

Wisdom that Works

“Remember the Sabbath Day”

Exodus 20:8-11

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or female servant, or your cattle, or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the 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."
(NASB)

Introduction

- Seen on a T-Shirt in the Pikes Peak gift shop: “Real women don’t need guardrails”
- Actually they do. And real men and youth and children do too. Life often accelerates to a speed that can careen us off the road and over a cliff. We need guardrails to remind us to slow down and to keep us on the road when we haven’t slowed down enough.
- Over centuries of time, the people of God have received from God, and learned from hard experience, some guardrails that are essential to pay attention to because they are essential to human health and well-being. We call it “wisdom that works.”
- The Ten Commandments are among the clearest guardrails we have been given. Today I want us to look at one of the commandments in particular: Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. We are commanded to observe a day of rest as a holy gift from our creator.

Our culture has some wisdom about this.

- In the early 20th century labor unions fought to limit the work week to 40 hours – but increasingly the 40 hour work week is a thing of the past.
 - No rest for this modern age
 - A 24 hour society

- The seven-day week
- No time to rest, no time to think
- In the face of all this, time management gurus stress the importance of regular times away from the workplace for personal renewal.
 - Stephen Covey says that one of the seven habits of highly effective people is that they get away frequently to sharpen the saw.
 - Many time managers have pointed out that renewal comes from a change of focus, a different activity, as well as from rest.
- Judging from the proliferation of recreational opportunities and exotic resorts, it seems that our culture has taken to heart the message that we need to rest and renew ourselves.

Most of this advice is good, as far as it goes, but from a biblical and a faith perspective it doesn't go far enough.

Gordon MacDonald helps us see the value of the Sabbath day and the deficiencies of the world's day of rest when he says,

"Sabbath rest penetrates to the deepest levels of fatigue in the inner, private world. This fatigue is rarely touched by any of the modern amusements... Leisure and amusement may be enjoyable, but they are to the private world of the individual like cotton candy [is] to the digestive system. They provide a momentary lift, but they will not last."

Biblical wisdom goes farther to include something our culture leaves out:

- Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy
 - Sabbath is not just a day of rest, but also of worship, and it doesn't mean the kind some people think they can do on the golf course.
 - Sabbath is a day set apart for the Lord
 - a day of rest and worship
 - a day to lie fallow (a farm term reminding us that in the OT, even the land is to be given a rest so it can renew itself.)
 - the Sabbath is to be a day to soak in our awareness of being in the presence of God and of God being present in us.

Someone has summarized the biblical command to remember the Sabbath this way:

So in both the Exodus and Deuteronomy accounts of the Ten Commandments, the sabbath was instituted by God himself as a provision of rest for Israel. It was a day of blessing in which the people of Israel were refreshed by ceasing from all their labors; a day to take delight in Yahweh by remembering his creative and redemptive works on their behalf. The sabbath was also a sign that they were a people set apart for God and that their trust and faith was to be in him alone.

The pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Cambridge Massachusetts reminds us that::

The sabbath is a **gift of rest**, modeled after God's rest. And as creatures, we need to rest. We cannot work nonstop. If we do, we go nuts. We get sick or worse. We harm others. We do stupid things and think weird thoughts. So we value the rest part of the sabbath.

But the sabbath is also a gift of **power**, modeled after God's freeing power in Egypt. **The sabbath is a shield against a kind of slavery.** And we seem to have devalued the power part of the sabbath.

The sabbath is **radical**. It is radical because sabbath **observance repudiates some the world's most binding values.**

The sabbath is **a repudiation of constant work**. Our faith says that no one can ask you to work all the time. No one owns all your days. **One out of seven (that's about fourteen percent) of the days is unavailable for sale or rent.** The eighty-six percent left is plenty. The seventh day is God's to give, and is given to you. No person has the authority to take it away. And even you don't have the authority to give it away.

The biblical wisdom that works implores us to live life with a Sabbath rhythm. What does that rhythm look like?

- Sabbath moments at the beginning and end of each day (Campolo)
- weekly Sabbath day on Sunday
- quarterly or at least annual Sabbath retreat focused more on *being* than on *doing*

An Invitation to Retreat

I want to invite you to give serious consideration to going on retreat. I want to share with you what Bishop Rueben Job says about the importance of practicing the spiritual discipline of retreat.

We have been created for companionship with God. God desires to relate to us and commune with us throughout all of life. As in any healthy relationship, our relationship with God requires our participation. Spiritual retreats are one way in which we become aware of God's companionship with us and his desire for our companionship as well.

In the Bible, spirituality is seen more as the work of God within us than our work of seeking God.

Walter Bruggemann says that Christians have to do with a particular God—a God made known in the Old and New Testaments, creation, centuries of experience with this God, and most fully made known in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is this God who calls us to companionship with him in the whole of life. We fashion this response to this God on the basis of the God whom we worship and follow. We fashion our response to God according to the image of God that we constantly hold before us.

Spiritual retreats have proven to be one of the significant ways of encounter with God. From Abraham and Moses to Jesus and now to us, the custom or spiritual discipline of withdrawing for a time of concentrated companionship with God has proven to be a transforming experience for individuals, congregations, and small groups. Retreats are a proven and effective way of opening our lives as individuals and as community to God's presence, guidance, healing, will and way.

Spiritual retreat is not so much about what we will do or our initiative as it is our response to God's initiative in calling us to closer companionship. In spiritual retreat we do not have the first word. In retreat we are awakened to God's call to us. We respond to God's gracious invitation to be fully present to him as he promises to be fully present to us.

Furthermore, we do not have the last word in spiritual retreats. As we are sent into the world following retreat, we are assured that we are not alone but that the Holy Spirit travels with us to guide and sustain us throughout life.