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LEADING THE FAMILIES OF NEW WORK FELLOWSHIP,
HOPKINSVILLE, KENTUCKY TO A BIBLICAL
UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF
SABBATH REST

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SABBATH REST

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PREFACE

This journey into Sabbath rest through the Doctor of Ministry program has been a life-giving experience for which I am grateful. After years of serving on the front line of ministry, the opportunity to step back into academia was a welcome opportunity. Throughout the process, the support of a number of people has been foundational.

First, I would like to thank my family. It was no easy thing to change the rhythm of our home to include a father who needed to read, study, write, and travel to complete this project. Janey, thank you for your support and encouragement during this process. Your partnership in this endeavor was vital. Thank you for sharing in my excitement and giving me a push when I needed it. Charlie and Elizabeth, thank you for agreeing to let Dad chase down this dream. My hope is that the core message of this project will become part of our family legacy for generations to come. Mom and Dad, thank you for raising me to love the Lord and the local church. Your generosity and partnership in biblical study has shaped who I am today. Thanks for pushing me toward taking this step.

From my first step into the D.Min program, Michael Wilder has been both an encourager and mentor. Thank you for the structure and encouragement with my writing. Entering the world of academia after a span of local church ministry can be daunting. Your help in elevating and crafting my passion for Sabbath rest into this project was indispensable.

The congregation of New Work Fellowship in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, has been very supportive and encouraging throughout this entire process. It is a pleasure to serve people who genuinely pursue the Lord and learn biblical disciplines. I cannot imagine a

better group of believers to serve and go through life with. Thank you for the positive response to the preaching series and small group study.

The pastors and elders of New Work Fellowship have provided the time for me to accomplish this degree. Thank you for generously giving me the days off to spend on campus, doing class work, and writing. Your desire to support the success of the pastoral team is an integral part of reaching our community with the gospel. It is a privilege to serve with you.

Cory Pitts

Hopkinsville, Kentucky

May 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to lead the families of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to develop a rhythm of work and rest in their lives as a result of a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest.

Goals

The first goal of this project was to evaluate the understanding of Sabbath rest among the congregation. This goal was measured by administering a survey in the congregation regarding their understanding of Sabbath rest,¹ which was deemed successfully completed when a minimum of one hundred people completed the congregational survey and it was been analyzed.² The analysis produced an accurate picture of the understanding of Sabbath rest among the families of New Work Fellowship.

The second goal of this project was to develop a four-week sermon series on Sabbath rest. This goal was measured by a panel of church elders who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series.³ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

¹See appendix 1.

²The congregation of New Work Fellowship consists of three hundred adults.

³See appendix 2.

The third goal of this project was to increase knowledge of Sabbath rest among worship attendees during a four-week sermon series. This goal was measured by administering a post-series survey of the understanding of Sabbath rest by the congregation.⁴ The post-series survey was the same survey used in the first goal. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre and post-series score.

The fourth goal of this project was to develop an eight-week curriculum that led adults to practice Sabbath rest. This goal was measured by a panel of church elders who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁵ The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The fifth goal of this project was to increase the practice of Sabbath rest among at least 10 adults who participated in an adult small group bible study. The study utilized the eight-week curriculum. This goal was measured by administering a pre-study survey and post-study survey, which was used to measure the change in practice.⁶ This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive significant difference between the pre and post-survey scores.

Ministry Context

The context of ministry at New Work Fellowship in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, framed the need for a project on Sabbath rest. New Work Fellowship is a Southern Baptist Church founded for the purpose of reaching those that are farthest from God. This core directive shapes the church even after eighteen years of existence. The church reaches families and individuals who have little or no church background. These people find

⁴See appendix 1.

⁵See appendix 3.

⁶See appendix 4.

themselves in a place where they feel welcome and challenged. New Work Fellowship is a church that is eager to reach new people, follow the Lord, and teach God's Word. The leadership dynamic is very positive and healthy. This dynamic sets the tone for the elder body and congregation as a whole. New Work Fellowship is a positive place to be part of a faith family and serve the Lord.

While there is excitement and enthusiasm in reaching those that are farthest from God, the inherent challenge is the lack of biblical knowledge the average church attendee possesses. Many times the basic message and narratives of the Bible are new to them. There had not been sufficient teaching in the area of Sabbath rest. As a result, the practice of Sabbath rest was a neglected discipline. The leadership at New Work Fellowship is passionate about teaching biblical principles from the context of Scripture in a way that can be easily applied to everyday life. Teaching on the subject of Sabbath rest was easily incorporated into the ministry of the church. The teaching structure of the church is one in which applied biblical principles are taught through preaching in worship services. Church members are encouraged to take part in small group Bible studies where community is formed around the study and application of scripture.

Another core directive of New Work Fellowship is to be a place of new beginnings for hurting people. In reaching those who are far from God, another challenge is guiding individuals and families who are struggling. The lack of the practice of Sabbath rest was seen in two areas. The first of these was in the home life of church members. Family roles were not clearly defined in many homes. Both parents in most homes work to support the family, which creates a tyranny of the urgent where parents do what has to be done to get through the day or week. Healthy parenting roles are lost in this unhealthy cycle and need to be restored. The second area where the lack of Sabbath rest was seen was the struggle among individuals to grow spiritually. This struggle was the result of neglected spiritual disciplines. Individuals know they should practice spiritual disciplines

regularly. These disciplines fall by the wayside because people lack rest and are overwhelmed by hectic schedules.

The church is located in close proximity to Fort Campbell, home of the Army's 101st Airborne division. The unique dynamic of young military families brings a weighty aspect of ministry for the pastoral staff. These families deal with the stressors and hectic pace of multiple deployments, military budget cutbacks, and being displaced from their family while trying to raise small children. The pastoral staff does a great deal of marriage and family counseling as a result. Fatigue is a common problem observed in these struggling families.

The families of New Work Fellowship struggled due to the lack of a rhythm of work and rest based on a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest. The hectic pace of life and lack of true spiritual rest combined to create fatigue in which it was hard for individuals to make wise decisions concerning family, health, work and spiritual discipline. There was a need among the families of New Work Fellowship to develop a healthy rhythm of work and rest. The project taught that ideally Sabbath rest should be practiced through dedicating one day per week to resting in the Lord. In circumstances where this was not possible due to work schedules or the demands of military life, options of incorporating Sabbath rest into everyday life were taught and practiced.

Rationale

The context of ministry at New Work Fellowship in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, clearly suggested the need for a project on the biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest within the families of the church. Five principles showed the rationale of this project.

First, the Bible clearly states in Hebrews 4:9 that Sabbath rest is a reality for the people of God.⁷ While this passage speaks of a future rest, Sabbath rest may

⁷“So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4:9 NASB).

currently be employed in the life of the believer. Because there was a need among the congregation to learn the biblical principle of Sabbath rest, Sabbath rest was taught in worship services and in small group Bible studies. A clear understanding of Sabbath rest is the foundation of practice.

Second, because there was clear teaching about Sabbath rest, the families of New Work Fellowship were enabled to develop the practice of Sabbath rest. Teaching on the subject of Sabbath rest was followed by clear guidelines of practicing Sabbath rest through a small group Bible study. This study provided participants with the community and accountability needed to form the discipline of Sabbath rest.

Third, because family roles were not clearly defined in many homes, healthy family roles were enabled through the practice of Sabbath rest. A biblical picture of family is clearly illustrated in the home through developing the tradition of Sabbath rest.

Fourth, because the individuals of New Work Fellowship struggled to grow spiritually, the practice of Sabbath rest enabled them to grow in their relationship with God. Resting in the Lord requires one to be keenly aware his work in their life. This direct focus brings about spiritual growth in the believer and serves as a reminder to practice spiritual disciplines throughout the week.

Fifth, because military families who attend New Work Fellowship face a unique dynamic due to the stress of military life, the practice of Sabbath rest offered a spiritual respite. Without a planned time of Sabbath rest, the dynamic of fatigue would have continue in these homes. A healthy cycle of work and rest, as seen in Scripture, benefitted these families.

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is an intentional period of time in which one ceases

work and rests by shifting his or her focal setting to the awareness of God's presence.⁸

Spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are “those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth.”⁹ These disciplines include Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence, solitude, journaling and learning.

Tyranny of the urgent. Tyranny of the urgent is the tension created when one allows “the urgent things in life to crowd out the important things in life.”¹⁰

Three limitations applied to this project. First, the value of the congregational and post-series surveys was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be accurate about their understanding and practice of Sabbath rest. Second, the focus of this project was on incorporating Sabbath rest into one's lifestyle. The subject of Sabbath is vast and was not addressed comprehensively in this project.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. The first delimitation was the project was confined to a twenty-week timeframe. This gave enough time to conduct the congregational and post-series surveys, prepare and lead the four-week preaching series, prepare and lead the eight-week study, and conduct the pre and post-study surveys. Secondly, the evaluation of the small group study was delimited to those who attended a minimum of seven sessions. The third delimitation was that the explicit practice of Sabbath rest was not prescribed by the author, instead the principle of Sabbath rest was the focus.

⁸Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time: Understanding and Practice for Contemporary Christians* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 51.

⁹Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 17.

¹⁰Charles E. Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent!* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 5.

Project Methodology

The methodology for this project included a congregational survey to determine the needs of the preaching series, a post-series survey, an evaluation rubric for the preaching series and study curriculum, and a pre and post-study survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the small group study.¹¹ Five goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal of this project was to evaluate the understanding of Sabbath rest among the congregation. This goal was measured by administering a congregational survey.¹² Each participant identified him or herself on the survey by using a unique four-digit personal identification number (PIN) of their choosing. The survey consisted of twenty statements in which the participant chose one of the following responses on a six-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree somewhat (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A), strongly agree (SA). The survey included demographic indicators, including gender, age, military or civilian, employment status, and number of family members and children living in the home.

The first goal was deemed successfully completed when a minimum of one hundred people complete the congregational survey and it had been analyzed. Success of this goal was accomplished by administering the survey within the congregation in two ways. First, the survey was included in the Sunday morning worship bulletin and given to each participant as they enter the worship service.¹³ During each of the Sunday morning worship services there was an explanation of the survey and ten minutes given for participants to complete the survey. The survey was then collected with the offering during each service. Secondly, the survey was available the following Sunday in the worship bulletin. An explanation of the survey was included in the video announcements. Those

¹¹All research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research and Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

¹²See appendix 1.

¹³New Work Fellowship has three worship services each Sunday morning.

who were absent the previous week were encouraged to complete a survey after the service and place it in a receptacle. The surveys were collected and analyzed. The analysis of the congregational survey produced an accurate picture of the understanding and practice of Sabbath rest among the families of New Work Fellowship.

The second goal of this project was to develop a four-week sermon series on Sabbath rest. The series consisted of four sermons explaining the biblical basis for Sabbath rest in the Old Testament, the biblical basis for Sabbath rest in the New Testament, the understanding of Sabbath rest as individuals, and the understanding of Sabbath rest as a family. Sabbath rest was the theme for the worship services in which the sermons were preached. I worked in conjunction with the Worship Pastor to incorporate musical themes on Sabbath rest.¹⁴ Corporate prayer in the services thanked God for providing rest for the soul. I worked in conjunction with the Missional Pastor to create video illustrations and promotional material for the sermon series.¹⁵ This goal was measured by a panel of five elders who used a rubric to evaluate the written material for the sermon series.¹⁶ The rubric led the elders to evaluate the series in the areas of biblical faithfulness, clarity of language, and relevance of the sermon series.¹⁷ The sermon series was submitted to the elders in the eight weeks prior to the beginning of the series. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

¹⁴Josh Hensley is the Worship Pastor at New Work Fellowship. As Worship Pastor he is responsible for creating the order of worship in conjunction with the Pastoral Leadership Team, leading the music and coordinating the technical team.

¹⁵Willis Adkins is the Missional Pastor at New Work Fellowship. As Missional Pastor he is responsible creating media to be used in worship services and marketing. He coordinates the live stream and recording of worship services. He is also responsible for providing local, national, and foreign missions opportunities for the members of New Work Fellowship.

¹⁶I selected the five elders from the body of church elders with input from the Lead Pastor.

¹⁷See appendix 2.

The third goal of this project was to increase knowledge of Sabbath rest among worship attendees during a four-week sermon series. The sermon material developed in the second goal was used to preach sermons on four consecutive Sundays. These sermons increased knowledge of Sabbath rest by communicating the biblical truths and life applications developed in the series material. This goal was measured by administering a post-series survey of the understanding of Sabbath rest by the congregation.¹⁸ A group of thirty participants was selected from the surveys based on those who attended all four sermons or watched the sermons they missed online. The post-series survey included the same survey used in the first goal with the addition of a space to indicate whether or not the participant completed the series either by attending or watching the sermon series online. The PIN numbers were paired from the first and second survey to select thirty participants to include in the t-test. The t-test is a statistical tool used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the means of two groups. The t-test was chosen because it showed the statistical difference between the pre-and post-series surveys. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre and post-series score.¹⁹

The fourth goal of this project was to develop an eight-week curriculum that led adults to practice Sabbath rest. The curriculum focused on a godly perspective of time, the importance of Sabbath rest, models of practicing Sabbath rest, resting in the Lord, building a holy time in the week, dealing with the tyranny of the urgent, Sabbath rest for busy seasons, and Sabbath rest in the family. Each session included a biblical basis for the weekly subject, discussion questions throughout the material and a reflection section at the end of each lesson. The material also included a section for participants to track his or her cycle of work and Sabbath rest. The same panel of elders mentioned in goal 2 used

¹⁸See appendix 1.

¹⁹Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 188.

a rubric to measure this goal.²⁰ The rubric led the elders to evaluate the material for its biblical faithfulness, clarity of language, and relevance for a small group study. The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The fifth goal of this project was to increase the practice of Sabbath rest among at least ten adults who participated in an adult small group Bible study. The study took place on eight consecutive Wednesday nights at New Work Fellowship from 6 to 7 o'clock in the evening. Participants were enlisted in a number of ways. First, the small group was introduced during the four-week sermon series as a valuable way to develop the practice of Sabbath rest. During these Sunday worship services the small group was promoted in the video announcements. A description of the small group was placed in the worship program. Participants signed up to attend the group on their New Work Fellowship Connect Card.²¹ The church website featured the small group and had an option for participants to sign up online for the study. I enlisted participants for the small group. The small group study utilized the eight-week curriculum developed in goal 4. This goal was measured by administering a pre-study survey and post-study survey which was used to measure the change in practice.²² The pre and post-study surveys consisted of thirty statements in which the participant chose one of the following responses on a Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree somewhat (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A), strongly agree (SA). The survey included the participant's name and demographic indicators, including gender, age, military or civilian, employment status, and number of family members and children living in the home. This goal was

²⁰See appendix 3.

²¹The Connect Card is an information card in the worship bulletin for worship attendees. All worship attendees are asked to fill the Connect Card out completely and place it in the offering basket. There is a place on the Connect Card for people to sign up to participate in small groups.

²²See appendix 4.

considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive significant difference between the pre and post survey scores.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR SABBATH REST

The purpose of this project is to lead the families of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to develop a rhythm of work and rest based on a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest. The practice of Sabbath rest is vital to incorporating a healthy cycle of work and rest into one's life. This chapter shows a healthy rhythm of work and rest can be observed by imitating God's example (Gen 1:1-2:3) of ceasing work for a time (Exod 16) without the weight of Old Testament regulations (Acts 15:28-29) hampering the opportunity to experience Sabbath rest (Heb 4:9). This chapter establishes the biblical and theological basis of Sabbath rest by exegeting four passages of Scripture. First, an exegesis of Genesis 1:1-2:3 shows the foundation of Sabbath rest in the creation account. Second, an exegesis of Exodus 16 shows that God provides a model for Sabbath rest to be followed by his people. Third, an exegesis of Acts 15:28-29 shows that Christians are not bound to the Mosaic laws concerning Sabbath. And finally, an exegesis of Hebrews 4:9 supports the thesis by establishing that Sabbath rest is available for Christians not only as a future promise, but a present reality.

The focus of this chapter is the biblical and theological basis for developing a biblical rhythm of work and rest by incorporating Sabbath rest into one's lifestyle. As previously stated in the project limitations, the subject of Sabbath is vast and is not addressed comprehensively in this chapter. The purpose of the chapter is not to prescribe

an explicit practice of Sabbath rest or enter into theological debate, but rather to focus on the biblical principle of incorporating Sabbath rest into one's life.¹

Genesis 1:1-2:3: The Foundation of Sabbath Rest in the Creation Account

“Why were people created?” “What am I supposed to do with my life?” Many people struggle with these questions. The way a person answers these questions greatly affects his or her life. An examination of Genesis 1:1-2:3 reveals God's foundational rhythm of work and rest. What one believes about creation, work, and rest sets the stage for his actions. Genesis 1:1-2:3 is the basis for God's plan for the universe. The Hebrew word “Sabbath” occurs 111 times in the Old Testament.² The meaning of the word is “to cease, stop; to stop working, celebrate, to rest.”³ The foundation of this rest exists in Genesis 1:1-2:3. A godly rhythm of work and rest is clearly seen in the creation account. Incorporating this rhythm into one's life is dependent on a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest.

¹For an in depth discussion of the different interpretations of Sabbath, see Charles P. Arand and Christopher John Donato, eds., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: 4 Views* (Nashville: B & H, 2011). In this book, the contributors provide a point-counterpoint discussion of Sabbath from the Seventh Day Adventist view by Skip McCarthy, the Christian Sabbath view by Joseph A. Pipa, the Fulfillment view by Craig L. Bloomberg, and the Lutheran view that Sabbath does not concern Christians by Charles P. Arand. Sabbath rest is a grace to be observed (Gen 2:1-3; Exod 16:23). Sabbath rest is fulfilled in Christ (Matt 12:8) and the believer is not bound to the Old Testament Sabbath Laws (Acts 15:28-29). The eschatological realities of Sabbath rest do not negate the freedom to practice it within a weekly rhythm of work and rest (Heb 4:9). The imitation of God in practicing a weekly time of rest can be a meaningful pursuit of holiness.

²An extensive study in the etymology of the term Sabbath can be found in Ron du Preez, *Judging the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2008), 17-26; and D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 23-24.

³Harold Dressler and D. A. Carson, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 23.

A Biblical View of Creation in Contrast to a Pagan View of Creation

The biblical account of creation stands in sharp contrast with pagan views of work and rest predominant of the time in which the Torah was given. The pagan view of the purpose of humanity was humans were created for the purpose of working for the gods.⁴ The biblical view of the purpose of humanity is to be in relationship with God the creator and join him in his work as stewards over creation.

Many pagan creation stories feature conflict between the gods as the foundation of creation. The world came to be as the result of warring gods. One such account states that after a great battle, Marduke defeats Tiamat and as a result, Marduke creates the world from Tiamat's dead body.⁵ After the world was created, there was much work to be done in tending to it. The gods did not like the work of tending to creation, so they created humans as underlings to perform menial tasks, which allowed the gods to pursue the more desirable tasks of leisure and ruling. Hamilton states,

In both the *Enuma elish* and the Atrahasis Epic the gods rest after the creation of man. With man to do the menial work of the day-to-day maintenance of the earth, the gods are now free for less demanding administrative tasks in the world. In appreciation for release from this manual work, the gods promise to build Babylon and its temple for Marduk. The gods' surrogate is now man, who is charged with the service of the gods that they might be as ease. It is not difficult to see how different the Mesopotamia concept of rest for the divine is from the biblical concept.⁶

Humanity works and the gods play. In pagan religions, work was the purpose for the existence of humanity. Humans worked so the gods could rest. The characteristics of a pagan cycle of work and rest were that creation came as the result of great conflict between the gods, humans were created to serve the gods, humanity served

⁴Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 37.

⁵Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 255.

⁶Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 143.

the gods by performing the work the gods did not want to do, and rest only came when the gods were pleased.

The first chapter of the most important book in history, the Bible, begins with the story of God and his work of creation. The first words of the Bible are, “In the beginning God created.” The first thing Scripture teaches about the creator is that God works. God works hard in a sense that there is an unmatched focus on the details of creation. It is impossible for even the best minds to comprehend the scope of creation. Humanity has never been able to comprehend the vastness or smallness of the universe. One can only theorize about what exists beyond our limited vision. While God worked hard in creating the universe, Scripture shows that he did it with ease: “Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light from the darkness. God literally speaks the universe into existence.

For six days God creates the heavens and the earth and everything in them. An omnipotent God could have just snapped his fingers and made it all happen at once. But he chooses to work through a process of building, creating, and interacting with his creation. In his work, God is not only creating the stuff of the universe—dirt, light, water, lava; but he is creating intimacy and relationship with creation. Three times God creates and then blesses. In speaking the world into existence, he also speaks to his creation:

God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind and God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas and let the birds multiply on earth.” (Gen 1:21-22)

God blessed his work, which is seen a second time when He creates man “in his own image” and blesses them. “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28). Gentry states that Genesis 1:26-28 is “intended to be

viewed as the climax and crown of God’s creative work.⁷ As the crowning achievement in the creation account, Gentry also asserts that “humans exercise royal rule” over the rest of creation:⁸

To sum up, the term “the image of god” in the culture and language of the ancient Near East in the fifteenth century B.C. would have communicated two main ideas: 1) rulership and 2) sonship. The king is the image of god because he has a relationship to the world as ruler for the god. We ought to assume that the meaning in the Bible is identical or at least similar, unless the biblical text clearly distinguishes its meaning from the surrounding culture.⁹

God has given humanity the work of ruling over creation. Work itself is a blessing from God. To have the ability to imitate God by working hard is a blessing in itself. Like the creation account, work should include joy, creativity, focus, purpose and fruitfulness. Part of being like God is learning to work hard.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 revolutionized the pagan approach to the purpose of humanity and a cycle of work and rest.¹⁰ The practice of a biblical cycle of work and rest is found in the creation account. Genesis sets the stage for the one true God, who creates not out of conflict, but by speaking. Creation is not the result of gods at war with each other. There is no strife or discord in the formation of the world. The God of Genesis creates the universe with ease. He merely speaks and the universe is formed. Not only is God so powerful that the world is formed at his command, he is also intimately connected to humanity and the world. God takes great joy in creation. Three times during the creation account He blesses the result of his words. He blesses the fish of the sea, humans, and then finally the seventh day itself.¹¹

⁷Peter J. Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 22.

⁸Ibid., 23.

⁹Ibid., 27.

¹⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 142.

¹¹Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 33.

God Makes a Portion of Time Holy

“God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning on the sixth day” (Gen 1:31). If God’s only intention in creating the world was to work, produce, and be fruitful, the creation account would end here, but continues, “The heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed his work which he had done” (Gen 2:1). God did not finish his work on the seventh day, but completed the tasks of creation in six days. The seventh day was different from any of the previous days, completely different. On this day, God did not work. The focus of the passage is still the same as Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God.” The focus is still God and what he is doing. It is just that on the seventh day, God chooses not to work. He does not disappear or vanish from the story like a genie going back into his lamp after performing a task. God is still present with creation. He is fully there, but in his sovereignty he chooses to rest: “And he rested on the seventh day from all His work which he had done” (Gen 2:2). God rests. In choosing to rest on the seventh day, God also blesses the day itself. God takes a portion of time and declares it to be holy. This act is an interesting aspect of the creation account. The first thing seen in Scripture to be made holy is a portion of time. Not a place. Not a person. Not the stuff of creation. God sanctifies a portion of time itself (Gen 2:3).

The creation account does not end on the sixth day. The first six days of work lead up to the seventh day which is altogether different. The work of creation is called “beautiful” or “very beautiful.” The final day described in Genesis 2:1-3 is the only one called “holy.” The seventh day is not an appendage to the creation account. It is a day that completes the creation but is set apart as holy. By sanctifying the seventh day God separated the everyday and the solemn. God creates days of work and days of rest.¹²

God chose, within this portion of holy time, to rest from his work. It was not that he did nothing. He did not work. Ceasing to work is not ceasing to exist. God

¹²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 143.

rested in what he had done. The six days of work came to completion in the time of rest. Genesis 1:1-2:3 is the biblical foundation of a healthy rhythm of work and rest. Work is not complete without rest and rest is not complete without work. Biblically, work and rest exist in a symbiotic relationship.

Work Because God Worked, Rest Because God Rested

A foundational part of being a follower of Christ is answering the call to be holy. In its simplest form, this means doing what God does: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:14-16). Pipa states that God instituted Sabbath and rested on it for three purposes: (1) to declare that His work as Creator was complete, (2) to express the delight he took in His creation, and (3) to provide a picture and demonstration of the rest he would provide for man.¹³

If a believer is to be like God, they will imitate what he does. This concept of imitating God has implications for the work ethic of a believer. One should work because God works. Ideally the believer should work hard wherever the Lord has placed them and focus on doing his or her work well. Tasks should be performed with joy in the knowledge that God gives the ability to work. Work is a blessing from the Lord and one lives in the image of God when he or she brings glory to the Lord through their work. Ultimately, the believer works for God.

In conjunction with work, the believer should also rest because God rested. If the Lord set aside a portion of time and rested in it, anyone who wants to be godly should do the same. Resting is not merely a task to be accomplished. Resting in the Lord means that rest should be done like God rested and for the same reasons that He rested. When

¹³Joseph Pipa, *The Lord's Day* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1996), 28-32.

rest is just another box to be checked off the task list, it ceases to become resting in the Lord. R.C. Sproul states, “Genesis 2:3 gives us insight into the nature of the Lord’s rest. This verse does not say that God ceased all activity on the seventh day; instead, he only rested from all from all his work that he had done in creation.”¹⁴ Kidner writes,

God’s finished task is sealed in the words *he rested* (2, 3; literally “ceased;” from *sābat*, the root of “Sabbath”). It is the rest of achievement, not inactivity, for he nurtures what he creates; we may compare the symbolism of Jesus “seated” after his finished redemption (Heb. 8:1; 10:12), to dispense the benefits.¹⁵

The Importance of the Rest of God in the Creation Account

For six days God creates the universe and everything in it. At the end of the sixth day, he is finished with his work, but it is not yet complete. The task of creation is over, but the creation account is not. God creates one more day and rests. The omnipotent creator of the universe chooses to rest. This is not the result of God being tired and needing to catch his breath. He is not experiencing fatigue or burnout. The day of rest is a deliberate part of his plan for creation. Not only does God rest on the seventh day, he also blesses the day and calls it holy. In essence, God sets aside a period of time in the creation account and declares it to be different than every other day of creation on which work was done.

The rest of God teaches the reader a number of things about God’s plan for creation. First, God works. He does the work of creation and sets everything into motion according to his will. Second, work is not complete without rest. The work of tending to creation is not complete unless a time of rest has been observed. Third, the first thing God makes holy is a period of time. God does not choose a person, place, or thing to make holy. He chose a time. Fourth, God blesses this period of rest for the purpose of

¹⁴R. C. Sproul, “God Rested,” Ligonier Ministries, 2011, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/god-rested>.

¹⁵Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 57.

allowing his work to come to fruition.

How does mankind relate to the holy time in the creation account? Wenham suggests that the seventh day rest of God is foundational in understanding one's very nature. Mankind is the height of the creation account. Genesis 1 builds toward man being created in the image of God. The seventh day of creation in Genesis 2:1-3 reveals man's true identity as God's representative on earth. Mankind is to rule over the creation while reflecting the image of God. Genesis 2:1-3 implies the rhythm of this rule should include a day of rest. The creator rested on the seventh day. Practicing a weekly rhythm of work and rest is beneficial to mankind as part of the created order and as stewards of creation.¹⁶

Because humans are made in the image of God, the believer should seek to be holy as God is holy.¹⁷ A believer should not practice Sabbath rest merely for the benefits of leisure, but rather for the purpose of holiness. Like any other spiritual discipline, one participates out of love for the Lord, not for self-centered profit.

Exodus 16: God's Model for the Practice of Sabbath Rest

The basis for a healthy rhythm of work and rest is seen in the creation account. This principle set forth by the example of God, which is working for six days and resting

¹⁶Kidner, *Genesis*, 38.

¹⁷Gentry, "Kingdom through Covenant," 23, briefly evaluates the views in Wenham's commentary on the subject of *imago dei*. Gentry offers five aspects in which humans are created in the image of God: (1) the terms "image" and "likeness" are distinct aspects of man's nature. The image denotes the natural qualities in the man that make him resemble God while the "likeness" refers to the supernatural graces that make him godlike. (2) The divine image refers to the mental and spiritual qualities that man shares with his creator. (3) The image consists of physical resemblance as well as the function of a ruling king. The image of God must characterize the whole man, not just his mind or spirit on the one hand or his body on the other. It is what separates man from the animals. (4) The divine image makes man God's representative on earth. (5) The image is a capacity to relate to God. The divine image means that God can enter into personal relationships with man, speak to him, and make covenants with him. Gentry's work on man being created in the image of God lends credence to the belief that one should seek to be like God by imitating the rhythm of work and rest found in Gen 1:1-2:3.

for one, becomes a model to be practiced by God's people in Exodus 16. Simply put, the best reason for one to practice Sabbath rest is the fact that God himself did so.

The best model for practicing Sabbath is that of God himself. The creation account sets a precedent which describes the biblical rhythm of work and rest as six days of work and one day of rest. This model is seen in Exodus 16. The purpose behind the rhythm of work and rest is not so the weak can recuperate and physically recharge. Recuperation is a result of Sabbath rest, but not the goal. The goal of Sabbath rest is refocusing on holiness by enjoying God's blessings. Sabbath rest is designed for people to be strengthened spiritually and closer to God. Physical restoration is secondary to spiritual growth.¹⁸

After Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt, they quickly experience difficulty in the desert. In Exodus 16, the hardships of Egypt, as well as the miracle of their deliverance, fade in the memory of the community of Israel. They complain to Moses about their hunger:

The sons of Israel said to them, "would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exod 16:3)

Fatigue alters the perception of reality. The exaggerated cries of the Israelites reveal a truth about the human condition. God's people allow the troubles of the past to fade in their memory when they are faced with new ones.¹⁹ Past circumstances are more appealing than present struggles. In their hunger, the people of Israel said death in the land of Egypt would have been preferred over the present hunger and fatigue they were experiencing. A skewed sense of reality leads them to sin against the Lord. They were

¹⁸Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 459.

¹⁹Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1967), 189.

talking to Moses, but they were complaining about the work of God. It is in this context that God reveals his plan for a healthy rhythm of work and rest.

The Israelites were rescued from the grips of Pharaoh and the oppressive daily grind of their existence. Pharaoh's oppression of the Israelites was accomplished by forcing them to work relentlessly. They were required to produce bricks every day of the week: "So go now and work; for you will be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks" (Exod 5:18) The nature of this quota is described in the next verse: "The foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, 'You must not reduce your *daily* amount of bricks'" (Exod 5:19, emphasis added) There is no indication that the Israelites were given any time to rest, but rather they were to produce a quota of bricks seven days a week.

Pharaoh increased the difficulty of the Israelite's labor by removing the provision of straw. He then hurts the Israelites more by blaming them for the new hardship they are facing. Pharaoh accuses them of being lazy. The hard-hearted leader cuts off all communication with Israel and tells them to get back to work (Exod 5:18). The wording of this verse comes back to haunt Pharaoh later. After the plagues have ravaged Egypt and taken the firstborn, a conquered Pharaoh utters, "Go, serve/worship Yahweh" (Exod 10:8, 11, 24, 12:31).²⁰

God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness. Before arriving at Mount Sinai they find themselves in the Wilderness of Sin. The journey was hard and the people of God are now grumbling to Moses about their empty stomachs: "Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we are bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exod 16:33). These people witnessed their own deliverance after the plagues in Egypt, the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea,

²⁰Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 157.

and the Lord's very presence leading them as a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. He provided "sweet water" for them at Marah when they were thirsty (Exod 15:22-25). According to Exodus 12:38 and 34:3, they had herds of cattle and flocks of goats with them. But the pain of hunger and the fear of what lay ahead caused them to grumble and complain. They were living in the very presence of the Lord God and yet were blinded by their own hunger.

God's Model of Work and Rest for His People

A model for Sabbath rest emerges in Exodus 16 that mirrors God's creative work and rest in Genesis 1:1-2:4. The Lord answers the Israelite's cry for food by providing quail and manna. While the quail was a temporary treat, manna became the object that the Lord provided for the daily needs of his people. God also used this provision to teach the Israelites a healthy cycle of work and rest. Each morning as the dew lifted from the desert floor, a finely formed substance, manna, accumulated on the ground.²¹ On the days God provided manna, it was to be gathered and prepared as food. The Israelites were to gather for six days and rest from their gathering on the seventh day: "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none" (Exod 16:26). The foundation of a biblical rhythm of work and rest is seen in this passage. Just like the Israelites, God's people today should observe a regular rhythm of work and rest.

In order to follow this principle, there must be anticipation and intentionality surrounding Sabbath rest. To rest from work for a period of time during the week means that work must be done in preparation of rest. In Exodus 16, the sixth day is different than the previous five in the sense that it is a day of preparation for Sabbath rest. The people of God went out to gather on the sixth day just as they did on the previous five days

²¹Enns, *Exodus*, 195.

of the week. On this day, however, God provided enough manna for two days. The picture here is not one of the Israelites having to work twice as hard to gather twice as much manna for the seventh day. The miracle of the sixth day was that God provided more manna per unit of ground than on the other days.²² Stuart writes, “Their faith in obeying the testing of each day had now been supplemented by the reward of their faith for obeying the special provisions for the sixth-day’s gathering.”²³

Exodus 16 established the practice of Sabbath rest in the lives of the Israelites. This model was followed a few chapters later in Exodus 20:8-11 by regulations surrounding the practice Sabbath rest:

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 of the Lord your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the 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. (Exod 20:8-11)

The practice of Sabbath rest in the community of Israel was reinforced by the command to observe the Sabbath. This command is much more than a restriction of activity on the Sabbath day. Throughout history it has been interpreted as the command to practice Sabbath rest on the Lord’s day by focusing on worship, restoration, and replenishment.²⁴ The command in this passage is the first time in Scripture the term “Sabbath” is connected to God’s action in the creation account.²⁵ The implication is that the believer should observe Sabbath because God modeled its practice. By following God’s model for Sabbath rest, one may participate in the benefits of resting in the Lord.

²²Stuart, *Exodus*, 381.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Richard Gavin, *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Glasgow: Bell and Bain, 1998), 80.

²⁵Dressler and Carson, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” 25.

The Benefit of Sabbath Rest Today

God's people today can benefit from the principle of incorporating Sabbath rest into a rhythm of work and rest. The Lord provides everything needed to enter Sabbath rest. The Israelites had to trust not only that God would provide throughout the week, but that He would also provide what they needed for a day of rest. The same trust is required today for believers to enter into Sabbath rest, provided in Christ, as part of a healthy rhythm of work and rest. Without trusting the Lord to provide, one may not cease from their work in order to enjoy rest. If God provided for the children of Israel, he will also provide for his children today.

Learning to trust that God will provide for needs is an important aspect of practicing Sabbath rest, but there is a foundational concept that should not be overlooked. The creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:4 shows God's rhythm of work and rest is to work six days and rest on the seventh. This rhythm is also seen in Exodus 16. God tells the Israelites to gather six days and cease from their work on the seventh. God is teaching his people to imitate him. The motivation for gathering twice as much on the sixth day is a time of rest on the seventh day of creation. The focus of both the sixth and seventh day command are on what God is doing on those days. On the sixth day God provides twice as much manna. On the seventh day God does not provide manna. God is teaching his people the lesson that he does not work on the seventh day. It is not that this time of rest is merely observed by Israel. God ceases work and there is no manna or quail to be gathered. Sabbath rest is something God does and the Israelites are expected to do as well.²⁶

Exodus 16 portrays God's consistent character. He works six days to provide for his people and rests on the seventh day. In doing this he is inviting the Israelites to join him in Sabbath rest. God is not only teaching them a healthy rhythm of work and

²⁶Enns, *Exodus*, 325.

rest, he is teaching them to be like him. God’s model for Sabbath rest is much more than a system of rules to be obeyed.

At first, some of the Israelites decide to trust their own instincts rather than God’s call to enter into Sabbath rest. They went out on the seventh day to gather and found God was true to his word. He provided nothing that day. God then speaks to Moses and warns the Israelites by asking “how long” (Exod 16:28). This passage is similar to what the Lord said to Pharaoh through Moses in Exodus 10:3: “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?” In this “how long” statement, God is reminding the Israelites that he delivered them from the grip of Pharaoh and they should be careful in their grumbling. Their rebellious attitudes and actions reflect more the mindset of Pharaoh than that of God who is calling them to be holy as he is holy (Lev 11:44-45).²⁷

Christians are called to be holy as God is holy (1 Pet 1:13-16). In order to do this Christians must be different than the world. Paul encourages believers in Corinth to “come out from among them and be separate” when instructing Christians to follow the Lord (2 Cor 6:17). As is shown later, society works at a breakneck speed. How is one to be different than the world in this aspect of work? Developing a biblical rhythm of work and rest by which one enters into Sabbath rest is a way that directly imitates God’s very own rhythm of work and rest and differentiates the believer from the common approach to work and rest.

Acts 15:28-29: Christians Are Not Bound to the Mosaic Laws Concerning Sabbath

The principle of Sabbath rest as a part of a biblical rhythm of work and rest can be clouded by the many Old Testament commands surrounding the day of rest. There are those like Skip McCarthy, who argue Christians are bound to the Law concerning Sabbath

²⁷Enns, *Exodus*, 327.

while others like Craig L. Blomberg, who believe Sabbath was fulfilled in Christ and therefore none of the laws governing Sabbath are binding.²⁸

The question of what Christians are bound to in reference to the Old Testament has its roots in the book of Acts. Acts 15 introduces this very issue as it arose in the ministry of Paul and Barnabus. While in Antioch of Syria, they encountered some men from Judea teaching that Gentile Christians were bound to the Mosaic Law regarding circumcision (Acts 15:1). A trip to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles and elders was necessary to settle the debate over what obligations Gentile Christians were under concerning the law.

While circumcision was the initial issue debated between the Judean men and Paul and Barnabas, the principle dealt with by the Council at Jerusalem was much broader. The apostles and elders ultimately render a decision that frees Gentile believers from being bound to the law. The Apostles rejected the yoke of the law for Gentile believers and asserted that their hearts were purified by faith in Christ.²⁹ This freedom still retains a solid biblical standard by which to live. The apostles and elders ask Gentile believers to abstain from “things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication” (Acts 15:28-29). Through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Gentile believers are freed from the burden of the law and given broader boundaries by which to live.³⁰ This decision embodies the freedom Christ taught in reference to the law. While fulfilling the Law, Jesus freed believers from the burden of the law. Thus, any application of the law must apply the freedom given by Christ (John 8:36). This would be true for

²⁸Craig L. Blomberg, “Responses to Craig L. Blomberg,” in *Perspectives on the Sabbath*, 410.

²⁹John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 326.

³⁰F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 315.

the practice of Sabbath rest in the life of a Christian. In relation to Paul's understanding of the law and its fulfillment, Schreiner says that Paul thought Sabbath rest should not be required for Gentile believers. Paul's treatment of Sabbath would be the same as that of circumcision. The practice of Sabbath rest could be practiced by anyone who felt so compelled, but was never to be imposed on all people.³¹

The Foundational Underpinning of the Council at Jerusalem

In Acts 15:19, James communicates the spirit behind the decision the apostles rendered later in verses 28-29: "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles." The New International Version uses the phrase "should not make it difficult" (Acts 15:19). The intention of the apostles when it came to Gentile adherence to the law was to free people and not bind them. Freeing people from being bound to the Law had great implications for the practice of Sabbath rest in the early church. In the day of Jesus, legalism characterized the observance of Sabbath more so than resting in the Lord (Matt 12:1-8). It would have been too heavy a burden for Gentile believers to adapt to all of the oral traditions surrounding Sabbath. Peter, James, and the other apostles and elders chose empathy when considering the application of the Old Testament law in the lives of Gentile believers.³² Polhill comments on Peter's speech in Acts 15:10-11,

By speaking of the "yoke" of the law, he did not mean that the law was an intolerable burden that Jewish Christians should abandon. Peter was using a common Jewish metaphor for the law that had the same positive meaning Jesus had given it (Matt 11:29f). Peter did not urge Jewish Christians to abandon the law, nor did they cease to live by it. For the Jewish Christian the law would remain a mark of God's covenant with them, a cherished heritage. It could not save them. Only one thing could; faith, believing in the saving grace of the Lord.

³¹Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 169.

³²Polhill, *Acts*, 327.

The good news of the gospel is the underpinning of the Jerusalem Council. Believers are free in Christ and not bound to the mosaic law.

Sabbath Rest Is a Matter of the Heart

A very important principle of practicing Sabbath rest within a biblical rhythm of work and rest still remains today. When Sabbath rest becomes a weight for the believer to bare it loses the very essence of its intended purpose. Legalism erodes this foundational principle of Sabbath rest. Rest for the soul is a matter of the heart and cannot be specifically legislated for each person:

If the principle of Sabbath rest was designated to benefit humanity, then there will always be circumstances in which what actually benefits a given person more than cessation of work is some important activity that someone else will consider to be work.³³

Biblical boundaries are needed to practice a healthy rhythm of work and rest. Entering into Sabbath rest as a part of this rhythm is less about obeying outward regulations and more about removing distractions for the purpose focusing on God. Simon Peter learned this principle at the home of Cornelius. Circumcision was not necessary for this Gentile household to be saved:

The fact that they had received the Spirit just as Peter and the Jewish Christians had was proof that God had accepted Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles on an equal footing. He “purified their hearts” by faith. For the Jew circumcision was a mark of sanctity and purity, of belonging to God’s people and being acceptable to him. But in Cornelius God had shown Peter that true purity comes not by an external mark, but by faith.³⁴

Polhill points out how the experience “made an indelible impression on Peter.” When considering this issue of faith during the council of Jerusalem, his desire was for Gentile Christians to learn that “God looks on the heart, not on external matter.”³⁵ The

³³Craig L. Blomberg, “The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ,” in *Perspectives on the Sabbath*, 334.

³⁴Polhill, *Acts*, 326.

³⁵*Ibid.*

practice of Sabbath rest is a matter of the heart more so than adherence to outward regulations. Just as the creation account in Genesis shows a clear picture of God's own rhythm of work and rest, and Exodus 16 creates a model by which God's people can join God in Sabbath rest, Acts 15:28-29 establishes that Christians are free in Christ and not bound to the yoke of the law. A further study of Hebrews 4 will bring to light Sabbath rest as both a future promise and present reality available to every believer through Christ.

Hebrews 4: Sabbath Rest: A Future Promise and a Present Reality

Hebrews 4 brings to light two important aspects of Sabbath rest. First, Sabbath rest has eschatological implications inherent with the saving grace of the gospel of Christ. Entering into "His rest" through the good news of the gospel is a promise of a future heavenly rest (Heb 4:1-2). Second, Sabbath rest is also a present reality that should be evident in the life of a believer (Heb 4:9-10). Christians should rest in the fact they are saved by grace through faith. When God saves, the believer can be assured of an eternal rest spent in the presence of the Lord. The practice of Sabbath rest within a rhythm of work and rest can also help one live out the gospel in very practical ways.

The Future Promise of Sabbath Rest

Very few commentators argue that an eschatological promise is not implied in Hebrews 4. William L. Lane argues the intent of the reference to Jesus as high priest in 4:14-15 is to illustrate that Sabbath rest is a future promise Christians will celebrate in the heavenly realm.³⁶ This approach sets the fulfillment of Sabbath in the framework of the rest one experiences as the result of faith in Christ. Lane writes that this is the intent of the author of Hebrews, thus the stark warning in opening verses of the chapter.³⁷ Lane

³⁶William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47a (Dallas: Word, 1991), 105.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 97.

argues that if one hardens their heart to the message of the good news of Christ, they will never enter into God's Sabbath rest. The eschatological understanding of "my rest" in Psalm 95:11 is the underpinning of Hebrews 4:1. One must believe in Christ in order to enter into true Sabbath Rest. Unbelief results in exclusion from Sabbath rest both now and for eternity.³⁸

Donald A. Hagner shares Lane's argument that the author of Hebrews uses the term "rest" to point the believer toward the future reality of an eternity spent in the presence of the Lord. Hagner points to the "typological relationship," which exists between rest in the land of Canaan and Sabbath rest spoken of in 4:1. Sabbath rest enjoyed by believers now is a foreshadowing of the rest they will enjoy in eternity.³⁹

France also interprets Sabbath rest in Hebrews as an eschatological reality. The author of Hebrews employs the word "rest" to communicate both present and future realities. The disobedience of Israel kept them from entering the temporal rest of Canaan. The message the reader of Hebrews should heed is not to lose his or her heavenly rest by being disobedient to the call of Christ.⁴⁰

These commentators are correct in their assessment of the future reality of Sabbath rest. Without the sacrifice of Christ, it would be impossible to enter a heavenly rest. This fact alone brings great comfort and ease to the believer. At the same time, the rest God intends for believers to experience is not just a future rest. A biblical rhythm of work and rest can be implemented in the life of a believer. Sabbath rest is not only a future promise of heavenly rest, but also a present reality as a part of a consistent rhythm of work and rest.

³⁸Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 98.

³⁹Donald A. Hagner, *A Good News Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 54.

⁴⁰R. T. France, *Hebrews*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 61.

The Present Reality of Sabbath Rest

Guthrie mentions the seventh day in the creation account is an “open-ended day” thus suggesting that “rest” in Hebrews 4 cannot be limited to a physical place or moment in time.⁴¹ Sabbath rest, while existing in the future, must also be seen as a present reality. To strengthen his argument, Guthrie asks how the Hebrews author’s audience could “fall short *now*” if Sabbath rest was no more than a future promise.⁴²

The Sabbath rest spoken of in Hebrews 4 shares four characteristics according to Guthrie. First, it is a rest that the hearers must fear missing.⁴³ The eternal consequences of missing the promise of salvation should strike fear into the heart of any listener. Just like the early audience of the book of Hebrews, people need to take their spiritual condition very seriously.

Second, some in the community are in danger of rejecting Sabbath rest because they have not combined faith with obedience to God’s Word.⁴⁴ The author of Hebrews is encouraging the ancient believers to stand strong in their faith and not fall away. This is important in today’s context for those in the church who claim to be followers of Christ but do not reflect true Christian faith in their lifestyle. Entering into the Sabbath rest provided by the atoning sacrifice of Christ results in a changed life. The change is evident through obedience to God. Resting in the Lord leads the believer away from religious passivity and toward acts of faith.

Third, Sabbath rest, when put into practice, consists of ceasing from one’s own works.⁴⁵ Guthrie takes the Sabbath principle of resting from works and puts an interesting

⁴¹George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 151.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 152.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 164.

spin on it. To rest in Christ is to trust in his work of atonement. Rest in the atoning sacrifice of Christ is ultimately where one finds rest for his or her soul. Fourth, the rest spoken of in Hebrews 4 may be entered now and will be consummated at the end of the age.⁴⁶

The tendency toward rush and overwork leads to the path of stress and fatigue. The tyranny of the urgent causes one to sacrifice what is important for what has to be accomplished right now. Everyday tasks that need to be accomplished immediately have the tendency to stack up and block out the most important things in life. Relationships are put on hold while careers are pursued. Physical health is sacrificed in the name of checking something off a to do list. Guthrie suggests, “Such frenzied activity perhaps manifests a deeper spiritual emptiness, which prompts us to be ever striving for something of eternal value to fill the void.”⁴⁷

God fills the spiritual void that exists in the human heart. He did so by sending Jesus to serve as the atoning sacrifice for sin. A believer is called to live out this salvation by imitating God and joining him in kingdom work. Hebrews 4 reminds the believer that they are to also join God in Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is a vital part of the work of God’s kingdom.

Conclusion

In creation, God worked six days and rested on the seventh. He then instructs the children of Israel to imitate this same rhythm of work and rest in Exodus 16. In Acts 15:28-29, the apostles and elders of the early Christian church free the believer from the burden of the many regulations surrounding the law and subsequent Sabbath practices. In Hebrew 4, the author invites Christians into both a present and future reality of Sabbath rest.

⁴⁶Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 165.

⁴⁷Ibid.

In *Sermons on Genesis*, John Calvin summarizes the purpose of Sabbath and the need for resting in the Lord as a vital part of the creative order:

When God sees that we are going astray, that we are often lost, and that we turn our backs on him, he calls us back to himself and sets aside one day for us, as if to say, “Now then, it is no longer a matter of having a good time as you are now doing, for you must be attentive to considering my works, which guide you to adore my glory and my majesty and to learn to subject yourselves to me, knowing that you belong to me and that all things I have given you to serve you and be of use to you obligate you to me even more.”⁴⁸

In the world today, work is a way of life. Rest is many times seen as unnecessary and in the worst case, lazy. It is easy to make a case for work from the Scripture. God worked for six days to create the universe (Gen 1). God worked to free the Israelites. Jesus worked as a carpenter. Paul worked as a tent maker and encouraged Christians to work as though they are working for the Lord (Col 3:23; Eph 6:7). Work is an important part of God’s plan for the believer.

A solid case for work can be made in Scripture, so too a case for rest. Just as Scripture encourages the Christian to work hard, as if they are working for the Lord, it also instructs one to rest in and with God. The Creator fashioned humans for both work and rest. One works better after he or she rests and rests better after he or she works. If work and rest are to be part of the Christian life, it is well advised to base this rhythm of life on biblical principles.

⁴⁸John Calvin and Rob Roy McGregor, *Sermons on Genesis, Chapters 1:1-11:4: Forty-Nine Sermons Delivered in Geneva between 4 September 1559 and 23 January 1560* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 128.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES
RELATED TO SABBATH REST

Rest is necessary. Jesus himself went to sleep in a boat while the world seemed to be crashing in around both him and the disciples (Matt 8:23-27). Why then do people run from a healthy rhythm of work and rest? Even humanistic psychologist Rollo May observes, “It is an old and ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way.”¹ Chapter 2 of this project showed that God provides the opportunity for believers to experience a healthy rhythm of work and rest. This chapter shows the need in today’s world for the practice of Sabbath rest. In today’s world, busyness has become a virtue. Sabbath rest is countercultural. The human body was not designed for constant motion. Mankind needs regular intervals of rest to maintain physical and spiritual health. When one’s life is filled with chaos and distraction, his or her well-being suffers and spiritual vitality fades.²

An individual’s life is negatively affected by the absence of Sabbath rest. This chapter serves to illustrate that this absence can lead to widespread problems, including poor time management skills, overwhelming busyness, family stress, and burnout. The result of these problems is a challenge for the believer and ultimately, the church. Swenson warns, “Chronic overload drains your spiritual reserves. It is an enemy of prayer, worship,

¹Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969) 15.

²William Brown, “Tuning Out the Noise,” *Cedarville University Torch* 32, no. 1 (2011): 1.

meditation, love for one another and service. We either stop doing those things, or worse, we simply go through the motions.”³

Time Management

The practice of Sabbath rest helps the individual practically manage one of the most important resources at his or her disposal—time. The pace of life can exact a toll on the individual whose life becomes dominated by the calendar and clock.⁴ The proliferation of time management tools is one indicator of the desire in today’s society to subdue busy schedules.⁵ The devices used to simplify scheduling have become increasingly sophisticated. Nevertheless, how an individual manages his or her time can be one of the most difficult areas of life. William Penn writes,

Time is what we need most, but alas, what we use worst. God will most certainly reckon with us most strictly when time is no more. Time is so important to us, both for this world and the next, that I can hardly wish you anything better than seriously consider what you do with your time. How and what do you use it for? What return do you make to God, your neighbor, and yourself for it? Will you never have an account book for this? Using time well is the greatest wisdom and work of life.⁶

Good time management aids the individual in the practicalities of life. Time management is necessary for a biblical rhythm of work and rest. Jonathan Edwards observed a time of Sabbath rest regularly. Edwards described one such day as “a sweet

³Richard Swenson, “Living Inside the Margin,” *Cedarville University Torch* 32, no. 1 (2011): 5.

⁴Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 40.

⁵At the time of this writing, a Google search of the term “time management” revealed about 492,000,000 results. A similar search on Amazon.com revealed over 134,000 books available for sale.

⁶William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude: Wise Sayings on the Conduct of Human Life*, ed. Eric K. Taylor (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2003), 44.

refreshing season, walking alone in the fields.”⁷ Edward’s practice of Sabbath rest was the direct result of decisions he made about how he would spend his time.⁸ A challenge exists for people who face daily activities that meet or exceed the amount of time one feels they have to accomplish these tasks. The expectation individuals’ face with time management can create immense pressure.

Productivity is the measure of the American economy. Employers seek to hire workers who have the ability to accomplish as many tasks as possible for the amount of time they work. “Time is money,” they say. “You can sleep when you are dead.” This mindset has influenced the church as well. Busyness is the marker of many of the most committed church members. One may serve on multiple committees or areas of service within the church. It is easy to forget that God looks at the heart, not deeds (1 Sam 16:7).⁹

The time crunch many individuals live under is not entirely due to the external forces of greedy business practices or overbearing bosses. Everyone chooses how they manage his or her time. Technology allows for increased efficiency, but the internal drive to succeed pushes people to unbalanced schedules. A survey by The Society for Human Resource Management found that 72 percent of employees in America do not take a lunch break during the day and work past scheduled hours during the work week. These workers are not required to work these hours by their employers; they choose to do so. The pressure they are under to perform is self-imposed.¹⁰ This was not the desired

⁷Jonathan Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 289.

⁸Ibid., 164.

⁹Brown, “Tuning Out the Noise,” 1.

¹⁰Society for Human Resource Management, “Employees Admit Self-Imposed Pressure to Work Long Hours,” May 12, 2009, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.shrm.org/about/pressroom/pressreleases/pages/shrmpollememployeesadmitself->

outcome some futurists in the 1960s foresaw. Technological progress was supposed to bring about the one wage earner family who only had to work twenty hours per week with increased productivity and wages. This did not happen according to the predictions. The average husband and wife unit currently work ninety hours per week.¹¹ Given the opportunity to rest or work, many individuals choose to work at the expense of their own well-being. This choice to press on in work, whether made because of internal or external pressure, results in the need for a biblical rhythm of work and rest in the life of the believer.

Time itself can be perceived as oppressive when there is an absence of Sabbath rest. Heschel describes a negative view of time in the following manner:

Time to us is sarcasm, a slick treacherous monster with a jaw like a furnace incinerating every moment of our lives. Shrinking therefore, from facing time, we escape for shelter to things of space; possessions become the symbols of our repressions, jubilees of frustrations.¹²

Time should not be an issue of bondage in the life of the believer. Even with these negative descriptions, the concept of time is not cruel and overbearing. Time is part of the created order and thus should not be seen in a negative light. In a world that treats time as a commodity that can be acquired and controlled, the believer should seek a different approach to time management. This approach should be to imitate God in redeeming time. Time is a gift from God, and acknowledging this fact is the first step toward a biblical stewardship of time. While the practice of Sabbath rest does not immediately solve all the practical problems of time management, it does help one to see time as holy. Ryken writes, “If time is holy, then the work and leisure with which we fill it are also holy.”¹³

imposedpressuretoworklonghours.aspx. This article was based on a poll of 605 full-time or part-time employed US residents in 2009.

¹¹Swenson, “Living Inside the Margin,” 5.

¹²Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 5.

¹³Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 277.

The apostle Paul promotes the wisdom of good time management: “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:15-17). The King James Version uses the term “redeeming the time” at the beginning of verse 16.¹⁴ Good time management and biblical wisdom are partners. How a believer lives according to the time he or she is given matters to God. Wasting time is not in the best interest of the believer or the work of the gospel. Christians are commanded not to waste time.¹⁵

Christians should be good stewards of their time. How then should he or she incorporate good time management into a healthy rhythm of work and rest? A look at the early church provides one framework that can be practiced. Early followers of Christ maintained a weekly rhythm of work and rest. These believers were free in Christ from the law of Sabbath yet maintained the Jewish days of the week, giving special status to the Lord’s day. Carson shows that while the early church met on the first day of the week, they maintained “a definite continuity with the Old Testament people of God in that this was done on a weekly and not a monthly or yearly basis. In this the early church acknowledged the sabbatical sequence of time.”¹⁶ This “early church” view of time models a weekly cycle of working six days and observing Sabbath rest on the first day of the week.

Time management that includes Sabbath rest can be practiced as a day of resting in the Lord that includes worship, Bible study, prayer, and fellowship with believers. The thought of devoting an entire day to Sabbath rest may discourage an individual from

¹⁴“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:15-17 AV).

¹⁵Tim Keller, “Wisdom and Sabbath Rest,” October 23, 2014, accessed March 4, 2015, <http://qideas.org/articles/wisdom-and-Sabbath-rest/>.

¹⁶D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 200.

entering into the practice. Circumstances that prohibit individuals from practicing a full day of Sabbath rest is one reason a rigid system should not be promoted as the only option. Doing so creates a “take it or leave it” mentality for the person already struggling to manage their time.

There are feasible options for the practice of a twenty-four hour period of Sabbath rest. For instance, a twenty-four hour period of Sabbath rest could be practiced from Saturday evening to Sunday evening. If done as a family, a meal could mark the beginning of Sabbath rest and the remainder of the time could consist of sleep, church attendance, time together as a family in the afternoon, and ending the time of rest with the Sunday evening meal. This suggestion of a full day of Sabbath rest could be out of reach for the person who has to work on the weekend, the soldier who is deployed, or the person caring for an elderly parent that requires constant attention. While talking about practicing a full day of Sabbath rest, Tim Keller offers five suggestions for activity during the period of a day while at the same time allowing for those who cannot take that full amount of time away from work:

- 1) **Take some time for sheer inactivity.** If your Sabbath time is very busy and filled with scheduled activities of “recreation” and ministry, it will not suffice. There must be some cessation from activity or exertion.
- 2) **Take some time for avocational activity.** An avocation is something that is sheer pleasure to you, but that does require some intentionality and gives some structure to your Sabbath rest.
- 3) **Consider whether you are an introvert or an extrovert.** When planning your Sabbath rest, ask yourself what really recharges you.
- 4) **Don’t necessarily count family time as Sabbath time.** Do a realistic self-assessment of family time and how it affects you.
- 5) **Honor both micro and macro rhythms in your season of rest.** It is possible to voluntarily take on a season of work that requires high energy, long hours, and insufficient weekly Sabbath time. During this under-Sabbathed time, do not let the rhythms of prayer, bible study, and worship die. Be creative, but get it in.¹⁷

¹⁷Keller, “Wisdom and Sabbath Rest,” emphasis original. This is not an exhaustive list of Sabbath rest activities but merely some suggestions. Keller goes on in the article to suggest brainstorming ideas with others and “injecting” Sabbath rest into

When it comes to time management and creating a time for Sabbath rest, establishing a consistent rhythm is important. This does not have to include a literal twenty-four hour period of observance. Edwards states, “Assuring room for this rhythm is more important than the particular and varied contents we may give the rhythm.”¹⁸ The idea is to establish a regular time of Sabbath rest in which one ceases his or her work and focuses on resting in the Lord. The absence of such an approach to time management can create a schedule that negatively impacts the individual. When the busyness of life is not controlled, it can become overwhelming.

Overwhelming Busyness

The absence of Sabbath rest may result in overwhelming busyness. Swenson notes, “We are all running, but God’s not running after us. He knows that speed does not yield devotion. The presence of God is in inverse proportion to the pace of our lives—meditation, wisdom, and worship are slow, mellow, and deep.”¹⁹ Loehr and Schwartz note the digital age in which individuals live and its effect on people. A life overwhelmed by busyness is marked by “breadth rather than depth and quick reaction more than considered reflection. Life turns into a race to the next item on the to-do list without any margin in which one may consider who we really want to be or consider where we want to go.” Society seems to be fully connected digitally, but is melting down.²⁰ Wayne Muller echoes

one’s work life. Keller does not suggest that the only way to practice Sabbath rest is by observing a strict 24-hour day of rest every week. He makes allowance for practicing a rhythm of work and rest that is conducive to the individual’s life.

¹⁸Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time: Understanding and Practice for Contemporary Christians* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 39.

¹⁹Swenson, “Living Inside Margin,” 5.

²⁰Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, *The Power of Full Engagement* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 3.

Loehr and Schwartz' thoughts about the negative effect of busyness in the absence of Sabbath rest:

In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between action and rest. There is a universal refrain: I am so busy. As it all piles endlessly upon itself, the whole experience of being alive begins to melt into one enormous obligation. Sabbath time is a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest.²¹

Each day has the same number of hours, minutes, and seconds. One can fill his or her time each day with only a certain number of activities. There is nothing wrong with being busy. People have a God-given capacity to perform any number of tasks in a given time period. Some have a greater capacity than others.

Charles H. Spurgeon was one such individual who possessed an amazing capacity for productivity. Spurgeon pastored the largest church in the world, preached almost every day, edited his sermons for publication, wrote 120 books, ran 66 organizations, read 5 books per week, and wrote 500 letters each week with a dip pen.²² Spurgeon had a capacity to accomplish the plan God laid out for his life. What sets Spurgeon apart was not only the number of tasks he performed, but his ability to maintain balance amidst the heavy workload.

Most believers in today's society more likely identify with Kevin DeYoung's confession about the negative effect of busyness on everyday life. Busyness develops into a problem when the day's routine becomes burdensome. Time is spent just trying to get through the day. The tasks of everyday life become a struggle. The house must be

²¹Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam, 1999), 1-2.

²²Donald S. Whitney, "Too Busy to Lead Family Worship?" *The Southern Blog*, March 2, 2015, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.sbts.edu/blogs/2015/03/02/too-busy-to-lead-family-worship/>. Whitney has written extensively on the importance of biblical spiritual disciplines as an integral part of the believer's daily and weekly rhythm. For further study, see idem, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014).

kept clean, and sick children must be taken care of. “We wake up most mornings trying not to serve, just trying to survive.”²³

Busyness becomes a problem when life is lived at capacity with no room for margin. Swenson defines margin as “the space between our load and our limits.”²⁴ Margin benefits one by granting freedom and rest. Both relationships and service are restored as well as spiritual vitality. Medically, margin is good for physical health. “Add a dose of margin and see if life doesn’t come alive once again.”²⁵ The practice of Sabbath rest can be an important aspect of creating the margin that Swenson speaks of.

Few people would argue that marginless living is healthy or even desirable. Then why do so many individuals seem to live frenetic lives with very little time for rest? In his article, “Why We Humblebrag about Being Busy,” Greg McKeown reveals one of the driving factors behind the overwhelming busyness that has become commonplace in today’s society. The pursuit of “more” causes rational people to behave irrationally. The “undisciplined pursuit of more” has developed into a societal mindset that overvalues the idea of having it all, doing it all, or achieving it all.²⁶

Sustained busyness with no margin eventually damages the individual in a number of ways. DeYoung points out three dangers of busyness to avoid. First, busyness can ruin one’s sense of joy. Joy should be one of the marks of a believer’s life (Phil 4:4). The second danger is that busyness can rob one’s heart. The worries of this world will choke out what God has planted in the life of the Christian (Mark 4:1-20). The third danger DeYoung states is that busyness can cover up the rot in an individual’s soul: “The

²³Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 21.

²⁴Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Resources to Overloaded lives* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 69.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Greg McKeown, “Why We Humblebrag about Being Busy,” *Harvard Business Review*, June 6, 2014, accessed March 5, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2014/06/why-we-humblebrag-about-being-busy>.

greatest danger of busyness is that there may be greater dangers you never have time to consider.”²⁷

In the light of these realizations, believers should enjoy Sabbath rest as part of their normal pace of life. Puritan preacher George Swinnock described a day of Sabbath rest as the “market day of the soul.”²⁸ Sabbath rest is a time when the believer can invest time in the worship of God. The products available on this “market day of the soul” are a time set aside to focus on the Lord, physical renewal, pleasure, leisure, recreation, and intentionality that brings about a more balanced life. Sabbath rest is both a time for rest and a willingness to be still. The time should be calendared, but the heart should be a willing participant. “It is a day we enter, but just as much a way we see.” By resting in God one may experience the *rest* of God he or she misses during the busyness of life.²⁹

With these Sabbath delights available in Swinnock’s market place for the soul, one would think the practice of Sabbath rest would be an aspiration in the life of a believer. Why would one with a heart for the Lord not jump at the opportunity to spend a day with him? In the same way a child loves to spend time with his or her father, the believer should long to spend time with the Lord. The self-absorbed will resent any time taken away from personal accomplishment or productivity. Without love for God such a requirement will seem narrow and a heavy burden. But for the godly it is a broad road of liberty and joy.³⁰ What a wonderful picture of Sabbath rest! Who would not want this experience on a regular basis? Yet some Christians treat the concept of a healthy rhythm of work and rest as unrealistic. In *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of*

²⁷DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, 26.

²⁸George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1868), 1:258.

²⁹Mark Buchanon, *The Rest of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 3.

³⁰Walter J. Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight* (East Peoria, IL: Versa, 2009), 20.

Now, Walter Brueggemann points out the helplessness one may feel in a society steeped in Collin's "undisciplined pursuit of more."³¹ When speaking of choosing to practice a time of Sabbath rest, Brueggeman explains that it takes intentionality and communal effort to rise above the pressures of daily life and the barrage of intrusions into family life. Sabbath rest becomes an act of resistance in a culture where one may feel helplessly caught in a "market ideology."³²

DeYoung states, "We hate being busy. But we never hate it enough to change."³³ People are creatures of habit. Sometimes individuals will cling to an unhealthy aspect of life just because it is part of their routine. Even though the very thing he or she is hanging onto is harming them. Overwhelming busyness saps a person's energy so that making a positive change may seem impossible. DeYoung goes on to write, "We won't say no to more craziness until we say yes to more Jesus. We will choose busyness over blessing."³⁴

The practical reality is that the practice of Sabbath rest does not make lives less busy during a time of work. Work is work and rest is rest. The nature of work itself is to be busy. The apostle Paul is a good biblical example of someone who was busy in all the right ways. The believer should work hard and feel the results of their work. He or she may be tired and even exhausted at times. Like Paul, one may say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" (2 Cor 11:29). However, God works in weakness. For when one is weak,

³¹Jim Collins, *How the Mighty Fall and Why Some Companies Never Give in* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 45-64.

³²Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), xvi.

³³DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, 117.

³⁴Ibid.

then he or she is strong (2 Cor 12:10). “Paul had pressure. You have pressure too. But God can handle the pressure.”³⁵

God is not surprised by the circumstances believers face each day, which is an important truth to remember. When one is overwhelmed by busyness, God is in control. Sabbath rest is a good way to regularly rest in the sustaining work of God and let him be in control. Swenson writes, “Fortunately for us, God breaks into our work and says, ‘OK, good job. Now it’s time to sleep. Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on the universe.’”³⁶

Family Stress

Time management issues and overwhelming busyness ultimately create havoc in an individual’s home-life. The absence of Sabbath rest may result in family stress. Swenson states, “Virtually all of our relationships are damaged by hurry. Many families are being starved to death by velocity. Our children lie wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions.”³⁷

The task of raising a family is not easy, even in the best of circumstances. Unfortunately, the current societal context creates a number of challenges to marriage and family. Modern society is exceedingly busy, and overload can bring disastrous results. A sad plight of children and youth today is evident in families where parents become more absorbed in other things, leaving very little time for their children.³⁸

Children are not the only family members who suffer under the strain of family stress. Karri Wyatt Kent echoes the stress many mothers face each day:

³⁵Ibid., 107.

³⁶Swenson, “Living Inside the Margin,” 5.

³⁷Richard Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 125.

³⁸Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*, 15.

I used to handle intense on-the-job pressure at a daily newspaper and stay cool. I actually enjoyed the adrenaline rush of dealing with demanding editors, tight deadlines, the noise and chaos of the newsroom. I could interview powerful politicians and pound out a breaking news story in a busy newsroom. So why can't I handle bedtime with two people less than three feet tall? What happened to me?

I wish my husband were home. I wish my kids were angelic more often, instead of only when they're sleeping or when they think I'm not looking. I wish I had more of God's peace and strength.³⁹

"More of God's peace and strength" can be the cry of the Christian parent. Richard Swenson identifies some common issues facing families today. The first of these is accessibility. Gadgets abound in today's society. They bring with them a fixation that consumes the owner. The result is a digital overload that has removed the privacy and solitude that was a natural part of life. There are no "hiding places" left where one may focus on being renewed and replenished.⁴⁰

Swenson is not the first to identify the phenomena of humanity creating devices by which to fill their time. John Owen published a work in 1671 that points to the problem with "devices." In Owen's *Exercitations* he states,

Solomon tells us, that in his discussion after the nature and state of things in the world, this alone he had found out; that is absolutely and unto his satisfaction; namely, "that God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions, (Eccles 7:29)."⁴¹

Owen later writes, "In all our ways, actions and duties, some of these 'inventions' are ready to immix themselves, unto our own disturbance, and the perverting of the right ways of God."⁴²

The second of Swenson's issues facing families goes hand in hand with the

³⁹Keri Wyatt Kent, *God's Whisper in a Mother's Chaos: Bringing Peace Home* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 16.

⁴⁰Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome*, 51.

⁴¹John Owen, *Exercitations Concerning the Name, Original, Nature, Use, and Continuance of a Day of Sacred Rest wherein the Original of the Sabbath from the Foundation of the World, the Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (London: R. W. for Nath. Ponder, 1671), 2.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 3.

accessibility created through technology. The problem of media overload affects today's family unlike any other time in history. All aspects of contemporary life have been influenced and affected by some form of media. Everything in a fallen world has a downside. In regard to media, many negative influences are causing problems for families.⁴³ Swenson outlines five effects of media overload faced by families today. Swenson says that media overload

Resets the Moral Acceptability Threshold: Moral drift is important to understand, for it continues unabated. Extrapolate ten or twenty years into the future and it is frightening to imagine what media content awaits us.

Resets the Shock Threshold: In the past, if we saw blood, killing, or tragedies on the evening news, it would disturb us for weeks. Today, however, the rule of thumb is, "if it bleeds, it leads."

Results in Addictive Behavior: As a generalization, when media is available, people use it as a first option—the younger the age, the truer the principle holds. Media increasingly defines our world, and taking the media away is like taking our world away.

Gives a More Negative View of the World: The world is already in enough trouble and we don't need to make it appear any worse than it is. But in the world of media, bad news sells.

Increases Exposure to Sexual Material: The pervasiveness of media leads to an almost unavoidable exposure to sexually explicit material at ever-younger ages.⁴⁴

A family that chooses to unplug from devices and media during a time of Sabbath rest could learn that media in moderation is healthier than being saturated by it every day of the week. Computers, social media, and telecommunications bring a sense of disconnectedness. Technology has positive aspects, but there also is much to lose. One's life may become dominated by devices and access to many forms of media. Researchers have formed categories for different types of media and explained the effects of each medium. Two of these categories are called "lean back" and "lean forward"

⁴³Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome*, 145.

⁴⁴Ibid., 149, emphasis original.

mediums.⁴⁵ Television is considered a lean back medium because it is used passively. Computers and handheld devices are considered lean forward mediums because they require engagement from the user. The ramifications of the mediums are the same within the family or social settings. “We withdraw from active engagement with our companions, essentially defining them as secondary as we shift our attention away from them.”⁴⁶

One of the negative effects the absence of Sabbath rest has seen is the disconnect that develops within families. Out of control schedules and overwhelming busyness cultivate a family dynamic where parents “check out” and children “check in” to the connection of media. A healthy family dynamic requires “attention and engagement.” The longer a family exists in “lean back” relationships, where a passive approach to the home is taken, the more relational drift will be experienced.

While Sabbath rest should be observed as an individual practice, a household who practices it as a healthy rhythm of work and rest will experience the blessings promised in God’s Word. Carson states, “The Pentateuch contains no promises; however, at a later stage there are promises for those who keep the Sabbath.”⁴⁷ Some of the blessings of Sabbath rest are seen in the book of Isaiah:

How blessed is the man who does this, and the son of the man who takes hold of it; who keeps from profaning the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing evil. (Isa 56:2)

For thus says the Lord, “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold fast to my covenant, to them I will give in my house and within my walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. (Isa 56:4-5)

Also to the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants every one who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast to my covenant; Even those I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and

⁴⁵J. Wesley Baker, “Alone Together,” *Cedarville University Torch* 32, no. 1 (2011): 10.

⁴⁶Baker, “Alone Together,” 10.

⁴⁷Harold Dressler and D. A. Carson, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” in *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*, 32.

their sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar; For my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. (Isa 56:6-7)

If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot, from doing you own pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking you own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isa 58:13-14)

In these passages from Isaiah, God is not addressing an individual. He is communicating with the community of Israel. Many of the terms used in the previous passages center around the image of a home: “the son of the man” (56:2), “my house” and “a name better than that of sons and daughters” (56:4-5), “my house of prayer” (56:7), and finally, “the heritage of Jacob your father” (58:14). These images of Sabbath rest no doubt had a profound effect on the households of Israel. Sabbath rest takes on a new dimension when it moves from an individual exercise to a family practice.

The blessing of Sabbath rest is not only illustrated in the Old Testament, but the New Testament as well. The words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30 are a timely message for those under the weight of family stress: “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus’ invitation to those who are heavy-laden ends chapter 11. It is no coincidence that chapter 12 begins with Scripture about Sabbath (see Matt 12:1-14). Christ shows how to “experience the peace and rest of salvation on and through this holy day.”⁴⁸ The practice of a regular time of Sabbath rest is one way a family can choose to live in the blessing of God provided through Christ. By resting in a relationship with the Lord, through Christ, one may also delight in a time to delight in everything the Lord has provided to enjoy.

⁴⁸Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrian Springs, MI: Tesar, 1980), 164.

Burnout

Wayne Cordiero, was a pastor struggling to lead a church as the flames of burnout consumed him. His vision for the church was barren, and his heart for others began to shrink. Everyday took its toll on him, yet he did not know how to stop the progression of burnout. The exhaustion and drain were winning.⁴⁹

The absence of Sabbath rest may result in burnout. Cordiero is not alone. Witt writes that “1500 pastors leave the ministry permanently each month in America and one out of every ten ministers will actually retire as a minister.”⁵⁰

Richard Krejcir surveyed 1,050 pastors and uncovered some disturbing statistics showing the burnout many are experiencing:

- 1) Fifty seven percent said that they would leave if they had a better place to go—including secular work.
- 2) Eighty nine percent said that they had considered leaving the ministry a one time.
- 3) Seventy percent stated that they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly basis and even daily basis.⁵¹

Pastors influence families in the church. A pastor who models Sabbath rest will lead others to do the same.⁵² Cordeiro’s peace of mind and ministry survived as the result of beginning the practice of Sabbath rest.⁵³ Pastors are not exempt from the need of Sabbath rest. God provided a weekly rhythm of work and rest for those burdened with work and under the heavy hand of task masters. Sabbath rest provides protection against exploitation. Everyone is equal in the right to rest. This important perspective should be

⁴⁹Wayne Cordiero, *Leading on Empty* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 2009), 13.

⁵⁰Lance Witt, *Replenish* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 18.

⁵¹Richard J. Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors: What Is Going on with the Pastors in America?” accessed March 7, 2015, <http://www.intotheword.org/apps/articles/?articleid=36562>.

⁵²Bruce Miller, *Your Life in Rhythm* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2009), 224.

⁵³Codiero, *Leading on Empty*, 122.

included in the view of Christian work and recreation.⁵⁴ Lincoln also asks, “If God commanded his people to rest every seven days back in the Old Testament and it was considered valuable, is it not likely that such regular rest will be just as valuable today?”⁵⁵ Without leaders in the church who possess a healthy rhythm of work and rest, the typical church family may live in ignorance of the grace afforded them in Sabbath rest.

The issue of burnout is not just a phenomenon among pastors. People in the church also experience the exhaustion of burnout. In an interview with Bill Hybels, Anne Jackson asked, “What are some of the diseases you see plaguing the church today?”⁵⁶ Hybels’ responds with what he called “twin towers of concern.” The first is burnout, and the second is complacency. He observes that many believers are sliding into apathy and complacency. Hybel’s concern is just as strong for those who are exhausted as to those who are apathetic. He hopes people can tap into energy from the Holy Spirit, so that instead of burnout, a sustaining, productive, Christ-honoring ministry can result.⁵⁷

Exhaustion crosses both age and cultural boundaries. In a study of nearly 300,000 teens between 1991-2012, The University of Michigan’s national survey revealed that more than half of teenagers fifteen and older are sleep deprived. This group falls two hours short of the recommended amount of nightly sleep.⁵⁸ The price of

⁵⁴A. T. Lincoln, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 403.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Anne Jackson, *Mad Church Disease* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 44.

⁵⁷Ibid., 44. Bill Hybels’ use the term “holy discontent” to refer to the action one takes when faced with an aspect of spiritual brokenness in the world. Holy discontent, according to Hybels’ use of the term, motivates believers to involve themselves in God’s plan for the world. For more information about the term, see Bill Hybels, *Holy Discontent: Fueling the Fire That Ignites Personal Vision* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 13-49.

⁵⁸Katherine M. Keyes et al., “The Great Sleep Recession: Changes in Sleep Duration Among US Adolescents, 1991-2012,” *Pediatrics* 135, no. 3 (2015): 462.

prosperity and success can lead to stress related health issues. According to a 2010 American Psychological Association survey, 44 percent of Americans indicated their stress levels had worsened over the last five years, specifically in the categories of money, work, and the economy. The percentage of stress related illnesses such as heart attacks, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, sleep, and anxiety disorders have increased dramatically in the twenty-first century.⁵⁹

Burnout can do more harm than one may realize. In Japan people are dying from overwork. Men in their thirties and forties, with no prior health problems, are dying while at work. So many are dying that there is an official term for the trend. Karoshi is defined as death from overwork. Overwork is causing high blood pressure that eventually causes acute heart failure, arteriosclerosis, or cerebral hemorrhage. It is estimated that ten thousand Japanese people a year are dying from Karoshi. By comparison, the same number of people are killed by traffic accidents. Karoshi is one product that America must not import.⁶⁰

The modern individualized lifestyle produces substantial pressure. When work and rest are out of balance, various forms of coping mechanisms may surface. Individuals may turn to the escape of the internet, television, drink, or drugs. Anything to numb the pressure can be found. Unfortunately, the rhythm of life for many swings from the pursuit of achievement to unhealthy escapes. An unbalanced rhythm of work and rest is based on a distorted view of humanity and poisons every area of life. Quality of life suffers and burnout may become a reality.⁶¹ God's people should not live in ways that constantly reflect the unhealthy tendencies that lead to burnout. Every day lived in

⁵⁹Milton Becknell, "Healthy in Mind, Body, and Spirit," *Cedarville University Torch* 32, no. 1 (2011): 14-15.

⁶⁰Raymond Brown, "Karoshi: A Fatal Export from Japan," *Contemporary Review* 263, no. 1533 (1993): 197.

⁶¹Edwards, *Sabbath Time*, 4.

exhaustion is a day in which one may be hampered in their service to the Lord. When people live in a sustained crisis, breakdown becomes imminent. One must be a good steward and learn how to distinguish between crisis and pseudo-crisis. “Psalm 46:10 admonishes us to ‘cease (unproductive) striving’ and learn to ‘be still.’”⁶² Sabbath rest requires the individual to rest and find quietness in his or her life.

The practice of a healthy rhythm of work and rest is one way to bring about positive change in the area of burnout. Sabbath rest brings with it a refreshing day that is not free of activity, but rather full refreshing action. What is rest to one person may not be rest to another. The principle of Sabbath rest is that the individual does what is best according to their way of life. For instance, one who has a sedentary job may be more refreshed by a time of physical activity during a time of Sabbath rest. An individual who provides manual labor all week in the heat of the summer may rest by sitting still in an air-conditioned room. This does not mean that any activity outside of one’s work is advisable or could be considered holy. Some actions can be sinful. All action should be done with God as the focus. Stuart writes, “To love God is not to have a lazy day one day a week; rather it is to focus on doing his will specifically on one day a week—to worship, learn, study, care, and strengthen the spirit.”⁶³

Galatians 6:7 teaches that God cannot be mocked. People will reap what they sew. The good news from a psychological perspective is that anything learned can be potentially modified and unlearned. People do not have to conform to the pattern of this world (Rom 12:2) but can be changed by the Holy Spirit. Pursuing physical, mental, and spiritual rest is not only healthy, but is a conscious act of submission to the Creator of the universe who loves and knows what is best for everyone he created.⁶⁴

⁶²Becknell, “Healthy in Mind, Body, and Spirit,” 16.

⁶³Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 460.

⁶⁴Becknell, “Healthy in Mind, Body, and Spirit,” 17.

Conclusion

Sabbath rest is a theologically complex concept that can be confusing for the average believer.⁶⁵ Church members who are aware of Sabbath rest as a biblical concept are often confused by the different theological interpretations and how he or she is to honor the command to remember it and keep it holy.⁶⁶ With the disappearance of many cultural boundaries that marked Sunday as a day for worship and rest, so has the practice of resting in the Lord through anything more than attending a church service. Sabbath rest is seen as a foreign concept that is not truly necessary for Christians.

A regular cycle of work and Sabbath rest is a realistic goal for most believers. One makes room in their life for what he or she perceives to be valuable. When the understanding of Sabbath rest is increased in the light of God's Word within a culture that is starved for rest, the practice should follow. This chapter has shown what can happen in the absence of Sabbath rest. The practice is valuable for believers who suffer from poor time management skills, overwhelming busyness, family stress, and burnout. So many suffer needlessly under the weight of daily burdens when the grace of Sabbath rest, provided through Christ, can be enjoyed within a healthy rhythm of work and rest.

⁶⁵Brown, "Sabbath Rest," *Cedarville University Torch* 32, no. 1 (2011): 2.

⁶⁶Tamara C. Eskenazi, *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xi.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS OF SABBATH REST SERMON SERIES AND SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

The purpose of this project was to lead the families of New Work Fellowship in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to develop a rhythm of work and rest in their lives as a result of a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest. The first goal of the project was to administer a survey to the congregation to determine their understanding of Sabbath rest. The second goal was to develop a four-week sermon series on the subject of Sabbath rest. The third goal of the project was to increase the knowledge of Sabbath rest among the congregation through delivering the four-week sermon series and administering a post-series survey.

The four-week sermon series taught the congregation about the biblical concept of Sabbath rest. The teaching in the first sermon focused on the rhythm of work and rest seen in Genesis 1:1-2:3. The second sermon focused on the model of Sabbath rest seen in Exodus 16. The third sermon showed from Acts 15 how believers are free in Christ when practicing Sabbath rest. Finally, the fourth sermon from Hebrews 4 instructed the congregation about what it means to rest in the Lord while practicing Sabbath rest.

Knowledge of Sabbath rest is incomplete without the practice of Sabbath rest. The fourth goal was to develop an eight-week small group curriculum to lead adults to practice Sabbath rest. The fifth goal of this project was to increase the practice of Sabbath rest among at least 10 adults who participated in the adult small group Bible study. During the first two weeks, the study focused on how God works and rests. Dealing with the natural resistance the believer may face when incorporating Sabbath rest into a weekly rhythm of work and rest was the focus of the third week. Instruction in the fourth week taught the importance of preparation leading up to Sabbath rest. In the fifth and

sixth weeks, freedom in Christ and how to practice Sabbath rest in the light of Christ's fulfillment of the Mosaic law was discussed. During the final two weeks, participants were led to understand the practical aspects of resting in the Lord both for salvation and in a weekly practice of Sabbath rest.

Sermon Series Curriculum Development and Approval

The initial step in the implementation of this project was a twelve-week preparation period in which the sermon series and small group material were developed. A basic framework of the four-week sermon series and eight-week small group curriculum was developed beginning in May 2015. Discussion of the development and approval of the eight-week small group curriculum follows later in this chapter.

During these twelve weeks, the worship services were planned in conjunction with the worship pastor. Worship elements were planned around the theme of Sabbath rest for each week. In addition to the sermons, each service contained songs, Scripture reading, and corporate prayer that focused on resting in the Lord. Also in the time of this preparation period, the missional pastor helped develop video illustrations and promotional images used during the sermon series. A fully developed framework, completed in August 2015, offered clear direction for the four-week sermon series. This clear direction, however, allowed freedom for necessary weekly adjustments and flexibility for the completion of final detailed outlines.

The four-week sermon series was developed around four biblical passages that each taught a different aspect of Sabbath rest. The teaching from Genesis 1:1-2:3 in week 1 focused on the rhythm of work and rest seen in the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3. The sermon on week 2 explored the model of Sabbath rest God gave the Israelites in Exodus 16. The message taught on week 3, from Acts 15:4-11, established that when practicing Sabbath rest, the believer is free in Christ and not bound to the Mosaic law. The final sermon on week 4 discussed what it means to rest in the Lord for salvation

and during a weekly time of Sabbath rest from Hebrews 4. Each week contained biblical instruction paired with practical application concerning the practice of Sabbath rest.

Evaluation of the Sermon Series

During the twelve-week preparation period, a panel of elders evaluated the sermon series. The panel consisted of Kevin Lee, Willis Adkins, Josh Hensley, Danny Frances, and Paul Goodman. Kevin Lee is the lead pastor of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Lee received his D.Min. from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and has pastored churches in Kentucky, Arkansas, and Colorado. He served as Acting Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dean of Academic Services for Colorado Christian University. Lee is currently an adjunct professor for Colorado Christian University. He evaluated the material from an educator's perspective.

Willis Adkins is the Missional Pastor at New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Adkins has been on pastoral staff for five years, serves on the preaching team, and leads a small group. As the Missional Pastor, Adkins evaluated the material for practical application.

Josh Hensley is the Worship Pastor at New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Hensley has served in ministry at churches in Kentucky and Missouri. Hensley has a strength in seeing the flow of worship themes and how sermons fit in worship services. Hensley evaluated the sermon series to help determine the amount of content delivered each week.

Danny Frances is a founding member of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Frances is an accomplished businessman and currently is the CEO of six companies. Frances evaluated the sermon series from the perspective of being at New Work Fellowship since the beginning and knowing what fits the makeup of the church. This perspective was important since the subject of Sabbath rest had never been taught in the church before.

Paul Goodman is another founding member of New Work Fellowship and has served as worship pastor, worship team member, and small group leader. Goodman is a computer systems administrator and has a strength in analysis. He evaluated the material from the perspective of how individuals in the congregation would receive the message. These men provided important feedback to the practical application of Sabbath rest and focus of the biblical teaching utilizing the evaluation rubric.¹

Each sermon in the series exceeded 90 percent of the sufficient score on the rubric needed to be considered successful. The goal of 90 percent sufficiency was surpassed and allowed the four-week preaching series to proceed with the approved sermons. The panel provided valuable feedback for the series. The men gave encouraging feedback on the aspects of the sermon series they thought were valuable to the congregation. Not only did the panel read and evaluate the sermon series, they also embodied the concept of Sabbath rest. Kevin Lee, Willis Adkins, Josh Hensley, and Paul Goodman all began practicing a time of Sabbath rest as part of their weekly rhythm of work and rest. Danny Frances did not adopt a new practice because he already considered Sunday a time of Sabbath rest in his week.

The panel also challenged the material in order to refine it. Kevin Lee offered feedback with ideas about the family application of Sabbath rest and practical things to do in order to practice resting in the Lord. Paul Goodman offered feedback that helped reduce redundancy during the series. Danny Frances, Josh Hensley, and Willis Adkins all offered feedback that encouraged good practical application.

Participant Recruitment

While the congregation of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky, was readily available for the pre-series survey and the sermon series, some recruitment was done to insure participation in the pre-series survey and to promote the sermon series.

¹See appendix 2.

A list of 150 church members was generated from those who had been in regular attendance for six months. An email was sent to these people informing them of the upcoming survey and sermon series.² The group was asked to be in attendance on the Sunday the pre-series survey was administered. The email also asked them to listen to all four sermons in the series either in a worship service or online before participating in the post-series survey. The group was asked to respond to the email if they were going to be able to participate in the pre and post-series surveys and watch all four sermons.

The intention of the recruitment was not to track these participants since the surveys were to be anonymous. The intention of the recruitment was to create a core group of congregants who were informed and willing to participate. The email was sent to 150 regular attenders on July 27, 2015. Positive responses from 76 people were returned by email within the same week. The goal of the pre- and posts-series surveys was to have 100 congregants participate.³ The group of 76 committed participants insured the goal of 100 congregants participating in the pre-series survey and four-week sermon series would be reached. On the Sundays the pre-series survey was administered, 263 surveys were completed.

Pre-Series Survey and Observations

The twelve-week preparation period ended with administering a pre-series survey.⁴ Originally, the survey was to be administered on the first week of a twelve-week preparation period, however, it was determined that August 2015, was the best time to begin preaching the four-week sermon series. At New Work Fellowship the month of August is one of the highest attended months of the year. Attendance increases as school starts and summer break ends. In order to maximize congregational participation, the

²See appendix 5.

³See p. 8 of the “Project Methodology” in chap. 1.

⁴See appendix 1.

sermon series began on August 9, 2015. Administering the pre-series survey was adjusted from the first week of twelve-week preparation period, which would have been May 17, 2015, to August 2, 2015. Had it been administered in May, the survey would not reflect many of the same participants present during the August sermon series.

The survey included a section for biographical information and another section for statements regarding Sabbath rest. The results of the first section provided a biographical picture of the congregation.⁵ The second portion of the survey contained statements to measure two aspects of the congregation's concept of Sabbath rest. The first was the congregation's understanding of the biblical model of Sabbath rest. The group of statements measures the accuracy of the following claim:

While there is excitement and enthusiasm in reaching those that are farthest from God, the inherent challenge is the lack of biblical knowledge the average church attendee possesses. Many times the basic message and narratives of the Bible are new to them. There has not been sufficient teaching in the area of Sabbath rest.⁶

Ten of the 20 statements on the survey measured participant's understanding of the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.⁷

The second aspect the survey explored was the congregation's weekly rhythm of work and rest. These statements sought to form a general picture of the participants' lifestyle and to determine effects of different levels of stress, fatigue, and burnout. These lifestyle statements related to the following statement:

The families of New Work Fellowship struggle due to the lack of a rhythm of work and rest based on a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest. The hectic pace of life and lack of true spiritual rest combine to create fatigue in which it is hard for individuals to make wise decisions concerning family, health, work and spiritual discipline. There is a need among the families of New Work Fellowship to develop a healthy rhythm of work and rest.⁸

⁵See appendix 6.

⁶See p. 3 of the "Ministry Context" in chap. 1.

⁷See appendix 1. Statements 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 measured the participants' understanding of the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.

⁸See p. 4 of the "Ministry Context" in chap. 1.

Four of the 20 statements on the survey served to discover whether the participants faced any challenges in their weekly rhythm of work and rest.⁹

The bulletins, each containing a survey, were given to participants as they entered the worship service and provided the means for administration of the survey. During each of the three morning services, a ten-minute period was included to explain the survey and allow the participants an opportunity to complete it. Collection of the surveys, along with the offering, took place at the conclusion of each service. In the second week, an explanation of the survey was included in the video announcements that play before the beginning of each worship service. On this week, the surveys were included in the bulletin and given to everyone as they entered the worship service. Instructions given to those who were absent the previous week clarified the necessity for completing and placing the surveys in a receptacle. Collection and combination of all surveys allowed for complete analysis.¹⁰

The analysis of the pre-series survey showed a picture of the biblical understanding of Sabbath rest among the congregation. The survey also showed the level to which stress, fatigue, and burnout affected the participants' rhythm of life. Observations extrapolated from the responses on the Likert scale for each statement are as follows:¹¹

Concerning a biblical model of Sabbath rest:

1. Twenty-three percent lacked a firm understanding of what it means to “rest in the Lord.” An additional 40 percent agreed somewhat to having a firm understanding of “rest in the Lord.”
2. Forty-one percent lacked a firm grasp of the concept of “rest for my soul.” An additional 41 percent agreed somewhat to having a firm grasp “rest for my soul.”

⁹See appendix 1. Statements 7, 12, 13, and 14 measured challenges participants may face when practicing Sabbath rest.

¹⁰263 surveys were collected for analysis.

¹¹See appendix 7. The pre-series survey observations data contains the survey statements corresponding to the observations listed. The survey statements are listed in the order of the observations.

3. Forty-six percent could not explain the biblical concept of Sabbath rest. An additional 39 percent agreed somewhat to being able to explain Sabbath rest.
4. Sixty-seven percent believed that Sunday morning church attendance is required for Sabbath rest.
5. Sixty-five percent did not know how to lead their family in a weekly time of Sabbath rest.
6. Forty-six percent did not know how to incorporate the practice of Sabbath rest into their life. An additional 36 percent agreed somewhat to knowing how to incorporate Sabbath rest.
7. Fifty-one percent did not know how to structure a time of Sabbath rest.
8. Eighty-seven percent desired to know more about the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.

Concerning rhythm of life:

1. Eighty-three percent get overwhelmed by their schedule.
2. Sixty-five percent experience family stress due to fatigue.
3. Seventy-five percent experience burnout at home or job due to fatigue.

The observations from the pre-study survey were addressed in the four-week sermon series. The survey showed the need for teaching the biblical model of Sabbath rest partnered with practical application. Each of the four sermons explained a biblical model of Sabbath rest along with suggestions for incorporating Sabbath rest into a biblical rhythm of work and rest.

Four-Week Sermon Series

Weeks 13 through 16 of the project implementation period consisted of teaching the Sabbath rest sermon series. Each week of the sermon series saw a production of a detailed outline, preaching outline, and program notes. The creation of a preaching outline followed the production of a detailed outline. The preaching outline detailed which key words would be used as fill-in-the-blank elements of the program notes. The preaching outline was used to lead the sermons and the program notes were included in the worship bulletin. Everyone entering each of the three worship services during the four-week sermon series received a worship bulletin.

The structure of the sermons included an introduction that comprised the focus of the sermon, a key truth taught from the passage, examples of what a life absent of Sabbath rest could result in, practical steps to practicing Sabbath rest, and a final thought. The worship services also included elements of prayer, singing, and scripture reading that centered on the theme of resting in Christ for salvation and thanking God for providing the opportunity to rest from our work.

Sermon Series Week 1

Week 1 of the sermon series introduced the congregation to the concept of Sabbath rest seen in Genesis 1:1. Leading up to the sermon, in a transition between songs, the worship pastor spoke briefly about the opportunity each week to rest in the Lord. After the song portion of the service he led a prayer thanking God for the rest we have in Christ. The sermon, entitled “Sabbath Rest: It’s About Time,” began by introducing the foundation of Sabbath rest in Genesis 1:1-2:4. The key truth taught from the passage was that God shows the foundation of a biblical rhythm of work and rest in the creation account. This rhythm included six days of work followed by a day of rest. Working hard for the Lord and then resting in him were encouragements given to the congregation. Teaching that work is not finished until there has been rest, and rest is not complete unless there has been work, communicated the relationship between work and rest.

Two examples used to illustrate what a life absent of Sabbath rest might look like were poor time management and overwhelming busyness. This part of the sermon directly related to statements 7 and 12 on the pre-series survey.¹² The illustration of poor time management and overwhelming busyness portion was followed by practical application. The question was asked of the congregation, “How do I build a temple in time for Sabbath rest?” The listeners were then taught to pick a period during the week to stop doing what is done to sustain life and focus on what is most important: faith and

¹²Statement 7: I get overwhelmed by my schedule. Statement 12: My schedule hinders me from practicing Sabbath rest.

family. The final thought for the sermon taught that it is important to develop a biblical rhythm of work and rest.

Sermon Series Week 2

Week 2 of the sermon series introduced the congregation to the model of Sabbath rest seen in Exodus 16. The sermon was entitled “Sabbath Rest: It’s about the Journey.” The songs in the service focused on following God and trusting him to provide for the needs in life. The worship pastor quoted Matthew 11:28, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest.” He used this scripture to prepare the congregation to learn more about the rest believers have in Christ, and how to practice resting in the Lord. The sermon began with an introduction focused on the model of Sabbath rest seen in Exodus 16. The key truth taught from this passage was that believers should incorporate a time of Sabbath rest into a weekly rhythm of work and rest because God did so himself. In Exodus 16, God provides manna for his people for six days. Then on the seventh day he does not work to provide manna, thus showing that God did not work on the seventh day.

Another truth taught from the passage was that Sabbath rest is best practiced within the home. This concept can be practiced individually, but has meaningful implications for the family who practices Sabbath rest together.

Family stress was given as an example to illustrate what can happen in a life absent of Sabbath rest. This practical example directly related to statement 13 on the pre-series survey.¹³ The illustration of family stress preceded practical application that answered the question, “How do I practice Sabbath rest?” The congregation was instructed to (1) pick a time during the week for Sabbath rest, (2) prepare for that time by completing work or tasks, (3) structure that time to include whatever insures rest, and (4) protect that

¹³Statement 13: I experience family stress due to fatigue.

time. The final thought shared with the congregation was if one wants to be significant in God's work, one must follow God in his rest.

Sermon Series Week 3

Week 3 of the sermon series taught the congregation practical aspects of setting aside a period of time for Sabbath rest using Acts 15:4-11 & 28-29. The sermon entitled "Sabbath Rest: It's About Freedom" began with an introduction to the struggle that exists in Sabbath rest between legalism and freedom. The key truth taught from the passage of scripture was the believer is free in Christ and therefore not bound to the Old Testament law.

As a result of feedback from the evaluation panel, an adjustment was made in this sermon that would give more time for practical application rather than examples of what could result when life is lived in the absence of Sabbath rest. The panel suggested the congregation needed to hear instructions on how to observe a day of rest as well as suggestions for anyone who may not be able to take a time of rest during their week. The sermon taught that when practicing Sabbath rest, what is rest for one person may be work for another. Because the believer is free in Christ, he or she is able to determine what they need to do during Sabbath rest to be restored. The sermon also included teaching that illustrated that while free, the believer is free within biblical boundaries.

Time was taken during the sermon to teach options for those who may experience difficulty practicing a time of Sabbath rest. Suggestions offered were for those who may be single, in the military and deployed, have small children that demand constant attention, have adult children who live outside the home, work more than one job, or have an occupation that demands working every day. The final thought for the sermon was, "What we make room for in our life reveals what we value more in our hearts."

Sermon Series Week 4

The fourth and final week of the sermon series introduced the congregation to the importance of resting in the Lord as seen in Hebrews 4. The sermon entitled “Sabbath Rest: It’s About Resting in The Lord” began with a video illustrating the success of Sabbath rest. The key truth shared from the passage was that Sabbath rest is more than physical rest. Sabbath rest is spiritual rest. The listeners were taught that Sabbath rest requires faith. This faith is first grounded in a relationship with Christ and has eternal implications. It was also taught that trust in the Lord is needed to practice Sabbath rest. If the believer ceases working for a period of time, he or she must trust that God will provide for them during that time of rest.

Burnout was given as an example of what may happen in a life lived with the absence of Sabbath rest. This example was directly related to statement 14 on the pre-series survey.¹⁴ Practical application was made in the form of having the congregation make a Sabbath rest to-do list. The list included suggestions for resting in the Lord during a time of Sabbath rest.¹⁵ The final thought for the sermon taught that living for God includes resting in him.

Post-Series Survey

The congregation took the post-series survey on week 16, the final week of the sermon series. After the preaching of the fourth sermon, time was given for the congregation to complete the survey. The surveys were then collected for analysis.

¹⁴Statement 14: I have experienced burnout in my job or at home.

¹⁵The Sabbath rest to-do list included items such as prayer, reading Scripture, meditating on Scripture, practicing thankfulness, looking for the hand of God at work, talking about the things of God, worshiping, staying away from ungodly things, and avoiding anything that would distract the believer from focusing on God.

Development and Approval of the Eight-Week Small Group Curriculum

As mentioned previously, a basic framework for the eight-week small group curriculum was developed during the twelve-week preparation time. The same scripture passages used in the sermon series provided a basis for the curriculum. In order to focus on the practice of Sabbath rest, two weeks were devoted to each of the four biblical passages. Development of the framework for the eight-week curriculum began in May 2015 and concluded by August 2015.

During week 1, the concept that believers should work was taught from Genesis 1. The teaching for week 2, from Genesis 2:1-3, was that the believer should rest. In week 3, Exodus 16:1-5 showed that believers should not resist Sabbath rest. The study of Exodus 16:21-27 during week 4 taught that the practice of Sabbath rest requires preparation. During week 5, the teaching from Acts 15:4-11, 28-29 dealt with the tension between legalism and freedom and asserted that the believer is free in Christ while practicing Sabbath rest. In week 6, participants were taught from Matthew 5:17-18 that they should rest and be refreshed during Sabbath rest. Participants learned from Hebrews 4:1-3 in week 7 that resting in the Lord is more than taking a physical break. Finally, the concept learned from Hebrews 4:9-10 in week 8 was that Sabbath rest requires faith.

Implementation of the pre-study survey and eight-week curriculum took place during weeks 17 to 25 of the project. Originally, the small group study was to begin on the third week of the four-week sermon series. In order to give more time to develop fully both the weekly sermons and the small group lessons, the start of small group study began after the conclusion of the sermon series.

Evaluation of the Curriculum

The same panel enlisted to evaluate the sermon series also evaluated the eight-week small group curriculum. Because the men were familiar with the sermon material, they were able to offer valuable feedback with the small group curriculum. The evaluation by the panel of elders for each lesson in the curriculum exceeded the 90 percent

sufficiency score required by the rubric to indicate success. As a result, the eight-week small group study proceeded with the approved curriculum.

The panel provided valuable feedback for the small group material. Like the sermon series, the men gave encouraging feedback on the aspects of the weekly lessons they thought were valuable to the practice of Sabbath rest. The panel also challenged the study material in order to refine it. Each of the panel members consistently encouraged the use of practical application in the weekly lessons.

Participant Recruitment

The pre-series survey administered before the four-week sermon series included a question asking if participants were interested in receiving information about attending the Sabbath rest small group study. Information about the small group was sent to 56 people who indicated interest in the small group. From this group of 56 people, 10 were able to commit to attending the eight-week small group study. More people attended the small group than were able to participate in the study consistently. Fourteen people attended the group during the eight-week study, with 10 participants agreeing to fill out the pre- and post-study surveys.

Pre-Study Survey and Observations

Administration of the pre-study survey took place in week 17 of the project. The survey consisted of twenty-four statements measuring understanding of Sabbath rest, home life, and actions taken in regard to a weekly rhythm of work and rest. Nine statements on the survey related to the participants' understanding of Sabbath rest.¹⁶ Nine questions on the survey were related to home life and how it affected participants' practice of Sabbath rest.¹⁷ The final group of six statements measured the practice of

¹⁶See statements 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, and 18 on the survey in appendix 4.

¹⁷See statements 1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 13, 17, 20, and 23 on the survey in appendix 4.

Sabbath rest in the life of participants.¹⁸ The following observations were extrapolated from the survey:¹⁹

Concerning participants understanding of Sabbath rest:

1. One hundred percent indicated an understanding of the concept building a holy time into the week.
2. Fifty percent indicated that Sabbath rest required following specific rules in scripture.
3. Ninety percent indicated a need to learn more about God's perspective on time.
4. Ninety percent felt that the practice of Sabbath rest would help them grow spiritually.

Concerning participant's life choices related to Sabbath rest:

1. Eighty percent felt that his or her life was driven more by circumstance than spirituality.
2. Sixty percent indicated that significant changes would have to be made in order to practice Sabbath rest.
3. Eighty percent indicated that they sometimes delay what matters most in life for what has to be done.
4. Forty percent felt that taking a day off seemed impossible when considering the practice of Sabbath rest.
5. Sixty percent felt that their life was sometimes ruled by the tyranny of the urgent.

Concerning the practice of Sabbath rest:

1. One hundred percent of participants stated that the practice of Sabbath rest was important to them.
2. Seventy percent were not confident he or she practices a healthy cycle of work and rest.
3. Eighty percent did not practice an intentional time of Sabbath rest on a weekly basis.
4. Eighty percent indicated that his or her family did not participate in a planned time of Sabbath rest each week.
5. Eighty percent indicated not effectively practicing Sabbath rest.
6. Ninety percent do not practice Sabbath rest when their schedule becomes overwhelming.

¹⁸See statements 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, and 24 on the survey in appendix 4.

¹⁹See appendix 8.

Each of the observations were noted and addressed with the group during the eight-week small group study.

Eight-Week Small Group Study

The small group curriculum consisted of three documents for each lesson. The first document detailed the teaching plan for each week. The second document was a participant's guide with blanks to be filled in by the participants. Finally, a participant's guide key provided answers to the blanks. Each of the eight-week studies followed the goal of being taught in one hour while allowing adequate time for group discussion. The weekly meetings were structured in a way that allowed participants to share how they were incorporating the practice of Sabbath rest into a weekly rhythm of work and rest. The small group began by giving participants time to discuss his or her plans to practice Sabbath rest in the coming week or report on the previous week's experience, which took approximately 10 minutes each week to accomplish. Teaching of the study material took place after this initial time of discussion. Each week the study material contained the same eight teaching elements:

1. **The goal:** The main point of the study was stated in this section to familiarize the group with the main point of the week. This was accomplished in approximately 1 minute.
2. **Introduction:** This section utilized a quote or scripture passage related to the lesson followed by group discussion questions. This was accomplished in approximately 4 minutes.
3. **Diving into the text:** This portion of the study contained the main teaching points from the main scripture passage with group discussion questions. This was accomplished in approximately 20 minutes.
4. **Reality check:** An example of what a life absent of Sabbath rest can result in was discussed by the group during this portion of the study. This was accomplished in approximately 10 minutes.
5. **Making Sabbath rest a reality:** Practical application related to the study was taught during this portion of the study. This was accomplished in approximately 10 minutes.
6. **Recapping the truth:** The key truth of the lesson was restated. This was accomplished in approximately 1 minute.

7. Sabbath rest challenge: A weekly challenge was offered to be accomplished by participants. This was accomplished in 3 minutes.
8. Preview: A brief preview of the next study was shared. This was accomplished in 1 minute.

Small Group Study Week 1

The first study taught that a biblical rhythm of work and rest is seen in the creation account of Genesis 1. Incorporating this rhythm into the life of the believer requires both work and rest. The goal of the lesson focused on the fact that God works, and this reality should shape the life of the believer. The key truth communicated to the group was that because God works, the believer should perform work as if it is being done for the Lord. Work performed during the week should lead to a time of Sabbath rest. Group members were challenged to consider a time during the week that could be used for a Sabbath rest.

Small Group Study Week 2

The goal of the second study focused on Genesis 2:1-3 and taught that after God worked in the creation account, he rested. God declared this portion of time in which he rested to be holy. The believer should make a portion of his week holy by practicing Sabbath rest. Work is not finished until there has been rest. Rest is incomplete unless there has been work. Group members were challenged to pick a time during their weekly schedule and practice a time of Sabbath rest and be prepared to share about the experience the next week.

Small Group Study Week 3

On the third week, the small group time began with participants sharing their experience with the practice of Sabbath rest. One couple shared the challenge of observing a period of Sabbath rest while dealing with the demands of small children. After discussing this challenge with the group, the couple decided that they needed to better prepare for their time of Sabbath rest. The husband and wife planned a time of rest, but did not

adequately prepare for meals, family activities, or explain to their children the concept of taking a time to rest.

The goal of the small group curriculum was to teach that Christians should trust God and not resist the practice of Sabbath rest. The text for the study was Exodus 16:1-5. The group discussed how fatigue could alter an individual's perception of reality. The reality check illustrated that a life absent of Sabbath rest could result in chronic fatigue. The key truth of the study was that individuals could sometimes face challenges to the practice of Sabbath rest. When faced with these challenges, the believer must trust that God will provide everything needed to enter into a time of rest. Group members were challenged to write a list of the things that prevented them from practicing a weekly time of Sabbath rest. On another list they were to write all of ways God had provided for them in their lives. They were to take these lists and pray about trusting the Lord in continuing a time of weekly Sabbath rest.

Small Group Study Week 4

On week 4, the group discussion began with the couple who had young children sharing that their time of Sabbath rest went much smoother. They were better prepared for the time of rest and taught their children the importance of taking time to rest like God did in Genesis 1. The discussion was a perfect illustration of the week's lesson. The goal of week 4 was to teach participants that successful Sabbath rest required preparation, that Sabbath rest is best practiced as a household, and the primary reason one should practice Sabbath rest is to be an imitator of God. After this discussion, the group began the study material.

The biblical text was Exodus 16:21-27. The passage was used to teach that a time of successful Sabbath rest requires anticipation and intentionality. The home should be prepared and work should be completed before the time of rest begins. Another key truth taught from the passage was that Sabbath rest is more about imitating God than following rules. This was illustrated by Exodus 16:24-27 when God did not work to

provide manna on the seventh day and expected the Israelites to imitate him by not going out to gather. The important point was made that in the Exodus passage, God did not work on the seventh day.

Participants were challenged to continue in their practice of a weekly time of Sabbath rest and to try a twenty-four-hour period of their choosing. It was suggested that, if possible, participants should begin a time of rest on Saturday evening and continue through Sunday evening. This gave time for preparation on Saturday, sleep on Saturday night, worship attendance on Sunday, and time for family and recreation on Sunday afternoon. The strength of this period of time was that it allowed participants a period of time to work on both days if they needed to. Saturday could be spent completing tasks around the home, and Sunday evening could be spent preparing for the school or work week.

Small Group Study Week 5

Week 5 of the small group study began with discussion about participants' practice of Sabbath rest. Most of the group members reported that they had been practicing a time of Sabbath rest during the weeks of the study. They were enjoying the time of rest and still learning what to do during the period of rest. One couple in the group said they had not attempted a time of rest. The couple talked about being inhibited by their schedule and the need to keep the house clean and laundry done with four children in the home. Two other women in the group reported that while they enjoyed their time of rest individually, they were facing challenges because their husbands would not join them in the practice. After this discussion, the group began the study material.

The biblical text of the lesson was Acts 15:4-11 and 15:28-29. The passage taught the principle that Sabbath rest can be a polarizing practice because of the struggle between legalism and freedom. One key truth of the lesson established that the believer is free in Christ and not bound to the Mosaic law. Another key truth established was that resting in the Lord means first resting in Christ. In relation to these key truths, the lesson

showed that the purpose of Sabbath rest is to delight in the Lord. In addition, that the believer should structure a time of Sabbath rest with freedom in mind rather than a plan of restricted activity. The group was challenged to plan fun activities with their family for the purpose of creating good memories during the next time of Sabbath rest.

Small Group Study Week 6

As the group discussion began, the young couple who had struggled in their attempt to establish a time of Sabbath rest reported a sweet moment with their two young children. This couple had chosen Saturday night through Sunday evening as their time of Sabbath rest. Over the first four weeks, they refined their practice by preparing and talking to their children. The Saturday evening of week 5 they were in the car with their children when their five-year-old son asked, “What day is it?” The father answered, “Saturday.” The son replied, “Hey, aren’t we going to do Sabbath rest?” He then turned to his three-year-old brother in the next seat and said, “We rest because God made the world in six days and rested on day seven.” The group was greatly encouraged at the good report!

The central text for the lesson was Matthew 5:17-18. This passage communicated to group members that because Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic law, including observance of the Sabbath, the believer can honor Christ by filling a time of Sabbath rest full. The reality check for the week contained a discussion about family disconnect as the result of a life absent of Sabbath rest. The key truth of the week was that freedom in Christ should bring about delight in the life of the believer. The practice of Sabbath rest is an entire period of time to focus on enjoying the blessings of God. Instead of focusing on what not to do during Sabbath rest, participants should be excited and willing to plan on doing those things that bring sheer enjoyment and rejuvenation. Resting in the Lord is about lifting one’s burden, not increasing it.

Small Group Study Week 7

Group members began week 8 by reporting the blessings they were enjoying during their time of Sabbath rest. Some spoke of the rhythm of work and rest becoming more normal, and that making room for Sabbath rest was not as much of a struggle. The two ladies who discussed their husbands not joining them in the practice of Sabbath rest on week 5 reported no change in their circumstance. As the group discussed the issue with the ladies it was discovered that both men came out of Lutheran backgrounds. This observation led to a discussion about sanctification and how an individual's theology, realized or not, determines how they live.

The goal of week 7 was to lead the group to an understanding of what it means to rest in the Lord. Sabbath rest is more than just taking a break and checking out. It is removing the distraction of work for a period of time to enjoy the presence of the Lord. The central text for the lesson was Hebrew 4:1-3. The key truth taught from the passage was that in order to practice Sabbath rest, one must first be in Christ. Christ not only fulfilled the Sabbath, but provided eternal rest for believers' souls. It is impossible to rest in the Lord if one is not in Christ.

Another truth taught from the central text is that Sabbath rest is more than physical rest. It is spiritual rest. The physical results of Sabbath rest will remain hollow without a heart directed toward the Lord. The reality check dealt with burnout as a possible result of a life lived with the absence of Sabbath rest. Group members were challenged to plan a time during their Sabbath rest to pray, read Scripture, meditate on Scripture, and practice thankfulness.

Small Group Study Week 8

Time was taken at the beginning of week 8 for the group to reflect on their experiences over the study on Sabbath rest. Group members discussed how they were doing with their practice of Sabbath rest. Some were consistent, while others could not from practicing a time of rest every week because of unavoidable circumstances. The

couple with four children who reported not attempting a time of Sabbath rest still had not done so at the end of the study.

The goal of this week's lesson was to lead the group to an understanding that Sabbath rest requires obedient faith. To follow the Lord in a biblical rhythm of work and rest, one must let go of the things he or she works hard for during the week. The practice of Sabbath rest is worth the effort when one realizes the consequences of a life without Sabbath rest. Hebrews 4:9-10 was the central text for the study.

The reality check for week 8 taught that individual exhaustion could be the result of a life lived in the absence of Sabbath rest. While working hard can be exhausting, chronic fatigue and exhaustion can seriously hinder one from fulfilling their call as a believer.

The key truth communicated and discussed in the lesson was that a regular cycle of work and Sabbath rest is a realistic goal for most believers. One makes room in his or her life for what he or she perceives to be valuable. When the understanding of Sabbath rest is increased in the light of God's Word within a culture that is starved for rest, the practice should follow. This study showed what could happen in the absence of Sabbath rest. The practice is valuable for believers who suffer from poor time management skills, fatigue, overwhelming busyness, family stress, burnout, and exhaustion. So many suffer needlessly under the weight of daily burdens when the grace of Sabbath rest, provided through Christ, can be enjoyed within a healthy rhythm of work and rest. Group members were challenged to continue a time of Sabbath rest beyond the small group study.

Post-Series Survey

On week 25 of the project, after week 8 of the small group study was taught, the post-series survey was administered. Ten surveys were completed and collected for analysis.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

This project was designed to increase the understanding and practice of Sabbath rest in a weekly rhythm of work and rest. The desired effect was to be accomplished through teaching a four-week sermon series and leading an eight-week small group study on the subject of Sabbath rest. This chapter serves to discover the effectiveness of the project through evaluating the purpose and goals. The strengths and weaknesses of the project are discussed before exploring what could have been done differently. Finally, the chapter concludes with theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to lead the families of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to develop a rhythm of work and rest in their lives as a result of a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest. The families of New Work Fellowship struggled due to the lack of a rhythm of work and rest based on a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest. The hectic pace of life experienced by the families of New Work Fellowship created fatigue, which could result in overwhelming busyness, poor time management, and burnout. When asked questions relating to quality of life on the sermon series pre-survey, 83 percent of respondents indicated that they became overwhelmed by their schedules at times, 65 percent experienced family stress due to fatigue, and 75 percent experienced some sort of burnout at home or job due to fatigue.¹ There was a need among the families of New Work Fellowship to develop a

¹See appendix 1 for survey and appendix 7 for observed results.

healthy rhythm of work and rest.

Scripture clearly speaks directly into the need of these families. Scripture says in Hebrews 4:9 that Sabbath rest is a reality for the people of God.² While this passage speaks of a future rest, Sabbath rest may currently be employed in the life of the believer. Because there was a need among the congregation to learn the biblical principle of Sabbath rest, the purpose of this project was to teach about Sabbath in worship services and in small group Bible studies. The congregation needed to gain understanding of the concept of Sabbath rest, which was vital because a clear understanding of Sabbath rest is the foundation of practice.

The second aspect of the purpose of this project was to lead a small group of adults through a Bible study for the purpose of encouraging the practice of Sabbath rest as a part of a weekly rhythm of work and rest. The small group taught more in-depth about the concept of Sabbath rest with the sole purpose of creating accountability for the practice of Sabbath rest. The plans to teach and encourage the practice of Sabbath rest matched the need expressed by the people of New Work Fellowship. The purpose of this project is shown to have been fulfilled through the evaluation of the project goals.

Evaluation of the Goals

The project was comprised of five goals. The development and completion of these goals were vital to the success of the project. The first goal was to evaluate the understanding of Sabbath rest among the congregation by administering a congregational survey. The second goal was to develop a four-week sermon series on the subject of Sabbath rest. The third goal was to increase the understanding of Sabbath rest among worship attendees during the four-week sermon series. The fourth goal was to develop an eight-week curriculum that would lead adults to the practice of Sabbath rest. The fifth

²“So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4:9).

goal was to increase the practice of Sabbath rest among at least ten adults who participated in the eight-week small group study.

Goal 1

The first goal of this project was to evaluate the understanding of Sabbath rest among the congregation of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. This goal was measured by administering a congregational survey.³ Each participant identified him or herself on the survey by using a unique four-digit personal identification number (pin) of their choosing. The survey consisted of twenty statements in which the participants chose one of the following responses on a six-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree somewhat (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A), or strongly agree (SA). The survey included demographic indicators, including gender, age, military or civilian, employment status, and number of family members and children living in the home.

The first goal was to be deemed successfully completed when a minimum of 100 people completed the congregational pre-series survey and it had been analyzed.⁴ The first goal was successfully met when 263 surveys were completed and analyzed. The analysis of the surveys created a clear picture of the congregation's understanding of Sabbath rest. In regard to the understanding of Sabbath rest, participants indicated the following:⁵

1. Twenty-three percent lacked a firm understanding of what it means to “rest in the Lord.” An additional 40 percent indicated “agree somewhat” on the same statement.
2. Forty-one percent lacked a firm grasp of the concept of “rest for my soul.” An additional 41 percent indicated “agree somewhat” on the same statement.
3. Forty-six percent could not explain the biblical concept of Sabbath rest. An additional 39 percent indicated “agree somewhat” on the same statement.

³See appendix 1.

⁴The congregation of New Work Fellowship consists of 300 adults.

⁵See appendix 7.

4. Sixty-seven percent believed that Sunday morning church attendance is required for Sabbath rest.
5. Sixty-five percent did not know how lead their family in a weekly time of Sabbath rest.
6. Forty-six percent did not know how to incorporate the practice of Sabbath rest into their life. An additional 36 percent indicated “agree somewhat” on the same statement.
7. Fifty-one percent did not know how to structure a time of Sabbath rest.
8. Eighty-seven percent desired to know more about the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.

The pre-series survey reflected the need within the congregation concerning a biblical understanding of Sabbath rest.

Goal 2

The second goal of this project was to develop a four-week sermon series on Sabbath rest. This goal was measured by a panel of five elders who used a rubric to evaluate the written material for the sermon series. The rubric led the panel to evaluate the series in the areas of biblical faithfulness, clarity of language, and relevance of the sermon series.⁶ This goal was to be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The panel was presented with all four sermons in the series. The men overwhelmingly supported and approved each of the sermons and gave feedback that helped shape the practical application and amount of information communicated each week. Every member of the panel gave the score of sufficient or higher on more than 90 percent of the evaluation rubrics on all four of the sermons. The goal of developing a four-week sermon series on Sabbath rest was successful.

Goal 3

The third goal of this project was to increase knowledge of Sabbath rest among worship attendees during the four-week sermon series. The sermon material developed in

⁶See appendix 2.

the second goal was used to preach sermons on four consecutive Sundays in August 2015. This goal was measured by administering a post-series survey of the understanding of Sabbath rest by the congregation.⁷ Originally, a group of 30 participants were to be selected from the surveys based on those who attended all four sermons or watched the sermons they missed online. The post-series survey included the same survey used in the first goal with the addition of a space to indicate whether or not the participant completed the series either by attending or watching all four sermons online.

The four-week sermon series was preached and the post-series survey was administered. A total of 235 surveys were collected for analysis. A list of participants who listened to all four sermons, completed a pre-series survey, and a post-series survey was compiled by matching pin numbers between the surveys. The data set was then cleaned using the pin numbers and biographical information given on each survey to insure matching data sets. This resulted in a test group of 91 participants, far surpassing the anticipated test group of 30.

The *t*-test was used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the means of two groups.⁸ The *t*-test was chosen because it showed the statistical difference between the pre- and post-series surveys. This goal was to be considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-series survey score. The *t*-test was performed and the goal was successfully met! The four-week sermon series on Sabbath rest preached to the select group of congregants made a positively statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their understanding of Sabbath rest ($t_{(90)} = 15.729, p < 1.460 \times 10^{-27}$).⁹

⁷See appendix 1.

⁸Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 188.

⁹See appendix 10 and appendix 11.

Goal 4

The fourth goal of this project was to develop an eight-week curriculum that led adults to practice Sabbath rest. The same panel of elders mentioned in goal 2 used a rubric to measure this goal.¹⁰ The rubric led the elders to evaluate the material for its biblical faithfulness, clarity of language, and relevance for a small group study. The goal was to be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The panel was presented with all eight studies in the curriculum. The men overwhelmingly supported and approved each of the studies and gave feedback that helped shape the material to better meet the needs of the participants. The men were very encouraging throughout the process and made comments about the need for this study. At one point, Frances said he wished he had gone through this material as a young man. Goodman, who did not participate in the small group study, began leading his family in a weekly time of Sabbath rest.

Every member of the panel gave the score of sufficient or higher on more than 90 percent of the evaluation rubrics on all eight of the studies. The goal of developing an eight-week small group curriculum focusing on the practice of Sabbath rest was successful.

Goal 5

The fifth goal of this project was to increase the practice of Sabbath rest among at least ten adults who participated in an adult small group Bible study. The study took place on eight consecutive Wednesday nights at New Work Fellowship from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. A group of ten participants was enlisted for the small group. More than ten people attended the group, but some did not complete surveys because of travel plans and worship schedules that kept them from attending consistently.

¹⁰See appendix 3.

The small group study utilized the eight-week curriculum developed in goal 4. This goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-study survey. The surveys were used to measure the change in practice.¹¹ The pre- and post-study surveys originally consisted of thirty statements in which the participant chose one of the following responses on a Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree somewhat (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A), strongly agree (SA). The survey was to include the participant's name and demographic indicators, including gender, age, military or civilian, employment status, and number of family members and children living in the home. The survey was changed before it was administered. The biographical information was removed and a pin number blank was added to identify the participants. This goal was to be considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive significant difference between the pre and post-survey scores.

The pre-study survey was administered before the eight-week small group curriculum was taught. The pre-study surveys were collected and analyzed. The results of the survey helped shape the eight-week small group material. The group met for eight weeks and all ten participants completed the curriculum. After the eight-week small group was completed, the post-study survey was administered and collected for analysis.

The *t*-test statistical tool was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the means of two groups of survey results. This goal was to be considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrates a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-study survey score. The *t*-test was performed and the goal was successfully met! The eight-week small group curriculum on Sabbath rest taught to the select group of adults made a positively statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their practice of Sabbath rest ($t_{(9)} = 4.389$, $p < .001$).¹²

¹¹See appendix 4.

¹² See appendix 12 and appendix 13.

Strengths of the Project

This project possessed a number of strengths. The five strengths to be discussed in this section are (1) teaching a biblical concept unfamiliar to the congregation, (2) meeting a true need in the lives of participants, (3) the overall reaction of the congregation to the subject matter, (4) creating a community within the small group, and (5) a healthy rhythm of work and rest adopted by those who incorporated a weekly rhythm Sabbath rest.

One strength of the project was the introduction of a biblical concept unfamiliar to the congregation. It has been shown that the congregation lacked a biblical concept of Sabbath rest based on the pre-series survey. While the term “Sabbath” was familiar, the practice of Sabbath rest had never been taught in the church. One woman, the widow of a pastor, commented that she had been in church all of her life and never heard a sermon on the subject of Sabbath rest. The context of ministry in chapter 1 stated many people attending New Work Fellowship lacked a basic knowledge of biblical concepts,¹³ and this was the case for the subject of Sabbath rest. The four-week sermon series and eight-week small group curriculum introduced people to a biblical concept they had not been exposed to previously.

A second strength of the project was the application of understanding and practice to a true need in the lives of participants. The pre-series survey also established the need for Sabbath rest in the lives of people attending New Work Fellowship. Family stress, fatigue, and burnout were all real issues in the households of congregants. Once educated on the subject, Sabbath rest was then implemented by members of the congregation. While the practice did not erase all stress experienced in life, it did create a new rhythm of work and rest, which gave more balance in the life of those who practiced Sabbath rest. One couple shared that they joined the small group study because they felt their lives were too hectic and busy. They mentioned that after a few weeks of

¹³ See chap. 1, “Ministry Context,” 3.

establishing a time of Sabbath rest in their home they began to look forward to it each week. As their days became hectic during the week, they developed a sense of anticipation for the time of rest in their immediate future. Looking forward to a time of Sabbath rest encouraged them in the midst of a hard work week. A time of Sabbath rest met a real need in their lives and others in the small group.

A third strength of the project was the overall reaction of the congregation to the project's subject matter. The prospect of teaching on Sabbath rest was risky. With the subject being unfamiliar and a negative perception of taking time off to rest every week, the church family as a whole could have easily dismissed the central theme of this project, however, this was not the case. As the sermon series was promoted, people began communicating that they were looking forward to it. During the sermons the congregation listened and interacted well. The statistical analysis of the pre- and post-surveys showed an increase in both understanding and practice. One woman who attended the small group had all of her sermon notes from the four-week series organized with comments and thoughts attached. Another man in the small group did the same with his sermon notes. During small group discussion questions, they both referred back to the notes to restate points and illustrations from the sermons. Overall, the congregation reacted with enthusiasm to the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.

The fourth strength of the project was the community created among the group of adults participating in the eight-week small group study. The group time began each week with open discussion about the previous week's practice of Sabbath rest. Each person openly shared his or her success and struggles with practicing a weekly time of Sabbath rest. As struggles were shared concerning family members who would not participate, kids who needed constant attention, and even sick pets that made constant messes, other members of the group would discuss options to help those who were struggling. These interactions created a running dialogue throughout the small group study and gave the group practical things to pray for each other about. Typically, this

portion of the study would be intentionally stopped so the lesson for the week could be taught. Discussion questions were placed throughout the study material to offer a high level of interaction among participants. The bond created within the group grew beyond the meetings. One woman planned an adoption fundraiser for another couple attending the study whom she did not know before the group started. The group had phrases and jokes common to the experience of the study. After the eight-week study concluded, one participant created a piece of art with sayings and teaching points from the study.¹⁴ After the conclusion of the project all ten adults who participated in the group surveys continued meeting for Bible study.

The fifth strength of the project was the healthy rhythm of work and rest implemented by those who incorporated Sabbath rest into a weekly rhythm. As mentioned, the statistical analysis of the pre- and post-study surveys showed an increase in the practice of Sabbath rest among group members. Some of the stories behind that increase showed the difference Sabbath rest made in the lives of those who entered into this practice.

One man in the small group shared how his practice of Sabbath rest was a great blessing. He is in a management position at his place of employment and often has to work seven days a week. His wife did not attend the small group study, but joined her husband in the practice of Sabbath rest. They decided to practice a time of Sabbath rest starting on Saturday night and ending on Sunday afternoon. They lit a candle at the beginning of this time and kept it burning as a reminder to enjoy themselves and focus on the Lord. The man shared with the small group how moving the experience was for him and his wife, and that the period of time they set aside was unlike any other period of time during their week.

One couple shared how they were glad to be creating a legacy of Sabbath rest with their children. Their hope was that the practice would be passed down through the generations of their family. This couple, who had struggled to establish a time of rest

¹⁴See appendix 11.

with small children, eventually settled into the practice. They found that their children would talk about and remind them about the upcoming time of Sabbath rest. Their hope was that their children would grow up in a home that delighted in the Lord through the freedom of Sabbath rest. The couple shared in the small group discussion about how the weekly practice of Sabbath rest could potentially be a very positive aspect of family life for generations to come.

One wife in the congregation who could not attend the eight-week small group study shared via social media that their family began practicing a weekly time of Sabbath rest as a result of the sermon series. This was especially significant for this particular family because the husband, who attends church, is not a believer. The couple has two children and the entire family chose to practice a time of Sabbath rest on Saturday because the wife has to work most Sundays. The wife shared privately that she was very excited about their family practicing this time of rest. Her prayer was that the practice of Sabbath rest would help communicate the need for eternal rest in Christ to her unbelieving husband.

Weaknesses of the Project

While successful, this project had weaknesses, including (1) the limit to which the individual practice of Sabbath rest transferred into a household practice, (2) the low level of active-duty military participants, (3) the confusing nature of the sermon series for some who attended a worship service only once in the middle of the sermon series, and (4) the length of the eight-week small group series following the four-week sermon series.

As a result of this project, the congregation at New Work Fellowship grew in the understanding of Sabbath rest, and small group members grew in the practice of Sabbath rest. Some households adopted the practice of Sabbath rest, some individuals did, and some rejected practice even though they gained understanding.

As mentioned in chapter 4, two women in the small group adopted the practice of Sabbath rest but their husbands did not. It was revealed that both of their husbands came from a Lutheran background, which led to a discussion within the small group about the

different views of sanctification generally held by Lutherans, Baptists, and Methodists. This weakness ultimately allowed the small group to see that one's theology, realized or not, drives his or her spiritual practice. Further teaching on the household practice of Sabbath rest would continue to address this issue and teach adults how to bless their household through Sabbath rest.

A second weakness of the project was the absence of active-duty military families. It was stated in the ministry context that New Work Fellowship is located close to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, home of the Army's 101st Airborne Division. While military families are part of the congregation of New Work Fellowship, not many were represented in the study. The biographical information from the pre-series survey showed only 5 percent of the participants as military.

One key factor in this weakness was that key influencers among military family were on active-deployment for the duration of the project. A military chaplain who typically influences a number of military families to attend was deployed to Afghanistan. Another First Sergeant was called away on duty as well. Two other families transferred to other bases just before the project began. The period of time the project was administered worked well for civilian families, but took place in a lull for military ministry at New Work Fellowship.

A third weakness of the project was the confusing nature of the subject matter for first-time visitors at New Work who only attended once after the sermon series was in progress. While not many of these occurrences were noted, one couple, who were first-time guests, expressed confusion to a pastor after visiting on the third week of the sermon series. The third sermon was on the struggle between legalism and freedom in Sabbath rest, and for the majority of the congregation, the subject matter added to the teaching about Sabbath rest from the previous weeks. However, for this couple, it was confusing because they had not been part of the process of learning. Because the sermons are recorded and archived on the church website, the pastor shared with the couple that they

could watch the previous sermons and catch up with the teaching, but it is unlikely they did so as they did not return for another visit during the project.

A fourth weakness of the project was the length of the eight-week study following the four-week sermon series. The last two weeks of the eight-week small group study included much material for discussion. The subject matter pertained to how one can rest in the Lord for salvation and spiritual rejuvenation. By the time the group got to these weeks, many of the questions surrounding the material had been discussed and answered either through the sermon series or during the open discussion at the beginning of each meeting. The group interacted well, but the teaching portion of the material outweighed participation in the material's discussion questions.

What I Would Do Differently

While much of the project would remain the same if done again, I would change some aspects. Each of the things I would do differently are directly related to some of the weaknesses of the project. In relation to the length of the sermon series and small group study, I would lengthen the sermon series to five weeks and shorten the small group study to six weeks. I would add another sermon to the end of the series teaching on the subject matter of creating a generational legacy of Sabbath rest. This sermon would encourage believers to bless their family with the practice of Sabbath rest by practicing it as a household. To shorten the small group study, I would revise the first two lessons of the small group material to create a single lesson on work and rest. I would also revise the last two lessons by combining the material into one lesson on resting in the Lord. These changes could potentially increase the number of households practicing Sabbath rest, which was a weakness of the project. These changes could have potentially created a higher level of momentum through the final two weeks of the project.

Theological Reflections

The project was limited to the incorporation of Sabbath rest into one's lifestyle. The subject of Sabbath is vast and was not to be addressed comprehensively in this project.¹⁵ Sabbath is a theologically diverse subject, yet one should recognize that theology is the underpinning of practice. What one believes, he or she acts upon. With this in mind, the following theological reflections served as an underpinning for this project.

First, Sabbath rest is a grace to be observed. One may experience a resistance to the practice of Sabbath rest because it can be perceived as a practice based on restriction and limitations. This may come as the result of a negative view of Sabbath based on its observance under the old covenant. In Christ, Sabbath rest is a grace to be enjoyed. Much like the practice of prayer or Scripture reading, Sabbath rest is available to the believer. Believers are not bound to the mosaic law concerning Sabbath rest or any other spiritual discipline. The believer does not practice Sabbath rest in order to be in right relationship with God. The believer is able to practice Sabbath rest because of his or her relationship with God through Christ.

Another theological reflection focuses on the purpose of Sabbath. Not only is Sabbath rest a grace to be observed, but it is a delight to be enjoyed. The goal of Sabbath rest, like all other spiritual disciplines, is to delight in the Lord. Rather than being seen as a time of boredom or restricted activity, Sabbath rest is a time to be filled with the very things that restore the body and encourage the soul. These Sabbath rest activities from God should be practiced in the realization that they are blessings given by the Lord for the purpose of enjoyment.

A third theological reflection is that the weekly practice of Sabbath rest reflects a biblical rhythm of work and rest. The model of work and rest seen in Scripture is to work hard for the Lord and then rest well in him. Work is not finished until there has been rest and rest is not complete unless there has been work. This theological concept can

¹⁵See chap. 1, "Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations," 7.

bring balance to a work ethic that has become out of balance due either to workaholism or laziness.

A final theological reflection on Sabbath rest is the practice can be an anchor for other spiritual disciplines. Sabbath rest should never be practiced in lieu of other spiritual disciplines. Yet, the practice of Sabbath rest can serve as an anchor to spiritual disciplines when one is faced with life's challenges. If a believer's daily practice of spiritual disciplines is neglected or interrupted, Sabbath rest can serve as a weekly time to rest and reprioritize one's life and spiritual practices.

Personal Reflections

The practice of Sabbath rest has been very meaningful in my own home. When this project began, my family had been practicing a weekly time of Sabbath rest for five years. My wife and I reached a place in our life where we were experiencing burnout in ministry and at home. With two small children and a growing church, our margin for rest had long since disappeared. We felt as if we were surviving, not thriving. We stumbled into the practice of Sabbath rest and went through the process figuring out how it could work in our family. The result in our family was astounding. We grew closer as a family and created margin in our life for rest. I found that I had increased physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual capacity to lead in ministry. Our children came to enjoy the practice and looked forward to it every week.

I pursued this degree to focus on the subject of Sabbath rest in an academic setting and formulate a teaching method that would lead the families of New Work Fellowship to the experience the same thing my family had discovered. It was a pure joy to talk with people who were going through the same struggles and victories my wife and I walked through. My intention following this project is to continue to learn about Sabbath rest and teach our church how to incorporate the practice. There is still much to be learned.

In addition to the project itself, my experience in the Biblical Spirituality D.Min. program was invaluable. When entering this program, it had been fifteen years since I

finished my M.Div. The opportunity to return to an academic setting was invaluable. The seminars helped sharpen my practice of ministry, introduced me to a world of literature I had previously not known, and served to increase my capacity for learning. The men I met and became friends with in this program will remain lifelong friends and partners in ministry. The encouragement shared along the way was meaningful and helpful in the academic process. My life has been enriched and my ministry broadened because of the time spent in the Biblical Spirituality track.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to lead the families of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to develop a rhythm of work and rest in their lives as a result of a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest. The purpose of the project was accomplished, and each of the five goals were successfully accomplished. The first three goals increased understanding of Sabbath rest through the development and preaching of a four-week sermon series. The final two goals increased the practice of Sabbath rest among a group of adults through the development and teaching of an eight-week small group study.

In chapter 1, the project demonstrated the need for Sabbath rest among the congregation of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Chapter 2 set forth the biblical and theological basis for Sabbath rest. Chapter 3 established the theoretical and practical issues related to Sabbath rest. Chapter 4 detailed the project through its development and implementation. Chapter 5 evaluated the project including its purpose, goals, strengths, weaknesses, needed adjustments, and important reflections.

The project fulfilled its purpose of developing a rhythm of work and rest as a result of a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest in the families of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky.

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-SERMON SERIES SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of Sabbath rest of the participant. This research is being conducted by Cory Pitts for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

PIN: ___ ___ ___ ___ (Create a unique identification code consisting of four numbers. You will also use this code for the post-series survey).

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

Military: ___ Civilian: ___

Employed: ___ Unemployed: ___ Retired: ___

Number of family members in the home: ___

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

Part 1

1. Do you consider yourself a Christian?
 A. Yes
 B. No
2. Will you listen to all four sermons (at church or online) in the series on Sabbath rest?
 A. Yes
 B. No
3. Are you married?
 A. Yes
 B. No
4. How many children age 18 or younger are living in the home? _____

Continue to next page

5. What is your age? ____
6. I would like more information about the possibility of attending a small group study on Sabbath rest: (optional) email_____

Part 2

Directions: Circle your answer to the following questions using this scale:

SD = strongly disagree, **D** = disagree, **DS** = disagree somewhat, **AS** = agree somewhat, **A** = agree, **SA** = strongly agree.

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 7. I get overwhelmed by my schedule. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I have a firm understanding of what it means to rest in the Lord. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. If asked, I could explain the biblical concept of Sabbath rest. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. If I heard it said, "Sabbath rest requires building a temple in time," I would know what it meant. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. I know how to lead my family in a weekly time of Sabbath rest. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. My schedule hinders me from practicing Sabbath rest. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. I experience family stress due to fatigue. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. I have experienced burnout in my job or at home. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. Sabbath rest requires me to follow specific rules in Scripture. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. I know how to structure a time of Sabbath rest. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. Sunday morning church attendance is a requirement of Sabbath rest. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. I desire to know more about the biblical concept of Sabbath rest. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. I know how to incorporate the practice of Sabbath rest into my life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. I have a firm grasp of the concept of "rest for my soul." | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC

Sabbath Rest Sermon Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon is clearly relevant to the issue of Sabbath rest.					
The sermon is faithful to the Bible's teaching on Sabbath rest.					
The sermon is theologically sound.					
The main idea of the sermon is clearly stated.					
The points of the sermon clearly support the main idea.					
The sermon contains points of practical application.					
The sermon is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the sermon is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 3

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM
EVALUATION RUBRIC

Sabbath Rest Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of Sabbath rest.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on Sabbath rest.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The main idea of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the main idea.					
The method of teaching the lesson gives adequate time for participant discussion.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 4

PRE AND POST-STUDY SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of Sabbath rest of the participant. This research is being conducted by Cory Pitts for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

PIN: ___ ___ ___ ___ (Create a unique identification code consisting of four numbers. You will also use this code for the post-eries survey).

Part 1

Directions: Circle your answer using this scale:

SD = strongly disagree, **D** = disagree, **DS** = disagree somewhat, **AS** = agree somewhat, **A** = agree, **SA** = strongly agree.

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. My weekly rhythm is driven more by circumstance than spirituality. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I would need to make significant changes to practice Sabbath rest. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. There are specific rules that should be followed in Sabbath rest. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. If asked to show someone a verse about resting in the Lord, I could quickly tell him or her two verses. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I understand the concept of building a holy time into my week. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I frequently delay what matters for what has to be done. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. The thought of taking a day off to rest seems impossible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Continue on next page

8. Growing up, my family instilled the importance of taking time to rest.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. Sabbath rest requires me to follow specific rules in scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. I need to learn more about God's perspective on time.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. Practicing Sabbath rest is important to me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I understand different models of incorporating Sabbath rest in my life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. My life seems to be ruled by the tyranny of the urgent.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I have a firm grasp of the concept of "rest for my soul."	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. I practice a healthy cycle of work and rest.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. I practice an intentional time of Sabbath rest on a weekly basis.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. My family participates in a planned time of Sabbath rest on a weekly basis.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. The practice of Sabbath rest would increase my spiritual growth.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. I have a specific time set aside for Sabbath rest.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. I encourage my family to practice Sabbath rest.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. I incorporate intentional times of resting in the Lord into my life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. I effectively practice Sabbath rest.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. I effectively lead my family in the practice of Sabbath rest.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. I practice Sabbath rest even when my schedule is overwhelming.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 5

SERMON SERIES PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello!

I hope you are doing well today. I'm writing because I need your help! You may or may not know that I have been in school for the last two years working on my Doctorate. I pursued this degree to study the subject of Sabbath Rest. The last four weeks of August I will be preaching a sermon series as a requirement for the degree. There will be two congregational surveys administered as part of my doctoral work. One before the preaching series and one after. These will be used to measure the results of the series. This is where you come in!

Would you mind participating in these surveys?

This would require that you fill out a survey this Sunday in one of the services. You would then need to attend the four-week sermon series on Sabbath rest or watch online if you miss a week. There will be a post-series survey given on the last Sunday of the series.

I have asked you specifically because you are a regular attender. It would really mean a lot to me personally if you were part of my doctoral project!

Again, the first survey will be given this Sunday, August 2, in all three services. If you can't be here, I can still get you a survey to complete before the series begins on August 9th.

If you would like to help me, please respond to this email with "I'm in!" and I will contact you again with more details before Sunday.

Thank you for your time!

Cory Pitts
Teaching Pastor
New Work Fellowship

APPENDIX 6

PRE-SERIES SURVEY BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Biographical information from the pre-series survey

40% Male	60% Female
95% Civilian	5% Active Military
99.6% Christian	.004% Non-Christian
76% Married	24% Single
76% Employed	14% Unemployed 10% Retired
94% Committed to listen to all four sermons in the series.	
21% wanted information about a small group on the subject of Sabbath rest.	
The average Number of people per household was 3 (2 adults and 1 child).	
Average age of those surveyed: 44.	

APPENDIX 7

PRE-SERMON SERIES SURVEY OBSERVATIONS DATA

Table A1. Pre-series survey observations data

Survey Observations	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. I have a firm understanding of what it means to “rest in the Lord.”	3	24	34	106	72	24
2. I have a firm grasp of the concept of “rest for my soul.”	11	43	54	109	34	12
3. If asked, I could explain the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.	19	40	63	102	27	12
4. Sunday morning church attendance is a requirement of Sabbath rest.	10	41	35	86	65	26
5. I know how to lead my family in a weekly time of Sabbath rest.	22	62	87	61	23	8
6. I know how to incorporate the practice of Sabbath rest into my life.	10	44	68	94	39	8
7. I know how to structure a time of Sabbath rest.	10	49	76	83	37	8
8. I desire to know more about the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.	0	2	4	27	126	104
9. I get overwhelmed by my schedule.	7	19	18	103	84	32
10. I experience family stress due to fatigue.	8	51	33	78	69	24
11. I have experienced burnout in my job or at home.	9	35	22	50	88	59

Note: The survey observations are numbered in the order listed in chap. 4 and 5. Statements 1 through 11 were used for the observations listed on pp. 7 and 8 of chap. 4. Statements 1 through 8 were used for the observations listed on pp. 3 and 4 of chap. 5.

APPENDIX 8

PRE-STUDY SURVEY OBSERVATIONS DATA

Table A2. Pre-study survey observations data

Survey Observations	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Concerning a biblical model of Sabbath rest:						
1. I understand the concept of building a holy time into my week.	0	0	0	0	8	2
2. Sabbath rest requires me to follow specific rules in scripture.	0	3	2	4	1	0
3. I need to learn more about God’s perspective on time.	0	1	0	2	6	1
4. The practice of Sabbath rest would increase my spiritual growth.	0	0	1	0	3	6
Concerning participants life choices related to Sabbath rest:						
1. My weekly rhythm is driven more by circumstance than spirituality.	0	1	1	3	4	1
2. I would need to make significant changes to practice Sabbath rest.	0	3	1	4	1	1
3. I frequently delay what matters for what has to be done.	0	1	1	4	2	2
4. The thought of taking a day off to rest seems impossible.	2	3	1	2	2	0
5. My life seems to be ruled by the tyranny of the urgent.	1	0	3	2	3	1
Concerning the practice of Sabbath rest:						
1. Practicing Sabbath rest is important to me.	0	0	0	2	6	2
2. I practice a healthy cycle of work and rest.	0	1	2	4	2	1
3. I practice an intentional time of Sabbath rest on a weekly basis.	2	3	3	1	1	0
4. My family participates in a planned time of Sabbath rest on a weekly basis.	5	3	0	2	0	0
5. I effectively practice Sabbath rest.	3	2	3	2	0	0
6. I practice Sabbath rest even when my schedule is overwhelming.	3	4	2	0	1	0

Note: The survey observations are numbered in the order listed on pp 14 and 15 in chap. 4.

APPENDIX 9

SABBATH REST STUDY ART



APPENDIX 10

PRE- AND POST-SERIES SURVEY AVERAGES

Table A3. Pre- and post-series survey averages

Understanding Statements	Pre-Series Average	Post-Series Average
8. I have a firm understanding of what it means to rest in the Lord	4.110	5.187
9. If asked, I could explain the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.	3.505	5.022
10. If I heard it said, "Sabbath rest requires building a temple in time," I would know what it meant.	3.000	4.967
11. I know how to lead my family in a weekly time of Sabbath rest.	3.154	4.934
15. Sabbath rest requires me to follow specific rules in scripture.	4.187	4.000
16. I know how to structure a time of Sabbath rest.	3.538	4.901
17. Sunday morning church attendance is a requirement of Sabbath rest.	3.901	3.286
18. I desire to know more about the biblical concept of Sabbath rest.	5.275	4.538
19. I know how to incorporate the practice of Sabbath rest into my life.	3.670	5.044
20. I have a firm grasp of the concept of "rest for my soul."	3.626	5.099

APPENDIX 11

PRE- AND POST-SERIES SURVEY T-TEST

Table A4. T-test: paired two sample for means for pre- and post-series survey

	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	36.429	48.516
Variance	47.536	14.763
Observations	91	91
Pearson Correlation	0.161	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	90	
t Stat	-15.729	
P(T<=t) one-tail	7.297×10^{-28}	
t Critical one-tail	1.662	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.460×10^{-27}	
t Critical two-tail	1.987	

APPENDIX 12

PRE- AND POST-STUDY SURVEY AVERAGES

Table A5. Pre- and post-study survey averages

Practice Statements	Pre-Study Average	Post-Study Average
15. I practice a healthy cycle of work and rest.	4.0	4.4
16. I practice an intentional time of Sabbath rest on a weekly basis.	2.6	4.8
19. I have a specific time set aside for Sabbath rest.	2.7	4.7
21. I incorporate intentional times of resting in the Lord into my life.	3.7	4.8
22. I effectively practice Sabbath rest.	2.4	4.0
23. I practice Sabbath rest even when my schedule is overwhelming.	2.2	4.2

APPENDIX 13

PRE- AND POST-STUDY SURVEY T-TEST

Table A6. T-test: paired two sample for means pre- and post-study survey

	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	17.6	26.9
Variance	30.267	42.767
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation	0.391	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	-4.389	
P(T<=t) one-tail	.0008	
t Critical one-tail	1.833	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001	
t Critical two-tail	2.262	

APPENDIX 14

SABBATH REST SERMON SERIES

Week 1: It's About Time Genesis 1:1-2:4

Introduction:

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

"In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between action and rest. There is a universal refrain: I am so busy. As it all piles endlessly upon itself, the whole experience of being alive begins to melt into one enormous obligation. Sabbath time is a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest."

- Wayne Muller

If we are going to live in the promise of rest Jesus offers us, then we have to start at the beginning.

The Foundation of Sabbath Rest: Genesis 1:1-2:4

1) It all begins with God. (1:1–2)

- a. Everything from this point on in scripture is the story of God. In the beginning, God. In the end, God. Everything in between is the story of God.
- b. Without the work of Christ on the cross, there is no rest. (John 14:6)

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." John 14:6

2) The first thing we learn about God in scripture: God works. (1:3–26)

- a. Creates time.
- b. Creates life and all that is needed to sustain it.
- c. God works hard.
- d. There is blessing in work.

3) The second thing we learn about God in scripture: God rests. (2:1)

- a. Work is not finished until there has been rest.
- b. Rest is not complete unless there has been work.

4) God makes a portion of time holy. (2:2-4)

- a. Not a person, place, or thing.
- b. God builds a Temple in Time.
 - i. First in the wilderness (the tabernacle) and then in Jerusalem (the temple) God instructs the Israelites to build a “place of meeting.” This is a place where God dwells and invites his people to come dwell with him. The temple is a place where relationship is made right, sins are forgiven, people learn about God, and God’s people rest in his presence.
 - ii. By declaring the seventh day holy, God is building a temple in time where his people can come to him for the purpose of being refreshed, reminded of the forgiveness of sin, and drawing closer to those in their family and faith community.
 - iii. Just like the tabernacle, this temple in time has boundaries. It is a portion of time within the week. There is a beginning time and an ending time.
 - iv. Just like the temple, God fills this holy time with his presence by resting in it himself.

Key Truth: In Genesis 1:1-2:4 God teaches us a biblical rhythm of work and rest. God’s got rhythm!

A life absent of Sabbath rest results in:

1) Poor Time Management.

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Ephesians 5:15-17 (NASB)

“Time is what we need most, but alas, what we use worst. God will most certainly reckon with us most strictly when time is no more. Time is so important to us, both for this world and the next, that I can hardly wish you anything better than seriously consider what you do with your time. How and what do you use it for? What return do you make to God, your neighbor, and yourself for it? Will you never have an account book for this? Using time well is the greatest wisdom and work of life.”

- William Penn

Ask Yourself: What am I doing with the time God has given me?

- Our use of time should reflect the purpose for which God created us.

2) Overwhelming busyness.

The Prediction:

“In the 1960’s, the futurists said by now you would have one wage earner in the family working 20 hours a week because progress and technology would lead to increased productivity. They predicted productivity would increase, wages would increase, and we’d all be bored.”

- Richard Swenson

The Reality:

“That is not what happened. Instead the average husband and wife unit is working 90 hours, not 20. The prediction only missed by 350 percent.”
- Swenson

A survey by The Society for Human Resource Management in 2009 found that roughly 7 out of 10 employees across the country report that they work through lunch during the workday, beyond daily work hours, and on weekends. More than half of polled employees admit that ‘self-imposed pressure’ is the main reason for working beyond scheduled time.

When either work or rest begins to dominate us, our life becomes unbalanced.

As yourself: Does my life reflect a biblical rhythm of work and rest?

God wants you to work and be busy. (2 Cor 11:27-30)

Illus: Charles Spurgeon

Spurgeon’s autobiography, as well as many first hand observers, tells us that Spurgeon: (1) Pastored the largest evangelical church in the world at the time, (2) preached almost everyday, (3) edited his sermons for weekly publications, and thereby (4) produced the largest collection of works by any single author in English, (5) wrote an additional one hundred and twenty books, (6) presided over sixty-six different ministries, (7) edited a monthly magazine, (8) typically read five books each week, many of which he reviewed for his magazine, and (9) wrote 500 letter per week with a dip pen.

- Donald Whitney

God wants you to stop and rest. (Ps 46:10)

How do I build a temple in time for Sabbath rest?

Pick a time during your week to stop doing what you do to sustain your life, and focus on what is most important: Faith and Family.

Next Week we will begin to look at how we can structure this time of Sabbath rest. (Exod 16)

Conclusion:

Kevin DeYoung in his book *Crazy Busy* says, “We hate being busy. But we never hate it enough to change.” God is not surprised by the circumstances believers face each day, which is an important truth to remember. When we are overwhelmed by busyness, God is in control. Sabbath rest is a good way to regularly rest in the sustaining work of God and let him be in control. I think Richard Swenson sums it up best for us, “Fortunately for us, God breaks into our work and says, “OK, good job. Now it’s time to sleep. Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on the universe.”

Final Thought: It is important that we develop a biblical rhythm of work and rest.

Week 2: It's about the Journey **Exodus 16:1-30**

Introduction:

If I offered your family an all-expense paid trip to a destination of your choice, would you take it? You can go anywhere you choose for the purpose of relaxation and fun. Would you go? Of course you would! In accepting this gift there are some things that would be required of you though. You would need to plan your departure and return date. You would need plan your activities and then finally, pack for the trip. Would those requirements change your mind about going on the trip? God provides a generous invitation into Sabbath rest, but we have to prepare for and make the trip.

Then why do we shy away from God's invitation to journey with him into Sabbath Rest?

Maybe we miss out on Sabbath rest because we exist in survival mode. Kevin DeYoung says:

“You and I have a problem. Most mornings, we drag ourselves out of bed, start the day's routine, and hope against hope that we can simply hold our ground. Maybe, just maybe, we can get enough done in the next eighteen hours to beat back the beast of busyness and live to see another day. We wake up most mornings trying not to serve, just trying to survive.”

After the Lord rescued the Israelites from Egypt, they find themselves in a situation where there are just trying to survive another day. Today we will look at Exodus chapter 16 and see how God teaches his people a healthy rhythm of work and rest and gives them a model the practice of Sabbath Rest.

God's Model for Sabbath Rest in Exodus 16:

1) Sabbath Rest is part of the biblical journey through life. (v. 1)

- Illus: Harrison Family

During the Gold Rush thousands of people traveled west by wagon train to California in hope of finding their fortune. The faster they got there, the more likely they were to find a choice spot to mine gold. Can you imagine the many obstacles to be crossed on a journey of that length with such meager means of travel? In 1850, Hugh Harrison decided to move his family to California. The Harrisons, leaving at the same time as many others, decided to be faithful to practice a day of Sabbath rest every Sunday. On this day they did not travel, but spent the day in worship, reading the Bible and resting. Other wagon trains would pass them as they were sitting still each Sunday. Some travelers began mocking the Harrison family by saying, “Pious fools, you may have all the gold on the streets of heaven, but you won't get any of the gold in California because we'll get there first. Much to the surprise of everyone, the Harrison family actually caught up to and passed these very people and arrived in California first. Their family members and animals were more rested, healthier, and stronger over the long haul. God honors Sabbath rest.

God is about to lead his people on a long journey and we will see in this chapter of Exodus, Sabbath rest is an integral part of his plan for that journey.

2) Our natural response is to resist God. (vv. 2-5)

a) Fatigue alters our perception of reality.

After joyfully leaving Egypt and following God into the desert, the Israelites encounter difficulties and long to turn back to their slavery. They actually talk about Egypt like it was a place of abundance. It was slavery! Drudgery! Bondage! Death! “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full!” (v. 3.) No they didn’t. They are tired and at the end of their rope. They don’t feel like they can go on in their journey. They just want to turn back and do what is familiar.

b) We would rather control our own journey than follow God.

“A heart that loves the Lord will leap for joy at the prospect of a day with him. Doesn’t a child love to have a day with his father? Of course the worldly will loathe giving any time to God. The self-absorbed will regret a day spent in his presence. Without love for God such a requirement will seem narrow and a heavy burden.”

- Walter Chantry

God is a generous father. His response to the complaints of his children is to bless them abundantly and prepare them for the promise of rest he would provide.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Look, I’m going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual.” (Exod 16:4-5)

A model for Sabbath rest emerges in Exodus 16 that mirrors God’s creative work and rest in Genesis 1:1-2:4. The Lord answers the Israelite’s cry for food by providing quail and manna. While the quail was a temporary treat, manna became the object that the Lord provided for the daily needs of his people. God also used this provision to teach the Israelites a healthy cycle of work and rest. Each morning as the dew lifted from the desert floor, a finely formed substance, manna, accumulated on the ground. On the days God provided manna, it was to be gathered and prepared as food. The Israelites were to gather for six days and rest from their gathering on the seventh day: “Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none” (Exod 16:26). Just like the Israelites, God’s people today should observe a regular rhythm of work and rest.

3) God provides, but we must prepare. (vv. 21-23)

“After this the people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual—four quarts for each person instead of two. Then all the leaders of the

community came and asked Moses for an explanation. 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.” (Exod 16: 21-23)

Successful Sabbath rest requires anticipation and intentionality. To rest from work for a period of time during the week means that work must be done in preparation of rest. In Exodus 16, the sixth day is different than the previous five in the sense that it is a day of preparation for Sabbath rest. The people of God went out to gather on the sixth day just as they did on the previous five days of the week. On this day, however, God provided enough manna for two days. The picture here is not one of the Israelites having to work twice as hard to gather twice as much manna for the seventh day. The miracle of the sixth day was that God provided more manna per unit of ground than on the other days. The more we can prepare for Sabbath rest, the more we will enjoy the blessing of it.

Sabbath is intended to be practiced in the home. “Each family according to its need.” Sabbath rest is best practiced in the family.

4) Sabbath Rest is more about imitating God than following rules. (vv. 24-27)

“So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor. Moses said, “Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the LORD. There will be no food on the ground today. You may gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath. There will be no food on the ground that day. Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food.” (Exod 16:24-27)

The Lord did not create a system of rules for the Israelites to follow concerning Sabbath rest at this time. It’s not that on the seventh day they gathered food and God punished them because they broke the rules by gathering. On the seventh day God did not work. He did not provide any manna. God was leading by example and the people sinned by not following his example.

“Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.” (Eph 5:1-2)

Reality Check: The absence of Sabbath Rest can result in family stress.

“Virtually all of our relationships are damaged by hurry. Many families are being starved to death by velocity. Our children lie wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions.”

- Richard Swenson

We so often fall prey to the illusion of “more is better.” The motto “I’ll sleep when I’m dead” is held in high value as we drive ourselves to the point of exhaustion just so we can achieve and acquire. To be busy is a virtue. The problem is that a fast paced life can create a great disconnect in families.

“We live in an exceedingly busy society. Pressures of too much to do bring about tragic results. One of the great sources of sadness and suffering in children and

youth is their having parents so absorbed in other things that they have no time for their sons and daughters.”

- William Chantry

Children aren't the only ones who suffer. When parents become consumed with career or other things outside the home, a lonely desperation can set in. Kerry Wyatt Kent in her book *God's Whisper in a Mother's Chaos* writes about what many mothers face each day:

“I used to handle intense on-the-job pressure. So why can't I handle bedtime with two people less than three feet tall? What happened to me? I wish my husband were home. I wish I had more of God's peace and strength.”

Practicing Sabbath rest is one way we find peace and strength in the Lord. A home without rest is a home a home in crisis. Much like the disciples in the storm we feel like our ship is sinking in a sea of chaos.

“As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let's cross to the other side of the lake.” So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm.” (Mark 4:35-39)

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is take a nap. Here is Jesus in the midst of chaos; resting. When he rebukes the wind and the waves and says, “Be still!” he was drawing from a Psalm central to the concept of Sabbath rest. “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Ps 46:10).

How do I practice Sabbath Rest?

1) **Pick a time. (Temple in time)**

- a. The ideal is for this to be a day of rest. This is not a legal requirement, but a biblical picture. We will talk more next week about exceptions to this and how Jesus brings about freedom in Sabbath rest.

2) **Prepare for that time.**

- a. What needs to happen in order for this time to be restful?
 - i. Food – make it easy
 - ii. Tasks – get them done or make them wait
 - iii. Company – be hospitable, but be together.

3) **Structure that time.**

- a. Worship (church), Replenishment (enjoy yourself), Relationship (enjoy your family)
- b. Have a beginning time and action.
- c. Have an ending time and action.

4) **Protect that time.**

- a. No work.
- b. No distractions.

A suggested model of Sabbath rest is one that can begin on Saturday at dinner and end on Sunday at dinner. This offers the ability to work around the house on Saturday and prepare for Sabbath rest, sleep is a part of that day, and then there is still time to accomplish some tasks after dinner on Sunday evening. That day of rest would could include family time, Sunday worship, meals together, Sunday afternoon relaxation, ending with a meal on Sunday.

Next week, using Acts 15, I will discuss options for Sabbath rest that one can adopt when they do not have the ability to take a full day of rest.

Final Thought: The best reason to practice Sabbath rest is the fact that God himself did so.

Week 3: It's About Freedom
Acts 15, Exodus 20:8-11

Introduction:

I understand the need for Sabbath Rest, now what?

Warning: Sabbath rest can be a polarizing practice. (Okra)

When Janey and I started practicing Sabbath rest, we immediately hit a bump in the road. I was very focused on what we *should not* do on our day of Sabbath rest and Janey was focused on what we *could* do. This all came to a head when Janey said, "I think I'm going to go to the garden and pick some okra for dinner tonight." I said, "Ummm, it's Sabbath. I don't think you should be 'harvesting' on the Sabbath." She looked at me for a second and said, "Well, hide and watch, cause I'm pickin okra!" We all enjoyed fried okra that night for dinner.

The struggle: **Legalism** vs. **Freedom**

When Sabbath rest becomes a weight for the believer to bare it loses the very essence of its intended purpose. Legalism erodes the very foundation of Sabbath rest.

Important questions for practicing Sabbath Rest:

1) Is the believer bound to the Old Testament Sabbath laws? NO!

- a. We are free in Christ. (Mark 2:27-28, John 8:36, Acts 15:4-11 & 28-29)

Believers are not bound to the requirements of the Law. Jesus met every requirement needed to bring us freedom from sin and bondage. We do not earn our salvation. We do not work for our salvation. God has provided salvation in Christ and we are free within it.

- b. We are free within biblical boundaries. (John 1:1-4, Exod 20:8-11, Isa 56:6-8)

We are free in Christ. Christ is the word. God's word is the standard by which the believer lives. So while we are not bound by the minutia of the Mosaic Law, God's Word gives us a framework to live within. Do we obey the ten commandments in order to be saved? No. We obey the ten commandments because they provide a framework for a godly life. No other gods, check. No false idols, check. No taking the Lord's name in vane, check. Honor your parents, check. No murder, check. No adultery, check. No stealing, check. No lying, check. No coveting, check. Wait, are we missing one? As believers we take the ten commandments seriously. Well, all but one right? The fourth commandment tells us to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

2) How can I honor Christ in Sabbath rest?

a. By filling it full. (Matt 5:17-19)

Just like Jesus we should seek to fulfill the practice of Sabbath rest and not abolish or ignore it because it may lend itself to legalism. We don't do it out of obligation to the Lord, we enter into it as a delight in the Lord.

Take some time for:

1. Sheer inactivity. (sleep in, take a nap, veg out, relax.)
2. Avocational activity. (do that "one day I'm going to" thing that your work schedule prevents you from doing, play, take a walk, paint, read an enjoyable book, listen to good music, enjoy creation, etc.)
3. Consider whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. (Consider what it is that truly recharges you.)
4. What benefits your family. (if your schedule prevents you from being with your family, spend time with them, if you are always with your family, do what is necessary to take a break from them.)

Adjust Sabbath rest to the seasons of your life:

- Single, a soldier, small children, adult children, more than one job or work all the time.

Every believer has something that will keep him or her from resting in the Lord. Busy schedules, hard circumstances, stages of life that are new and challenging. If you are single, plan being in Christian community. If you are a deployed soldier, try to plan a time that your family know you are praying for them, reading God's word and doing what you can to take a break, use those skype, face time or phone conversations to pray for your kids wife and bless them, tell them how you are resting in the Lord in the midst of your circumstances. If you have small children, work together to plan a break so you can rest. If you have adult children, let them know that each week, when you start Sabbath rest, that you are praying for them. Plan a time to connect with them somehow during Sabbath rest. If you work all the time. Ask your self why? Are you working too much? Is there sometime you can plan to rest in the Lord? If so take it. Fight for it!

b. By restoring it to relationship. (Matt 11:28-30)

i. Sabbath rest is a grace to be observed. (Rom 6:12-14)

Sabbath rest is not something we do in order to have a relationship with God. It is something we do because we have a relationship with him in Christ. There is nothing left for the

believer to do to be in relationship with God. We have been saved by grace. But then within that relationship God gives us grace each day. We grow in prayer, we grow in God's word by reading and studying it, we grow in Sabbath rest because it is way of participating in the grace freely given and readily available to us at every moment.

- ii. The goal is unity not uniformity. (John 17:20-24)

As a community of faith we should all be willing to lean into the practice of Sabbath. We would all say that prayer should be an important aspect of our lives, but we don't all pray the same way, or for the same things. We would all say that practicing our spiritual gifts is important in the work of the Kingdom, but we don't all have the same gifts nor do we all use them in the same way. We all come to worship and sing the same songs, but not one person sings exactly like anyone else. Sabbath rest is given to the church for the purpose of restoration, replenishment, and resting in our relationship with the Lord. We operate within the biblical concept of Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is important and should be part of the believer's life. But Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So we have freedom within Sabbath rest to push aside every distraction and focus on God and the what he has done in the world, in our homes, and in our hearts!

Final Thought: What we make room for in our life reveals what we value most in our hearts.

Week 4: It's About Resting in The Lord Hebrews 4:9 – 11

Introduction:

Sabbath rest is successful. (Isa 58:13-14)

Illus: Chick-fil-a https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dqc_ctPNGwk

One principle of Sabbath rest is that our work is more productive when we take time to rest as God commands. Chick-fil-a does more business in 6 days than the rest of their competitors do in seven, and they put out a better product! This is much more than a business plan though. God wired us for this biblical rhythm of work and rest.

As believers we should know that God remains true to his promises. He created Sabbath rest for us. He gave us a model by which to enter into it. He gives us freedom within Sabbath rest to do what replenishes us. Sabbath rest is all about God and he is faithful to us in it. This is why it important for believers to understand that there is a difference between just taking a break and entering Sabbath rest.

1) Sabbath Rest is more than physical rest. It is spiritual rest. (Heb 4:1-3a)

So far we have talked about the model of Sabbath rest and how the believer can enter into that time on a weekly basis. It is important to know how to choose a time, begin and end that time, and how to fill that time with activity that replenishes the believer. But Sabbath rest is about so much more than taking a physical break from a hectic schedule. Ultimately, Sabbath rest is about learning to rest in the Lord. The physical results of Sabbath rest will remain hollow without a heart directed toward the Lord.

2) How do I rest in the Lord? (Heb 9:4-11)

A) Don't miss it! (v. 9)

- a. Sabbath Rest is for both here and eternity.

God offers us rest and is waiting on us to enter into it. Did you know that if a person were obedient to the principle of Sabbath rest for their entire life and they lived to be 70, they would have spent 7 years of their life resting? Why we would we want to miss this?

Don't miss that we enter into Sabbath rest through Christ. If you are here today and you do not know him as your personal savior, repent, confess and believe. Accept the truth that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness. Confess that fact to the Lord by talking to Him and asking forgiveness for all of your sins. Believe that Jesus died on a cross and provided forgiveness for you and that because he was raised to life, you can have new life in Christ. It is only in this relationship with Christ that you can enter into eternal rest. It is waiting for you now. Don't

miss it. Verse 3 said, “For only we who believe can enter his rest.” God’s invitation is here and now. Don’t miss another second of life in Christ.

I can’t help but think that this Sabbath rest practiced now prepares us for the rest God offers us in Christ for eternity. If we can’t get used to the thought of Sabbath rest here and now, what do we think Heaven is going to be like?

Once we are in relationship with Christ, our lives should be different. We should be transformed into his likeness. Sabbath rest is one of the ways our life can be different. The rest spoken of in verse 9 is in both present and future tense. Sabbath rest here and now, yes. Sabbath rest for eternity with Christ, yes. No one should miss it!

B) Have faith. (v. 10)

Sabbath rest requires faith. Faith that everything will be ok. Faith that we can trust God. Faith is integral to our life in Christ. Let’s look at Psalm 46:10 and see how this related to resting in the Lord by having faith.

Psalm 46:10 (Be still and know that I am God.)

- a. Faith is about obedience. (Be still. Let go and relax. Release your grip.)

The word used here for be still literally means to let go and relax, to loosen your grip. This is a perfect picture of entering Sabbath rest. We have to loosen our grip of those things we hang tight to all week that sustain us. Life can be heavy. God invites us to put the weight down and relax for a little while. We can’t enjoy life when we are burdened. God is serious about obedience to Sabbath rest. Exodus 20: 8-11, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” This is a command. It takes faith to follow. It takes faith to be obedient.

- b. Obedience is about action. (And know that I am God. To know by experience.)

Obedience leads to action. The believer should bear fruit. It is one thing to think about Sabbath rest. It is another to trust God by doing it. When we put action to our faith, it brings life to it. James tells us that faith without works is dead. We can’t work to earn our salvation, but if we are saved, we will hunger for the things of God and gladly desire them.

In Sabbath Rest you should take time to individually:

Sabbath Rest to Do List:

- Pray
- Read Scripture
- Meditate on Scripture
- Practice Thankfulness to the Lord
- Look for the Lord’s hand at work around you
- Talk about the things of God
- Worship
- Stay away from things that are ungodly or distract you from the Lord.

C) Hurry up! (v. 11)

- a. Do your best to enter Sabbath rest.

The “do your best” used here in verse 11 means to hasten, to use speed, be diligent, and labor toward. This is the picture of the heart that longs for Sabbath rest. When a biblical rhythm of work and rest is practiced, Sabbath rest becomes the pinnacle of the week. There is a longing for it. We should desire it. We should fight for it. We should be diligent in preparing for and entering into it. Why would we not? We get to rest with the creator of the universe, the lover of our soul, the holy God who invites us to rest and play. We should never allow the busyness of our lives to outpace our desire for rest in the Lord. When we do, we discover that a life without Sabbath rest has consequences.

- b. The stakes are high.

When we don't rest in the Lord we burn out.

Many things happen in the life of the person who does not rest in the Lord. Burnout is one of the most prevalent and destructive results of a restless life. Anne Marie Miller in an interview with Bill Hybels asked what he saw plaguing the church. His answer was as follows:

“I see twin towers of concern. One is burnout; the other is complacency. I'm concerned about believers who are borderline exhausted. I would hope we could find the kind of energy that come only from the Holy Spirit so that we can sustain productive, Christ-honoring ministry over the long haul.”

Burnout has serious consequences. The Japanese have one of the highest work ethics in the world. It is not uncommon for Japanese workers to average 60 hours per week, many times working longer. Competition for jobs and high standards of quality force many into overwork. The result is that seemingly health young men are dropping dead on the job from coronary failure and stroke due. Karo-shi (death from over work) is the official term for this phenomenon. There are an estimated 10,000 workers per year dying from Karo-shi in Japan. The stakes are high. This is one economic product America cannot afford to import.

We were created by God to work and to rest. Sabbath rest is given to us by God as a vital part of the rhythm of our life. We should not miss it. We should fight for it. We should desire it and we should teach our families to follow the Lord in it.

Final Thought: Living for God includes resting in Him.

APPENDIX 15

GROUP STUDY LEADER GUIDES

Week 1: God's Got Rhythm Genesis 1 – God Works

The Goal:

A biblical rhythm of work and rest is clearly seen in the creation account. Incorporating this rhythm into our life requires both work and rest. The goal of this lesson focuses on the fact that God works and how this reality should shape the life of the believer.



Introduction:

Have you ever had a conversation with anyone wrestling with the purpose of his or her existence? “Why was I created?” “What am I supposed to do with my life?” Have you ever asked these questions yourself? The way we answer greatly affects how we live. Work is an important consideration when discovering our God given purpose. God works and calls us to do the same.

Read this quote from Wayne Muller and let the group respond to the following questions:

“In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between action and rest. There is a universal refrain: ‘I am so busy.’ Sabbath time is a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest.”

- Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*

Group Discussion:

What is it that makes you feel overwhelmed by the busyness of life?

What does your life look like when work gets out of balance?

Diving Into The Text:

If we are going to live in the promise of rest Jesus offers us, we have to start with the creation account. Have the group follow along in their Bibles as you teach through the following points. Ask people in the group to read each passage out loud as you work through the text.

Read Genesis 1:1 and then talk with the group about the importance of the first four words of the Bible. The most important book in history starts with these words:

“In the beginning God...” (Gen 1:1)

The first words of a book are significant. They immediately let the reader know what the story is based on. In the Bible, the first four words of Genesis introduce us to the central character in scripture, God. Everything from this point on is about God and his work. This sets the stage for a biblical understanding of Sabbath rest.

We have to know God to practice Sabbath rest. Ask a group member to read Psalm 62:1. Explain to the group that Sabbath rest is only possible as the result of being in relationship with him. We cannot know true rest unless we know God.

“I am at rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him.” (Ps 62:1 HCSB)

We cannot know God unless we are in Christ. Ask a group member to read John 14:6. Explain to the group that while we can only practice Sabbath rest if we know God, the only way to know God is through a relationship with Christ. We do not practice Sabbath rest in order to be saved. We are given the opportunity to practice Sabbath rest because we are saved.

“Jesus told him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (John 14:6 HCSB)

Group Discussion:

How could you share the Gospel with someone who was struggling to find balance in their life?

What can our practice of Sabbath rest, or lack of, teach us about our relationship with the Lord?

After being introduced to the creator of the universe in Genesis 1:1, the first thing scripture teaches us about God is that he works. Ask a member of the group to read the first five words of Genesis 1:1. Explain to the group that work was part of God’s plan from the beginning. It was not a result of sin entering the world. It is a blessing, not a punishment.

“In the beginning God created...” (Gen 1:1)

Rather than have the group read all of Genesis 1, ask different members to read the following passages. Ask the group to answer this question after each passage:

What kind of work is God doing on the first six days of creation?

Day 1	Day 4
“Let there be light,” and there was light. (v. 3)	“Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years.” (v. 14)
Day 2	Day 5
“Let there be space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.” (v. 6)	“Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” (v. 20)
Day 3	Day 6
“Let the waters beneath the sky flow together in one place, so dry ground may appear.” (v. 9) “Let the land sprout with vegetation – every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” (v. 11)	“Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind – livestock, small animals, that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” (v. 24) “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.” (v. 26)

Group discussion:

We see that God works, how should this influence the life of the believer?

Do you think there will be work in heaven?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in overwhelming busyness.

Drive home the following point with the group: When either work or rest begins to dominate us, our life becomes unbalanced.

Use the following quotes to illustrate the importance of avoiding overwhelming busyness:

“In the 1960’s, the futurists said by now you would have one wage earner in the family working 20 hours a week because progress and technology would lead to increased productivity. They predicted productivity would increase, wages would increase, and we’d all be bored. That is not what happened. Instead the average husband and wife unit is working 90 hours, not 20. The prediction only missed by 350 percent.”

- Richard Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome*

A survey in 2009 found that roughly 7 out of 10 employees across the country report that they work through lunch during the workday, beyond daily work hours and on weekends. More than half of polled employees admit that ‘self-imposed pressure’ is the main reason for working beyond scheduled time.

- The Society for Human Resource Management

“We hate being busy. But we never hate it enough to change.”

- Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*

Making Sabbath Rest a Reality:

The first step in making Sabbath rest a reality is for the believer to work. In order to help us put work in the right perspective, have different members of the group read each of the following verses and let the group discuss how it pertains to work:

- Genesis 2:15 - God gave Adam work.
- Mark 6:3 - Jesus was a carpenter.
- 2 Corinthians 11:27-30 - Paul the Apostle was busy.
- 1 Timothy 5:8 - Believers must be providers.
- 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 - Work is the antidote to laziness.
- Colossians 3:23 - Believers ultimately work for the Lord.

Group discussion:

Based on these passages, how would you describe the biblical picture of work?

In what ways does the biblical picture help you adjust your personal work ethic?

Recapping the Key Truth:

In the creation account we see that God works. A biblical rhythm of work and rest includes performing our jobs as if we were working for the Lord. Our work during the week should lead to a time of rest.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

Ask group members to consider the following question:

Does my life reflect a biblical rhythm of work and rest?

Ask them to look at how much they work and pray about when they will incorporate Sabbath rest into their week.

Preview:

Next week we will study the rest God entered into on the seventh day of creation (Gen 2:1-3) and how this rest can shape the life of the believer.

Week 2: God's Got Rhythm Genesis 2:1-3 – God Rests

The Goal:

A biblical rhythm of work and rest is clearly seen in the creation account. Incorporating this rhythm requires both work and rest. The goal of this lesson focuses on the fact that after God works, he rests. God declares this portion of time in which he rests to be holy. The believer should make a portion of their week holy by practicing Sabbath rest.



Introduction:

What we believe about creation, work, and rest sets the stage for our actions. God created us to glorify him through both work and rest. Many times we struggle with what it means to rest. The Hebrew word “Sabbath” occurs 111 times in the Old Testament.

The meaning of the word Sabbath is “to cease, stop; to stop working, celebrate, to rest.” If we are going to follow God in a rhythm of life that brings glory to Him, we need to know how to work hard and rest well.

Ask a group member to read this passage and have the group respond to the questions below:

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matt 11:28-30 NASB)

Diving into the text:

Group Discussion:

What need in your life does this passage of scripture speak to?

When do you feel like rest is a waste of time?

Other than sleep, what do you consider to be rest in your life?

Genesis 2 introduces the reader to an important aspect of creation. It is at this point in scripture that we see God rest. Ask a group member to read Genesis 2:1-2.

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work.

There is a God ordained relationship between work and rest. Explain to the group that the idea behind Genesis 2:1-2 is the same as Genesis 1:1, *“In the beginning God created.”* The focus is still on God and what he is doing. In this passage we see that after God completes the tasks of creation, he takes another day to rest. He does not disappear or vanish from the story like a genie going back into his lamp after completing a task.

Ask a group member to read Exodus 20:8-10. Explain to the group that when read as a whole, the creation account shows the work God did during the first six days was not finished until he had rested. The rest God entered into on the seventh day would not have been complete without the six days of work. There would have been nothing to rest from.

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God.” (Exod 20:8-10)

God does not have to rest, but chooses to. Ask a group member to read Isaiah 40:28. Explain to the group that God, in all of his power, chose to rest. As believers we must make the same choice as a part of our week. We work hard, as if working for the Lord. We should then chose to rest in the same way the God chose to rest.

Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. (Isa 40:28)

Group Discussion:

Why do you think God chose to rest and then show us in scripture that he did so?

What is significant about God resting by choice?

What are some things people rely on for rest that are God-honoring?

The final act of creation is one that is easily overlooked but has profound meaning in a biblical rhythm of work and rest. Ask a member of the group to read Genesis 2:3. Not only does God choose to rest with his creation, but the Lord also declares the seventh day of the week to be holy.

And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation. (Gen 2:3)

The first aspect of creation God declares to be holy is a portion of time during the week. Explain to the group that this is significant because God could have chosen anything to be holy. He could have chosen a person, a designation of land, an object, an animal, anything. The fact that the Lord chose a portion of weekly time as holy has far reaching ramifications.

Time is one of the few aspects of creation that man cannot control. If God had declared a person, place, or thing holy, mankind would find a way to manipulate and profit from it. Read the following quote to the group and then answer the discussion questions that follow.

“It is impossible for man to shirk the problem of time. The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments. We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.”

- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

Group Discussion:

Does the concept of holiness have a positive or negative connotation to you?

Why do you think God chose to declare a portion of time holy?

What is your reaction to Heschel’s quote about the significance of time?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in poor time management.

Drive home the following point with the group: We cannot control time. God has appointed us stewards over it. When we choose not to use our time wisely, we suffer the results of poor time management.

Use the following quotes to illustrate the importance of Sabbath rest as a component of good time management:

“Our American economy is measured by productivity. In the marketplace, multitasking is a valued and employable skill. Everyone’s looking for a superhuman who can effortlessly spin 36 plates in the air and get by on four hours of sleep. “Time is money,” they say. “You can sleep when you’re dead.” This “do more” philosophy has extended beyond the workplace to the heart of religious culture. After all, it’s easier to measure spiritual devotion by the number of church committees you serve on than by God’s standard—looking at the heart.”

- William Brown, *Turning Down the Noise*

“Solving the problem of time begins by acknowledging that time is not our possession. It is a gift from God. We are simply allowed to use it as stewards to whom it has been entrusted. While this acknowledgement does not solve the problems surrounding the quantity of time at our disposal, it instills an attitude toward time that can make us value the quality of the time that God has given us as a gift. If time is holy, then the work and leisure with which we fill it are also holy.”

- Leland Ryken, *Redeeming The Time*

“Fortunately for us, God breaks into our work and says, “OK, good job. Now it’s time to sleep. Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on the universe.”

- Richard Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome*

Making Sabbath Rest a Reality:

The first step in making Sabbath rest a reality is for the believer to work. The second step is to commit a portion of time during their week for the practice of resting in the Lord. In order to help us put rest in the right perspective, have different members of the group read each of the following verses and let the group discuss how it pertains to rest:

- God commands rest. (Exodus 20:8-11)
- There is rest in the presence of God. (Exodus 33:14)
- Absence of rest creates useless work. (Psalm 127:2)
- Jesus rested. (Mark 4:38)
- Jesus told his disciples to rest. (Mark 6:31)
- Jesus promises rest for those who follow him. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Group discussion:

Based on these passages, how would you describe the biblical picture of rest?

In what ways does the biblical picture help you connect the relationship between work and rest?

Recapping the Key Truth:

A biblical rhythm includes both work and rest. God chose a portion of time to rest in and declare holy. Work is not finished until there has been rest. Rest is incomplete unless there has been work. Our own rhythm of work and rest should reflect what God did in the creation account.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

Ask group members to pick a time of the week within their work schedule where they could practice Sabbath rest.

Challenge the members of the group to practice Sabbath rest during that time and share their experience the following week.

Preview:

Next week we will study what to do when we feel resistant to Sabbath rest. Exodus 16 will show us the love of a generous father in the face of a resistant people.

Week 3: A New Way to Trust Exodus 16:1-5 & 13-4

The Goal:

When worn down by the pace of life, the believer has a choice to either follow a biblical rhythm of work and rest or cling to an old way of life. The goal of this lesson is to teach that Christians should trust God and not resist the practice of Sabbath rest.



Introduction:

What we chose to do in the midst of our busy week matters to the Lord. Sabbath rest is a necessary part of a biblical rhythm of work and rest. Why then do believers run from this gift of weekly rest? When we chose to take control of our own schedule and ignore God's biblical framework for our weekly rhythm, we eventually suffer in every area of our life.

Read the quotes below to the group and ask participants to respond to the following questions:

“Chronic overload drains your spiritual reserves. It is an enemy of prayer, worship, meditation, love for one another and service. We either stop doing those things, or worse, we simply go through the motions.”

- Richard Swenson, *Living Inside the Margin*

“In today's 24/7 world, thousands of years after Mount Sinai, remembering the Sabbath is countercultural. Our bodies and souls were designed for regular intervals of rest, yet we fill our lives with chaos, noise, and distraction. When we ignore God's commandment, we pay the price in our physical health, emotional well-being, and spiritual vitality.”

- William Brown, *Tuning Out the Noise*

Group Discussion:

Why do we sometimes work harder when we should stop and rest?

Can you share a time when fatigue robbed you of spiritual vitality?

What are some reasons we resist Sabbath rest?

Diving into the text:

Exodus 16 introduces the reader to the model of Sabbath rest God offers his people when they are struggling to survive in the wilderness. Before the people learn to practice Sabbath rest, they are reluctant to follow God. Ask a group member to read Genesis Exodus 16:1-3.

Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron. "If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death." (Exod 16:1-3)

Explain to the group that **when we resist the practice of Sabbath rest we can become fatigued. Fatigue alters our perception of reality.** After God rescues his people from slavery they joyfully escape Egypt and follow God into the desert where they encounter difficulties. They respond by longing for Egypt. They talk about it like it was a place of abundance. Their perception of reality is off! Egypt was drudgery, bondage, and death! Ask a group participant to read 2 Peter 2:20-22.

"And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. They prove the truth of this proverb: "A dog returns to its vomit." And another says, "A washed pig returns to the mud." (2 Pet 2:20-22)

Reinforce with the group the truth that we do not practice Sabbath rest in order to be saved, but rather because we are saved. When we have been made new in Christ we are to pursue holy living. We should not return to the old life Christ saved us from. **We are at risk of clinging to the old life when we are not rested and focused on the Lord.** Ask group to discuss the following questions:

Group Discussion:

When we are fatigued, how is our decision making ability altered?

What practical things should believers do to follow God when experiencing fatigue?

We live in a culture that is obsessed with having “more.” When we are driven by the need for “more” our focus can shift from relying on God to provide, to what we think will work. We see in Exodus 16 where God responds to the complaints of the Israelites. Ask a group participant to read Exodus 16:4-5:

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Look, I’m going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual.’” (Exod 16:4-5)

Explain to the group that **God responds as a generous father**. His choice in this case is to bless them abundantly and prepare them for the promise of rest he would provide. A model of Sabbath rest emerges in Exodus 16 that mirrors God’s creative work in Genesis 1. The Lord answers the cries of his hungry people by providing quail and manna. Explain to your group that for hundreds of years in Egypt the Israelites had been in survival mode. Generosity was a foreign concept to them. They had not learned to trust God. Explain to the group that the Lord was teaching his people to trust. Ask a group member to read Exodus 16:13-14 and the discuss the questions below.

“That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew. When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground.” (Exod 16:13-14)

Group Discussion:

What are some ways the Lord has lavished his blessings on you?

If you were given the opportunity to take a day off from work this week, is there anything that would prevent you from taking it?

Where do you find it easy to trust the Lord?

Where do you struggle in trusting the Lord?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in chronic fatigue.

Drive home the following point with the group: When our life is in overdrive it becomes out of balance and we experience fatigue. Fatigue is more than being sleepy. It is the cumulative effect of living beyond our limits. When we become fatigued our decision making process becomes clouded. We are at our worst when we are worn down by the chaos of life. Even in these times, God invites us into his rest.

Use the following quotes and the passage of scripture to illustrate the importance of practicing Sabbath rest during times of fatigue:

“You and I have a problem. Most mornings, we drag ourselves out of bed, start the day’s routine, and hope against hope that we can simply hold our ground. Maybe, just maybe, we can get enough done in the next eighteen hours to beat back the beast of busyness and live to see another day. We wake up most mornings trying not to serve, just trying to survive.”

- Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*

“Why are typically rational people so irrational in their behavior? The answer, I believe, is that we’re in the midst of a bubble; one so vast that to be alive today in the developed world is to be affected, or infected, by it. I call it “The More Bubble.” The nature of bubbles is that some asset is absurdly overvalued until—eventually—the bubble bursts, and we’re left scratching our heads wondering why we were so irrationally exuberant in the first place. The asset we’re overvaluing now is the notion of doing it all, having it all, achieving it all; what Jim Collins call “the undisciplined pursuit of more.”

- Greg McKeown, *Harvard Business Review*

“As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm.” (Mark 4:35-39)

Making Sabbath Rest a Reality:

Explain to the group that making Sabbath rest a reality requires the believer to be trust the Lord and push through the resistance that come when considering the practice of Sabbath rest. In essence we must say, “I will not return to my former way of living. I will trust the Lord and rest in him for my salvation and my daily life.” In order to encourage the group to trust the Lord in the practice of Sabbath rest, have different members of the group read each of the following verses and let the group discuss how they pertain to trust. Then answer the questions below:

- Proverbs 3:5 – Trust God more than your own understanding.
- Romans 8:28 – Trust God to work in all circumstances.
- Psalm 37:4-6 – Trust God and delight in Him.
- Matthew 6:25 – Do not worry
- Jeremiah 29:11 – Trust that God has a good plan for you.
- John 14:1 – Believe in God when your heart is troubled.

Group discussion:

What is the picture of trust portrayed in these passages of scripture?

What experiences have taught you to trust in the goodness of the Lord?

Recapping the Key Truth:

The practice of Sabbath Rest can present some challenges. One challenge is the initial resistance to re-ordering our life to include a period of resting in the Lord. When faced with this reluctance, we must trust that God has provided everything we need in order to rest in him. It is up to us to step into that rest.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle creating two columns. On one side list all of the things that prevent you from practicing Sabbath rest. This is the resistance list. On the other side, list ways God has provided and taught you to trust in him. After completing the lists pray and ask God what he wants you to do with Sabbath rest in your life. If you desire it and there are things on the resistance list that you don't know how to navigate, pray about those items and ask God for help.

Preview:

Next week we will study the model for Sabbath rest God give his people in Exodus 16. Sabbath rest requires preparation!

Week 4: Preparation is Key Exodus 16:21-27

The Goal:

To goal of this lesson focuses on the following: 1) Successful Sabbath rest requires preparation. 2) Sabbath rest is best practiced as a household. 3) The primary reason we practice Sabbath rest is to be imitators of God.



Introduction:

The consistent practice of Sabbath rest can be challenging. Taking a time out of every week to stop and rest in the Lord does not happen by default. Our time fills up quickly and before we know it, our life becomes driven the tyranny of the urgent.

Sabbath rest is important. God invites believers into this time and blesses us with everything we need to be sustained while we rest in the Lord. It is up to us carve out a time for Sabbath rest and make it different than every other day of the week. God gives us the ability, but there are things we must do to get ready to follow God in the journey of Sabbath rest.

Read this story to the group and have the group respond to the questions below:

During the gold rush thousands of people traveled west by wagon train to California in hope of finding their fortune. That faster they got there, the more likely they were to find a choice spot to mine gold. In 1850, Hugh Harrison left Minnesota with his family and headed west. The Harrisons decided to be faithful to the practice of Sabbath rest every Sunday. On this day they did not travel and spent the day in worship, reading scripture, and resting. As others would pass by and observe the Harrison's stopped on the trail they began to taunt the family. "Pious fools, you may have all the gold on the streets of Heaven, but you won't get any in California because we'll get there first." Much to their surprise, the Harrison family passed all of these people and arrived in California first. They and their animals were more rested, healthier, and stronger upon arrival than the others.

Group Discussion:

What about practicing Sabbath rest doesn't seem to make sense to the world?

What makes sense about the principle of Sabbath rest?

Diving into the text:

In Exodus 16 after the Lord provides for the needs of his people he gives them structure for how they should go about their week. From this passage emerges a biblical model of work and rest that mirrors God's creative work in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Explain to the group that after following the Lord's direction, the people of Israel began to prepare and eat the manna provided each morning. On the sixth day of the week the people wound up with twice as much food after preparing the manna. Ask a group member to read Exodus 16:21-23 and then lead the group through the points below.

“After this the people gathered the food by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual – four quarts for each person instead of two. Then all the leaders of the community came and asked Moses for an explanation. 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.” (Exod 16:21-23)

Explain to the group that **successful Sabbath rest requires anticipation and intentionality**. To rest from work for a period of time during the week means that work must be done in preparation for rest. The sixth day in Exodus 16 is different than the previous five days of the week. The Israelites did not have to work twice as hard to gather twice the amount of manna. The blessing of the sixth day is that God provided more manna per unit of ground. Explain to the group that God gave them everything they needed to prepare for Sabbath rest.

Explain to the group the next important aspect of Sabbath rest: **Sabbath rest is best practiced in the home**. Read Exodus 16:16 to the group. “*Each house should gather as much food as it needs.*” While Sabbath rest is an individual practice, it is best when everyone in the home enters resting in the Lord as a family unit. Take some time to discuss the questions below before moving to the next section.

Group Discussion:

What period of time during the week do you anticipate Sabbath rest working for you?

What do you have to do to prepare for that time of rest to be successful?

What are some hurdles you face when practicing a time of Sabbath rest?

In Exodus 16 the Lord gives his people a very basic order of work and rest. There are not a great number of rules and regulations that surround the biblical rhythm of work and rest at this point in the Bible. He told them to gather and prepare food for six days and to practice Sabbath rest on the seventh day of the week.

Explain to the group that the rhythm of work and rest seen in Exodus 16 is not based on making and breaking rules. Drive home the point that **Sabbath rest is more about imitating God than following rules**. Ask a group member to read Exodus 16: 24-27 before explaining this concept.

“So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor. Moses said, “Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the Lord. There will be no food on the ground today. You may gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath. There will be no food on the ground that day. Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food.” (Exod 16:24-27)

Teach the group that it’s not that on the seventh day they gathered food and then God punished them because they broke the rules by gathering. The important point here is that **God did not work on the seventh day!** He did not provide any manna. God was leading by example and the people sinned by not following his example. Have a member of the group read Ephesians 5:1-2 and then discuss the questions below.

“Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.” (Eph 5:1-2)

Group Discussion:

In your experience, what have been the rules surrounding Sabbath rest?

How does the idea of imitating God change your approach to Sabbath rest?

Discuss practicing Sabbath rest to achieve a certain result verses practicing Sabbath rest because of God’s example.

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in family stress.

Drive home the following point with the group: Practicing Sabbath rest is one way we find peace and strength in the Lord. A home without rest is a home in crisis.

Use the following quotes to illustrate the importance Sabbath rest as a component of diminishing family stress:

“Virtually all of our relationships are damaged by hurry. Many families are being starved to death by velocity. Our children lie wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions.”

- Richard Swenson, *Living Inside the Margin*

“We live in an exceedingly busy society. Pressures of too much to do bring about tragic results. One of the great sources of sadness and suffering in children and youth is their having parents so absorbed in other things that they have no time for their sons and daughters.”

- Walter Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*

Take a moment to explain to the group the children are not the only ones who suffer from family stress. Parents struggle when there is an absence of rest in the home. Read the following quote and scripture to the group:

“I used to handle intense on-the-job pressure. So why can’t I handle bedtime with two people less than three feet tall? What happened to me? I wish my husband were home. I wish I had more of God’s peace and strength.”

- Keri Kent, *God’s Whisper in a Mother’s Chaos*

“How blessed is the man who does this, and the son of the man who takes hold of it; who keeps from profaning the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing evil.”
(Isa 56:2 NASB)

Making Sabbath Rest a Reality:

Take the following steps in practicing Sabbath rest this week:

- 1) Pick a time** – Taking a day for Sabbath rest is ideal. This is not a legal requirement. It is a biblical picture. If you can’t take an entire day, pick a period of time that works.
- 2) Prepare for that time** – What needs to happen in order for this time to be restful? What will you eat? What tasks need to be finished? What plans need to be made for the family to be together?

- 3) **Structure that time** – Have a beginning and ending time. Do something as a household to mark that beginning and ending time. Sabbath rest can include time for worship, replenishment, and relationship.
- 4) **Protect that time** – No work. No distractions.

Recapping the Key Truth:

Successful Sabbath rest requires anticipation and preparation. The practice of Sabbath rest is not based on a set of specific rules and regulations. It is based in the concept of imitating God and joining him in a biblical rhythm of work and rest. Sabbath rest can be very fulfilling and meaningful when practiced as a household.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

If your schedule allows, plan a time of Sabbath rest that begins on Saturday evening and ends on Sunday evening. This allows time to worship as a family, be off of work, and plan something to do together outside of church. The time could start with a meal together and end the same way the following evening. Preparing for church on Saturday afternoon could make Sunday morning easier on the family. This schedule also allows work to be done during the day on Saturday and in the evening on Sunday. It is an entire 24 hour period that can be utilized for Sabbath rest. If Saturday to Sunday doesn't work, try Friday to Saturday.

Preview:

Next week we will discuss the tension between legalism and freedom when practicing Sabbath rest. Acts 15 teaches us that we are free in Christ!

**Week 5: Can I pick Okra?
Acts 15—Freedom vs. Legalism**

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson focuses on the freedom the believer has in Christ within Sabbath rest. Old Testament laws and cultural traditions surround the practice of Sabbath rest. This lesson deals with the tension that exists between legalism and freedom.



Introduction:

Warning! Sabbath rest can be a polarizing practice. Throughout history the practice of Sabbath rest has been a deeply dividing issue. Some people are rule makers and others are rule breakers. Depending on your background, you may lean toward legalism or freedom when practicing Sabbath rest. If we are serious about practicing a biblical rhythm of work and rest, we want to know how to do it right! Many times the interpretation of passages surrounding what we are supposed to and not supposed to do can get confusing. We will see in Acts 15 and other passages that we are free in Christ!

Ask a group member read the story below and have the group discuss the questions below:

Our family practices a time of Sabbath rest from Friday evening through Saturday evening. On our first Saturday my wife and I were standing in the dining room looking out at our garden. She said, “I think I’ll go pick some okra for us to have tonight.” I looked at her with great concern and answered, “Honey, it’s Sabbath rest, I don’t think you should be harvesting your crops.” Tension mounted. After an awkward pause she said, “Hide and watch!” We had fried okra for dinner that night.

Group Discussion:

Who do you think was right and who was wrong in this situation?

What experience do you have with the practice of Sabbath rest prior to this study?

Are you a rule maker or a rule breaker?

Diving into the text:

One question we may face when starting the practice of Sabbath rest is if we are bound to the old testament laws about Sabbath. Explain to the group that the early church in Acts dealt with the same tension over the practice of circumcision. **The question arises, “Is the believer bound to the Old Testament Sabbath laws?” The quick answer is, “No!”**

Lead the group through the following passages that teach the truth of being free in Christ. Ask different group members to read each passage and then answer the questions below. Pause between each reading to briefly discuss what is going on in the passage:

Then Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!” (Mark 2:27-28)

In Mark 2:27-28 Jesus had been accused of breaking the Sabbath law by picking grain as he and his disciple walked through a field. Explain to the group that Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath and gives the believer freedom.

“When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, ‘The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.’

So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: ‘Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.’” (Acts 15:4-11)

Explain to the group that an argument arose in the Jerusalem church. Some men from Judea arrived and claimed that the Gentile believers (believers who are not Jewish) must obey the Law. This brought about a legitimate issue in the church. The apostles dealt with the question and came up with the following decision concerning the Gentile believers:

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements. You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farwell.” (Acts 15:28-29)

Explain to the group that, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the apostles decided to free Gentile believers from the weight of the Law. Discuss the following questions with the group:

Group Discussion:

Why is there tension between freedom and legalism concerning Sabbath rest?

In your practice of Sabbath rest, have you wrestled with the feeling that you aren't meeting a perceived standard?

How do you think these passages will affect your practice of Sabbath rest?

As you move into the next section of discussing the text, explain to the group that **while believers are free in Christ, we are free within biblical boundaries.**

We learned in the previous section that Christians are free in Christ. Freedom in Christ does not mean all standards for living have been erased. God's word is the standard by which the believer lives. The following passages of scripture teach us that Christ is the Word. Explain to the group that while we are not bound to the minutia of the Mosaic Law, scripture still offers a framework for living a Christian life. Ask different members of the group to read the following passages and then answer the questions below:

“In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.” (John 1:1-4)

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 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. 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.” (Exod 20:8-11)

“When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” (John 15:10-11)

Group Discussion:

What healthy tension do these passages of scripture create when placed beside the passages about freedom in Christ?

How are Old Testament passages like Exodus 20:8-11 still valuable for believers today?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can cause us to miss meaningful experiences with the Lord.

Drive home the following point with the group: When we either ignore the practice of Sabbath rest or are too legalistic about the practice, we miss out on the very things God intends for us to experience as we rest in him.

Discuss the following benefits of practicing Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest allows us a time to:

- 1) Connect with the Jesus without any of the distractions that come during the workweek.
- 2) Connect with others believers in worship and bible study.
- 3) Stop and reflect on the life of Christ and the grace we have received as a result of the Gospel.
- 4) Enjoy God's creation and have fun with our family.
- 5) Look forward to a time when we will enjoy eternal rest with our savior Jesus in the God and all of those who have gone before us.
- 6) Replenish our bodies of the energy that we expend during our work.
- 7) Establish meaningful traditions within our home that shape our families for generations to come.
- 8) Take time to bless our children with the gift of both quantity and quality time.
- 9) Provide a witness to those in the world who are lost and need to know what it means to rest in the Lord through a relationship with Christ.
- 10) Enjoy the life we work so hard to sustain during the week.

Explain to the group that when we take time to do these things within Sabbath rest, we are free from guilt or anything that may rob us of making our time with the Lord a pure delight. Ask a member of the group to read the following passage before moving on to the next section:

“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. 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!” (Isa 58:13-14)

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

Placing boundaries around Sabbath rest is important. It is a time that must be protected. Explain to the group the following thought: “While there are things we can do to make Sabbath rest a reality, there are also some things we must prevent when practicing Sabbath rest.” Discuss the list of things to avoid and have group members answer the following questions:

- Focusing to rigidly on religious rules about the Sabbath.
- Remaining subject to something that controls our time. (Cell Phone, Social Media, etc.)
- Not practicing a good work ethic during the week.
- Entering Sabbath rest without preparing for a time of rest.
- Practicing Sabbath rest as a “to do item.”

Group discussion:

What have you struggled with on the list of items you just discussed?

What other things can you share that would help protect a time of Sabbath rest?

Recapping the Key Truth:

Believers are free in Christ and not bound to the Old Testament Law! Resting in the Lord means first resting in our relationship with Christ. There is no more work to be done for salvation. He has freed us from sin. As a result we are free to live within the biblical standards God provides in his word. Structuring our time of Sabbath rest is important, but we rest for the purpose of delighting in the Lord.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week as you get ready for your time of Sabbath rest, plan ahead for making memories with your family and ways you can connect with the Lord. Plan a time to rest and replenish yourself as well!

Preview:

Next week we explore how the believer can honor Christ through the practice of Sabbath rest. We will learn how to fill it full and restore Sabbath rest from rules to relationship!

Week 6: Filling Sabbath Rest Full Matthew 5:17-18

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson is to answer the following question: “What do I do during Sabbath rest?” Because the believer is free in Christ, they are free to fill Sabbath rest with those things that give them rest and restore relationship with God.



Introduction:

It is easy to become so focused on the restrictions of Sabbath rest that we can miss the freedom inherent to the practice. The believer is free in Christ, no longer bound to the weight of the law. A believer practicing Sabbath rest is free within biblical boundaries. After we discover this freedom within Sabbath rest, we may find ourselves struggling with what to do during a time of rest. As believers we are to delight in God during the practice of Sabbath rest. In turn, God also desires that we experience pleasure.

Ask a participant to read the following quote and have the group discuss the questions below:

Call the Sabbath a delight: a delight to the soul and a delight to the body. Since there are so many acts which one must abstain from doing on the seventh day, you might think I have given you Sabbath for you displeasure; I have surely given you the Sabbath for your pleasure. To sanctify the Sabbath does not mean: Thou shalt mortify thyself, but, on the contrary: Thou shalt sanctify it with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy senses. “Sanctify the Sabbath by choice meals, by beautiful garments, delight your soul with pleasure and I will reward you for this very pleasure.”

- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

Group Discussion:

What would be your dream Sabbath rest?

What kind of pleasure do you think God wants the believer to pursue during Sabbath rest?

How does the pursuit of delight change your perception of the Sabbath rest?

Diving into the text:

In this study so far we have discussed the biblical foundation for Sabbath rest, the model God provides, and the struggle that can exist between freedom and legalism. The next question to consider is, “How can I honor Christ in Sabbath rest?”

One way the believer can honor Christ in Sabbath rest is by filling it full. Ask a group member to read the following passage and then discuss ways to structure a time of Sabbath rest:

“Do not misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.” (Matt 5:17-18)

Jesus’ purpose in coming was to fulfill or perfect the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets. Rather than focusing on the restrictions of the Law, Jesus took action to fulfill the law. We have the same opportunity with Sabbath rest. In his article “Wisdom and Sabbath Rest,” Tim Keller shares some of the following suggestions. Discuss these with the group:

When practicing Sabbath rest, take some time for:

- 1) Sheer inactivity.
- 2) Avocational Activity.
- 3) Considering whether you are an introvert or an extrovert.
- 4) What benefits your family.

Another consideration is adjusting the practice of Sabbath rest to the seasons of life. The key to adjusting the practice of Sabbath rest is determining what the real need is in each circumstance. Discuss Sabbath rest options for people who are in the following life stages or circumstances:

- 1) Single: The need for community.
- 2) Deployed Soldier: The need for connection.
- 3) Small Children: The need for solitude or friendship.
- 4) Adult Children: The need to support.
- 5) Heavy work schedule: The need for balance.

Another way the believer can honor Christ in Sabbath rest is by restoring it to relationship. Ask a group member to read the following passage and then discuss the questions below:

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

Group Discussion:

What relational language do you see in this passage of scripture?

What do you think Jesus means by “take my yoke upon you?”

What kind of rest do you think Jesus is talking about?

Explain to the group that a focusing on a relationship with God is the key to practicing Sabbath rest. Read and discuss the following illustration:

Imagine a son or daughter comes to you and asks, “Do I have to date someone before I marry them?” Your answer would most likely be, “Yes.” It is important to get to know someone before you enter into a lifelong binding covenant with them. What if that same son or daughter came to you with their new spouse and asked, “Now that we are married, do we still have to date?” What would your answer be? You would most likely encourage them to continue dating even though they don’t have to date in order to be married. They should date because they love each other and enjoy taking time out just to be together. How often would you encourage them to date? Ideally, it would be best for them to take time out once per week and just delight in being together. No work, no distractions, no burdens, just love.

The same is true for the practice of Sabbath rest. The Church is the bride of Christ. We are forever bound together through the covenant of his blood. Before this covenant was fulfilled, the people of God were bound to the Law of Moses. Today the believer is free in Christ. We don’t practice Sabbath rest because we have to. We practice it because we want to take time out and delight in God. No work, no distractions, no burdens, just love.

Ask a participant to read the following passages and lead the group through the teaching points below:

“Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.” (Rom 6:14)

Explain to the group that Sabbath rest is a grace to be observed. It is not something we do in order to have a relationship with God. It is something we do because we have a relationship with God. We grow in the practice of Sabbath rest the same way we grow in the practice of prayer, studying scripture, and any other means of grace afforded to us through Christ.

“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.” (John 17:22-23)

Explain to the group that the goal of Sabbath rest is unity not uniformity. As a community of faith, we should all be willing to lean into the practice of Sabbath rest. We would most likely all say that prayer should be an important aspect of the Christian life, but we would not say that every believer must pray the same way, or for the same things. Sabbath rest is given to the church for the purpose of restoration, replenishment, and resting in our relationship with the Lord. All of these things should be done in a way that brings glory to God.

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in family disconnect.

Richard Swenson in his book *The Overload Syndrome* writes about issues families are facing as the result of overload. One particular area is that of media overload brought about by increasing technology. Ask a group member to read the quote below and then discuss the following ways media overload can affect the family:

The future arrived yesterday when the Starship Enterprise landed in our back yard. Slick gadgets are strapped to every belt, plugged into every socket, and stuck in every ear. Overhead still more gadgets swim in the heavenlies. But what will be the result of this incredible flurry of seemingly unstoppable activity – good or bad? Like most modern things, it will be both.

-Richard Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome*

Swenson writes that one of the bad results of technology is media overload. Discuss the following affects of media overload:

Resets the Moral Acceptability Threshold: Moral drift is important to understand, for it continues unabated. Extrapolate ten or twenty years into the future and it is frightening to imagine what media content awaits us.

Resets the Shock Threshold: In the past, if we saw blood, killing, or tragedies on the evening news, it would disturb us for weeks. Today, however, the rule of thumb is, “if it bleeds, it leads.”

Results in Addictive Behavior: Media increasingly defines our world, and taking the media away is like taking our world away.

Gives a More Negative View of the World: The world is already in enough trouble and we don’t need to make it appear any worse than it is. But in the world of media, bad news sells.

Increases Exposure to Sexual Material: The pervasiveness of media leads to an almost unavoidable exposure to sexually explicit material at ever-younger ages.

Explain to the group that a family that chooses to unplug from devices and media during a time of Sabbath rest could learn that media in moderation is healthier than being saturated by it every day of the week.

Making Sabbath Rest a Reality:

Filling Sabbath rest with the things that restore us and help us delight in the Lord is at the heart of the practice. We have learned so far that Sabbath rest requires preparation. It is also important that the practice is protected from work and distractions. Sabbath rest also requires that we structure the time with the things that recharge and restore us. As believers we should structure our time of resting in the Lord to include as much delight as possible.

Group discussion:

What in this study has been the most important realization for you?

What are ways that you can structure your time of Sabbath rest around delighting in the Lord?

Recapping the Key Truth:

Freedom in Christ should bring about delight in the life of the believer. The practice of Sabbath rest is an entire period of time to focus on enjoying the blessings of God. Instead of focusing on what not to do during Sabbath rest, we should be excited and willing to plan on doing those things that bring sheer enjoyment and rejuvenation. Resting in the Lord is about lifting our burden, not increasing it.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week plan your time of Sabbath rest to include things that bring you and your family joy! Ask yourself, what is my greatest need? What is the greatest need in my home right now? Take time during Sabbath rest to be restored and enjoy your life in Christ.

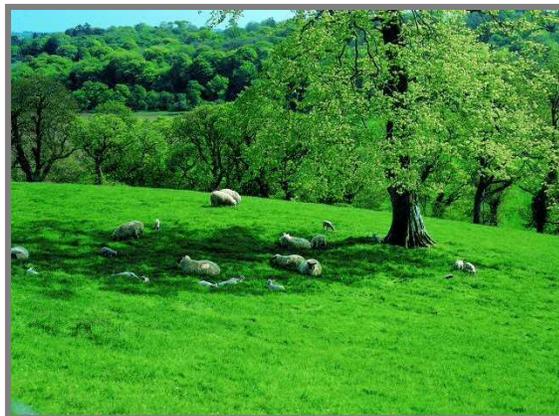
Preview:

Next week we explore what it means to rest in the Lord! Taking a day of rest is more than just a day of vacation. There is significant spiritual meaning in the practice of Sabbath rest.

Week 7: Resting in The Lord Hebrews 4:1-3

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson is to lead the group to an understanding of what it means to rest in the Lord. Sabbath rest is more than just taking a break and checking out. It is removing the distraction of work for a period of time to enjoy the presence of the Lord.



Introduction:

One principle of Sabbath rest is that our work is more productive when we take time to rest in the Lord. God is true to his promises. He created Sabbath rest for believers. He gave us a model by which to enter it. He gives us freedom within Sabbath rest to do what replenishes us. Sabbath rest is a successful practice because when we rest, we rest in the Lord.

Ask a participant to read the following example and have the group discuss the questions below.

Excerpt from David McCullough's "The Wright Brothers" about their first flight in France:

An exuberant Hart Berg wanted Wilbur to keep flying the next day, but Wilbur would have no part of it. As was explained in the French press, "Today, because it is Sunday, M. Wright, a good American, would not think of breaking the Sabbath." The Crowd that came to Hunadieres would have to be content with looking at a closed hangar.

On Monday, August 10, when the demonstrations resumed, more than two thousand people came to watch, including a number of Americans this time. Nearby inns and cafés were reaping "a harvest of money." Those who have made the effort to attend were to be even more dazzled by what they saw than those who have been there two days before.

Group Discussion:

What are other examples of Sabbath rest can you see in our world?

Why do you think the practice of Sabbath rest has disappeared in our culture at large?

Diving into the text:

At the heart of Sabbath rest we find three truths that are evident within the practice:

The first truth is that Sabbath rest is successful.

God shows us in scripture that he will remain true to his promises when we delight in him through the practice of Sabbath rest. Ask a group member to read the following passage and discuss the following questions:

“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. 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!” (Isa 58:13-14)

Group Discussion:

What stands out to you in this passage of scripture concerning the practice of Sabbath rest?

How have you seen the Lord bless your time of Sabbath rest?

The second truth is that Sabbath rest is more than physical rest. It is spiritual rest.

In this study series we have discussed the model of Sabbath rest and how the believer can enter into that time on a weekly basis. Briefly review with the group the importance of knowing how to choose a time, begin and end that time, and how to fill that time with replenishing activity. Explain to the group that Sabbath rest is about so much more than taking a physical break from a hectic schedule. Ultimately, Sabbath rest is about learning to rest in the Lord. The physical results of Sabbath rest will remain hollow without a heart directed toward the Lord.

Hebrews 4 speaks of a present and future rest for the people of God. Ask a member of the group to read the passage of scripture below and then discuss the following questions with the group:

“God’s promise of entering his rest still stands so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. For this good news – that God has prepared this rest – has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn’t share the faith of those who listened to God.” (Heb 4:1-2)

Group Discussion:

What are your thoughts surrounding Hebrews 4:1?

How do we see the Gospel reflected in the practice of Sabbath rest spoken of in Hebrews 4:2?

The third truth is that Sabbath rest is for believers.

The point of Sabbath rest is to rest in the Lord. This is only possible through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is impossible to rest **in the Lord** if we are not **in Christ**.

Teach the group that for the non-Christian, they need to see that work cannot ultimately **save** and **satisfy**. How much money is enough? “Just a little more,” one may say. Salvation cannot be accomplished by our own efforts. Failure to **rest** is a failure to treat God as **God**. Failing to rest in Christ is to deny the salvation provided by his atoning sacrifice.

Explain to the group that taking a break and resting once per week may have physical benefits, these benefits are only temporary. The ability to practice true Sabbath rest is impossible outside of relationship with Christ. Ask a group participant to read the scripture below and discuss the following questions:

“For only we who believe can enter his rest.” (Heb 4:3a)

Group Discussion:

According to Hebrews 4:3a, who are the only people that can enter into Sabbath rest?

Why is it impossible for an unbeliever to enter into Sabbath rest?

What evangelistic implications does this have for the practice of Sabbath rest?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in individual burnout.

In his book *Leading on Empty*, Wayne Cordiero, a pastor struggling to lead a church as the flames of burnout consumed more and more of his ability to serve the flock entrusted to him, states,

My vision for the church was barren, and the once-alive heart that beat incessantly for others had begun to shrink. Each day that passed was taking a toll on me, but I didn't know how to stop the progression. Whatever was causing the drain was winning.

The absence of Sabbath rest may result in burnout. Cordier is not alone. Witt writes that “1500 pastors leave the ministry permanently each month in America and one out of every ten ministers will actually retire as a minister.”

Richard Krejcir surveyed 1,050 pastors and uncovered some disturbing statistics showing the burnout many are experiencing:

- 1) Fifty seven percent said that they would leave if they had a better place to go—including secular work.
- 2) Eighty nine percent said that they had considered leaving the ministry at one time.
- 3) Seventy percent stated that they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly basis and even daily basis.

Group discussion:

How can the problem of burnout affect the local church?

Has burnout ever kept you from being able to serve in ministry?

After reading this, why is it important for leaders in ministry to observe Sabbath rest?

What are some ways the local church help their leadership be successful in the practice of Sabbath rest?

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

We have discovered the importance of Sabbath rest as part of a biblical rhythm of work and rest. It is important for the believer to take a period of time during their week to rest in the Lord. This time is successful when we prepare for and practice it consistently. While filling the time of Sabbath rest with replenishing activity and rest, we must also take time to focus on the Lord and rest in him.

Recapping the Key Truth:

Sabbath rest is resting in the Lord. Sabbath rest is spiritual rest for both the body and soul. We are free and secure in Christ as believers. We cannot work for our salvation. We must rest in Christ. Our relationship with Christ should be the focus of our time of rest.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week as you plan your time of Sabbath rest, prepare to spend some time doing the following things: Pray, read scripture, pick a portion of the scripture you read to meditate on that day, and practice thankfulness.

Preview:

As we continue to study what it means to rest in the Lord, next week we will finish our study by talking about the role faith plays and the urgency with which we should pursue the practice of Sabbath rest.

Week 8: It Takes Faith Hebrews 4:9-10

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson is to lead the group to an understanding of the faith that is required to rest in the Lord during a time of Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest requires obedient faith. To follow the Lord in a biblical rhythm of work and rest, we must let go of the things we work hard in during the week. The practice of Sabbath rest is worth the effort when we realize the consequences of a life without Sabbath rest.



Introduction:

The practice of Sabbath rest is a weekly time for the believer to let go of the pressures of the week and rest in the Lord. Explain to the group that a biblical rhythm of work and rest includes working hard and resting well. We are created to work for the Lord and rest in him. When this rhythm gets out of balance, burnout and exhaustion can set in.

Ask a group member to read the following example then discuss the group questions below.

This individualized way of life, even during leisure time, produces enormous pressure on us. When it becomes too much we are tempted to collapse into some form of oblivion: sleep, drink, drugs, any kind of television, or whatever else might numb our self-production for a while.

The rhythm of life for countless people, set up by this culturally pressured way, this emerges as one that oscillates between driven achievement (both on and off the job) and some form of mind-numbing private escape. This crazed rhythm, based on a distorted view of human reality, increasingly poisons our institutions, relationships, and quality of life.

- Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time*

Group Discussion:

What have you learned about your rhythm of life since we started this study?

How has faith played a role in your practice of Sabbath rest?

Diving into the text:

Teach the group that the following question should be central to the practice of Sabbath rest:

“How do I rest in the Lord?”

Explain to the group that in answering this question we must consider some of the truths seen in Hebrews 4:9-10.

Sabbath rest is for both here and eternity. (Heb 4:9)

Hebrews is written to a Jewish audience. The author is encouraging these Jewish believers to persevere in their faith in Christ and not return to the old way of living under the Law. The weekly practice of Sabbath rest was still observed by these early Jewish believers. This weekly practice reflected the model God gave them in Exodus 16. The writer of Hebrews points the practice of Sabbath rest to the reality that our faith is ultimately in Christ. Sabbath rest practiced now points the believer to the eternal rest we have because of Christ. Ask a group member to read the verse below and then discuss the following questions.

“So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God.” (Heb 4:9)

Group Discussion:

How would you explain that Sabbath rest is for both here and eternity?

Do you think that because Sabbath rest has been fulfilled in Christ means that the practice should cease? Why or why not?

Sabbath rest requires faith. (Heb 4:10)

Teach the group that practicing Sabbath rest with consistency requires faith. As believers we must develop a faith that relies on God to provide for us as we rest in him. Ask a group member to read the scripture, teach the key truths and then discuss the questions that follow:

“For all who have entered into God’s rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world.” (Heb 4:10)

Group Discussion:

What kind of faith does Hebrews 4:10 require?

In what ways has the practice of Sabbath rest increased your faith in God?

Faith is about obedience.

Explain to the group that Psalm 46:10 points to the practical side of what it means to rest in the Lord. Ask a group member to read the scripture, then lead the group through the teaching point. Afterward, discuss the questions below.

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps 46:10)

Teach the group that the term “be still” in this passage of scripture means to let go, relax, or loosen your grip. This is the perfect picture of entering Sabbath rest. We have to loosen our grip of those things we hang tight to all week that sustain us. Life can be heavy. God invites us to put the weight down and relax for a little while. We can’t enjoy life when we are burdened. This is not easy to do sometimes. It takes faith to follow.

Obedience is about action.

Teach the group that the term “and know” means to know by experience. If we are in Christ then we continue to learn about God through being obedient to him.

Obedience leads to action. The believer should bear fruit. It is one thing to think about Sabbath rest. It is another to trust God by doing it. When we put action to our faith, it brings life to it. We can’t work to earn our salvation, but if we are saved, we will hunger for the things of God. Rest should be one of those things.

Group Discussion:

How do you react to the invitation God gives us to let go, relax and loosen our grip?

What is God asking you to let go of?

Is there anything you sense God asking you to do to take the next step in the practice of Sabbath rest?

Reality Check:

Explain to the group that a life absent of Sabbath rest can result in individual exhaustion. Afterward, discuss the following:

Exhaustion crosses both age and cultural boundaries. In a study of nearly 300,000 teens between 1991-2012, The University of Michigan’s national survey revealed that more than half of teenagers fifteen and older are sleep deprived. This group falls two hours short of the recommended amount of nightly sleep. Milton Becknell writes in his article “Healthy in Mind, Body, and Spirit”:

We live in a world that is moving at a pace far beyond what our ancestors could have imagined, and we are finding that the price of success and prosperity can be hazardous to our health. According to a 2010 American Psychological Association survey, 44 percent of Americans reported that their stress levels had increased over the past five years, especially in the areas of money, work, and the economy.

Indeed, the proportion of stress-related disorders has increased exponentially with modernization in the 21st century, including heart attack, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, sleep disorders, chronic back pain, migraine/tension headache, as well as depressive and anxiety disorders, to name a few.

Burnout can do more harm than one may realize. In Japan people are dying from overwork. Seemingly young men in their thirties and forties are dying while at work. So many are dying that there is an official term for the trend. Raymond Brown in his article, “Karoshi: A Fatal Export from Japan” writes,

[This is] what the Japanese are now calling karoshi—death from overwork. Karoshi usually refers to acute heart failure following high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis, or a cerebral hemorrhage. Today’s lawyers estimate that some 10,000 Japanese per year are dying from it. This is the same number as are killed by traffic accidents. Karoshi is one product the West does not need to import.

Group discussion:

Can you share an experience you have had with exhaustion?

How does a lack of rest effect us?

If all believers practiced Sabbath rest, how do you think it would change our world?

How do you think it would effect future generations?

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

Remain faithful. Remember and press on. Sabbath rest can be a rich experience for the believer. It has the ability to create healthy rhytym of work and rest in a family. It allows time for parents to bless their children and spend meaningful time together. If this is done each week, it becomes a life giving part of our spiritual walk. The best way to make Sabbath rest a reality is to step into it and do it. Learn what works and what does not. Make adjustments when needed. But over all, trust God and be obedient to him. There is blessing awaiting all who do.

Recapping the Key Truth:

Teach the group that Sabbath rest is a theologically complex concept that can be confusing for the average believer. Church members who are aware of Sabbath rest as a biblical concept are often confused by the different theological interpretations and how he or she is to honor the command to remember it and keep it holy. With the disappearance of many cultural boundaries that marked Sunday as a day for worship and rest, so has the practice of resting in the Lord through anything more than attending a church service. Sabbath rest is seen as a

foreign concept that is not truly necessary for Christians.

Drive home the point that a regular cycle of work and Sabbath rest is a realistic goal for most believers. We make room in our life for what we perceive to be valuable. When the understanding of Sabbath rest is increased in the light of God's Word within a culture that is starved for rest, the practice should follow. This study has shown what can happen in the absence of Sabbath rest. The practice is valuable for believers who suffer from poor time management skills, fatigue, overwhelming busyness, family stress, burnout, and exhaustion. So many suffer needlessly under the weight of daily burdens when the grace of Sabbath rest, provided through Christ, can be enjoyed within a healthy rhythm of work and rest.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week as you plan your time of Sabbath rest, prepare to spend some time doing the following things: Look for the Lord's hand at work around you. Talk about the things of God with those you are close to. Worship. Stay away from things that are ungodly or distract you from the Lord.

APPENDIX 16

PARTICIPANT GUIDES

Week 1: God’s Got Rhythm Genesis 1—God Works

The Goal:

A biblical rhythm of work and rest is clearly seen in the creation account. Incorporating this rhythm into our life requires both work and rest. The goal of this lesson focuses on the fact that God works and how this reality should shape the life of the believer.



Introduction:

Have you ever had a conversation with anyone wrestling with the purpose of his or her existence? “Why was I created?” “What am I supposed to do with my life?” Have you ever asked these questions yourself? The way we answer greatly affects how we live. Work is an important consideration when discovering our God given purpose. God works and calls us to do the same.

“In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between action and rest. There is a universal refrain: ‘I am so busy.’ Sabbath time is a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest.”

- Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*

Group Discussion:

What is it that makes you feel overwhelmed by the busyness of life?

What does your life look like when work gets out of balance?

Diving Into The Text:

If we are going to live in the promise of rest Jesus offers us, we have to start with the creation account.

The most important book in history starts with these words:

“In the beginning God...” (Gen 1:1)

Setting the stage for a biblical understanding of Sabbath rest:

We have to know God to practice Sabbath rest.

“I am at rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. (Ps 62:1 HCSB)

We cannot know God unless we are in Christ.

“Jesus told him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (John 14:6 HCSB)

Group Discussion:

How could you share the Gospel with someone who was struggling to find balance in their life?

What can our practice of Sabbath rest, or lack of, teach us about our relationship with the Lord?

After being introduced to the creator of the universe in Genesis 1:1, the first thing scripture teaches us about God is that he works.

“In the beginning God created...” (Gen 1:1)

What kind of work is God doing on the first six days of creation?

Day 1	Day 4
“Let there be light,” and there was light. (v. 3)	“Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years.” (v. 14)
Day 2	Day 5
“Let there be space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.”(v. 6)	“Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” (v. 20)
Day 3	Day 6
“Let the waters beneath the sky flow together in one place, so dry ground may appear.” (v. 9) “Let the land sprout with vegetation – every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.”(v. 11)	“Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind – livestock, small animals, that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” (v. 24) “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.” (v. 26)

Group discussion:

We see that God works, how should this influence the life of the believer?

Do you think there will be work in heaven?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in overwhelming busyness.

When either work or rest begins to dominate us, our life becomes unbalanced.

“In the 1960’s, the futurists said by now you would have one wage earner in the family working 20 hours a week because progress and technology would lead to increased productivity. They predicted productivity would increase, wages would increase, and we’d all be bored. That is not what happened. Instead the average husband and wife unit is working 90 hours, not 20. The prediction only missed by 350 percent.”

- Richard Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome*

“A survey in 2009 found that roughly 7 out of 10 employees across the country report that they work through lunch during the workday, beyond daily work hours and on weekends. More than half of polled employees admit that ‘self-imposed pressure’ is the main reason for working beyond scheduled time.”

- The Society for Human Resource Management

“We hate being busy. But we never hate it enough to change.”

- Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

The first step in making Sabbath rest a reality is for the believer to work.

- Genesis 2:15 - God gave Adam work.
- Mark 6:3 - Jesus was a carpenter.
- 2 Corinthians 11:27-30 - Paul the Apostle was busy.
- 1 Timothy 5:8 - Believers must be providers.
- 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 - Work is the antidote to laziness.
- Colossians 3:23 - Believers ultimately work for the Lord.

Group discussion:

Based on these passages, how would you describe the biblical picture of work?

In what ways does the biblical picture help you adjust your personal work ethic?

Recapping the Key Truth:

In the creation account we see that God works. A biblical rhythm of work and rest includes performing our jobs as if we were working for the Lord. Our work during the week should lead to a time of rest.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

Consider the following:

Does my life reflect a biblical rhythm of work and rest?

Think through your work-week and pray about when you can practice a time of Sabbath rest.

Preview:

Next week we will study the rest God entered into on the seventh day of creation (Gen 2:1-3) and how this rest can shape the life of the believer.

Week 2: God's Got Rhythm Genesis 2:1-3—God Rests

The Goal:

A biblical rhythm of work and rest is clearly seen in the creation account. Incorporating this rhythm requires both work and rest. The goal of this lesson focuses on the fact that after God works, he rests. God declares this portion of time in which he rests to be holy. The believer should make a portion of their week holy by practicing Sabbath rest.



Introduction:

What we **believe** about creation, work, and rest sets the stage for our **actions**. God created us to glorify him through both work and rest. Many times we struggle with what it means to rest. The Hebrew word “Sabbath” occurs **111** times in the Old Testament.

The meaning of the word Sabbath is “to cease, stop; to stop working, celebrate, to rest.” If we are going to follow God in a rhythm of life that brings glory to Him, we need to know how to work hard and rest well.

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matt 11:28-30 NASB)

Group Discussion:

What need in your life does this passage of scripture speak to?

When do you feel like rest is a waste of time?

Other than sleep, what do you consider to be rest in your life?

Diving into the text:

Chapter two of Genesis introduces the reader to an important aspect of creation. It is at this point in scripture that we see God rests.

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. (Gen 2:1-2)

There is a God ordained relationship between work and rest.

The idea behind Genesis 2:1-2 is the same as Genesis 1:1, “*In the beginning God created.*” The focus is still on God and what he is doing. In this passage we see that after God completes the tasks of creation, he takes another day to rest. He does not disappear or vanish from the story like a genie going back into his lamp after completing a task.

The work God did during the first six days was not finished until he had rested. The rest God entered into on the seventh day would not have been complete without the six days of work. There would have been nothing to rest from.

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God.” (Exod 20:8-10)

God does not have to rest, but chooses to.

God, in all of his power, chose to rest. As believers we must make the same choice as a part of our week. We work hard, as if working for the Lord. We should then chose to rest in the same way the God chose to rest.

“Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding.” (Isa 40:28)

Group Discussion:

Why do you think God chose to rest and then show us in scripture that he did so?

What is significant about God resting by choice?

What are some things people rely on for rest that are God-honoring?

What are some things people rely on for rest that are destructive?

The final act of creation is one that is easily overlooked but has profound meaning in a biblical rhythm of work and rest. Not only does God choose to rest with his creation, but the Lord also declares the seventh day of the week to be holy.

“And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.” (Gen 2:3)

The first aspect of creation God declares to be holy is a portion of time during the week.

He could have chosen a person, a designation of land, an object, an animal, anything. The fact that the Lord chose a portion of weekly time as holy has far reaching ramifications.

Time is one of the few aspects of creation that man cannot control.

If God had declared a person, place, or thing holy, mankind would find a way to manipulate and profit from it.

“It is impossible for man to shirk the problem of time. The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments. We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.”

- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

Group Discussion:

Does the concept of holiness have a positive or negative connotation to you?

Why do you think God chose to declare a portion of time holy?

What is your reaction to Heschel’s quote about the significance of time?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in poor time management.

We cannot control time. God has appointed us stewards over it. When we choose not to use our time wisely, we suffer the results of poor time management.

“Our American economy is measured by productivity. In the marketplace, multitasking is a valued and employable skill. Everyone’s looking for a superhuman who can effortlessly spin 36 plates in the air and get by on four hours of sleep. “Time is money,” they say. “You can sleep when you’re dead.” This “do more” philosophy has extended beyond the workplace to the heart of religious culture. After all, it’s easier to measure spiritual devotion by the number of church committees you serve on than by God’s standard—looking at the heart.”

- William Brown, *Turning Down the Noise*

“Solving the problem of time begins by acknowledging that time is not our possession. It is a gift from God. We are simply allowed to use it as stewards to whom it has been entrusted. While this acknowledgement does not solve the problems surrounding the quantity of time at our disposal, it instills an attitude toward time that can make us value the quality of the time that God has given us as a gift. If time is holy, then the work and leisure with which we fill it are also holy.”

- Leland Ryken, *Redeeming The Time*

“Fortunately for us, God breaks into our work and says, “OK, good job. Now it’s time to sleep. Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on the universe.”

- Richard Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome*

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

The first step in making Sabbath rest a reality is for the believer to work. The second step is to commit a portion of time during their week for the practice of resting in the Lord. Read each of the following verses and discuss how it pertains to rest:

- God commands rest. (Exod 20:8-11)
- There is rest in the presence of God. (Exod 33:14)
- Absence of rest creates useless work. (Ps 127:2)
- Jesus rested. (Mark 4:38)
- Jesus told his disciples to rest. (Mark 6:31)
- Jesus promises rest for those who follow him. (Matt 11:28-30)

Group discussion:

Based on these passages, how would you describe the biblical picture of rest?

In what ways does the biblical picture help you connect the relationship between work and rest?

Recapping the Key Truth:

A biblical rhythm includes both **work** and **rest**. God chose a portion of time to rest in and declare **holy**. Work is not **finished** until there has been rest. Rest is **incomplete** unless there has been work. Our own rhythm of work and rest should reflect what God did in the creation account.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

Pick a time of the week within your schedule where you can practice Sabbath rest.

Practice Sabbath rest during this time and share your experience the following week.

Preview:

Next week we will study what to do when we feel resistant to Sabbath rest. Exodus 16 will show us the love of a generous father in the face of a resistant people.

Week 3: A New Way to Trust Exodus 16:1-5 & 13-4

The Goal:

When worn down by the pace of life, the believer has a choice to either follow a biblical rhythm of work and rest or cling to an old way of life. The goal of this lesson is to teach that Christians should trust God and not resist the practice of Sabbath rest.



Introduction:

What we chose to do in the midst of our busy week **matters** to the Lord. Sabbath rest is a necessary part of a biblical rhythm of work and rest. Why then do believers run from this gift of weekly rest? When we chose to take **control** of our own schedule and ignore God's biblical framework for our weekly rhythm, we eventually suffer in every area of our life.

“Chronic overload drains your spiritual reserves. It is an enemy of prayer, worship, meditation, love for one another and service. We either stop doing those things, or worse, we simply go through the motions.”

- Richard Swenson, *Living Inside the Margin*

“In today's 24/7 world, thousands of years after Mount Sinai, remembering the Sabbath is countercultural. Our bodies and souls were designed for regular intervals of rest, yet we fill our lives with chaos, noise, and distraction. When we ignore God's commandment, we pay the price in our physical health, emotional well-being, and spiritual vitality.”

- William Brown, *Tuning Out the Noise*

Group Discussion:

Why do we sometimes work harder when we should stop and rest?

Can you share a time when fatigue robbed you of spiritual vitality?

What are some reasons we resist Sabbath rest?

Diving into the text:

Exodus 16 introduces the model of Sabbath rest God offers his people when they are struggling to **survive** in the wilderness. Before the people learn to practice Sabbath rest, they are reluctant to follow God.

“Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron. ‘If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt,’ they moaned. ‘There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death.’” (Exod 16:1-3)

When we resist the practice of Sabbath rest we can become fatigued. Fatigue alters our perception of reality. After God rescues his people from slavery they joyfully escape Egypt and follow God into the desert where they encounter difficulties. They respond by longing for Egypt. They talk about it like it was a place of abundance. Their perception of reality is off! Egypt was drudgery, bondage, and death!

“And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. They prove the truth of this proverb: ‘A dog returns to its vomit.’ And another says, ‘A washed pig returns to the mud.’” (2 Pet 2:20-22)

We do not practice Sabbath rest in order to be saved, but rather because we are saved.

When we have been made new in Christ we are to pursue holy living. We should not return to the old life Christ saved us from. We are at risk of clinging to the old life when we are not rested and focused on the Lord.

Group Discussion:

When we are fatigued, how is our decision making ability altered?

What practical things should believers do to follow God when experiencing fatigue?

We live in a culture that is obsessed with having “more.” **When we are driven by the need for “more” our focus can shift from relying on God to provide.** We see in Exodus 16 where God responds to the complaints of the Israelites.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Look, I’m going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual.’” (Exod 16:4-5)

God responds as a generous father. His choice in this case is to bless his people abundantly and prepare them for the promise of rest he would provide. The Lord answers the cries of his hungry people by providing quail and manna. For hundreds of years in Egypt the Israelites had been in survival mode. Generosity was a foreign concept to them. The Lord was teaching his people to trust.

“That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew. When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground.” (Exod 16:13-14)

Group Discussion:

What are some ways the Lord has lavished his blessings on you?

If you were given the opportunity to take a day off from work this week, is there anything that would prevent you from taking it?

Where do you find it easy to trust the Lord?

Where do you struggle in trusting the Lord?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in chronic fatigue.

When our life is in overdrive it becomes out of balance and we experience fatigue. Fatigue is more than being sleepy. It is the cumulative effect of living beyond our limits. When we become fatigued our decision making process becomes clouded. We are at our worst when we are worn down by the chaos of life. Even in these times, God invites us into his rest.

The following quotes and the passage of scripture illustrate the importance of practicing Sabbath rest during times of fatigue:

“You and I have a problem. Most mornings, we drag ourselves out of bed, start the day’s routine, and hope against hope that we can simply hold our ground. Maybe, just maybe, we can get enough done in the next eighteen hours to beat back the beast of busyness and live to see another day. We wake up most mornings trying not to serve, just trying to survive.”

- Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*

“Why are typically rational people so irrational in their behavior? The answer, I believe, is that we’re in the midst of a bubble; one so vast that to be alive today in the developed world is to be affected, or infected, by it. I call it “The More Bubble.” The nature of bubbles is that some asset is absurdly overvalued until—eventually—the bubble bursts, and we’re left scratching our heads wondering why we were so irrationally exuberant in the first place. The asset we’re overvaluing now is the notion of doing it all, having it all, achieving it all; what Jim Collins call “the undisciplined pursuit of more.”

- Greg McKeown, *Harvard Business Review*

“As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm.” (Mark 4:35-39)

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

Making Sabbath rest a reality requires the believer to be trust the Lord and push through the resistance that come when considering the practice of Sabbath rest. In essence we must say, “I will not return to my former way of living. I will trust the Lord and rest in him for my salvation and my daily life.” Read each of the following verses and discuss how they pertain to trust.

- Proverbs 3:5 – Trust God more than your own understanding.
- Romans 8:28 – Trust God to work in all circumstances.
- Psalm 37:4-6 – Trust God and delight in Him.
- Matthew 6:25 – Do not worry.
- Jeremiah 29:11 – Trust that God has a good plan for you.
- John 14:1 – Believe in God when your heart is troubled.

Group discussion:

What is the picture of trust portrayed in these passages of scripture?

What experiences have taught you to trust in the goodness of the Lord?

Recapping the Key Truth:

The practice of Sabbath Rest can present some challenges. One challenge is the initial resistance to re-ordering our life to include a period of resting in the Lord. When faced with this reluctance we must trust that God has provided everything we need in order to rest in him. It is up to us to step into that rest.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle creating two columns. On one side list all of the things that prevent you from practicing Sabbath rest. On the other side, list ways God has provided and taught you to trust in him. After completing the lists pray and ask God what he wants you to do with Sabbath rest in your life. If you desire it and there are things on the resistance list that you don't know how to navigate, pray about those items and ask God for help.

Preview:

Next week we will study the model for Sabbath rest God give his people in Exodus 16. Sabbath rest requires preparation!

Week 4: Preparation is Key Exodus 16:21-27

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson focuses on the following: 1) Successful Sabbath rest requires preparation. 2) Sabbath rest is best practiced as a household. 3) The primary reason we practice Sabbath rest is to be imitators of God.



Introduction:

The consistent practice of Sabbath rest can be challenging. Taking a time out of every week to stop and rest in the Lord does not happen by default. Our time fills up quickly and before we know it, our life becomes driven the tyranny of the urgent.

Sabbath rest is important. God invites believers into this time and blesses us with everything we need to be sustained while we rest in the Lord. It is up to us carve out a time for Sabbath rest and make it **different** than every other day of the week. God gives us the ability, but there are things we must do to **get ready** to follow God in the journey of Sabbath rest.

Listen to this story and respond to the questions below:

“During the gold rush thousands of people traveled west by wagon train to California in hope of finding their fortune. That faster they got there, the more likely they were to find a choice spot to mine gold. In 1850, Hugh Harrison left Minnesota with his family and headed west. The Harrisons decided to be faithful to the practice of Sabbath rest every Sunday. On this day they did not travel and spent the day in worship, reading scripture, and resting. As others would pass by and observe the Harrison’s stopped on the trail they began to taunt the family. “Pious fools, you may have all the gold on the streets of Heaven, but you won’t get any in California because we’ll get there first.” Much to their surprise, the Harrison family passed all of these people and arrived in California first. They and their animals were more rested, healthier, and stronger upon arrival than the others.”

Group Discussion:

What about practicing Sabbath rest doesn’t seem to make sense to the world?

What makes sense about the principle of Sabbath rest?

Diving into the text:

In Exodus 16 after the Lord provides for the needs of his people he gives them structure for how they should go about their week. From this passage emerges a biblical model of work and rest that mirrors God's creative work in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Explain to the group that after following the Lord's direction, the people of Israel began to prepare and eat the manna provided each morning. On the sixth day of the week the people wound up with twice as much food after preparing the manna. Ask a group member to read Exodus 16:21-23 and then lead the group through the points below.

“After this the people gathered the food by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual – four quarts for each person instead of two. Then all the leaders of the community came and asked Moses for an explanation. 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.” (Exod 16:21-23)

Successful Sabbath rest requires anticipation and intentionality. To rest from work for a period of time during the week means that work must be done in preparation for rest. The sixth day in Exodus 16 is different than the previous five days of the week. The Israelites did not have to work twice as hard to gather twice the amount of manna. The blessing of the sixth day is that God provided more manna per unit of ground.

Another important aspect of Sabbath rest: **Sabbath rest is best practiced in the home.** While Sabbath rest is an individual practice, it is best when everyone in the home enters resting in the Lord as a family unit.

Group Discussion:

What period of time during the week do you anticipate Sabbath rest working for you?

What do you have to do to prepare for that time of rest to be successful?

What are some hurdles you face when practicing a time of Sabbath rest?

In Exodus 16 the Lord gives his people a very basic order of work and rest. There are not a great number of rules and regulations that surround the biblical rhythm of work and rest at this point in the Bible. He told them to gather and prepare food for six days and to practice Sabbath rest on the seventh day of the week.

The rhythm of work and rest seen in Exodus 16 is not based on making and breaking rules. **Sabbath rest is more about imitating God than following rules.**

So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor. Moses said, “Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the Lord. There will be no food on the ground today. You may gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath. There will be no food on the ground that day. Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food.” (Exod 16:24-27)

It’s not that on the seventh day they gathered food and then God punished them because they broke the rules by gathering. The important point here is that **God did not work on the seventh day!** He did not provide any manna. God was leading by example and the people sinned by not following his example. Read Ephesians 5:1-2 and then discuss the questions below.

“Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.” (Eph 5:1-2)

Group Discussion:

In your experience, what have been the rules surrounding Sabbath rest?

How does the idea of imitating God change your approach to Sabbath rest?

Discuss practicing Sabbath rest to achieve a certain result verses practicing Sabbath rest because of God’s example.

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in family stress.

Practicing Sabbath rest is one way we find peace and strength in the Lord. A home without **rest** is a home in **crisis**.

Discuss how the following quotes illustrate the importance of Sabbath rest as a component of diminishing family stress:

“Virtually all of our relationships are damaged by hurry. Many families are being starved to death by velocity. Our children lie wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions.”

- Richard Swenson, *Living Inside the Margin*

“We live in an exceedingly busy society. Pressures of too much to do bring about tragic results. One of the great sources of sadness and suffering in children and youth is their having parents so absorbed in other things that they have no time for their sons and daughters.”

- Walter Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*

Children are not the only ones who suffer from family stress. Parents struggle when there is an absence of rest in the home. Read the following quote and scripture to the group:

“I used to handle intense on-the-job pressure. So why can't I handle bedtime with two people less than three feet tall? What happened to me? I wish my husband were home. I wish I had more of God's peace and strength.”

- Keri Kent, *God's Whisper in a Mother's Chaos*

“How blessed is the man who does this, and the son of the man who takes hold of it; who keeps from profaning the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing evil.”
(Isa 56:2 NASB)

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

Take the following steps in practicing Sabbath rest this week:

- 1) **Pick a time** – Taking a day for Sabbath rest is ideal. This is not a legal requirement. It is a biblical picture. If you can't take an entire day, pick a period of time that works.
- 2) **Prepare for that time** – What needs to happen in order for this time to be restful? What will you eat? What tasks need to be finished? What plans need to be made for the family to be together?
- 3) **Structure that time** – Have a beginning and ending time. Do something as a household to mark that beginning and ending time. Sabbath rest can include time for worship, replenishment, and relationship.
- 4) **Protect that time** – No work. No distractions.

Recapping the Key Truth:

Successful Sabbath rest requires anticipation and preparation. The practice of Sabbath rest is not based on a set of specific rules and regulations. It is based in the concept of imitating God and joining him in a biblical rhythm of work and rest. Sabbath rest can be very fulfilling and meaningful when practiced as a household.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

If your schedule allows, plan a time of Sabbath rest that begins on Saturday evening and ends on Sunday evening. This allows time to worship as a family, be off of work, and plan something to do together outside of church. The time could start with a meal together and end the same way the following evening. Preparing for church on Saturday afternoon could make Sunday morning easier on the family. This schedule also allows work to be done during the day on Saturday and in the evening on Sunday. It is an entire 24 hour period that can be utilized for Sabbath rest. If Saturday to Sunday doesn't work, try Friday to Saturday.

Preview:

Next week we will discuss the tension between legalism and freedom when practicing Sabbath rest. Acts 15 teaches us that we are free in Christ!

Week 5: Can I pick Okra? Acts 15—Freedom vs. Legalism

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson focuses on the freedom the believer has in Christ within Sabbath rest. Old Testament laws and cultural traditions surround the practice of Sabbath rest. This lesson deals with the tension that exists between legalism and freedom.



Introduction:

Warning! Sabbath rest can be a **polarizing practice**. Throughout history the practice of Sabbath rest has been a deeply dividing issue. Some people are rule makers and others are rule breakers. Depending on your background, you may lean toward legalism or freedom when practicing Sabbath rest. If we are serious about practicing a biblical rhythm of work and rest, we want to know how to do it right! Many times the interpretation of passages surrounding what we are supposed to and not supposed to do can get confusing. We will see in Acts 15 and other passages that we are **free in Christ!**

Read the following story and discuss the questions below:

Our family practices a time of Sabbath rest from Friday evening through Saturday evening. On our first Saturday my wife and I were standing in the dining room looking out at our garden. She said, “I think I’ll go pick some okra for us to have tonight.” I looked at her with great concern and answered, “Honey, it’s Sabbath rest, I don’t think you should be harvesting your crops.” Tension mounted. After an awkward pause she said, “Hide and watch!” We had fried okra for dinner that night.

Group Discussion:

Who do you think was right and who was wrong in this situation?

What experience do you have with the practice of Sabbath rest prior to this study?

Are you a rule maker or a rule breaker?

Diving into the text:

One question we may face when starting the practice of Sabbath rest is if we are bound to the old testament laws about Sabbath. The early church in Acts dealt with the same tension over the practice of circumcision. **The question arises, “Is the believer bound to the Old Testament Sabbath laws?” The quick answer is, “No!”**

Read the following passages about freedom in Christ. Between each verse, briefly discuss what is going on in the passage:

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!’” (Mark 2:27-28)

In Mark 2:27-28 Jesus had been accused of breaking the Sabbath law by picking grain as he and his disciple walked through a field. In this passage we see that Jesus is **Lord** over the Sabbath and gives the believer **freedom**.

“When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, ‘The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.’

So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: ‘Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.’” (Acts 15:4-11)

An argument arose in the Jerusalem church. Some men from Judea arrived and claimed that the Gentile believers (believers who are not Jewish) must obey the Law. This brought about a legitimate issue in the church. The apostles dealt with the question and came up with the following decision concerning the Gentile believers:

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements. You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.” (Acts 15:28-29)

Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the apostles decided to **free** Gentile believers from the **weight** of the Law. Discuss the following questions with the group:

Group Discussion:

Why is there tension between freedom and legalism concerning Sabbath rest?

In your practice of Sabbath rest, have you wrestled with the feeling that you aren’t meeting a perceived standard?

How do you think these passages will affect your practice of Sabbath rest?

While believers are free in Christ, we are free within **biblical boundaries**.

We learned in the previous section that Christians are free in Christ. Freedom in Christ does not mean all standards for living have been erased. God's word is the **standard** by which the believer lives. The following passages of scripture teach us that Christ is the Word. While we are not bound to the minutia of the Mosaic Law, scripture still offers a framework for living a Christian life. Read the following passages and then answer the questions below:

“In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.” (John 1:1-4)

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 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. 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.” (Exod 20:8-11)

“When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” (John 15:10-11)

Group Discussion:

What healthy tension do these passages of scripture create when placed beside the passages about freedom in Christ?

How are Old Testament passages like Exodus 20:8-11 still valuable for believers today?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can cause us to miss meaningful experiences with the Lord.

When we either ignore the practice of Sabbath rest or are too legalistic about the practice, we miss out on the very things God intends for us to experience as we rest in him.

Sabbath rest allows us a time to:

- 11) Connect with the Jesus without any of the **distractions** that come during the workweek.
- 12) Connect with others believers in **worship** and **bible study**.
- 13) **Stop** and **reflect** on the life of Christ and the grace we have received as a result of the Gospel.
- 14) **Enjoy** God's creation and have **fun** with our family.
- 15) Look forward to a time when we will enjoy **eternal** rest with our savior Jesus in the God and all of those who have gone before us.
- 16) **Replenish** our bodies of the energy that we expend during our work.
- 17) Establish meaningful **traditions** within our home that shape our families for generations to come.
- 18) Take time to **bless** our children with the gift of both quantity and quality **time**.
- 19) Provide a **witness** to those in the world who are **lost** and need to know what it means to rest in the Lord through a relationship with Christ.
- 20) **Enjoy** the life we work so hard to sustain during the week.

When we take time to do these things within Sabbath rest, we are free from guilt or anything that may rob us of making our time with the Lord a pure delight.

“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. 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!”
(Isa 58:13-14)

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

Placing boundaries around Sabbath rest is important. It is a time that must be protected. While there are things we can do to make Sabbath rest a reality, there are also some things we must prevent when practicing Sabbath rest. Discuss the following list of things to avoid and answer the discussion questions:

- Focusing to **rigidly** on religious **rules** about the Sabbath.
- Remaining subject to something that **controls** our time. (Cell Phone, Social Media, etc.)
- Not practicing a good **work ethic** during the week.
- Entering Sabbath rest without **preparing** for a time of rest.
- Practicing Sabbath rest as a “**to do item.**”

Group discussion:

What have you struggled with on the list of items you just discussed?

What other things can you share that would help protect a time of Sabbath rest?

Recapping the Key Truth:

Believers are free in Christ and not bound to the Old Testament Law! Resting in the Lord means first resting in our relationship with Christ. There is no more work to be done for salvation. He has freed us from sin. As a result we are free to live within the biblical standards God provides in his word. Structuring our time of Sabbath rest is important, but we rest for the purpose of delighting in the Lord.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week as you get ready for your time of Sabbath rest, plan ahead for making memories with your family and ways you can connect with the Lord. Plan a time to rest and replenish yourself as well!

Preview:

Next week we explore how the believer can honor Christ through the practice of Sabbath rest. We will learn how to fill it full and restore Sabbath rest from rules to relationship!

Week 6: Filling Sabbath Rest Full Matthew 5:17-18

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson is to answer the following question: “What do I do during Sabbath rest?” Because the believer is free in Christ, they are free to fill Sabbath rest with those things that give them rest and restore relationship with God.



Introduction:

It is easy to become so focused on the restrictions of Sabbath rest that we can miss the freedom inherent to the practice. The believer is free in Christ, no longer bound to the weight of the law. A believer practicing Sabbath rest is free within **biblical boundaries**. After we discover this freedom within Sabbath rest, we may find ourselves struggling with what to do during a time of rest. As believers we are to delight in God during the practice of Sabbath rest. In turn, God also desires that we experience pleasure.

Read the following quote and discuss the questions below:

Call the Sabbath a delight: a delight to the soul and a delight to the body. Since there are so many acts which one must abstain from doing on the seventh day, you might think I have given you Sabbath for you displeasure; I have surely given you the Sabbath for your pleasure. To sanctify the Sabbath does not mean: Thou shalt mortify thyself, but, on the contrary: Thou shalt sanctify it with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy senses. “Sanctify the Sabbath by choice meals, by beautiful garments, delight your soul with pleasure and I will reward you for this very pleasure.”

- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

Group Discussion:

What would be your dream Sabbath rest?

What kind of pleasure do you think God wants the believer to pursue during Sabbath rest?

How does the pursuit of delight change your perception of the Sabbath rest?

Diving into the text:

In this study so far we have discussed the biblical foundation for Sabbath rest, the model God provides, and the struggle that can exist between freedom and legalism. The next question to consider is, “How can I honor Christ in Sabbath rest?”

One way the believer can honor Christ in Sabbath rest is by filling it full.

Read the following passage and discuss ways to structure a time of Sabbath rest:

“Do not misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.” (Matt 5:17-18)

Jesus’ purpose in coming was to fulfill or perfect the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets. Rather than focusing on the restrictions of the Law, Jesus took action to **fulfill** the law. We have the same opportunity with Sabbath rest. In his article “Wisdom and Sabbath Rest,” Tim Keller shares some of the following suggestions.

When practicing Sabbath rest, take some time for

- 1) Sheer **inactivity**.
- 2) **Avocational** Activity.
- 3) Considering whether you are an **introvert** or an **extrovert**.
- 4) What benefits your **family**.

Another consideration is adjusting the practice of Sabbath rest to the seasons of life. Because there is freedom in Christ, we can adjust the practice of Sabbath rest to different life circumstances. The key to adjusting the practice of Sabbath rest is determining what the real need is in each circumstance. Discuss Sabbath rest options for people who are in the following life stages or circumstances:

- 1) Single: The need for **community**.
- 2) Deployed Soldier: The need for **connection**.
- 3) Small Children: The need for **solitude** or **friendship**.
- 4) Adult Children: The need to **support**.
- 5) Heavy work schedule: The need for **balance**.

Another way the believer can honor Christ in Sabbath rest is by restoring it to relationship. Read the following passage and discuss the questions below:

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

Group Discussion:

What relational language do you see in this passage of scripture?

What do you think Jesus means by “take my yoke upon you?”

What kind of rest do you think Jesus is talking about?

Focusing on a relationship with God is the key to practicing Sabbath rest. Discuss the following illustration:

Imagine a son or daughter comes to you and asks, “Do I have to date someone before I marry them?” Your answer would most likely be, “Yes.” It is important to get to know someone before you enter into a lifelong binding covenant with them. What if that same son or daughter came to you with their new spouse and asked, “Now that we are married, do we still have to date?” What would your answer be? You would most likely encourage them to continue dating even though they don’t have to date in order to be married. They should date because they love each other and enjoy taking time out just to be together. How often would you encourage them to date? Ideally, it would be best for them to take time out once per week and just delight in being together. No work, no distractions, no burdens, just love.

The same is true for the practice of Sabbath rest. The Church is the bride of Christ. We are forever bound together through the covenant of his blood. Before this covenant was fulfilled, the people of God were bound to the Law of Moses. Today the believer is free in Christ. We don’t practice Sabbath rest because we have to. We practice it because we want to take time out and delight in God. No work, no distractions, no burdens, just love.

Read the following passages and discuss the points below:

“Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.” (Rom 6:14)

Sabbath rest is a grace to be observed. It is not something we do in order to have a relationship with God. It is something we do because we have a relationship with God. We grow in the practice of Sabbath rest the same way we grow in the practice of prayer, studying scripture, and any other means of grace afforded to us through Christ.

“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.” (John 17:22-23)

The goal of Sabbath rest is unity not uniformity. Prayer is an important aspect of the Christian life, but we would not say that every believer must pray the same way, or for the same things. Likewise Sabbath rest is important, but can be practiced according to the need of the individual.

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in family disconnect.

Richard Swenson in his book *The Overload Syndrome* writes about issues families are facing as the result of overload. One particular area is that of media overload brought about by increasing technology. Read the quote below and then discuss the following ways media overload can affect the family:

The future arrived yesterday when the Starship Enterprise landed in our back yard. Slick gadgets are strapped to every belt, plugged into every socket, and stuck in every ear. Overhead still more gadgets swim in the heavenlies. But what will be the result of this incredible flurry of seemingly unstoppable activity – good or bad? Like most modern things, it will be both.

-Richard Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome*

Swenson writes that one of the bad results of technology is media overload. Discuss the following affects of media overload:

Resets the Moral Acceptability Threshold: Moral drift is important to understand, for it continues unabated. Extrapolate ten or twenty years into the future and it is frightening to imagine what media content awaits us.

Resets the Shock Threshold: In the past, if we saw blood, killing, or tragedies on the evening news, it would disturb us for weeks. Today, however, the rule of thumb is, “if it bleeds, it leads.”

Results in Addictive Behavior: Media increasingly defines our world, and taking the media away is like taking our world away.

Gives a More Negative View of the World: The world is already in enough trouble and we don’t need to make it appear any worse than it is. But in the world of media, bad news sells.

Increases Exposure to Sexual Material: The pervasiveness of media leads to an almost unavoidable exposure to sexually explicit material at ever-younger ages.

A family that chooses to unplug from devices and media during a time of Sabbath rest could learn that media in moderation is healthier than being saturated by it every day of the week.

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

Filling Sabbath rest with the things that restore us and help us delight in the Lord is at the heart of the practice. We have learned so far that Sabbath rest requires preparation. It is also important that the practice is protected from work and distractions. Sabbath rest also requires that we structure the time with the things that recharge and restore us. As believers we should structure our time of resting in the Lord to include as much delight as possible.

Group discussion:

What in this study has been the most important realization for you?

What are ways that you can structure your time of Sabbath rest around delighting in the Lord?

Recapping the Key Truth:

Freedom in Christ should bring about delight in the life of the believer. The practice of Sabbath rest is an entire period of time to focus on enjoying the blessings of God. Instead of focusing on what not to do during Sabbath rest, we should be excited and willing to plan on doing those things that bring sheer enjoyment and rejuvenation. Resting in the Lord is about lifting our burden, not increasing it.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week plan your time of Sabbath rest to include things that bring you and your family joy! Ask yourself, what is my greatest need? What is the greatest need in my home right now? Take time during Sabbath rest to be restored and enjoy your life in Christ.

Preview:

Next week we explore what it means to rest in the Lord! Taking a day of rest is more than just a day of vacation. There is significant spiritual meaning in the practice of Sabbath rest.

Week 7: Resting in the Lord Hebrews 4:1-3

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson is to lead the group to an understanding of what it means to rest in the Lord. Sabbath rest is more than just taking a break and checking out. It is removing the distraction of work for a period of time to enjoy the presence of the Lord.



Introduction:

One principle of Sabbath rest is that our work is more productive when we take time to rest in the Lord. God is true to his promises. He created Sabbath rest for **believers**. He gave us a model by which to enter it. He gives us freedom within Sabbath rest to do what replenishes us. Sabbath rest is a successful practice because when we rest, we rest in the **Lord**.

Read the following example and have the group discuss the questions below.

Excerpt from David McCullough's "The Wright Brothers" about their first flight in France:

An exuberant Hart Berg wanted Wilbur to keep flying the next day, but Wilbur would have no part of it. As was explained in the French press, "Today, because it is Sunday, M. Wright, a good American, would not think of breaking the Sabbath." The Crowd that came to Hunadieres would have to be content with looking at a closed hangar.

On Monday, August 10, when the demonstrations resumed, more than two thousand people came to watch, including a number of Americans this time. Nearby inns and cafés were reaping "a harvest of money." Those who have made the effort to attend were to be even more dazzled by what they saw than those who have been there two days before.

Group Discussion:

What are other examples of Sabbath rest can you see in our world?

Why do you think the practice of Sabbath rest has disappeared in our culture at large?

Diving into the text:

At the heart of Sabbath rest we find three truths that are evident within the practice:

The first truth is that Sabbath rest is successful.

God shows us in scripture that he will remain true to his promises when we delight in him through the practice of Sabbath rest. Read the passage below and discuss the following questions:

“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. 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!” (Isa 58:13-14)

Group Discussion:

What stands out to you in this passage of scripture concerning the practice of Sabbath rest?

How have you seen the Lord bless your time of Sabbath rest?

The second truth is that Sabbath rest is more than physical rest. It is spiritual rest.

In this study series we have discussed the model of Sabbath rest and how the believer can enter into that time on a weekly basis. We have talked about the importance of knowing how to choose a time, begin and end that time, and how to fill that time with replenishing activity. Sabbath rest is about so much more than taking a physical break from a hectic schedule. Ultimately, Sabbath rest is about learning to rest in the Lord. The physical results of Sabbath rest will remain hollow without a heart directed toward the Lord.

Hebrews 4 speaks of a present and future rest for the people of God. Read the passage of scripture below and then discuss the following questions with the group:

“God’s promise of entering his rest still stands so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. For this good news – that God has prepared this rest – has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn’t share the faith of those who listened to God.” (Heb 4:1-2)

Group Discussion:

What are your thoughts surrounding Hebrews 4:1?

How do we see the Gospel reflected in the practice of Sabbath rest spoken of in Hebrews 4:2?

The third truth is that Sabbath rest is for believers.

The point of Sabbath rest is to rest in the Lord. This is only possible through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is impossible to rest in the Lord if we are not in Christ.

For the non-Christian, they need to see that work cannot ultimately save and satisfy. How much money is enough? “Just a little more,” one may say. Salvation cannot be accomplished by our own efforts. Failure to rest is a failure to treat God as God. Failing to rest in Christ is to deny the salvation provided by his atoning sacrifice.

Taking a break and resting once per week may have physical benefits, but these benefits are only temporary. The ability to practice true Sabbath rest is impossible outside of relationship with Christ. Read the scripture below and discuss the following questions:

“For only we who believe can enter his rest.” (Heb 4:3a)

Group Discussion:

According to Hebrews 4:3a, who are the only people that can enter into Sabbath rest?

Why is it impossible for an unbeliever to enter into Sabbath rest?

What evangelistic implications does this have for the practice of Sabbath rest?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in individual burnout.

In his book *Leading on Empty*, Wayne Cordiero, a pastor struggling to lead a church as the flames of burnout consumed more and more of his ability to serve the flock entrusted to him, states,

My vision for the church was barren, and the once-alive heart that beat incessantly for others had begun to shrink. Each day that passed was taking a toll on me, but I didn't know how to stop the progression. Whatever was causing the drain was winning.

The absence of Sabbath rest may result in burnout. Cordier is not alone. Witt writes that “1500 pastors leave the ministry permanently each month in America and one out of every ten ministers will actually retire as a minister.” Richard Krejcir surveyed 1,050 pastors and uncovered some disturbing statistics showing the burnout many are experiencing:

- 1) Fifty seven percent said that they would leave if they had a better place to go—including secular work.
- 2) Eighty nine percent said that they had considered leaving the ministry at one time.
- 3) Seventy percent stated that they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly basis and even daily basis.

Group discussion:

How can the problem of burnout affect the local church?

Has burnout ever kept you from being able to serve in ministry?

After reading this, why is it important for leaders in ministry to observe Sabbath rest?

What are some ways the local church help their leadership be successful in the practice of Sabbath rest?

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

We have discovered the importance of Sabbath rest as part of a biblical rhythm of work and rest. It is important for the believer to take a period of time during their week to rest in the Lord. This time is successful when we prepare for and practice it consistently. While filling the time of Sabbath rest with replenishing activity and rest, we must also take time to focus on the Lord and rest in him.

Recapping the Key Truth:

Sabbath rest is resting in the Lord. Sabbath rest is spiritual rest for both the body and soul. We are free and secure in Christ as believers. We cannot work for our salvation. We must rest in Christ. Our relationship with Christ should be the focus of our time of rest.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week as you plan your time of Sabbath rest, prepare to spend some time doing the following things: Pray, read scripture, pick a portion of the scripture you read to meditate on that day, and practice thankfulness.

Preview:

As we continue to study what it means to rest in the Lord, next week we will finish our study by talking about the role faith plays and the urgency with which we should pursue the practice of Sabbath rest.

Week 8: It takes Faith Hebrews 4:9-10

The Goal:

The goal of this lesson is to lead the group to an understanding of the faith that is required to rest in the Lord during a time of Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest requires obedient faith. To follow the Lord in a biblical rhythm of work and rest, we must let go of the things we work hard in during the week. The practice of Sabbath rest is worth the effort when we realize the consequences of a life without Sabbath rest.



Introduction:

The practice of Sabbath rest is a weekly time for the believer to let go of the pressures of the week and rest in the Lord. A biblical rhythm of work and rest includes working hard and resting well. We are created to work for the **Lord** and rest in **him**. When this rhythm gets out of balance, burnout and exhaustion can set in.

Read the following example then discuss the group questions below.

This individualized way of life, even during leisure time, produces enormous pressure on us. When it becomes too much we are tempted to collapse into some form of oblivion: sleep, drink, drugs, any kind of television, or whatever else might numb our self-production for a while.

The rhythm of life for countless people, set up by this culturally pressured way, this emerges as one that oscillates between driven achievement (both on and off the job) and some form of mind-numbing private escape. This crazed rhythm, based on a distorted view of human reality, increasingly poisons our institutions, relationships, and quality of life.

- Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time*

Group Discussion:

What have you learned about your rhythm of life since we started this study?

How has faith played a role in your practice of Sabbath rest?

Diving into the text:

The following question should be central to the practice of Sabbath rest:

“How do I rest in the Lord?”

In answering this question we must consider some of the truths seen in Hebrews 4:9-10.

Sabbath rest is for both here and eternity. (Heb 4:9)

Hebrews is written to a Jewish audience. The author is encouraging these Jewish believers to persevere in their faith in Christ and not return to the old way of living under the Law. The weekly practice of Sabbath rest was still observed by these early Jewish believers. This weekly practice reflected the model God gave them in Exodus 16. The writer of Hebrews points the practice of Sabbath rest to the reality that our faith is ultimately in Christ. Sabbath rest practiced now points the believer to the eternal rest we have because of Christ. Ask a group member to read the verse below and then discuss the following questions.

“So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God.” (Heb 4:9)

Group Discussion:

How would you explain that Sabbath rest is for both here and eternity?

Do you think that because Sabbath rest has been fulfilled in Christ means that the practice should cease? Why or why not?

Sabbath rest requires faith. (Heb 4:10)

Practicing Sabbath rest with consistency requires faith. As believers we must develop a faith that relies on God to provide for us as we rest in him. Read the scripture below and then discuss the questions that follow:

“For all who have entered into God’s rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world.” (Heb 4:10)

Group Discussion:

What kind of faith does Hebrews 4:10 require?

In what ways has the practice of Sabbath rest increased your faith in God?

Faith is about obedience.

Psalm 46:10 points to the practical side of what it means to rest in the Lord.

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps 46:10)

The term “be still” in this passage of scripture means to **let go**, **relax**, or **loosen** your grip. This is the perfect picture of entering Sabbath rest. We have to loosen our grip of those things we hang tight to all week that sustain us. Life can be heavy. God invites us to put the weight down and relax for a little while. We can’t enjoy life when we are burdened. This is not easy to do sometimes. It takes **faith** to follow.

Obedience is about action.

The term “and know” means to **know** by **experience**. If we are in Christ then we continue to learn about God through being obedient to him.

Obedience leads to action. The believer should bear fruit. It is one thing to think about Sabbath rest. It is another to trust God by doing it. When we put action to our faith, it brings life to it. We can’t work to earn our salvation, but if we are saved, we will **hunger** for the things of God. Rest should be one of those things.

Group Discussion:

How do you react to the invitation God gives us to let go, relax and loosen our grip?

What is God asking you to let go of?

Is there anything you sense God asking you to do to take the next step in the practice of Sabbath rest?

Reality Check:

A life absent of Sabbath rest can result in individual exhaustion.

Exhaustion crosses both age and cultural boundaries. In a study of nearly 300,000 teens between 1991-2012, The University of Michigan's national survey revealed that more than half of teenagers fifteen and older are sleep deprived. This group falls two hours short of the recommended amount of nightly sleep. Milton Becknell writes in his article "Healthy in Mind, Body, and Spirit":

We live in a world that is moving at a pace far beyond what our ancestors could have imagined, and we are finding that the price of success and prosperity can be hazardous to our health. According to a 2010 American Psychological Association survey, 44 percent of Americans reported that their stress levels had increased over the past five years, especially in the areas of money, work, and the economy. . . . Indeed, the proportion of stress-related disorders has increased exponentially with modernization in the 21st century, including heart attack, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, sleep disorders, chronic back pain, migraine/tension headache, as well as depressive and anxiety disorders, to name a few.

Burnout can do more harm than one may realize. In Japan people are dying from overwork. Seemingly young men in their thirties and forties are dying while at work. So many are dying that there is an official term for the trend. Raymond Brown in his article, "Karoshi: A Fatal Export from Japan" writes,

[This is] what the Japanese are now calling karoshi—death from overwork. Karoshi usually refers to acute heart failure following high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis, or a cerebral hemorrhage. Today's lawyers estimate that some 10,000 Japanese per year are dying from it. This is the same number as are killed by traffic accidents. Karoshi is one product the West does not need to import.

Group discussion:

Can you share an experience you have had with exhaustion?

How does a lack of rest effect us?

If all believers practiced Sabbath rest, how do you think it would change our world?

How do you think it would effect future generations?

Making Sabbath Rest A Reality:

Remain faithful. Remember and press on. Sabbath rest can be a rich experience for the believer. It has the ability to create healthy rhythm of work and rest in a family. It allows time for parents to bless their children and spend meaningful time together. If this is done each week, it becomes a life giving part of our spiritual walk. The best way to make Sabbath rest a reality is to step into it and do it. Learn what works and what does not. Make adjustments when needed. But over all, trust God and be obedient to him. There is blessing awaiting all who do.

Recapping the Key Truth:

Sabbath rest is a theologically complex concept that can be confusing for the average believer. Church members who are aware of Sabbath rest as a biblical concept are often confused by the different theological interpretations and how he or she is to honor the command to remember it and keep it holy. With the disappearance of many cultural boundaries that marked Sunday as a day for worship and rest, so has the practice of resting in the Lord through anything more than attending a church service. Sabbath rest is seen as a foreign concept that is not truly necessary for Christians.

A regular cycle of work and Sabbath rest is a realistic goal for most believers. We make room in our life for what we perceive to be valuable. When the understanding of Sabbath rest is increased in the light of God's Word within a culture that is starved for rest, the practice should follow. This study has shown what can happen in the absence of Sabbath rest. The practice is valuable for believers who suffer from poor time management skills, fatigue, overwhelming busyness, family stress, burnout, and exhaustion. So many suffer needlessly under the weight of daily burdens when the grace of Sabbath rest, provided through Christ, can be enjoyed within a healthy rhythm of work and rest.

Sabbath Rest Challenge:

This week as you plan your time of Sabbath rest, prepare to spend some time doing the following things: Look for the Lord's hand at work around you. Talk about the things of God with those you are close to. Worship. Stay away from things that are ungodly or distract you from the Lord.

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ABSTRACT

LEADING THE FAMILIES OF NEW WORK FELLOWSHIP, HOPKINSVILLE, KENTUCKY TO A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF SABBATH REST

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
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The purpose of this project was to lead the families of New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to develop a rhythm of work and rest in their lives as a result of a biblical understanding and practice of Sabbath rest.

Chapter 1 defines the goals of the project, ministry context, rationale, definitions, limitations, delimitations, and research methodology.

Chapter 2 defines the biblical model of Sabbath rest by exploring Genesis 1:1-2:3, Exodus 16, Acts 15, Hebrews 4.

Chapter 3 explores the cultural need for Sabbath rest and the results of a life lived with the absence Sabbath rest.

Chapter 4 describes the process by which the project was implemented.

Chapter 5 records the results of the project that consisted of a four-week sermon series and an eight-week small group study on Sabbath rest.

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