

Worshiping by Sabbath Rest in a Culture of Busyness & Exhaustion

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

My name is August Verne, and I am one of your deacons with a nice little orange name tag. Today we have two scripture readings, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

Today's scripture reading is Psalm 92 and Hebrews 4, verses 9 and 10, as printed in your liturgy. A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day. It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night to the music of the tin-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.

For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord. I sing for joy at what your hands have done. How great are your works, Lord! How profound your thoughts! Since those people do not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever.

[1 : 23] But you, Lord, are forever exalted. For surely your enemies, Lord, surely your enemies will perish. All evildoers will be scattered. You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox.

Fine oils have been poured on me. My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries. My ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes. The righteous will flourish like a palm tree.

They will grow like a cedar of Lebanon. Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age.

They will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, The Lord is upright. He is my rock, and there is no wickedness in him. The grass withers and the flowers fall.

But the word of our God stands forever. The New Testament lesson. A reading from the letter to the Hebrews. There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

[2 : 24] For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church.

I would like to begin today with a simple question. And the simple question is this. What is good? What is good?

We all want something good, but ideas of what is good vary widely, do they not? Many think that it would be good to gain wealth and possessions, what we often call goods, after all.

Some seek good in fitness and in health, and others in exotic travel. For some, all the good that they want is bound up in the care and enjoyment of family.

Others concentrate on the good of education or the acquisition of some useful skill. Some pursue the good in the arts. Others find good in the excitement of watching sports, especially if you're a Dodgers fan right now, for example.

[3 : 40] Some think it good to award themselves with a really good time by indulging, overindulging, binging on alcohol or something harmful like Netflix, for example.

There are so many different views of what is good. So what do you think? Here we are, this election, right, is eight days away, and the polls indicate that half of the nation thinks that this blue option is good.

And the other half of the nation thinks that this red option is good. And how the opposition's vision of the good affects us is quite intense right now.

Some of us are anxious. Some of us are depressed and cynical. Some of us are exhausted. And by the way, the church's mission is going to be the same the day after the election as it is right now,

right?

Jesus is still going to be calling us to be the salt of the earth that resists decay, the light of the world that penetrates the darkness. But coming back to Psalm 92, it is good to blank.

[4 : 53] How will that sentence continue? How will we fill in that blank? Psalm 92 commends as really, really good something we haven't even mentioned yet. It is good to what?

It is good to praise the Lord. And praising the Lord is good all the time, but it's good especially on the Sabbath day. Notice that superscript.

It says a psalm, a song for the Sabbath day. This is the only reference to the Sabbath day in the whole Psalter. And that Hebrew word Sabbath, it simply means stop, quit, take a break, rest.

To us, that word rest conveys inactivity. It conveys vegging out in our sweatpants on the couch. But the main way that the biblical Sabbath day renews our strength and our joy is through the highest of all goods, which is worship and praising the Lord.

The command to keep the Sabbath, it's actually one of the most repeated of all of God's commands in the scriptures. And yet it's also one of the most ignored in our culture.

[6 : 01] And part of the reason I think that there's so much exhaustion and so much burnout right now in our culture is that when we love and when we serve and when we praise anything more than God as if it were a greater good than God, it becomes an idol that then saps our energy and our strength and our vitality.

Right? Because idols are never satisfied. The idol of career and status and success and relationships. The idols of money and sex and power. They promise more than they deliver.

They take more than they give. And this Sabbath song of Psalm 92, it holds before us this conviction that it is good to praise the Lord and to praise the Lord alone.

It's good to worship the true God of perfect love. This is the only good that actually holds the power to restore us and to reinvigorate us.

And so today we're continuing to talk about these holy habits of grace. And I want to talk about this holy habit of the Sabbath. And I want to ask these three questions. Why did God give us the Sabbath?

[7 : 12] How do we celebrate the Sabbath? And what does God do in us through the Sabbath? Why did God give us the Sabbath? How do we celebrate the Sabbath? And what does God do in us through the Sabbath?

First of all, why did God give us the Sabbath? Verse 1 says, it is good to praise the Lord. And then verse 4 says, you make me glad by your deeds, Lord.

So the Sabbath is about the goodness and the gladness of a life that is centered on the Lord, on who he is and what he has done. Why did God give us the Sabbath day?

So that we could experience his goodness and his gladness. And this takes us all the way back really to pages 1 and 2 of the Bible. There in Genesis 1, it says that God said, let there be light. And bang, there was light. And then there's this poetic image of God as a worker laboring for six days to build his creation. And then what does he do on that seventh day?

[8 : 12] Genesis chapter 2 says this, thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. And 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 then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. Because on it, he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. You see, the Sabbath day was created in the beginning.

Before sin came into the world. It was created when Adam and Eve were without sin in the Garden of Eden. And why did God rest on that seventh day of creation?

Well, it wasn't because God needed rest. God is God. God has eternal, unceasing life in himself. God does not get tired.

He does not get exhausted. He does not get overworked and burned out. God did not take a Sabbath because he needed rest. He took a Sabbath because we needed rest. And this is why Jesus says three times in the Gospels that the Sabbath was made for people.

[9 : 17] The Sabbath was made for people. Again, that Hebrew word Shabbat, it means to stop. But it also has this sense of delight. If this 24-hour, one-day-and-seven Sabbath was created for Adam and Eve to experience not only rest, but also delight and refreshment in the presence of God before sin came into the world, how much more do we need the Sabbath?

Why did Jesus, the Son of God, build into his life this rhythm of an entire day to stop and delight in God once a week?

It's because God built the Sabbath into the grain of the universe. And if you go against the grain of the universe, guess what's going to happen? You're going to get splinters.

Jesus read Genesis 1 and 2. And when he read Genesis 1 and 2, he saw that God blessed three spheres of his creation. First of all, he saw that God blessed the animal kingdom and said, Be fruitful and multiply.

And then God blessed the human family and said, Be fruitful and multiply. And then what did he bless next? He blessed the Sabbath day and he meant it as something to be fruitful and to give us life.

[10:37] God means the Sabbath to fill up his world with more and more of his life. He not only blessed the Sabbath day, Genesis says, but he made the Sabbath day holy, which means he set it apart.

He consecrated it as a time for us to linger with him and luxuriate in his holy presence so that we are saturated with him and that we're saturated with his vision of life.

We're saturated with a sense of his holy will for our lives and for his world. So why did Jesus himself practice the Sabbath? Because he saw it as a gift of God that's both blessed and holy.

You with me? More than that, the Sabbath is one of God's ten commandments. You know, in Exodus 20, Israel, they've been liberated from their soul-crushing bondage in Egypt.

And therefore, God gives them this manifesto of how to live as free people. And he gives it to them on tablets of stone, right, written with the very finger of God, like kind of a big deal.

[11:43] And the Sabbath command that comes in all these ten commands, it's way longer than all the rest of the commands. If you took all the ten commandments and you put them in a pie chart, the Sabbath command would take up about 30% of that pie chart.

If this is God's priority list, the Sabbath ranks two commands before thou shalt not murder. It's kind of important. And here's what it says in Exodus 20.

Remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy. The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

And to the Lord your God means that it's a day of worship. It's a day of whole life orientation toward God.

It's a day to experience what Psalm 92 calls the goodness and the gladness of God. You know, 40 years later, 40 years after Mount Sinai, Exodus 20, Moses reissues the ten commandments for the next generation before they're about to enter into the promised land.

And it says this in Deuteronomy 5. It says, Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. And then it says this, 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.

[13:00] So in Exodus, the Sabbath command is grounded in the creation story and the rhythm that the Creator God built not only into the universe but into our very bodies. And then in Deuteronomy, the Sabbath command is grounded in the redemption story.

It's grounded in Israel's liberation from slavery into a freedom that they now have to worship their gracious Redeemer God. So here's a once-a-week celebration of all that is good in God, our Creator and Redeemer.

Fast forward, after Jesus' resurrection from the dead on Sunday morning, the early church moved their day of worship to the first day of the week and they started to call it the Lord's Day.

And so if you read the New Testament, you read the book of Acts, the letters of the New Testament, every time the resurrected Jesus meets with His disciples as they are publicly assembled, guess what day it is?

It's Sunday. It's the day of resurrection. So from that first Sabbath day in the Garden of Eden all the way to the empty tomb of Jesus on Easter Sunday, all the way to that day when Jesus finally returns in His glory, God has always intended His people to stop, to rest, to breathe, to delight, to celebrate, to worship our Creator, to praise our Redeemer, and to allow this 24-hour period, one day a week, to fill us with His eternal and abundant life.

[14:42] And this is why Psalm 92 says, it is good to praise the Lord, especially on the Sabbath day. Do you share in this conviction?

And more than that, does your calendar line up with this conviction? Might this holy habit of grace be just what our exhausted bodies and our burned-out souls really need here as we come to the

end of 2024?

Why did God give us the Sabbath? But here's the next question. How do we celebrate the Sabbath? How do we celebrate the Sabbath?

That opening word, good, in verse 1, is rich in meaning. It means beautiful. It means desirable. It means pleasing and life-giving. So this psalm opens, and it doesn't say, you are commanded to praise the Lord. It does not say, you should praise the Lord.

[15:45] You ought to praise the Lord. You must praise the Lord. What does it say? It is good to praise the Lord. The public gatherings of God's people for worship, one day in seven, are a sheer delight to the psalmist.

It's not just a regularly ingrained habit or a faithful duty. No, he positively delights in it and takes pleasure in it. He longs for it. He looks forward to it.

It is so, so, so good. As we heard in Psalm 122 last week, I rejoiced when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

He brings with him to the Sabbath day a certain attitude, a certain cast of mind and spirit, and it's one of delight, and it's one of rejoicing.

It's one of celebration. And what are the features of this Sabbath worship? Well, look with me at verse one. It says, it is good to praise the Lord and to make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night to the music of the tin-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.

[16:55] What this tells us is that Sabbath worship, it's not an individual thing. It's a collective, corporate, gathered assembly of people, and it's also not a passive thing.

It's not a passive audience coming to watch a performance. It's rather an active congregation of engaged participants. And what are they doing? With the help of some instruments, the people of God are making music.

They're keeping time. They're singing melodies of praise. And it's not just one in four people singing. It's all the people proclaiming to God and to each other through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs who God is.

And who is God? God is the Most High. God is sovereign and supreme. God is glorious and praiseworthy.

God's name is above every other name. And so Sabbath worship is about praising God as higher and greater and lovelier than anything and anyone else.

[18:00] And what is the focus then of our praise and our proclamation on the Sabbath day? Well, verse two says this. It says, We proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night.

This is what we're meant to give our time and attention to from the beginning of the day to the very end of the day is to focus on God's character and on His attributes.

And this isn't the general love of the Creator God for His creatures. That's not the love that's being talked about here. This is the special and particular love that the Redeemer God has for His chosen people.

This is His covenant love. This is His sworn loyalty to be our God to the point ultimately of shedding His blood and giving His life. That's how much He loves us.

Listen to verse four. It says, For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord. I sing for joy at what your hands have done. Now, a less tame translation says this.

[19:06] I shout cries of joy for the works of your hands. And my mentor, Bruce Walkie, comments on this verse. He says, It's like shouting for a sports hero in a stadium.

Right? Like Freddie Freeman's walk-off Grand Slam the other night. It's like shouting like that. Any of you spontaneously rejoice when you saw Steph Curry in the Olympic finals this summer?

I mean, wasn't that unbelievable? And the psalmist would say, You know, what if we had more joy and more awe at what the Lord's hands have done than what Steph Curry's hands can do?

Or what any human hands can accomplish? See, why do we rejoice with shouts of joy on the Sabbath? Or why do some churches rejoice with shouts of joy on the Sabbath?

Verse 4, For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord. I sing for joy at what your hands have done. How great are your works, Lord. How profound your thoughts. The psalmist has in mind the saving deeds of the Lord in the Exodus, the wonderful works of redemption from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the promised land.

[20 : 20] And friends, we have so much more to rejoice over because we've seen the saving deeds and the wonderful works of the Lord in His Son, Jesus Christ. How He's taken us out of our bondage and He's given us His freedom.

We've seen how the Father sent His Son from heaven to earth. We've seen how Jesus took on human nature so He could represent us. We saw how Jesus embodied and demonstrated the Father's covenant love and His sworn loyalty by volunteering His hands for the nails of that cross. We saw how Jesus put Himself there in our place to be punished for our sins and to die our death. And we saw how He was raised to life so that He could give us new life.

And when we see the costly love of Jesus on His cross, we can't help but cry out, You make me glad by Your deeds, Lord. I shout with cries of joy at what Your nail-pierced hands have done for me.

You with me? So, I just want to give a little bit of practical, down-to-earth, nitty-gritty pastoral application and some guidance to help you put this holy practice, this holy habit of grace into practice on a weekly and not every other weekly or monthly basis.

[21 : 50] You ready for some guidance? You're not ready. I can tell. I can tell. Here's the first thing. Prepare for the Sabbath on Saturday morning and afternoon.

Get your laundry washed, your bills paid, wrap up that work project, finish your homework, do the grocery shopping, work through your to-do list. Our Friday newsletter that we send out every week has a link at the very bottom.

It says, Songs for this Sunday. It takes you to a YouTube or a Spotify playlist and you can listen to that while you work so that you can know the songs we're going to sing here on Sunday morning. Secondly, begin your Sabbath on Saturday at sundown and mark the moment. Light a candle. Pray a psalm.

Ask the Holy Spirit to come and fill you and fill that time. Enjoy dinner with your family and your friends. Go on a walk. Have dessert. Drink tea. Stop.

[22 : 51] Number three, take a 24-hour break from your technology. Ooh. Turn off your screens. Power down your devices. Put them in a box and stow them in a closet.

Create an out-of-office message that says, I will respond to emails on Sunday night and just drink deeply of an unplugged human life. Amen?

Number four, prepare for worship. So, after you've put yourself to bed early on Saturday night and given yourself the opportunity to get really good sleep and woken up and had that delicious and big breakfast to last you through about 1 o'clock or 1.30 on Sunday afternoon, I want you just to pray on Sunday morning, whether that's at home or here in our boiler room because how many of us go and work out without warming up?

What happens when we work out without warming up? Bad things happen. Bad things. Your Achilles starts to act up and you've got to go to physical therapy, right? So, why wouldn't we warm up for worship?

Number five, arrive early and stay late and here's the deal. If you come 15 minutes earlier than you normally do, you will be here, some of you will be here to welcome the newcomers who get here at 10.15 and some of you will be here at 10.30 when we start.

[24 : 12] Every week. Our coffee hour afterwards, our monthly lunches, those are times to build up the joints and the ligaments and the connective tissues of the body of Christ. Our classes are times for us to have shared vision and values, shared life and language, so pack a lunch if you need to.

Number six, pursue one another's good. The Gospels tell us that Jesus fed people and he healed people on the Sabbath day. So, invite someone to lunch and allow God to minister through you to their loneliness and to their burdens that you have no idea they're carrying into this place.

Number seven, this is really important, take a nap. Go on a walk. Enjoy the fact that salvation has been finished in Jesus Christ.

Enjoy the fact that the Holy Spirit has set you free. Here's number eight. Make a plan for Sunday evening because the Psalm says we proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night.

The whole day belongs to God. It's not Sabbath morning and then the rest of the day you just do whatever you like. It's not the Lord's hour, it's the Lord's day. So, I think all of us would do well to ask this question, how can I live on the Sabbath day the way that I want to live all the other six days of the week from morning to night?

[25 : 38] And maybe for you that's just sitting down at the dinner table and opening the Bible, maybe reviewing what you heard about in the sermon of the lesson that day. Sing a hymn, pray about the week ahead, pray for all the people you're going to have conversations with, pray that God would give you guidance that through you God's blessing would flow into the lives of other people.

Psalms 92 says that the Sabbath is a whole day for the goodness of praising the Lord and the gladness of His saving deeds. Some of you complain that I'm not practical enough and I'm trying to remedy that in this series by just getting super down to earth and I hope that's helpful for you. Why did God give us the Sabbath? How do we actually celebrate the Sabbath? But then the last thing I want to look at is what does God do in us through the Sabbath? What does God do in us through the Sabbath?

And here's verse 6. See what the Sabbath day does is it enables us to gain perspective.

The Sabbath day enables us to rise above the mess and the muddle of our week. It enables us to rise above all those limited, finite, fallible, and temporary perspectives of all the people around us in order to come and gain God's perspective on human life and human history.

[27 : 11] The psalmist says, left to ourselves, we are senseless and foolish. Left to ourselves, we just don't know and we don't have understanding. Understanding about what? Well, he says, think about the seasons.

The climate in Israel is basically like the climate in Northern California. And he says, you know, think about those winter rains. Think about how the hills spring up and they flourish with lush green grass.

And remember that God allows that to happen. He allows people to flourish who actually are centering their lives on themselves.

People who are centering their whole life, organizing all their time around their desires and their agendas. God is so kind and he's so patient that he allows people who neglect him and who ignore him.

He allows people who live apart from him. He allows people who think to themselves, it is good to do almost anything but praise the Lord. God allows them to flourish like the green grass.

[28 : 17] But of course, that's not the whole story, is it? Because the green grass grows from about November to May. and then what starts to happen? And then the sun starts to scorch the grass and wither the grass.

It turns the grass golden and brown and lifeless. And you see, the Sabbath day gives us God's perspective of how to distinguish between flourishing now and ruin later.

How does the psalmist describe this for us? He says in verse 8, but you, Lord, are forever exalted for surely your enemies, Lord, surely your enemies will perish.

All evildoers will be scattered. You see, if the Lord is the exalted one, if he's the most high, if he's sovereign and supreme, if he's utterly just and righteous, and if people neglect him and ignore him, if people live apart from him as if they're their own makers and their own judges and their own lords. That green grass that God is allowing to flourish now, it's very soon going to face the reality that without a relationship with the living God, without his divine life, without his eternal life in you, you just can't stay green forever.

[29 : 37] You're going to dry up. You're going to wither. You're going to become lifeless. You're going to become like chaff that the wind blows away. And you see, it's only as we give ourselves to the Sabbath worship of God that he enables us to see that temporary prosperity is very often just a prelude to perishing, but that it's eternal flourishing that ultimately matters in the end.

And what is it that brings about eternal flourishing? Well, in verse 8, there's this very subtle shift in the speaker. And we kind of have to ask ourselves, like, who is speaking here?

And who it is, this is actually God's anointed king, and he's speaking to the Lord, and the anointed king is saying to the Lord, he says, Lord, you are forever exalted. Lord, your enemies are going to perish.

And then what does the king declare? He says in verse 10, you have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox. Fine oils have been poured on me. My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries.

My ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes. This is a king who's talking enthusiastically about the victory that God has given him.

[30 : 54] The ox is a symbol of fierce strength. The horn, a symbol of power and honor. The oil, a symbol of anointing. All of these are signs of a royal victory.

And of course, Christians can't help but hear in this the voice of our king, Jesus, speaking to the Lord about his victory over sin and death, about the defeat of his great adversary, the devil, about the rout of his wicked foes, those dark powers and principalities that seek to steal and kill and destroy human beings.

And this is a song for us about the victory of this anointed king who paradoxically wins by being defeated. But more than that, this song is not just about the victory of the anointed king, it's about what his victory means for us and for our lives.

And here it is in verse 12. The righteous will flourish like a palm tree. They will grow like a cedar of Lebanon. Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God.

They will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, the Lord is upright. He is my rock and there is no wickedness in him. You see, the victory of King Jesus means that instead of our lives being like green grass that just flourishes today and perishes tomorrow, we, by God's grace, can be these palms and these cedars, these evergreen trees in the presence of God.

[32 : 36] The picture here is of a new garden of Eden. The picture here is of an orchard of evergreen trees who find their nourishment in the abundant and never-ending source of God himself.

Those who find their nourishment in God humbly draw their strength, their spiritual energy from him, they're going to flourish like that tall and graceful palm tree, it says.

They're going to flourish like that mighty and beautiful cedar tree, it says. Those who say to God, you are my rock and no other. You are my reliable refuge.

You are my never-failing shelter and my savior will be like these rooted and stable and long-lasting evergreen trees whose leaves never wither.

Those who look to the resurrected Jesus as their rock, those who look to Jesus and say, you are upright and there is no wickedness in you, they're going to be full of sap and they're going to be laden with rich foliage, not only in their old age, but they're going to have endless vitality in Jesus' new creation.

[33 : 52] Friends, that is the eternal perspective that God wants to put into us on his Sabbath day and that is the coming reality, that is the coming hope that we celebrate on the Sabbath.

And so, I want to just end with these words from the prophet Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah says this in Isaiah 58, if you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord.

Then I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land. And then you will feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.