

BELPRES CHURCH

Sabbath Rhythms

Leviticus 25:1-28, Mark 1:24-38

Speaker: Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

Well, good to see all of you here. Thank you for joining us. And those of you online, thank you for joining us in worship here. The last couple of weeks we have been talking about how Jesus restores us. And the biblical word for restore is Sabbath. Sabbath is not a legalistic obligation. It is a gift that should lead to joy and delight. It should be the best day of the week. And Sabbath is connecting with God, people who point us to Jesus and the things we delight in to be restored to mental, emotional and spiritual strength. It's how we receive spiritual power.

And God says this, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all of your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord." And for years, even after I was a pastor, I did not keep this commandment. But the turning point came for me when I was a college pastor and there were two interns on my staff and I was their boss, I was their mentor and they said, "We want to take you to lunch." And I thought, "Oh, how nice." Some of you have heard me tell this story. I thought, "Oh, how nice. I'm their mentor. They want to take me to lunch and tell me how I changed their lives." But when we got there, they said, "You're bumming this out." And I was like, "Oh, so this is not a thank you for changing our lives lunch. This is a room for improvement lunch."

They say, "You work seven days a week. You never take a day off. We see you trying to be an excellent pastor, but we need you to be an excellent husband, father, and follower of Jesus because that's who we want to be. And you're supposed to show us how and you're not." Ooh. Now that took courage, right? I was their boss. I was their mentor that took courage. And after that, I mean, what else could I do? I fired them of course. You can't talk to me like that. No, actually I started taking a day off every week from then on, but I still wasn't Sabbathing. I had more to learn, which I'll talk about in a minute.

Some of you may have days where you don't have anything to do, but are you being restored? Is it Sabbath? Are you being restored to the spiritual power Jesus wants to give you? And Sabbath isn't just one day a week, it's actually a rhythm of life throughout the week. We see this in the Bible in Mark chapter 1, which describes one day in Jesus' life, just one day. And in that one day, he goes around the countryside preaching, calls his first disciples, drives out an impure spirit. He heals one of his disciple's mother-in-law. And then in the evening he heals a whole crowd of folks, all in one day. And you thought you were busy. That's all one day in the life of Jesus.

And then it says, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for Him. And when they found Him, they exclaimed, "Everyone is looking for you!" Do you ever feel like that? Everyone wants something from you. Everyone needs something from you. And again, this is just one day in Jesus' life. And what you see is there's lots of activity, there's lots of work. Work is good. I like to work. Work is good. We get six days to do it. But also in the middle of all that activity, Jesus gets up before sunrise, that's how important this is, to go be with God, AKA Sabbath. And he does this frequently throughout scripture. You see Him do this all the time.

And his disciples don't understand it. They say, "Why are you praying? What are you doing praying? Jesus, come on man. You're on a roll. You're healing. You're preaching. Everybody wants you. We got to make the most of these opportunities. This Sabbath thing is unrealistic, Jesus. Carpe diem, Jesus. Carpe diem." But Jesus knows that to do the things He's called to do, He needed the spiritual power that comes from Sabbath with God. And if that's Jesus, how much more do we need it? And what He shows us is that Sabbath is more than just a day off. Sabbath is a rhythm of life that empowers you to do the things God has called you to do.

Rhythm is written into the fabric of the universe. There's rhythm everywhere, right? Tides go in, tides go out. We breathe in, we breathe out. There's baseball season and the time of darkness from which we are now about to emerge. And you see this rhythm in the command itself. Six days shall you work, one day shall you rest. Six and one. Six and one. But the command didn't stop there. God goes on and He said, "For six years, sow your fields and gather their crops. But in the seventh year, the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards." There again, six and one. This is all a part of God's Sabbath commands, six and one.

It didn't stop there either. God also said, "Count off seven Sabbath years, 49 years, consecrate the 50th year and proclaim liberty throughout the land. It is a jubilee and it's to be holy for you." Does the word jubilee mean burdensome, legalistic, obligation that is no fun? No, it means celebration. It's celebration, it's joy. And in that jubilee year, no crops were to be planted. Slaves were set free and all property reverted to its original owners so that if people had fallen into poverty and had to sell their land, they could be

restored to their land as an act of justice. Sabbath is also about justice and restoration. And again, it's a rhythm. Six and one. Breathe in, breathe out. Work, rest.

And we, all of us, have daily, weekly annual rhythms. Another word for that might be routines. And we all have them. We all have routines. And here's the thing, our habits shape our hearts and our routines run our souls. The things we do over and over and over again form us. There's a study done by two leading scholars where they told a group of volunteers that they were testing sound quality on some new headphones and that they were going to listen to a political speech and then talk about the sound quality. And they told one group as they listened to this speech, they told one group, "As you listen to it, keep shaking yes to let us know that you're hearing it." They told a second group, "As you listen to the speech, shake your head no to let us know that there is no audio problems." The third group, they said, "Just hold your head still."

Afterwards, they asked bunches of questions about all about sound quality. But somewhere along the way, the researcher would just casually say, "Oh, by the way, did you agree with that speech or not?" The group that shook their head yes, more likely to agree with the speech. The group that shook their head no, more likely to disagree. The group that didn't move their head at all kind of didn't have an opinion. Here's the point. What we do in the body influences our minds, hearts and souls. And the things we do over and over form neural pathways in our brain so that we're much more likely to do those things again. It's like ruts in a road that you just fall into naturally, which can be a very bad thing. But if it's a good rut, if it's a good routine, it can be a very good thing. Our habits shape our hearts, our routines run our souls.

So here's the question, what are we training ourselves and our kids to do and be by our routines? Because a lot of our routines are often they teach us that what matters most is economic success. So I have to work all the time to get a promotion or get into that college I want. The busyness of our calendars, trains our hearts and our minds and our kids that what really matters is efficiency, not relationships. We're seeing an explosion of anxiety and depression, especially ages 13 to 25. And part of the reason is an overscheduled life where there's too much pressure to succeed. But Jesus promises restoration.

And here's the thing, routine is your friend. It can be a trap, but routine, if it's a good routine, can also be your friend. When our kids were growing up, we had family routines, family rhythms, mostly because my wife understands this better than I do. And she made sure that we had dinner together, at least bare minimum, at least four nights a week. And sometimes I would have to have dinner and then come back to the church for a meeting, but we had dinner together where we could catch up, where we could talk. I have three kids, two daughters and a son. Every Saturday I would take one of them to breakfast, every Saturday morning. And then on the fourth Saturday of the month, I would take all three of them together. I started doing this when our oldest was two. One of the reasons we did it was to make it normal for them to talk to me so that when they got

older, they would continue to talk to me especially about meaningful or important things, which for the most part they do.

We had annual routines. I took no evening meetings in the month of December. Every night we'd have Christmas cookies and we'd watch a Christmas movie. And when they were really little, at first the only two movies we would watch is a Charlie Brown Christmas and How the Grinch Stole Christmas. We'd watch them over and over. Talk about neural pathways in my brain. It came without ribbons, it came without tags, it came without packages, boxes or bags. "Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. Christmas perhaps means there's a little bit more." See, Latin and calculus gone, but that locked in my memory forever. Fortunately, as they got a little bit older, we added some other Christmas movies.

And now that they're grown, it's interesting, they will frequently say, I've heard them say to other people, "Oh, my dad was always around when I was growing up." No, I wasn't. I mean, I did a pretty good job given the job I have, but there were things I missed. But I think the reason they say I was always around is because of our family rhythms. They never had to wonder, "When is the next time I see dad?" Because our family rhythms, they always knew and it gave them a certain sense of confidence and security. "Dad's always going to be here. I can plan on it. I can count on it." Routine is your friend. It trains our hearts, minds, souls to prioritize what matters most for all of us.

The good news is once you do these things enough, those neural pathways, it just becomes second nature. They're always on the calendar because you put them on the calendar, because you calendar the most important things first and let everything else just fall in the places around it.

So just let me make a couple of suggestions. You can also think of suggestions of your own, but just a couple of suggestions. There are daily routines, most important of which is time with Jesus. I spend 30 minutes in the morning in prayer and scripture. I also pray throughout the day, but 30 minutes in the morning in prayer and scripture. And last week I talked about how to pray in a way where you can actually experience Jesus' presence. That's a daily Sabbath.

And just a life hack tip. The way I made this second nature for me was I really like coffee and I would not allow myself to have coffee unless it was with my Bible and Jesus. And that just sort of over time kind of trained me until the second nature. And now I don't need the coffee to spend time with Jesus, but that got me into it. So you could try that if you like coffee or chocolate or whatever. Or you could try this. Before you look at your smartphone in the morning, read the Bible and pray for at least 10 minutes. At least 10 minutes. You can get up 10 minutes earlier.

The other daily routine I would suggest is dinnertime conversations with your spouse, with friends or with your kids. Our kids and students, Pastor Colin Robeson says that at dinner he asks his kids two questions, "What did you enjoy today and where did you see God?" And he says they just get these great dinner time conversations, behavioral issues, like arguing has decreased. He said it's even improved his conversations with his wife because they'll say something at dinner with the kids there and then after the kids are in bed circle back to what they said at dinner for a deeper dive. You can do that with your spouse, with your friends, your kids, if you've got that daily routines.

Then there are weekly routines. The one we're talking about in this series is a weekly Sabbath day. I know because of our culture, this is super hard to do. Those of you with kids and they're all in their different activities, you may have something every day of the week. We get that. We'll talk about that in an upcoming sermon. The goal is a whole day, a whole Sabbath day. That's the goal. That's what God sets out in front of us. Because you'll feel better. You will feel better if you do that. But don't also do what we sometimes do, which is, "Well, I can't do a whole day so I won't do anything at all." Right? Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. If you can't yet figure out a whole day of Sabbath, start with half a day. The goal here is progress, not perfection. So start with half a day and progress into a whole day.

And then the other thing I would suggest as a weekly routine is connect with a close friend who points you to Jesus at least once a week. My Sabbath day is Friday, but I really actually start the Sabbath day on Thursday afternoon at 4:30 when I grab a beer with a close friend and we talk about what's going well, what's not going well, debrief our life, talk about where we're struggling, where we're celebrating, a little bit of accountability. "Are you being the man you want to be?" All of that. That's kind of how I start my Sabbath with that close friend. It is on my calendar every Thursday afternoon until Jesus returns because I put the most important things there first. And everyone knows that they can't have that spot. They know the command. Do not touch Thursdays at 4:30. For on the day you touch thereof, thou shall surely die, right? Occasionally, I have to make an exception, but it's pretty rare. It's Sabbath, connecting with a friend who points me to Jesus.

And then there are annual routines like the December thing we did with our kids, vacations, that sort of thing. Daily, weekly, annual rhythms. Now, everything in our culture works against. This is a radically counterculture sermon series. Everything in our culture works against it so we're doing this one building block at a time. Last week's action step was stop something. Work, technology, and use that time to connect to God and other people. This week's action step is rest. And we've made some suggestions. Go to nature walk, get outside, enjoy creation. Or maybe sleep in or go to bed early or nap when your child naps instead of doing chores when your child is napping. Or have an unplanned day. Go somewhere without schedule, without agenda, or something else that you can think of on your own.

And in order to do this, the thing that real rest requires is real rest requires trusting Jesus. In the same Bible passage where God says, "Let the land rest for a year," he goes on and he says, "You may ask, what will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest crops?" That's a really good question, isn't it? "God's Sabbath is so impractical. What will we eat if we Sabbath? What if I don't get the A and get into that college? What if I don't kill it at work and I don't get the promotion? This is not practical God." God says, "I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you'll eat from the old crop and continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in."

And what that means is trust Jesus to provide what we need. And that if you don't get straight A's and go to that college you want to or don't kill it at work and get the promotion, it will not interfere with God's plans for your life. Maybe not your plans, but it will not interfere with God's plan for your life. He's got you.

A number of years ago, I burned out here in my job. I burned out very badly. And this was a long, long time ago, so don't be trying to figure out, "When was that? Oh, there was that one sermon I didn't like. It must've been then." Don't be doing that. Okay, it was way, way, way, way back. Long time ago. And where I felt it the most was in writing sermons. I mean, I can kind of do the management part of my job okay when I'm tired. I mean not great, but okay. But man, creative energy, that is just different. You can't be inspiring, funny and profound every single week, which let's just be honest, that's what you want from us, right? You can't do that when you're tired. And writing sermons is never easy. But in this season for me, it just became excruciating. It was like pulling teeth. It was horrible. And I started to say, "If Jesus showed up in the flesh and told me I would never preach again, I would fall on my knees and say thank you." I thought I was done.

This went on for two years. I don't think any of you noticed, at least no one said anything right? By God's grace, somehow the sermons kind of still all worked out. But man, for me, the process was just miserable. Three things got me out of that. First, I got better at keeping the Sabbath holy. The command does not take a day off. The command is keep the Sabbath holy. I was taking a day off, but I wasn't using it really to connect with God in any meaningful way. So I started listening to sermons on my Sabbath day on Friday. I put more prayer time into my Fridays. I'm an active guy. I often hear God best when I'm moving. So I pray when I'm at the gym. I mean, it's just time. It's just kind of one of my Sabbath habits, is pray at the gym. So I put more "keep it holy" stuff into my Sabbath.

Second thing I did that got me out of burnout was I put Sabbath rhythms throughout the week. I took a day off every week, but the rest of my week was a nightmare, right? Every week I would have several 15, 16 hour days. I was cramming seven days of work into six days. And cramming seven days of work into six days is not the point of Sabbath. Plus, you go into your Sabbath day just wiped out. Sabbath is a rhythm of life throughout the day, week, year.

So I made some small adjustments. For instance, every Thursday morning at 6:30 in the morning, I give my sermon to a team of people who critique it. And then my practice was, after that I would just roll right into my day with a meeting right at 7:30 when sermon review ended and I would just keep going and go all day, until at one point my assistant said, "You know, this is the day before your Sabbath day. So what if instead of a meeting, right after sermon review at 7:30 in the morning, what if you just took an hour to go to a coffee shop and read or pray or just have some downtime? I mean, would the church really fall apart if you did one fewer meetings a week?" Of course it would. That's how important I am. I hold this whole thing up, don't you know that? I actually took her advice and I started doing it. And it was just this small one hour. Small change, but it made a big difference in the feeling, the rhythm of my week.

I also preached two or three fewer times a year, which gave me a few more lighter weeks. And it's better for you because you need to hear from people other than me with different perspectives. And then the last thing I did that got me out of that burnout was I practiced the discipline of disappointing people. Some things in my job I really need to do very, very well. There are some things in my job where I need to get an A just to be responsible, but not everything. Sometimes in some things a C is just fine. I can't answer every email immediately. There are meetings I just can't go to. And that may disappoint people, which is why it's a discipline for me. I'm a people pleaser. I hate disappointing people, but I learned to trust Jesus better. That just as he provided an abundant crop for the Israelites to get them through the year of not planting crops, he'd provide enough for me and for this church.

And that was a long time ago. And so far, the church hasn't fallen apart and you haven't fired me yet because it never depended on me in the first place. It's not my church. It's Jesus' church. I'm actually not as important as I think I am, which is really good news because that frees me to rest in the all sufficiency of Jesus. And gradually, I emerge from those horrible two years of burnout and found greater joy in my job and in my life.

So what Sabbath rhythms can you adapt to shape your heart toward eternal things? And this week, okay, rest, which may mean at some point as your pastor and spiritual authority, I am telling you to do a profoundly mediocre job on something this week, okay? Get a C in something because if we're getting an A in everything, then we are getting an F in life. So this is the best news you're going to hear all week. As your pastor, I'm telling you, get out there and half bake something this week, okay? You think you can do that? You think there's something out there that you could half bake, get a C on, so that you can rest in the all sufficiency of Jesus?

So Jesus, we can't even rest without your help. So Lord, show us where we can get to C this week so that we can have time and space to rest in you. Lord, help us do that. And help us keep it holy when we are resting, when we have time off. Lord, come to us, talk to

us, speak to us. Help us to connect with you so that we can be restored to the people you originally created us to be. And we pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What would be the effects of the sabbath and jubilee year commands in Leviticus 25 on individuals? On Society as a whole?
- What kinds of pressures does Jesus face? Of those pressures which ones tend to make you feel the most stress?
- What do we learn from Jesus in this passage about handling stress and pressure?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What Sabbath habits and routines do you already practice? What Sabbath habits and routines would you like to incorporate into your day? week? year?
- What is something that you can let go of, and allow to be a "C" instead of an "A" this week? Is this hard or easy for you to do?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.

This week's Sabbath practice: REST

What's one way you can rest on sabbath?

- Nature walks, get outside and enjoy creation.
- Sleep in or go to bed early. Nap when your child naps instead of getting things done.
- Have an unplanned day. Go somewhere new without an agenda or schedule.