

Background - Rhythm of Life

<Provide some context to your group on why we're talking about Sabbath and summarize the discussion from Session 2.>

The Rhythm of Life is a tool that we've provided to the Vox community to provide a framework for what spiritual growth and development looks like. In our attempts to support our community in their spiritual formation, we will provide our midweek groups an opportunity to dialogue and practice through each of the rhythms over a few seasons.

In the past, our midweek groups have spent seasons exploring Scripture and prayer and engaging each of those through different practices and expressions. This past spring, we spent a season on what it means to be Invitational and to discover healthy expressions of evangelism for our community. The hope is as we package guides for each rhythm, groups can go through them at their own pace or as new groups start up.

Sabbath: Session 3 Objectives

These objectives might be helpful in shaping and guiding the discussion to a healthy landing spot by the end of the night.

- a. discuss ways to reframe their concept of the sabbath
- b. develop practical ideas for adding intentional sabbath to their schedules.

Active/Intentional Nature of Sabbath

In the last weeks, we've discussed the idea of sabbath as a commandment, as an internal focus on God's word and presence in our lives. We've talked about it as an outward expression, unifying community and prioritizing "just being" with each other. But in our busy lives, sabbath doesn't come easy. We have to ask for time off, and give each other permission to take that time. This leads us to the very active nature of sabbath.

1. How can we think of the sabbath as an intentional, active celebration?

<It might be helpful to provide some context based on the notes below>

- *On the face of it, to sabbath is to rest. To take time away from chores and work and to concentrate on the immediate. It's to not worry about tomorrow, but to enter into a place of stillness so that the presence of God may be more poignantly felt. In his book, *The Sabbath*, Abraham Heschel explains that by instituting a sabbath on the seventh day, God created a void. By then commanding people to fill that void, he established a bride-bridegroom balance. And, he writes, we are the bridegroom. In the traditional man-woman constructs, it is the man who pursues the woman, so for the purpose of this allegory, it's helpful to put aside modern ideas we have about equality. Heschel writes that like a bride on her wedding day, the sabbath needs pursuit (we show up), honor (we stand as she enters), ceremony (we watch), and celebration (we do the funky chicken). The word for betrothal in Hebrew is the same used for sanctifying the sabbath. Heschel describes rabbis who will put on their best robes as Friday evening approaches, then throw open the doors, dance, sing, and generally exude welcome to the sabbath as it approaches.*
- *Think of sabbath as a verb, and a practice of remembering (gratitude, blessings), like the original commandment version of it. God has promised to walk with us (Psalm 23), and committing to a sabbath rest is actively seeking ways to spend time walking with God. Forgetting to rest can be damaging, leading to overwork, or giving too much. It's not meant to be a sad, gloomy thing, but rather a joyful time to remember God's blessings.*
- *Heschel writes that "man's relation to the spirit is not one-sided; there is reciprocity between man and the spirit. The sabbath is not only a legal institute, state of mind or form of conduct, but a process in the world of spirit," (53). The work we ultimately do in this life, in this world, is temporary. Practicing sabbath is practicing an understanding of eternity. He writes, "There is heaven and everything else," (47). We are to be in love with eternity, like it is our wife/husband/mate/life partner/helpmeet, and practice it here.*

Scripture on Sabbath

Reflect on the interaction Jesus has with the religious leaders over his healing on the Sabbath by reading Luke 6:1-11.

Scripture Reading:

- **Luke 6:1-11**

2. How do we respond to Jesus' example of restoration on the sabbath?

- *Jesus puts a new face on the idea of sabbath for the Jewish leaders at the time. He brings the love to the law, and puts a person's heart well before the policies of cleanliness or behavior. He knew the pharisees were just looking to catch him so they could accuse him, but he continued to do what he knew to be right. This is our example to live. Man was not created for the sabbath, but sabbath was created for man. In our world and our lives, we are challenged to find, no, make the time to spend with God. God walks with us, and our response to that is in turning to him.*

3. What does it look like to prioritize sabbath? (e.g. Can we do laundry and get groceries and drive in our cars?)

- *Jesus asks the leaders if it is lawful to do good work, and they are silent. He's furious with them. Is our avoidance of this question something he could be angry about? God commands us to spend time in sabbath rest, not so he can condemn us to hell, but so he can fulfill the promise of creation. So we can rest and honor what he's given us. When we carve time out (and doesn't it feel bloody sometimes?), we are gifted the opportunity to reflect on what God's given us, what he's doing in our hearts, and what kind of eternity this temporary Earthly work is leading to. It's good for us, like carrots and kale, and God wouldn't have commanded it if it wasn't.*
- *Again from Heschel: "This, then, is the answer to the problem of civilization: not to flee from the realm of space; to work with things of space but to be in love with eternity. Things are our tools; eternity, the sabbath, is our mate," (48).*

Expression of Sabbath

In your group, develop ideas of how to add a restorative activity (sabbath) to your personal life. Throw out ideas at first, then start to hone in on how it might look to practice this intentional rest. **Be specific.** What would it look like? Where might you have to spend less time in order to make it happen?

Instead of meeting for the group's next session, plan to set aside the two hours you would have spent at group for your sabbath activity. Dedicate that time to intentional, restorative rest with God. Carry out the plan you developed tonight and be prepared to chat about it next time your group meets. (*You can see some examples in the Appendix below.*)

As you are brainstorming ideas, choose one idea that you think will work for you. Answer the following questions on paper or your phone:

- **What is my chosen sabbath activity?**
- **When and where will this intentional rest and time with God occur?**
- **How will this activity serve as a reminder of and celebrate the Creator?**
- **How will this activity fill my need for restoration?**

Have each person share their proposed activity and their hope and motivation behind it.

Remember: this is a practice, and it won't be perfect. Try an idea and if it doesn't seem to help you get the time and rest in with God, think about how you could change or modify it to be a meaningful time with God and community.

Prayer

Close your time in prayer for any reflections that came from this time of dialogue and also allow space for any personal areas that require care.

Appendix - Other Resources

Scripture Passage

Luke 6:1-11 — Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

1 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. 2 Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

3 Jesus answered them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” 5 Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

6 On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. 8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Get up and stand in front of everyone.” So he got up and stood there.

9 Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”

10 He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so, and his hand was completely restored. 11 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Ex. 20:8 // Sabbath as a commandment

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Matt. 12:8 // The son of man is lord of the Sabbath

Jesus is accused of breaking the sabbath by picking grains from the field as he and his disciples walk. He replies, “6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

Mark 3:4 // It is lawful to do good work on the Sabbath

In looking to trip Jesus up so they could condemn him a heretic, the Pharisees engineered a test to see what he'd do with a sick man on the sabbath day. “[Jesus] said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.”

Hebrews 4:8-13 // There remains a sabbath rest for the people

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Sabbath Brainstorming Ideas:

- Jog outside with a prayerful focus
- Trap myself in a yoga class (great because there are no disruptions)
- Hiking/walking dog at the park or on trails
- Crafting - draw, painting, or being outside and creating things
- Knitting - need to be intentional about keeping stitches loose, so it helps to maintain a posture of relaxation
- Focus on being together with family and running with the kids (get to observe our creation of a child and be thankful for that)
- Have intentional conversation with spouse/kids and get rid of all the “noise” and distractions so we can reflect on where God has taken us on this journey
- Silence (no electronics)
- Driving out into the hill country and get out of the city, grab a bite out there and drive back home

Additional Resources

- “Sabbath” by Wayne Muller
- “Sabbath as Resistance” by Walter Brueggemann
- “The Sabbath” by Abraham Heschel
- “24/6” by Matthew Sleeth