

The 4th Command: Breathe!

Exodus 20:8-11

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Are you ready for a convicting message? I have one, at least if you are at all wired like I am. Does it seem to you like there are just not enough hours in the day? Not enough days in the week? Does it feel like Monday is every other day? Do you often feel like you're about to lose it? Does everything feel chaotic?

Are you a driven individual? Performance is really important. It was important in the home you grew up in. Your school or job requires you to run at high rpms all the time. You have goals. Life goals. Family goals. Daily and weekly goals. Things you want accomplish. Things you *have* to accomplish because your whole identity depends on it. It's 24/7, go, go, go all the time.

But quietly inside you are totally stressed out. Maybe you don't sleep well. You are easily irritated. Impatient. You have no time for relationships. Life feels out of control. That's where the 4th commandment comes in.

It also has something to say to the other end of the spectrum. Your life is largely lounging and leisure. You may have a job and all but you are happiest on the couch. You play at your work and work at your play. An assessment of your time would say that your best friend in the world is your TV. Nights are frittered away on less than noble pursuits. Facebook gobbles your time or maybe a mindless hobby. I was on a Florida beach once and there were elderly people all over sifting through the sand. I asked one of them, "What are you looking for?"

He said, "Shark teeth."

I asked him, "What do you do when you find them?"

His reply was classic. "Nothin'."

Your life is like searching for shark teeth. You have something to do but nothing of lasting value. This message has something for you too.

All of this comes from the 4th commandment. Last week we did an exposition and explanation of the command without much application. This weekend is the application. Let me read the command again,

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:8-11 ESV)

Just to quickly review, the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. Jesus established a New Covenant through his cross and salvation by faith in him. He is our Sabbath sign and will be eternally. The Sabbath sign of the old covenant no longer applies. Saturday isn't our Sabbath and Sunday isn't required either. However, the creation rhythm of God in creation does still apply. Just like God builds sleep into our daily routine, he built Sabbath into our weekly rhythm. It was a gift from him, like a good night of sleep is to us. This week, how do we obey the 4th command?

The 4th Command and New Covenant Christians

Work is sacred and good

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor." (Exodus 20:8)

People tend to focus on the question of the Sabbath-keeping portion and miss the very direct command that humans are to work. God made us to work from the beginning.

"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:28)

This is called the *Creation Mandate*. Note that this command to work and exercise dominion over the earth is *before* the Fall. Many Christians think work is part of the curse. Difficulty in work is, but not work itself. It is part of God's good creation.

God worked. Work must be holy. Indeed. We are made in the image of a working God. We are not made for unending leisure. This is something to keep in mind in a culture that worships weekends and retirement with the goal to retire early. The Bible has a lot to say about work and a good work ethic.

"For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10)

This isn't the unemployed person working hard to get a job; this is the freeloader—the mooch—the person who is not adding anything to society or providing for anybody by their daily labors. Paul writes elsewhere that if a man doesn't provide for his family, he is worse than an unbeliever. Why? God built work and a daily wage into the fabric of human society.

The wisdom literature, especially Proverbs, decries the slothful individual. It describes him this way, *"As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed."* (Proverbs 26:14) He doesn't sow in spring and is surprised not to have crops at harvest. His home, his yard, his things are neglected and in disarray. Proverbs praises the diligent man who prizes his possessions and works hard for his harvest. Why? Work is holy and sacred. *"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men."* (Colossians 3:23)

These and many other passages call us out of a natural laziness and love of ease and comfort. They remind us that we are made to work. Work is good and holy. Christians should be the best employees. Remember that as you head to work on Monday. Six days you shall work.

For most of us though, our issue isn't having nothing to do. It is our obsessive compulsion to do more and more and more. They're often things that add little value to life; trivial things. Then we are often not busy with the things that are most important. Instead we busy ourselves with the "nothings" while ignoring the big "somethings." We are busy for the sake of being busy. God is often pushed out to the margins in our time and thoughts. Sundays or Sabbath days are catch up days for business or school. We go to church and check it off the list. On to the things that are really on my mind! Whatever free moments we might have, they seem to disappear into our games, social media, and TV. We think deeply about shallow things and think shallowly about deep things. We are addicted to busyness. Why?

"The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves and, we imagine, to others. To be unavailable to our friends and family, to be unable to find time for the sunset (or even to know that the sun has set at all), to whiz through our obligations without time for a single mindful breath, this has become the model of a successful life." (Wayne Muller, as quoted by Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, p. 15)

What is the number one thing people say when you ask how they are doing, other than "Good" or "Great"? *Busy. Crazy busy! It's crazy. It's like, amazing, crazy busy.* That statement kind of gives off a vibe like, *I don't have time to be talking to you*, doesn't it? Do we ever ask, why am I so busy?

More

One reason for our busyness could possibly be greed and bowing at the altar of materialism. If I work a little more, make a little more, work the margins just a little more, then I'll be happy. There certainly is that.

Me

I think behind most of our busyness is just plain old pride. 24/7 activity creates a kind of image for us. It puffs us up. As long I am busy, I must be somebody important. As long as I feel the rush of hurriedness, what I'm doing must be important. As long as my Christmas card is impressive with accomplishment and my calendar looks like the South Shore train schedule, my life must be important which means that I am important. All of this is to protect my fragile ego. My friend Mike Wittig found this quote, "Busyness serves as a kind of...hedge against emptiness." (Tim Kreider, "The 'Busy' Trap," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2012)

Sabbath as Creation Rhythm

This brings us back to the 4th commandment. While the God/Israel covenantal aspects no longer apply in the New Covenant of Jesus, God appeals to his own creation rhythm of six and one as the model for Israel. If God thought this was important for him and for Israel, why should we not see it as important for us as well?

Who here wouldn't love to have a day just to breathe? I entitled this message, *Breathe*. To breathe is to catch our breath spiritually and relationally from the craziness of our week. We need a day to exhale; a day to refresh. Would we not be healthier in the other six days if we took one day to breathe?

While there are some who need to get to work, for most of us we desperately need a break from it. Our souls are shriveled. Our relationships are frayed. We feel empty inside because we are literally running on fumes all the time.

I think it's striking to read the gospels and see that Jesus never seemed to be in a hurry. You may say, *but I have more important things to do than Jesus*. You can say that, but Jesus had huge crowds to teach and heal, enemies scheming to kill him, disciples to prepare for gospel mission, and redemption to accomplish for his people, the church. Whatever we are doing, it's not as demanding as what Jesus did. Yet, he never seemed hurried or too busy.

To this God says, *I worked six days and rested on the seventh. I Sabbath and I'm God. You should too.* **I am encouraging all of us to follow the pattern of a working and resting God—a six and one creation rhythm—that works to the glory of God six days and Sabbaths on one to the glory of God.** What should a weekly Sabbath Day look like?

A Sabbath Day

A Day of Different

Sabbath isn't two hours at church. It isn't listening to a sermon online. It is a day to breathe. A day that is different than the other six. Different doesn't mean that instead of slaving around US Steel, I slave around the house working on the honey-do list. That's just different work, not a different day.

A Sabbath is an intentional day of breaking the grinding and exhausting routine of the other six days. What is that day for you? Do you have one or are they all the same?

Do you see how having a day set apart minimizes the idols of *more* and *me*? By not working a day I am saying, God, your provision meets my needs. By not working a day, I'm acknowledging the world can get along just fine without me. Could I make more money working on a Sabbath? Sure. But it's the same issue with tithing and giving. Who do I trust? When I honor God with my tithe, I believe that God can do more with 90% than I can do with 100%. Do I think God can do more with my six days than I can do with seven? This was always Israel's struggle. They wanted to cheat a little. *Let's just do a little business on the Sabbath. Just get ahead a little. It's only a little here and there.*

Sabbaths are about trust in God and his ability to meet my needs. Think of it as a different day; a break. For many of us, how about a day away from connection to the web, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, games, and maybe TV? It's a day to breathe. Just the thought has some of you twitchy with withdrawal. One of our pastors this week told me he and his wife looked at each other one night and there they were on the couch, alone, both consumed with their smartphones. They decided, enough is enough and together they closed both their Facebook and Twitter accounts. What would it take for you to have a different day?

A Day of Worship

I believe that every day is a day of worship as we do everything to the glory of God. But we don't do that corporately every day. The early church began by meeting every day but then moved to a corporate gathering for worship and preaching once a week on the Lord's Day. That doesn't mean you can't do anything else on that day; it just means that nothing else is more important on that day. Worshiping him. Serving him. Getting vertical with him in worship and prayer. A day for God.

"Freedom from secular chores secures freedom to serve the Lord on his own day. Matthew Henry says that the Sabbath was made a day of holy *rest* so that it might be a day of holy *work*....Physical recreation and family fun will not be excluded, but worship and Christian fellowship will come first." (J.I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments*, p. 67)

Worship is the priority on a Sabbath day. The New Testament urges us to make this a priority. We are not to forsake getting together (Hebrews 10:24-25). Churches are called in the Pastoral Epistles to be beehives of teaching and singing and serving and loving. This takes time and we always give time to our priorities. The Sabbath allows for it.

One of the easiest signs of spiritual illness is when people are not prioritizing the worship of God. Over and over again I hear, "Where's so and so? I haven't seen them." We begin looking and sure enough, something has gone terribly wrong spiritually or morally.

I want to urge you to simply resolve to have a weekly Sabbath day, a Lord's Day, and make God and his worship the priority in it. Once a week. Not once a month or every other week. Once a week.

Parents, the priority you make church and worship will leave a lasting impression on your children of where your priorities are really at. Model it for them. This doesn't guarantee they will embrace it, but if you model not prioritizing God one day out of seven, you'll bat a high percentage of your kids doing the same. Have a day of worship.

A Day of Renewal

Sabbath gives us time to order our inner life, which governs our priorities, passions, and purposes. When we are always on the go, our heart, soul, imagination, creativity, and the spirit grow thin. Some of you are right there this morning. Inside, you feel small. Fragile. Cold. The things of God seem distant. You're thinking now about all the things you have to get done. You're actually making a list on your sermon notes right now. Rush. Rush. Rush. That's your life. What is the remedy?

We need to breathe. We need to take time to breathe; to be fully human. This outward chaos is indicating that there is disorder inwardly. How about a Sabbath day each week? Try it. Intentionally don't do what you do during the week. *I can't get it all done then!* Does God require us to do more than six days' work? Breathe.

Breathe by doing the things that enliven you and refresh you. Resist the temptation to waste the Sabbath with something mindless. Avoid the forgettable movie. Turn off the digital distractions. Go for that walk. Read the Psalms. Reflect on the past week. Eat good food. Write an encouraging note. Serve someone else. Think about your life. Pray for your loved ones. Married couples, Sabbaths can be great days relationally and physically! Reach out to a neighbor. Whatever.

Sabbaths are about renewing us vertically with God and horizontally with each other. Sabbaths are great days for families. Great days for friends. Great days for serving each other by showing love and care. But to spiritually and relationally breathe, we have to have margin in our lives to do it. This means getting a hold of our calendars before our calendars get a hold of us. If we don't, we will spend our time on the trivial and live superficially. Sabbaths create margin for meaningful things and meaningful people.

A Day of Rejoicing

Why did God rest on the seventh day? He wasn't tired. He wasn't on vacation. John Piper makes the point that God's Sabbath was a day of exultation. Exulting in the creation he had made. Exulting in its inherent goodness and beauty. Exulting in its reflection of his divine beauty and glory.

In other words, it was a happy day. Sabbaths ought to be happy days. Not silly and phony but days of thanksgiving, gratitude, gospel reflecting, and just plain old fun.

Even John Calvin, who many strict Sabbatarians hold very highly, would preach in the morning and then play bowling type games with the children in the town square in the afternoon. Is there room on the Sabbath for good meals, recreational activities with others, and long walks? I think so. In fact, I would encourage it. Bethel, breathe! It's a commandment.

So Steve, for example, we know you like golf. Would you play golf on Sunday? Calvin played games, but he's Calvin, he can get away with it. What about you? Everyone has to do what is right to their own conscience. We are not judging each other. But to answer that personally...if I have gathered with God's people for worship, spent time in the Word and prayer, gone on a walk with my wife holding her hand, spent time tickling my daughter, and served others in some way, then if there's time to play a round of golf on Sunday, yes, and I would do it to the glory of God.

However, if I'm golfing instead of worshiping or spending money on greens' fees so that I now can't give to God, and all week my thoughts about Sunday are about golf day instead of the Lord's Day, that is something to repent of and I should not play any golf until I get my priorities right.

The legalist wants a rule. I'm not giving any rules. I'm holding out a rhythm set upon the priority of God and intended by him to keep us from busyness and laziness, and renew us with worship, service, and times of holy refreshment. *Breathe!*

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