

“Cultivating a Sabbath Mindset”

Series: Drawing Close to God

Scripture: Exodus 20:8-11 | The Message; Mark 2:23-28

Rev. Mary Bowman

October 12, 2025



At the top of our bulletin this morning is a wonderful quotation from the beloved rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

The quotation reads . . . “The Sabbath is the most precious present mankind has received from the treasure house of God.”

In our New Testament reading, Jesus also speaks of the Sabbath as a gift created for humanity.

And yet, when we survey the multitude of gifts bestowed by God on humankind, how many of us would consider Sabbath as THE most precious gift from God?

I think more of us might describe Sabbath as a requirement rather than a gift.

That would be true of me.

I am not sure when I was first introduced to the idea of a Sabbath, but I do remember that it was in the context of the Ten Commandments.

In my growing up, the Ten Commandments emerged as the criteria on which I could measure whether I was a good Christian or a bad Christian, whether I was doing Christianity “right” — or not.

Therefore, the Sabbath was a demand, a test, a requirement.

I wonder how you were introduced to the idea of Sabbath . . . ?

Did you also learn about Sabbath in the context of the Ten Commandments?
Or did it come to you through the eloquent description of creation in Genesis?
Or perhaps another way all together?

If you came to Sabbath from the Genesis description, you would have learned that it was the bookend to God’s six days of creation.

In Genesis, God actively creates for six days. At the end of the six days, we hear God’s declaration that all that had been created was good - in fact it was very good.

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In the Genesis description of Sabbath, it is that goodness that frames the idea of Sabbath. In the Genesis telling of the Sabbath, it is God’s generosity that yields the Sabbath . . . not that God was exhausted and needed a break, but that we did and would.

I think God took a rest so we would take a rest.
I think God was modeling for us what we would need.
God had just finished creating humankind and so had to be aware of our limitations and our needs.
It would seem that we are a species that needs rest.

Sabbath is intended to be a time of restoration, of renewal, and of refreshing.

So how did the Sabbath get to be a requirement rather than a gift?

The Ten Commandments — or really in the Hebrew language they are called the Ten Words — are a part of the Bible called the Torah.

In the Hebrew language the word Torah simply means instructions or guidance.

The Torah was given to the Israelites when they had been delivered by God from slavery.

God claimed the Israelites as God’s people and gave them the Torah as a description of how to live with God and with one another.

Everything listed in the Ten Commandments is intended for our good.
(Do you hear the echo of goodness?)

For example, absolutely nothing good comes when murder happens.
Absolutely nothing good comes when adultery happens . . . as we are acutely aware.

Our lives are better when we do not covet what we don’t have.
Our lives are better when we take time to celebrate Sabbath.

In God’s eyes, honoring the Sabbath is on par with not murdering.
Not murdering protects life.
Keeping the Sabbath protects life.

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I find it intriguing that the definition of Sabbath is similar to the words a police officer says to someone engaged in illegal activity.

The word Sabbath means to stop, to desist, to cease.

What exactly does desist mean, you might ask?

It means to refrain, to hold back, to discontinue, to suspend, to leave off, to forgo.

And this desisting is a hard for human beings to do.

I went walking with a friend this weekend and she was expressing her frustration about the pace of her life and that she had been trying to simply set aside one hour to read every day . . . just one hour of reading . . . and she hadn't been able to find the time.

In essence, she had not been able to desist from her normal routine to take the time to relax and read a book and rest.

We live in a culture that is demanding.

We live in a culture that is distracting.

We live in a culture of performance and doing.

We live in a culture where being busy is both the status quo and a badge of honor.

But our lack of rest isn't simply a result of pressures from the outside.

These outside pressures have moved inward.

The theologian Thomas Kelly tells the story of being concerned about his inability to slow down and to get beyond being busy. So he decided to leave his ministry in Pennsylvania¹ behind and move to Hawaii so he could slow down. It may not surprise you, but when he got to Hawaii he became just as busy as when he was in Michigan.

The reason — his busyness was not simply a product of pressures outside of him. His busyness was due to the pressures on the inside of him.

¹Originally cited inaccurately as Michigan

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I would suggest that the struggle with Sabbath goes deep into ourselves.
I would suggest that the challenge of Sabbath is an inner battle for where we find our identity,
where we find our worth, what we worship.

Sabbath is a battle for our identity and worth.
Are we in charge of our identity and worth or is God?
At our core, what drives us and motivates us?

Over the next several weeks, we will wrestle with why resting is so hard and what we lose when
we don't live into Sabbath as a sacred gift.

God knows the battles we have to find time to rest.
God also knows the importance of a sacred rest for all of us.
This is why Sabbath made the top ten list.

Sabbath is a tremendous gift . . . some of us have unwrapped it . . . and for some of us it is still
sitting on a shelf.
May we with God's help draw closer to God through the Sabbath gift God has given.