

Lesson 3: The Sabbath

The story of King David's Flight

You may know about David from the story of David and Goliath, when the small shepherd David used his sling to kill the giant Goliath in battle. However, that's not the only part of the story. David later would become the king of Israel, but not before having a lot of misadventures first. Honestly, I'm pretty surprised there's never been a hit TV series about all the adventures David had. So let's talk about how David outran his enemies, succeeded where everyone expected him to fail, and honored the rest that God invited him into.

David joined the army when a guy named Saul was king. That's how he ended up fighting Goliath. King Saul was so impressed by David that he started putting him in charge of things, until David was a commander in the army. Things were going very well—David was winning battles and serving the king well. King Saul even gave David one of his daughters in marriage! David was very good at his job, to the point that the people of Israel loved him more than King Saul—there were even songs about it.

Now King Saul was a little paranoid. He'd gotten word that God wasn't going to support him as king anymore, and with David getting so popular, he was afraid David would try to seize the throne. He plotted to have David killed, but David's wife (who was Saul's daughter, remember) warned him, so he fled. He ran off into the Judean wilderness to hide from King Saul. What followed was years of David hiding in caves, running from town to town, hiring himself out as a mercenary, and acting like a Bible-times Robin Hood in the wilderness for a few years.

It was in that time, while he was running away from King Saul, that David wrote a lot of the words of one of our books of the Bible: the book of Psalms. In particular, I want us to look at one of the Psalms he wrote, the twenty-third one. Even if you don't know it, you know it. Go ahead and open your Bibles to look at Psalm 23, right in the middle of your Bible. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," it goes. What a phrase to say when you're running for your life!

When David was running for his life from King Saul, he could have focused on how difficult things were. It would have been easy to assume that he had to be on his guard at all times, take advantage of every single second to outwit and outmaneuver the King's armies that were trying to catch him. But David knew that God commanded the Sabbath rest for a reason. So he took the time, even when some might say it would've been wise not to, to spend time with God, resting and reflecting and worshipping. It re-centered his life and his worldview so that even when he was being chased, he could trust that God was with him.

See, David did that his whole life. Even when his life was on the line, David had this knack for turning to God, for recognizing that even in the hardest of circumstances there was

still time to sit back and let God restore you. When he was on the run, worried that any day King Saul could have thugs pop up out of nowhere and kill him, he still took time to sit down and be with God. And David trusted God all the more because of this. David grew in trust to God because he took the time to regularly slow down and pay attention to all the ways God was helping him—and a lot of the time, he wrote it down in a Psalm.

Now, running from King Saul wasn't the only time David would have an opportunity to rest in God even when things were going badly for him. Read the books of First and Second Samuel to hear his story. He would face rebellion, war, and personal tragedies. But he would always come back to the truth that God calls us to rest and be restored. And that rest and restoration is what we call the Sabbath.

What it means to honor the Sabbath

David's story is one of action. If you read it, you'll see that he is constantly running, plotting, planning, and acting. But it's more than that. His story also shows us a person who recognized how he needed to set aside the time to pay attention to what God was doing, rest his body, and let himself be restored for the things he needed to do.

See, when God gave the commandment to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy, God was talking to the Israelites. They had been slaves in Egypt for four hundred years—and as slaves, they didn't get any breaks! They were worked hard. When God gave this commandment, it was really good news. It meant that God, the creator of the universe, wanted them to rest. They were given a specific instruction that taking a break wasn't just supposed to be the privilege of well-off people, or only a certain selection of particularly lucky people, but it was a gift for everyone! Rest was important, to the point that God reminded the people that even God rested on the seventh day of creation!

Now it is probably important to point out what exactly is meant by "rest" when we say "Sabbath rest." It's more than just sleeping in, playing video games, whittling away the afternoon with TikToks, or generally using it as an excuse to be lazy. When we talk about Sabbath rest, we're talking about rest meant to create wholeness. And that rest looks like two equally important things.

The first is being restored by focusing on God. The world is very busy—I'm sure y'all know at least some of that. Think about how you have to run from one extracurricular to the next; working on one homework assignment only to have another one right after it; chugging through block days and being exhausted by the time the sending bell rings. In all of that, how often do you think of God? How often do you even get a chance to notice what God is doing? When we are so busy that our lives don't have room to notice God, Sabbath rest becomes that much more important. It's a whole day that God has given us to stop doing all that busy work and open our eyes to what God is doing. It's a day where we get to be in worship together,

hearing hymns and scriptures and sermons and prayers, and getting to reorient ourselves to see God's work.

Like how David took the time to notice how God was working in his life, even when he was in really bad circumstances, we are given this gift of the Sabbath to notice God. And we can notice God by worshipping, reading scripture, and praying in our Sabbath rest.

The other way of honoring our Sabbath rest is doing things that bring life outside of worshipping together. These are things that aren't just time-wasters or distractions like watching Netflix or mindlessly scrolling through the latest app. We honor the Sabbath by doing things that make us feel whole and connected to God and each other. It's things like reading a book that you love just for the joy of reading. It's things like going for a run, not to train for cross country but just because you love the feeling. It's things like making a drawing just to see the result. Sabbath rest looks like doing things that aren't work, but are things that bring you life.

How does it affect the real world?

Honoring the Sabbath and keeping it holy affects the real world by changing how we understand what is important. If you haven't already, you will probably soon feel the pressure from others to do, do, do. In our country we have an unhealthy belief that we have to hurry all the time, and work all the time, if we want to do what we want to do. It's so ingrained that half of all Americans who have paid time off didn't use it all, and in 365 days, the average number of vacation days used was 17! That would be like you going to school all but two weeks in the entire year—not the school year, the calendar year.

But God doesn't just want us to have vacations. God wants us to be whole and healthy, and be able to notice where God is at work in the world. When we're so busy, not taking breaks and not resting and not taking enough time to unwind from doing things all the time, it gets hard to develop a practice of noticing God. That's why David is so special here! He was in really bad circumstances, but because he took the time to regularly honor his Sabbath rest, he could see where God was protecting him or guiding him or correcting him. When we honor the Sabbath, we'll start to notice that too.

What honoring the Sabbath does is it teaches us to slow down. If we honor the fact that God calls us to *mindfully* rest, put down our busy-ness, and let ourselves be restored, it changes our perspective on the world. It helps us put our priorities in place. If a thing requires that you not take a single day off—well, maybe that's God pointing out that it's not something worth doing! If you have a day to reflect and wonder what God is up to, it helps you see how God is there in your schoolwork, or in your sports, or in your music or interests or friendships. When you slow down and honor the Sabbath, you can start to see things the way that God sees them.