



# Sabbath

Teaching Notes



PRACTICING THE WAY

## Sabbath | Part One: Stop

# Teaching Outline

### Intro hook:

- Flip through any popular magazine and you will see all sorts of advertisements—a couple drinking coffee and reading the morning newspaper in bed, a man lounging on the couch playing the guitar, a group of friends on the beach for a picnic...
- What exactly are they selling?
  - They are selling sabbath.
  - The word sabbath is shabbat in Hebrew and it literally means to stop, or cease, or be done.
  - The marketing departments of companies the world over know that you ache for this kind of a life — but that you don't have it. And they are offering to sell it to you!
  - The irony is, you can't buy sabbath! And you don't need to. To sabbath, you don't need to drop \$69.99 on a new terrycloth bathrobe or blow half your paycheck on a new couch, you just need to stop.

**Seam:** *This primal human ache for sabbath — for what the spiritual writer Marva Dawn called “a sabbath spirituality,” a life where we are at peace in God, and live with joy — is nothing new, it goes all the way back to Jesus’ day.*

### Matthew 11:

- One of Jesus' most famous invitations is from Matthew:  
*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.” [Mt. 11v28-30]*
- I love pastor Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Matthew 11:  
*“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”*
- “Are you tired” has become a rhetorical question in the modern age.
- Of course you are!
- Low-grade exhaustion is the new normal.

## Reasons:

- Part of the reason for this is body-based.
- Up until very recently in human history, the most people slept ten to eleven hours a night. Now, the average in Western nations is just over six.
- Cue all the latest research from neuroscientists on the devastating effect of insufficient sleep on our mind and body.
- And while there are seasons of life when that's unavoidable, it's become chronic for far too many of us.
- We are diminished in our whole person because we are so tired.
- But it's not just our bodies that are tired, it's, in Jesus' language, our "souls."
- Even when we go on vacation and catch up on sleep, there's a psycho• spiritual exhaustion that does not go away in the modern world, as a result of:
  - The hurry, busyness, and frenetic pace of modern life.
  - The noise pollution of city life.
  - The always-on work culture.
  - The rising cost of living, more and more people working multiple jobs to stay afloat.
  - The digital age - the phone that never stops buzzing, the constant stream of alerts, the churn of a 24/7 news cycle, full of outrage and fear.
  - The polarization of politics.
  - Radical individualism, and with it the epidemic of loneliness, what some call the greatest health crisis of our time.
- It's just too much to carry.
- Is it any wonder we're tired?!

**Seam:** *And this problem of chronic exhaustion isn't just an emotional problem, or even a medical problem, at its core, it's a spiritual problem.*

## Love:

- Why? Because we follow Jesus, who said the greatest commandment in all of Scripture is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself.
- For Jesus, love is the telos of the spiritual journey. It is the metric by which we chart our progress.
- But the more exhausted we are, the more difficult it is for us to love, or to bear any of the fruit of the spirit. As Jesus said, *"The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."* [Mark 4v19]

- The hard truth is...
- 1. If love for God and obedience to God are two sides of the same coin, as Jesus seemed to teach, it's hard to love God when you're worn down.
  - When we're tired, we're more prone to sin.
  - Scientists tell us that a lack of rest erodes energy from our pre-frontal cortex, the part of our brain that exercises impulse control. But secondly...
- It's hard to love people, too.
  - As a general rule, tired people are not loving.
  - Most of my worst moments as a human, as a friend, or co-worker or husband or father, are when I'm exhausted, stressed, and in a hurry.
  - I'm more irritable, impatient, selfish; it's like I've devolved down Maslow's hierarchy of needs to my base survival instincts.

**Seam:** *This is not how it's meant to be.*

### **Jesus' and exhaustion:**

- Jesus' will for your life is not for you to be chronically exhausted, sleep-deprived, unhappy and living with no margin.
- That's the enemy's will for your life! Not Jesus!
- It's the enemy who is anti-sabbath.
- I remember a cliché from when I was a kid that was used to justify a sabbathless church life, it was: "The devil never takes a day off." True. But last time I checked, we're not following the devil, we're following Jesus. And in the end, the devil dies.
- I began the weekly practice of sabbath fifteen years ago; at the time, I was church planting, working six or seven days a week, and under a ton of stress. Year over year, I was becoming less loving, not more! I was running on anger, on edge, worn thin, I did not have the energy to be present to my family, my life, or even to God. The practice of sabbath changed the trajectory of my life. I will devote myself to this practice for all my life, because, for me, it's a weekly experience of transformation.
- Here's a metaphor that may help: imagine your life energy as a power bar, like on your phone. 100% is what Jesus called "life to the full," 0% is dead.
- We usually don't rest until we're dangerously tired, down to 20 or 30%. And when we do rest, it's often not long enough to get all the way back to full, but just to keep going. But what do we miss out on in that last 30%? What the NT calls the "fruit of the spirit" — love, joy, peace, and more. The best stuff all comes when we're rested — wisdom, insight, hope, vision

for the future, grace for other people's shortcomings, for our own, energy to do our best work, etc.

- This is why rest is essential to apprenticeship to Jesus. Because if the end goal is to become a person of love in God, we can't do that if we are chronically exhausted.

**Hinge:** *So, is there a practice from the Way of Jesus to reorient us away from exhaustion and toward "life to the full"? Yes, it is the practice of sabbath.*

### **Sabbath:**

- The word sabbath, or shabbat in Hebrew, most literally means to stop. But it can also mean to rest, to delight, and even to worship. Based on that, you can frame the Sabbath in four movements — stop, rest, delight and worship. The plan is to cover each movement over the four Sessions. All we want to cover in Session One is, to stop.
- If you have your Bible with you, open to Genesis 2... read with me...

### **Genesis 2:**

- Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. [Gen. 2v1-3]
- Notice, God sabbathed.
- I've read this passage since I was a little boy, but I remember the first time it hit me, God sabbathed.
- Yeah, but I'm a type-A, high capacity person—God sabbathed.
- Yeah, but I'm more a doer, and I have a lot going on in my life right now—God sabbathed.
- Yeah, but I have little kids at home and I'm starting a business—God sabbathed.
- God the Creator stopped.
- And in doing so, he built a rhythm into the fabric of creation.
- We work for six days, and then we sabbath, we stop, for one.
- It comes as no surprise that every single society in the history of world civilization has been built around a seven-day week, even though, the week is the one unit of time that's not tied to the movement of the stars—the day is tied to the earth's 24-hour rotation, the month to the moon's lunar cycle, and the year to the earth's journey around the sun. The seven-day week is not. It's built out of God's own life rhythm.

- The last time a serious attempt to change the seven-day week was made was in 1793, in the French Revolution, where they attempted a ten day week to up productivity. The result? Productivity plummeted, and worse, there a rash of suicides and spread of mental illness.
- Our generation is re-living the French Revolution all over again, not due a government fiat to elongate the week, but to a kind of vast conspiracy of modern life that is throwing us out of any kind of rhythm at all.
- The smart phone, electricity, the alarm clock, the car, and more have created a world where we go and we go and we go and we never stop.
- But God created the human body and the planet itself to live in a rhythm.
  - There is a rhythm between day and night, waking and sleeping.
  - There is a rhythm between the noise and activity of spring and summer and the quiet and dormancy of fall and winter.
  - There's a tidal rhythm between the land and the sea that's over all the earth.
  - Within our own bodies there's a rhythm of the breath as we inhale and exhale.
  - When we lose this sense of rhythm, of pace, of back and forth, we lose a part of our humanity.
- You are not a machine; you have a soul, and it was not created to move 24/7.
- When we live without sabbath, we go against the rhythm that God the Creator himself built into our body, and into the fabric of all creation.
- And, as the philosopher H.H. Farmer once said, "When you go against the grain of the universe you get splinters."
- This is true on the "negative side" — when you don't sabbath, you suffer the consequences: burn out, stress, trashed immune systems, brain fog, frayed relationships, distance from God, etc.
- But it's also true on the positive side — when we do sabbath, we reap the reward.
- In Oregon, where I live, the myth of the Oregon Trail is alive and well. And historians tell a story about pioneers traveling the Oregon Trail; winter was approaching and the group broke in two, with half traveling seven days a week to get to Oregon in time, and the other half refusing to break sabbath; the group that was practicing sabbath arrived first!
- More recently, a medical study was one on a large community of Christians who practice the Sabbath. The study found that not only are they much happier, on average, than the general population, but they live eleven years longer than other Americans. One doctor pointed out that if you add up the time devoted to sabbath over a life, it's right around eleven years. He theorized that for every day you sabbath you literally add a day to your life!
- My point is, this six-and-one rhythm is built into to the fabric of God's world, just like gravity or thermodynamics. If you fight it, you will face the consequences.

**Seam:** Which is why, later in Scripture, it's commanded by God. Turn to Exodus 19. Exodus 19 is home to the Ten Commandments. Read number four, verse eight...

**Exodus 19:** "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." [Ex. 20v8-11]

- The Sabbath isn't just a good idea; it's one of the ten commandments.
- In fact, it's the longest of all ten commandments. If you were to make a pie chart, it's around 37%! In God's economy, it's just as or more important than not lying or stealing or killing.
- And it's the only commandment we brag about breaking! Even in the moral decay of the West, few people brag about how many lies they told that week or how many affairs they had, yet many of us brag about how many days in a row we worked, how many emails we did over the weekend, etc.
- Busyness is a sign of social status, of how high up the ladder you are.
- But this is not the Way of God.
- Now, Christians have long debated whether or not the sabbath is still a binding command on followers of Jesus. And there are good people on both sides of the argument. But for me, asking whether we "have" to keep the Sabbath or not is about as helpful as asking if we "have" to keep the second law of thermodynamics. You can work with it, or against it, but it just is. Even if the Sabbath command is no longer binding, it still stands as wisdom. Lots of things aren't commanded in Scripture, but they are essential to becoming a person of love.
- As Wayne Muller put it:  
*"The sabbath is not a burdensome requirement from some law-giving deity — "You ought, you'd better, you must" — but rather a remembrance of a law that is firmly embedded in the fabric of nature. It is a reminder of how things really are, the rhythmic dance to which we unavoidably belong."*
- Jesus famously said, in Mark 2, *"The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath."*
- He was speaking to a generation that had the opposite problem to ours; they had hundreds of rules around the Sabbath that warped God's intent behind the day.
- First century Jews needed to hear the second half of that line—*"The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath."*
- But I would argue, most twenty first century Christians need to hear the first part—*"The Sabbath was made for people."*

- Our problem isn't that we have too many rules for the Sabbath; it's that we don't have any!
- Long before the Sabbath is a command in Scripture, it's a gift, from the Creator to you and me and all of creation... from a generous, joyful, loving God that Jesus called "the Lord of the Sabbath."
- Hence the command: remember the Sabbath.

**Seam:** *What is it we remember on the sabbath?*

**Remember:**

- We remember there is a creator God. We live in his world, and it's good.
- We remember there's a rhythm to creation.
- We remember that we don't stop when we're finished; because we're never finished; it's never enough; we stop when the rhythm God built into our bodies says, stop.
- We remember we're not what we do or what we have or what other people think of us, we are who we are deeply loved by.
  - Many people fear stopping, they fear what emotions may come up — who am I if I'm not producing or performing? Sabbath is a weekly act of identity formation, we remember —I am God's loved one.
- We remember that our life with God is not a "right," but a gift.
- We remember that the world is full of evil and injustice, yes, but it's also full of goodness and beauty and truth.
- We remember that we owe it to God to be grateful and full of joy in his world.

**Day and spirit:**

- You see, sabbath is more than just a day, it's a way of being in the world.
- The practice of sabbath is a day of rest by which we cultivate a spirit of restfulness in all of life.
- A practice by which we undergo a dramatic shift, from restlessness to restfulness:
- From/to:
  - Hurry/Peace
  - Busyness/margin
  - Burnout/sustainable pace
  - Noise/quiet
  - Distraction/clarity
  - Isolation/solitude



- Crowds/community
- Grasping/gratitude

**Seam:** *Do you see it?*

**Ending:**

- But Sabbath isn't just an aspirational idea; it's a practice. What the psychologist James Clear calls a "keystone habit," out of which so many other good habits flow.
- Sabbath, like all of the practices, is a means to an end. The end isn't, I practice sabbath. It's not even to be well rested and happy. It's to participate in the love and life of God himself. To center our entire life around him, to live more deeply in him.
- Not just on Sabbath, but all week long.
- As the biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman said, "*People who sabbath live all seven days differently.*"
- That's why the Sabbath is on day seven, not on day three or four. It's not a break in the middle of the week so we can get back to the real business of work. It's the apex, what the entire week is all about.
- You do not have to live a sabbath-less life of non-stop exhaustion. You, right where you are, no matter your stage of life, can adopt the practice of Sabbath.
- And you don't have to buy it or order it online or earn it, all you have to do, is stop.

# Teaching Outline

## Intro hook:

- The spiritual journey begins with desire, with wanting to follow Jesus and be transformed into a new kind of person.
- Desire is the engine of our life; the drive to get out of bed in the morning, and live.
- But when you pay close attention to the inner dynamics of the heart, you realize desire is never satisfied.
- A thousand years before Christ, the writer of Ecclesiastes said, “The eye is not satisfied with seeing.”
- A more recent philosopher just said, “I can’t get no satisfaction.”
- No matter how much we get, it’s never enough.
- Thomas Aquinas, that towering Medieval intellectual, once asked the question, What would it take to satisfy human desire? The answer he came up with was — everything. We would have to experience everything and everyone and be experienced by everything and everyone to feel satisfied.
- We would have to be infinite.
- But we’re not. We’re finite.
- So all of us live with chronically unsatisfied desires.
- The word used by the writers of the Bible to name this inner disquiet is “restlessness.”
- This is an ancient problem rooted in human nature, but it’s been manipulated by the culture of consumerism in the West, and in particular by advertising, which is basically an attempt to monetize our restlessness.
- We see upwards of four thousand ads per day, all of it intentionally designed to leave you and I feeling unsatisfied.

- And it works! We fall for the old carrot on the stick routine — chasing more money, more clothes, more things, more square feet, more experiences, more stamps on our passport, more relationships, more, more, more. But it's never enough.
- “Rest” is always just out of reach.
- In the East, they call this the “wheel of suffering,” which isn't really a religious idea, as much as a cogent insight into the human condition. The wheel of suffering is craving and aversion. Craving is a chasing after your desire, what you want and aversion is a running away from what you don't want, what you fear or whatever causes you pain. The result is suffering, because the moment we catch what we're chasing, if we catch it, we immediately want ten new things! And the moment we solve one problem, if we can solve it, it's like whack a mole, a new one pop up to take its place!
- Is there a way off the hamster wheel of craving and aversion, chasing after our desires, and running away from our fears? In more biblical language, is there a way to fight against the cancerous restlessness of the human heart and the age to which we belong?
- Yes. Sabbath.

**Claim:** *Sabbath is a practice from the Way of Jesus by which we war against the cancerous restlessness of our age, and instead, take on the easy yoke of Jesus our Rabbi to find rest for our souls.*

### **Rest:**

- As we said in the previous Session, there are four movements of the sabbath — stop, rest, delight and worship.
- On the docket for this week is rest.
- If you have your Bible, one more time, turn to Genesis 2. And read with me, verse 2...

**Genesis 2v2-3:** By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested [תָּבַח] from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested [תָּבַח] from all the work of creating that he had done.

- Now, when I hear the word “rest” I think of sleep. Or maybe a little margin, a day off, a few hours of quiet, or just some time to relax.
- But the idea behind shabbat is far more, its holistic rest, or what Jesus called “rest for your souls,” for your whole person.
- On the Sabbath we rest from work...

- All work, not just paid work, not just our jobs. But all work, including chores and errands and to-do lists.
  - We rest from working.
  - But it's more...
- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his magisterial book *The Sabbath*, says we rest not just from work but from even thinking about work.
  - Neuroscientists tell us that when we think about work, even if we are at home resting, it secretes the same stress chemicals in our brain as if we were at the office in the actual situation.
  - We rest from even the thought of working.
  - But it's still more...
- We rest from wanting and worrying... we get off that wheel of suffering — I want this! I don't want that! and we come to rest...

**Segway:** *To unpack this idea, let me Bible nerd out on you for a few minutes. Turn over to Deuteronomy 5.*

### **Deuteronomy set up:**

- You may or may not know there the Ten Commandments are recorded twice in the Torah, the Hebrew word for the Books of Moses.
- The first is in Exodus 20 when Israel is at the foot of Mt. Sinai, right after leaving Egypt; the second is in Deuteronomy 5 on the edge of the Jordan, right before entering the Promise Land.
- There are forty years in between, which means, Deuteronomy 5 is to the next generation, who were unborn or still kids at Mt. Sinai.
- And the Sabbath command is similar, but a little bit different. Read with me...

**Deuteronomy 5v12-15:** *“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. 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 ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”*

## Differences:

- There are two differences between the Sabbath command in Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5.
- The first is minor. In Exodus, it's "Remember the Sabbath," but here it's "Observe the sabbath."
- In Hebrew the word is שָׁמַר (shamar) and it means to keep watch over, to guard.
  - Think of how we observe a holiday, or holy-day, such as Christmas or Easter. We guard it. We make it special and unique.
  - That's the idea. Sabbath is like a weekly holiday, we are to keep over it, less it become just another ordinary day.
  - This is why in the Kiddush, which is the ancient Jewish liturgy to begin the sabbath, you light not one but two candles, to symbolize the two commands: remember the sabbath and observe the sabbath.
- That's change one. The rest of the command is verbatim, until the end, where there's a major change.
- In Exodus, it's For in six days YHWH made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the Seventh day. Therefore YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- But in Deuteronomy it's, Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, but the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm...
- Same command, but a whole other rationale behind the command.
- In Exodus, the rationale is grounded in the story of creation. "For in six days..."
- Here in Deuteronomy, it's grounded in the story of liberation. "You were [past tense] slaves in Egypt, but you're not slaves anymore!"
- At Sinai, Sabbath is about rhythm.
- In Deuteronomy, it's about resistance.
- Last Session was all about rhythm, this Session is about resistance.

**Seam:** Give me a few more minutes to lay it out...

- In the Exodus story, there's all sorts of language about restlessness. For example, here's from Exodus 3 alone:

- “Why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!”
- “Make the work harder so that they keep working.”
- “Pharaoh said, ‘Lazy, that’s what you are — lazy! That is why you keep saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’ Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.’”

- In the story, Pharaoh is a cruel tyrant. No matter how hard the Hebrews worked, it was never enough. They lived under the oppressive yoke of the daily quota — more, more, more.

- And it wasn't just Pharaoh; it was the socio-economic system of Egypt as a whole.

- Israel was making bricks to build “supply cities.” Entire cities just to the store all of Pharaoh's extra stuff.

- And it was an economic system built on the back of slavery.

- To get to the lavish, opulent lifestyle of a Pharaoh or an Egypt, you need cheap labor to work, while you rest.

- And slaves don't get a Sabbath. Slaves are subhuman, a commodity to buy and sell. They only have value in what they produce. They work all day, every day, until they die.

- Rest is what comes when you are set free from God...

- So, the command is to remember, you're not slaves anymore; you're in a new kingdom, under a new king. There's no daily quota. No taskmaster over your head.

- And — and this is key — remember to never become a slave driver yourself.

- Hence the command about your male and female servants, the foreigner, even your animals. All are equal under the Sabbath. All rest.

**Seam:** *And we need this practice now more than ever because Pharaoh and Egypt are both alive and well.*

- In the literary design of the Bible, Egypt is an archetype, similar to Babylon later on. It was a real Empire, but it's symbolic of all empires down through time.

- What's on the back of the American one dollar bill? A pyramid, which has long been the symbol of Empire. With 13 levels for the 13 colonies. But it's unfinished, to symbolize that America isn't done yet, there's a desire for more.

- For those of you outside of America, if you work in finance you will recognize what economists call the “Global Wealth Pyramid.”
- Notice, at the bottom is 70% of humanity who control 3% of the world’s wealth; at the top is 0.6% who control 40% of the world’s wealth.
- If you are watching this, I’m guessing you are toward the top, but you may not be.
- Either way, the point is, Egypt is horrible if you’re a slave, but it’s not half bad if you’re an Egyptian.
- “Below” us are billions of people who work hard every day to make our clothes and shoes and phones.
- We think of slavery as a tragedy from the past, but social activists tell us there are upwards of 40 million slaves in the world today, most of them women and children.
- For the record, I have no political agenda here, my point is simply that Egypt isn’t just a historical nation/state, it’s running theme in the library of Scripture for a culture of restlessness, of which there are many examples down through history and around the world today — of a culture of unchecked desire for more.

### **In the West, we work more than ever before....**

- The Japanese have a word — karoshi — that means “death by overwork,” but we Americans work 137 more hours per year than the Japanese, 260 more hours per year than you Brits, and 499 more hours per year than the French. God bless the French!
- In my home country, the US, we work more than any other nation in the world.
- And yet, in the 1960s, with the rise of so called “labor saving devices,” such as dishwashers and central heating and computers, futurists predicted that within a few decades, we’d all be working no more than 20 or 30 hours a week and living in leisure. Yet leisure time is down 37% since the 60s.
- Now, as a general rule, this is more true of older generations than younger; in fact, many young adults have the opposite problem. For them, it’s often not too much work, but too much pleasure.
- But as a culture, we work more than ever before...

### **And we have more than ever before...**

- Conservative estimates say we now spend two to ten times more on goods and services than our ancestors did in 1945. Our homes are three times larger and full of more than twice as many things.
- The average home in America has over 300k items in it. That's not the rich, that's the average.
- Here in the US, we don't have "supply cities," but there 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage space, something like 7.3 square feet for every person in our nation.
- Meanwhile, many people all around us, hiding in plain sight, and possibly some around you right now, are barely able to put food on the table.

### **But in spite of that, we're unhappier than ever before...**

- Sociologists tell us that the happiness levels in the West hit a peak in the 1950's, and have been in decline ever since. Interesting, as that's right around when the Blue Laws in my country and others were phased out, and the "Lord's Day," or the Sabbath, was secularized into the "weekend."

### **To sum up...**

- We work more than ever before.
- We have more than ever before.
- And we're still not happy.
- It's Egypt all over again.
- And it's so easy to just get sucked into the culture.
- To feel like you just have to work those extra hours to get ahead.
- Like you have to reach a standard of living to be happy.
- You just have to own x numbers of shoes, and x number of outfits, or have x square feet.
- You just have to participate in this part of the economy, even though it does great harm to the earth or the poor.
- It's so easy to just say, Well, that's just how it is.



- But it doesn't have to be this way.
- Listen...

### **Rest is an act of resistance.**

- It's an act of defiance against Pharaoh and his empire. It's way of saying with your body, enough.
- Enough work. Work is a good thing, but it's not the thing.
- Enough stuff. Stuff isn't bad, but most of us have more than enough.
- Sabbath is a way to break our addiction to the twin gods of the West, accomplishment and accumulation.
- Later in the OT, there are sabbath commands against buying or selling on the sabbath.
- In our family, we've chosen to follow this ancient wisdom. On the sabbath, we don't shop, or do anything that would make us want more, we don't even talk about what we want more of, we just be, and practice gratitude for what we have, and enjoy the goodness of God in our actual life.
- This can be hard to do — we have three teenagers, and I watch our culture attempt to monetize their restlessness, constantly, but every week is our line in the sand, enough.

### **Limit:**

- My point is, accomplishment and accumulation aren't evil; they can even be good. But there's a limit. At some point you need a line in the sand to say, This far you shall go but no further.
  - I do not need to work more hours.
  - I do not need to make more money.
  - I do not need a new car.
  - I do not need the perfect grade or the perfect body or the perfect yard.
  - I do not need to earn my human father's approval, I already have it from my heavenly Father.
- Pharaoh and his army are at the bottom of the Red Sea. I'm free. I have all I need to thrive with God in his world.
- And I'm in a new kingdom now, with a new king.

### **Forces:**

- Of course, this all sounds great! But my point is, sabbath is an act of resistance. A line of war. Which means, when you practice, sabbath, you will feel resistance.

### **Both external resistance...**

- The culture all around you is a sabbathless, rhythmless, hollow-out-your-soul culture. To sabbath well will require intentionality, preparation, and a resolute determination to go against the flow of the cultural tide. To live differently.
- This is not easy, but you are standing against what the Apostle Paul calls “the principalities and powers” in Ephesians.
- The theologian Walter Wink defines the powers as “both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and visible.”
- They are the meta-forces that keep us and others from sabbath rest — systemic racism, sexism, greed, political corruption. All these forces are animated by dark spiritual powers that are all anti-sabbath.
- Through sabbath, we defy these powers, and align ourselves with the God of Sabbath, of rest.

### **But there’s also internal resistance...**

- Egypt isn’t just around us, it’s in us. To sabbath, to rest, we have to resist the internal dynamics of restlessness in our fallen heart — greed, envy, discontentment, anxiety, addiction, etc.
- With all the practices, and frankly, with God himself, we feel what Ruth Haley Barton calls “the push/pull dynamic.” There’s a tug of war inside us.
- We feel a pull toward Jesus and his Way, a genuine desire to be with him and find rest for our souls. But we also feel a push away from Jesus and his Way... a resistance or reluctance to give up our autonomy and self-will and surrender to him.
- In the practice of Sabbath, you will feel this push/pull dynamic at work in your own chest.

### **Ending:**

- But Sabbath rest is your secret weapon in the struggle against the powers of the age. An entire day, to have enough.

- In those push/pull moments, when you have to resist both external forces and internal forces that are anti-sabbath.
- Remember.
- You're not a slave anymore.
- God is king. But he's nothing like Pharaoh. He is a Sabbath keeping, sabbath-commanding, God. Jesus called himself the "Lord of the sabbath." And he's offering you "rest for your souls."
- The question is, Will you resist?

# Teaching Outline

## Intro hook:

- *“Because the world is full of ugly things, we need the sabbath to feed our soul with beauty.”*
- So said the pastor Timothy Keller of New York City, and it’s true.
- The world is full of ugliness — systemic injustice, war, mass violence, crushing poverty, and more.
- But it’s also full of goodness.
- In the Genesis story, we read, *“God saw all that he had made and it was very good.”*
- The word translated “good” is *tov* in Hebrew, and it can also be translated “beautiful.”
- But all too often, the goodness and beauty of life with God in his world is eclipsed by what the NT writer Paul calls “the kingdom of darkness” — the fallout of a post-Eden world.
- Of course, this is significantly exacerbated by the digital age:
  - Through the 24/7 news cycle, we are force-fed a steady diet of fear and rage. The news is biased, not left, or right, but down — to the worst things in the world.
  - And through social media, we are living in the epitome of Teddy Roosevelt’s line about how “Comparison is the thief of joy.” We are constantly exposed to a curated vision of another person’s happiness. All we see is what they have, but we don’t have.
- But. Even if we could travel back in time to a pre-digital, pre-24/7 breaking news world, we would not find utopia. We would find a world without modern medicine or sanitation or a steady food supply, where famine, plague, and war regularly tore through society, where life expectancy was decades lower than it is today, where it was “normal” to lose loved ones, especially children, or to be widowed and left bereft. Much of the world still is this way.
- My point is, yes, the digital age distorts our vision of the world to make life look a lot worse than it actually is, but, even if we could see the world accurately, it would still be full of ugly things.
- Jesus himself said, *“In this world, you will have trouble.” [John 16v33]*

- Will have trouble.
- You see, trouble, and with it, sorrow, is inevitable in life.
  - No matter your genetic wiring, if you have a sunny disposition and you're a glass half full personality, or if you win the circumstance lottery and end up healthy, wealthy, and wise... you will have trouble. "Time and chance happen to us all," as Ecclesiastes says.
  - But sorrow is not the whole story in the human experience.
- Jesus also said, "*These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full [John 15v11]*" Other translations have, "*that your joy may overflow.*" You know the feeling when you are so full of joy that you can't contain it all, it's like it has to spill out in a shout or dance or a round of applause. That level of joy is Jesus' will for you, his apprentice.
- The problem is: sorrow is inevitable in life, but joy is not.
- Sorrow will come to visit our life, with or without our permission, but joy we have to choose, and to keep choosing it, over and over again.
- In Scripture, the word "joy" is both a noun and a verb, which is translated in English as "rejoice," but more literally means, "to joy."
- In an in-depth biblical theology of joy, you discover joy is 1. A feeling, 2. A condition, and 3. A discipline. [CS make Venn diagram]
- 1. A feeling:
  - Contrary to what you hear in church circles that happiness and joy are not the same thing, that happiness is based on your circumstances, but joy is not, if you do a word study on joy and happiness in Scripture you find they are used interchangeably. Yes, there is a joy from God that goes beyond our circumstances, but there is also a joy that we experience when life is as it should be. That feeling in your body when all is well. But joy is also...
- 2. A condition (or a character trait):
  - It is not just a feeling that comes and goes, but the kind of person you become through following Jesus.
  - In Galatians 5, Joy is the second fruit of the spirit, after love.
  - In classical language, it's a virtue, just like wisdom or courage or fortitude. And it must be developed as such. Which is why joy is also...
- 3. A discipline:
  - There are times when joy is easy — the natural emotional response to the circumstances of your life. On your wedding day. When you receive good news. The first sunny, warm day of Spring.

- And there are times when joy is a sheer act of obedience to Jesus. A discipline, to index your heart toward the good.

- Richard Foster called this the “discipline of celebration,” and said:  
*“The decision to set the mind on the higher things of life is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a Discipline. It is not something that falls on our heads. It is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living.”*

*Hinge: Sabbath is a discipline of celebration, and a delivery mechanism for joy. It is one of the most important disciplines by which we become people who are full of joy, like our God.*

- To recap the last two sessions, the four movements of sabbath are stop, rest, delight and worship.
- The first two are more about what we don’t do; the second two are more what we do.
- Next up is delight.
- Take a look again with me at Genesis 1 and 2:

**Genesis 1v31-2v3:** *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested [sabbathed] from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested [sabbathed] from all the work of creating that he had done.*

- As you know, the word translated “rested” is shabbat in Hebrew, and while it literally means “to stop,” or “to rest,” it also has this idea that “God delighted in all his work.”
- The idea here isn’t that God was burned out and needed a break. No, it’s more like the feeling you get after a long, hard day of working in the yard, where you get it all cleaned up and beautiful, then you call it a day, take a shower, and sit down on your porch and just enjoy it... Or that feeling when you complete a work project that was months long, and you throw a party with your team. Or you finish a hard season with someone you are caring for, and you get to just breathe for a while. That’s the feeling of Sabbath.
- Notice also that God “blessed” the Sabbath day. The word there is barak; to barak, can be translated “to bless”, but also “to make happy.” The sabbath is a happy day.

*Seam: An entire twenty-four hour time period, set aside to follow God’s example, to stop, rest, and delight. [CS make linear line? Tie to below?]*

### **Delight:**

- In God’s world — to let your mind focus on all that is “very good” in the earth. To curate a view of the world, with special attention to the good, the beautiful, and true.

- To delight in your life in God's word. It's so easy to lose sight of just how much goodness is in our life. Neuroscientists tell us the mind is drawn to the negative over the positive at a rate of something like 14 to 1. On the Sabbath, we mitigate against this survival instinct in our brain, and we "remember," as the sabbath command has it, just how many blessings populate our life.
- Finally, we delight in God himself. In the access we have, through Jesus' death and resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, into the inner life of the Trinity — via all the Practices, but especially Sabbath, we get to participate in the flow of love and joy and peace between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, just by setting our life before God and lifting up our heart to him in prayer.
- Many of us have yet to learn how to enjoy God... believe in him, yes, learn from him, yes, fear him, obey him even, but delight in him? But the longer I follow Jesus, the more of my life I give to prayer, especially through Sabbath and silence, the more I realize how incredibly good God is... he radiates joy... as we draw near to him, we draw near to all our heart is aching for — full delight.
- Of course, few of us have the capacity for so much delight.
- Dan Allender, in his book on the Sabbath, from our recommended reading, has this insight: *"The sabbath is an invitation to enter delight. The sabbath when experienced as God intended, is the best day of our lives. Without question or thought, it is the best day of the week. It is the day we anticipate on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday — and the day we remember on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Sabbath is the holy time where we feast, play, dance, have-sex, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk, and watch creation in its fullness. Few people are willing to enter the sabbath and sanctify it, to make it holy, because a full day of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone a week."*
- Or take a look at this from the theologian Marva Dawn, in her book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*: *"Observing the Sabbath gives us the opportunity to be as careful as we can to fill our lives with beauty and to share beauty with the world around us. When we observe a day especially set apart for beauty, all the rest of life is made more beautiful...In a larger sense, the whole practice of Sabbath keeping makes me feel more beautiful. As I spend the day reflecting on the character of God, I am overwhelmed by his love for me. As I feast upon his goodness in all its beautiful forms, I realize more profoundly that I am a special part of his creation and designed especially for his purposes in a uniquely beautiful way."*

**Seam:** *Are you the picture coming into focus for you? Sabbath is not a dreary religious duty, but a life-giving day of delight.*

## Five things:

- Now, how do we do this? This kind of joy is so against the flow, not only of our host culture, but even the neurobiological wiring of our own brain.

- A few things:

### 1. First we have to slow down.

- Hurry and joy and are incompatible. Delight demands that we slow down and savor the goodness of each moment.
- This is very hard for me, I'm a type-A, impatient person by nature. But I'm in the process of re-learning from Jesus how to walk at a slower pace.

### 2. Secondly, It will require us to put boundaries around our day.

- To enter sabbath delight will require us say no to some things, in order to say yes to joy.
- Marva Dawn writes, *"We don't know how to feast, because we don't know how to fast."*
- Meaning, we don't know how to savor each bite of food, because a lot of us overeat all week long; we don't know how to savor a good film, because we binge TV every night; we don't know how to savor our closest relationships, because we're over busy.
- Part of Sabbath is learning how to slow down our overall life, to live with moderation during the week, in order to turn Sabbath in to a celebration.
- But this will require boundaries. During the week, and on the Sabbath.
- A good beginning place for your Sabbath practice is to make two lists: a "I will" list and a "I will not" list... In my family, it's we will sleep, pray, be together with kin, feast, celebrate, etc. and We will not go shopping, do work around the house, read the news, watch TV, etc. — but you have to make your own list.
- This isn't legalism; it's actually freedom! To enjoy the Sabbath free of care.
- As you are developing your two lists, it can be a bit tricky to discern if an activity is a good fit for the sabbath, or not.
- I would just run every potential activity through the grid of stop, rest, delight, and worship.
- Is this stopping, what I normally do during the work week? (If you are a mechanic and you love gardening, go for it, but if you're a landscaper, maybe wait for a better time. Do something else.) Is this resting? Is this delighting, does it spark joy? And is it worshipping? Does it connect me more deeply to God?



- These “rules” are not burdens, but boundaries to guard the Sabbath day from all that is ugly, sad, and untrue. To replace it with beauty, joy, and life with God.

### **3. Finally, and most importantly, it will require you to give yourself to joy.**

- Rabbi Reb Zalman recommends you begin the Sabbath by saying, “Today I am going to pamper my soul.”
- For those of you new to Sabbath, a great question to ask yourself and give shape to your practice is, What could I do for a twenty-four period of time that would bring me deep, visceral joy in God?
- Psychologists have a great label for when you save up a bunch of your favorite experiences for a single moment, such as your birthday or anniversary or a vacation. They call it “pleasure stacking.”
- The Sabbath is a day for pleasure stacking.
- In our home, there are special foods we only eat on the sabbath, it’s the night we always have desert, our closest friends come over, I let myself read fiction during the day... we just pamper our soul.

### **There are all sorts of traditional Sabbath activities that you can adopt to delight:**

1. Feasting is by far the most popular, and for good reason.
  2. Community — we want to celebrate with people we love.
  3. Gratitude — which is a practice by which we focus on what we have, not on what we need or lack or want, and as a result, realize just how rich our life is.
  4. Play — Dan Allender and others make a strong case for the Sabbath as a day for play.
  5. Making love to your spouse — in the Talmud, there’s a command for every couple to make love every Friday night!
  6. Nature — anything beautiful, from forest trails to flower pedals, all of it is fodder to beautify your soul.
- And so much more... (the arts, poetry, music, singing, dancing, laughter, walking, picnics, flowers, sweets, time with family, friends, the outdoors, watching the sunset, etc.)

### **But one of the best ways to do this is through the Sabbath meal.**

- In a traditional Jewish Sabbath, this is on Friday night; in a common Christian home, it’s on Sunday afternoon after church. Both are great.

- In my family, every Friday night we host a Sabbath meal. It's our family, plus about half a dozen of our closest friends, who are kin to us; we all begin the sabbath together. Christian and Yinka, who were just on before me, literally keep slippers in our coat closet! We start with a Sabbath box, where we put our phones, our devices, our wallets; we all write our any anxieties, sorrows, and unfinished tasks on little pieces of paper, and then prayerfully put them away in the box. Then we sit down at the table, light the candles, pour the wine, I bless my children, we bless one another, we read a Psalm, and invite the Spirit of Jesus to come and give us rest.
- Then, we feast! Oh man, we eat good. Every week, I make a soup and my wife makes the best homemade sourdough bread you have ever had in your life.
- As we eat, we go around the table and share our highlight of the week.
- After the meal, we sit around the fire pit, and share our dayenu, which is a Hebrew word that is roughly translated as "It would have been enough, but..." "It would have been enough to have bread and water, but you gave us tonight's feast..." "It would have been enough to have one or two friends, but you gave us this kinship group, this family..." Just trying to curate joy.
- There is inevitably dance music that comes on at some point, compliments of one of my teenagers. Or a guitar comes out and there's singing.
- It is a weekly celebration of goodness and beauty.
- Most weeks, that four- or five-hour sabbath meal time is the highlight not only of the Sabbath but of the entire week. Something really good has to happen to beat it out.

### **Of course, sadness will come...**

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, "*It is a sin to be sad on the Sabbath day.*" What he meant was, on the Sabbath, we do our best to set aside all of the sad things in our life, to just let them be, for a day.
- But the reality is, sometimes, the Sabbath comes in a season of life that is full of a lot of sadness.
- Other times, because of overwork or over-activity during the previous six days, on the sabbath, we crash, our nervous systems goes through withdrawals, and our body is just in a slump.
- And often on the sabbath, we have space, in the quiet, to breathe, and in that space, whatever feelings we've been running away from all week long, catch up to us.
- I call this "the sabbath sadness."
- The key is not to fight the sabbath sadness, or let it discourage you, as if "Sabbath isn't working," but rather, to let it pass over you like a wave.

- Jesus' desire isn't for us to bypass our pain, or get stuck in it, but to go through it, and in time, come out the other side. This is the death and resurrection pattern laid down by Jesus himself.
- Delight is not denial of pain; it's determination to move through pain, courageously and honestly and patiently, and into joy.

### **This is why Sabbath comes every seven days....**

- ...to remind us of the goodness of our life with God in all the seasons of our lives, including the ones that don't feel very good.
- Unlike other spiritual disciplines, the timing of Sabbath is set by God himself, not by our own inner spiritual clock that tells us the need of the hour.
- Sabbath comes at the end of a great week, and at the end of a lousy one. When we finished all our to-do list, and when we're woefully behind. In summer, and in winter. When all is well, and when our life is falling apart.
- To remind us, it's okay that we're not okay. In those seasons of the dark night, where our prayers are unanswered, our dreams over, when we feel God's absence more than his presence, the Sabbath comes, and with it a sense of peace, of trust in God, despite our circumstances, not because of them.
- Teaching us to delight and even be happy in all the seasons of our life. Or as Paul said, to "rejoice in the Lord always."

*Seam: And this is the invitation of Jesus, to come, and find rest for your souls. To follow his six-and-one-rhythm of work and rest... there is a time to work, and sweat, and fast, and lament, and there is a time to stop and rest and feast and delight.*

### **Ending:**

- To end, let me read over you a promise from the prophet Isaiah:  
*"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath  
and from doing as you please on my holy day,  
if you call the Sabbath a delight  
and the Lord's holy day honorable  
and if you honor it by not going your own way  
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words  
then you will find your joy in the Lord,  
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land  
and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob."  
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. [Isaiah 58v13-14]*

# Teaching Outline

## Intro hook:

- What is your Sabbath like?
- I'm guessing it's on Sunday, as that's the best day of the week for most people.
- But here's what Sunday is like for a lot of modern, Western Christians.
  - You stay up late on Saturday night, watching a movie or TV, or going to a party... you overeat, possibly over drink.... You wake up Sunday morning in a fugue, and rush out the door to church in a hurry, that is, if you go to church. More and more people don't. After church, you go shopping or watch the game on TV or work around your house or in the yard, maybe you get ahead on email and plan out your week, or meal prep, or do homework, or whatever. Watch another movie at night. Go to bed.
- To clarify, that's not a sabbath.
- I don't say that with even a hint of judgment — please do not feel any shame. It's just an honest appraisal. That's not a sabbath.
- That's what the late pastor Eugene Peterson called a “bastard sabbath” — the unacknowledged offspring of the ancient practice from the Way of Sabbath, and the modern, secular day off.
- It's what people in our church have taken to calling “sabbish,” meaning, kind of sabbath, but not really.
  - Because we've been teaching on and practicing Sabbath for so many years, it's woven into the culture of our church, but as you can imagine, people are at all different places in their practice. It's common to hear someone ask, How was your Sabbath? And then hear, “Oh, fine. I slept in, read Scripture for a while, then I had to catch up on laundry, organize my garage, work on my taxes, and then I had a great afternoon, I binged all of season three of whatever on the couch!
  - It was “sabbish.”
- How do we keep sabbath from becoming sabbish? From becoming just another activity on the weekend?
- As we've said through this entire Practice, there are four movements to the Sabbath— stop, rest, delight, and worship.

- In our final teaching, we come to what is arguably the most important of all four—the Sabbath is a day for worship.
- Now, where does this idea come from?

**Seam:** *Let's read one last time from Genesis 2...*

**Genesis 2v2-3:** *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

*Seam: Notice God did two things on the Sabbath:*

### **1. God “blessed the seventh day.”**

- We covered that in the last session. The word blessed can also be translated make happy. The Sabbath is a happy day.
- A blessing in Genesis is a life-giving capacity to fill the earth with more life.
- The sabbath is blessed, it's life-giving.
- But secondly...

### **2. God “made it holy.”**

- Okay, I know “holy” is very religious sounding language, but stay with me, because this is fascinating.
- In the ancient world, the gods were found in the world of space, not of time. Meaning, they were found on a holy mountain, or a holy temple, or a holy cave.
- You would expect God to make a holy place.
- But instead, God makes a holy day.
- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel called the Sabbath “architecture in time” and said, *“The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals.”*
- Because for this God, the one, true Creator God, the entire cosmos is his temple, there is nowhere he is not.
- So, if you want to find this God, you don't need to climb a mountain or travel to a shrine—he's all around you—you just need to set aside the time to come awake and alive to his presence.
- But what exactly does it mean to make a day holy?

## Holy:

- Well, in Hebrew, the word “holy” is quodosh. And it literally means unique, or special, or uncommon.
- A theological definition would be “set aside for God’s special purposes.”
- We tend to think of holiness as a moral descriptor, a way of saying something or someone is good or evil.
- And in a sense, it is. Contrary to our humanistic culture’s view, goodness, or what the ancients called virtue, has always been a minority position in society as a whole.
- As Jesus said, *“Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” [Matthew 7v13-14]*
- The narrow way of Jesus is holy — it’s uncommon goodness.
- But holiness isn’t just a moral world.
- In the Torah, there are holy pots and holy pans and holy utensils for the tabernacle. A fork or knife can’t be good or evil, but it can be “set apart for God’s special purposes” or just used for normal life.
- Growing up, I remember my grandparents had a set of fine china. My grandfather used to travel to Japan for work, and over the years he collected a beautiful set of high-quality Japanese china. It was kept in a special piece of furniture called a hutch, with glass windows to display the plate ware, and it was only brought out for special occasions — Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner or a celebration. Then they had a whole other set of plate ware that was for everyday use, much cheaper, more hardy, easy to replace, etc.
- The china was holy. It was set apart for my family’s special purposes, not used for daily life.
- What my grandparents fine china was to daily plate ware, the Sabbath is to the rest of the week—holy. Set apart.
- But for what? Or better said, for who?

*Seam: Turn over to Exodus 16...*

**Exodus 16v23-30:** [Moses] said to them, “This is what the Lord commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’” ...Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said

to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days... So the people rested on the seventh day.

- Notice the phrase “a holy sabbath to the Lord.”
- That can be translated “set apart for the Lord” or “dedicated to the Lord.”
- The sabbath is an entire day that is set aside, not just for rest or celebration, but for God.

### **Hinge to worship:**

- Put another way, it’s a day for worship.
- A lot of us hear the word worship, and we think of singing, and that is an example of worship. But worship is so much more. In the biblical sense, to worship is to orient and reorient your entire life around God, our Creator, our Center.
- It’s to lay your entire life before him in love, and to deepen our surrender to his love.
- One way to do that is through worship by singing, but there are so many more ways — giving our time, our resources, our attention and affection to God, yielding our will over to God... Anything we do to center God, and to direct our heart in love to his glory, his goodness, is a form of worship.
- Yes, it’s a day to stop, and rest, and refill our tank. Yes, it’s a day of delight — to celebrate. But above all, it’s to contemplate the good news that God has given his life to us in Jesus, and now it is our joy to give our life back in worship. It’s to deepen our commune with the deepest reality there is.
- This is the final and most important movement of Sabbath: worship.

### **Progression:**

- And in my experience, there is a progression that I observe my soul go through on the Sabbath.
- First, I stop... Then I rest... Then, as my energy comes back, I begin to delight... and as I delight, I almost can’t help but burst into spontaneous worship and gratitude and praise and wonder and awe at the goodness of God... by the end of the Sabbath, I often find myself on a quiet walk, just looking up at the sky saying, thank you.

- Ruth Haley Barton, in her chapter on Sabbath in the book *Sacred Rhythms*, writes:
  - “I know what it’s like to rest for hours until I have the energy to delight in something—good food, a good book, a leisurely walk, a long-awaited conversation with someone I love. I know what it’s like to feel joy and hope and peace flow back into my body and soul though I had thought it might never come again. I know what it’s like to see my home and my children through the sabbath eyes of enjoyment. I know what it’s like to have rest turn into delight, and delight turn into gratitude, and gratitude into worship.”
- This is one of the many reasons that, for most of you, Sunday is by far the best day to sabbath. For over a thousand years, Sabbath and Sunday worship were synonymous. Only recently were they separated. But they go together.

*Seam: And tragic way the Sabbath has been co-opted by the weekend, from a day of worship to a “day off,” goes to the heart of the matter. The Sabbath is holy, but we have to keep it holy. In the Ten Commandments, we read...*

**Exodus 20v8-11:** “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”

- The Jews don’t talk about practicing the Sabbath, but keeping the Sabbath. Meaning, keeping it holy.
- They call this “sanctifying the day,” or “setting apart the day.” Treating it as special and unique.
- You see, we can either sanctify the Sabbath, and keep it holy, or we can, in the language of Scripture, “profane” the sabbath, meaning, we can devalue it, dishonor it, treat it like just any other day, for doing as we please.
- What about you? Do you keep the Sabbath holy? Or do you profane it?
- What about me?
- Because ultimately this isn’t about a day, but about your life.
- (Remember: all the practices are means to an end. The sabbath is a day of worship by which we cultivate a spirit of worship in all the days of our life.)
- Is your life holy? Is your life set apart for and dedicated to God? An uncommon goodness. Or is it profane? Common. Following the broad path that’s all around you?

*Seam: My aim here is not to guilt trip you into going to church more often or doing all sorts of spiritual disciplines. It’s to drive home that the Sabbath is of life or death importance.*



### **Life/death:**

- Followers of Jesus disagree about whether not the Sabbath is still a binding command, but whoever is right, it's one of the Ten Commandments, and all the commandments of Scripture, but especially the ten are put there to guard you from death and guide you into life.
- As Moses said of the commandments in Deuteronomy, *"I set before you life... or death... Choose this day."*
- Keeping the Sabbath is arguably just as important as not lying or stealing or killing.
- It is of life or death importance.
- Our culture is killing itself through overwork, overconsumption, over-activity... we are, as Neil Postman famously said, "Amusing ourselves to death."
- Few things are as desperately needed today as the recovering of the ancient practice of Sabbath...

*Seam: The sabbath is a means by which we enter into what Jesus called "the kingdom, or the reign, of God." It's a day when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.*

### **Back/forward:**

- Theologians point out that the sabbath looks both backward and forward in time.
- It's an aftertaste of the Garden of Eden and a foretaste of the New Jerusalem.
  - When we gather for the Sabbath meal, around a table, with the multi-ethnic family of God, not just friends, but kin, brothers, sisters, bound together around Jesus, the host and honored guest, and we eat the bread, and drink the wine, and we give thanks and sing and laugh and dance and celebrate and revel in the sense that all is well — that's not just a sign of salvation; that is salvation.
- I love that: on the sabbath we are practicing for eternity.
- Here's Abraham Joshua Heschel again:

*"Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in this world, unless one is initiated into the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come... The essence of the world to come is Sabbath eternal, and the seventh day in time is an example of eternity."*
- And what makes the Sabbath just a joy isn't just good food, around a table with family and friends, and time off work to rest and delight... it is God himself, the trinitarian community at the center of the universe who radiates joy.

- He is what we crave deep in our being, whether we put the name God to our ache or misdiagnose our desire for God as a desire for something else.
- The danger of last week's teaching on the Sabbath as delight is, as with all ideas, the enemy is constantly at work to warp good ideas from reality to parody; we can be easily confused in our hedonistic culture into confusing a Godward day of joy into a self-centered day of pleasure.
- Anyone who has ever tasted of true delight—as the Creator intended for the creation—knows there is a chasm of difference between delight and hedonism or simple pleasure.
- Delight is meant to draw your whole being to God in gratitude and joy; pleasure is just trying to make your body feel good; you don't walk away from pleasure feeling profound gratitude, you just walk away wanting more pleasure.
- But there is a kind of delight that is virtually indistinguishable from worship.
- I love this, again, from Dan Allender:
 

*“For six days, I wrestle with a world under the toil of the curse, soiled by the oil of humanity's commerce, deeply longing for the bright wings of the coming dawn. And each day, at best, is a repletion of the day before, unless the next day is the Sabbath. It is the queen of all days, the day in which division, destitution, and death are put aside to celebrate our union with God, the abundance of his love, and the wild hope of the coming kingdom. It is a day of holy fiction, a day when the promise of God is fulfilled on a stage where we write the script and take the roles we most want to act for his glory.”*
- In other words, the Sabbath is a day for worship.

### **Ending:**

- To end, the social critic David Foster Wallace, in a famous commencement address said this about worship:
  - *“In the day-to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship [...] is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough... Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you... Worship power — you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on. Look, the insidious thing about these forms of worship*

*is not that they're evil or sinful; it is that they are unconscious. They are default-set things. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day..."*

- Put another way, the question isn't, Do you worship? It's who or what do you worship? And, if we become like who or what we worship, as the wisdom tradition has long said, than what kind of person is your worship forming you into?
- You will worship something. You will orient your life around something.. put your faith, hope, and love onto something... find your identity, community, and sense of meaning and purpose in something... pursue it, sacrifice for it, discipline yourself for it...
- The question is simply, what?
- And no matter how good or noble a pursuit is, the moment we elevate a created thing to place reserved for the Creator, we immediately ruin it, and in doing so, ruin ourselves. Because nothing can bear the weight of our worship other than the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- The sabbath is a day for worship...
- All week long, the false gods of the world lurk us out of our orbit around God in a kind of gravitational decay... invisible, yet powerfully pulling us down... They all promise us rest — and a sense of joy, satisfaction, identity, community, etc. Yet all they give is the incessant weariness and emptiness of soul the Western world has honed to perfection.
- On the Sabbath, we come back to what the Quakers call our “holy Center” in God... this point, deep within all of us who have been baptized, where we are “in Christ,” where our spirit is in communion with his spirit, where we're not even sure whose who anymore... where we draw on the life at the heart of the Trinity itself. And give our life back in return.
- The sabbath is a day for worship.