

Background - Rhythm of Life

<Provide some context to your group on why we're talking about Sabbath.>

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 1 Objectives

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

- a. reflect on the challenges of practicing sabbath in the context of the busyness of our lives
- b. reshape understanding of sabbath being life-giving and not simply restriction and prohibition
- c. brainstorm ways to practice life-giving rest and sabbath

Personal Experience of Sabbath

Start off the dialogue by establishing a personal connection to the tension of busyness and rest and why it's difficult for us to practice Sabbath.

1. Examine the past week and think through your rhythm of work and rest each day. Maybe even write out what each day looked like. How would you describe your balance of busyness and rest?

<Hopefully this will allow people to reflect on the reality of what their lives are like and to examine their balance of work and rest.>

2. What does Sabbath mean to you? What images come to mind? What do past experiences of Sabbath involve?

<Give people an opportunity to share whether they have practiced Sabbath before or if this is an unfamiliar idea for them. This is a chance to gauge where everybody is coming from when it comes to Sabbath.>

3. If we know that Sabbath is something that is healthy for us and even beneficial to us, why is it so difficult for us to practice Sabbath?

<Allow space to reflect on why we don't or why we even avoid practicing Sabbath. Most everyone probably understands the benefits of rest and the need for us to keep ourselves from over-work, but our default isn't to intentionally or proactively practice sabbath. Why is that and what are the challenges of living in a work-centric and always-on culture?>

4. Wayne Muller in his book "Sabbath" says that "busyness is a kind of violence in our lives". How can forgetting sabbath be destructive (in a similar way that the other commandments are morally and socially dangerous)?

<You can also reference the Thomas Merton quote in the appendix below>

<Do we view busyness in the same light as stealing, murdering, committing adultery, etc? Maybe busyness reveals a selfishness that keeps us absorbed in our own agenda. It also doesn't allow us to take a step back and reflect on what areas in our lives need transformation. Maybe there's no margin for us to hear God speaking in our lives. Or there's also health impacts associated with high levels of busyness. And it can also impact how we view and treat other people around us because our value system becomes based on what we do.>

Scripture on Sabbath

Split the readings among the group and give time for people to reflect on their passage and share reflections and thoughts.

Scripture Readings:

- **Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 16:28-29, Exodus 20:8-11, Mark 1:32-36, Mark 2:23-28**

5. What are your reflections and observations about what each passage says about Sabbath and/or God's intention for us to practice Sabbath?

Genesis 2:1-3:

God sets the original model from creation when he rested on the 7th day. He was not a workaholic. The rest was not just an absence of work, but he was also reflecting on the goodness of the creation (work) that he had already done. By setting this day aside for rest, he was establishing a model and rhythm that is how life is intended to be lived.

Exodus 16:28-29:

This response is given in the context of God providing mana for the Israelites as they're traveling through the desert after being freed from slavery in Egypt. There's a lack of trust in God's provision or fear of not having enough that drives the people to work on the Sabbath and collect more mana than they need. Sabbath is an opportunity to practice gratitude of God's blessings and a practical expression that demonstrates our trust in His ability to provide for us.

Exodus 20:8-11:

This is giving in the context of the ten commandments and is focused on the communal aspect of Sabbath where everyone, no matter their perceived value in society, needs to rest from work.

Mark 1:32-36:

Even in Jesus' time on earth, living and serving people in need, He still recognized his personal responsibility to rest and pray. Sabbath isn't simply the absence of work and vegging out, but it's an intentional time to be recharged through our interaction and prayer with God.

Mark 2:23-28:

This is Jesus' response to the Jewish religious leaders who had twisted the practice of Sabbath into a legalistic, restrictive practice that led to a very somber expression of Sabbath. "Sabbath was made for man" (it's meant to be a joyful expression of gratitude for life and blessings, a practice of enjoyment), "not man for the Sabbath" (gloom and restriction/prohibition)

Expression of Sabbath

In light of understanding that Sabbath is meant to be a live-giving practice of enjoyment and not a prohibitive somber practice of gloom (Mark 2:23-28), finish the dialogue by trying to discover what Sabbath looks like in our context today.

Traditionally, Sabbath is honored by lighting candles, gathering in worship and prayer, blessing children, singing songs, keeping silence, walking, reading Scripture, making love (for those who are married), sharing a meal.

Read the following quote:

"Sabbath can only begin if we close the factory, turn out the lights, turn off the computer, and withdraw from the concerns of the marketplace. Choose at least one heavily used appliance or device - phone, TV, computer, stove - and let them rest for a Sabbath period. Whether it is a morning, afternoon, or entire day, surrender to a quality of time when you will not be disturbed, seduced, or responsive to what our technologies have to offer. Notice how you respond to its absence." (Wayne Muller, "Sabbath", 27)

6. Brainstorm a personal expression of Sabbath for the upcoming week (e.g. sleeping earlier/longer, disconnect from technology for half a day, go for personal solitude half a day, spiritual journaling, etc)

<Spend some time brainstorming what rest looks like in the context of Sabbath. The goal is to practice an expression of Sabbath in the next week and share that experience with the group the next time you meet. The key is to find ways to remove distractions and things that we have become over-dependent on in order to reflect on the blessings and life God has given us.>

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 Passages

- **Genesis 2:1-3** -- Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 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.
- **Exodus 16:28-29** — Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” So the people rested on the seventh day.
- **Exodus 20:8-11** — “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 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 male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- **Mark 1:32-36** — That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him
- **Mark 2:23-28** — One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”
- **Luke 5:15-16** — Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Current Environment and Culture

- Recent story on Apple’s work ethic culture for upper management - Tim Cook sleeps 3-4 hours a day and managers are expected to respond to emails even in the middle of the night. That is viewed and pursued as what makes a successful company and career.
- None of us necessarily work to that level of intensity, but how might we be more similar than different to that work ethic and culture?

Thomas Merton Quote:

“There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence [and that is] activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence.

To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence.

The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.”

Additional Resources

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