

## Sabbath

*Father God, today I seek to know what it means to enter into your rest,*

*to cease from my own work and to enter into yours.*

*Forgive me for my busy-ness. Forgive me for all the times you  
were calling me to rest in you, but I had to finish my self-imposed list.*

*Forgive me for spending my strength on things that didn't matter.*

*Open my eyes to the rest that you offer.*

*Teach me what it means to keep the Sabbath holy.*

"I learned to keep Sabbath in the crucible of breaking it. God made us from dust. We're never too far from our origins. The apostle Paul says we're only clay pots—dust mixed with water, passed through fire. Hard, yes, but brittle too. Knowing this, God gave us the gift of Sabbath—not just as a day, but as an orientation, a way of seeing and knowing. Sabbath-keeping is a form of mending. It's mortar in the joints. Keep Sabbath, or else break too easily, and oversoon. Keep it, otherwise our dustiness consumes us, becomes us, and we end up able to hold exactly nothing."<sup>70</sup>

### A. What Sabbath is not

1. Resting because you are too tired to do anything else is not Sabbath.
2. It is not necessarily the absence of activity. It is the nature of the activity you are involved in.

### B. What is it? The Nature and Principles of Sabbath

1. At the roots of our beginnings
  - a. Gen. 2:1-3 "So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. <sup>2</sup>On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup>And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation." NLT

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<sup>70</sup> Buchanan, Mark. *The Rest of God*. Thomas Nelson. Nashville. 2006. p. 2

- b. “So God, knowing both our need and our folly, took the lead. He set the example. Like a parent who coaxes a cranky toddler to lie down for an afternoon nap by lying down beside her, God woos us into rest by resting.”<sup>71</sup>

## 2. The Command

- a. Ex. 20:8-11 ““Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup>You have six days each week for your ordinary work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.”
- b. “This is Sabbath’s golden rule, the one rule to which all other rules distill. Stop doing what you ought to do. There are six days to do what you ought. Six days to be caught in the web of economic and political and social necessity. And then one day to take wing. Sabbath is that one day. It is a reprieve from what you ought to do, even though the list of oughts is infinitely long and never done. Oughts are tyrants, noisy and surly, chronically dissatisfied. Sabbath is the day you trade places with them: they go in the salt mine, and you go out dancing. It’s the one day when the only thing you must do is to not do the things you must. You are given permission— issued a command, to be blunt—to turn your back on all those oughts.”<sup>72</sup>
- c. “Sabbath helps reorient us to our work. It is an opportunity to step back far enough from what we do to look at it objectively and ask, Is this what I was sent to do? Am I on course? Is this my food?”<sup>73</sup>

## 3. Sabbath is an orientation, not a day of the week or a specified length of time

- a. The legalists destroyed the intent of Sabbath. We must be careful we don’t do the same thing.
- b. “The attraction of legalism is that, despite all its complexity, it’s mindless. It requires little or no personal engagement. It’s sheer mechanics, simple arithmetic, no more

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<sup>71</sup> Buchanan, M. p. 88

<sup>72</sup> Buchanan, M. p. 125

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 169

difficult than cranking a hoist or measuring a length of board. You just follow orders. You match the parts to the diagram and apply pressure. It need draw nothing from your heart, your mind, your strength, your soul. It's like paint-by-numbers: it requires no artistry, no imagination, no discipline, just dumb, methodical obedience."<sup>74</sup>

- c. "The law of Sabbath is not legalistic. It is a command given to save us from ourselves."<sup>75</sup>
- d. "Jesus's Sabbath-keeping always looked, to his enemies, like Sabbath-breaking. That was one of the many ironies of their accusations against him: people who knew nothing of rest accused a man whose every word and gesture came from rest of Sabbath-breaking."<sup>76</sup>
- e. "The...remarkable thing is that they (the Pharisees) plot murder on the Sabbath. As they see it, healing on the Sabbath is forbidden, but plotting murder is perfectly acceptable."<sup>77</sup>

#### 4. The Sabbath is time set apart (holy)

- a. "Sabbath is time sanctified, time betrothed, time we perceive and receive and approach differently from all other time."<sup>78</sup>
- b. "One of the largest obstacles to true Sabbath-keeping is leisure. It is what cultural historian Witold Rybczynski calls "waiting for the weekend," where we see work as only an extended interlude between our real lives. Leisure is what Sabbath becomes when we no longer know how to sanctify time. Leisure is Sabbath bereft of the sacred. It is a vacation—literally, a vacating, an evacuation. As Rybczynski sees it, leisure has become despotic in our age, enslaving us and exhausting us, demanding from us more than it gives."<sup>79</sup>

#### 5. The Sabbath is about trust

- a. Ex. 16:28-30 "The LORD asked Moses, 'How long will these people refuse to obey my commands and instructions?'<sup>29</sup> They must realize that the Sabbath is the LORD's gift to you. That is why he gives you a two-day supply on the sixth day, so there will be

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 107

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 114

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 219

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 106

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 33

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 35

enough for two days. On the Sabbath day you must each stay in your place. Do not go out to pick up food on the seventh day.’<sup>30</sup> So the people did not gather any food on the seventh day.”

1) First occurrence

a) Ex. 16:23 “He told them, ‘This is what the LORD commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day set apart for the LORD. So bake or boil as much as you want today, and set aside what is left for tomorrow.’”

b. Can we trust God that we will get everything done we **actually need to get done** if we set aside time to rest, time to re-create.

6. The Sabbath Year

a. Lev. 25:1-7 “While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the LORD said to him,<sup>2</sup> “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the LORD every seventh year.<sup>3</sup> For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops,<sup>4</sup> but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the LORD’s Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year.<sup>5</sup> And don’t store away the crops that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of complete rest.<sup>6</sup> But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own during its Sabbath. This applies to you, your male and female servants, your hired workers, and the temporary residents who live with you.<sup>7</sup> Your livestock and the wild animals in your land will also be allowed to eat what the land produces.”

b. The Exile was a direct result of Sabbath breaking

1) 2 Chron. 36:21 “So the message of the LORD spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate until the seventy years were fulfilled, just as the prophet had said.”

a) Jer. 25:11 – Jeremiah’s prophesy of the 70 year Babylonian captivity.

c. This is directly tied to the people’s lack of trust in God. They did not believe he would supply their need in the seventh year. So they worked.

7. The Sabbath is about joy and delight in which God is the center

- a. Is. 58:13-14 “Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don’t pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the Lord’s holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don’t follow your own desires or talk idly. <sup>14</sup>Then the Lord will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the Lord, have spoken!”

- 1) It doesn’t necessarily mean you only do *spiritual* things, though we need to redefine spiritual. Any activity done unto the Lord or with an awareness of God is spiritual (e.g. picnic, roller skating, hiking, etc...).

### C. The Biggest Obstacle to a Modern Observance of Sabbath

1. “Many years later I had moved to Chicago. Entering into a very busy season of ministry, I called Dallas to ask him what I needed to do to stay spiritually healthy. I pictured him sitting in that room as we talked. There was a long pause — with Dallas there was nearly always a long pause — and then he said slowly, ‘You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.’ I quickly wrote that down. Most people take notes with Dallas; I have even seen his wife take notes, which my wife rarely does with me. ‘Okay, Dallas,’ I responded. ‘I’ve got that one. Now what other spiritual nuggets do you have for me? I don’t have a lot of time, and I want to get all the spiritual wisdom from you that I can.’ ‘There is nothing else,’ he said, generously acting as if he did not notice my impatience. ‘Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.’”<sup>80</sup>
2. “Someone asked me recently what was my biggest regret in life. I thought a moment, surveying the vast and cluttered landscape of my blunders and losses, the evil I have done and the evil that’s been done against me. ‘Being in a hurry,’ I said. ‘Pardon?’ ‘Being in a hurry. Getting to the next thing without fully entering the thing in front of me. I cannot think of a single advantage I’ve ever gained from being in a hurry. But a thousand broken and missed things, tens of thousands, lie in the wake of all that rushing.’”<sup>81</sup>
3. “My whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted,” Henri Nouwen said near the end of his life, “until I discovered the interruptions were my work.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ortberg, J. p. 20

<sup>81</sup> Buchanan, M. p. 45

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 79

4. “When I try to step back from my day’s work, the taskmasters in my head rise up, look at me menacingly, advance toward me. ‘What do you think you’re doing? Uh, just taking a few minutes to . . . sit down. You’re taking a few minutes to sit down? How quaint. How charming. You’re taking a few minutes to sit down, as though there’s not a huge, stinking pile of things that you’ve left undone. You are so weak and pathetic. I’m warning you. There are a thousand things to do. There are a million things to worry about. Get off your lazy, sprawling backside and get busy!’ This happened just today—even though I should know better. I lay down for no reason other than to lie down. Within a minute, a taskmaster in my head spotted me, strode over, started his tirade. ‘When are you going to clean your office? Have you phoned the mechanic yet to have that rattle in your truck motor looked at? What about the situation with that couple at church—when are you going to attend to that? Do you know how many e-mails you haven’t responded to? Do you think you can just wile away an hour here on the couch when all this hangs over you? You are so smug, so rude, so slothful. What kind of time-frittering, excuse-mongering sad sack of a sluggard are you anyhow, lolling about as if the work’s all done? You should be ashamed of yourself.’ Taskmasters despise rest. They create a culture where rest must be stolen, savored on the sly, and of course then it’s not rest: worry over getting caught plunders rest’s restfulness. Even if they never lay a hand on you (hard to do, since they’re imaginary), they mount a ruthless psychological war, a propaganda campaign at once cunning and artless, that defeats you more than whips. Maybe you, too, have a taskmaster or three living with you. I am learning how to let them drown.”<sup>83</sup>
5. “The Chinese join two characters to form a single pictograph for busyness: heart and killing.”<sup>84</sup>
6. “If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath— our pneumonia, our cancer, our heart attack, our accidents create Sabbath for us.”<sup>85</sup>
7. Ruth Haley Barton says we suffer from CFS: Christian Fatigue Syndrome
8. “Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points that would show us where to go, we bypass the nourishment that would give us succor. We miss the quiet that would give us wisdom. We miss the joy and love born of effortless delight. Poisoned by this

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<sup>83</sup> Buchanan, M. p. 91

<sup>84</sup> Buchanan, M. p. 45

<sup>85</sup> Mueller, Wayne. *Sabbat:h Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*. Bantam Books. New York. 1999. p. 20

hypnotic belief that good things come only through unceasing determination and tireless effort, we can never truly rest. And for want of rest our lives are in danger.”<sup>86</sup>

9. “Psychiatrist Carl Jung once remarked, ‘Hurry is not of the Devil ; it is the Devil.’”<sup>87</sup>
10. “Being busy is an outward condition, a condition of the body. It occurs when we have many things to do. Busy-ness is inevitable in modern culture. If you are alive today in North America, you are a busy person. There are limits to how much busy-ness we can tolerate, so we wisely find ways to slow down whenever we can. We take vacations, we sit in a La-Z-Boy with a good book, we enjoy a leisurely meal with friends. By itself, busy-ness is not lethal. Being hurried is an inner condition, a condition of the soul. It means to be so preoccupied with myself and my life that I am unable to be fully present with God, with myself, and with other people. I am unable to occupy this present moment. Busy-ness migrates to hurry when we let it squeeze God out of our lives.”<sup>88</sup>
11. “There is something deeply spiritual about honoring the limitations of our existence as human beings— physical bodies in a world of time and space. A peace descends upon our lives when we accept what is real rather than always pushing beyond our limits.”<sup>89</sup>

#### D. Conclusion

1. “Sabbath isn’t eternity, but it’s close. It’s a kind of a precinct of heaven. A well-kept Sabbath is a dress rehearsal for things above. In finding the rest of God now, we prepare for the fullness of God one day. In Sabbath, we anticipate forever.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Barton, R. loc 1948

<sup>87</sup> Foster, R. p. 15

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 133

<sup>89</sup> Barton, R. loc 1925

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 213