

Abide, John 15, The Practices, 6/19/22

Pray: Students, Father's Day, Juneteenth- June 19, 1865- Slaves in the south were emancipated. Just as we know that it was not by the hand of Moses or Aaron or Pharaoh that the Jewish slaves were freed, but by the hand of God, so we praise you Father- by your hand was that great sin of slavery in America ended and our African-American ancestors freed. Only in you is there true freedom. We thank you Lord, because only in you all men and women are created equal and endowed with unalienable rights, only in you do all people have inherent dignity. May we be a community marked by unity, equality and honor of all people.

Turn to Mark 2. We are finishing our short series Abide. Wrapped up in this metaphor of the vine and the branches is the secret of all discipleship to Christ. He is our source of vitality, production of fruit and transformation. None of this is possible unless Jesus makes his home in our lives, that he gets the real estate in our hearts. **Abiding: Christ is formed in our hearts (transformation) as we partner with the Holy Spirit to train our heads (attention) and hands (practice) in the ways of Jesus.** Abiding starts with what we give our attention to. Our problem is we are suffering from distraction-sickness as we found out last week. We are distracted by the digital world, distracted by our desires for more, distracted by our need to keep up, ambition and fear.

Anxiety is eating us for lunch. Psychologists tell us that anxiety is often the canary in the coal mine, our souls way of telling us something is deeply wrong and we need to fix it fast. The indie rock band Arcade Fire recently released the song Age of Anxiety, playing off of W.H. Auden poem written in 1947 by the same name. Haunting lyrics that capture the experience of our digital age.

*It's the age of doubt
And I doubt we'll figure it out
Is it you or is it me?
Age of anxiety*

*Fight the fever with TV
In the age when nobody sleeps
And the pills do nothing for me
In the age of anxiety*

And yet, nothing is new- thousands of years before Auden and Arcade Fire- the poet Solomon- Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 ²² *What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun?* ²³ *even at night their minds do not rest.*

Met with a couple- stressed out, anxious, feeling completely overwhelmed with life, parenting, everything is flying by them...had them walk through their life. They were living as slaves to hurry, distraction and the tyranny of anxiety's demands. I've prayed for God to help me get rid

of my anxiety but it hasn't worked. I gave them this analogy, imagine you are a fast food junkie and every day after work you go through the **McDonald's drive thru line**, while you are praying, "Lord, help me not to buy a Big Mac and Fries." They got it. The answer to your prayer is not God magically making your anxiety go away, it is to learn to abide through filling your mind with the things of the Spirit and making space in your life to prioritize a lifestyle of abiding in Him through the disciplines. This is where many of us are...we don't want the anxiety, we live distracted, we feel the stress in our body...we have even prayed that God would give you peace, but as the the 4th century African Bishop of the St. Augustine, in *Confessions* **"You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."** We must learn how to consistently allow the Holy Spirit to train us to abide through the spiritual disciplines of **Solitude & Prayer, Sabbath, Meditation & Memorization, Fasting, Simplicity, Community**. I would like to give you a challenge- some of us have tried to cure our anxiety through self-medication, prescription pills, through working more hours, therapy, essential oils...and I'm not saying some of these things aren't helpful or even necessary. But before we reach for the things of man, what if you begin to reorder your life around the practices of abiding? Last week I gave you a list of 10 practices of Abiding, posted that on Facebook. This week I'm going to talk about just one of those practices...and I choose this one because I think it is simultaneously most neglected and the practice upon which the other practices find their place.

Practicing the Sabbath Principle. I believe the Sabbath principle from the Bible can dramatically change your life, reduce your anxiety, help you become a resilient disciple. And yet, many in the evangelical world go without ever hearing anything about the Sabbath. I grew up in a Baptist church and I don't recall ever hearing a teaching on how to practice Sabbath. Now that is either because it was assumed, or because it was avoided as an over correction to the fear of the legalism of the pharisees. But as I've studied the Scriptures and watched my spiritual mentors live, I have come to the conclusion that the Sabbath principle is thoroughly Biblical and is a central practice to abiding. And yet many of us do not practice the Sabbath principle to our own detriment. Keelers are right with you.

Every religious Jew at least since the days of Moses all the way to the present practice Sabbath. Sabbath or Shabbat to the Jews is a word that comes right out of the creation account in *Genesis 2*. ² *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.* ³ *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.*

On Mount Sinai in **Exodus 20**- God instituted in the 10 Commandments the practice of Sabbath on the 7th day. Work was to cease, and the people were to rest in the goodness, grace and provision of God, just as God did in his creation of the world. In the context, remember the Israelites were coming out of over 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Slaves don't sabbath. They work every day, grueling, inhumane conditions. Work which is given as a gift by God, becomes a curse and a tyrant for generations. And so the command to cease work for a day in rest and delight was intended to be a wonderful gift from God to the people of Israel, and restore their human dignity. To remind them- you are not a piece of property, you are made in the image of God who rested from his work. And this is why when we do not practice the Sabbath principle,

when we are workaholics, we are never more like the slaves of Egypt, dehumanized and robbed of God's gift to humanity.

Mark 2 ²³ *One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.* ²⁴ *The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"*

Now in the Torah there is no detailed rules as to what is considered work. And we know that to be true today- thought experiment: are these activities restful or work- Cooking, reading, gardening, hiking, spending time with in-laws. So there were certainly no laws in the Torah against Jesus and his disciples snacking in the grain fields. It was that the Pharisees over the years, kind of like helicopter parents, decided to stack rules on rules to protect people from possibly disobeying and control the outcomes. ²⁷ *Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* You have this backwards. You have taken this great gift, this compliment to the dignity of humanity and made it into a ball and chain, a soul sucking legalistic practice. I would argue that modern Christians need to hear the first part far more than the second. We have the exact opposite issue as the pharisees, our problem isn't that we have a bunch of legalistic rules around Sabbath, it's that we don't have any at all.

"The Sabbath has largely been forgotten by the church, which has uncritically mimic the rhythms of the industrial and success obsessed West. The result?"

Our road weary, exhausted churches have largely failed to integrate Sabbath into their lives as vital elements of Christian discipleship. It is not as though we do not love God, we love God deeply.

We just do not know how to sit with God anymore. We have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history." - A.J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*

Now as Christians of the New Covenant, we are no longer under the law but under grace. Jesus has fulfilled the Law for us- Sabbath is not a law but is a principle bring into our lives as the gift God intended it to be from the beginning. It's not about a specific day, although most of Christian history has considered that to be Sunday, but Paul says in *Romans 14:5* *One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.* It is a principle all throughout Scripture given for our good, not as bondage.

Let me give you **3 Practices of the Sabbath** and then some ideas about how to begin integrating this abiding practice into your life.

Stopping- Shabbat- To stop, literally. **To stop working** for a day. Which is different than a day off when we do all the work we don't get paid for. Not just to stop working but to **stop thinking about work**- induce same chemicals as the stress of work. Cultivate the mental discipline to set aside. **Stop Worrying**. Emotional, Relational...John Mark Comer says his family disciplines themselves to try not think or talk about anything sad on Sabbath. **Stop wanting**- online

shopping, needing things. Also a call to **stop relying on self** and rely on God in your unfinished work. In agrarian society of ancient world, you work the land. And a day off from the land, from plows and plucking and harvesting and watering and threshing- it meant there was work left undone, unfinished, there was more that could be done...but they were to cease from that work and leave it be. Like the cooking show Chopped...buzzer goes off and it's done. You drop the pepper grinder, you drop close your laptop, that email unanswered, you leave that room undusted...

This is how this shows up in my life...I prepare my sermons on Thursdays and Fridays. Any preacher will tell you that there is always more tweaking and work that can be done on your sermon. When Sabbath begins for me- which is Friday late afternoon, the laptop shuts, wherever I am is where I am. I don't touch that sermon until early Sunday morning. Some days that easy...other days I say...Lord I have to trust you to do the work because this hasn't come together! What I have found when I have made that commitment to the Lord is that He works when I rest.

Delighting: The word- Shabbat has the dual meaning to stop and to delight. God took in all that he made, he delighted in his work and then he blessed the Seventh day and made it holy. Easy to think about Sabbath in the negative. All the things you can't do...but it's a blessed day. What do you enjoy? Feed your soul with what is beautiful and good and brings laughter and love... because our world is filled with so much that is evil, ugly and a lie. And it's easy to see the world in a negative light. It reminds us to be joyful even in the circumstances of your life.

For me that's sleeping in, it's mountain biking, it's several cups of coffee, eating well, it's enjoying a glass of wine or a day at the ocean, it's enjoying the wife of my youth...(that may be work for her), it's unhurried time in the backyard with my family.

Worshipping: This is the response after stopping and delighting...it's not something you need to check off your list, it's rather just the reasonable response to making the space for Sabbath.

Ruth Haley Barton, Sacred Rhythms- "I know what it's like to rest for hours until I have the energy to delight in something- good food, a good book, leisurely walk, long awaited conversation with someone I love.

I know what it's like to feel joy and hope and peace flow back into my body and soul though I had thought it might never come back again. I know what it's like to see my home and my children through the Sabbath eyes of enjoyment.

I know what it's like to have rest turned into delight, and delight turned into gratitude, and gratitude into worship."

This is why I believe all the other practices have their starting place in the Sabbath principle. It's the place where we begin to carve the space to abide for the rest of the week, that fuels our

abiding rhythms for the rest of the week. N.T. Wright- “It is only when we slow down our lives that we can catch up with God.”

Everyone loves the idea of Sabbath. But to actually practice it is one of the most counter-cultural, and challenging things you can do. To say yes is to say no to a dozen or more other things. But it is worth it. Let me give you a few tips:

1. **Start small and grow into it.** Start with a 4 hour stretch. Grow into an evening into the next day afternoon. The Keelers are right there with you, this is something we want to grow into more and more.
2. **Pick the same day/time each week to establish a rhythm**
3. **Begin and end with a habit** or celebration that marks it “holy”. Traditional way was to light candles as a way to remember and observe the Sabbath. Pray and ask God to bless it and give you rest, delight and worship. Pray a blessing over your family. Read a Psalm. Share a meal, go for a family walk.
4. **Prepare for Sabbath.** Get done your shopping, figure out meals, put away your phone...
5. **Adapt** your day to your personality, preference, stage of life, and however it is you connect with God: time in nature, walking your dog to the park, playing frisbee golf with your kids, getting lost in a good novel, etc. Just take the day to pamper your soul in God’s presence.

PracticingtheWay.org/practices

²⁸ ***So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*** Ultimately, Sabbath isn’t just about a practice, it’s about a person. Sabbath ultimately points us to the one in whom we find our ultimate, soul rest. Humanity attempts to live their whole lives justifying themselves. We try to make a name for ourselves, trying to be somebody, working hard to be noticed, or proving that we matter, to ourselves, to others and to God. All of this is exhausting isn’t it? Jesus says in Matthew 11- I will give you rest. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, not only because as Creator of the world He is the one who created the Sabbath, but because he is the end of our soul work.