

WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW, VOLUME II (#WCSK2), PART X: THE SABBATH

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The series What Christians Should Know Volume II (#WCSK2) boosts your understanding and shows you how to apply Biblical principles to everyday life. All Scriptures are taken from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. Biblical references are examples and are in no way intended to be exhaustive. Many of the ideas here build upon the series [What Christians Should Know, Volume I](#) (#WCSK), which provides education on core beliefs and doctrines in the Christian faith. All of the lessons are best used as a general guide as you engage in your own Bible study.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105).

How this Biblical principle applies to your everyday life: Because the ultimate promise of God (eternal life) is a gift qualified by *time*, and the pursuit of holiness *in time* is perfectly embodied in the weekly Sabbath. The day of rest (Sunday) is less about what you do or don't do and is much more about how you fill your time with God.

Introduction

If I were to piggyback and use the lesson on sanctification to sum up this lesson in two sentences, here it is: Sanctification refers to the pursuit of holiness *in space*. The Sabbath refers to the pursuit of holiness *in time*.

Of course, one reason why Christians pursue holiness in time is because we pursue *eternal* life, not temporary life in the world. The temporary world will pass away, so we strive for THE LORD and His Word, which are endless. God rested on the Sabbath, and the Bible commands us to do the same:

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 of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays

with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the 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).

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9).

Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God (Ezekiel 20:20).

If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Practically speaking, many Christians may be aware that the Sabbath (or Sunday) is a “day of rest.” It’s a day different from the others because you get up later than normal, you typically *don’t* go to work, you *do* go to church, and the very essence of the day feels different from the rest of the week. This distinctive essence is a signal that the Sabbath is in fact intrinsically separate from the other days, and what Christians should know is that God has decreed not only that the Sabbath be distinct, but that the way we think, act, and behave on the Sabbath be distinct. From this distinction and subsequent separation results an evergreen way of thinking about God, ourselves, our neighbors, and the world. We therein carry this imagination with us into all those other “regular” days. In this frame of mind, we don’t do our regular routine Monday through Saturday and then take a break on Sunday. Rather, Sunday is when we embrace our true selves. Here, God has provided the time (by stopping labor) so that we may devote all of our hearts, all of our souls, and all of our might to THE LORD within the confines of a sacred, hallowed day. There are many other things that will compete for our time the rest of the week, but Sunday belongs to God. Exclusively focusing this day on the One who gave us days in the first place is an often overlooked and casually dismissed act of worship, reverence, and obedience to THE LORD.

In this lesson, I am strategically going to avoid speaking about the Sabbath as it pertains to the Fourth Commandment because there will be an entire lesson devoted to this in *What Christians Should Know Volume III: The Ten Commandments*. Accordingly, this lesson will assist you in the process of *formation* and how you think about the Sabbath. The lesson in Volume III will be focused on *execution* and the specific peculiarities of the Fourth Commandment. By far, of all the chapters in this book, this one will persuade you to think more than you actually do.

Furthermore, many of the concepts discussed will rely on a timeless classic, *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel. This is a text that I highly recommend and encourage everyone to read for themselves: Your walk with God and understanding of the Sabbath will forever be changed.

What is the Sabbath?¹

The Sabbath is Sunday and is a day of rest and holiness. The word for Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word *sabat*, which means seventh. Hence, the Sabbath is the seventh day and is the first thing in the history of creation that was made holy by God. Genesis 2:2-4 (ESV) says:

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Holy comes from the Hebrew word *qadas*, which means to be clean, consecrate, be hallowed, or be separate. So by hallowing the seventh day, God set the Sabbath apart from the rest. Why is this important? Because, as an ordinance for *all of creation*, God declared that the seventh day would be something unique and special. God is in a covenant with creation, and a critical component of that covenant is the Sabbath—it so critical that in the Old Testament, violation of the Sabbath carried with it the penalty of death. Because of the meaning of the word Sabbath, some insist that Saturday is the legitimate Sabbath and not Sunday. Yet, historically speaking, Christianity has celebrated Sunday as the Sabbath because it is the day that Christ rose from the dead,² and it is called the “LORD’S day.”³ It must be noted that prior to the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath was celebrated on Saturday, and then it moved to Sunday, the first day of the week, after the resurrection.

Potentially, I could divert here and discuss some of the quarrels believers have about the Sabbath, but my concern is not about the specifics of the day but rather the principle of the Sabbath. Bible scholars and theologians have many disagreements about what is proper to do and not to do on the Sabbath, yet a vast majority concur that it is certainly a time to engage in corporate worship, to reflect on God’s Word and what God has already done for us in Christ. Most theologians also agree that the Sabbath mandates stoppage of all but vitally necessary commerce or labor.⁴ Of course, stoppage does not imply total inactivity, because in Matthew 12:1-21, Mark 3:1-6 and Luke 13:10-17, we see Jesus engaging in active works of ministry and outreach on the Sabbath despite objections from religious leaders at the time.

If we look back at Genesis 2:2-4, we see that God’s special Sabbath decree carries with it a threefold mandate: to rest, to bless, and to make holy. Because this creation ordinance is located in Genesis, it applies *to everything* in existence throughout the entire Biblical narrative until the present day. Note as well that God did not consecrate a mountain. He did not sanctify a piece of land. He did not hallow an idol. The first entity

¹ See Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Isaiah 58:13-14; Matthew 12:1-14; Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-2; Revelation 1:10

² Mark 16:9

³ See Revelation 1:10

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 239.

that a holy God made holy was *a day*, a segment of time. In fact, the Sabbath is the only thing made holy in the entire order of creation. Everything that God made was either “good” or “very good” (e.g., Genesis 1:31), but the Sabbath was exclusively made *holy*.⁵ Hence, the Sabbath, which came first, is a pursuit of holiness *in time*;⁶ it is only later in the Bible—at Mount Sinai—that holiness *in people* was decreed by THE LORD: “[Y]ou shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6; c.f. Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:19, 28:9). And, if you really want to get fancy, what came third was the holiness *of space* that was decreed in the construction of the [Tabernacle](#).⁷

Of course, the Tabernacle points directly to Christ, and the mobile sanctuary was only meant to be temporary because it directs our attention to the Messiah. So, by understanding this trinity of holiness (in time, people, and space), by modern extension we appreciate the fact that holiness of space serves to do the same thing as the Tabernacle: to point us to God, who then animates our own pursuit of holiness on the Sabbath. The Sabbath, then, is the incarnation of God into time. As in the case of Jesus, His focus was to save sinners in order to bring life. The Sabbath is about giving life and nurturing life, and it is not about adding burdens to life and following rules. While legalism may define the contours of holiness, legalism divorced from God’s *hesed* or overflowing love for His creation simply misses the point. Of what value is rest or “holiness” if we despise our neighbors and project disdain against God and His creations?

Abraham Heschel writes:

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try become attuned to *holiness in time*. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.⁸

Architecture of Time

Using Heschel’s language, the Sabbath is a great cathedral of time, built within an architecture of time for a people who are largely concerned with the sanctification of time. In fact, time is the greatest challenge of humankind: The ultimate defeat is death (time is up), and the greatest victory is eternal life (time never runs out). So, no matter who you are or where you are, a cathedral of time can never be torn down, nor can spiteful outsiders ever sack it. To make that concept plain, consider when the Israelites were conquered and exiled to Babylon: They realized that they were a foreign people in a

⁵ This is an intriguing point of contemplation because according to God, there is something much more desirable than “good,” and that is holiness. We stand on earth able to be simply “good” by our own merit. God stands in heaven, being holy, something remarkably distinct and greater than “good.”

⁶ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005), 9.

⁷ See Exodus 25-40.

⁸ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 10.

foreign land with foreign customs and a foreign God. Every one of the Babylonian norms ran counter to what the Israelites stood for, and as God-worshippers in a land that was indifferent to Yahweh, they were also far, far away from their physical sanctuary: the Temple in Jerusalem. So, the Jews realized that the one thing the Babylonians could not take away from them and their communal identity was how they honored God *with time*. Hence, the Sabbath was a sanctuary of time impervious to assault and built with foundation stones that no foreign invader could ever remove. The Sabbath also became a way for a displaced community to remember weekly who they were and where they came from by participating in the ritual. If I figuratively say that nowadays, Christians are the displaced Israelites who worship God in the midst of an empire that would rather engage in recreation on Sunday, then the analogy begins to become very clear.

Time is so important because it lies at the center of our existence. At the boundaries of every person's life lie two markers of time: a date of birth and a date of death. What happens in between all occurs in time, yet modern society is largely more concerned with space and the things that occupy it. Again, Heschel writes:

In technical civilization, we expend time to gain space. To enhance power in the world of space is our main objective. Yet to have more does not mean to be more. The power we attain in the world of space terminates abruptly at the borderline of time.⁹

The promise of God to those who have faith and believe in Him is a promise qualified by time: *eternal* life. This helps to make sense of Jesus's words when He asks, what does it profit a person to gain the whole world (space) when he loses his soul to eternity (time)?¹⁰ The Bible is full of stories of people who take a wrong turn when they begin to pursue space and neglect the realm of time. This is part of the reason why idolatry is so attractive: It attempts to change something immaterial into something material in our space that can be made, contained, and carried in our pockets. Temporal things never saved anyone. This isn't a call to reject the natural world but rather to highlight the idea that while in the world, we are sincerely committed to our loving and timeless Father in heaven.

The Sabbath, a holy day, reflects the pervasive Biblical idea that no person can ever use things to overcome time. The only entity that does allow us to overcome the inescapable endpoint of our time—death—is Christ. God is the same one who reveals to us that moments mean more than schedules, stewardship means more than money, familial relationships mean more than inheritances, and the cultural legacy and history of a community mean more than national or political boundaries.

Practical Implications

With this framework in mind, it now becomes clear that in order to enter into the sanctuary of time, we have to adequately prepare ourselves and take certain measures: We don't take the baggage of the world with us into the sanctuary of time, because

⁹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 3.

¹⁰ See Mark 8:36, 16:26

material, worldly things have no place in an immaterial refuge. Consequently, we not only cease working, but we also embrace the idea that creation will continue to thrive without our efforts. For six days we work in order to produce, to provide, and to support as a means to make our journey in the realm of space more certain and comfortable. Then, on the Sabbath, we rest and acknowledge that ultimately, God is the one who provides and supports us. What this means, practically speaking, is that work stoppage on the Sabbath isn't just a physical act; it entails a mental and emotional separation as well. It means not allowing your thoughts to dwell on work, not allowing your mind to go into a frenzy about deadlines, and not allowing your cell phone to dictate what you do. The Sabbath, then, is a command that engenders a state of mind and forms of conduct.

Indeed, as Jesus says in Mark 2:27, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." Hence, the Sabbath isn't just a day to get up late and to recoup from a long week of work so that you have restored energy to go back to work. If *that* was the case, this tacitly admits that our existence is nothing more than a commodity to be traded and managed for the sake of labor. Labor without purpose is just toiling for the sake of toiling. Because God made the Sabbath *for us*, it is a gift to be celebrated in recognition of the gift-giver. It also means that we ought not to sacrifice our neighbors for the Sabbath because God made humankind first, *and then* He rested. The Sabbath isn't a destination but a place of origin so that we are not citizens of the world who seek to travel *to* the sanctuary of time; rather, we are citizens of a heavenly realm who travel *from* the sanctuary into the rest of the week. In this perspective, the Sabbath is the well of inspiration that we draw from, and this life-giving drink sustains us from Monday through Saturday.

People often neglect to realize that God rested and participated in the Sabbath, so when we recognize the holiness of the day and rest, we are imitating God. It is in that imitation that we discover that "the likeness of God can be found in time, which is eternity in disguise."¹¹ The Sabbath is meaningful to *both* God and humankind.

When I go to work on a normal weekday, my day is gauged by what I *do*. If I get up late and reach the office late, I have a bad day. If I miraculously heal someone, I have a great day. The other six days are granted value as a function of what we accomplish with our time, how we use it, and whether or not we are effective. The Sabbath, however, is holy and set apart *regardless* of what we do. It is a block of time sanctioned by God as holy and distinct from the rest. So, when Christians feel restless about things, where do we turn for rest and comfort? Where do we turn to find the peace of God? The Sabbath, which prescribes a time of tranquility and tells us that in the realm of space, we may possess many things, but ultimately, we can do without them because we seek holiness in time. So, is it really possible to do *all* of your work in six days? Of course not. There is always something to do. And that's the point. We rest *as if* our work is done, not as if our work is endless.

The last point to make in this section is that the Sabbath, practically speaking, does not just revolve around the concept of work. It compels us to reconcile with God. It is a time hallowed by THE LORD to hit "pause" on everything else and the frantic nature of life in order to honor He who gives life in the first place. We are not sovereign, but God is, and by consecrating time to God, we thus draw closer to He who brings order to

¹¹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 16.

our lives. Oftentimes, He will thus reveal to us that many of the things we are “busy” with are not things we ought to be concerned with. Ultimately, everything has a time and a season, and He can direct us as to what particular season we are in. As Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3:1-10:

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace. What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

So, for example, if during the week you don’t normally read the Bible, pray, listen to a sermon, or sit down and fellowship with others, then the Sabbath is the perfect place to start. In fact, for anyone in pursuit of personal holiness, the ideal time to practice holiness is in the unit of time that God has already prescribed to be set apart from the rest.

The typical weekend, for example, is when people do what they want to do. So, if you’re in a cubicle all week, the weekend is when you go to the beach, swim, and talk about baseball with your friends on the sand. You spend the evenings looking out over the horizon and painting images on a canvas. You do this because in the cyclical weekend break, your thoughts and behaviors manifest from who you are and what you love. Your true identity is not a cubicle worker. In a similar light, celebrating the Sabbath is the return to who we truly are: loving servants of THE LORD created in His image in order to glorify Him. The stoppage of labor facilitates us never forgetting or becoming distant from who we are truly called to be. Heschel writes, “What *we are* depends on what *the Sabbath is* to us. The law of the Sabbath day is in the life of the spirit what the law of gravitation is to nature.”¹² Personal holiness without a proper understanding of the Sabbath can never reach maximum potential.

Sabbath as Resistance

The Sabbath was instituted as a formal national command to Israel after God freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. While the Jews were in Egypt, they lived amidst a culture that was oppressive, had no regard for life, and was not concerned with communal wellbeing. The Egyptian ethos, in fact, was dedicated to profit and production, and the destruction of human life was an acceptable consequence to anything that threatened the economic system. Consider what the Bible tells us about what that Egyptian system looked like in Exodus 1:9-14:

¹² Heschel, *Sabbath*, 89.

[Pharaoh] said to his people, “Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.” So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Ramses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them.

These verses tell us that Egyptian culture was inherently competitive, and anything that threatened national interest—even if speculative—required swift and destructive counter-measures. This ideology sacrificed people for the sake of fabrication. This way of thinking is also evident when Pharaoh orders that all firstborn Hebrew males be killed as soon as they were born because they were viewed as a threat due to their numbers and might.¹³

The point I am trying to make is that God liberated His people from this tyrannical system and then gave Israel a new set of commandments (Exodus 20:1-26) on their way to the Promised Land. The Sabbath was a part of these new rules, which stood in direct contrast to the life-destroying ways of Egypt. God even prefaces the commandments that He gives by saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). In other words, God was basically telling His people, “Hey, I am the one who set you free, so I am in the business of liberation. Now, let Me tell you My life-giving rules.” The Sabbath was thus a part of a blueprint that not only prescribed how to live God’s commandments but also made the people aware of the pervasive forces of the world that seek to thwart God’s purposes.

Accordingly, in *Sabbath as Resistance*, the authors elucidate observation of the Sabbath as both the acknowledgement of an alternative consciousness (as already discussed) and an act of resistance. This resistance is not an armed insurgency but rather a purposeful, deliberate, and visible insistence that the seductive ethos of consumerism—characterized by competition, consumption, privatization, and perfection—is *not* what we ultimately worship. Indeed, the ideology of insatiable consumption invades every aspect of our lives, so not only does celebration of the Sabbath involve tremendous effort on the part of the individual, but a sincere effort amongst a community of believers as well. In turn, this alternative consciousness leads us to neighborliness, cooperation, communal well-being, and fallibility. This leads to resistance against four aspects of consumer culture, all of which have a chapter devoted to them in *Sabbath as Resistance*.

Resistance to Anxiety.¹⁴ As the authors write:

¹³ See Exodus 1:8-16

¹⁴ See Exodus 20:12-17

Sabbath-keeping is a way of making a statement of peculiar identity amid a large public identity, of maintaining and enacting a counter-identity that refuses “mainstream” identity, which itself entails anti-human practice and the worship of anti-human gods. Understood this way, Sabbath is a bodily act of *testimony* to alternative and *resistance* to pervading values and the assumptions behind those values.¹⁵

Anxiety is the fear of the future. Restless anxiety results when we are preoccupied with having enough or producing enough or concerned that others will inhibit our ability to get more. Anxiety results from legalism or moralism, where one violation of a rule tramples upon our sense of worth. Anxiety results when people on the margins have no genuine identity in a system obsessed with consumption. Yet, in a paradigm where the Sabbath is considered holy and people are placed in the center of a new imagination, anxiety fades away because it is no longer *I* that is my ultimate source of trust. It is no longer the Dow Jones Industrial Average. It is no longer the number of likes, followers, or connections that I have:

[T]he work stoppage permits a waning of anxiety, so energy is redeployed to the neighborhood. The odd insistence of the God of Sinai is to counter *anxious productivity* with *committed neighborliness*. The latter practice does not produce so much; but it creates an environment of security and respect and dignity that redefines the human project.¹⁶

The consecration of the Sabbath persuades us to realize that indeed, there is much about the future that we do not know, but we have a relationship with God, who stands above time. We therefore don't preoccupy ourselves with the uncontrollable future but with the known God who set us free from endless Egyptian anxiety. The treatment, therefore, for the disease of anxiety is prescribed in a system of rest, perfectly dosed in a day of rest, the Sabbath. This idea is what Jesus relayed to His disciples in Matthew 6:25-31:

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little

¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, et al., *Sabbath as Resistance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2014), 21.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *Sabbath*, 28.

faith! Do not worry then, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear for clothing?”

*Resistance to Coercion.*¹⁷ The Sabbath resists the overriding theme of coercion that essentially equates to keeping score: doing more, achieving more, participating in more, and being more than someone else. This means trusting God enough to rest and believing that taking a break from what we typically do in the other six days will not irrevocably harm us. Deceptively, a coercive system entices its subscribers to place trust in the score, so as long as you are getting points, you tend to forget about THE LORD. Of course, the obsession with the score leads to anxiety and animates nonstop dreams of counting bricks. Surely it is human nature that abundance sows the seeds of forgetfulness, which is why God on *multiple* occasions warns the Israelites not to forget¹⁸ before they enter into the land of abundance, the Promised Land.

On a practical level, many readers may think that dominant culture isn’t coercive at all, but in response, I dare propose a few challenges: (1) Don’t use your cellphone, check your email, or use social media on the Sabbath. Would you feel as if you’re “missing out”? (2) Don’t catch up on errands on the Sabbath. Would you feel as if you’re “losing time”? (3) Don’t think about all the stuff you have to do in the upcoming week. Would you feel as if you’re “out of touch” with your responsibilities?

Additionally, with the weekly intermission comes a revitalized imagination of an alternative consciousness of what truly matters:

Sabbath is not simply a pause. It is an occasion for reimagining all of social life away from coercion and competition to compassionate solidarity. Such solidarity is imaginable and capable of performance only when the drivenness of acquisitiveness is broken. Sabbath is not simply the pause that refreshes. It is the pause that transforms.¹⁹

*Resistance to Exclusivism.*²⁰ In a society ruled by exclusivism, certain people do not “qualify” and are unfit for entry. So, whether we’re talking about an exclusive church, an exclusive country, an exclusive race, an exclusive school, or exclusive access, the Sabbath lends our attention to the fact that the day has been made holy as a creation ordinance. This means it is a day that pertains to *all* of creation, so no longer are there divisions and fences that keep people isolated, but rather the communal remembrance that everything is because of God. Our neighbor and our world are therefore not commodities to be used but gifts that compel reverence and proper stewardship. In other words, *everything* gets a break. The Sabbath draws our attention to those fruits of the Spirit that require interpersonal *cooperation* (Galatians 5:22-23), while the works of the flesh result from interpersonal *competition* (Galatians 5:19-21).

¹⁷ See Deuteronomy 5:12-14

¹⁸ See Deuteronomy 6:12, 7:18, 8:14, 18, 16:3, 12, 24:18, 22

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Sabbath*, 45.

²⁰ See Isaiah 56:3-8

*Resistance to Multitasking.*²¹ The Sabbath resists the enticement to do other things while honoring and worshiping God. The point here is that behaviors may appear to be restful, but the genuine intent is consumed by uneasiness. In modernity, multitasking equates to going through the motions of the Sabbath (acts), all the while consumed by the restlessness and the longing to return to the world of commodities (mindset). Multitasking allows you to sit down with your family or community members for a meal, but your attention is on your latest notification. Multitasking equips you to go to church service but check scores while the preacher is preaching. Multitasking empowers you to raise your hands and praise God with a thunderous shout with the awareness that the car you intend to sell someone is a lemon. *Unitasking* on God compels you to reconcile with God, and reconciliation with God compels you to reconcile with neighbors.

Conclusion

The Sabbath invites Christians to embrace their natural identity, not their assigned identity. A natural identity—that we are formed in the image of God—educates us and tells us that we are adequate, and, therefore, we are content. An assigned identity works in reverse and informs us that because we lack certain things, we as people are incomplete. Of course, there is always more to be had, so our identities are always deficient and fragile.

The Sabbath is never meant to be celebrated in isolation. It invites couples, families, neighbors, church members, and communities to participate together. Time is perfectly egalitarian, and thus the holiness of time influences all individuals equally. The communal participation therefore gives like-minded people a refreshing new cultural identity as fellow Sabbath participants. This culture is nurtured weekly and animates common meals, common meeting places, common stories, common histories, and common language.

On a personal note, where my wife and I live, there is a very large Jewish population, and if you threw a rock in any direction, chances are it would hit a synagogue. Starting each and every Friday evening and continuing for 24 hours, our neighborhood shuts down. Commercial streets go black. It is common on Saturday morning to see groups of families walking together to the synagogue. Then, after sundown on Saturday, the commercial areas come alive again. Into the wee hours of the night, Jewish families now crowd once-desolate commercial streets. Restaurants are now overflowing with people who often tend to sit 10 or more at a table. The point is that communal celebration of the Sabbath brings people together under a common identity with a common purpose. It still boggles my mind that this tradition that began in the Middle East thousands of years ago in a small, seemingly insignificant sect still survives today amongst Jews all over the world. Things can survive for a long time, but for tradition to survive that long, it must be well-grounded in a purposeful community with an unshakable distinctiveness. That is the power of the Sabbath.

On the Sabbath, time is measured in depth (quality), not in minutes (quantity). After all, the Sabbath contains the same 24 hours as any other day of the week, but it is *how* we spend those minutes that counts for something. Dominant culture measures

²¹ See Amos 8:4-8

performance by how fast we can do something or how convenient something is by how much time it saves. In the urgent care office that I work in, we pride ourselves by pointing to the time the patient saves by not going to the emergency room. Yet, in measuring the minutes saved, no one ever counts the lack of *quality* time the doctor spends with the patient. In fact, a physician who pursues quality but spends too many minutes in that pursuit is regarded as inefficient.

So, the Sabbath is a period of holiness that is not only separated *in* time but is also an unconventional construction *of* time. That is, when it comes to Sabbath observance, the authors of *An Other Kingdom* note:

[People] have time on their hands. Like observing the Sabbath, their interpretation of time is an act of defiance against the dominant culture and its restless productivity. The Sabbath gave form to the fact that no matter how busy I am, there is always time. The lesson from the margins is that there is enough time. In the consumer society, time is scarcity.

In the sacred texts, there is that famous idea in Ecclesiastes: a time to laugh and a time to cry, a time to live and a time to die. In other words, in the season there are rhythms that belong to the very structure of creation that cannot be viewed with impunity. And they do not necessarily occur by the clock.²²

Imagine what a world without the Sabbath would look like. It would be a world without rest, where all would toil without ceasing, nor would there be a reason to cease. It would be a world where identity would come from toil, and everything would be a commodity. We would all dwell in cities that “never sleep,” not realizing that sleep is absolutely crucial because it restores us. There would be no clear separation among days and no sacred time hallowed by God. Hence, it would be a world that knew only itself, where creation lacked consecrated time to pursue holiness. Without this sacred time, week by week, we would be compelled to forget about God and what He has done for us through Christ. Just as neglect of the ritual ceremony of communion compels us to forget the broken body and shed blood of Christ, a lack of the Sabbath compels us to forget that God holds time in *His* hands. We then fall prey to restless anxiety and chase after the wind in pursuit of elusive time. Indeed, the Sabbath was made for us, because without it, we may actually begin to believe the delusion that we hold time in the palm of our hands.

This will conclude *What Christians Should Know Volume II*. In the interest of rest, I will pause for a time and come back with *Volume III: The Ten Commandments* in the fall. *Volume Zero* will continue to be produced in the interim.

Until then, and God bless.

Dr. C. H. E. Sadaphal

²² Walter Brueggemann, et al., *An Other Kingdom* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 64.