

“Give It a Rest!”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, March 21, 2021

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website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/sermons/>

Scripture Text:

Exodus 20:8-11 [NRSV]

(Refer to parallel in Deut. 5:12-15)

OPENING

How many of you kept the Sabbath in your families growing up? Do you have fond memories of it? Was it fun? Was it joy-filled? Was it dreary? Was it a drudgery?

The thing that stands out most to me in my childhood memories of “Sabbath keeping” – we didn’t even call it that(!), we just called it “Sunday” – is that everything was closed, so you couldn’t go out and buy anything! Kind of dates me, but what the heck...that’s what I remember. That and going to church, of course.

I suppose it afforded me a little more time for play and recreation, but as I got older, our teachers never seemed to have gotten the memo that assigning homework over the weekend challenged our Sabbath keeping! And today, sports and a dozen other activities crowd out Sabbath keeping, as well.

How about you? What kind of memories of Sabbath keeping do you have? How about now? Do you have any practices around Sabbath keeping that are life-giving? Do you observe it in your families now?

Teach the practice to your kids or grandkids? I’d love to hear about them, if so.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

This commandment, like all of the Ten Commandments, is given twice in the Bible:

1. Exodus 20 that *Lindsay / Lynn* read to us just a few minutes ago and
2. Deuteronomy 5

In terms of the Biblical narrative, they’re separated by 40+ years, with the first being given at Mt. Sinai to Moses and the people *by God Almighty* and the second being a reminder of what God had said that Moses shared with the people near the end of his life as he prepared them for entry into the Promised Land.

In terms of the history of the compilation of the Bible, they may be separated by six hundred years or more – the timespan from Moses to the reforms by King Josiah (c. 640 – 609 BC) just before the Exile and to additions made well into the Persian period of Israelite history.

The first part of the commandment is essentially the same for both:

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. (Deuteronomy fills in a little more detail here, but it’s only illustrative, not expansive of the commandment.)

The reasons then follow. Looking at them is not only informative but is deeply motivating of our desire to keep the Sabbath, to honor it, to set it up as something holy in our lives, to not neglect it.

Exodus 20:11

11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

The rationale here has to do with remembering that we are the image-bearers of God. And if God stopped in the midst of His work to reflect on it and celebrate its goodness, then we, as image bearers of God, are called – commanded even – to do the same. Keeping Sabbath is part of what it means to have been created in God’s image and likeness.

Deuteronomy 5:15

15 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.

This appears to be a reflection on Moses’ part and is very powerful. Moses reminds the people that the mighty arm of God had just freed them from slavery – and the Sabbath, with its extension to the entirety of their households, including livestock and foreigners living among them was to be a weekly reminder to never go back to being enslaved by ANYTHING or ANYONE.

Dr. Julie Canlis, in her piece on “Parenting and Sabbath” [Christian Living, “A Parents’ Guide to Sabbath and Rest”, published by and for axis.org], writes this:

“Deuteronomy...focuses on the Sabbath as a protest against the idols and the gods of this age. Having just emerged from more than 10 generations of slavery, the Israelites would have had trouble really believing that they were now free—even if they had physically entered the Promised Land. Could they ever shake their slave-mentality? Part of God’s plan for their rehabilitation was to challenge their belief that they had been made for ceaseless work. ... The Sabbath was a weekly reboot for the Israelites’ Operating System [the original iOS!! – SE-M 3/21/21]. ... In God’s economy, both His people and His land are allowed to rest due to His mercy and grace.”

We would do well to ask ourselves how our Sabbath practices reflect two things:

1. How we embrace the truth of our being created in God’s image and likeness, that is how we refuse to be reduced from “human beings” to “human doings”, AND
2. How we refuse to be enslaved by the godless values of our age, just like the Israelites were challenged to refuse to be enslaved by the godless values of their age.

SERMON THOUGHTS

- The meaning of the word Sabbath is not “to pass out with exhaustion”, either for you and me OR for God! God didn’t collapse from too much activity

in His six-day work week, worn out... God SHABBAT'ed (Gen. 2:2); that's what the Hebrew says... God simply STOPPED. God ceased His creative work.

Was the work of creation done? I don't think so... God is continually creating and caring for creation. God simply exercised some self-discipline and said, "That's enough... for now. Now is the time for delight."

And God commanded His people to do the same. And if we are going to be God's people today, the command applies to us, as well.

- The development of my Sabbath practices: my first RIM retreat and, more recently, *EHS*.

I've shared mine with you many times: I take as much of Sunday after worship and into Monday after lunch time as my Sabbath. In fact, weather permitting, Kim and I take what I call a Sabbath-ending walk on Mondays during her lunch break. There's a defined beginning and a defined end. The time in between is God's for rest and renewal.

- Pete & Geri Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, and Sabbath
(*Applicable to families with kids, individuals, retired persons, etc...*)
 - Stop work / interrupt your regular, weekly routine
 - Enjoy rest
 - Practice delight
 - Contemplate God

CONCLUSION AND PRAYER

What is important here is that God is not trying to take anything away from us in this command but is blessing us with a gift. And I can tell you from my practice of it, that it is life-giving.

The work of ministry, like the work of many of you, never ceases. So, if I waited until I got all of it done for the week, I'd work myself into the ground! But on Sunday afternoon into Monday after lunch, I STOP; I SHABBAT. And I revel in what God has done in the course of the past week, and I trust God to keep the world spinning for the next 24 hours.

He does not need my help! On the contrary, I need His re-creating Spirit to renew and refresh me and allow me to approach the week ahead from a place of deep grace and connection with Him.

(*Invite a few moments of reflection time in silence. Then, prayer time...*)