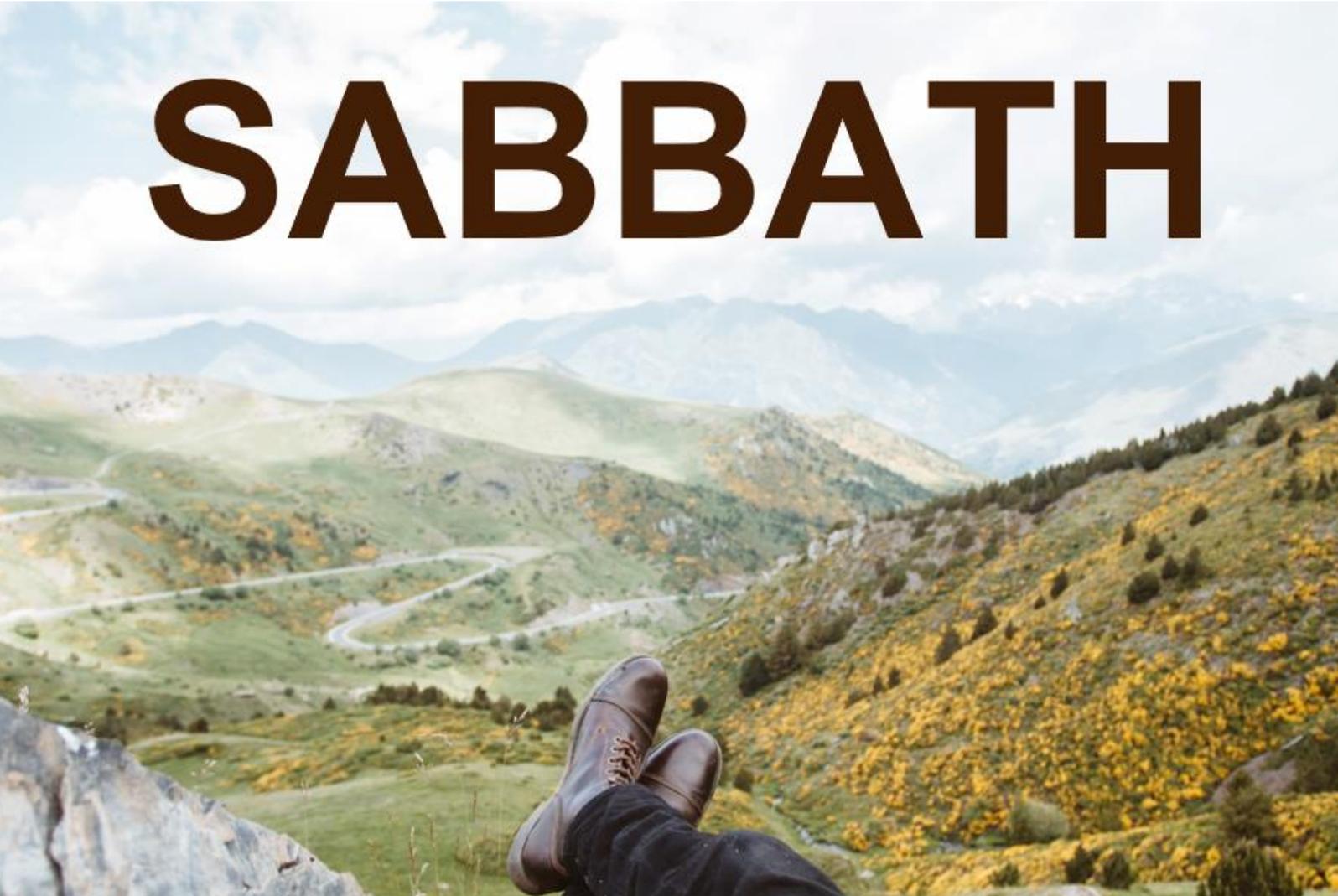


WEEK OF PRAYER
9-16 January 2022

SABBATH



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SHABBAT – SHALOM

Dear Sisters and Brothers around Europe,

The topic of this week of prayer *Sabbath: Living according to God's rhythm* is a special joy for me. Years ago, my father introduced me to a booklet by the Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel. The title was simply *The Sabbath – Its Meaning for Modern Man*.

One important statement was that the Sabbath had a different quality in comparison to the rest of the week. Did you know that the word "holy" is introduced for the first time during the story of creation in relation to the Sabbath? When God began the work of creation and spoke the world into being, he saw that they were good and ultimately very good when man and woman were made. But when he put the Sabbath in place, he said "it is holy". That's the difference between creating and working in the space of the things on one hand and the sphere of time on the other hand. Because Sabbath is nothing else than raw time unpolluted by work.

Are you aware that you can only change time for the space of things and not the things for time? Yet we behave like we could win time through work. Heschel calls it "the conquest of space". But this is an illusion. The only way you can make more out of time is by stop from work and spend it on relationships; on being. That's what God invites us to with his offer of Sabbath, spending time with him and his people.

So, should we be surprised that the day of rest is under attack these days? As people become more and more estranged from God's good guidelines for life, a day of rest just does not make any sense. We tell ourselves that we cannot afford to have Sabbath as there is so much good and im-portant work to be done. At least we might be able to catch up on some stuff which did not fit into the workweek. And yet by making more and more people work during the day of rest the relation-al fabric which holds society together is more and more torn apart. It is a vicious circle we are experiencing. The thought of getting more by not keeping the day of rest is not adding up. Rather it is producing more loss than ever.

The Sabbath is an ingenious gift from God which follows a different logic. As you go through this week of prayer you will be introduced to various aspects of this. My prayer is that as you pray you will be reintroduced to this day of rest, the Sabbath, which we Christians in Europe have celebrat-ed for just over 1700 years on Sundays (introduced by Constantine, emperor of Rome in 321 AD). I am convinced that having a good day of rest will bring the peace (Shalom) into our lives which we all long for so much.

In this regard I wish you Shabbat Shalom



Thomas Bucher

General Secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance

PS: A heartfelt thank you to the Swiss Evangelical Alliance for providing the content for this meaningful topic of the Week of Prayer 2022!

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOSTING A WOP PRAYER MEETING

Many local churches in Europe take this Week of Prayer as an opportunity to organise joint prayer meetings, which we would like to encourage. Here a few suggestions for you to keep in mind when you plan:

1. Please make sure that ALL Evangelical churches are invited and included in your prayer gatherings. Make an extra effort to also reach out to the migrant churches. Do you have Roma churches that you could invite? Including everyone will make your unity richer and more diverse.
2. It's always a richer experience to go to various places, don't forget about the smaller ones? Each place is different and adds colour to your unity.
3. How can you practically express the vast diversity in your country? Do you make room for that? Opening up, making room adds surprising perspectives to unity.
4. Is your event relevant and appealing for youth as well? We encourage you to allow youth to participate and even help you plan and prepare. Unity across generations is really important for the church.
5. Plan a creative, relevant and appealing prayer meeting? Double check to make sure that prayer has the bulk of time?
6. We urge you to keep a gender balance. Have both men and women working together to create a program that will help express diversity?
7. Consider the future. Imagine seeing this event grow throughout the years. How can you create this year's prayer event that will draw people back and bring their friends with them?

INTRODUCTION

Sabbath. Living in God's rhythm

We have more leisure time than any other preceding generation. Having more time without work, however, does not automatically mean having ease of mind. The increasing speed and pressure that we experience in our work place has already, has already found its way into our free time and even into our life of faith. As a matter of fact, many struggle to pray and be still for only ten minutes. We are living in a time of constant entertainment and self-promotion. Unsurprisingly, offers that promise rest and relaxation like mindfulness training, yoga or a long hiatus – also known as “sabbatical leave” – are booming.

Modern managers use the expression “Sabbatical leave”, a word that is deeply rooted in Jewish Christian tradition. «Sabbath» means to stop, time out, pause. When God calls us once a week to put everything aside, He wants to preserve our freedom. We ought not to let our worries, our needs or our environment define us, but live out of the intimate relationship with our Creator. The Sabbath is the best remedy to fight estrangement and the best mean to live a successful life.

The purpose of the Week of Prayer 2022 is not to protest against working on Sundays. The week of Prayer is an opportunity to rediscover freedom in the midst of a world relentless with demands and pressure. Every day, we will focus on one aspect of the Sabbath: identity, provision, rest, compassion, remembrance, joy, generosity and hope. By praying together, we want to encourage each other to dance to the rhythm of heaven ¹now. This includes a lot more than spiritual wellness for our own soul, but by praying we commit ourselves to building healthy communities and churches.

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¹ Ott, Bernhard (2019): Tänzer und Stolperer. Wenn die Bergpredigt unseren Charakter formt. Cuxhaven: Neufeld Verlag.

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DAY 1 – THE SABBATH AND IDENTITY

VERSES

Therefore say to the children of Israel: I am the Lord; I will bring you out from your burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgement.

(Exodus 6,6)

MEDITATION

Two friends had been looking for work for a long time, which weighed heavily upon both, as they both had a family to take care of. They were attending a course which I was teaching at my church called “Christianity and work”. During the course, they reflected very openly on their unemployment, and they were particularly bothered by questions about their identity. Is my value depending on my relevance in the working world? How much do I identify myself with the work I do? What impact does unemployment have on me? Our attention was drawn to their testimonies and we realised, how important our jobs are to our identity. God has ordained a day without work for each week – The Sabbath – to remind us that our identity is not determined by our jobs.

The Jews were robbed of the Sabbath rest. As slaves, they had to labour incessantly in the Pharaoh’s service. They were trapped in a system that exploited them and exercised absolute domination over God’s creation. However, God would not accept the status-quo. He freed His people from slavery. Outside of Egypt, in the desert, the Jews were able to celebrate Sabbath once again. While worshipping God, they were reminded of their deepest and truest identity: They were the chosen and loved people of God.

That is why the Sabbath is pivotal for us all. When we worship God, and have fellowship with one another, we experience that by giving we always also receive. We are more than what we do and what we achieve. Ultimately, our identity and dignity are found in acknowledging that we are – undeservingly – beloved children of God. Work helps us in building our character, but our value as a person is not determined by what we do. On our day of rest, we get to distance ourselves from our work and experience God’s closeness anew. With the help of the Sabbath Rest ordained by God, we receive peace; our worth as human beings is based on our relationship with God.

The two friends, who attended the course have reflected extensively on their identity. During a difficult time, they have learned that they are loved by God, regardless of their occupation or their achievements. As a result, they have found a sustaining and encouraging perspective for their lives.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How does society measure my value? How does God?
- Do I define my identity through constant achievements, or can I just “be” rather than “do” on a Sunday?
- How can I experience my value in God in everyday life and show it to others?

PRAYER TOPICS

- We thank God for our weekly time of rest, when we experience being beloved children of God without having to accomplish anything at all.
- We thank God for our work and how it develops our character and sustains us.
- We pray for the ones that have become slaves to the performance-based society we live in. Lord, free them like You once freed your people from Egypt.
- We repent because we depend too much on our achievements and performance, instead of basing our identity in God.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord! We try helplessly to find shelter in You, but we do not know how to. Influenced by our daily lives, we focus solely on our achievements, even though we are yearning for approval and love.

Thank You for loving us first. Thank You for giving us Your love unconditionally. Thank You for nurturing us, and our souls, and for providing us with everything we need. There is no need for any supplementary “vitamins”.

Lord, help us to understand our hunger as a desire for You. Help us to be nourished by Your love. Show us how to be in your presence daily and guide us always. Amen.



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DAY 2 – THE SABBATH AND GOD’S PROVISION

VERSES

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour 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.

(Exodus 20, 8-11)

MEDITATION

Ever since the first quarter of the year 2020, people around the world remember all the difficult situations that have been caused by the pandemic. These moments remind us Christians of the time that God’s people spent in the desert, when they wanted to go back to slavery in Egypt because they were hungry: “...Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full...” (Exodus 16, 3). God created the Sabbath as the last act of His creation as a symbol for His grace and His providence for His people.

In Exodus 20, 8, God reminds us to adhere to the Sabbath, a day of rest for everybody, a day that eliminates every inequality in every part of life, especially for those who are part of the socially lower classes. God expresses His Love for us and treats all of His creatures equally. All of us shall be able to enjoy godly rest on the Sabbath.

In the desert, God feeds His people with a new type of food which literally is called „What is that?“ It was a food with a question mark, that met their needs and translates from Hebrew as „Mann-hou“, manna. With this food God prepared the Sabbath and He made it possible for His people to be provided for and to break free from their past in Egypt.

After Exodus 16,4, the people received a ration everyday as sufficient provision for the day. The focus here is for the people to obey instructions and to move forwards in a disciplined manner. We (the people in the desert and we Christians today) receive daily through the Word of God both of these important qualities: obedience and discipline. They provide us with the certainty of God’s grace in our lives.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do we have «full pots» which we should replace with new food from above?
- How has God provided for You with «new food» that you did not know before?
- The daily «dependence» on God should be a reality for us Christians and instruction and discipline are not always part of our lifestyle. Should we discover these elements anew and how?

PRAYER TOPICS

- We pray for the persecuted Christians in this world. May they receive manna, the daily provision from God.
- We pray for the faith of Christians with a migration background, especially for young people whose faith is being tested.
- We pray that God raises up «Moses» (leaders) again in our Christian communities.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord, You took care of Your people in the desert. You fed them, protected and encouraged them. Thank You for the grace You offered the ones You freed from slavery in Egypt.

Thank You for us as well: You have freed us from living in bondage of sin and You have included us in Your kingdom. You nourish us with Your word, You protect us and encourage us every day.

We renounce going back to our „Egypt“ of the past and we turn toward You, Jesus. Help us to act out times of rest in Your presence where You provide us with all the strength and boldness that we need to do Your will. Amen.



Author

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DAY 3 – THE SABBATH AND REST

VERSES

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

(Genesis 2,2-3a)

MEDITATION

When I was a child, I owned Sunday dresses. I would lay them out on Saturday night, and I knew that tomorrow was Sunday. With that came rest. In the morning I attended Sunday school with my siblings. Throughout the afternoon, my parents would spend time with us. We played together, made music or went hiking. Today, I am a deaconess, and I wear a special dress on Sundays once again.

Nowadays, people find ease of mind in slowing down life, whereas Jews and Christians have known the principle of rest and pause on the Sabbath for thousands of years. It originates from the story of creation when God rested on the seventh day after six days of creation. Since the resurrection of Jesus, the day after the Sabbath defines the rhythm of life for the emerging Christian community. On that day, they came together for worship and fellowship.

God gave us a day of rest – the Sunday – as a helpful interruption of the cycle of work and the consumer lifestyle we live in. The day of rest is not bound to one specific day of the week, but it should differentiate from other weekdays. It is a symbol for the fact that our value as human beings is based on more than our achievements. A doctor and theologian called Albert Schweitzer said appropriately: “When your soul lacks a Sunday, it will wither.”

We decide for ourselves when we hold our day of rest. It takes time to become still. If I pour a glass of dirty water, the dirt will settle after some time and the water will become clean. It «has found stillness». When we seek out rest in silence, our souls will do the opposite. A lot of our deepest thoughts will appear on the surface...

Every day I consciously set aside half an hour. I go to a place where I am undisturbed. I come before God, before Jesus, just as I am. He is expecting me. I turn my attention inwards, to my breathing and then I turn my attention towards my thoughts and emotions. Whatever moves me, I bring before Him with every exhale. I let go and let God. I take my time and conclude with a prayer of thanks.

Jesus invited his disciples: «Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.» (Mk 6,31a) Now, he is inviting us to do the same.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What keeps me from taking a time to find quiet and rest?
- Do I dare to consciously spend a day without news or phone?
- God has blessed and sanctified the seventh day; do I still consider the Sunday holy? Do I feel His blessing over the Sunday?

PRAYER TOPICS

- We pray for grace to overcome our fear of silence and to be able to just be.
- We pray for the yearning in our hearts for God's presence to stay alive and that we make time for it in our daily life.
- We pray for the inexplicable things that surface from the depths of our hearts when we become quiet. We pray that we do not ignore them but dare to acknowledge them before God.
- We pray for wisdom and protection for the moments in silence when we are moved by God's word.
- We pray for churches and chapels, places of rest, to be places where people hear God's word.
- We pray for everybody who feels overwhelmed by work and responsibilities and is unable to leave those pressures behind.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Here I am before You, God, just the way I am: rested or tense, empty and dried out or filled with gratitude, full of longing or without any perspective.

God, you are the source of life, come with Your renewing power, purify me, heal me, so I can become the human You made me to be. Amen.



Author

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(Photo: Bernhard Jungen)

DAY 4 – THE SABBATH AND COMPASSION

VERSES

Then He said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

(Matthew 12,11-12)

MEDITATION

God has not provided the Sabbath as a law AGAINST us, but as an act of compassion FOR us. Therefore, the disciples were allowed to eat the heads of grain to satisfy their hunger on the Sabbath (cf. Mt 12, 1-8). Therefore, the man with the withered hand was healed on the Sabbath (cf. Mt 12, 9-13). Jesus saw the disciples’ hunger and the man’s misery and was moved by it. The Sabbath is a day for nourishment and healing: Neither prohibition of actions (“doing nothing”) nor the requirement of actions (“offering sacrifice”) are at the centre of the Sabbath – the main aim of the Sabbath is to show us the compassion of God.

In the Old Testament, the Sabbath is an expression of the covenant between God and His people, as is circumcision. The Sabbath serves as a day of rest, of looking up to God and marvel at His compassion and holiness. “Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.” (Ex 31, 13). The people of God receive God’s compassion, they are “infected” by it, and they then pass it on as a blessing to the whole world.

When we come together for worship and fellowship, when we listen to His voice and talk to Him, we break out of our daily life and celebrate His compassion. At church the economic performance-thinking, as well as the recreational entertainment-thinking, shatter. Hence, church service is neither business nor show, neither religious effort nor religious consumption. It is much more than that: it is a place where our souls can rest and where we experience God’s mercy. At church, God ministers to us with His compassion. Whoever receives God’s mercy will become a giver of mercy. «Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful» (Lk 6,36/ verse of the year 2021).

Though the gift of mercy, God prepares us to live and act mercifully, to do good to each other. The verse of the day encourages us to be Jesus-oriented in this world.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Meditate on the following sentence: God has not provided the Sabbath as a law AGAINST us but as an act of compassion FOR us.
- How can I experience God’s compassion demonstrated in the Sabbath in relation to God and in relation to the people around me?

- What small change can I make in order to prioritize God's compassion on the Sabbath – as an individual, in the family, in church?

PRAYER TOPICS

- We pray for time to focus on God. We break out of our usual way of thinking that focuses on performance and consumption. We ask God for His mercy (Kyrie eleison – Lord have mercy!).
- We pray for forgiveness for the times when church services have become religious activism instead of an encounter with God.
- We pray for everyone who preaches the word of God and that the merciful message of God may be heard and received.
- We pray for God to open our eyes, so that we can act mercifully towards our neighbours as He has been merciful with us.
- We pray for the Holy Spirit to show us how we can act god-centred and care for all of creation.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Merciful God! We praise and celebrate You. We worship You. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Zeboath (almighty)", we pray with the army of angels.

Forgive us for being self-centred and focused on our activities, when we should have been focused on You. Revive our church services with Your Holy Spirit, for us to encounter You afresh and for our hearts to be transformed by Your compassion. Bless all those who preach the Word of God. Open our eyes and our hearts to the needs of our neighbours and of our society. Give us ideas and courage to invest mercifully into Your church and the world. Amen.



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DAY 5 – THE SABBATH AND REMEMBRANCE

VERSES

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour 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 ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave 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.

(Deuteronomy 5,12-15)

MEDITATION

This Bible passage is the declaration of the fourth commandment. The Lord instructs us to adhere to the Sabbath, the day of rest after six days of work – a day to be refreshed. At the centre of rest is the call to remember: «and remember» (Deuteronomy 5,15). The Sabbath and remembrance are deeply connected, but how and why?

Let us remember that the system of a weekly day of rest for everybody had no parallels in any ancient civilisation! The Greeks thought the Jews idle because they demanded one day off every week. What an extraordinary gift of God the Sabbath is!

«You shall remember» two realities: First of all: You were a slave in Egypt. Second: The Lord, Your God has brought you out of Egypt. In other words: Firstly, you were robbed of your freedom and secondly, the Lord has freed you. The Sabbath reminds us of how we can live free from slavery because of God! The fourth commandment addresses the topic of freedom, namely the freedom from slavery of our own work!

Freedom! Every year I remember May 8, 1945. My father was conscripted by the Nazi regime and had to work day and night. When he secretly listened to the BBC and heard of the advance of the American troops, he fled and arrived in his hometown in Luxemburg on the aforementioned day of truce. Out of Nazi slavery into freedom, he was incredibly grateful for his liberators. Every experience of freedom becomes part of our identity and becomes a testimony.

Before Jesus revealed himself to me, every day I would live in fear. When the Holy Spirit came to live in my heart, he came to impart the peace of Christ into the depths of my being. This kind of peace remains! The deliverance from the deepest fear: my identity in Christ, my testimony which I remember and share with others!

Remember it, but not only for yourself: On the Sabbath, servants, slaves and even strangers shall rest with us (cf. Deuteronomy 5, 14)! Always remember the ones who are suffering from slavery and have not received their liberation yet!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- God, our Father does not look for workers first, but for sons and daughters! What do you think about this statement? How does the Sabbath help you remember that?
- What are your testimonies of deliverance/liberation which you enjoy remembering and sharing?
- In order to be free, we must remember! Is that true? How do you do it?
- Who are the «Slaves of Egypt» of today? The ones you do not want to forget? The ones you want to invest your life in?

PRAYER TOPICS

- We pray that God, our Father, still delivers us from fear and enslavement to evil in our lives through Jesus Christ.
- We pray that we learn to live as sons and daughters of God, our father, delivered to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and according to God's word.
- We pray that gratitude and therefore joy may grow in our hearts, in our families and in our churches.
- We pray for the liberation of modern-day slaves (child soldiers, victims of human and child trafficking, ...)
- We pray for God's support and the release of the ones that are imprisoned in this world because of their belief.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Thank You, Father: No! You have not given me a spirit of bondage that leads me back into a life in fear. If anything, You have given me a spirit of childhood which makes me Your son, Your daughter. That is why I say loud and clear: "Abba! Father." It is real, because Your spirit testifies that I am Your child. Jesus, I am the heir to Your life and Your heart. Wherever You have set me free, send me to set free and bring the ones You love back to our Father. And if I have to suffer with You, I will welcome it, for then Your glory will be revealed, now and for eternity. Amen. (cf. Romans 8, 14-17)



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DAY 6 – THE SABBATH AND JOY

VERSES

But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.

(Psalms 73,28)

MEDITATION

« What to do on Sundays? 50 ideas to fight boredom! » A magazine is trying to get your attention with this headline. The day of rest is being crammed full of fun leisure-activities or action-packed trips. The main goal is to experience something that gives enjoyment. However, joy cannot be grasped. Pleasant and joyful experiences may be repeatable, yet, as soon as they are gone, the accompanying emotions will vanish as well. What is left is the longing for more of those delightful experiences. Our world is literally crying out for happiness that is found in experiences. Yet, how can this desire for joy and happiness be fulfilled and not just remain a chasing after the wind? And what happens to our joy, when a dark cloud of pain and sorrow covers these wonderful experiences? The answers to these questions are simple and challenging at the same time.

If joy was only connected to beautiful and happy God given experiences, it would not be true joy. The joy that God gives to us through the Sabbath is much deeper and can never be taken away. He provides us with space and time for companionship with Him. When we are close to God, true joy becomes tangible; this kind of joy exceeds any conceivable desire for any other joy. We can be filled with profound joy in the presence of God, even though our soul is weeping. This particular joy equips us with a new perspective and gives us support in times of adversity. It flows directly from God's heart into our hearts and is an expression of His love for us.

If God himself rejoiced over His creation on the seventh day, how much more do we have a reason to rejoice, as we partner with Him in His kingdom. When we realise that our lives are in the hands of an absolutely sovereign God, and that everything we have and need is found in Him, then our hearts can only rejoice. This is what true Sabbath means.

Because of the joy that He gives us and we have in Him, we can enjoy God's gifts even more deeply; gifts like walking and admiring God's creation, enjoying a brunch with friends, or celebrating with the whole family. Sunday does not have to be a day of asceticism. We may enjoy it as a day of fellowship and celebration.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How do I express my joy of God on Sundays?
- The Bible says: «For the joy of the Lord is your strength» (Neh 8,10) Are my strength and power defined by the joy of the Lord or by my circumstances?
- Can I enjoy God's gifts without always wanting more?

PRAYER TOPICS

- We pray that God may show us anew how to enjoy the Sabbath with Him.
- We pray for heavenly joy which revives our lives regardless of our circumstances.
- We pray that the Sabbath is characterized by the Holy Spirit who kindles joy inside us.
- We pray that our churches will celebrate with the power of abundant joy.
- We repent for all those times when we focused on God's gifts and lost sight of God, the giver.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord, we thank You because Your presence is all we need. In You we find joy in abundance. We lift our gaze to You and praise You, for You are our God and king. Thank You for showing us how we can honour and celebrate You on the Sabbath. Thank you for holding our lives in your hands and that you are the source of our happiness. Amen.



Author

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DAY 7 – THE SABBATH AND GENEROSITY

VERSES

And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family.

(Leviticus 25, 10)

MEDITATION

We all have a yearning for holiness and wholeness. We desire a life full of goodness and long for an «intact» society, for an ideal world. The Sabbath commandments include more than just the instruction to have one day off each week. With the call to celebrate the year of Jubilee, God gives His chosen people a foretaste of what eternal holiness will be like – a foretaste of the «eternal Sabbath».

The book of Moses and the new Testament talk about the Sabbath and the year of Jubilee as a way to maintain generosity, justice and restoration among the people of God. Each tribal family was dependant on owning a sufficient area of land to provide for every member of the community.

On the one hand, the Sabbath commandments support us as individuals. They help us to find rest from work and to find time to worship God, while at the same time our work provides for our daily needs. On the other hand, even more than helping us as individuals, the Sabbath commandments focus on living as a community. The commandments show us what God is like and how we as humans – and especially as Christians – are created to live in community. Our shared lives should be characterised by generosity as a symbol for God's grace, which we ourselves have experienced. Our lives should be characterised by justice, which we make available for others, because God is a God of justice. Our lives should also be characterised by restoration, by helping people around us to take their place in society with dignity. Nowadays, it does not necessarily mean that we have to own a plot of land. Instead, we can commit ourselves to supporting others to get a job, have a good living space and a healthy social life.

In a globalised world, our neighbours also include people living around the world, we are obliged to consider the ecological consequences of our lifestyle. When we treat natural resources and the climate with respect and care, we will enable life and Sabbath in Africa, Asia and the rest of the world. Generosity knows no geographical boundaries.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Have I personally experienced generosity, justice or restoration through other people?
- What do we learn about God when people are generous, fight injustice and help restore people's dignity?
- How can I experience the Sabbath commandments – apart from resting – as an opportunity for social justice?
- In what aspect of my life can I practice generosity in new ways?

PRAYER TOPICS

- We pray for people who experience great injustice.
- We pray for those on the fringes of society who desire a life with dignity.
- We pray that the church will reflect God's generosity and justice.
- Lord, show me how I can share Your justice and generosity in my daily life.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your immeasurable generosity for us human beings. It culminates in You giving Your Son to die for us. Not only has he shown us Your grace and justice through His life on earth, but he has made it possible for us to receive Your grace and justice by dying on the cross and by his resurrection on Easter.

Grant us wisdom and power through the Holy Spirit to live a life of generosity and justice. And help us to care for Your creation because we are made in Your image. Give us eyes to see those who need restoration so that we can be channels of Your love today. Amen.



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DAY 8 – THE SABBATH AND HOPE

VERSES

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

(Hebrews 4,9-12)

MEDITATION

«I cannot wait to finally retire», would my younger roommate often say half jokingly, half seriously, when he went to work, even though he still had a few decades of work left before his wish would come true... «Long live retirement!» can sometimes define our attitude when we think of the «rest» that has been promised us when we gave our life to God, the Promised Land that awaits us after death. It can seem very far away when we think about life as a weary journey in the desert. However, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews «pushes» us to enter His rest right now (cf. Heb 4,11). There remains a rest for the people of God, indeed (cf. Heb 4,9), «that means that there is a spiritual rest to which God calls us» (Johannes Calvin). Therefore, there is something of the «Sabbath rest» that is already available to us as a preview of what will be the reality and will continue and increase tenfold in the promised eternity.

In Hebrews 4 «rest» refers to a promised place in the future, a safe and glorious land for God's people, as well as a present state that is connected with the rest God created after finishing His creation and the celebration of His work. In conclusion, it is both the Promised Land of milk and honey and the moment of joint exultations in the presence of God. One day, we will reach the end of our journey, just like God's people reached the Land of Canaan. Yet, from this day on and especially today we are invited to have a taste of this rest and turn towards God to marvel at His glory, to be reminded of His work and to put our trust in Him. The latter is crucial because the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews warns the reader that just like the Israelites missed the opportunity to enter the Promised Land in Kadesh Barnea, we can miss our chance when we harden our hearts. By trusting God and choosing to do so day by day, the «Sabbath rest» will accompany us from this day on until it will enter into its true form in His eternal presence.

Let us not be ignorant in our worship but let us worship God in Spirit and in truth. Read the Bible and hear the voice of God. Read the Bible and see Jesus. Read the Bible and receive the Holy Spirit's power.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does «spiritual rest» mean to me?
- How do my Sabbath times nurture my hope?
- Are there aspects in my life that have led me to «harden my heart»?

PRAYER TOPICS

- We pray that God may give us rest today.
- We pray for forgiveness for the times we let our hearts be hardened and turned away from God.
- We pray for forgiveness and for His promise to give us access to the Promised Land, a place of rest and the place where He will spend eternity with us.
- We pray for help to encourage each other to be a good example of loyalty for the next generation.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Father, I trust in You, although, I might be in the desert, because I know that You will lead me into Your rest, into Your safe and glorious presence. I want to live in Your presence to receive this hope and «Sabbath rest» every day. Amen.



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