

**Foundations: The Fourth Commandment**  
**Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (AFBC 9/11/16)**

**"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."**

Here we have the fourth commandment. Did you notice that it took four verses to say it? Two of the commandments consist of just four words in English; but this commandment requires four verses, making commandment four the longest of the ten.

More significantly, however, is that this may be the most neglected commandment of them all—especially for busy, successful people. Or maybe it's just me who struggles with keeping the Sabbath.

Perhaps that's a strange thing for a preacher to say; but there are many weeks when I don't really get around to observing a Sabbath—weeks when I work some every day—even MAINLY work every day—including Sundays! Some of you are also guilty of this.

Sometimes we go out to eat after church, which, of course, means someone else has to work on Sunday. Other times we have Sunday lunch at home—but again, SOMEONE has to work. At least I don't cut grass on Sunday—that was always taboo when I was growing up and I still won't do that.

But honestly, whatever spin you choose to give to the fourth commandment, I've probably found a way to break it. And it's highly likely that you have too!

Is it completely crazy to think we could actually turn one day out of seven into a day of rest and worship? Or have we just decided instead that keeping nine out of ten commandments "isn't so bad?"

Maybe you're thinking, "Now, Jim...You know we aren't under the Law anymore. The Sabbath commandment is part of the old covenant. We're under the new covenant now, so isn't this commandment obsolete?"

After all, **II Corinthians 3:6** says: "**He [God] has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**"

And **Romans 7:4** says: "**So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.**"

It's true that our salvation is not based on following a list of rules. We're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on the cross. But if the Law doesn't matter anymore, does this mean we can worship other gods, carve idols, and abuse God's name? How about murdering and stealing and lying—is that okay for folks who are saved by grace?

Evidently Jesus didn't want us to be confused about this. He said in **Matthew 5:17-20**: "**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**"

That really complicates things! By Jesus' day, the Pharisees had created over 1500 rules about keeping the Sabbath. They kept all 1500 of them meticulously—including laws like not eating eggs laid on the Sabbath Day because the chickens had to work to lay them! How could anyone ever get more righteousness than that?

Even Jesus couldn't. Jesus was always getting into trouble for breaking one of their Sabbath laws—healing someone one Sabbath, and picking corn the next! I guess nine out of ten commandments

was okay for Jesus too. By the way, I checked our eggs at home. They have a “sell by” date, but no “laid on” date—sooo... maybe they had their own chickens—so they’d know!

What are we to make of this? In the scripture we just read, Jesus told us He didn’t come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it. He clearly affirmed the Ten Commandments, yet Jesus did not explain their meaning in the same way as the religious leaders of his day.

Where does this Sabbath idea come from? Well, from God. As we know, the first two chapters of Genesis tells us about God creating the world and everything in it. Then it says on the seventh day, God rested. Listen:

**“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” (Genesis 2:2-3)**

So God established a sacred day, a holy day, as part of each week. It would be different from the other days. **“The LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exodus 20:11)**

The word “Sabbath” comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to cease, desist, or rest.” To “Sabbath” is to stop doing what you’ve been doing. Did God stop creating and rest because He was tired? I don’t think so. Elsewhere in Scripture we are told that God ‘does not grow weary, that He neither slumbers nor sleeps.’

God was not exhausted, then, from His work of creation—the Genesis account doesn’t say He was. The Sabbath has more to do with God’s understanding of us--that we can get exhausted from our labors. Out of love and concern for us, God established this pattern for humanity (actually, for animals and the land as well!)—that one day out of seven would be set aside for rest and worship—because God knows we need both!

Our text explains: “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15). In other words, you’re not to be slaves anymore!

Our Maker understands our physical, mental, and emotional need for rest, but He also recognizes our spiritual need for worship. It's vital that in worship we get beyond self-interest and focus on the One who is the source of our deliverance—the God of our salvation.

For God's people, keeping the Sabbath was how they demonstrated that they knew who they were, that they remembered who it was that had set them free and to whom they now belonged.

Worship continues to meet a need deep inside of us, but only if it enables us to refocus our lives on something beyond ourselves. As long as the attention is on us, we can't rest. If it's just our agenda, there can be no peace.

There are six other days for us to focus on our work, and play, and whatever else; but on the Sabbath, we give *our stuff* a rest and focus on God. That's when we find God meeting a deeper need in us than we even knew existed—a need we could never have met on our own--without God.

We need this, friends. Judith Viorst has a way of helping us see ourselves more clearly. She calls this piece her "Self-Improvement Program." See if you recognize anybody you know:

I've finished six pillows in Needlepoint,  
And I'm reading Jane Austen and Kant,  
And I'm up to the pork with black beans  
in Advanced Chinese Cooking.  
I don't have to struggle to find myself  
For I already know what I want.  
I want to be healthy and wise... and extremely good-looking.

I'm learning new glazes in Pottery Class,  
And I'm playing new chords in Guitar,  
And in Yoga I'm starting to master the lotus position.  
I don't have to ponder priorities  
For I already know what they are:  
To be good-looking, healthy, and wise.  
And adored in addition.

I'm improving my serve with a tennis pro,  
And I'm practicing verb forms in Greek,  
And in Primal Scream Therapy as my frustrations are vented.  
I don't have to ask what I'm searching for  
Since I already know that I seek

To be good-looking, healthy, and wise.  
And adored. And contented.  
I've bloomed in Organic Gardening,  
And in Dance I have tightened my thighs,  
And in Consciousness Raising  
there's no one around who can top me.  
And I'm working all day and I'm working all night  
To be good-looking, healthy, and wise.  
And adored. And contented. And brave.  
And well-read. And a marvelous hostess,  
And bilingual, Athletic, Artistic.  
Won't someone please stop me?

Sound familiar? Maybe you don't do all this stuff personally, but you do want your children to have all these opportunities you never had! If we keep this up, we'll all need Primal Scream Therapy—whatever that is—OR, here's a novel idea--we could start obeying the fourth commandment and keep the Sabbath day holy.

I know that sounds crazy, but what we're doing now is crazier! Under Old Testament law, the penalty for consistently breaking the Sabbath was death! Break the Sabbath and they would stone you.

That sounds crazy, too, but maybe death is still the penalty when we go week after week and month after month and year after year without taking time off to rest and worship. Some people kill themselves working. Others... by playing too hard.

Go for long without Sabbath rest, though, and something will die. It may not be your body. It could be your soul. Or your marriage. Or your relationship with your children or friends or God. There's no time to nurture the relationships that are most important.

In 1967—fifty years ago—a Senate subcommittee held hearings about increases in leisure time for American families. Experts predicted that by 1985, average work weeks would be 24 hours.

TIME magazine did a story on the challenges we'd face deciding what to do with so much time on our hands. What in the world happened to that???

Today, workers average closer to 50 hours a week, and many professionals work 70 to 80 hours plus. Devices that were supposed to be "time-savers"—computers, smart phones, and

more—often mean that our minds never get to rest. There’s no down time—no Sabbath—no rest for the weary!

It’s like we’re afraid of slowing down or allowing for any quiet space in our lives. Could this be contributing to all the problems we’re facing in our culture and increasingly in our churches which are often just a reflection of our troubled world—rather than being, as intended, distinctively different from the world.

A man who had been a pastor for twenty years left the ministry to become a funeral director. Asked why, he said: “I spent three years trying to straighten out John’s life and he still can’t get it together. I spent six months trying to straighten out Susan’s marriage and she filed for divorce. I spent two-and-a-half years trying to straighten out Bob’s drug problem and he’s still addicted. At least now, when I straighten people out, they stay straight!”

Maybe some of our problems could be resolved if we would just take time for a Sabbath each week. I’m not talking about this in a legalistic sense. But what if we set aside a block of time every week for genuine worship and a total break from our usual, frenetic pace of life?

What if we began each week by determining when our Sabbath time will be. Maybe it can’t always be a whole day, but at least some time set apart for refreshment and renewal and a complete break with our normal schedules. We may still miss out some weeks; but by being intentional, it should at least get better.

Plan your Sabbath with these goals in mind:

A. REST YOUR BODY! Some wag observed that if we’re burning the candle at both ends, we’re not as bright as we think. We can be consumed by our careers. Why do people push so hard? More money, more recognition, more sense of achievement—not necessarily bad motivations as long as we don’t lose sight of the fact that our bodies are not built to work non-stop.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm tells us, concerning the Good Shepherd, that **“He makes me to lie down in green pastures.”** He knows we need to rest.

1. Include time for quietness and meditation: the Bible says, “Be still and know that I am God.” In Mark 6:31, Jesus said to his

disciples, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted (quiet) place and rest a while."

2. Include time for family or other close relationships. As I was growing up, my father worked long hours, but Sundays were always different. Sundays were for church and family. Play together, talk together, enjoy being together as a family on Sundays. And if it can't be on Sunday, carve out some other time to do this. It's vital!

B. Rest Your Body and REFOCUS YOUR SPIRIT. Sundays are time for worship. It's the Lord's Day and worship should be part of what we do on Sundays. Prepare for worship. Get in a mindset for worship. In fact, let worship begin for you before you ever arrive at church. Yes, you may have to get up a bit earlier for this to happen—but it will be worth it!

Many families are so stretched for time today they turn Sundays into a "fun day." They go to the pool, the lake, the golf course, or maybe to the mountains for a hike or a picnic. Worship is left out—it isn't part of their day.

Before long, the kids get the message that only two things are important: work and play. Let's please make sure our children understand that it's also vitally important—more important than work or play, in fact--that we worship God together.

The 4th Commandment says "Observe the Sabbath day—remember it--by keeping it holy." How are we doing? Are we too tired? Do we feel pulled in too many directions? Do we find ourselves just wanting to run away and escape from all the pressures we face?

The Lord Jesus himself showed us the way—a much better way to live. He had the most important work ever in all the world to do, but He kept the Sabbath holy. He found time to worship and pray and rest.

And, friends, He still extends this invitation to us all: **"Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."**

**(Matthew 11:29)**

**Thanks be to God... for Sabbath!**