

Week Two STOP

Overview

So here we are with week two as we consider what it means to STOP and pause to allow space for Sabbath – a day of rest to spend time with God and one another.

Last week you had homework. To pause for five minutes and invite God to come and sit with you. Nothing to fill the time, no prayers or reading just being with each other.

Who managed to do it everyday? Some days? One day?

Who found it helpful? Who found it OK? Who found it a bit meh?

Today we are going to consider what it means to STOP. The most literal meaning in Hebrew of the verb shabbat means to stop. So to experience Sabbath means to stop, to cease, to be done.

If you consider many of the adverts we see – they are all about stopping – pictures of people lounging on a bed reading the paper, napping on the couch with the cat on your lap, friends on the beach for a picnic – all images of stopping.

Marketing departments know that the thing our souls crave is a life with moments of peace, ease, calm – a Sabbath rest. They are offering you in essence a sabbath – but the irony is you don't need the posh sheets, or the comfy sofa or the beer and barbecue on the beach – though they might be nice. You just need to stop.

In the Genesis story the Creator God himself rested on the seventh day – and so wove rest into the fabric of creation. We are not created to relentlessly plough on day after day but to stop regularly. Weekly. To breathe and to come to rest.

And when we don't stop – when we fill every moment with tasks - we invite exhaustion, confusion and a fracture in our relationships – with each other and with God.

So today, we consider what might it mean to just Stop.

Teaching

So we know God stopped on the seventh day – we've read that in Genesis – but have you realised his command to us to do the same is not only included in the 10 commandments – it's almost a third longer than any of the other commandments. He wanted to make sure not only did we stop but we didn't force animals or servants to do the work instead – if **we** were stopping, then everyone needed to stop.

We know that in many orthodox Jewish communities that it still taken very literally. Even flicking a light switch is considered work. And yes, Jesus said to be careful of this religiosity – don't get too legalistic. In Mark 2:27-28 “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” - to highlight that the Sabbath is a gift for human benefit, not a burdensome obligation. Later he says (this time in Matthew 12) “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.” So, rest from work is important, but put it in appropriate perspective.

I wonder why we feel obliged to always be busy? The reality is that everyone is tired – centuries ago we would sleep 10-11 hours while the average now is about six hours a night.

And many of us are not just tired in body but also in mind and spirit – the constant demand on our time, the churn of information through our devices. This is not an easy yolk we carry – yet Jesus offers us rest for our souls.

And remember when we are tired, it's harder to love – we get impatient and irritable, selfish even – we have no energy to be present to our

relationships, to our work, with God. It's like the power bar on our phones – if the bar is at 100% then that's life to the full. If it's 0% then we are dead. The reality is many of us are operating at dangerously empty levels. And even if we move up to 70% then we are still missing out on the best stuff – which only really comes when we are fully and regularly rested.

Remember the parable of the sower – the seeds among the thorns – “someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.” If we are so busy with the demands of life, then we choke out space for God and our lives are not as fruitful as they have the potential to be. And yet there is the invitation we ignore - to stop and to really rest.

I wonder who equates stopping and resting only with holidays?

Or – stopping and resting means being lazy, because when will everything get done?

It's interesting that our culture tells us that we have to keep going – we must, we should, we ought – when in reality, God gifted us a life that includes stopping every week to rest, recharge and restore. It's part of how we were created – how creation was put together. Even fields are left fallow in order to regenerate sufficiently to allow crops to be fruitful.

So – have I convinced you that Sabbath rest is an important thing?
But who is having a counter argument in their head that says there just isn't time?

Let's consider how we might carve out sabbath space – when could we do this?

1. The first is obvious, pick Sunday because that's when we meet as a church to worship.
2. Choose the traditional Jewish sabbath – from sundown on Friday to the same time on Saturday
3. Or a midweek sabbath if your schedule allows.

When the Bible talks about sabbath the day starts at sundown, not sunrise as we might imagine. By the end of the week most of us are too exhausted to really enjoy our sabbath, so by starting the night before, maybe with a meal with family or friends. Light a candle, say a prayer together – give thanks for the week of work and tasks and actively step into a time of rest. We can talk next week about more ideas.

But if you think that a whole 24 hours is too much for you and your household, that's fine – consider setting aside a 3-4 hour time period, maybe after church on Sunday or a weekday evening. Turn off your phone – we turn off our internet – and just stop.

Try and get into a rhythm by having the same time each week. Put it in your diary, don't book in anything else – your body will begin to look forward to it and you will live off the energy and joy in the days after.

Personal exercise

So, I want you to spend some time now – either on your own, or quietly with your other half if they are here – to work out how you might enter into the spirit of Sabbath.

Pick a time

Pick some activities to consider during your sabbath.

It's not a to do list – more like some things to grow into – choose 1-3 things that your heart is drawn to.

And if you live alone, are there other people you could spend some sabbath time with? Your homegroup or other Christian friends?

Homework

Your homework for this week is to sleep a full 8-9 hours every night for an entire week. There are some additional tips to help you. But good sleep is a great starting point for our bodies as we approach living, working and resting in a different way. I really struggle with sleep, this is difficult for me, but we can only try....