this right? Or like, I don't

wanna fail at Sabbath. But that was already coming in with a mindset of like, there are certain rules that are things that I have to do versus things that I get to do. And like what he said, the most important thing is that we're connecting with God and enjoying the gift that he's given. And he's not placing those expectations on me, but wants me to delight in him and to delight in people.

So in some ways, Sabbath has started to feel kind of like a yes day. Obviously I don't do everything and anything I want. But it does feel like a breath of fresh air, of like freedom of I get to linger a little longer here. I get to enjoy time with family, time with myself, time and community in time with the Lord. And that's something that he wants for me. I'm not breaking- breaking a rule. Yeah. By doing that, I'm embracing a gift that he's given. So it feels like a yes day to me.

Kevin Sneed: Yeah. That's good. I like that.

Brandon Pasion: Well, let's do it together guys.

Kevin Sneed: Let's do it. Sounds great.

Brandon Pasion: Well, we're really, really excited to do this together. And in fact, we are, we are launching our Sabbath series next week. And so, we hope that you'll join us on this journey. There's a lot of grace on the earning journey, like you said, there's, it's not about perfection, it's about embracing the gift of what God has created for us. And so join us on that journey. Come to church and let's change our lives together.