

Sabbath For a Whole Year?

Leviticus 25:1-7



Opening

The 2024 Stewardship Worship Guide offers reflections on the theme of Sabbath as gift. Using key themes from Leviticus 25 you are invited to build illustrations and points of connections from your own community regarding how the gift of Sabbath is intended not just for God's people but for all of God's creation. The order of service below offers various resources to adapt for your worship service. Blessings to you in your preparation for preaching and helping others enter worship and consider God as the Lord of the Sabbath.

Call to worship

We come together for sabbath rest.
We rest in the love of the Creator, who made us.
We rest in the hope of Jesus Christ, who saves us.
We rest in the power of the Holy Spirit, who makes us one.
In this hour of worship, we come as God's people
to rest together in the peace of God's presence.

Invocation

Gracious and loving God, you have created for us this gift called Sabbath for which we give you thanks. You have also called us to be stewards of your Abundance, the caretakers of all you have entrusted to us. Help us always to use your gifts wisely and teach us to share them generously. Send the Holy Spirit to work through us, bringing your message to those we serve.

Hymns and choruses

- I owe the Lord a morning song
- Come ye that Love the Lord



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Children's lesson: the gift of rest

Do you know why we need sleep? (Allow students to answer.)

Sleeping is how our brains and our bodies recharge. It's like plugging in a phone that has a low battery. We grow best and learn best when we sleep well. Did you know that rest is so important, that God made it one of his commandments? It can be found in Exodus 20:8-11.

"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy."

The fourth commandment instructs us, "**Remember** to observe the **Sabbath** day by keeping it **holy**." When this verse says, "**Remember** to observe," it means, "don't forget to do." The word "**Sabbath**" means to, "stop and rest".

Does anyone know what **Holy** means? (Allow students to answer.) Holy means set apart for a special use. So, in the fourth commandment, God is basically telling us, don't forget to take a day for special rest to worship him every week.

Now of course it's good to worship God every day and to read our Bibles every day and pray every day and do kind things every day. But this commandment tells us we are supposed to take ONE day out of every week and make it a special time for God. The Sabbath day is a day to rest and relax and focus on God. Most Christians choose Sunday as their Sabbath day, since that's the day they go to church.

Resting is important. But not many people are very good at it. We don't like to stop doing things, and we don't like to be bored. So, we keep our days busy, busy, busy! We keep our days so busy however, that we don't make time for God. Adults may work a whole lot because they enjoy their jobs and because they want to make money. That is an okay thing to do, but we also need to take time to stop, and be still and consider all that God has done for us. Kids may go to school and play sports and other activities because those things are fun and important. What are some ways that you think children can stop and rest and consider God's goodness and involvement in their life? (Take time for children to respond).

Thank you for paying attention and being part of our worship service in this way. Let's pray together.

We thank you God for strong bodies and minds that allow us to play and do schoolwork. We also thank you that you encourage us to rest our bodies and minds and think about you, and to come together like this to worship you on our sabbath, our day for worship and rest. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Hymns and choruses

- As I went down to the River to Pray
- Be Still and Know

Sermon: Sabbath for a Whole Year?

Scripture selection: Leviticus 25: 1-7

Introduction

This information is designed as food for thought. It is not a complete sermon but ideas on the text and how the text represents healthy stewardship habits. Feel free to use what makes sense for you and your congregation.

Conversations about stewardship often begin with Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world, and its inhabitants too." (CEB)

This verse is the linchpin for all that follows. We spend our lives wrestling with what it means to be God's people, the stewards of God's kingdom. It's easy to say that God owns everything, all our time, all our talent and all our treasure. But it is not easy to live as if we are only stewards of what God has given us.

Practicing Biblical stewardship requires discipline

God knew this about us. God knew that as humans we would need regular reminders that everything belongs to God, including the land on which we stand.

Therefore, in the book of Leviticus, as the Israelites are getting ready to enter the land of Canaan, God gave Moses a list of rules and regulations meant to accompany the Israelites on their faith journey as well as their physical journey.

In Chapter 25 we read about the Sabbath year. Every seven years, the land was to be left fallow. In verse 2 we read, "Once you enter the land that I am giving you, the land must celebrate a sabbath rest to the LORD." In verse 4 it says, "But in the seventh year the land will have a special sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the LORD."

Not only were the Israelites required to take every seventh day off – every seven years, the land was to have a time of rest. It was a reminder, every seven years, that the Israelites did not own the land, God owned the land.

So much of the life of the Israelites was a rhythm. A rhythm of being reminded of their place as God's people and living in God's ways. What they ate, how they dressed, their living in covenant with God was regularly demonstrated in their lives, both to themselves and to others.

What are the ways you or your congregation continue this practice of reminding yourselves and others that you are God's people? Do you have regular practices that are seen by the outside world that show you living out your covenant with God? Do your practices include the land on which you live or on which your church is planted? What would it look like for you or your congregation to give "the land" a time of rest every seven years?

Expanding this idea further, what would our world look like today if all Christians lived as though we believed the land belongs to God? How would this basic Biblical understanding have impacted Western colonization? Or our current use of resources?

Practicing Biblical stewardship means shifting our thinking from being self-centered to being God-centered

Digging further into the idea of Sabbath rest and what that meant for the land as well as the Israelites, we read in verse 5, “you must not harvest the secondary growth of your produce or gather the grapes of your freely growing vines.” It is important to note that while the land was resting, it was not dormant. The land continued to provide food, but without the intervention of the farmer.

Often, we live believing we are at the center of the world. We believe without our intervention, nothing will be as it should be. In practicing a year of Sabbath rest for the land, the Israelites were meant to lean into their dependence on God as well as be reminded that the land produces even without them. They were reminded that they were not the center of God’s world but rather that God was the center of their world.

Consider for a moment, the places (committee, work, family) in your life where you believe you are at the center. If you were not there, what would happen? Or what would not happen? Now, using your imagination, place God at the center. How is that different? How does that change your thinking about that place?

Biblical stewardship means there will be enough for everyone

What I found most surprising about this text was to whom the food, that the land produced without intervention, was available. The food was available to everyone and everything, not only for the Israelites, but also for “your male and female servants, and for your hired laborers and foreign guests who live with you, as well as for your livestock and for the wild animals in your land. All of the land’s produce can be eaten.” (vs 6-7).

It’s a scene of abundance. It almost seems like part of the book of Revelation that at the end of the days, there will be enough food for everyone and everything. All creatures will walk through the fields eating their fill.

What would that image of abundance look like in your context? In what ways do you see your congregation, workplace, home life practicing abundance? Where are the places where there is enough for all creatures and all peoples?

Conclusion

Practicing Biblical stewardship is a discipline that requires the creation of regular practices that remind us of our place in God’s world. In reminding ourselves we will shift our focus from being self-centered to being God centered. As we shift our thinking to God, we will also find that there is enough for all of God’s people and all of God’s creatures.

Offertory prayer

In a world where we so often
dwell on what we lack,
you are a God of abundance.
In the face of hunger,
you call us to share food.
In the face of poverty,
to share resources.
In the face of despair,
to share hope.
Accept these offerings
as a sign that all we have is yours.
We trust in your abundant love
that flows in us and through us. Amen.

Sending Hymn/s

- How Great Thou Art
- Doxology

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 3:24-25).

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