



grow. pray. study.



Reading the Ten Commandments through the Eyes of Jesus

“Sabbath: Rest, Renewal and Reverence”

Scripture: Exodus 2:8-11

Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. Six days you may work and do all your tasks, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. Do not do any work on it—not you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals, or the immigrant who is living with you. Because the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days, but rested on the seventh day. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

This week we are memorizing:

Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy.

Sabbath began with God MONDAY Genesis 1:31 – 2:3

The creation narrative from Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 reflected the essential rhythm of life. “There was evening and there was morning: the first day” (Genesis 1:5). Six days of work. One day of rest. This daily, weekly, and yearly rhythm of life provided a life structure that centered around stopping, giving thanks to God, resting in God’s mercy and recognizing that what God has created is very good.

- The ancient rabbis taught that on the seventh day, God created *menuha*—tranquility, serenity, peace, rest in the deepest possible sense of healing stillness. Until the Sabbath, creation was unfinished. Only after *menuha*, only with tranquility and rest, was the circle of creation made complete. Does your life rhythm allow “healing stillness”? What practices ground you (or could ground you) into a life filled with that type of holy rhythm?
- Exodus 31:17 recounted, “In six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day Yahweh rested and was refreshed.” The word for refreshed (*naphash*) meant *to breathe*. Take a deep breath. Hold it for a count of four. Exhale for a count of six. Imagine God exhaling peace and tranquility into the world. When and how do you find tranquility or rest? How can God’s gift of sabbath rest help you to be a complete creation?

Prayer: O creator God, sometimes I’m proud of my ability to “keep my nose to the grindstone.” Thank you for reminding me that, from the beginning, rest and renewal are a vital part of a truly human life. Amen.

Israel’s two reasons for Sabbath TUESDAY Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Casual Bible readers may be surprised to find two versions of the 10 Commandments giving different reasons for Sabbath. Most mainline scholars believe Exodus and Deuteronomy compiled traditions

and stories passed down from earlier in Israel's history, and took the form in which we have them today around the 6th or 5th century before Christ. * The setting for Exodus was Mount Sinai after Israel's deliverance from slavery, while Deuteronomy's was about 40 years later just before entering the Promised Land.

- Exodus 20 said to rest on Sabbath "because Yahweh made the heavens and the earth...but rested on the seventh day." "The purpose of the Sabbath was to give the Israelites time to reflect, not on their works, but on God's works. They were then to find refreshment in knowing that their physical needs were supplied not by their toil, but by the God who had created the universe and had given them life." ** In what ways does reflecting on God as creator move you to worship and praise?
- In Deuteronomy 5, the reason for Sabbath was "you were a slave in Egypt, but Yahweh your God brought you out of there." The creator God also acted to redeem God's people from a painful situation rooted in human violence and cruelty. "The principle of the Fourth Commandment on the need for time to reflect upon God's glorious work never changes. Yet it is interpreted differently from one generation to another." ** What aspects of God's glorious work mean the most to you?

Prayer: O God, you are both my creator and my redeemer. Remembering and honoring both are reasons for me to make Sabbath a regular part of the rhythm of my life. Amen.

* See the introductions to Exodus and Deuteronomy in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, pp. 81OT and 259OT.

** Both comments by John Maxwell, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 5: Deuteronomy*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987, pp. 103-104.

Sabbath: a day for worship and praise WEDNESDAY Psalm 92:1-8

We only find the word "Sabbath" once in the book of Psalms (and in the editorial "superscription" to Psalm 92, not in the text itself). The patterns of Israelite life were different from ours: "Worship was being offered in the temple every day, and there was not much difference about the worship offered on the Sabbath. The main point about the Sabbath was that it be a day of stopping work." * In all times and settings, a key part of Sabbath is to express that "you, Yahweh, are exalted forever!"

- The key sources of joy in Psalm 92 were God's loyal love (Hebrew *hesed*) and faithfulness. Those are with us every day, not just on Sabbath. But for an Israelite farmer struggling to feed his family from rocky, semi-arid soil or for a worker today scrambling to meet multiple deadlines and goals, purposely setting aside everyday demands creates space to focus on God's unending love. How have you found spiritual value from taking a Sabbath break from your "daily grind"?
- Psalm 92 observed one thing that can block our worship. To human eyes, "all evildoers seem to blossom." (See a longer poem about this in [Psalm 73](#).) Why trust God if those who don't are thriving? Psalm 92 noted that "the wicked spring up like grass" is a short-term outlook. Eventually, evil is self-destructive. How has it helped you learn to trust God to think in terms of "forever" outcomes?

Prayer: O God, ground of all being, save me from short-term thinking that ultimately leads to ruin. Teach me how to treasure the "forever" life you offer me through your covenant with those who love you. Amen. * John Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone, Part 2: Psalms 73–150*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, p. 72.

Sabbath: a symbol of inclusion and justice THURSDAY Isaiah 56:1-8, 58:6-14

Leviticus 25 set out a “Sabbath” principle for land use and even the forgiveness of debts. In actual practice, “this legislation seems not to have been observed historically.” * That may be one reason Isaiah 56 and 58 linked keeping Sabbath with practical steps to welcome and help excluded groups like eunuchs and immigrants (e.g. [Deuteronomy 23:1-6](#)), and the hungry and homeless poor. These prophetic passages called Israel to keep Sabbath not idly, but as a nation in which everyone was responsible to seek the wellbeing of all.

- Isaiah 56 challenged the human inclination to shut out people who are, in various ways, not “like us.”

How did this passage teach that treating “outsiders” justly is a key part of keeping the Sabbath? What kinds of attitudes and actions, guided by the God who gathers outcasts, can help make our church more fully “a house of prayer for all people”?

- The first part of [Isaiah 58](#) showed that some Israelites complained that their pious fasting brought no reward from God. But “the acceptable fast means refraining from taking economic advantage of others, and instead offering assistance necessary for health and dignity....Self-serving piety is called *trampling the Sabbath*. Those who honor Sabbaths and holy days do what pleases God on those days.” ** How can you avoid “self-serving piety” (on Sabbath or any time), and do what pleases God?

Prayer: God of justice and compassion, grow in me a spirit that seeks to truly revere your Sabbath commands by doing the things that please and honor you. Amen.

* A. E. Willingale, article “Debt, Debtor” in *The New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

** Patricia K. Tull, study notes on Isaiah 58:5-7 and 58:13-14 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, pp. 1190OT.

The Lord of the Sabbath condemned for doing good FRIDAY Matthew 11:28-12:14

Did you know that different approaches to Sabbath were one reason Jesus’ enemies sought to kill him?

Devout Hebrews in Jesus’ day saw Sabbath keeping as a key way to let God govern life’s pace. But too often, they lost the spiritual purpose of Sabbath in a blizzard of rules and regulations. Jesus, “the Lord of the Sabbath,” hated that. The point of Sabbath rest, he said, wasn’t to conform to detailed rules (especially those that forbade doing good) but to rest in his grace and caring.

- Matthew arranged his stories to show his readers the contrast between Jesus’ “easy” yoke and a complex, legalistic system that criticized acts of mercy and healing. If you make Sabbath mainly about what you cannot do, you imply “that the reason for the Sabbath is that God is a killjoy, that He is against enjoyment and in favor of solemnity.” * How can you make your Sabbath practices Jesus’ kind of “yoke,” easy and light to bear?
- In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrased a part of Jesus’ invitation as “Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.” ** Can you think of times when you, or someone you admired, have lived in “the unforced rhythms of grace?” How present are those rhythms in your life now? As you open yourself to God’s gift of Sabbath, how can God’s living presence transform your life from “duty and works” to “joy and peace”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it seems as though the more I rush, the farther behind I get. Yet you promised me “rest”—not passive idleness, but deep inner calm that can keep me from feeling frantic, aimless or helpless. Fill me with your rest. Amen.

* John Maxwell, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 5: Deuteronomy*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987, p. 104.

** From Matthew 11:28-30 in Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message Numbered Edition Hardback*. Navpress. Kindle Edition.

The call to enter God's rest is always open SATURDAY Hebrews 4:1-12

This section started in Hebrews 3:7. In the part before Hebrews 4:1, the writer drew on Genesis 2 and Psalm 95 to say that merely living in the physical Promised Land did not completely fulfill God's promise of "rest." God's true "sabbath rest" comes from resting from our own works, and instead trusting in God's gift of salvation. That kind of inward rest transforms "the heart's thoughts and intentions." Sabbath is not just about something we can mark on a calendar, but about releasing our need to control every outcome, and trusting God to direct our life better than we could. As we trust Christ, "we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help" (Hebrews 4:16).

- Dr. Louis Evans wrote, "How many times are hypertension, migraine headaches, a peptic ulcer, arthritis, nervous exhaustion, illness, insomnia, overweight and irascibility evidences of a life not at peace with the will and pace of God?" * In today's 24/7 world, the Bible principle of taking a day for spiritual and physical rest may feel unworkable and absurd. Can you trust, down deep, that if you live at "the will and pace of God" you'll truly be more productive? Hebrews said God's word is "living, active....It's able to judge the heart's thoughts and intentions." How can taking Sabbath seriously help you more clearly discern, and live beyond, the inner wishes or fears that keep you feeling locked into a frenetic life pace?

How can your Sabbath practice become more about renewal than merely about leisure?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to make every effort to enter your rest. Guide me into a pace of life that accomplishes what is most important, including renewing time spent with you. Amen. * Louis Evans, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 33: Hebrews*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, p. 102.

Family Activity: God gifted people with time for rest and renewal! How well does your family take time to relax with God and one another? Begin by creating a pie chart with seven sections. Label each section with the name of one day of the week. In each section, write down or draw everything each person does each day. Notice how much time you spend intentionally honoring God by resting and relaxing. Remind your family that God knew we would need rest and wants us to set aside time for that. Choose one day this week for Sabbath rest. Maybe you will enjoy God's creation, play games, read, listen to music or take a nap! Include a time of prayer in whatever you choose to do. In that prayer, thank God for Sabbath!