

Title: The Book of Mark: Part 7, Sabbath Keeping

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Passage: Mark 2.23-28

Big idea: You can experience the benefits of the Sabbath when you practice the 4-R's of Sabbath keeping



Think for a moment about this question: *What does the word Sabbath convey to you?*

BIG IDEA

You can experience the benefits of the Sabbath when you practice the **4-R's of Sabbath** keeping.



It is important to realize that we with a modern western mindset are at a disadvantage to understand how important the Sabbath was to Judaism.

Two key observances defined a Jewish person:

1. Circumcision and
2. Sabbath which extended from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday. Of course, Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday so Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday.

According to Jewish tradition, God chose Israel from all the peoples of the earth and instituted the Sabbath as an eternal sign and blessing of Israel's unique status

²³ One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶

In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." ²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Mark 2:23-28

Mark 2:23 "One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain."

Jesus' disciples were eating some of the grain off the grain stalks in a field on the Sabbath as they were walking through a field. It was barley or wheat, and it was common for travelers to munch on the raw kernels.

Mark 2:24, "The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?'"

Their objection was not in plucking the grain but because they considered this a type of reaping grain, that was prohibited on the Sabbath.

As a result of these legalistic laws, Jesus often came into conflict with the Pharisees about their legalism. The Gospels record it happening at least 6 times.

Sabbath keeping was one of the 10 commandments. The 10 commandments are the 10 core principles God gave the apex of his creation, human beings, as definitive guides to:

- live lives that best honor him,
- have an ordered society,
- show us how we should treat others,
- and provide principles, that if followed, help us live the good life God designed us to live.

The 10 commandments have been the moral framework for orderly societies in the west for centuries. History has proven that when societies neglect and ignore them, the moral fabric and glue in those societies begins to unravel, which we see now in our country and the world in general.

These 10 include such things as don't steal, don't murder, keep sex only within the confines of marriage between a biological man and a biological woman, honor your parents, and so on.

Many are self-evident but this one in particular does not lend itself to an intuitive understanding. Sabbath keeping is the fourth commandment and the longest one recorded in the book of Exodus.

Exodus 20:8, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy".

Moses gives further detail about this commandment in Exodus when he writes:

⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
Exodus 20.9-11

The Jewish people were in bondage for 400 years and had never had a day off. They worked 7 days a week. When God used Moses to deliver them from Egyptian bondage, he affirmed their dignity as human beings made in His image, and gave them the ten commandments, one of which was to honor the Sabbath.

That command reminded the people that for 400 years they were considered

- a) cogs in a machine,
- b) slaves of the Egyptians
- c) not human
- d) labourers to work, work, work

But now, God has instituted something for their great benefit, the Sabbath.

Because it was so important to the Jewish person, the scribes, the religious scholars, and later generations, went overboard to protect it and created a bunch of extra prohibitions about working on the Sabbath. There were 39 classes of work that you could not do on the Sabbath including what we might expect like plowing or hunting but also as minute as:

- tying or loosening knots,
- sewing more than one stitch, or
- writing more than one letter

In the creation account in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, God set an example for us to rest when he rested on the seventh day, although God did not need to rest, he exemplified rest for our benefit.

Genesis 2:2-3, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."

As previously mentioned, the scribes and Pharisees had instituted this complex set of rules of what they believed would safeguard keeping the fourth commandment. And by Jesus' time, the religious leaders had codified 1,521 Sabbath prohibitions.

In the west, these prohibitions were called blue laws or Sunday laws.

I had a personal experience with blue laws as a kid growing up in Alabama. I remember this little pond right beside the church we attended. I loved to fish in that pond, except on Sunday. A sign similar to the one on the right of this page was posted on a tree at the pond.



As a little kid, I never really understood why you couldn't fish on Sundays. I imagined a police officer hiding behind the building to catch me if I fished on Sunday. That really put me in a good spiritual mood for church. I figured it had something to do with an 11th commandment, 'Thou shalt not fish on Sundays'.

On the other extreme end are those who simply disregard the 10 commandments. Some have even called them the 10 suggestions.

The reason these scribes came up with all these "don'ts" was because they sought value in legalistic acts rather than fidelity to God in their heart. Legalism was not God's intent for the 10 commandments.

Jesus and his disciples break two categories of work when they ate some of the grain on the stalks: first traveling more than 800 meters was prohibited and second, reaping by plucking off some grains off the stalks was prohibited.

Mark 2:25-26, "He answered, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.'"

Jesus meets the accusation of the Pharisee with a counter question. This reference Jesus used comes from 1 Samuel which records the time when David and his companions were estranged from King Saul. They were hungry so they went into the Temple to look for food. They ate the consecrated bread which was twelve loaves baked of fine flour that were arranged in two stacks on the table in the Holy Place in the Temple for the priests to eat. Fresh loaves were brought into the sanctuary each Sabbath.

Although it was contrary to the law, Jesus did not condemn David and his companions for eating the bread because he placed human need above religious ritualism.

Mark 2:27-28, "Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"

When Jesus said that the sabbath was made for man he shattered the iron prisons of prohibitions which had turned a day of joy and love into a day of sullenness and fear.

To Jesus, the Sabbath was not created for its own sake; it was a gift from God to us. Its purpose was not to put us into a kind of straight jacket. It was for our good—to provide rest from labor and opportunity for worship (*Expositors Commentary*). God instituted the Sabbath to bless us and enhance our well-being.

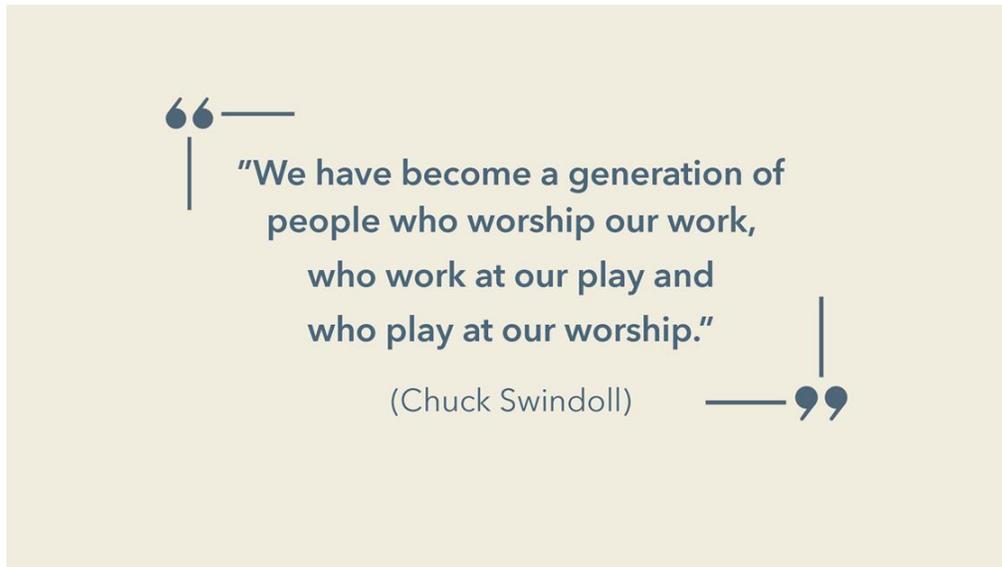
The authority for Jesus to redefine the perceived purpose of the Sabbath was his Lordship overall. As The Son of Man, one of Jesus' self-titles that describe his divine authority and power, He is Lord, ruler, and King of all, including his preeminence over the sabbath.

Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath." (NLT)

Exodus 20.8-10, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.”

- To remember means to keep in mind and hold as a priority.
- To do no work means to cease or rest.
- Holy means something set apart vs something common.

Chuck Swindoll writes that this commandment and all of them are extremely valuable because of our tendency to do this:



So, the Sabbath principle is there for a reason. Here is how do we do it:

1. Rest and re-charge

Don't work one day out of seven. It is common sense. Six days we shall labor means that in God's scheme of things, if you manage your time wisely, you should be able to do what you need to do in 85% of the time in a week, 6 days. If you can't, you may be too busy or have misplaced priorities that demands your time.

A caveat: There are seasons when you just have to do stuff 7 days a week: a sick family member, a new baby, a second job just to make ends meet. God understands that there are those times when you can't take that day for a sabbath. But, it should be a season, not permanent.

A weekly Sabbath is more like a re-charge. I have an iPhone and when the charge gets low it gives me a warning. I have to plug it in to recharge. Weekly Sabbath is that weekly recharge for our souls and bodies. Keeping a sabbath is interrupting the routines of life so that we can re-charge.

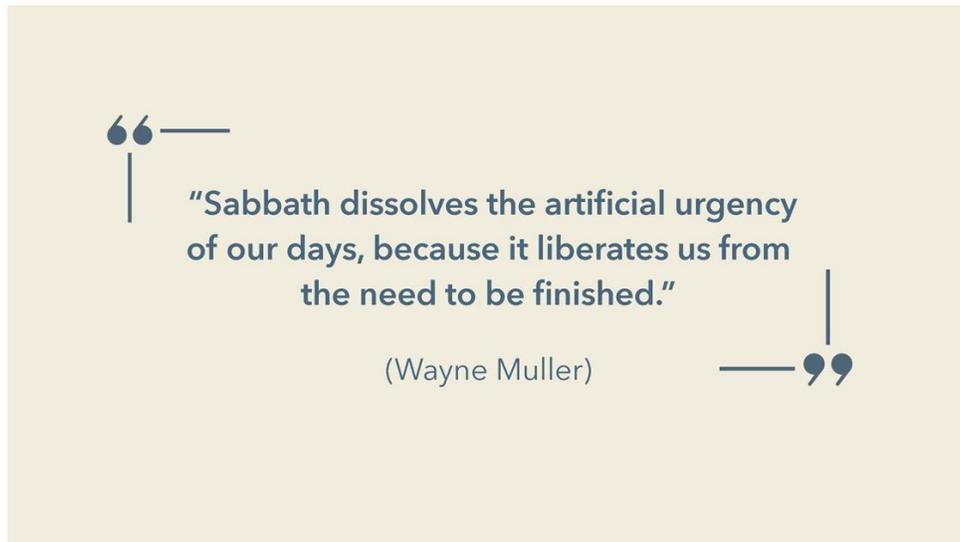
It is a deliberate act of non-doing. It is not meant to be a legalistic deal, but a time that we stop and let God take care of us.

Another caveat here: it does not mean you just sit around all day. Rest is not necessarily mindless activity or a cessation of activity. It may mean on that day you enjoy:

- a hobby
- music
- sports
- gardening
- reading
- taking a nap
- playing

...whatever replenishes you.

Ask yourself what gives you rest and re-charges and replenishes you? Do that as part of your sabbath.



2. Reflect

Exodus 20:11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

When God rested it was not because he was tired or that he ran out of ideas. Yet, after each day of creation, the bible says that God said his creation was good.

Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning -the sixth day."

Each day before the sabbath day, God noticed and reflected on his good creation.

Keeping a sabbath is a time when we allow God to look in, as he looked at his creation, and for us to look in as well to reflect over our lives.

Psalms 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

It is a time to reflect and ask ourselves, how well did I do life this past week: my work, my family, my other relationships, my body care, my spiritual development, my use of time?

3. Recalibrate.

I'm not a car guy, but I know a bit about cars. Older cars had carburetors in their engines that mixed fuel and air. Now cars have a fuel injector that does that job.

Back then, engines periodically needed a tune up. Some of the settings would get off a bit and needed adjusting, some gunk would form around nozzles that needed cleaning, the spark plugs would need changing, and so on. If you wanted your car to ride smoothly you had to have a regular tune up.

A weekly sabbath can help you tune up your soul. It can:

- recalibrate your soul by cleaning out some gunk that has collected,
- gain perspective on what happened the prior week or will happen in the upcoming week,
- reminding yourself of the purpose God has for you,
- acknowledging and appreciating your work of the past week, and
- fine tune the navigational instruments in our hearts to prepare to navigate the next week well.

God gave his work meaning and acknowledged its completion and said it was good as an example for us to do the same.

We must live within the design specifications of our Creator because our tendency is to drift away from those things. A weekly recalibration can help us catch any drift. And we can only become aware of those drifts and need for recalibration when we stop. Sabbath helps us stop.

4. Renew

For the Jews, Sabbath was originally a day to remember how God rescued them from slavery and brought them into rest. It was a time for worship. The sabbath is a time to worship, reflecting on the Lord, and for spiritual renewal. Sunday, for most, is that Sabbath rest day, for that is when we come together for corporate worship and spiritual renewal. For us pastors, Sunday is a workday so we need to pick a different day.

Isaiah 58: 13-14, “you must start respecting the Sabbath as a joyful day of worship. You must stop doing and saying whatever you please on this special day. Then you will truly enjoy knowing the Lord.”

It isn't that God says don't go to the grocery store, play golf, go fishing, or cut the grass on Sunday. But the principle from the pen of Isaiah is this: don't let other activities become substitutes for corporate worship when we are supposed to come together to be spiritually renewed.

Someone wrote, “It's not that we want people to go to church because the golf course is closed on Sunday mornings, but that we develop men who prefer God over golf.”

Unless you prioritize the sabbath, the world will quickly swallow your time.

Your practice of the sabbath principle will always be contested by Satan. He does not want you to rest, reflect, recalibrate, or renew. He wants you to keep your busy, frenzied schedule apart from Him.

Sabbath is a day to ponder God and spiritual things and rest.

Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, | and I will give you rest."

The best translation for this phrase from the Greek language is this: "And you will be rejuvenated."

One of the most profound insights I've ever learned about this idea of sabbath, rest, slowing down, not being so busy, comes from this Chinese word for busy.

What makes it so profound is that the two words that are combined for the word busy are, Heart and Death. The Chinese describe busyness as the path that leads to the death of your heart.



Do you need sabbath for your soul today?

**“The heart is the
place the busy
life exacts its
steepest toll.”**

(Mark Buchannan)