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A Slower Pace



QUESTION 1:

What's your favorite way to spend a day off?

THE POINT

Rest is a gift from God.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The American economy is built on productivity. The American mindset has embraced that same idea, and it feeds into virtually every part of our lives. We all surely know people who say, with a sense of pride in their voices, “I am so busy.”

With this mindset, we often believe our productivity determines our worth and value. I’m busy. I’m doing something important. That means I am important. If that is true, then the busier we are, the more important we are.

If we’re not careful, we can find ourselves cutting corners, neglecting our families, and putting off things that are actually more important. However, productivity is not tied to the number of things we do, but the way we use our time. God has given us a gift toward that end called rest. On the surface, it may seem that a life of simplicity that includes meaningful times of rest might eat into our productivity, but that’s not the case at all. We need to recapture the importance of the habit of rest as a time of refreshment and restoration.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

EXODUS 20:8-11

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: ⁹ You are to labor six days and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates. ¹¹ For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

The principle of a Sabbath rest is as old as creation. Genesis 1 describes God's work of creation in six days. "On the seventh day God had completed his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all his work of creation" (Gen. 2:2-3). Now, in Exodus 20, God included this principle in the Ten Commandments, His timeless moral law. The timeless principle is that all people should set aside this time to rest and refresh themselves.

This command is counter-cultural; it is markedly different from how we live today. Despite culture's opinion, God's commands are designed for our benefit, and obedience to a Sabbath rest benefits us greatly.

I learned this the hard way. When I completed my seminary training, I met with a council of professors. Their duty was to strengthen and prepare me for ministry and expose any weaknesses that could potentially cause me harm. In one meeting, one professor told me, "Noe, this is a marathon, not a race. If you keep going at this pace, you will burn yourself out of ministry." He was right. My workaholic personality has caused problems in my relationships, brought strain to my health, and produced ministry burnout. Why did this happen? I didn't like to stop and rest. This may sound absolutely ridiculous, but I loathe resting! However, I have discovered so many benefits to the Sabbath rest.

QUESTION 2:

Why do we often struggle to slow down and take a break?

- ▶ **Physical rest.** I have a 1984 El Camino that I love to drive as a weekend car. If I drive this old truck too long without stopping, the engine overheats. We are wired much like that 1984 El Camino: if we fail to stop on a regular basis, we will “overheat.” We will exhaust ourselves. God didn’t create our bodies to run without rest. He created the Sabbath for physical rest.
- ▶ **Spiritual Refreshment.** One of the most dangerous things we can do is try to be self-sufficient. Our spiritual life is not to be our “backup” for those times we don’t feel sufficient to carry out the everyday duties of life by ourselves. No, everything should flow out of our dependency on Christ. While we are to walk with Christ daily—moment-by-moment—a Sabbath rest allows us to slow down and renew ourselves spiritually, even as we restore ourselves physically.
- ▶ **Reflection.** At our family dinner table, we implemented something we call “highs and lows.” This is a time when our children reflect on their day and share one good thing and one not-so-good thing that happened. It lets us as parents hear what’s on their hearts, and just as important, it allows them to reflect on their day. Times of reflection are highly beneficial for us. The Sabbath rest forces us to pause from our “busyness” and reflect on the highs and lows of life. Reflection allows us to make course corrections and realign ourselves with the will of God.



The Fourth Commandment—“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”—has two parts:

1. We remember the Sabbath day by taking a break from our normal workweek.
2. We keep it holy by using the Sabbath as a time of focused attention on our lives in Christ.

Unfortunately, too many people ignore one or both parts of this command, but when we observe both, rest—true rest—is taking place.

EXODUS 31:12-14

¹² The LORD said to Moses: ¹³ “Tell the Israelites: You must observe my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, so that you will know that I am the LORD who consecrates you. ¹⁴ Observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Whoever profanes it must be put to death. If anyone does work on it, that person must be cut off from his people.”

God had spoken of the Sabbath rest in Genesis 2 and Exodus 20, and He came back to it again as He revealed the law to Moses. For several chapters in Exodus, God explained the design and plan for the tabernacle—the central place of worship for the Israelite community—and now He brought the subject back to the Sabbath.

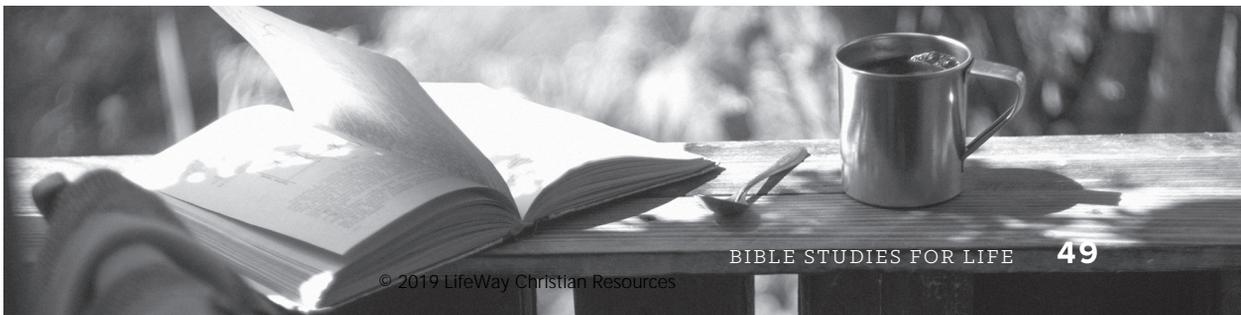
Notice that whenever God spoke of the Sabbath, He always emphasized consecration and holiness. When God consecrates something, He sets it apart. To be consecrated is to be holy, set apart from everything else. The temple was holy, set apart exclusively for the worship of Yahweh God, and the Sabbath was set apart from the other days of the week. The tabernacle was a place set apart for worship, and the Sabbath was a day set apart for rest and worship. The two went hand-in-hand.

QUESTION 3:

What does it mean to keep a day “holy”?

The Sabbath rest was obviously an important command for God’s people, but not everyone sees the importance of the Sabbath rest. As mentioned earlier, the command to observe a Sabbath rest is counter-cultural. Even today, the world tells us to go, go, go; however, God calls us to go against that natural pull and take time to simply rest. When the Israelites chose to obey God in this matter, it reflected that they belonged to God. We also are called to be holy. In Christ, we are to be set apart—to live for God in a way that is a far cry from the way the world expects us to live. That holiness is reflected in our desire to keep a Sabbath rest that lends itself to worship, rest, and reflection.

The timeless truths of the Ten Commandments and the principle of a Sabbath rest still stand. We now celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every week by joining together with other believers to worship Him at our local churches. This is a shining sign to the world that we have been saved by Jesus who has sanctified us and set us apart!



EXODUS 31:15-17

¹⁵ “Work may be done for six days, but on the seventh day there must be a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD. Anyone who does work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. ¹⁶ The Israelites must observe the Sabbath, celebrating it throughout their generations as a permanent covenant. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the Israelites, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”

The Sabbath was a covenant between God and His people, and even today, our practice of a Sabbath rest reflects our covenant relationship through Christ.

QUESTION 4:

How does a Sabbath rest impact our relationship with God?

Being a parent has helped me understand the covenant relationship. I am blessed to have four energetic children with wonderful personalities. We set boundaries for our children. We are in charge, knowing what is best for them at their young ages, and we expect them to abide by our rules. Of course, we extend plenty of grace, but our “covenant” with our kids is a promise of love and boundaries. Similarly, in God’s covenant with His people, He knows best how to guide and protect His people. He has provided boundaries and guidelines for them called commandments and laws. Consequences would follow when His people failed to live by His guidelines and laws.

God also set boundaries for our covenant relationship with Him through Christ, and those boundaries protect and guide us. Those boundaries are for our good and for His glory. Even as we are thankful for the grace of God, we should never lose sight of the consequences that result from disobedience. The remedy for this is to repent of our wrong, turn back to God, and resume the holy life He calls us to live. An important part of that is observing the Sabbath rest.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another reinforce the importance of rest in our lives?

THE GIFT OF REST

Choose the words below that best describe how you view rest or Sabbath.
Then write a prayer thanking God for the gift of rest.

Optional	Necessary	Difficult	Unproductive
Productive	Renewing	Witness	Relaxing
Reflective	Requirement	Old Testament	New Testament
Gift	Law	Other: _____	

My Prayer:

“God, you have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.”

AUGUSTINE

