

“Sabbath Rest” (Mark 2:27-28)

We are together taking a journey of series “Being Set Free.” Congratulations. This is actually the last lesson. The theme is “Sabbath Rest.”

1. Living in a stressful world

This is the research data by The American Institute of Stress.

Daily life stress¹

77 % of people regularly experience physical symptoms caused by stress

54 % said stress has caused them to fight with people close to them.

Work place stress²

40% of workers reported their job was very or extremely stressful

25% view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives

Top Causes of Stress in the U.S.

	Cause	Factors
1	Job Pressure	Co-Worker Tension, Bosses, Work Overload
2	Money	Loss of Job, Reduced Retirement, Medical Expenses
3	Health	Health Crisis, Terminal or Chronic Illness
4	Relationships	Divorce, Death of Spouse, Arguments with Friends, Loneliness
5	Poor Nutrition	Inadequate Nutrition, Caffeine, Processed Foods, Refined Sugars
6	Media Overload	Television, Radio, Internet, E-Mail, Social Networking

Probably the situations are much the same in other countries.

Job pressure is the number one cause of stress and money is the second greatest cause of stress. If you think you need more money, you have to work harder. And it might lead us to ruin our health, which is the third greatest cause of stress. And to escape the stress, we eat unbalanced meals. This can also lead us to ruin our health.

¹ <https://www.stress.org/daily-life/>

² <https://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/>

I found no.6 interesting. Media Overload. If it causes stress, you had better stop it, but you cannot. As an outlet for stress, we watch TV or surf the Internet. And that can become another cause of stress.

Something is wrong. Something is wrong with our modern society. We Christians and the church also cannot look at these problems as by-standers. We are missing something very important. Or maybe we know it, but we pretend to be unaware of it, and hope we can get away with it. We may be thinking we will continue like this, and somehow eventually a solution will come for these problems.

Some weeks ago, I talked about "Crafting the Rhythm of Life." "We live in a blizzard. And few of us have a rope." God is offering us a rope to keep us from getting lost. In his book "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" Peter Scazzero says that the rope is the Daily Office and Sabbath.

I shared about "The Daily Office" already. If you missed it, you can check it at our website. All my messages are there. Today we'll look at Sabbath. How can we take it? Is it adding another burden? Does it make us busier? What is the Sabbath rest?

Sabbath rest is something important which Christians must not lose. Sabbath rest is the good news only Christian Church can offer to the society full of stress. Sabbath rest is the mark of God's redeemed people, a life of being set free.

2. The Sabbath was made for people

Mark 2:27-28

Then he [Jesus] said to them, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The Sabbath was made for people. God created the Sabbath for us. It's for us. We need it. God knew it and created it and gave it to us. And he demonstrated it (Gen 2:3). Sabbath rest is the privilege of God's people. Ignoring the Sabbath will forfeit a very important thing God prepared for us.

Which came first? The instruction of Sabbath rest in the Ten Commandments or being set free from slavery in Egypt? Being set free from slavery came first. Sabbath rest is a privilege God's redeemed people can have. Slaves don't have rest. Laborers are evaluated by their productivity. A person with high productivity will be regarded highly. A person with low productivity will not be regarded highly. Slaves and laborers aren't free to take it easy and not work or do something not productive.

Taking the Sabbath is an experience of being accepted by God though we don't produce anything. I am not doing anything, I have not produced any results, but God still accepts me, loves me and He is smiling at me, saying "You are precious in my eyes." Moreover, God knows my need and he will fulfill it. It's amazing!

God made the Sabbath for us. You are no longer slaves. You must listen to God, says "I redeemed you. I liberated you. I made you my child. You are an heir to the glory of My kingdom." Remembering these promises and enjoying the blessings of being God's child, and setting aside other issues, this is the heart of Sabbath rest.

God created the whole universe and humans, and looked at all he had made and he saw that it was very good. And on the 7th day he rested from all his work (Gen 1:31-2-3). "Sabbath rest invites us to step back, and see that it is good."³

God knows our hearts very well. He knows us even better than ourselves. That's why He made Sabbath. Sabbath rest was made for us. If we forget the Sabbath, we will work too hard and forget our more tender mercies, forget those we love, forget our children and our natural wonder. Riches may enable us to buy things that may bring happiness for a short while. We will realize we are spending all our time taking care of all our things, and hardly any time actually enjoying our children, lovers, friends, or nature.⁴

To observe Sabbath is to rest in our Lord Jesus. It's not that we rest because we have completed our task. But we rest and receive the Sabbath rest by faith because it is what God has decided and given us.

"He is Lord of the Sabbath and Lord of our lives, and so we no longer have to be self-reliant."⁵ Our Lord, Jesus is the Lord of all the earth. He is in

³ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, 2013, Kindle, 41

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32; 205

⁵ Shelly Miller, *Rhythms of Rest: Finding the Spirit of Sabbath in a Busy World*, 2016, Kindle, 89

control of everything. He can turn this planet Earth without me. He can arrange, advance, and complete anything. I know him as my Lord. So I can come to Him and rest with Him.

Speaking of rest, we think of having a day off. But Sabbath rest and day off are different in nature. We can have Sabbath rest on our day off. But having a day off doesn't mean having Sabbath rest. For a long time, I couldn't get it. Day off is there for us so that we can work more. But for Sabbath, we come to Jesus, trust in him and entrust everything to him, acknowledge what He has given us once again, enjoy them, rejoice and rest in His presence. That is Sabbath rest.

3. Practical components

Now let's look at how we can spend our Sabbath practically. The point is not what we do or what we don't do. But the point is to come to God as His child, enjoy what he has given you, rejoice in God and enjoy being His child.

(1) Remember

Among the ten commandments, Sabbath is the only commandment that begins with the word "remember." Remember! It refers to something we already know, but have forgotten. The Sabbath, which means "to cease." We must cease in order to rest.⁶

There is a God who cares for you, who knows the hardship you are facing right now, who gives you strength, and constantly provides what you need. Remember this and come to this God and just spend time with Him. The point is not to get some solution or wisdom, or to discuss matters with Him. But to leave everything with Him, to choose to let go of everything, just to spend time with Him, to feel that you know Him and you are known by Him. To set aside time to spend just for this. "Sabbath can only begin if we choose."⁷ So we must remember it. Otherwise it never comes automatically.

At dinner time on the Sabbath day, Yumi and I have a habit of putting candles on our table. We remember that the Lord who is light is there with us. The light spreads throughout the whole room. We remember that the Lord, the Light of Truth, is present in every aspect of our lives.

⁶ Shelly, 24

⁷ Wayne, 44; 27

Remember the Sabbath is not just for the people of Israelites. Sabbath is also for “your son or daughter, your male or female servant,” and also for “your animals, and any foreigner residing in your towns” (Ex 20:10).

How shall we apply this in our modern time? Choose at least one heavily used device— the telephone, television, computer, tablet, washing machine or iron — and let them rest for a Sabbath period.

(2) Schedule and Surrender

Sabbath rest must be scheduled. It is like booking a date with God. And when the time comes, we put aside whatever else we are doing and enter the Sabbath rest.

In other words, “the Sabbath requires surrender; surrender to a quality of time when you will not be disturbed.” “If we only stop when we are finished with all our work, we will never stop— because our work is never completely done.” “Not later. Not when their trials are over. Not when they are fixed. Right here, right now. There is a blessing for you here, now, in this very moment.”⁸ This is the Sabbath rest.

Sabbath days, we can experience a lovely freedom from expectations— other people’s and also my own.⁹ We must set ourselves free from our boss “shoulds.”¹⁰ And “When we feel trapped by a problem, we must surrender to not knowing the solution.”¹¹

(3) Be Still and Silence

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I am God.”

Henri Nouen insisted that the noise of our lives made us deaf, unable to hear when we are called.¹² So silence is necessary to come close to God, move into his presence and spend time with him. “Sabbath time is enriched by some period of intentional silence.”¹³

⁸ Wayne, 27; 82; 43

⁹ Wayne, 67

¹⁰ Shelly, 174

¹¹ Wayne, 189

¹² Wayne, 84

¹³ Wayne, 55

I found that it's not easy to be calm and focus on the Lord for the first 5 minutes. I try to turn my heart to the Lord, but many thoughts come up in my mind. But I don't try to shut them up by force.

Notice what arises in silence. Write on a small piece of paper a word or phrase that signifies a particular worry or concern you would like to leave behind for the time being.¹⁴

In my case, after 5 minutes or so, I start to calm down gradually. Sometimes I imagine that I am in my favorite place with God alone. I think about the moment when God worked in my life last week.

I don't try to make something happen. I don't try to gain something. I don't try to get the answer, nor wisdom, nor solution, nor power. I just enjoy being able to spend time with God without disturbance.

Sabbath reminds us that we are loved deeply and we belong to him.¹⁵ That's all about the Sabbath.

(4) Giving Thanks and Delight

"Sabbath is an especially sweet time for giving thanks."¹⁶ The Sabbath is a day of delight, a day to be at peace with all we have.¹⁷

During Sabbath time we are focusing on our gratefulness for what has already been given. We set aside time to delight in being alive, to enjoy the gifts of creation, and to give thanks for the blessings.¹⁸

I usually look back at the last week, remembering what I am thankful for, and write these things down. I don't try to make well-structured sentences. I don't wait until I have gathered all my thoughts to write. I just write down thoughts one after another. Once I start writing, I try not to stop in the middle but continue to write like a half page until I've written as much as possible. Surprisingly thoughts come up one after another. Sometimes I can't think of anything to be thankful about. Then I just start writing, "I don't have anything particularly thankful this week..." As I continue to write, often I find something I can be thankful about.

At dinner time on the Sabbath day, I make it a habit to share with Yumi about what each of us felt thankful for in the past week.

¹⁴ Wayne, 56; 60

¹⁵ Shelly, 78

¹⁶ Wayne, 229

¹⁷ Wayne, 132

¹⁸ Wayne, 128; 26

(5) Simple Prayer and the Word

Thanks giving brings a prayer.

Give a simple prayer to bless yourself and someone you love. For this moment, let the hurry of the world fall away, and remain in his presence.¹⁹

When I preached the message “Crafting the Rhythm of Life”, I introduced how I spend time with God. One of them is observation of the portion of Scripture. I don’t do it for preparation for my message or ministry. But I do it for the nourishment of my own soul, and refreshment for my heart. Sometimes I read spiritual books, or listening to sermons.

(6) To Play: Enjoy what you are given

“Play nourishes our delight. When we engage in “purposeless” enjoyment of one another, we harvest some of the sweetest fruits of life.”²⁰

To walk without purpose. To take a Sabbath bath. To watch a movie. To read a book, not for gaining knowledge nor studying nor training, but just for enjoyment, for refreshing your soul. To meet with friends. To visit a place where you can relax.

Yumi and I bake bread together sometimes. As we eat freshly baked bread together, we talk about what to make next. It’s fun and delightful.

Well, it can be anything. Enjoy what God has given you. Enjoy the time you can spend with your loved ones. For some people, gardening on weekends is their delight. But for others it is a duty. If it’s something you have to do because you ran out of time during the week, then don’t do it on the Sabbath.

For parents who are raising children, it’s not easy to take Sabbath rest. But by changing our state of mind we can even enjoy what we used to consider a demand as God’s blessing.

This is what Wayne Muller said: “During Sabbath we take the time to bless our children, place our hands upon their heads, our fingers in their hair, and pray for their strength, and courage, and happiness. We rest with them, eat with them, play with them, walk with them, listen to their stories and their worries and their laughter, and remember to whom they belong.”²¹

¹⁹ Wayne, 22

²⁰ Wayne, 102

²¹ Wayne, 160

I heard someone say this: to control your children according to your schedules and your plan is a tireless battle. If parents let their children lead, it will be a lot smoother. If they start to see things from their children's point of view, sympathize with what they discover, and enjoy with them what they found surprising and exciting, then they will start to understand well their interest, their characteristics, what they are good at and so on. And they will be closer to their children. The communication between parents and children will become better. Children are basically very interested in what their parents are doing. They will start to listen to their parents.

I heard that the key to this is not to tell them what to do "Do this or do that. Don't do this or you cannot do that", but to ask them questions "What is that over there? What shall we do after meal? Who needs help to change their clothes?" I heard the key is to let the children decide and act on their own initiative.

Of course I understand you can't do that every day. But I think it may be possible for you to do that a few hours a week. What about enjoying your time with your children a few hours a week? It must be good.

(7) The time for finding

"Sabbath is about celebrating the goodness of our Creator."²²

During Sabbath time, we focus our heart not on what we need, but rather on what we have. When we are trapped in seeking, nothing is enough we see only what is missing. When the Sabbath time begins the time for seeking is over; the time for finding has begun.²³

Our Creator, the source of life, great God takes notice of me and knows me and takes care of me. It doesn't mean all my problems have disappeared. From the following day, I will still face those problems. But there will be total difference in my finding that God is in control of the universe, and I am not. And on the Sabbath, we are in the moment of experiencing God. There is nothing to prove and nothing to accomplish. We just come to him and to be ourselves. We find grace and rest.

4. A Life of Being Set Free

²² Shelly, 94

²³ Wayne, 202

Taking Sabbath Rest is the core of a life of being set free.

“If we surrender fully into Sabbath time, we can slowly move from a life so filled with noisy worries that we are deaf to the gifts and blessings of our life, to a life in which we can listen to God.”²⁴

“When we cease our daily labor, other things —love, friendship, prayer, touch, singing, rest —can be born in the space created by our rest.”²⁵

My hope and prayer is that our Sunday Worship is the Sabbath time for you. Every week, I hope you are all experiencing the Sabbath together. You all have so many things to do. But on Sabbath, you stop doing them for the moment, turn your heart to God, and offer your thanksgiving and praise to Him with all your might. Sabbath is the time to praise the Lord with a loud voice, without reserve. It is the time to listen to the Word of God, and be in awe of God’s greatness. It is the time to renew our trust in God. It is the time to realize that the burdens we bear on our own, we can bring to God and rest in Him.

It is the time to remember the blessings God has given us, and share them with one another. It is the time to care for one another and serve one another. It is the time to enjoy fellowship and talk with one another.

What you do for living, what kind of result you achieved, or couldn’t achieve don’t matter. Whether we succeeded nor failed don’t matter. People who are loved by God and who love God are gathered from all over the world and we share this moment together, enjoying the foretaste of heaven. And we feel Jesus in each other and we are transformed into Jesus’ likeness through one another’s presence. “Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives.” In our worship service, we share the Sabbath time together. That is wonderful, isn’t it?

“One of the most precious gifts we can offer is to be a place of refuge, to be Sabbath for one another.”²⁶ Our church must be the place like this. So we must understand the Sabbath rest and practice it and taste it. Otherwise we cannot offer it.

Sabbath Rest is the important thing Christians cannot lose. Because Sabbath Rest is the good news only the church can offer to the society which is full of

²⁴ Wayne, 84

²⁵ Wayne, 30

²⁶ Wayne, 119

stress. Sabbath Rest is the mark of God's redeemed people, a Life of Being Set Free.

For Lifenet groups and personal reflections:

- 1) Make a list of principles that shape your days.
- 2) How do we find delight when we feel the lingering tug of so many choices, worries, and responsibilities?
- 3) Why Sabbath Rest is the mark of God's redeemed people? And what does it proclaim to the world?

Some are taken from *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, by Wayne Muller, 2013, Kindle, 113; 147