

BE STILL, MK2:23-3:6

Ten Step Program #4

♦**Intro:** “Remember the Stopping Day by setting it apart.”

That’s my translation of the fourth commandment, or should I say the “fourth saying”. In Hebrew they are called “ten utterances”.

Ten words of wisdom, or as we’re calling it, a ten step program to freedom, health, sobriety. Todays beautiful word is about sabbath rest. Sabbath. שַׁבָּת; the Hebrew word for ceasing, stopping. Spelled almost exactly like the Hebrew term for seven: שְׁבָע The shabbah is for shabbat! The 7th day is for stopping. In the number we see a pattern that God has set for human life. Every seven days we are to stop, be still and rest our souls.

♦God did not stop because he was tired. He stopped to pattern for us what life is really about. So the “be still” command, or the sabbath day command reminds us that we are more than our bodies, we also have souls. We are more than what we do. We are human *beings, not doings*. Who we are and what we are becoming is greater than what occupies our time.

♦

♦**The fatigued soul:** Sabbath rest is a physical rhythm and a spiritual rhythm. It’s a living rhythm, like eating; you cannot skip it for six months and then do it all at once. By then you will be dead. And this is one of the reasons so many are alive and busy, but dead in their souls. Psychotherapist Roy Boumeister spoke of what he called “ego depletion”, a fatigue that goes beyond physical tiredness. This is tiredness in your soul, your inner being.

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♦How do you know if your soul is fatigued? Here are some indicators:

- ♦Things seem to bother you more than they should. Your spouse's chewing-gun style suddenly reveals to you a massive character flaw. [Roy Baumeister observed that dual career couples tend to fight more over trivial issues every evening. His advice was to go home early. So that they had more time to fight? No. But when they come home late as though life is about work, they have no soul-energy left to handle each other's annoyances. No energy left for relationship.]
- ♦It's hard to make up your mind even about a simple decision.
- ♦Impulses to eat, drink, spend, indulge -are harder to resist than usual. That is, you are more likely to eat the whole package of Oreos when your soul is fatigued then when it is not.
- ♦You are more likely to choose short term gains that will leave you will long term losses. (say, too much soothing drink now, and sickness and missing work tomorrow.)
- ♦You are more afraid and have less courage.
- ♦When you realize you left your smart phone home you worry the whole time that you might have missed an important text, or call.

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♦If these feel like you, it might do you good to consider the wisdom of God's fourth step to wholeness: keeping the stopping Day holy, or set apart; a pattern for having an alive soul. How do we find health for our souls?

♦**1. To be healthy my soul needs rest.** The Chinese join two characters to form a single pictograph for busyness: heart, and death: 忙. The heart is the place a busy life exacts its deepest toll.

♦A. Much of the time even when we "stop working" we still haven't truly stopped. We fill the time with other things like games, which in all honesty, we really "work" at. We even come home from vacation exhausted (which begs the deeply theological question "What's up with that?) There is no soul formation without stopping. Growing in your soul, or becoming healthy in your spirit requires reflection, and reflection flourishes in silence and solitude. This is why Christians down through the centuries have practiced the disciplines of silence and solitude. What did Jesus say to his disciples after a period of busy ministry?

♦"*The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*" Mark 6:30-32, NIV.

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♦What? Weren't there still sick people? Still demon possessed that needed healing? There's work to do. There are lives to save. But like his father, God's son stops. Something happens to the soul in quietness and solitude. *In solitude we withdraw from the pressure of the world and do nothing.* We withdraw to give our soul its rest. In solitude we remember our size. In solitude it is easier to see that you are not the center of the universe, and that we are not what people think of us, and that doing is not as central as being, and that there is a God and that you are not him.

♦B. Vance Havner once said, "If you don't come away for a while, you will come apart in a while." But guess what happens when the human person slows their soul?

♦Lets try an **Exercise**: if you have a cell phone, I invite you to take it out and hold it up. Now, would you please power it off? Now lets just rest a moment... Think of it! No one in India can contact you. All the people waiting for you to Tweet are holding their breath. You won't be the first to know what Beyonce is saying! Know what? These things will never, never fill that space inside we call the "soul".

♦Turn off all screens. Put away all gadgets that connect you with all the other millions of busybodies in the world. Go someplace quiet and alone. And there talk with God. Tell him what you feel. Ask him questions. Or just tell him your listening if he wants to speak.

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♦Know what happens when you slow down and rest the soul? You find a growing desire within for what is wholesome and good. You more easily follow habits that lead to excellence. Your mind begins to obey God with joy. Your thoughts are thoughts of beauty and truth. If you want to practice sabbath rest, start stopping. Now that doesn't mean make yourself bored and miserable. There's more.

♦2. To be healthy my soul needs delight.

♦A. To often in history God followers have turned the wisdom of sabbath rest into the dreariness of sabbath boredom and felt very religious about the whole deal. Don't turn sabbath rest into dreariness and boredom. That's a sin too! Some of us can recall sabbath practices that included meals, and naps and lots of church services. Dad and mom might have been delighting but the kids weren't learning to look forward to God's day! I know people who actually think if you enjoy it you should not do it on Sunday. Wow. This is what the Pharisees were doing in our text, as if man was created for the obeying of sabbath rules (cf. v27) Though they lived long before him, the Pharisees would have agreed with Immanuel Kant, the famous philosopher who said that only if one has no desire to perform an act, but does so out of duty and derives no benefit from it, material or spiritual -is it a moral act. God does not agree with this. Let me list off a few texts that would question this concept.

♦Ps.16:11 Eternal pleasures are at your right hand

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- ♦Ps.32:11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice.
- ♦Ps.34:8 Taste & see that the Lord is good.
- ♦Ps.37:4 Delight yourself in the Lord
- ♦The Catechism interestingly calls sabbath a “festive day of rest.” In fact, the early Christian Church was so festive on Sunday that Roman writers suspected them of perpetrating obscene orgies on the grounds that they enjoyed their day so much!
- ♦You get the picture. The Pharisee saw the sabbath as a day of don’ts. They had 1521 prohibitions for the Sabbath. 156 double pages in the Talmud. Let me share a sampling:
 - ♦You couldn’t wear ornaments, nose-rings because you might take them off to show them to your friend and then you would be carrying them and that would be work, and they you’d be breaking the law. [And you thought nose rings were a modern fad!]
 - ♦You could only walk 2000 cubits on the Sabbath from your home. However, if two meals just happened to be sitting at the end of your path, well that basically constituted “home”, so now you could go another 2000! [That sounds more like politics than theology!]
 - ♦Pharisees considered sabbath a day of self-denial. To insure self-denial meant to keep away from pleasure for that was surely selfish. In other words, to be godly I must be unhappy, or if it feels good it must be wrong, or true

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morality is duty not joy, or to really be godly you must get nothing out of it. (any of this sound familiar to you?) So *thou shalt not work* has become *thou shalt not enjoy life*. And with every joy we rule out on earth, we narrow the scope of holiness until it's hardly possible, and God has become the foe of joy instead of its source!

♦B. Those ancients seem almost ridiculous don't they? Of course, we shouldn't be hard on them. Christians today have all their own forms of sabbath rules. Some think that God would surely frown upon you for golfing, and for heaven's sake stay away from your wife! The ancient Hebrew however knew that Sabbath was for restoration and delight! In my heritage the rule was that you couldn't eat out on Sunday because you were causing someone else to work. But apparently God didn't mind if you caused someone to work while you were out of town and on vacation. Then it was permissible. The rest of the time we didn't make anybody work, except Mom. She better have roast, potatoes, veggies, and gravy ready after church and then clean it all up when we were done. I know a Baptist congregation in CT in which most of them all go out to eat on the Sabbath based on the premise that they should not make MOM work, but it's just fine if pagans do!

♦People ask me if I think it's wrong to shop on your sabbath day. Some Christians refrain from it on Sunday because they do that on just about any day, and consider it a chore. On the other

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hand if roaming the aisles at Walmart is a joy-filled pass-time for you, then I'd call it highly appropriate for sabbath. If you work at Walmart, I suggest you find another way to renew yourself on your day of worship.

♦C. Sabbath theology centers around appreciation for God and his goodness. Genesis chapter 1 says God saw that all he made was good and he rested. That makes Sunday an invitation to rejoice in creation. Deuteronomy 5:15 tells Israel to rest because God has delivered them from Egypt. That makes Sunday a party day over freedom! "Don't you dare turn freedom from slavery back into slavery!" God is saying. Run and leap in the fields, don't hang out by the prison barbwire fence. Take the **Bread of Presence** in the Tabernacle (v26): it was a symbol that God provides food, nourishing. It sat right there in the foyer of the church, 12 loaves baked fresh each Sunday! Do you see what's going on here? God is providing for people. Sunday is the day you celebrate his provision for us. We are not *providing for God!*

♦3. **To be healthy my soul needs God.** Worship and love of God is the primary object of the Fourth Command. It is a sabbath "unto the Lord". Worship is giving honor to God. Of course we believe that Christians are to walk and talk with God everyday. But remember, the seventh day is a whole day devoted to God above all else. A day of rest doesn't end at 11:00am when church gets out. The Fourth Command isn't "You shall go to worship me for one hour a week"! If that's the extent of your

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sabbath, don't be surprised if your soul doesn't seem all that refreshed.

♦A. Also, lets not confuse leisure with sabbath rest. Leisure is time off minus the sacred. Sabbath is rest plus the sacred.

Knowing God is the single most important way of finding life in your soul.

♦Acts of worship are obvious: song, studying God's word, sharing wealth in offerings, talking with God (prayer). Do other things count as worship of God? You bet! Jesus points out (v4) that doing good is an act of worship. One way we display our love for God is by loving others in his name. The Rabbis knew and taught the same thing. That's why they remained silent (v4b).

♦I know that some of you understand this. Some of you have skipped worship to bail out a friend in a crisis because you love God, and you need to know that the Lord is honored by that love as well.

♦B. Contributing to the soul hope of others is as much worship as singing songs and prayer.

♦"*but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do.*" Deuteronomy 5:14, NLT.

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♦And this is why churches have fellowship, and classes, and small groups, etc. We're working on soul-health. That's why we welcome each other, and ask about each other, instead of sitting in our car in the parking lot listening to worship on the radio. Do you sense God's desire to save and refresh human beings in the Dt.5 text?! Give your employees the time off. Unharness the horses. Turn off the production line. Park the truck. Everything and everyone gets a Snow Day!

♦**Conclusion:** Rest, Delight, Worship. Is your soul fatigued? Do you ever wish your soul felt livelier? Consider some ways you can implement Step 4 in your life. Jesus for example, chose to take a walk through the farm fields with his closest friends on the sabbath. The soul cannot find health apart from it's savior. It's hard to find the savior if you don't slow down enough to realize you are more important to him than what you do. God made this step, this command, for your benefit!

♦LS...

♦Now, listen closely. The fourth command is a reminder that God wants your soul to live! Do you? If you really want your soul to be at rest you need to deal with your own sin and your own evil. Sin is the biggest enemy of the soul. But there is a way to rid your soul of the guilt you carry. God can forgive you, and wipe it off your story. There is only one way to rest from all your evil ways; it comes through repentance and appeal to the Son of God.

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Jesus said come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. ...learn of me and you will find rest for your soul.

♦And what do we learn about Jesus? His body was broken so yours could be whole. His blood was spilled so you could keep yours into all eternity. He took the burden of justice against human sin so we could rest in the free love of God the Father. Welcome him into your own heart as your savior. And if you do, come to his table and celebrate what you've been given.

♦Psalm 62.

♦Acts 3:13-20

Children's sermon:

Do you know what a day I'm talking about?

There's nothing on the schedule. Nothing you have to do because what you would normally do got stopped.

Everyone else stops too.

You are free to do anything you want. Nobody goes to school. Nobody goes to work. You just relax. Drink sweet drinks. Play games with your family and friends. Maybe watch a good movie.

Build a snowman. Have a snowball war.

Help mom in the kitchen maybe. Have nerf battles.

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No homework on this day. Cause you did it all the day before.

No chores. Dad stays home. Mom stays home.

It's a snow day. Did you know God said to have a snow day every week! We call it Sunday. It's the day we relax, enjoy all the good God made and thank him for it all. We usually gather here to celebrate how much we love God by singing, praying with him.

People who use Gods snow day well are usually happier and have more energy.