

ATTENTIVENESS

SABBATH



SESSION 2: SABBATH AS RHYTHM



Main Text:

Exodus 20:8-11

Take Home Exercise:

Prepare for Sabbath

OPENING EXERCISE (10 Minutes)

Spend a moment in prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together, and then lead your group through the below exercise.

Throughout this series, we are exploring four elements of Sabbath—stop, rest, delight, and worship. This week we will briefly explore the second element—rest. Sabbath is a day when we fill our souls with deep rest. This is different from leisure. We engage in activities that restore and replenish us. For some, this might look like sleeping in, slowly sipping a cup of coffee or tea, reading, listening to music, or going on a slow, long walk in nature. Rather than filling the whole day and hurrying from activity to activity, we intentionally move through the Sabbath day slowly. We take time to linger a little longer, pause and allow for more margin in our schedules.

Invite your group members to get comfortable and take a few slow, deep breaths. After a long, full, or busy day, it can be hard to slow down, so allow for some extra time and space for your group to settle in.

Consider using a breath prayer here (syncing your prayer with the cadence of your breathing) as you meditate on Psalm 46:10:

Inhale: **Be still**

Exhale: **and know You are God.**

As a group, read and take a few minutes to slowly reflect on the following poem by Wendell Berry:

To sit and look at light-filled leaves
May let us see, or seem to see,
Far backward as through clearer eyes
To what unsighted hope believes
The blessed conviviality
That sang Creation's seventh sunrise,

Time when the Maker's radiant sight
Made radiant everything he saw,
And everything he saw was filled

With perfect joy and life and light
His perfect pleasure was sole law;
No pleasure had become self-willed.
For all his creatures were his pleasures
And their whole pleasure was to be
What he had made them; they sought no gain
Or growth beyond their proper measures,
Nor longed for change or novelty.
The only new thing could be pain.

-III, from A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems
1979-1997 by Wendell Berry

Use the following questions to guide your conversation as you briefly discuss your reactions to the poem:

What themes or images stand out to you?
Is there a line that you find to be particularly beautiful?

OPENING DISCUSSION (15 Minutes)

Spend some time together debriefing the take-home exercise from your last gathering.

In your last gathering, you were encouraged to find a day, whether a full 24 hours or 3-4 hours, to practice stopping. The take-home exercise was to begin your Sabbath by creating a Sabbath Box—placing any cares, concerns, and unfinished work in a box or jar and then closing it as a physical act of trusting the Lord and surrendering these worries to him.

Giving yourselves immense grace, share with the group how this went. Use the following questions to guide your discussion as you reflect back on your Sabbath experience:

Were you able to find a day/time to stop? If not, what prevented you from doing so?

How was your experience with building a Sabbath box? Was there anything particularly encouraging, surprising, or challenging for you?

Going forward, how might you practically remind yourself to stop this week regardless of whether or not your work is finished (i.e., setting an alarm or reminder on your phone, powering down devices at a certain time)?

STUDY TOGETHER (20 Minutes)

Lead the study and discussion below for your group.

Watch this brief overview video together and discuss.

Video 2 - Sabbath as Rhythm

Have someone in your group read Exodus 20:8-11 aloud.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

As God was liberating the Israelites and forming them in the wilderness, the command of Sabbath became a central part of what it meant for them to follow God. For their years in slavery in Egypt, they were forced to live out of rhythm with creation. They worked seven days a week. Their existence was reduced purely to what they could produce. They were transformed more into machines than humans.

When God created the world and rested, he wove a rhythm into the fabric of creation, six days you work, and one day you rest. This six-and-one rhythm confronts the gods of accomplishment that views rest as a mere impediment to achieving more. It confronts our addiction to achievement and forces us to embrace our limitations.



When we resist this rhythm, we experience dissonance, stress, anxiety, and tension. Or, as the saying goes, “When you go against the grain of the universe, you get splinters.” Over the next few questions, discuss the way life in the modern world pulls us toward living without rhythm.

Why might God have explicitly instructed the Israelites to “remember” the Sabbath command?

Why is this reminder significant for us today, too? What causes us, today, to forget to rest?

In Genesis, the day begins with rest (evening), and for man (created on the sixth day), the week begins with Sabbath. On the first day of their human existence, God himself rested on the Sabbath, blessed it, and called it holy. How is the rhythm of creation a reflection of the grace of the gospel?

How does the Sabbath challenge our cultural beliefs about where we find our identity (i.e., you are what you accomplish, you are what you produce)? How is Sabbath a humbling act for us? How is it liberating?

PRACTICE THIS TOGETHER (10 Minutes)

Ironically, taking one day a week for Sabbath rest requires work of intentional planning and preparing for the day. The author of Hebrews writes about Sabbath rest: “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest...” (Hebrews 4:11a). The Sabbath is a gift that we must actively and willfully receive and enter into. If we do not plan and prepare for Sabbath, it simply will not happen.

This week you will come up with a plan for how you will intentionally prepare for the Sabbath day. It is typically helpful to set aside a few hours the day before your Sabbath, or perhaps throughout the week, to plan and prepare. As you plan for your Sabbath, take into consideration your work, your relational responsibilities (i.e., caregiving or parenting), and other routine life tasks—grocery shopping, cleaning, preparing food, paying bills, and running errands. The goal of preparation is not to complete every task on your to-do list prior to Sabbath—but rather for you to plan your week in a way that allows you to freely engage in activities on the Sabbath that lead you to rest, delight, and worship.

Take some time now as a group to discuss how you will go about planning and preparing for your Sabbath this week:

What day/time of the week works best for you to spend a few hours intentionally planning and preparing for your Sabbath?

What obstacles might you encounter as you prepare for your Sabbath? How might you overcome these?

What might you need to say no to on your Sabbath in order to say yes to embracing this gift of rest?

How might you invite others, perhaps from this group, to support you in this?

TAKE-HOME EXERCISE—Prepare for Sabbath (5 Minutes)

Read through the below exercise that each individual will do before your next gathering. Work through any questions people may have on what they are to do. Again it is about practice, not perfection. Give yourselves grace.

The goal of the take-home exercise for this week is to create a plan for your Sabbath preparation day(s). Ironically, it takes work to stop. There are a few categories you might consider as you plan for your Sabbath preparation day: work responsibilities, relational responsibilities, errands, and boundaries for technology.

Spend a few minutes reading the instructions for this take-home exercise aloud with the group and discuss any questions that may arise:

Set aside time during the week to attend to routine life tasks that won't be done on Sabbath. For many people, this typically looks like taking a few hours the day before Sabbath to do so, but you might find it helpful to have a few days to space out the preparation and planning.

It will be helpful for you to share this plan with those you may be spending the Sabbath with (family, friends, roommates, etc.), and also to communicate about and take into consideration differences in personality and preferences. Take some time to pray over your Sabbath and to invite God to guide you as you plan.

Remember that the goal of Sabbath preparation is not to check off every item on your to-do list or to fill your entire Sabbath day with activities. Plan your Sabbath day loosely in a way that allows you to move through the day freely and slowly as you stop, rest, delight, and worship.

Take into consideration the following categories to start as you plan for your Sabbath preparation day:

Work Responsibilities:

- What might you need to communicate with coworkers, supervisors, etc?
- Will you set an automatic response on email?

Relational Responsibilities:

- What relational/care responsibilities will you have?
- How might you invite others to support you in this?
- Are there events/activities/appointments/sports on the calendar for those you are caring for that you need to plan for? Which ones will you say yes to on the Sabbath? Which ones will you need to reschedule or say no to on the Sabbath?

Errands/Routine Tasks:

- When will you take time to go grocery shopping?
- Will you need to cook meals in advance?
- When will you clean, do laundry, housework, etc.?
- When will you pay bills, go to appointments, and complete other routine tasks?

Boundaries for Technology:

- If you will be turning your phone off for the day, what plans will you need to make in advance?
- What decisions might you make in advance about screens, social media, etc.?

Additional practical tips for your Sabbath this week:

- Unplug from social media, and limit your time on screens.
- Engage in activities that restore and replenish you. Binge-watching a TV show might sound relaxing, but consider activities that allow you to genuinely rest and be refreshed.
- What is restful for you will likely be different from those you may be practicing Sabbath with. Have a conversation in advance about what resting looks like for you on the Sabbath, as well as how you might navigate those differences.
- If possible, aim to get at least 6-7 hours of sleep the night before your Sabbath.
- Remember that not everything needs to be done/finished before your Sabbath starts.

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 Minutes)

Close your time by reading the following prayer together. Then take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other's upcoming week.

"O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

(from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer)