

Practicing the Way: Sabbath

Week 2: Stop

- Begin in Prayer (5 Minutes)
- Read: *Genesis 2:1-3; John 10:10; Colossians 3:12-17; Galatians 5:22-23*
- Leader Overview:

Note: Messages can be (re)watched shortly after Sunday gatherings on our YouTube [Page](#)

Last week, we began with a question: What if God is inviting us to do *less* in 2023? It's a counterintuitive question, to say the least. In our always on, always busy, life hacking, productivity-obsessed, consumeristic culture, such a question can be difficult to even consider. But consider it we must if we are going to give the practice of Sabbath a fair hearing. Sabbath, you may remember, refers to a twenty-four hour period of time each week that is marked by four rhythms: stop, rest, delight, and worship. Each week of this series we will be examining one of the core movements of Sabbath and inviting you to try it out for yourself. On the agenda this week is the first word: Stop.

For most of us, the idea of stopping for 24 hours is, well, uncomfortable. We spend our days (and thus our lives) on the go. We have become accustomed to living lives that are *full-work*, errands, chores, shopping, kids activities, sports, homework, news, social media, binge watching, etc.—but not necessarily *fulfilling*. In fact, the only time most of us really ever stop is to sleep, but we rarely get enough—we are simply too exhausted, too burned out, too stressed out for that. There is a certain irony worth appreciating here. Even though most of us would admit that our pace of life does not lead to fullness of life (and we likely wouldn't commend it to others as a model of human flourishing), we still find the prospect of stopping to be all but impossible in *our* situation. Even though God Himself is inviting us to do this, we don't believe we can. And, if we are honest, even if we could stop, we aren't sure we want to. This is why the practice of Sabbath is so challenging, and perhaps threatening, to us. Choosing to stop for twenty-four hours will likely bring us face to face with two areas of our lives that make us uncomfortable: our identity and our idolatry.

At Seven Marks we take identity very seriously. That's why the first mark of a disciple is they are learning to find their identity in Christ. When you and I come into relationship with God in and through Jesus we receive a new identity. What is true of Him becomes true of us. Our lives, through the work of the Spirit, are meant to be an increasingly accurate picture of this inner transformation (see, for example, Col. 3:12-17). All of that is to say that nothing about life in the modern world will help us here. We live in a world where identity is earned, produced, merited, purchased, and performed. This is precisely why it's so hard for many of us to stop. We don't know who we are if we stop (and we are afraid to find out). But there is a reason we are called human beings and not

human doings. We are not machines. We are image bearers of the God who made us, knows us, and loves us—regardless of what we do, earn or accomplish with our days. The beauty of this profound truth—that we are loved by God regardless of what we do—cannot change us in the abstract. It is not enough to simply believe it despite the way we live. We must learn to know it by how we live; it must be experienced in practice. This is why we stop.

Of course, it must also be mentioned that when we stop, we will also have to confront our idols. The unfortunate truth is that many of us don't derive our primary identity from our status in Christ, but rather from all of the things we feel we cannot stop doing. Working, performing, earning, producing, buying, selling, etc. are not just the things that we do, they are things which do something to us. Many of us will discover, when we finally stop, that our idols have a much tighter grip on our hearts than we ever realized and they don't let go as easily as we wish. But don't worry, because Sabbath comes every week. And slowly, but surely, practicing the Sabbath can reorder and rewire our hearts. Lynne Baab sums it up nicely: *"Keeping a Sabbath week after week and year after year inscribes on our hearts that we are finite creatures of an infinite God and that the universe, our work, our families, everything we feel responsible for, belongs to God. God is God and we are not. We desperately need to know this truth deep inside our hearts, and the Sabbath helps to put it there."*

- **Questions for Discussion (20-30 Minutes)**

1. What grabbed your attention/heart/mind from the weekend talk or leader's summary?
2. Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Discuss the following as a group:
 - What does it mean to have life to the full? Is it possible, or even likely, in our modern western context?
 - In what ways does the enemy try to steal, kill, and destroy fullness of life in our modern western context?
3. The first movement of Sabbath is to stop. What are the potential obstacles and anxieties you expect to encounter if you decide to stop for twenty-four hours once a week? (Ex. Work, season of life, young kids, boredom, etc.)
 - Bonus Question – Below, we recommend three things to stop during Sabbath: Work, buying/selling, and social media/digital technology. Time permitting, you may want to discuss what kinds of things you will stop doing to honor the Sabbath.
4. (Re)Read Colossians 3:12-17 and Galatians 5:22-23. As Pastor Paul said on Sunday, both of those passages are about the kind of person God wants us to become, yet neither of these passages speak to the kinds of things we normally use to define our lives and fill our days (e.g. work, possessions,

accomplishments, money, status, neighborhood, etc.). Do you think practicing Sabbath could help you grow in your identity in Christ? If so, how? If not, why not?

5. On Sunday, we said that practicing Sabbath is not only for identity formation, but also idolatry confrontation. If you decided to practice Sabbath, what kinds of idols do you expect you may have to confront along the way?

- **This Week's Practices**

Sabbath as an idea sounds beautiful, but it will never make a difference in our lives unless it becomes a regular, rhythmic part of our lives. That's where practice comes in. For this week, we are simply asking that you begin, however clunky and uncomfortable it may be, to practice a Sabbath. To that end, here are a few ideas for getting started:

1 – Pick a Day/Time to Sabbath

Practicing Sabbath always begins by deciding when you will stop. There are three basic options here:

- Sunday – This option will be optimal for most as Sunday is already a day off from work and it is the day when our church family gathers for corporate worship.
- Traditional – Some, in keeping with the traditional practice from the Jewish people, may choose to honor the Sabbath from Friday night to Saturday night.
- Midweek – For those with a non-traditional work schedule, something midweek may be the path of least resistance.

NOTE: If an entire day is too much for you, that's fine. Start where you are. We recommend you set aside at least 3-4 hours to start, perhaps after church on Sunday or on a weekend night. Start small and start where you are.

2 – Pick a Beginning and Ending Ritual

In a traditional Sabbath ceremony, called the *Kiddush*, you begin by lighting candles, praying, and eating a Sabbath meal with your family and community. And you end by praying and sharing the highlight of your Sabbath.

You can do exactly that, or you can let Sunday worship with your church mark the start, or you can get creative—start with a picnic, bonfire, or hot bath. Let your imagination guide you.

3 – Pick a few things to *stop* doing

Sabbath is not just about stopping, as we will see in coming weeks, but we can't enter into all of the good things that God has for us until we learn to stop. Below are a few suggestions. As you read and consider them, please keep the heart of Sabbath in mind. Nothing here is meant to be a 'to-do' list or legalistic.

- Stop Work – In our 24/7, always on, workaholic culture of productivity, technique, and efficiency, a major blessing of Sabbath is that we simply say 'no' to all of that for 24 hours. In her excellent book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Marva Dawn writes, "*To cease working on the Sabbath means to quit laboring at anything that is work. Activity that is enjoyable and freeing and not undertaken for the purpose of accomplishment qualifies as acceptable for Sabbath time.*" Stopping work for one day every week forces us to rely on God for our future. On the Sabbath, we do nothing to create our own way. We abstain from work, from our need to produce and accomplish, from all the anxieties about how we can be successful in all that we have to do to get ahead. The result is that we can let God be God in our lives.
- Stop Buying and/or Selling – In our consumeristic culture, one of the most important ways that we resist the spirit of the age is by practicing Sabbath. For a pre-determined period of time, we cease the kinds of identity-warping economic activity that would have us believe, "I shop therefore I am" or "I am what I own" or even "I can buy my way to fullness of life."
- Stop Social Media/Digital Technology – While these things can be forces for great good in our lives, they often are not. Instead, they are often a primary source of anxiety, stress, anger and envy. Sabbath is an amazing opportunity to hit the reset button, to shut off the noise from the world around us, and to recalibrate our hearts for life with God. Consider powering off your phone for Sabbath or at least putting it on "Do Not Disturb" mode so that you won't be bombarded or tempted by constant notifications and interruptions.
- Close in Prayer (5-10 Minutes)