

INTRODUCTION

In **Romans 12:1–2** God teaches us how our hearts can be transformed. How is that? By offering our minds to God and our bodies to God, our hearts are transformed. It's a pretty simple formula. The primary doorways into your heart, into that part of you that is the real you. The primary avenues into your center, your heart: it's your mind and your body. And by allowing God to renew your mind and by offering him your body, your heart will be primed to love rightly and to love well.

So, for we looked at some of the ways that God's view of time in terms of a day is very different than the view that many of us have. So we **offer our minds to God**. We say, God renew our thinking about a day and a week. Here's what we were raised to think, what our society thinks and assumes about a day and a week. Here's what you say about it. Help us to learn to think about a day and a week like you do.

But we don't stop there. Because **a human being is not only a mind**. We have bodies and our bodies matter. Our bodies are as important to our hearts as our minds are. So we look in Scripture for ways that we can offer our bodies to God with regard to this issue of time and busyness. And we've looked at a wise practice that can become a habit that shapes our hearts so that we can develop the dispositions of patience, and alertness, and presence.

Now we're going to look at the issue of a week. How should we think about a week? what is the rhythm God has given to the week? And what embodied practices can help us to step in rhythm with the rhythm God has given to the week.

Turn in your Bibles to **Genesis 2:1**.

SIX DAYS OF WORK, ONE DAY OF REST

Genesis 2:1, *“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”*

Last week we saw the rhythm of “evening and morning.” Today we see the rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest.

In Genesis chapter 1—Evening and morning.

In Genesis chapter 2—six days and one day.

Evening and morning...six days and one day.

Sleeping and waking...working and resting.

That's the rhythm. “On the beat, God creates; on the off beat, God pauses to see that what has been created is good.”¹

And so, when “our bodies move to [this]...rhythm of work and rest” we are following “the rhythm originally strummed by God on the waters of creation.” As God worked, so do we; as God rested, so do we. Working and resting. We are living in the image of God.²

THE SABBATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now, if you’re familiar with the New Testament, you may know that some of Jesus’ biggest conflicts came about because of his different approach to the Sabbath than the reigning Jewish leaders in his day. We saw a snippet of this in our gospel passage (Mark 2:23–28). But Jesus doesn’t object to honoring the Sabbath. His objection was the way certain Jewish leaders had misconstrued the Sabbath.

In fact, Jesus insisted that the Sabbath was a gift for humans. He didn’t “obliterate Sabbath teaching.” What he does in the gospels, and we see this worked out in the epistles, is that Jesus fulfills the Sabbath laws, and then with the explosion of his resurrection he reframes the sabbath. Now, Christians experience the Sabbath on Sundays. The day of his resurrection.

Some of you may know, that, on the Christian scene, there are huge debates swirling around the issue of the Sabbath. The thing we are focused on this morning is how the Sabbath teachings in Scripture alert us to a the rhythm of a week. Because, as I’ve already said, our great need is to learn how to live in rhythm with God’s work.

The recovery of the Sabbath is a critical move. “Without Sabbath...the workplace is soon emptied of any sense of the presence of God and the work becomes an end in itself. It is this ‘end in itself’ that makes an un-sabbathed workplace a breeding ground for idols...If there is no Sabbath...we soon become totally absorbed in what we are doing and saying, and God’s work is either forgotten or marginalized. When we work we are most god-like, which means that is in our work that it is easiest to develop god-pretensions. Un-sabbathed, our work becomes the entire context in which we define our lives.”³

Transition: Okay, with that being said. Here are 3 practical ways to receive the gift of the Sabbath. Number 1, we cease.

1. CEASE

Remember what we saw earlier in Genesis 2:1–3. At the heart of Sabbath-keeping is that for a whole day you do not produce or accomplish. For 1 day out 7 you cease productivity. This is not something you nibble at in bits and pieces as convenience allows. For an entire day you cease work.

But what exactly do we mean by work?

Well, there’s the rub. Unless you belong to a very strict group where the answers are fixed and explicit, you need to be discerning as you sort out what makes for ceasing work.⁴

“One classic answer is that work is whatever changes the natural, material world. All week long...[we] wrestle with the created world, tilling and hammering and carrying and burning [and organizing and administrating]. [But on Sunday,] let it be...Celebrate it as it is and live in it... [with] peace and gratitude...It is right and good to remember that it is not [your effort] alone that grows grain, forges steel, feeds your family, fights injustice, teaches your students.”⁵

Over the years of practicing the Sabbath, I’ve learned that “work comes in many varieties and can take on many guises. Each of us must determine, in conversation with others, [and prayer and looking in Scripture. Each of us must determine] what work needs to be relinquished if we are to enter the practice of keeping sabbath.”⁶

Now this is hard. An entire 24 hour period, where we cease working. One of the biggest challenges you’ll face as you endeavor to embrace God’s rhythm of 6 days of work and 1 day of ceasing is that your own obsessions, your preoccupations can be so hard to let go of—shopping, housework, work brought home from the office.

In **Exodus 16** there’s an amazing story. “Less than two months after their exodus from Egypt, the tribes of Israel were already growing impatient with life in the wilderness. They even complained of their freedom, a freedom that left them so hungry that they longed for the places and foods of their enslavement. Moses carried their complaint to God, and God answered them, though not in the way or on the schedule they wished.”⁷

What was God’s answer? It was “Manna—a mysterious food whose name means ‘what is it?’—was to be their sustenance, and time was to be their teacher.”⁸

“Each morning, when fresh manna appeared on the ground, they could gather an amount sufficient for the need of each person for just one day, because it was in the nature of this food to require equitable distribution and to rot if it was hoarded.”⁹

“There was no forgetting its origin as a gift: every night the people had to go to sleep trusting that God would provide it once again. Moreover, at the end of each week, the gift was multiplied. On the sixth day, a double supply could be safely gathered, for the gift of the seventh day would be the gift of time itself, time free both from the work of gathering and from the usual bedtime worry about tomorrow’s provisions. This was the gift of the sabbath.”¹⁰

Do you see how practicing the Sabbath by ceasing is an act of trust. It is a decision to release the world and your fate, and your reputation, and all the needs around you. It’s a decision to release all of that “into the hands of God.”

When we stop from our work, we are exhibiting a fundamental trust and faith in the goodness and praiseworthiness of God.” Sabbath ceasing is Sabbath trusting. It’s “a call to visibly demonstrate in our daily living that we know ourselves to be upheld and maintained by the grace of God rather than the strength and craftiness of our own hands. To enjoy a Sabbath day, we must

give up our desire for total control. We must learn to live by the generosity of the manna falling all around us...[You see] Deep down, we all have difficulty with the idea that we live through the mercy of divine gift. We prefer to think that we live through the might and control of our own exertion.”¹¹

So Sabbath ceasing is a radical decision to depend on God. “You will not take charge of the outcomes. You will do your part, of course, but your part will always be chastened by the sense that you are not God.”¹² Do you see how, **Sabbath keeping is our resistance to our culture’s emphasis on accomplishment and our steadfast commitment to live by grace through faith.**

Transition: So that’s the first way we embrace the rhythm of a week as God has designed it. Now the second way we receive the gift of a week is that on the Sabbath, we rest.

2. REST

Go back to **Genesis 2:1**, *“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”*

Now think about Adam and Eve. They were created toward the end of the 6th day, and they had work to do. Huge work. Important work. That was back in **1:28**. So that was at the end of the 6th day. So they go to bed, and they wake up on the 7th day, ready to go to work, but no. It’s not a work day. Their first full day is the 7th day. So they wake up on the 7th day, and instead of going to work, they go to rest. “Work had to wait until the next day.”¹³ “Their first full day alive is” a day of rest.¹⁴

And the rest we see in Genesis 2. The rest we are called to is a true rest. A holistic rest.

1. Physical Rest

Your body needs to rest after working for six days. We need rest from the anxiety and strain of our work. We need to walk away regularly from our work. In doing this we are resting in God. Trusting that God is the one on whom the world depends. And the rest you need is the rest of silence. Think in terms of taking gentle walks together; turning off the TV and radio, and taking a nap.

2. Spiritual Rest

But the Sabbath is about more than rest for the body; it is about inner rest of the soul. Spiritual rest – to be held in the loving embrace of God. You need to make room for this. At the heart of “Sabbath resting is the opportunity to know the presence of God, no matter what our present circumstances might be.”¹⁵

Central to Sabbath rest is setting aside time for worship on Sunday, where we confess our sins, and then I'm assured of forgiveness, and sing praises, and hear God's word, and then feast at God's table. It's a time when we rest in the bosom of Jesus. Part of what we see in Genesis 2 is that "we are created to rest first—in company with God."¹⁶ "God's love toward human beings takes form as time shared with them."¹⁷

You may have noticed, our church is very intentional about not having a lot of programs. We are working to stay simple as a church. One worship and one small group and find a way to serve. And your service may be to the church or to the community, but serve. As a result, there are programs, good programs, that we will never have. We're in a pretty good place on this. I hope we can stay this way.

3. Emotional rest

Too often we are so emotionally drained, we can't cope with our lives.

This comes through a balance of time with friends and time alone. Each person needs to discern their own level of balance. Extroverts and introverts are different. And different seasons of life require different levels of community time and alone time. What really recharges you?

Janielle and I are very different. For me it's people. For Janielle it's less people.

One more thing about emotional rest. Emotional rest includes the things that worry us. We must try not to think about these things. But, for some of us, the more we try to not think about something, the more it is on our mind. So one thing to do is to "avoid activities that we know will summon worry, activities like paying bills, doing tax returns, and making lists of things to do in the coming week...One wise woman" that I read about "deliberately refrains from thinking about people who make her angry, practicing letting go of the slights and grudges that accumulate over the course of any week. And we can cultivate those forms of engagement with nature, ideas, and other people that really get our minds off of the week ahead."¹⁸

4. Intellectual rest

Rest your brain. Stop your intellectual labors. I know that I have to be very strict about trying not to think about whatever my brain is having to work on during the week.

Transition: So to receive the week, we embrace the Sabbath. We taking a whole 24 hours to cease and to rest. And one more, to feast.

3. FEAST

In the Bible, the Sabbath is about more than just taking time off. You see, after creating the world, God did not just cease from his labor. The image is of God stopping his work in order to enjoy what he had made. We need to stop and to enjoy God, to enjoy his creation, to enjoy the fruits of our labor. At the heart of the Sabbath is joy!

In Proverbs 8, we see Jesus at the side of the Father, while the Father is creating the world. Listen to what it says, **Proverbs 8:30–31**, “*Then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.*” The word “rejoice” means “laughter” or “play.”

One of my favorite philosophers translates it this way: “I was enjoying myself day after day, playing around all the time in front of God’s face, playing through the hemispheres of his earth, having fun with all of mankind.’ God was being playful in creation. He was having fun. Through play we participate in this divine creative joy. We share in God’s delight in the world he has made.”¹⁹

A friend of mine likes to say, “Jesus ate his way through the gospels and eventually he died because of who he ate with.” Jesus was no gloomy bystander at parties.

I like the way John Ortberg, a pastor in California, lays this out. “One day a week eat foods you love to eat, listen to music that moves your soul, play a sport that stretches and challenges you, read books that refresh your spirit, wear clothes that make you happy, surround yourself with beauty. [Make a list of your favorite things and indulge in them.] And as you do these things, give thanks to God for his wonderful goodness. Reflect on what a gracious God he is to have thought of these gifts. Take the time to experience and savor joy, then direct your heart toward God so that you come to *know* he is the giver of ‘every good and perfect gift.’”²⁰

Imagine with me, Aaron Cook “sitting on his porch drinking coffee with that air of leisured satisfaction which in itself is already a vote of confidence in God.”²¹

Transition: So there you have it. Three actions at the heart of Sabbath–Keeping: cease, rest, and feast. We honor the Sabbath to honor God and his creation. To dishonor the Sabbath dishonors both.

CONCLUSION

Our need is to learn how to receive time as a gift from God. God created time. And to receive time as a gift from God, we must accept the nature of time as God has designed it. What is the nature of time? Well, that’s a very complex question. But, we’ve been looking at one component in the structure of time...the rhythm God has established with time.

And the reason we’ve been looking at the rhythm of time, is because this is the most powerful and practical way to deal with our busyness. When it comes to being overly–busy, the solution is not to find a balance between work and rest and play. The solution is to learn how to walk in step with God’s rhythm.

Let’s pray.

¹ Dorothy Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, The Practices of Faith Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 47.

² Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 48.

³ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 116–17.

⁴ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 51.

⁵ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 51.

⁶ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 67.

⁷ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 13.

⁸ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 13.

⁹ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 13.

¹⁰ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 13.

¹¹ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 37–38.

¹² Dallas Willard, “Foreword,” in Ruth Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004), 10.

¹³ Marva Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 36.

¹⁴ Ford, *Shape of Living*, 137.

¹⁵ Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 61.

¹⁶ David Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, [1997] 2004), 137.

¹⁷ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 47. She is summarizing Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), 213ff.

¹⁸ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 65.

¹⁹ Tim Chester, *The Busy Christian’s Guide to Busyness* (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 34.

²⁰ Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, 70.

²¹ Donald Nicholl, *The Testing of Hearts: A Pilgrim’s Journal* (London: Lamp Press, 1989), 245. Cited in Ford, *Shape*, 140.