

Slowing Down to Sabbath

Introduction

The Text

A. The text for this morning comes from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses is preparing the people of Israel to enter the Promised Land and he's recounting some of God's directives to them. In particular here, he's rehearsing what was given to them back at Sinai—what we all know today as the Ten Commandments.

1. And we're dropping in to [Deut. 5:12-15](#) here to focus on the fourth of these commandments—that which deals with what's been called the Sabbath . . .

¹² "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." (Deut. 5:12–15)

Slowing Down to Sabbath . . . in Silicon Valley

A. The title of today's message is [Slowing Down to Sabbath](#).

1. I thought, you know, we're in the mountains, it's a beautiful place, it's a break from the norm, and often these are good times to slow down and consider our lives from a different perspective. We get clearer vision of things—what needs to change when we get back to "normal" or whatever.

B. And the piece that I'm particularly interested in considering with you right now is: Where are you at in your relationship with God?

1. Are you spending time with him? Are you deeply engaging and worshiping and growing in affection? Or are you buried in the busyness and stress and all that comes with life in Silicon Valley? Are you slowing down to sabbath with God?

C. The Bay Area is a bustling place, and it can be quite burdensome in so many ways.

1. And this, no doubt, is part of the reason for the great turnover and migration we see going on around us these days. To be sure, many people are still coming in to the area, but just as many are going out. They can't keep the pace. They can't bear the weight. They're breaking under the pressure of it all. They want out.

- D. And I am saying here that if we want to survive, and not just survive, but thrive, in the city God has placed us in and called us to, then we need to learn the secret of sabbath rest.
 - 1. And what better time to think about it, then here and now, as we sit away from the pressures of our everyday life for a moment.

What Do I Mean by “Sabbath”?

- A. Now, I realize from the outset here, I probably need to define my terms. What exactly do I mean by “sabbath”?
 - B. Well, sabbath comes from the Hebrew word *shabbat* meaning to *cease* or *stop* or *rest* or even to *celebrate*.
 - 1. The idea of sabbath has its basis in the rhythm God established from the very beginning in creation—how he created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rested on the seventh ([Gen. 2:2-3](#)). He was done. He looked out and saw that it was all “very good” ([Gen 1:31](#)), so he kicked up his feet and he ceased, he stopped, he rested, he celebrated . . . he sabbathed.
 - C. And then, amazingly, with this original pattern now established, we see how God proceeds to call men and women, created in his image, to follow in this way of work and rest.
 - 1. Hence, the fourth commandment, which, as [Ex. 20:8-11](#) makes plain, has its basis in God’s rest at creation: “⁸Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . .¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (vv. 8, 11).
 - D. Broadly speaking, then, the idea of Sabbath speaks eloquently of the fact that your life is not just about productivity. You are more than what you do.
 - 1. God has created you not just to work for him but to rest with him—to enjoy him, to celebrate who he is and what he’s done and is doing in your life. That’s what sabbath means.
 - a. Setting aside the debates about how exactly this commandment should be interpreted by Christians today, we can all agree that it at least means that your life should be characterized by a deep resting in God and Christ, that your soul is settled down in relationship with him.
 - E. And the question we have before us then this morning is: So where are you with this? Are you sabbathing with God? It’s what you’ve been created to do, and when we’re not, of course then things aren’t going to seem quite right in our lives.
 - F. I’ve got three headings for us. They’re really quite simple: (1) Slavery; (2) Sabbath; and (3) Sonship. Each has a little subheading but I’ll give those to you as we come to them . . .

(1) Slavery: Symptoms of the Un-sabbathed Soul

Six Symptoms

- A. How do you know if you're not resting in God? What does the un-sabbathed soul look like? What sorts of symptoms present themselves?
 - 1. I've got six of them that I'll kind of rifle through here, and it's up to you to consider your own heart and see what may or may not stick.
- B. But I put all of this under the heading "Slavery" because that's what we find here at the end of the day.
 - 1. A lot of times we don't stop to be with God and things because we're pursuing more. We want this or that, we have dreams and goals, there's no time for worship or rest with God—we think we're pursuing freedom and things.
 - 2. But though there's great promise held out to us in all this, we quickly enough come to find that we've been deceived and we've really gotten ourselves enslaved—there are shackles around our hands and chains around our hearts.

Symptom #1: Panic Static

- A. With this I'm referring to the sort of background buzz that's always there no matter what you're doing.
 - 1. You're not able to get quiet. You try, but you can't. There's always noise, not externally so much as inside.
 - 2. You have no center. Your thoughts sprint and scatter.
 - 3. You find it hard to sleep. You perhaps sleep only after numbing a bit with alcohol or distracting with entertainment or something like this.
- B. Sometimes I'll sit to try to write a sermon and I feel this way. I can't concentrate. I feel so busy and pulled that I can't slow down enough to even get words out.
 - 1. So often I will just have to pull away and pray, go for a walk or a run, retreat to sabbath with God, before I can even really gather myself to begin.

Symptom #2: Control-Freaking

- A. You've heard of the idea of a control freak. What I'm meaning by "Control-Freaking" here is that the control freak mentality will inevitably lead to freaking out in the end.
 - 1. One of the things we say when we sabbath is: "I'm not in control . . . God is." If I stop, the world's not going to end. It's going to stay in its trek around the sun. It's not on me. It's on him.

2. So when you don't regularly pause to rest with God, you start to feel like it is on you, like if you pull away to rest or unplug for even a moment it's all going to spin out of orbit.
 - a. And so this control freak mentality leads to freaking out, right? Because you're not God and you know you can't possibly maintain all these spinning plates, you're going to drop stuff and break stuff . . . and you crack.

Symptom #3: People-Pleasing

- A. If you haven't been alone with God and resting in him, then suddenly he gets a lot smaller and other people get a lot bigger—his voice gets quieter, and everyone else gets louder. So you find yourself spun around trying to please people.
 1. This might manifest itself in that you take on too much. You can't say no. You have a hard time discerning between a person's need and God's call. Every need feels like a call. You feel guilty if you don't. You do things not because you want to or because you feel God leading you to but because you feel you have to or you're going to let people down.
 2. Another thing you'll notice is that you start to lose your sense of self. Because you're not rooted in who God says you are, you're adrift in the tossing sea of who everyone else says you are. You form your sense of self in the way others think and talk about you. You rise with their praise and fall with their criticism.
 3. And because you can't please them all, you regularly feel conflicted, confused, indecisive, exhausted, desperate, ready to give up.
- B. To illustrate . . .
 1. If you're a mom, you're wondering how can I keep the house clean so the guests will comment still about my decorating skills and what not. Or how can I keep my kids in line and successful so others think I'm a success?
 2. Or if you're a manager somewhere, you're always thinking how can I get the numbers, keep producing, so people keep noticing and approving of me? If I ever let up, my approval rating goes down, I stop trending on twitter or whatever, and then what?
 3. Or even as a kid, you know, you think I've got to make my parents proud, so you overdo it, and you get lost in their expectations of you. They put your report card up on the fridge when it's straight A's but what happens when you get a C, or God forbid a D?

Symptom #4: Millimeter Fuse

- A. Another thing you'll notice when you haven't been resting in God is you'll quickly lose patience with others.
 1. You're touchy. You're prickly.
 2. People around you feel as if they are walking on eggshells. They always have to tiptoe past and speak carefully. The relationship feels riddled with landmines. They make a wrong move and things could blow.

- a. Because you feel hen-pecked and slave-driven in your own work and things, you actually start to treat others that way as well.

Symptom #5: Rumbling Grumbling

- A. With this I'm simply wanting to draw your attention to that avalanche of discontent and bitterness that is often set in motion when we neglect to sabbath with God.
 1. We lose sight of what God is doing, how he's up to good.
 2. We bemoan the way that things aren't working according to our plans, that we can't please everyone or control everything or sleep at night and things.
 3. We get angry, not just at other people, but at God. We blame him for the messes of our own making. We lose sight of grace.

Symptom #6: Impending Burnout

- A. One of the things, sadly, that we're getting used to here in California is the threat of wildfire and things. And you know the forest service has that scale that they use to determine fire danger ranging from low to extreme, in the red.
 1. And, listen, when you are not taking time to sabbath with God, your soul is like that . . . in the red. Everything's dry and parched. It's a spiritual drought. You haven't been drinking in from the river of living water, so you're ready to burnout.
- B. Where are you at on that scale? You green and good to go? Yellow? Orange? Red? Maybe you feel like you're on fire right now.

Martha, Martha

- A. To put some flesh on this, you might find it helpful to revisit that story of Mary and Martha back in [Luke 10:38-42](#). You remember, Jesus had come into town and Martha welcomes him into her home.
 1. And we're told Mary, Martha's sister, is sitting at Jesus' feet just listening to his words, sabbathing we might say.
 2. But Martha's running around and you can tell she has this slave mentality. She's got all the symptoms of the un-sabbathed soul.
 - a. You can tell she's got the panic static. So Jesus even mentions that she is "[anxious and troubled about many things . . .](#)" (v. 41).
 - b. And she's got the control-freaking thing going on as well. This is her house it has to look a certain way. The Messiah is here, this has to go well. "It's up to me." So we're told she's "[distracted with much serving](#)" (v. 40).
 - c. And, of course, we see how this relates to people-pleasing. "What's Jesus going to think of me? The home has to be clean. The meal has to be good."
 - d. And then the millimeter fuse comes out. There's tension in her relationship with Mary. Because she feels like a slave she starts to treat Mary as such. She demands

of Jesus: “Tell her . . . to help me” (v. 40). “She’s lazy and not doing anything. It’s ridiculous.”

- e. And this of course is connected to the rumbling grumbling, where we see Martha isn’t amazed and overjoyed that Jesus would be there in her home and share words of life with them. No! She’s frustrated, not just with Mary, but with Jesus: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?” (v. 40).
 - f. And of course we see it . . . burnout is coming.
- B. And this is why Jesus turns to her (as he would to us as well) and says: “⁴¹ Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (vv. 41–42). In other words: “Martha, I want to help you discover what Mary’s discovered here: namely, sabbath rest.”

(2) Sabbath: Breaking Chains and Signing Papers

The Exodus

- A. What I mean here by breaking chains and signing papers is that God talks about how redemption in him is actually setting us free from slavery (breaking chains) and also adopting us as his children (signing papers).
- B. If you noticed this is what is particularly brought out in that text in [Deut. 5](#) I read at the beginning.
- 1. In [Ex. 20](#), as we’ve seen, God grounds the command to keep the Sabbath in creation.
 - 2. But now here in [Deut. 5](#) he gives yet another ground, not just creation, but also redemption. So he says in v. 15: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”
- C. We were created to find our ultimate rest and enjoyment in God. But, in our arrogance, we play right into the hands of Pharaoh. We get enslaved in our sin. We work and we work and we work and we never rest.
- 1. And so God, who is rich in mercy, redeems. He breaks into the story and breaks us out of the house of slavery. We go from slave to son.
 - a. You remember how God told Moses: “²² [Y]ou shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son,²³ and I say to you, ‘Let my son go . . .’” (Ex. 4:22–23). “Israel is not your slave. Israel is my son.”
- D. And, amazingly, one of the things God does to help his people transition away from the slave mentality towards the son mentality is . . . he gives them the Sabbath.
- 1. He saves us and then he tells us to stop and rest and celebrate and enjoy him. It’s going to be okay. He’s got us.

- a. The Sabbath drives that redemptive reality deeper into our souls. Week after week, it begins to percolate into our hearts. We're free. We're loved. We're not slaves. We're sons.

The Cross

- A. And, of course, what happens here in the Exodus is ultimately fulfilled in the mission of Jesus. He is the one who will bring us fully and finally into the deep rest of God.
- B. [Matt. 11-12](#) presents this wonderfully . . .
 - 1. First he issues this profound invitation: “²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” ([Matt. 11:28–30](#)).
 - 2. And then he puts forward his credentials—on what basis can he claim to give us such things? Well he says: “[T]he Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath” ([Matt. 12:8](#)).
 - 3. And then, if we still had any doubt, he proceeds to evidence his authority as such and his ability to deliver this rest. He performs a Sabbath day miracle, where he takes a man's withered hand and makes it whole again ([Matt. 12:9-13](#)).
 - a. The religious leaders had asked: “[Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?](#)” (v. 9). But Jesus says: “Are you kidding me? That's what the Sabbath is all about!” This man is a picture of the Sabbath's end-goal—healing, wholeness, the removal of the curse, rest and enjoyment with God.
- C. And, of course, Jesus will go from here to the cross . . .
 - 1. where we're told he takes the full weight of the curse upon himself;
 - 2. and, just before he breathes his last, he cries out, “[It is finished,](#)” ([John 19:30](#))—much like God did on Day 6 of creation;
 - 3. then he's laid in the tomb where he remains for the entirety of the Sabbath;
 - 4. and then, on the first day of the week now, he erupts in life and steps out from that tomb now as the pioneer of God's new creation;
 - 5. and later he ascends to heaven where he at last sits down in royal repose looking out over all he has done—“It is very good”;
 - 6. and then he pours his Spirit out upon us so that we can now enter by faith into this new creation of his and rest with him even now. So [Heb. 4:3](#): “[W]e who have believed enter [that rest.](#)”
- D. To sabbath, therefore, is to slap the face of Pharaoh, to ring the bell of liberty, to blast the trumpet of Christ's triumph—it is to unlearn the ways of a slave and relearn the ways of a son . . . in view of the gospel, our creation and our redemption and re-creation in Christ!

(3) Sonship: Reconnecting Our Heart's Burden to Our Lord's Rest

Six Shifts

A. So all I want to do here is show you what this unlearning and relearning looks like, what happens when we get the gospel and we take on the yoke of Jesus and we reconnect our heart's burdens to his rest.

1. I want to show you how those six symptoms of the un-sabbathed soul begin to shift and change. Some I'll have to just breeze right by, others I'll linger over for a moment.

Shift #1: From Panic Static to Settled Peace

A. When we sabbath with the Lord, when we make time each day and week to re-hitch our hearts to him, when we remember that we are his kids, beloved and cherished in Jesus . . . that cuts through the noise. We don't have to panic, we don't have to worry. There's a calm that comes over us. We can sleep because we know he never does (cf. [Pss. 127:2; 121:3](#)).

1. As Paul says in [Phil. 4:7](#): "[T]he peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Shift #2: From Control-Freaking to Humble Trust

A. When you stop to sabbath with Jesus, you are acknowledging that he is in control and that he can be trusted.

B. This is one of the first lessons God tried to teach Israel with the Sabbath ([Ex. 16](#)). When they were in the wilderness and he was feeding them with manna and things he said: "Listen, on Friday, gather twice as much Manna, and on Saturday, the seventh day of the week, rest. The manna won't go bad. I'll keep it for you. I've got you. You're not in control, I am."

1. They are unlearning the ways of Egypt. They don't have to fend for themselves. He will fend for them. They are not slaves nor are they orphans. They are children. And as such they have a Father who will happily and bountifully provide for them.

C. One of the things I love to do when I'm trying to rest in God, sabbath with him, is I go out into creation like we are here this weekend. Because it reminds me who my Father is, how big and beautiful he is. And I don't have to worry.

1. This is what Jesus is getting at in the Sermon on the Mount when he says: "²⁵ [D]o not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing?"

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:25–33).

- a. The whole point is: Stop for a moment, go outside, see what God has made and what he's up to, and then remember, this God is your Father. If he cares for the birds and the fields how much more will he care for you?! You don't need to control, you don't need to store up in fear . . . you can trust.

Shift #3: From People-Pleasing to Living in Light of God's Pleasure

- A. When we stop to sabbath with God his voice grows louder and we find ourselves again in him. Instead of trying to please everyone else, we let in the gospel truth that God in Christ is already pleased with us, that he loves us, that he delights in us, in Jesus, before we've done anything.
- B. You know Jesus as God's Son, for the first thirty years of his life, seems to have not done anything all that spectacular, at least it's not recorded for us, and yet at his baptism still God says: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).
 1. And that pleasure of his Father that Jesus enjoys at the outset of his public ministry is what gives him the strength to get through it. He's not working for his Father's pleasure, he's working from it. He can deal with letting people down because he knows what his Dad thinks.
- C. And it's the same that happens with us.

Shift #4: From a Millimeter Fuse to Patient Love

- A. When you regularly stop and let the love of God penetrate your own heart, you find that have more and more love for others as well. When you feel well cared for, you're able to care well for others.
 1. It's like what they tell you on plane rides—put the oxygen mask on yourself first and then help your kids. That's the idea here.
 - a. When you have the pure oxygen of God's love flowing to you, suddenly you have resources and strength to serve others. But if you don't have that flowing, there's the panic and frustration and competition and impatience.
- B. You know, this is why back in our text in Deut. 5, if you noticed, this sabbath idea, it's contagious. It comes not just to bless us, but moves through us to bless others.
 1. So God says in v. 14: "On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your

livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.”

- a. You see how this works? When we feel like slaves, we treat others in our lives as slaves. But when we get deep soul-satisfying rest from God, we give others rest as well.

Shift #5: From Rumbling Grumbling to Grace-Eyed Gratitude

- A. Taking time to rest with God helps us see ourselves and our lives in new light.
 1. It's in our times sabbathing with God that we wrestle through the grumbling and the discontentment. We run to him like the psalmists so often do and cry out: “Where are you? What are you doing? Why am I not able to discern your hand?” And then he shows us, he speaks, he helps.
- B. I've been trying to go on regular mountain bike rides for a little while now and I just cry out to God, not just because it's hard going up inclines and things, but because life is hard, and ministry is hard, and I don't always get what he's doing.
 1. And, it never fails, I come away every time with a fresh sense of his care and even gratitude for what he is doing by grace in my life.

Shift #6: From Impending Burnout to Abiding Endurance

- A. This last piece is just that when you have your roots now settled deep in the streams of God's grace, you have what you need to survive the drought, the hard times, there's still green on the tree.
 1. You still struggle. Of course you do! I'm not implying that everything gets magically better. But the bottom doesn't drop out from under you anymore. You fall but you hit the rock. There's a floor. You're sustained in the good and the bad. He's keeping you.

Slow Down to Sabbath!

- A. So today, let me encourage you, rest with God. Enjoy the woods, the food, the company, the fun. Let it all minister to you of his compassion and care. Let it woo you back to him and draw you deeper in.
 1. And, maybe as you drive home later, spend some time considering and praying how you might integrate more of this sabbath rest into you daily, weekly, and annual rhythms. What could it look like? When will you do it? How will you do it? How can you slow down to sabbath even in Silicon Valley?!