

The Rhythm of Rest or the Rat Race
The Fourth Commandment
Exodus 20:1-21

Did you hear about the 83-year-old man who had lived his entire life as a bachelor. One day he gathered his four nephews and announced that he was planning to be married. His nephews were in shock. One spoke up and said, "Uncle are you getting married because this woman is beautiful?"

He said, "No." Another nephew asked, "Uncle are you getting married because this woman is a great cook?" Again he said, "No."

The third nephew questioned, "Are you marrying this woman because she is rich?"

"Of course not," was his reply. The final nephew said, "Uncle if your not marrying this woman because she is beautiful, or a great cook, or because she is rich, then why are you marrying her?"

With a wink he said, "She has a valid driver's license and can drive at night!" Now there's a man who knows what he needs.

As God led the people of Israel from the harsh bondage and existence they experienced in Egypt, God knew exactly what the people needed. They needed his blueprint, his code, in order to build a godly nation with godly people. They needed more than gold. They needed a goal to strive for in their relationship with him and with each other. Every road leads nowhere when we don't know where we want to go. God was leading his people toward the promised land, but there was work to do before they got there.

It's interesting that God said more about the fourth commandment than all the other commandments combined. I get the impression that there's something of importance to this fourth commandment. The Sabbath reconnects us to two very important concepts.

First, **the seventh day of rest from the work of creation follows our Creator's design in the creation story.** The Sabbath day gives meaning to the other six days of the week. It was the Sabbath that reminded them they were God's creation, not someone else's to do with as they pleased.

The Sabbath gave them dignity. It reconnected them to the wisdom of the unspoiled beauty of the first creation. As Christians, of course, we are connected to the re-creation, the new creation, we have in Jesus Christ. We belong to him, not to Caesar or to the company store or the cellular phone.

It was the Sabbath day which allowed them to reflect and consider which god they were serving. The God of Abraham, Creator of the universe, or a god of their own making. The Sabbath reminded them whose laws they were really following.

Lloyd C. Douglas is the author of *The Robe*. In it he says:

Like a navigator needs a north star,
like a builder needs a plumb line,
like a mathematician needs a square root,
like a musician needs a fixed note,
so we who believe in a sometimes hectic
and overwhelming world need a sanctuary,
and One who is the same
yesterday, today, and forever.

One of the things I have noticed in this commandment is that everything and everybody was to rest. Gone are the labels "Master" or "servant", "slave" or "alien"-- everyone is honored. The Sabbath embraced all living things, even animals. It brought a sense of the sacred and holy to life, which can be so easily lost in our world which moves so fast and so coldly.

The Sabbath is one of the great gifts God gave to the world. The Sabbath day reminds us that the world really does belong to God. "You see the holiness of God is like a tent pole holding up everything else," says John Killinger. "True reverence is hierarchical not democratic. It descends from above."

The Sabbath day is holy because it comes from above. It reflects God's design for life and creation. The Sabbath, like the tent metaphor, covers the rest of our days with its perspective and vision for life. Jesus was always in the Temple on the Sabbath day. And the purpose of the Sabbath was for the adoration of God, for the examination of our lives, for celebration, for acknowledging that God actually wants to spend quality time with us.

The distinguished missionary Gladstone once said, "Tell me what the young men of England are doing on Sunday and I will tell you what the future of England will be." The same applies to us as well. I've heard it said that our great-grandfathers called it the holy Sabbath; our grandfathers, the Sabbath; our fathers, Sunday; but today we call it the weekend. Perhaps that explains the moral and social erosion taking place in our world.

The second important concept that we learn in this commandment is that **the sabbath was given to restore a divine rhythm to human life** that had been lost because we had become enslaved by a foreign god who had no love, honor, and compassion upon us.

Eugene Peterson reminds us that our ancestors went four hundred years without a vacation in Egypt. Never a day off. The consequences were tragic. They were no longer persons, but slaves. They were units of work, not citizens. The face of God's creation was defaced and devalued.

The Twenty-third Psalm says that He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. Those words affirm that regular rest and renewal is essential for human life.

We know that the sustained intensity of motion can burn out a motor or its moving parts. The same thing happens to the human soul. Remember the saying "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." In truth, all work and no rest makes Jack less than human.

The word Sabbath means rest or cessation of activity. What God commanded in this fourth commandment is what we all know to be true but ignore too often: a person or worker is more productive when they take regular intervals of rest and renewal. But the real purpose of the Sabbath is to remind us that there is meaning in life that goes beyond the work we do. In God, there is divine permission to cultivate and enjoy life.

We all know that computers sometimes crash. And when the computer hardware crashes the software within it is absolutely worthless. Our body is the hardware, our soul is the software. When they work together, it's great. When we exhaust our body, our soul life suffers.

A physician said to his students, "More and more we doctors prescribe long periods of rest for our patients. Most of those periods, I am convinced, are for the Sundays for which they are in arrears." Much like a checking account--if it's not replenished with resources, bankruptcy will occur.

God created us with a need for a rhythm of rest from the rugged rat race in order to drink deeply the rich cup of faith--to allow our souls to catch up with our very being. The ringing of church bells are far more important than the ringing of the cell phone. Time spent in worship provides a proper perspective for the rest of the other "time."

Chuck Swindoll reminds us that "fatigue is not next to godliness." The poet Cleland B. McAfee wrote, "There is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God. A place where sin cannot molest. Near to the heart of God."

Thanks be to God for giving us permission to spend quality time with him, to rest our soul, to refresh our body, so that we might fill our life with his truth and his joy.