

Story of creation

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Day 6

Day 7

Why did God have a rest?

Do you like resting? What is good about having a rest?

Where do you like to go to have a rest and relax?



Draw a picture of something you enjoy when you are relaxing. Or somewhere you like to go on holiday.

What sort of restrictions did you live with when you were growing up?



When I was a kid, my parents would occasionally go to the supermarket after church on a Sunday. This doesn't seem like a big deal nowadays back twenty years ago it was something they felt bad doing. Some of you may remember when the shops were still closed on Sundays. Many of you will resonate with that sense of "not being allowed to go certain places" or "not being allowed to do certain things" on Sundays, and I know for my parents there remained a residual reticence to go to the supermarket that was communicated to me as a child.

Somehow though, the concept of Sabbath has become diluted. The best we can manage is coming to church on Sundays (mostly). There are often parties, sports games, shopping, preparations for the week to come that happen on a day traditionally marked for stopping, disconnecting, resting and catching your breath. How have we lost this appreciation for the value of the Sabbath? This is coupled with a relentless agenda of busyness – I know I am as much a part of this culture as the next person.



Cease, pause, desist, stop, rest

When we talk about Sabbath we are referring to a word that means to cease, desist, pause, rest, stop. This is extraordinarily difficult to do unintentionally and even more so in the rhythms of connectedness that we are bound up in.

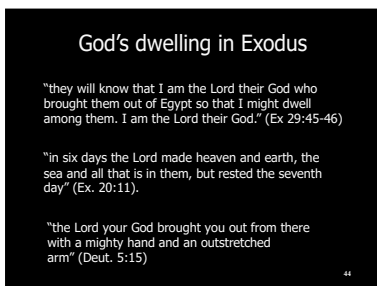
My readings this morning I think offer a perspective on the Sabbath that could help to expand our vision of it from a rule of time-keeping and being organised enough

to take a break, to a prophetically cosmic activity that foreshadows God's beautiful intention for all of creation. And so along with words like cease, desist, pause, rest and stop, I want to add one more word: DWELL.



The thing I like about the word dwell is it incorporates a sense of location as well as a sense of time. We are a space/time creation. We inhabit physical and temporal dimensions and this was how we were created.

Beginning in creation, God's desire has been for his creation to dwell in relationship with one another and with God. Adam and Eve dwelt in the Garden of Eden where God was also present. The building of the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and ultimately the temple were expressions of God breaking into our world and being present among his people.

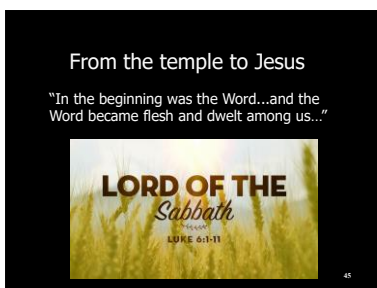


As God gave instructions for his tabernacle to be constructed and priests to be consecrated, he declared that "they will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God." God chose his people, Israel to live in his presence, giving them laws and a way of life that would demonstrate to the world what a life in relationship with God looked like. Among these laws were commandments regarding keeping the sabbath. The two sabbath commands give different reasons for keeping the sabbath. In the Exodus version, the sabbath is commanded because *"in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day"* (Ex.

20:11). In the second version, God wants the Israelites to remember that they were slaves in Egypt and *"the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm"* (Deut. 5:15).

These two commands reflect the two central acts of God in human history: God as Creator and God as Redeemer. Practicing a Sabbath is a discipline that allows us to dwell in creation with God's presence, and to be free to dwell with God.

The Old Testament prophets also proclaimed what it would be like to have God's chosen One, the Messiah dwell and rule over them. We read these portions of scripture in the season just passed – Isaiah 9 describes it in those famous words "For to us a child is born, to us a son is give, and the government will be on his shoulders and he will be called wonderful counsellor, mighty God, Everlasting Father, prince of peace."



But even the prophets couldn't find words to adequately express what happened next. John's Gospel echoes those first activities of creation...In the beginning was the Word...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ, God's own Son, truly God, the Word of life and salvation, was born as a human, lived a life of humility and died a death of humiliation. God's desire to be fully present to his creation, to dwell among them became even clearer in the person of Jesus. No longer was God's presence mediated by one meeting place – the temple, but Jesus offered a radically new way to approach God. Prayer was an intimate conversation. Sinners and saints, ordinary people and those on the fringes were all accepted by Jesus and offered restoration, healing and redemption, hallmarks of Sabbath. Jesus' own approach to the Sabbath meant that he saw beyond the legalistic demands of setting aside a day of not working to the real purpose of the Sabbath – a glimpse

into the coming kingdom of God that would look like Jesus' famous proclamation of Luke 4.

Tom Wright: Space, Time and History

Jesus' opening announcement about the kingdom of God was that 'the time was fulfilled'. His opening sermon in Nazareth, in Luke 4, declares the Jubilee, the seventh seven, the great Year of Release. The point is, as Jesus knew very well, that to the Jew the Sabbath was the moment when, every week, the Age to Come would appear in advance in the midst of the Present Age. Thus, even in the ongoing world of sin and death, one might live for a day in the promised New Age of blessing, healing and forgiveness.

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Tom Wright puts it like this:

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Jesus' dwelling on earth among his creation demonstrated another significant Sabbath principle. When we rest on the Sabbath we are acknowledging the outrageous gift of grace that we receive from God. We cannot earn our righteousness by good works, we cannot sweat our way to salvation. Jesus' love, mercy and grace, is offered to everyone regardless of status, saintliness or history. Sabbath is about stopping and dwelling together, celebrating God's love and celebrating one another.

The discipline of dwelling in God's presence is grown through Sabbath keeping but ultimately as we look towards a future time when God will be fully and gloriously indwelling his creation, we are called to be sabbath people in all of our lives. Setting aside time and space to remember and celebrate God's activity of creation and redemption helps to calibrate us towards living in that spirit at all times.

Ephesians 2:21-22

"In him (Jesus) the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God."

Setting aside time and space to remember and celebrate God's activity of creation and redemption helps to calibrate us towards living in that spirit at all times. Paul's letter to the Ephesian church exhorts us that we, the church, are the dwelling places of God's spirit and God's way of peace and hope and joy and power.

Paul's letter to the Ephesian church exhorts us that We, the church, are the dwelling places of God's spirit and God's way of peace and hope and joy and power. We carry the spirit of the Sabbath with us – in space and in time. From God being present, dwelling, in the tabernacle and the temple, to God being present in Jesus, dwelling in person on earth, to God choosing us to being a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit within us, the fulfillment of God's plan to be fully present on earth as in heaven is something we can participate in even as it is still to come into fruition.

What practices help you experience **God as Creator**? Perhaps walking, hiking, biking, gardening, painting, or reading poetry?

What practices help you experience the **freedom God has given us in Christ**, our redemption from slavery? Turning off the computer, the phone, or the TV, putting away the calendar, turning off worry or the temptation to obsess with dissatisfactory issues in our lives?

As I close let's return to Exodus. Sabbath helps us to remember and celebrate God as creator and God as redeemer and saviour. A helpful reflection for sabbath practice begins here. What practices help you experience God as Creator? Perhaps walking, hiking, biking, gardening, painting, or reading poetry? What practices help you experience the freedom God has given us in Christ, our redemption from slavery? Turning off the computer, the phone, or the TV, putting away the calendar, turning off worry or the temptation to obsess with dissatisfactory issues in our lives?