

TEN | Remember the Sabbath

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Introduction

We're in Week 5 of our series on the Ten Commandments, and each week we see from a different angle that the Law of God is not evidence of God's anger or a demand for obedience—the Law of God is evidence of God's **LOVE**.

Consider all God did for the nation of Israel before He ever gave them a single commandment: He confronted Pharaoh, He worked miracles, He sent the plagues, He led them from slavery, He parted the Red Sea . . . He was the faithful, steady hand keeping and guiding the Hebrew people every step of the way.

Before God gave the nation of Israel a single commandment, He chose them.

So when you get to the giving of the Ten Commandments in Scripture, you realize that the commandments were for Israel's benefit—and are for our benefit—not because God is trying to get something from us or needs us to do anything for Him, but because He created us, He knows what's best for us, and **He loves us**.

Because God loves us, He establishes rules and laws to help us flourish. So far we've discussed:

1. No Other Gods
2. Make No Idols
3. Don't Take My Name in Vain

Most of us have never felt guilty about breaking the 4th commandment, but it gets more clarification than any of the others, which tells us how important this commandment is to God and should be to us.

Exodus 20:8–11

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

This commandment was revolutionary for the people of Israel. They came out of a slave culture where there were no days off, and now in the middle of the wilderness God is telling them, "I don't want you to work, I don't want you to scavenge, I don't want you to gather, I don't want you to try to produce a thing. Instead, I want you to set aside a 24-hour period of time to stop your work and rest."

Rest

Just before this commandment was given, the Israelites had an experience with God that put the commandment into a very specific context:

Exodus 16:1–5

And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”

- God sent manna as daily provision for the Israelites, but He stipulated that they were only to gather as much as they needed for each day. They were not to store any for the next day. The only exception was on the sixth day, when Israel could gather twice as much to have enough bread for the sixth and seventh days.
- God was enforcing the Sabbath before they even knew what that meant. For three months, He was training the Israelites to trust Him for their daily bread.

Exodus 16:26–30

“Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.” Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the Lord said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” So the people rested on the seventh day.

- Some of the Israelites didn’t listen, trust, or obey, and they gathered more than they needed. When they woke up the next day there were worms in the leftover bread.
- God’s purpose was to give Israel a weekly reminder of their dependence on God! God is telling the nation of Israel, “*What’s best for you is to remember how dependent you are on Me.*”

Exodus 20:11

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

- As this verse reminds us, the Creation account in Genesis tells us God rested on the seventh day.
- Why did God rest? Was He worn out from the six days of creating the entire universe? Of course not! He’s God!
 - God rested on the seventh day because He was satisfied in His completed work and was modeling for mankind a rhythm of work and rest.

Application—The problem is that everything in our western culture, from the day we are born, tells us that our value is determined and measured by what we do. It’s all about our personal significance and impact, and so we build our identities around what we do and how much we accomplish. Even pastors and Christian leaders become more concerned with the work they *do for* God rather than *being with* God.

So of course we overwork. Of course we’re stressed. Of course burnout is a reality, and anxiety and depression run rampant in our culture. The pressure to perform and achieve is intense.

For Israel, working wasn’t about personal worth and identity, it was about **survival**. They were former slaves wandering in a desert. There was no economy. There were no merchants or markets at which to buy or trade for food. The Israelites had every reason to believe that if they did not work, they would not survive.

But God said, “No, you won’t. I’ve got you. You can trust Me. I will give you seven days of provision for six days of work.”

From the very beginning of Creation God set the example for every single one of us.

Just in case we missed it, He re-enforced it with the provision of manna in the wilderness.

In case we missed it again, He gave us the 4th commandment.

And in case we missed it there too, the New Testament is full of instruction on the need for work *and* rest.

**God knows the human heart.
He invited Israel then
and invites every one of us now
to rest in Him.
To trust in His provision.
To trust Him to give seven days of provision
for six days of work.**

When the rule becomes more important than the commandment—

The unfortunate reality is that we create rules to keep us from breaking the commandments, and the danger of doing that is we forget why we created the rules in the first place. Last year, I went with a crew from Grace Chapel to Israel. It was my first time, and I observed that on the Sabbath in Israel, everything is shut down. For example, at our hotel the elevator was shut down, because pushing the button on the elevator is viewed as “work.” The funny thing, though, is that you instead have to walk up and down a number of flights of stairs, which is much more work than pushing the button in the elevator. The observation of the rule has become more important than the observation of the commandment.

When God issued the 4th commandment, He issued an invitation not just to take a day off of work, but to set aside a full 24-hour period to remember that everything exists because God created it. To remember that you are more than what you do—that you’re not a slave to the identity society wants to put on you.

**When you rest,
you take on the identity and the value
that comes from being made in the image of God
and being under the care and provision of God.**

Personal—The first time I was really confronted with the idea of Sabbath rest is when we planted a church in Washington in 2012. I’d never been a lead guy before, and in addition to that, I was trying to build our volunteer teams, doing weekly setup and teardown, and preparing to preach every week. I was working like crazy, and one day God convicted me on this very issue. The challenge God gave me was about the Sabbath. The hard reality of the rhythm I was in was that as a pastor, preacher, and church planter, I was not trusting God to provide for me what I felt I needed to provide for the people every Sunday.

So, I said, “Okay, God. Sunday is a workday, Saturday is spent getting ready for Sunday morning, and for the rest of the week I’m shepherding Your people. So how exactly am I supposed to do this?”

The answer was to take a Sabbath rest from 6 PM on Friday night to 6 PM on Saturday night, no matter what. It was a self-imposed, 24-hour period where I wouldn’t touch my work, not even think about it. And that’s still my practice today. When I leave the office at the end of the week, if the sermon isn’t quite where I want it to be, I say, “Okay, God. If that sermon is going to be what You want it to be, You’re going to have to do something! I need the fruit of seven days of labor when I’ve only put in six days of work, because You told me to take a day off. I need You to make up for what I lack.”

**The Sabbath is an invitation to allow God
to provide what you could produce
but choose not to.**

Objections—Isn't this irresponsible or bad stewardship? Isn't this laziness or carelessness?

If that's your reaction to the 4th commandment, then perhaps the Holy Spirit is exposing your lack of trust in God as your provider.

Observing the Sabbath does two things—**it exposes and it expands**. It exposes our lack of trust in God, and it makes room for God to expand our faith.

Personal—In Washington there was a day when a high-capacity leader started coming to the church plant. My boss came to me and said, "Rob, you've got to recruit this guy. I know him. He's solid and he'd make an incredible addition to your team." So I schedule a meeting with this leader on a Friday, my day off.

My boss finds out about it and comes into my office and asks, "Rob, you scheduled a meeting with this guy on Friday?"

"Yes," I said.

"Cancel it. Call him back right now and cancel the meeting. That's your day off. That's your Sabbath. That's your day with family. That day is sacred."

So I canceled the meeting, and the guy never got involved.

But what I've gained, not just on that one day, but with a regular rhythm of taking a Sabbath, is precious time with my wife and children where I'm present with them. I'm also learning to trust Him in moments when I feel like I'm missing out or falling behind or not measuring up.

Every other religion and especially the 24/7 culture we live in demands that we work harder, run faster, do more. The problem is that we can go our whole lives feeling inadequate because it's all up to us. We never have an ounce of peace because there are no assurances or guarantees that our anxious toil will pay off. **The weekly rhythm of Sabbath is designed to remind us that God is so big, so powerful, so kind, and loves us so much that He says, "Take a day off and trust Me."**

Application—If we can get in the habit of taking a Sabbath rest, over time we'll find that we're able to release control of all the things we're trying to force to happen. We'll find that even when we do work, our work will be free of anxiety. Free of worry. Free of feeling like we're always falling behind. Free of the need to prove ourselves. *The Sabbath doesn't free us from hard work, but it does free us from anxious work because the condition of our soul while we engage in hard work will be one of trust and peace.*

**The message of the 4th commandment
is that your strength comes not from how hard you work
but from how well you rest.**

My challenge for you today is to put the Sabbath into practice. Find a 24-hour period where you're not trying to produce—you're simply trusting in the provision of God. Make it a day to pray and play, to be attuned to God and present with those you love.

Jesus is our Sabbath Rest

Hebrews 4:9–11

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

- These verses tell us that there is a present and eternal rest available to every one of us, and it's not just a rest from work. It's rest from self-justifying work. It's rest from the fear that you'll never be good enough, you'll never measure up or have approval.

Question—How do we enter that rest?

Hebrews 4 tells us that this kind of deep inner rest can only come through the person of Jesus Christ, Who took upon Himself the brokenness of the human condition. Jesus Christ carried the sin of the world on His shoulders to the Cross, where the Father gave him silence and rejection. But through His resurrection, we have unconditional acceptance. We are now free from the need to prove ourselves to God because we've been chosen, accepted, and saved by God.

This doesn't mean that what you do doesn't matter.

It means that who God says you are matters infinitely more.

Allow that to sink in and you will discover you don't have to work *for* rest, but to work *from* rest.

When you are at rest in the work of Jesus, then your work—whatever it may be—can be done from a place free of anxiety and worry.

Discussion Questions

1. What was the context in which God gave the 4th Commandment to Israel? What was God trying to teach Israel with this commandment?
2. Read the Creation account in Genesis of God resting on the seventh day. What was the significance of this?
3. How well do you live in a consistent rhythm of work and rest?
4. Do you find it easier to place your identity in the things you achieve or in who God says you are in Jesus Christ?
5. Discuss: The message of the 4th commandment is that your strength comes not from how hard you work but from how well you rest.
6. How is Jesus our Sabbath rest? How do we enter that rest? Why is this the truest rest of all?

NOTES