

“The Sabbath was Made for People” (Mark 2:27-28)

We’re in the series of “The Call to Undivided Intimacy” studying the Ten Commandments. Today is the 4th Commandment part 2. We will learn more about the Sabbath, and I will talk about how we can practice the Sabbath rest.

1. 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.”

People were not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for people. The Sabbath is not there to bind us and stifle us. We feel tired because of work, child raising, and something else. We are overburdened with burdens of the past, present and future. God is calling us to come to rest in Him, that is the Sabbath. He is not a God who can be limited by human rules, cultures or customs. He is far greater than those. God wants to give us rest and peace. So, He made it for us. We can still have peace while we are in sadness which we cannot bear by ourselves. We can still rest in Him while we are facing problems which we can’t handle by ourselves.

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. Sabbath rest is the privilege of God’s people. Ignoring the Sabbath will blind us to see who we are.

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 have.

During 400 years of slavery in Egypt, Israelites not only learned the pattern of life as slaves, but they also internalized a slave mentality down to their bones. They lost their dignity as human beings. God wanted to recover their human dignity. And through them, God redeemed community, the kingdom of God will be revealed.

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 unproductive.

God made the Sabbath for us, you and me. God is saying “Listen to me. I redeemed you. I liberated you. You are no longer a slave. 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.

Taking the Sabbath is an experience of being accepted by God though we don’t produce anything. In the Sabbath, you are not doing anything, you have not produced any results, but God still accepts you, loves you and He is smiling at you,

saying “You are precious in my eyes. I’m pleased by you because you are my child.” Moreover, God knows your need and he will fulfill it. It’s amazing!

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.¹

To observe Sabbath is to rest because of Jesus. It’s not that we rest because we have completed our task. But we rest and receive the Sabbath rest by faith because what Jesus had done for us.

“He is Lord of the Sabbath and Lord of our lives, and so we no longer have to be self-reliant.”² Our Lord, Jesus is the Lord of all the earth. He is in control of everything. He can turn this planet Earth without you and me. He can arrange, advance, and complete anything. You know him as your Lord. So, you can come to Him and rest with Him.

2. Pointing to Christ

By practicing the Sabbath, we not only experience Christ ourselves, but we also point others to Christ.

Exodus 20:8-10

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ 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 the alien within your gates.

It’s not just Israelites who don’t work on the Sabbath day, but their slaves and livestock also don’t work. Egypt would never allow that. They would make the Israelites constantly work so that they themselves can rest, and live comfortably. By practicing the Sabbath, the redeemed community of Israel demonstrates the mercy, love and care of God.

“One of the most precious gifts we can offer is to be a place of refuge, to be Sabbath for one another.”³

¹ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, 2013, Kindle, 32; 205

² Shelly Miller, *Rhythms of Rest: Finding the Spirit of Sabbath in a Busy World*, 2016, Kindle, 89

³ Wayne, 119

Heidelberg Catechism says this: Everyday on my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.⁴

Through this commandment, God is calling us to undivided intimacy. And it's not only for us. God will use us to call others to undivided intimacy.

3. To Love Yourself in God

Now I want to talk about how we practice Sabbath. Two things I want to invite you to do. One is daily and the other is weekly.

First is crafting your day, to make it Christ-centered, rather than driven by demands and duties. You come to God not just once a day but actually many, many times. When you do something, you begin with coming to God. This is how you can do it. After you finish one task, one duty, one meeting, or whatever, you come to God before you start the next thing. It may be just to say "Jesus, please come with me." You may remember the sermon title "To Rest in God" "The Sabbath was Made for People." That can be your theme of the week. You may look at one verse which you read in the morning. You need just a second to do it. Or, you may use NLIF Bible reading plan, which guides you to read a small portion of Psalms and Proverbs every day. You need only 1 or 2 minutes. The download link is on this video and the church website. I call it "Selah" or a "between time." By doing this, you are crafting the rhythm of your day. You are centering yourself on Jesus throughout the day. It's aligning your whole day with the Word.

Second is weekly intentional rest in grace. For practicing Sabbath rest, the point is not what you do or what you don't do. But the point is to love yourself in God and to love yourself in relationships with people. You come to God as His child, enjoy what he has given you, rejoice in God and enjoy being His child, and enjoy being a part of his family, his community. You may start with one hour once a week. You may make it longer, maybe half a day, or a whole day.

Today, I will talk about especially how we can practically "love yourself in God."

(1) 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 your trials are over. Not when they are fixed. Right here, right now. There is a blessing for you here, now, in this very moment."⁵ This is the Sabbath rest.

⁴ Quoted by Michael, 1939

⁵ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, 2013, Kindle, 27; 82; 43

Sabbath days, we can experience a lovely freedom from expectations—other people’s and also your own.⁶ We must set ourselves free from our boss “shoulds.”⁷ And “When we feel trapped by a problem, we must surrender to not knowing the solution.”⁸

(2) Be Still and Silent

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.⁹ 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.”¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.¹² It’s not because we have done good things, but it’s because we are who we are, we are his greatly beloved children. That’s what the Sabbath is all about.

You schedule the date with God, and now the time has come. You sit down, be still and calm. Then, what is the next step? Today I’ll introduce a couple of things you can do.

(3) Reflection

Each time I preach, I make reflection points. You can find them on NLIF YouTube channel and homepage. It’s designed to help you to see yourself deeper in the light of the Word, and to lead you into deeper relationship with God, and encourage you to apply the truth in your life and to practice what you learned, instead of just hearing a sermon in the service.

⁶ Wayne, 67

⁷ Shelly, 174

⁸ Wayne, 189

⁹ Wayne, 84

¹⁰ Wayne, 55

¹¹ Wayne, 56; 60

¹² Shelly, 78

If you missed a service, don't worry. You can watch our service later on YouTube and you can also find my sermon note at the church website. And it has reflection points. I recommend you read or watch the sermon first, and do the reflections. Don't rush. Calm down. Take your time. You don't have to finish all points at once. You can do them in different times.

(4) Prayer with Psalm

Some of you may wonder how prayer can be fellowship with God, instead of just repeating your wish list. I used to wonder the same.

Here is how I've been learning prayer. It's very simple. Choose one Psalm. Read out one verse aloud. And rephrase it with your own words. It's okay if your words or thoughts move out of the context of the verse. Do it continually until you have no other words. Then, go to the next verse. And repeat this same pattern. You may do it with three, four or five verses.

This is interesting. You are talking, and you will hear from God.

I give you an example. Psalm 23:1. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want." Lord you are my shepherd. You are always with me. You are my true shepherd and you gave me life. And you promised me abundant life. I am your sheep. I used to be far away from you. But I am redeemed by your blood, and now I belong to you. You never forsake me. Even if I lose my way, you will surely find me. You are my shepherd. And I am your sheep, I know your voice. When I feel anxious, downcast with sorrow, I hear your voice and I find peace. I long for you, and I seek you. Please let me hear your voice. Please let me walk with you. I want to remain in your gentle support, for this is the best place I can be. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want...

This can be done as a spoken prayer or by writing a journal.

(5) Scripture Observation

What you need is: The Bible. Please use the book. Then a notebook and a pen. I don't recommend you to use your computer or phone. It's important to make a difference between this and your work. Go to a quiet place and sit down silently.

1) Quiet your heart. And invite the Holy Spirit. You may take deep breath a couple of times.

2) Read the Bible, just a portion, about 10 to 20 verses. Read it slowly once.

3) Summary. Write down the summary of the portion. But "Jesus healed the sick" is too simple. Write down the summary so that you can understand the content.

4) Observation. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you about God and about yourself through the scripture. And write them down.

(1) About God. For example, God's nature, greatness, promises, guidance, and model or pattern.

(2) About yourself. For example, who I am for God, what I need to change, what God is encouraging me to do.

5) Application. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you can apply the truth from your observation to your life. Write down how you are actually going to practice what you learned.

6) Close by a simple prayer.

(6) The Time for Finding

“Sabbath is about celebrating the goodness of our Creator.”¹³

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.¹⁴

Our Creator, the source of life, great God takes notice of you and knows you and takes care of you. It doesn't mean all your problems have disappeared. From the following day, you may still face those problems. But there will be total difference in your finding that God is in control of the universe, and you are not. You are in his covenant. And he is faithful. 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. There we find grace and rest.

What I shared is like a buffet menu. You choose what you like, and do it. Next time, you may do something different. Do whatever works for you. Each time you can do it in a different way. The point is not what you do or what you don't do. The point is to love yourself in God. You set aside time just for this. Start with one hour once a week. You give that one hour to God only. No internet, no phone. It's like a date with God. How can you miss it? Enjoy it!

Through the 4th Commandment, God calls us to remember what kind of covenant He made with us. He invites us to remain in the covenant, tasting the blessings we have been given, and looking forward to the day the covenant is fulfilled. It's the call to undivided intimacy.

For Lifenet groups and personal reflection

1. During 400 years of slavery in Egypt, Israelites not only learned the pattern of life as slaves, but they also internalized a slave mentality down to their bones. What is a slave mentality like? Can you see any of them in society, in your mind? How does practicing the Sabbath work for restoring human dignity?
2. List what you can give thanks to God for from last week.

¹³ Shelly, 94

¹⁴ Wayne, 202

3. How will you love yourself in God this week? When and how will you have the Sabbath this week? (Some ideas about how you can practice the Sabbath are introduced in the sermon.)