

Preparing the Way of the Lord in Our Church Life

by Stewart Ruch

Embracing Sabbath is essential for recognizing God's sovereignty over our lives and finding a balance between making and connecting with God and others.

Duration: 26:49

Scripture: Leviticus 25:2-4, Leviticus 25:6, Leviticus 25:10, Leviticus 25:17, Leviticus 25:23, Leviticus 25:38

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing that our lives are a loan from God. He encourages Christians to take regular breaks from the busyness of life and spend time with the Lord in nature or at a monastery. The speaker references the story of Job to illustrate the concept that God gives and takes away, reminding us that we do not own our days or time. The sermon also mentions the idea of living in a rhythm of holy engagement, where we make and connect with God and others, following the example of Sabbath rest in the Bible.

Transcript

Okay, I would like to conduct an absolutely unscientific poll that only has as its purpose the opening of my sermon, okay? So, I saw a lot of young people at Church of Resurrection using this device. I think they called an Apple telephone. And I thought that was handy, and there was a sale at Target, and so the church picked one up for me, and I actually use this for a lot of things.

You can make phone calls on it, but you can also, I learned, keep a calendar on it, so that I, now if I need to find out if I can do something on a certain day, I go to an icon, or an image, or an app, or whatever it is, and I scroll through to that, and I'm guessing, and I'm curious kind of how we as a church tend to manage our calendars, so I'm wondering how many of you, I'll ask for a show of hands in just a moment, use a smartphone, or a laptop, or a desktop with some kind of digital Google calendar on it. Just show of hands, how many of you manage your calendar that way? Okay, vast majority. Some of you are feeling smug right now because you're old school.

How many of you, say, use an annual, you know, kind of pocket-sized calendar that you get at your dentist for free? How many of you use that? Yeah, okay, good. Now I'm wondering, how many of you, like my wife, actually carry a calendar this large everywhere you go? Yeah, this is Katherine's calendar, it's

terrifying, both for its size, and all that's written in each day, but this is Katherine's technology, so if she has to know, oh, can I do something on August 24th, well, let me just pull out my calendar and find out. Alright.

It's a mom calendar. Okay, I got permission, Katherine was good with me using that. Don't lose it, Katherine said don't lose it, alright.

Alright, so we are dealing with time all the time. We're always dealing with time. Time is a really abstract concept at one level, I mean, what is time? It's a philosophical concept at one level, and yet it is extraordinarily concrete, because every day, every hour, every minute, every second, we are dealing with the reality of time, how we manage it, how it manages us, and time in the Bible is a critical component of how we live our lives with God.

As a matter of fact, how you relate to time, according to the scriptures, has a great deal to tell you about how you relate to God. How you relate to time will tell you a great deal about how you relate to God. God created time, he said, let there be day and let there be night, and then God, so that he had a people who would think differently and act differently and be empowered differently than those who are in the world.

God set apart an understanding of time for those who are followers of God to live by, so that you're full of God and his presence as you seek to love the world. We had a rather obscure passage from the Old Testament read for us this morning, Leviticus chapter 25, and I want to look at that with you this morning. You can turn over there in your bulletin to Leviticus 25.

There we have a teaching on the Sabbath year. This is a teaching about how those who want to live with God and follow God and obey God will think about time. Sabbath captures understanding of time in so many ways, a perspective on Sabbath.

You see the title in your sermon notes section. I do want to talk about preparing the way of the Lord for our ministry here this year, but that's really more of an application of what I want to talk to you about this morning. First, I want to deal with a biblical understanding of Sabbath and of time.

Now, those who would be receiving this teaching in Leviticus 25 would have received an earlier teaching that is foundational to this teaching, which is this. There were 10 commandments. They're also called 10 words given to people of God.

This is how you were supposed to live. And one of those commandments, the only one that uses the word remember, says this. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

Why would that one have remember? I think it's obvious because we forget. We forget that time belongs to God. We forget that we are called to live our lives within a God framed calling of time and Sabbath.

As a matter of fact, it's very likely that the beginning to teach on this, you're starting to think my time is out of control. Or my time stretches out before me and I don't even know what to do with it all. I actually, if you're talking about it, I have a really conflicted relationship with time and with my calendar.

I'm not even thinking about Sabbath. As a matter of fact, I have forgotten Sabbath. I don't even know what it is.

If you're wondering, it's just an Old Testament thought. It's kind of a Hebrew era thought. The New Testament teaches that a Sabbath remains for the people of God.

Strive to enter the Sabbath. Hebrews chapter four, New Testament book. It is also to train us and to guide us in our thinking about Sabbath.

Let me define Sabbath first as we get started. It's a hard one to define exactly. But Sabbath living is a kind of holy rhythm.

Sabbath living is a holy rhythm. It's a holy rhythm, which you're living a life of engagement all the time. You're engaging in making.

You're engaging in producing. You're engaging in creating. Indeed, God created six days, and then on the seventh, he Sabbath.

Both were times of engagement. Neither one did God sleep. Neither one did God take a nap.

When it says the word rest, referring to Sabbath, it's referring to a kind of engagement. As a matter of fact, there's making and there's connecting. And that's part of the rhythm, a holy rhythm of life.

You're making, and then you're connecting with God and with others, being restored by him and his presence and his glory and the feast at the table and the word of God. And then you're making and then you're connecting with God and others. Then you're making.

And that is a holy rhythm of life. And Leviticus 25 talks about living this holy rhythm. It talks to us about a Sabbath year.

There was Sabbath every week. There was Sabbath every six years. And then you have a Sabbath every 49 years in the life of Israel.

At least they were supposed to. So look at the text with me. The cornerstone understanding of how one lives a Sabbath life, of how one has a Sabbath perspective here in these verses, Leviticus 25 is this.

Your life is more of a loan than a gift. That's a textual foundation here in Leviticus 25, one to seven. Your life is more of a loan than a gift.

Everyone says life is a gift. Yes, that's true. But technically and biblically speaking, your life is more of a loan than a gift.

Let's look at it together. OK. The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, speak to the people of Israel and say to them, when you come into the land that I give you.

The land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord. It's very specific in verse 23, which you don't have in front of you. But then God says this, that land that I've given you, that land should not be sold over and over again in perpetuity because that land is mine.

That land still belongs to me. I've released it to you in our parlance. I've loaned it to you, but it's mine.

The land belongs to me. The land was more than soil for an Israelite. Land was soul.

Land is more than soil for an Israelite. Land is soul. Land is livelihood.

Land is sense of place. It's very hard for us to make the connection in terms of how profoundly land matters if you primarily lived your life here in 20th, 21st century America, because very few of us have land in the suburbs. Maybe we have a third of an acre and our house is on it, maybe.

And we don't live off our land. Our livelihood doesn't seem to depend on our land per se. But for the Israelite, land was everything.

It was your inheritance. It's where you got your food. It's how you made any kind of monies or commerce.

Your family belonged to a slice of land or a part of land for century upon century. Land was soul. So for God to say, your land is actually my land, and I release it to you, is for God to say, your life is my life.

Your soul is my soul. I release it to you. Invest it.

Learn it. Live it. But never, ever forget that the land is mine.

This is why Jesus builds on this understanding about our souls and about our lives. He talks very little about our land. Jesus does.

Or you know what? The Israelites land was very concerned about the human soul. And Jesus says, if you want to gain your soul, lose it. For those who try to gain their soul on their own will lose it.

So Jesus is saying, your soul is mine. Your life is mine. You want to gain your life, lose your life, give up your life, release your life.

Because the fact of the matter is, every person's life belongs to me. And the distinction in this world is that there are those who know that their life is a released loan from God, and they live their lives seeking to remain in God because of that. And those who have been given their lives from God, and they disregard it, or they don't even know that the life has been given to them as a loan for a season.

But it will be taken again in the book of Job chapter one. We see this clearly. Job has been struggling and suffering with many calamities.

His life has been hanging in the balance. And Job says the Lord gives. And the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. You don't own your days. We don't own our calendars.

Our time is not our own. Brothers and sisters, and I am utterly guilty of this. We are such an arrogant people when we actually get affronted, when our calendars are interrupted because maybe God is asking something else of us.

Our Saturday that we had planned perfectly, and somebody has a need, a true need, a gospel need, small or large, and we're affronted. That's my time, my calendar. Do we think we own our lives? Israel would not remember the Sabbath.

The prophets would come to Israel again and again and say, you've forgotten Sabbath. And they weren't simply saying you haven't legalistically kept every jot and tittle of the law. That's not what the prophets were after.

They were saying, you've forgotten that your life is not your own. You've forgotten that it's released to you by the Lord, and he will take it back at one point. You forgot that your time is not your own.

So your time is spent giving and spending, giving and spending, giving and spending. Taking, the Lord gives, the Lord takes away. I think one of the first times I began to wonder if our lives were our own was after college.

I had a dear friend from Wheaton College, a school in this area, and he had graduated and was preparing to be a missionary in China. He's a man that walked with God. We're 23 years old.

Both of us were classmates. I was not walking with God at that point in my life. And this guy who's going to go give his life for the Chinese to know more about Jesus Christ.

Died in a sudden car accident on North Avenue. James Likasholt. Actually, what happened to his life? It was there and then it was gone.

It hit me. Our lives are not our own. Our days are appointed, the Bible says.

Why don't we keep Sabbath? By that, I mean a holy rhythm. What we're making and creating, but we're also connecting with God and with others. Do we need to change our minds? I got to change my mind.

I'm going to keep Sabbath holy rhythm. It won't be enough. It's too powerful.

The forces are laid against us are way too powerful. That's why actually Moses and Leviticus talk about the fact that. People were taking their land, if you will, their souls, their lives, and they're putting idols, other gods, false gods on the very place that God has said, this is mine.

They're saying, no, no, no, this is this is it. But this belongs to it because I can't afford to not have you provide for me, God. And maybe this item will make sure that what I need from the land will come.

That my livelihood will come to my life will come. The fact of the matter is, we don't keep Sabbath because there's an idolatry in all of our hearts that we want to own. Our lives is an idolatry of life ownership.

We may not fashion idols just like the Israelites did with pagan gods around them, but we fashion them in our hearts just like it. Do you feel affronted by the fact that your life is not your own? Then it's possible there's an idolatry connection in your heart. Now, the antidote for the idols that get placed on our souls, on our land and our hearts is the Sabbath.

A holy rhythm in which we are busy making for the Lord. And then we're connecting just with him when it says that God rested on the seventh day in Genesis chapter two, it's not saying that God ceased activity. That's impossible.

We would cease to exist if God ceases activity. It's a God is with God's self when he rests, he's with his presence, father, son and Holy Spirit. And to do Sabbath is to be with the Lord.

This is this is Lord's day worship. But this isn't entirely Sabbath, but this is certainly Sabbath to be with the Lord and the Lord's day worship. Brothers and sisters, when we know that we're releasing legalism around coming to church, why would we ever, ever miss Lord's day worship? Why would folks come twice a month? The Lord's day worship when you're made for this rhythm.

Yes, when you're ill, but even when you're traveling, aren't you building your plans around how we can get somewhere with the assembly of God is occurring and we can worship the Lord because we have the Sabbath. We have to remember the Sabbath and have a holy rhythm of life. So let me encourage you to

consider a Sabbath risk to call us all individually first and incorporate this year to a Sabbath risk.

For some of you, this will look like reducing your productivity. You need to reduce your productivity. You're constantly making you're constantly feeling a need to produce.

As a matter of fact, it looks impressive to many people around you, but biblically speaking, you're afraid. You're afraid of what will happen to your identity. You're afraid of what will happen to what your peers think about you, what your employer thinks about you.

You're afraid you're driven by fear, economic fear that if you stop, even just stop in a measured way, stop in a Sabbath way. If you develop a rhythm that somehow or another your grip will break and you will be left alone, penniless, isolated. You can't stop and people around you are saying, you've got to slow down.

You've got to stop. In fact, the matter is that makes you feel better. You feel like now you're doing something well because we're saying that to you.

You're deceived. You've forgotten Sabbath. Take a risk, a huge risk.

And I know it feels like a huge risk. Reduce your productivity, increase your connectivity to God and to others. Yes, with Lord's Day worship.

But I have a particular application. It's a moment in other ways as well. But others have used the flip.

Your Sabbath risk goes like this. And teaching to the scripture, the Sabbath came once a week. But you'd like it seven days a week.

As a matter of fact, you're listening to me going, I don't have a problem with increasing my productivity. I've totally eschewed the American grind. I'm above it all.

Well, maybe or maybe you're slothful. Maybe you've forgotten that actually part of Sabbath is a holy rhythm that includes making making in the marketplace, making it home, making an educational institutions, making amidst the poor, making in the church, making actual pieces of art, making books. Whatever it might be, you're making you're you're making manufacturing realities.

You're making pipes together, whatever it might be. You're making you're made to make you're made to create. That's part of the rhythm.

But you think that somehow you can get out of that, and that's not Sabbath rhythm. So for both, there needs to be a proper rhythm, whether you're struggling with decreasing your productivity to increase your connectivity to God. Or it's a matter of running the Sabbath comes once a week, and that's rich enough.

And I want to encourage you all is to consider very seriously and calendar it as soon as possible. Regular prayer retreat away. Yes, Lord's Day worship, unless you're ill.

Every single Lord's Day on Sunday. Yes, yes, absolutely. Time with each other and fellowship groups of different kinds throughout resurrection or beyond if you're not at res.

But regular prayer retreat, part of a holy rhythm of life. Here's what I mean very specifically. Every four to eight weeks as a Christian in this culture where everything is coming at you all the time, and it is an idolatry culture of life ownership.

You need to get away and be reminded that your life is a loan from God released to you for a season. Every 48 weeks, you need at least a day every once in a while and overnight. Well, you're camping or you're out of the forest preserve or you're at a monastery or you go somewhere with place set aside, preferably in nature, and you were spending time with the Lord.

I require this of our staff team from the very beginning, not because I want them to have more leisure. I hope they have a level of leisure, but because I need them connecting with God to do the work of that they've been called to do to be makers. It's it's it's it's somewhat, you know, driven by a desire to create a stronger church, not being nice.

Very difficult. You're saying, oh, well, that's great. I mean, you can do that because you're a pastor and people and you can do that because they're pastors.

And I just want to just push back a little bit. You have a lot of folks here at res who are not pastors. Most of you aren't last time I checked and they're doing this.

They're doing this. We have a businessman here at res. He runs his own business.

So every day depends on him. He has a staff of several people under him, but he decided to take a Sabbath risk last year and every other month he took an overnight prayer retreat during business time, not on the weekends. He had a freedom as an entrepreneur.

If you might have to be a weekend. But it utterly, he told me, rearranged his spiritual life last year. He learned how to Sabbath.

He learned how to have time with the Lord. I asked him about it. He said, I lived on the benefits gained in that prayer retreat for eight weeks, and then I couldn't wait to get back there again.

And then I lived on the benefits gained for eight weeks, and I couldn't wait to get back there again. And he's planned it again for this next year. And his business is far from suffered.

It's prospering. That's not always a promise. God does what he does with our businesses, as he does with our teaching, whatever it might be.

But it is a promise that God will meet you in power in the rhythms of Sabbath. Father Kevin's going to post on our website how to take a prayer retreat. And some of you go, I want to do for a whole day.

He'll help you do that. I want to guide you in that. But it's critical that we consider that rhythm because our lives are not our own.

We see that our time is not our own as well. In the seventh year, verse four, there should be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. Later on, they say in this passage to Moses, what will we eat if it's a Sabbath to the land, how we survive? And Moses teaches them in the Sabbath year, everybody's fields belong to everybody else. It wasn't about private ownership because the land ultimately was not yours, but God's.

So you would go out into the field, whether it was your field or not, whether you were rich or you were poor, and everyone was on equal footing for that year long in terms of production. And they would receive

what the land was giving them. You could take from what the land was producing.

It's not so they harvest it for yourself. And you fed on that and a kind of solidarity for an entire year. So you were connecting to God.

He's providing for you. But who else are you connecting to one another in a profound connectivity? You were realizing how deeply you were connected to each other. And for that year, it didn't matter whether you're rich or poor.

What matters that God was providing from the land. And God promised that you would take a Sabbath. He would provide financially.

He would provide spiritually what you need. Why are we so disempowered? And why are we so anxious about time? Could it be that we have forgotten Sabbath rhythms altogether? The developing world just helps us so much with this. They have their problems.

They're not perfect at all. They have their idols. But it's helpful sometimes to have someone from the developing world in your life to help you realize what your own national idols are and that you can help them if they let you realize what their national idols are.

But the developing world, particularly my some of my friends that I have in Africa, I have a freedom here. They don't think about time as their own because time is being taken from them all the time. And that was displayed for me when Archbishop Ben-Quashi, who was here a year ago for my consecration as bishop, I called and asked him to be a part of the consecration.

And he said he would. But then he said he is in demand all around the world. He's speaking everywhere.

It's just part of his ministry. He said, I'm going to come not for a day or two days. I want to come for a week.

I'm going to come for a week and I'm going to spend it with you and Catherine so I can spend time with you, praying for you and discipling you as you become a bishop. I'm sorry, but I never would have thought that way. As Brenda, my personal assistant, I'm always thinking, how can I get in and out, get in and get in and out? That's how I think all the time.

Somehow he had the freedom, knowing that his life is a released loan from God and that his time belongs to God to hear from the Holy Spirit, spend a week with Stuart and Catherine and it changed our lives. That's the freedom that I'm talking about. And if we know we can see this year resurrection, we want to try and live by the same freedom.

We want to try and live in a kind of rhythm of holy engagement. We had lined up for this fall a capital campaign, what we call a generosity initiative. This would be our third one in the last five years.

And it's conventional that once you're into a building like we are and you can reach that two year mark, you have the reality of needing more space for ministry, which we do for children and youth and other areas, especially. And you have debt, which we do. So you want another generosity initiative to help face those realities.

And I was investing meetings and we were planning for that generosity initiative. When all of a sudden I got a check from the Holy Spirit. I said, whoa, time out.

Destry, are you guys really ready for this? Is it time for us to do another capital campaign? And there's a strong sense that we can't believe you just asked us that question. Can we really tell you what we think? I said, yeah. I said, no, let's wait.

I said, you realize we built our budget 2014 on gifts coming in through the capital campaign in December, right? I said, yeah, we realize that. But we don't think in the Lord, it's time for us to do this. We think we need to give the land a rest.

I confer with the staff and our team leaders and everything back and said, let's take a year of preparing for the work of the Lord by saying no to a capital campaign and all that that means with preaching and all of our programs being influenced by that. Let's take a year and wait on the Lord and see how he will provide for us. Let's simplify our programming throughout the week, which we're doing.

And you'll see more details about that. Let's let's find a way, actually, to make sure we have plenty of time for prayer, play time for the Lord's Day worship and worship beyond that play time for community groups to do their work together. So in this next year as a church, we're going to be waiting on the Lord this way, not ceasing activity, not ceasing doing ministry, but seeking to have a rhythm after a lot of years of making of having a special focus on connecting with God and one another.

Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28816.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/stewart-ruch/preparing-the-way-of-the-lord-in-our-church-life/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net