

“The Perfect Ten #4: Celebrating Freedom”  
Deuteronomy 5:12-15

It is summer, and for many it is a time for vacations. I started ministry in farm country, where many people never took a vacation.

You might think that vacations were unknown to people in biblical times, but you would be wrong. In Israel, there were three annual feasts most commonly celebrated: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. They involved a week or so off from work, and for many, a trip to Jerusalem.

The Passover was kept just before the beginning of harvest, Pentecost, at the conclusion of the corn harvest and before the vintage, and Tabernacles after all the fruits of the ground had been gathered.

They were part of the worship and culture of the Jewish people. There were also one day Feasts, the most important of which was weekly, the Sabbath.

Since the coming of Christ, and the “internationalization” of the church, we do not formally celebrate the annual, week-long feasts, but we continue to celebrate the weekly feast, the Sabbath.

In considering the 10 Commandments, we come this week to the 4th: “Remember [observe] the Sabbath.”

Let’s listen again to “The Perfect Ten”. [song  
@<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNRzwn3UZ8Q>

In the New Century Version, it begins, “Remember to keep the Sabbath as a holy day.”

The expression “holy day” is the root of “holiday,” but many Christians don’t equate the expression “Sabbath” with a “Happy holiday.”

I believe, however that it is God’s intention for it to be a joyful celebration, a gift and a blessing.

But before we can receive it as a gift, we need to discard our image of Sabbath as a time of negative rules and restrictions, a day of obligations (catholic) or, on the other hand, a day like any other.

In its history, believers have gone from calling it, “the Sabbath”, to, “the Lord’s Day”, to, “Sunday”, to, “the weekend”.

1. All of us have a Need within us for the Sabbath.

A. We need physical rest from our daily toil: “I’m tired, exhausted.”

Americans are overworked. Work hours are up, sleep time is down

Husbands work overtime or 2nd jobs, working wives come home to a "second shift" of housework, students are overscheduled w/ homework, after school activities & sports or part-time jobs.

B. We need relief from mental and psychological stress. "I never seem to have enough time for \_\_\_\_"

We are also bombarded with messages to spend more, improve our homes more, and improve ourselves as wage-earners, investors, lovers, parents or ideals of health & fitness.

To accommodate this, stores and the Internet stay open all night, seven days a week, and entertainment is available around the clock.

C. We need spiritual rest from striving to be acceptable to God, and we need time to enjoy life.  
"I'm bored" does not mean "there's nothing to do," but "there's nothing fun to do !"

2. The Sabbath is God's gift to those He loves.

It is God's provision for rest, relief and rejoicing.

The basic Commandment as originally given was probably simply, "Remember the Sabbath day."  
The Scripture gives 3 reasons for God's gift

A. In Exodus 20, it is rest from Physical Work, as a celebration of God's work of Creation: Exo 20:8-11 (NKJV) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

The very first story of the Bible climaxes on the 7th day. The working pattern of God Himself is working 6 days and resting from work the 7th.

This is why the Sabbath is moral, not ceremonial law. Its roots are in creation.

The pattern was taught even before the Commandment was given, in God's giving of the manna.

They were to rest from physical work. What is to be seen as work? One classic answer is "whatever requires changing the natural, material world."

Instead of changing it, we are to celebrate it as it is, and live in peace and gratitude for it.

This would involve commerce as well as "jobs"

Instead, it calls for enjoyment of God's provisions, delighting in relating to Him in worship, and in relationships with family and friends, taking a walk, resting, writing or calling loved ones, reading, etc.

B. In Deut. 5:15 it is also rest from mental stress, a celebration of Freedom from bondage:

(NKJV) "And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day"

Slaves cannot take a day off, free people can.

This freedom is a celebration of the freedom God gave Israel from slavery in Egypt, but more fundamentally a freedom from the bondage to this fallen world that we suffer because of sin.

The Exodus was a type of God's gift of freedom from the crushing slavery of sin, that places us under the stress of God's judgment.

Sin is a burden that oppresses people and steals their hope, for they know they can never work hard enough to get free of it.

The Sabbath is God's gift of relief from the mental stress that says, "improve yourself, you're not good enough yet".

It is what Jesus offers in Matthew 11:29 (NKJV) "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

The word for "souls" here is "Psoche", from "psucho", "breath", that is, the abstract part of us.

The Pharisees had made the Law of God a crushing burden, but Jesus' yoke of discipleship brings rest through simple commitment to him.

The Sabbath is "a piece of time that opens space for God. To experience its goodness, you must enter its activities."

In short, it is to be a break from the sins that cause unhealthy stress in your life.

C. There is a 3rd reason given in the NT. We add to the celebration of Creation and Freedom the Victory and Grace of God over the powers of death.

As such, the Lord's Day celebrates life in Creation, Freedom in our souls, and Grace that relieves our spirits from fear of condemnation.

The Resurrection, Easter, is the 8th day of some of the ancient festivals, which point forward to the celebration of Eternal Life in Christ.

- the 4th Commandment does not specify a day.

Added to the Sabbath as rest and relief is rejoicing in the abundant life He came to give.

Accordingly, from the early days, Christians came together on the first day to gather, break bread and rejoice, celebrating with a feast of communion, looking back to Jesus' passion and Resurrection, and forward to the great banquet at the end of time.

The Sabbath looks forward to final rest through faith in Christ, into which we enter through faith.

In Hebrews 3 and 4, the writer quotes from Psalm 95. In it he refers to Israel entering the “rest” of the promised land, but although they entered it physically, they had to be challenged to enter it spiritually:

Hebrews 4:1-10 (HCSB) 1 Therefore, while the promise to enter His rest remains, let us fear that none of you should miss it. 2 For we also have received the good news just as they [Israel] did; but the message they heard did not benefit them, since they were not united with those who heard it in faith 3 (for we who have believed enter the rest), in keeping with what He has said: “So I swore in My anger, ‘they will not enter My rest’” (Psalm 95:11)”. And yet His works have been finished since the foundation of the world, 4 for somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in this way: “And on the seventh day God rested from all His works”. 5

Again, in that passage (Psalm 95) [He says], “They will never enter My rest”. 6 Since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news did not enter because of disobedience, 7 again, He specifies a certain day—“today”—speaking through David after such a long time, as previously stated: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 Therefore, a Sabbath rest remains for God’s people. 10 For the person who has entered His rest has rested from his own works, just as God did from His.”

“The promise of entering now into this rest means ceasing from the spiritual strivings that reflect uncertainty about our final destiny; it means enjoyment of being established in the presence of God, to share in the everlasting joy that God entered when he rested on the seventh day (v. 10)”

Trans: So God says in the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, “Celebrate what I have done, am doing and will do by resting your body, resting your soul, and resting your spirit in what I have done in the world and in you.”

3. You and I will be blessed when we Celebrate the Sabbath. How shall we do so?

A. Celebrate Creation rest by ceasing from work.

Specifically, the work that is toil, or causes toil for others, but don't treat it legalistically.

Jesus was often criticized by the Pharisees for things He did on the Sabbath.

Mark 2:23-28 (NKJV) Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the show-bread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?" And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

When He was criticized for healing on the Sabbath, He taught that works of necessity and mercy are exceptions.

The rule is not the amount of energy used, but celebrating God's good gifts. If gardening and yard work are a refreshing and relaxing break for you, then do them.

The problem with shopping on the Sabbath is that many times it is not a joy, and it also causes others to work.

B. Celebrate the relief of Deliverance by avoiding things that put you under stress and worry.

Activities that do this like paying bills, preparing tax returns and making lists of things to do in the coming week.

C. Celebrate life in Christ by making it a "holiday" to rejoice in God's gift of Eternal Life.

Isaiah 58:13-14 in The Message (MSG) says,  
 "If you watch your step on the Sabbath and don't use my holy day for personal advantage,  
 If you treat the Sabbath as a day of joy,  
 God's holy day as a celebration,  
 If you honor it by refusing 'business as usual,'  
 making money, running here and there—  
 Then you'll be free to enjoy God!

Oh, I'll make you ride high and soar above it all.  
 I'll make you feast on the inheritance of your ancestor Jacob." Yes! God says so!

We do this, of course, primarily in Sunday morning Worship.

ILL: I read a story of a man coming out of church on Christmas day, and the preacher was standing at the door as he always did to shake hands. He grabbed the man by the hand and pulled him aside.

The Pastor said to him, "You need to join the Army of the Lord!"

The man replied, "I'm already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor."

The Pastor questioned him, "How come I don't see you except at Christmas and Easter?"

He whispered back, "I'm in the secret service."

Don't be in the secret service!

In Worship we join with other Christians to celebrate God's Word, Prayer and the Sacraments that remind us of God's love in creating the world, giving freedom from sin, overcoming the power of death, and giving new and abundant life.

As for other activities, fellowship with family and other Christians and many other things can be proper celebrations.

Your personal observance must be tailored to your life, but You and I will be blessed by the Sabbath if we reflect on what is good on this day and what is not.

This "rest" is a time to be in the presence of God for strengthening and renewing.

It is a time to be first in with Him, and then out for Him. You should celebrate it because it is a blessing and a joy.

Action: Consider things you are used to doing on the Lord's Day that make it just like any other day.

Write down ways you can rest your body, your mind, and your spirit this Lord's Day.

Thank God for the blessings we celebrate today.