

Breathe – May 8

Getting good rest is hard these days.

Tell me if this ever happens to you. Whenever I have time off from work, whether it's a vacation or my day off on Fridays or whatever, I find myself **struggling to rest**.

I push so hard through the week and then just sort of stumble into my time off completely exhausted and totally spent. And then I'm like, "Alright, I'm off. Rest. Rest, darn it. Come on. Relax. You don't have much time. Rest! Recover! It's almost over! Aaaand I'm back at work again."

Or, even worse, I get to my time off and think, "ah, I should just chill out. Maybe I'll just look at **TikTok** for a few minutes..." FOUR HOURS LATER I'm like, "well that didn't recharge me like I thought it would."

Maybe you relate to that. When even resting isn't restful.

The pace of this modern life can be relentless. We're exhausted, we're stressed, we're anxious... Sometimes it feels like we are **being ground into dust**.

But what if it didn't have to be that way? **What if there was another way to live?**

Well, spoiler alert: I think there is. I think there is an idea weaving throughout the whole Bible that is just begging for us to take it seriously.

The idea is called "**Sabbath**," and I believe it could be the key to us finding true *rest* in these hectic times.

SERIES INTRO

That's what we're talking about all month. The series is called "Breathe," which we named after one of our core values as a church. Here's how we define it:

Breathe

We will not be ground into dust by this life. We long to be continuously

refreshed by Jesus, to pursue what makes us healthy, and to practice the spiritual disciplines of solitude, silence, and sabbath rest.

Last week, my dad did a great job setting up the problem we are facing.

Worry
Speed
Lack of sleep
Digital sabotage

We are worried and anxious, the speed and pace of life is increasing, we don't get nearly enough sleep, and we are being sabotaged all the time by our devices and technology and social media.

No wonder we don't know how to rest! But **there is another way.**

So let's get into it. What is Sabbath? And is there really **something in this ancient book** which can free us from **all this modern chaos?**

Before we start, let's pray together.

[PRAY]

SABBATH WAY OF LIFE

Alright. Let's begin here. What does sabbath mean?

Sabbath, in its most basic form, is **a day** - the seventh day of the week - in which the Israelites (the people of God) were expected to rest. Completely.

They were not allowed to work their fields or harvest food or travel. It was a day of total rest for the people.

Jewish communities still practice Sabbath today - from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday everybody rests and sings and eats together and worships God. That's what the day is for.

But in Scripture the concept of Sabbath rest goes way beyond just a communal day off. There are **deep theological implications** of Sabbath that involve the land, justice for the poor, and the very relationship

between humanity and our Creator.

Those are the concepts I want to talk about in this series. I'll put it this way: The point here is not that we should all just have better days off once a week.

What I want us to see is that the Bible is calling us to adopt a **Sabbath way of life** that can change everything for us, especially now, in this hectic, anxious time.

DEUTERONOMY 5

Today, I want us to explore the Sabbath command itself in the law of Moses and see if we can understand the spirit behind it.

To do that, let's look at Deuteronomy 5, where the Sabbath day shows up as one of the 10 commandments.

Deuteronomy 5:12

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Some quick context. In the narrative of the Bible, the Israelites, the chosen people of God, are **enslaved by the powerful Egyptians** for hundreds of years.

There they are forced into backbreaking labor, making bricks for Pharaoh in the hot sun day after day. They are being ground into dust by their work.

But God rescues the people from slavery. He takes them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

From the very beginning it's clear God's desire is to form the Israelites into something new: into a **unique people** that can demonstrate God's intentions to the world.

A "holy nation" that can show all other nations a **new way to live**. Guided by, among other things, 10 commandments, including this one:

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but

the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.

A couple of things to point out here.

First of all, the word “Sabbath,” *shabbat* in Hebrew, literally means to *stop*. *šāḇaṭ - to stop, to put to an end*

Six other days of the week you’re in the grind, wringing profit from the earth, but on the Sabbath, you stop. You stop working and rest, whether you want to or not.

But this *stop day* - this Sabbath day - is not just for you... take a look at verse 14. **It’s for everybody**. Your children, the people who work for you. Even your livestock. *The whole community* stops working and rests.

And why is God making this demand? Well, verse 15. “Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt.” Remember: you *were* being ground into dust by work.

The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that **God has rescued you** and you are no longer in chains.

Ah, but there’s another layer to this. Because God knows what is going to happen when the Israelites set up shop in the Promised Land.

When they’ve got *their own* fields and *their own* livestock and they’re making *their own* bricks, it will be **all too easy to once more find themselves enslaved**.

Not enslaved to another nation but enslaved to the demands of work. Enslaved to the demands of profit. Driven ahead by the cruel taskmasters of hunger and survival.

They may be free people now, but they can still find themselves in chains, being ground into dust by this life.

It's part of the human condition. Everybody struggles with this. But if the Israelites are to be **a people set apart**, an example of God's intentions for the world, then they must live another way.

And so, Sabbath. A day to *stop* the grind completely. A day where work is not an option. Where there is no profit to be had. A day of trust that God is going to meet your needs.

You can see this is way more than a day off to recharge your batteries. **The Sabbath is a protest against the forces of this world that would keep the people in chains.**

“Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt...”

“Work, profit, survival... they are not your masters anymore.”

A MATTER OF TRUST

So that's the Sabbath day put very simply. But frankly that's just **the tip of the iceberg** about how Sabbath rest plays out in Scripture. We'll get into more of that in the weeks to come.

But for now, let's ask this: what are we supposed to do with this today? Are we supposed to start practicing the Sabbath day like the law of Moses commands?

Well, first of all, I don't think we can. Not literally. The Sabbath day **requires the entire community** to be bought in.

Sure, maybe we could all agree on a common day off where we all relax and none of us open up our email. But Sabbath is for everyone. Look at verse 14 again.

What about the people who work for us? I don't just mean our employees if we have them. What about the **garment manufacturers** in Bangladesh? Or the coal miners who provide our electricity. Do they get to rest?

What about our **sons and daughters**? If your kids live in another state, are they supposed to join in?

How about the **livestock**? Do the dairy cows get a day off? Do the sheep who provide the wool for your suit coat get to rest?

You can see - we are not subsistence farmers in ancient Israel. Our community is global.

So what do we do? We follow the other 10 commandments, don't we? Don't murder. Don't commit adultery... But what about this one?

Well here's where I think **Jesus** comes in. Jesus, who took the law of Moses, and expanded it into a whole new way to live.

"The law says don't murder? I say don't even hate someone."

"The law says don't commit adultery? I say don't even look at someone with lust in your heart."

"The law says to observe the Sabbath..."

But what did Jesus say about the Sabbath? Well, we talked about it last week...

Matthew 6:24-25

"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life."

You see, I believe Jesus is not inviting us to practice a *day* of Sabbath rest. He is inviting us **to turn Sabbath rest into our lifestyle.**

To be the kind of people who live free of the shackles of work. Who are no longer enslaved by profit or survival. Who are free from the taskmasters of our time that seek to grind us into dust with worry, stress, and anxiety.

We are called to be the kind of people who carry on the mission of Israel: to show the world that there is another way to live...

Jesus is inviting us into a Sabbath way of life.

“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life.” You can be free.

NEXT STEPS

There’s lots more to unpack here over the next few weeks, but for today, what are we supposed to do with all this?

Well, I think it’s important to start with **some self-evaluation**. To look at our own lives and understand what a Sabbath way of life might look like for us.

I’ve got three encouragements for you. Three ideas for you to think about and pray about this week. We’ll start with this:

Know your enemy.

A big part of understanding the biblical call to a Sabbath way of life is understanding the forces that are seeking to rob us of it.

What is it that is grinding you into the dust? What “work” is trying master you? What are you enslaved to?

For the Israelites, and maybe for some of you, work was a matter of **survival**. “If I don’t put in the hours, if I don’t till my fields, I’m not gonna eat.”

Or maybe your **job** puts relentless pressure on you to keep pushing, to keep working overtime, to keep getting promotions, because if you don’t you might not have a job.

Or maybe you’re driven by **greed**. Always hustling for another buck...

So every day you grind and grind and it never seems to let up. Is work your enemy?

Or maybe it’s something else. Maybe it’s **social media**, or TikTok, or YouTube, or the bottomless pit of scrolling and scrolling and scrolling

that never lets up. Is the algorithm your slave master keeping you oppressed by anxiety?

Maybe it's the constant demands of your **reputation**. You've got to work tirelessly to keep up your image.

Maybe it's your **kids**. If you don't make sure they are in every program and travel team and extracurricular activity they're going to fall behind and everyone's going to think you're a bad parent.

What is it that is grinding you into dust? **Know your enemy.**

Because when God says he wants you to experience *rest*, this is what he's talking about. Sabbath is a protest against these forces that want to keep you in chains.

So first, if you want to experience Sabbath, you have to know what you're up against. Second, you've got to

Trust in God.

If you think about what Sabbath meant for the early Israelites, you can see why this was an extreme demand. Maybe the hardest of all the commandments to keep.

Because if you're a **subsistence farmer** and you depend on your crops to survive, then you've *got* to work the fields.

If you're going to give up one out of every seven work days to Sabbath, then it requires a massive amount of trust that God will come through for you.

That he'll keep the weeds at bay. That he'll maximize your yields. That he'll keep the raccoons out of the corn while you rest. (And yes, I know that neither raccoons nor corn were native to Israel, but you get the point)

This is the big idea for the whole series:

Sabbath is a matter of trust.

Sabbath means trusting that when you say “no” to the demands of this world, when you stop letting your enemy wrap you in chains - even just for a day - even just for a moment - **that God is going to bless you** for doing it. He’s going to come through for you.

Maybe for you this *does* mean **protecting a day** every week where you don’t work at all. Turning work notifications off on your phone and trusting that God will make you even more productive the rest of the week.

Maybe it means **saying ‘no’ to that promotion** that’s going to demand even more of you. Saying ‘no’ and trusting that God is going to stretch the money you already make. That takes a lot of trust!

Maybe it means **coming to the Care Center** for food to take some of the pressure off, and trusting that you won’t experience shame by asking God’s people for help. Maybe that’s how God gives you rest.

Or if your enemy is social media or TikTok, maybe Sabbath is **protecting an hour** every day when you don’t even touch your phone and trusting that God will bless that time to help you unclutter your mind.

If you’re enslaved to online shopping, maybe Sabbath is taking a month off from buying new stuff and trusting that God will help you be satisfied with what you already have.

Or maybe Sabbath means giving your kids **a summer to be bored** and trusting that God will still help them get into a great college.

You get the idea.

A Sabbath way of life requires trust.

So, know your enemy, trust in God, and finally,

Settle in.

In Deuteronomy 5, the word “rest” in Hebrew is

nuaḥ - to settle in, rest, wait

It’s not so much taking a nap as it is **settling in to a space of comfort and refreshment** (maybe that *is* taking a nap for you). I think of *nuaḥ* as settling in on the couch to read a great book or having a seat next to a bonfire.

The rest and refreshment you experience in that space is **not yours to generate**. You don’t make yourself rest. You make *room* for rest to happen.

Remember I was joking at the beginning about trying to force myself to rest on my days off? “Come on, rest, darn it!”

That’s not our job. Our job is **to create space for God to move** - to stop the grind regularly - to settle in to his presence, and letting him refresh us. That is a Sabbath way of life.

Jesus himself said it perfectly:

Matthew 11:28

Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

A Sabbath kind of life is one where we go to Jesus. We silence the demands of our enemy even for a moment. We stop. We *shabbat*. And we settle in...

That’s when we find **rest for our souls**.

SABBATICAL

[describe sabbatical, need for it, my plans to put these concepts into practice...]

[conclusion]

[PRAY]