

Luke 6:1-11

The Certain Gospel: What is the Sabbath?

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What is the Sabbath? I want to offer you **two definitions:**

“Biblical Sabbath is a twenty-four-hour block of time in which we stop work, enjoy rest, practice delight, and contemplate God.” *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* by Peter Scazzero

“Saturday; the holy day when Jewish people were commanded not to work.” *Luke 1-12 For You* by Mike McKinley

Our first definition is more **modern**, and explains how the Sabbath **matters** for **us**. Our second definition goes back to the **original context** of Sabbath, and how it mattered for the nation of **Israel** thousands of years ago. Both definitions are good, but does the **Bible** have a **definition**? Let’s turn to the **Ten Commandments**.

Exodus 20:8-11 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (NIV®)¹

Why do we **throw out** this commandment? We don’t do that with any of the other **10 Commandments**. The Bible says Jesus perfectly obeyed the law, but that doesn’t mean we can now **murder** or **steal** (Matt 5:17-18). Jesus **kept** Sabbath, and as a **follower** of Jesus, I believe we’re called to keep a day of Sabbath rest still. In our **passage** today, Jesus **doesn’t end** the **practice** of Sabbath, but **clarifies** it. He doesn’t say, “You should no longer do this” but rather, “This is how you should do it.” In one sense, Jesus offers us his own definition by first tellings us what the Sabbath is **not**, and then what it **is**.

The Sabbath is not... a day for burdensome rules. (Luke 6:1-2)

Luke 6:1-2 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

When the Pharisees see the disciples picking and eating heads of grain on the Sabbath, they believe they have broken the Sabbath law. They counted the act of **plucking** as **reaping**, the act of **rubbing** as **threshing**, and the act of **eating** as **preparing a meal**, all of which are work.² They did all this to get a small **gooey** pellet of food, which I’m sure tasted like something you can buy at **Whole Foods**.

For a long time the nation of Israel **broke** God’s sabbath laws and this is one of the reasons God sent Israel into **exile** (2 Chronicles 36:21). So as the Jewish people came back to Israel, they created **extra rules** to

¹ All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

² Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 3; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 142. https://accordance.bible/link/read/Tyndale_Commentary#43872

prevent themselves from breaking the Sabbath again. If there's a **fence** around the Sabbath, they created a fence around the fence so that they wouldn't come close to breaking the Sabbath. They did this by **forbidding** 39 activities on the Sabbath, and that day the disciples broke at least **four** of their rules.³

But if you look at the **restrictions** around the Sabbath in the Bible, there aren't that many. You're not supposed to work, collect, prepare food, or start a fire, you're supposed to rest, and a few others. It doesn't say you can't **write** or erase **two letters**, but their list of 39 rules said that.

When we **add rules** to God's way, we create **religion**. What a religion based on rules does is create **fear**, **guilt**, and **anxiety**. In the grainfield that day, Jesus challenges their additional rules and the guilt it creates.

There's a very **simple application** for us here. *The Sabbath is not a day for burdensome rules*. As Christians, God gives us a day of rest each week. This is not a day to **worry** about if you're doing Sabbath rest **right** or **wrong**. Trying to do Sabbath **right** should not **stress** you out. However, neither should we use our **conviction** of Sabbath rest to **lord** it over others and to look like a superior **religious** person.

The Sabbath is not... a day for burdensome rules. But does that mean it's a day for **no rules at all**? The **Bible itself** gives some rules for Sabbath rest. Should we just ignore them now because Jesus **obeyed** them each **perfectly** on our behalf? Or perhaps, is part of what it means to **follow Jesus** to have a day of Sabbath rest like him? Some might **argue** that Sabbath is optional based on **Romans 14:5-6a** where **Paul** says to be fully convinced in your own mind about whether one day is special or not. I respect that view, but I still think God provides a day of Sabbath rest, with **healthy** (not burdensome) **boundaries**, for our good.

Let's go back to the **fence illustration**. Trail Ridge Road is near the town I grew up in, Estes Park Colorado. This road is the "highest **continuous** paved road in the United States, reaching an elevation of 12,183 feet."⁴ When you drive that road, do you think you feel **safer** on the stretches of roadway that have a **guardrail** or the stretches that don't have a guardrail? You feel much safer when there's a guardrail. God gives us guardrails for our Sabbath days. The **key** is to discern his guardrails and not to place our own where we shouldn't put them.

The Sabbath is... a day for boundaries that liberate. (Luke 6:3-11)

Here we find **three boundaries** (or principles) of keeping Sabbath rest. We **don't** have a story in the Bible of Jesus encountering an **overworked** individual who never takes a Sabbath. Maybe it's because most Jews were trying to keep it. I still think we can draw out principals that apply to us who have **trouble stopping**.

1) Sabbath is a day to have our needs met. (Luke 6:3-4)

Luke 6:3-4 Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

In **1 Samuel 21:1-6**, **David** is fleeing from **King Saul**. Saul wants to **kill** David because God chose David to be king **instead** of him. But David and his men quickly run out of **provisions** and the only food available is **consecrated bread** that only the Priests were supposed to eat. The priest agrees to give David the bread, and they take and eat it. Jesus is **pointing back** to this story for **two reasons**. **First**, if David used consecrated bread to meet his needs, we can use a Sabbath day to meet our needs.

³ McKinley, Mike. *Luke 1-12 For You*. The Good Book Company. 2016. Kindle Edition. Loc 1013.

⁴ Trail Ridge Road. <https://rockymountainnationalpark.com/trails-maps/trail-ridge-road> (accessed 1/25/18).

Mark 2:27 Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

When we think about our Sabbath day, we should think about it as a day to meet our **spiritual, emotional, and physical** needs. If I am a **glass of water** that is **poured out** over the course of a week, how can I be **filled back up** on my day of rest?

- How can I be filled up **spiritually**? Maybe I spend time in prayer or reading my Bible or singing or playing an instrument I enjoy.
- How can I be filled up **emotionally**. Maybe Monica and I go for that walk together, or I invite friends over to watch a movie, or we play board games.
- How can I be filled up **physically**? Maybe I sleep in and take a nap or go out for a nice meal, or if you’re like one of our ushers, go run 60 miles.

The Sabbath is a day to have our needs met. The **Second reason** Jesus tells this story is because King David **foreshadowed** a greater king to come. King David was a **Messianic figure**, and so he has **special authority**. But he wasn’t the true Messiah, God’s final chosen King. Jesus is, and so he claims even greater authority than King David. He is **Lord** of the Sabbath, which leads us to our **second boundary**.

2) Sabbath is a day to commune with Christ. (Luke 6:5)

Luke 6:5 Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

There’s only way to truly experience Sabbath rest, and that’s **in Christ**. Back in **Genesis**, at the end the **creation account** God rested on the **seventh day**. We read about this in **Exodus 20:11**. God created the world in **six** days, but **entered** into a special divine rest on the seventh day. The Bible **never** tells us God left that state of spiritual rest. In fact, the very first people, **Adam and Eve**, were supposed to share in this eternal rest with God, but they **sinned** and **separated** themselves from God’s rest.

Hebrews 4:9-10 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

So **how** can we **enter into** this rest? Through **Christ!** That’s **why** Christ came, to **restore** our access to our Sabbath rest with our **Heavenly Father**.

Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

We all spend our whole lives **looking** for this Sabbath rest. We want peace and happiness, but no matter how many **vacations** we take, or how much **exercise** we get, or how many **football games** we watch, we still feel **unrested** and **unsatisfied**. See, we can’t find lasting rest in **things** or **experiences**, but in a **person**, Jesus.

Jesus Christ **is** our Sabbath rest. Jesus stepped down out of heaven and into our **unrest**. He took the **chaos** of our sin **upon himself** on the cross and died. He didn’t stay dead. He **rose** and **ascended** into perfect heavenly rest. Now he **invites** us to come and join him in this rest. He offers us his perfect **spiritual rest** for our **imperfect** spiritual unrest. By **confessing** our sins and **believing** in him, he gives us his rest. He makes it so that we **no longer** have to be **perfect** to please God, so that we’re no longer **slaves to sin**, and so that we are **children** of God. We have so much rest in Jesus!

Our day of Sabbath rest is a **symbol** for a much greater rest. Just like the **local church** is the **visible manifestation** of the **universal church**, a day of **Sabbath rest** is the visible manifestation of our **eternal Sabbath rest**. When we **stop** for a day to be in communion with Christ, we **tell the world** we don’t have to

work hard for God to love us. We won't know full rest **until** eternity, but we can **begin to taste** that rest today through a **spending** a day in **relationship** with him.

Question. Do you spend time communing with Christ on your Sabbath? Is he Lord of your Sabbath? I've included a **Sabbath assessment quiz** in the bulletin that I'd like you to take after the service. It will give you a good idea of whether or not you're taking a Sabbath rest with Christ or not. *First, Sabbath is a day to have our needs met. Second, Sabbath is a day to commune with Christ. Third...*

3) Sabbath is a day to do good things. (Luke 6:6-11)

On another Sabbath, Jesus enters the synagogue and there's a man there with a **withered** hand. He has some sort of **disability** that made it so he can't move or use his right hand. The Pharisees, who loved rules, think that maybe Jesus is going to break another one of their rules by **healing** on the Sabbath. They said you weren't supposed to do this except for **life threatening** emergencies.

Luke 6:9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

Jesus goes on to heal the man, proving that the Sabbath is a day on which we can do good things, and this makes the Pharisees so mad they are "filled with **fury**" and begin **plotting** against Jesus.

Sometimes **I feel mad** at Jesus for asking me to do good things on my Sabbath day. Like I really don't like doing **home improvement** projects or **manual labor** on Sundays, my Sabbath day. I don't really like **helping people move**, but sometimes Jesus asks me to do those good things. And you know what? I've had **people** come help me on their days off, which I'm so grateful for.

The Sabbath is not a day for burdensome rules... But, the Sabbath is a day for boundaries that liberate. There's a **tension** here. We don't want to be **burdened** by **legalism** on our Sabbath day, but we could still use some **guidance** for how to treat this **special day**. There's a **paradox** here.

I want us to take a moment and run everything we've learned through a **case study**. **Joshua** has always had trouble knowing if he is doing Sabbath right, and because he is more **left-brained**, more **type a**, more **analytical** and **organized**, he has written down his **Sabbath boundaries**. He doesn't want to be a **legalistic** Pharisee, but he also doesn't want to ruin the day of rest God has given him. So he has **asked** us as a church to **review** what he has put together. First he wrote down his goal for his Sabbath:

Goal: Rest from work, feel refreshed, and spend time with Jesus, family, and friends.

Based on what I understand of the Sabbath, I think Joshua has a good goal. Next he decides when it will be.

Duration: Our Sabbath day starts at church Saturday at 5pm and lasts till Sunday at 5pm.

Of course, Joshua goes to the greatest church in the world, Cornerstone Congregational Church, so he kicks off his day of Sabbath rest by going to church on Saturday evening, even serving with the **welcome team**. Then he writes down his **boundaries** for what his **family's** Sabbath **is**, and what it **is not**.

Our Sabbath is:

- a. A day to spend time with Jesus at church through worship and at home through personal and family devotions and prayer.
- b. A day to spend time with my wife and children, eating meals, playing outside and games, going on family outings, watching a movie together.

- c. A day for our family to spend time with friends (so long as it doesn't sacrifice family time).
- d. A day for each of us to have some alone-time being refreshed or doing what we enjoy (football, hike, paint, read, nap, etc.).
- e. A day for us to serve and love others in need.

When I look at these boundaries, I see **spiritual, emotional**, and **physical** needs being met. I see **intentional communion** with Christ, but also communion with Christ throughout the day, and I see lots of good things. I do see a **danger** that if every Sabbath is an opportunity to serve and love others, then you may never rest or spend time with family. Of course, any of these could become **Pharisaical rules**, so they should all be **held loosely**. Now let's look at what his family's Sabbath is **not**.

Our Sabbath is not:

- a. A day to check emails, finish work projects, or do homework from school.
- b. A day to do housework, chores, or home improvement projects.
- c. A day to over consume media or over commit to sports.
- d. A day centered on me, but on Christ.

I think it's **harder** to come up with boundaries you won't do on your Sabbath day, as it's easy to become **legalistic**. Joshua **doesn't** find home improvement projects **relaxing** and enjoyable, but some of you may. He tends to **work too much**, so he needs to remind himself to stay away from email. These boundaries may need to be broken on occasion. Joshua may have to **finish work** because a deadline is looming, but if a deadline is looming every week, it's time for him to **change jobs**. Joshua may also need to prepare for his Sabbath day. The Jews took a **day of preparation** to get their house clean and food prepared. What can he do to prepare for his Sabbath day? (prepare a meal, do the dishes, take out the trash)

I hope these **boundaries** don't feel like **legalism** to you. Many of you know how to rest naturally and don't need them. But what I like about them is they actually set Joshua **free** and they can set **us free** too. I don't have to check email today! I don't have to strain my eyes sitting in front of a computer all day! I don't have to do dishes! So I want to encourage you to go home, talk with your family, and **create** your own **Sabbath plan** to help you enjoy the liberation Christ gives you on this day. Here's my closing big idea.

The Sabbath is a day of need, a day of communion, a day of good things.

We're going to close by singing "Resting Place." The first verse says this, "My faith, has found, a resting place. Not in my work or deed. I trust, the ever living One. His wounds, for me, shall plead." We can take a day of rest **with Christ** because we already have a day of eternal rest **in Christ**. When we rest, we say, "It's not about my work" but his. *The Sabbath is a day of need, a day of communion, a day of good things.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. Click here to listen to more sermons or click here to read our story.