

Windows on God Week 4 – **The delightful rediscovery of the Sabbath rest**

It's the great theologian St Augustine who famously said:

“You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

With the upcoming summer break, many of us are looking forward to some kind of holiday to pause and rest. While holidays are great to re-connect with family, friends, God, nature and ourselves, what if rest could be a more regular experience, even a daily one? I know, it seems idealistic, for the idea of finding rest in a hurried and restless Western world seems out of reach for many, including me.

Today, we are exploring the practice of a weekly *Sabbath Rest* that can transform the chronic restlessness of our condition and culture. It's a rhythm of work and rest that ultimately produces health and life. It's a window through which we see God more clearly and experience the world and our place in it more fully.



Sabbath is an entire day set aside to follow God's example to stop and delight in the world, in our lives and supremely in God himself. It is an act of worship that is not limited to prayer and Scriptures; although it certainly should include elements of that, but that embraces everything that will help you discern God's reality, his goodness and his restorative presence in your life.



Dan Allender, in his book *Sabbath* writes: “The Sabbath is an invitation to enter delight. The Sabbath, when experienced as God intended, is the best day of our lives. Without question or thought, it is the best day of the week. It is the day we anticipate on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday – and the day we remember on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Sabbath is

the holy time where we feast, play, dance, have sex, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk, and watch creation in its fullness. Few people are willing to enter the Sabbath and sanctify it, to make it holy, because a full day of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone a week.” (*Sabbath*, 4-5)

So, for you, a *Sabbath rest* might include a good meal with friends, a walk on the beach or in the forest with your partner, sitting on the patio with a good book, etc.

- What are the things you enjoy most? What are the things that bring you delight and refresh your soul?
- What would your top 5 be? (Write them down)
- How does the idea of living out what you wrote fill you with excitement?

Sabbath is best understood through the lens of the following words:

Stop: you stop working and stop worrying about working or wanting.

Rest: It's the whole of your being that needs to rest. Physically: sleep, slowing down, etc. Emotionally: relax, calm down, process your week, etc. Spiritually: rest in God's love through abiding and hearing God saying, "Do not be afraid, I have called you by name, you are mine"

Delight: you pamper your soul with activities that spark joy, wonder, gratitude, and happiness.

Worship: you grow in grateful praise and adoration, surrounding our lives one week at a time.

- Which of these four do you need most at this time?
- How could you live that for a period of 24 hours?

For some a *Sabbath Rest* might be completely new or you've been exploring it, but feels it is just out of reach. For others, you are on the journey, with ups and downs! It is important to remember that we do not "succeed" or "fail" in seeking to grow in this practice. The goal is simply to show up. So resist the temptation to say "I am bad at this," or "It is not for me."



Be patient with the practice and with yourself. It is by far one of the most counter-cultural practice of our Western hurried culture. Someone said "It's a form of spiritual warfare, a kind of assault on hell's hold over our over busy soul."

SABBATH

Here are some suggestions to grow into a *Sabbath Rest* practice:

1. Mark out in your diary a 24 hours' time period, or as close as you can get. If that is too much, start with an evening-morning or afternoon-evening.
2. Choose a day: some will find Saturday best, others will use their Sunday which includes a time of worship at a local church, others who are usually working over the weekend will find a week day better.
3. Pick a ritual to clearly mark the start and end of your *Sabbath Rest*. This might include lighting a candle, reading a Psalm, a short time of prayer and blessing (if you have a family, it is a special time to bless your children), a meal, a walk, a looking back with gratitude, etc.
4. Spend the time you have set aside to experience the four areas described here above: Stop, Rest, Delight, Worship.
5. Learn to make a distinction between recreation like entertainment, TV, social media, shopping or "going out" and restoration which are activities that deeply connect you to Jesus and his rest. Seek activities that restore your soul and your body.
6. There is no right way, so adapt your practice of the *Sabbath Rest* to whatever is restorative and restful for you in accordance with your personality, preference and stage of life. Here are some helpful questions as you discover what works for you: What is restful for me? What brings me an easy delight? What is a worshipful way I can connect to God?

Many of the above thoughts and ideas have been gleaned from "Practicing the Way" a website that helps you put into practice various Spiritual Practices. I encourage you to visit their webpage on the Sabbath for more teaching, ideas and suggestions:

<https://practictheway.org/practices/sabbath>