

Sabbath Rest  
Deuteronomy 5:12-15  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
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Cameron was about four or five days old. Everything was going smoothly.

And I just wanted to cry.

Here was this newborn baby whose life was literally dependent on me. Now, not me alone. Jim was there. My mom was there. The older kids were there. We had a supportive community around us. But as a mother of a newborn baby, I felt like his life was dependent on me.

And, that little life woke up every few hours, at best, all through the day and all through the night.

And I was exhausted.

Thankfully because I was not alone, I was able to lay down and take a nap. And I remember realizing, on that early day of his life, that even one extra hour of sleep made me feel better. On the verge of tears as I went to sleep, I woke up and was able to gain a different perspective.

Rest matters.

We do not function at our best or anywhere near our best when we are worn out. And we know that. We are shown that in all sorts of ways in our own lives. We know that from science and from medicine and from psychology, in addition to our own lived experiences. And yet, the way that we live indicates that we forget it very quickly.

Over the month of July we are going to be talking about sabbath. Perhaps this is on my mind because come August 1st, I will begin my sabbatical, three months of extended time of rest and renewal and resetting.

But sabbath is not only on my mind for that reason. It is on my mind because scripture calls us back time and time again to sabbath. And today we are reminded that it is one of the Ten Commandments. Scripture tells us that when the rules for living most faithfully with God and community were whittled down to ten things, *sabbath* made the short list.

So, as we explore this theme of sabbath over these four weeks, we are going to look at four different aspects of sabbath. There is more to it than that, but I have chosen four aspects of it to talk about.

And it felt important to start with rest because that's where the Ten Commandments lodge sabbath; that's the connection that they make. And, in fact, as someone pointed out in Bible Study, in this list Sabbath and the rest that comes with it is the link between what we think about as the "God commandments" and the "community commandments." Sabbath is both

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about our relationship with God and about our relationships with others. And to do both of these well we need to slow down enough to rest.

And there's something else to note here. What we read here in Deuteronomy says even the slaves, even the animals, get rest from their work.

So sabbath rest is about health and wellness. It is about slowing down enough to connect. It is about taking a break from things in order to have the energy to start again. It is about all of this, but if we listen closely, it is also about justice and about identity.

After all, for so many of us, our identity has become so wrapped up in our productivity that we don't know who we are without naming what we are doing or creating or producing.

As Tricia Hersey writes, in her book *Rest Is Resistance*, "Far too many of us have claimed productivity as the cornerstone of success. Brainwashed by capitalism, we subject our bodies and minds to work at an unrealistic, damaging, and machine-level pace - feeding into the same engine that enslaved millions into brutal labor for its own relentless benefit" (Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2022; inside cover book summary).

And I feel that. I am amazed at how often I ask people how they are or how their day has been and the first word to come out of their mouths is, "Busy." We wear our busyness as a badge of honor, as if the world will stop on its axis if we take a break.

I have noticed this inclination in myself as people inquire, asking about my upcoming sabbatical. "What are you going to do?" is a common question. And I always find myself searching for the correct language to say, "I am going to rest. I am going to make intentional choices about how I spend my day - choices that nurture my body, my soul, and my relationships. I am going to focus on my well-being and trust that my own wellness will make a difference for others as well."

But, do you know what? I don't usually say it that well. Instead, I often say it sheepishly or apologetically. Or I say it in ways that sound like I just haven't yet had time to make a plan, but I will soon be filling my calendar with important sabbatical tasks.

Because we don't do sabbath very well. We don't do rest very well. We don't value the gift of rest and renewal, of sabbath and a change of pace, of spending days with intention but without productivity. And sometimes I feel like I need to apologize for not having a more structured plan so that when I return November 1st I can share with you all of my great accomplishments.

And when I have these thoughts...these feelings...these reactions, I am reminded that the commandment to take sabbath is likely our most broken commandment.

In the book *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, Wayne Muller writes, "A 'successful' life has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company; war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities, because we are fearfully protecting what we have, and do not feel safe

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enough to be kind and generous; war on the earth, because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feed us, to taste its blessings and give thanks” (Muller, *Sabbath*, New York: Bantam Books, 1999, p. 2).

Friends, we live in a world where we feel the demands of production and constant work. We live in a world where some people must work daily just to earn enough money to feed and house their families. We live in a world where guilt nibbles around the edges of our rest. And we, too often, give in to these ideas and participate as if we have no other choice.

But, “when we cease our daily labor, other things - love, friendship, prayer, touch, singing, rest - can be born in the space created by our rest” (Muller, 30).

And yet, too many of us will never - or at least rarely - discover this. Instead we are driven by production and the hope of prosperity that comes with it. We are driven by fear, fear of finding out who we are and what we are feeling when our identity is not wrapped up in our productivity. We are driven by expectation, afraid to claim the value of rest, afraid of being seen as lazy or unworthy. And, many of our neighbors are simply driven by the reality of unaffordable housing, exorbitant medical costs, rising food prices, and stagnant wages, and so there is no escape hatch for them, no way to step off the hamster wheel of work and movement and busyness.

But, what would our lives look like if we chose rest?

What would our world look like if we allowed animals, people - all people, and creation to have a regular rhythm of rest?

What would happen if we opened up space in our lives, space that is currently filled with labor and busyness...what might grow there in its place?

The speed of our lives keeps many gifts at bay. “It prevents us from tasting those things that would truly make us safe. Prayer, touch, kindness, fragrance - all those things that live in rest, and not in speed....In the stillness there are forces and voices and hands and nourishment that arise, that take our breath away, but we can never know this, *know* this, until we rest” (Muller, 53).

See, here’s the thing, while it may be hard for us to imagine setting aside our tasks, laying down our phones and computers, not checking items off our to-do lists, the commandment to practice sabbath is an invitation to joy and delight. It is an invitation to slow down, to taste and see the goodness of God, to listen and be present with each other in intentional and loving ways. It is an invitation to resist the ways of this world, the ways of earthly kingdoms that demand results and enslave us to productivity. It is an invitation to embrace the ways of God’s realm and to be present in a slower, more intentional, and life-giving environment

Friends, you are not what you do. Your value is not in what you produce. You are enough and you are even more when you choose rest. Amen.