

I love asking people questions and one of my favourites is actually quite simple: *how are you doing these days?* You can use this question with almost anyone—with the people you know best (family and friends), and with people you’ve just met. I’m amazed by how often this question opens the door to someone’s soul.

Because this is one of my go-to-questions, I’ve received many different answers:

- Fine
- Good
- I’ve been better
- Fantastic
- Terrible
- Sad
- Happy
- Content

But these days there is one response that is more prevalent than the others, in fact, I may hear this response more than all the other responses combined. Does anyone want to guess the response? **Busy.** Conduct your own informal survey this week and pay attention to how often people tell you that they are, or feel, busy.

I have too much to do and not enough time. I’m running from the time I wake up until the moment my head hits the pillow at night. I feel anxious, stressed, and under constant pressure—I’m like an elastic band that has been stretched to its capacity and is just beginning to tear. Is this your experience of life? Do you long for a different experience?

This week I’ve been asking myself a particular question with respect to technology: *does it make us more free, or, does it further enslave us?*

Back in the 1950’s and 60’s futurists looked to technology as the great saviour; they predicted that computers, satellites, robots and the like would allow for work to be done so speedily that people would have an over-abundance of time. A Time Magazine article reported the testimony given in 1967, before a United States Senate subcommittee, predicting that “by 1985, people could be working just 22 hours a week, or 27 weeks a year, or could retire at 38.”

Kerby Anderson, author of the book *Technology and Social Trends*, quotes a Manhattan architect by the name of James Trunzo: “Technology is increasing the heartbeat... We are inundated with information. The mind can't handle it all. The pace is so fast now, I sometimes feel like a gunfighter dodging bullets.”¹

Letters used to take close to a week to be delivered, and then, another week for a reply to be sent back. We used to have time to write a thought response, but no more. Email and text allows for instant communication, but the instant access simultaneously frees us and binds us. What is the acceptable response time to an email or a text? A day? An hour? A minute? Cell phones mean that we are always connected, even when we shouldn’t be—any time of day or night. The company cell phone can be like a golden handcuff; we cannot break free from our work.

¹ Kerby Anderson, *Technology and Social Trends*, 102.

Are we the “busiest” generation ever? That’s very debatable but I could make a case that we are one of the most “overwhelmed” generations in the history of the world. We’re not very good at saying “no,” we like to keep every option open, and because we rarely “unplug” from technology, we’re always “on”—bombarded by information, requests, and opportunities.

illus: If you’ve ever been on Youtube, then perhaps you watched a video of a hamster running on a wheel. Their little legs get going so fast that they can no longer keep up with the wheel; it’s just a matter of time before they spin out of control and thrown to the ground. Do you know what the worst part of it is? A hamster’s brain is so tiny, they get right back on the wheel and the same thing happens again and again. I wonder, how different are we from our tiny-brained friends?

We don’t have to get back on the hamster wheel; the Bible tells us that we were made for something much more.

As we’ve been saying each week, God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt and He spoke the Ten Words to protect their ongoing freedom. The **1st Word**—*no other gods*—sets us free from things that cannot satisfy our needs and desires. The **2nd Word**—*no idols*—protects us from trying to make God in our own image—god as we want Him to be, not God as He is. The **3rd Word**—*don’t misuse His name*—frees us to know to know Him, call upon Him, to honour Him, and to be named by Him—in Christ we are His sons and daughters.

The **4th Word** is designed to free us from compulsive busyness. Word #4 tells us that we were created to enjoy, commune, and find

our rest in God. At this time I want to encourage you to turn with me in your Bible to Exodus 20:8-11.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

1. What is the Sabbath? In order to understand what Sabbath is, we need to go back to the very beginning when God created the world. The first page of the Bible reveals something important about God—He is a God who works. The particular work we read about in Genesis 1 is the work of creation; God brings His creativity, majesty, and beauty to bear upon this world.

But, we must note, that when God works, He is not all business. Let me read Genesis 1:11-13:

“God said, ‘Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.’ And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.”

At the end of each day, God paused from His work. The text doesn't say that God was so busy that He worked through the night; God stopped His work and then picked it up once more the next day. The question is, *Why did God pause? Did God need a rest?* No—at least not in the way one might think. God is not like us, He doesn't get tired, He doesn't wear out like we do.

Genesis 1 tells us that God paused from His work to look upon what He had made; the text says, “*And God saw that it was good.*” Perhaps you've never thought about God in this way before; He paused to savour the moment, to enjoy what He had made. But by the seventh day, God had accomplished all He had set out to do—His creation work was completed. Genesis 2:3 tells us that “*God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*”

Paul Stevens writes, “Sabbath *seems* to be a waste of time, but in reality it is the redemption of time. The first mention of holiness in the Bible refers to time: ‘And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy’ (Genesis 2:3).”²

Think about Adam and Eve. Humanity was created by God on the sixth day, they went to sleep that night, and what did they awake to? Off to work? 9-5? Adam and Eve awoke to the gift of Sabbath—their very first experience in the world was a day in which they could enjoy God, one another, and creation without disruption.³

² R. Paul Stevens, *Seven Days Of Faith: Every Day Alive With God*, 209.

³ Stevens, 214-215.

⁴ Exodus 21:2.

God spoke the 4th Word—a word about Sabbath—to a people who had been enslaved. They had been controlled by cruel and relentless task-masters, they were driven in their work to the point of death—they knew what Sabbath was, but they had never been able to practice it. God has woven this principle into the fabric of creation.

Long before agricultural science, God instituted a sabbath rest for the land. In Exodus 23:11, God instructed Israel to let the land lie fallow every 7 years. We know today that in allowing a field to “rest,” the nutrients in the soil are replenished, allowing for future fruitfulness.

In the Old Testament, the sabbath principle was applied to new marriages. Deuteronomy 24:5 says, “*A newly married man must not be drafted into the army or be given any other official responsibilities. He must be free to spend one year at home, bringing happiness to the wife he has married.*” Now fortunately for us, recently married Pastor Paul, failed to negotiate that clause in his employment contract.

The sabbath principal was also woven into Israel's economic system. Every 7th year, those who had sold themselves into slavery to pay off a debt, were released.⁴ And every 49 years, plus 1, prisoners and captives were set free, all debts were forgiven, and all property was returned to its original owners.

Through the 4th Word, God proclaimed a sabbath rest for all people: men and women, young and old, whether they were natural born Israelites, foreigners, or slaves. Dennis Prager notes that even the animals were given a Sabbath rest—it's the first law in history written to protect animals.⁵ At its heart, the sabbath principle is about freedom, rest, and enjoyment.

At this time, I want to direct our attention to the “why” question.

2. Why is the Sabbath so important to God, and for us?

On one level, we practice Sabbath not simply to obey God's command but because we want to follow His lead—because God pauses from His work, we pause too.⁶ God established a sabbath rhythm in creation—six + one. We were made in God's image; He is a worker and we are too, but we were not made exclusively for work.

Darrell Johnson writes, “We were not created to handle pressure, tension, and stress every day, day in and day out. We will burn out. Nor were we created for constant leisure. We will ‘bore-out.’ We are ‘sabbatical creatures,’ creatures who work, and work hard; but who

must stop every seventh day to rest, reflect and worship. To violate this rhythm is to violate our essential nature; it is to do violence to God's good creation.”⁷

But there's more to sabbath than taking a rest *from* work; in sabbath we intentional seek our rest *in* God. One scholar suggests that resting from work isn't an end in itself but simply the means to clear a space to behold God, ourselves, others, and creation.⁸

When we practice sabbath, we demonstrate our commitment to the 1st Word—no other gods. Johnson writes, “*one of the clearest indications of what we value is how we spend our time...* We all have the same amount of time *allocated* to us: sixty minutes an hour, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. How we spend our time reveals our true allegiances.”⁹ Have we made “gods” of our work, school, or our leisurely pursuits?

The Sabbath frees us from bowing down to false gods. Our work cannot tell us who we are or what we're worth. If you live for your work, you will be terrified at the thought of retirement—who will you be when you retire? The same can be said of those whose full-time work is parenting. When a child grows up and leaves the home,

⁵ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code*, 31.

⁶ Peter Enns, *NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, 419.

⁷ Darrell Johnson, *Jealous For Our Freedom*, 35-36.

⁸ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 226.

⁹ Johnson, 35.

some parent are utterly lost—they no longer know who they are or what makes them significant apart from the work of child-raising.

While we are made *to* work, we were not made *for* work; we were made *for* God. Six days for work and one day for rest. The Sabbath creates space to look up, to look within, and to look around.

Looking Up: A time-out from our regular activity, creates space to look up, to remember who God is, to receive His provision, and to renew our commitment to following Him.

Looking Within: A time-out from our regular activity, creates space to look within—to remember that we are human *beings*, not human *doings*. God's love isn't dependent on our production value; our success, or failure, doesn't even factor in.

Paul Stevens writes, “Children ask their parents, ‘Will you play with me?’ In one sense nothing is accomplished by such play, but in reality something crucial *is* achieved: parent and child mutually affirm that they enjoy and prize each other.”¹⁰ Sabbath is like that. We don't accomplish anything, but something crucial is achieved—we find our rest in God, we hear once again that He enjoys us, treasures us, loves us, and we respond in kind.

Your work might be all-consuming, you might be excellent at what you do, you might be wildly successful, and well-compensated for your work, but you are a slave nonetheless. Pausing from work, even sleeping, can be an act of faith; our lack of production on the Sabbath is a declaration that we are, to a degree, unnecessary. We do

not keep the world spinning, we aren't irreplaceable; we can stop and God can sustain the world without us.

Looking Around: A time-out from our regular activity, creates space to look up, look within, and to look around. Sabbath is a day for celebrating God's goodness in its many forms—friendships, family, a delicious meal, or a beautiful sunset.

God gave humanity the Sabbath in order to protect our freedom from busyness. In the time remaining, I want to talk about how we can bring a Sabbath rhythm into our lives.

3. How do we keep Sabbath today? If you're here this morning and you're saying, “I'd like to keep the Sabbath but I'm too busy,” then you've just diagnosed the problem—to enter into rest, something will need to change. I'm not saying it will be easy, you will need to make hard decisions about priorities. God gave us the Sabbath to protect us from busyness, compulsion, burn-out, and narcissism. We cannot sustain the proper focus on God, self, and others on our own; long-term health requires a Sabbath rhythm.

But, all of us need a rhythm that fits our stage of life. The Sabbath rhythm of a retired couple will look different from the rhythm of parents of young children. Similarly, a single university student may need to adopt a different rhythm during exam time; so too will an accountant during tax season. Sabbath will look different in different seasons of your life both in terms of *when* you practice sabbath and *how*.

¹⁰ Stevens, 212.

The 4th Word tells us that on the Sabbath we are to rest from our work, but it doesn't clearly define what "work" we are to rest from. In Jesus' day, Sabbath had become a day filled with complicated restrictions. Out of an intense desire to keep the Sabbath holy, the rabbis went to great lengths to define what was, and wasn't considered "work". All told, they came up with 1521 things that one could not do on the Sabbath.¹¹ Here are a few of my favourites:

You were not allowed to look at your reflection on the Sabbath because you might see a grey hair, be tempted to pluck it out, which would clearly be reaping—and as everyone knows, reaping is work.

If your chicken laid an egg on the Sabbath, you could not eat it because the chicken had been "working" on the Sabbath. There was a loop-hole in this particular prohibition; you were free to eat the egg, *if*, you killed the chicken for Sabbath-breaking. But wouldn't killing the chicken be considered sabbath-breaking-work?

If the candles were lit when Sabbath began, they could remain lit, but one could not blow them out at bed-time; this was considered work. If you forgot to light the candles before Sabbath began, you could not light them—that too was considered work. Modern Sabbath laws prevent an orthodox Jew from turning a light switch on and off on during the Sabbath—that's work—*but*, you can set an automatic timer *before* Sabbath begins so that the lights will turn on and off by themselves.

Just as an aside, 9 years ago I was in Jerusalem on a Sabbath day and after dinner I got into the elevator to go to room on the 10th floor.

What I didn't know was that I had entered a Jewish elevator that had been programmed to honour the Sabbath. At every floor the elevator came to a complete stop—it rested for a few seconds in honour of Sabbath—before continuing to the next floor. Let's just say it wasn't life-giving; each of the 10 "rests" gave me an opportunity to rant and rave. It was only after I checked out of the hotel that someone told me there was "Gentile" elevator just around a corner.

It was unlawful to wear any jewelry or ornaments on the Sabbath, since this was considered "carrying a burden."

It was fine to spit on a rock on the Sabbath, but you could not spit on the ground, because it might make mud, mud is mortar, and making mortar is work.

It's no wonder Jesus got in so much trouble on the Sabbath. Jesus regularly broke the sabbath "rules" by doing what His Father in Heaven enjoyed doing—healing, helping, and serving. Better than anyone, Jesus knew the Sabbath's true purpose—it was a day for communing with God, others, and celebrating God's goodness.

Here's a few ideas of what the Sabbath could look like:

a) Commune with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: taking a break from work does not equal Sabbath; we have not sabbath-ed until we find our rest in God. Moving from working compulsively to compulsively watching TV, or compulsively gaming, exercising, or eating won't get us to the rest God intends.

¹¹ Johnson, 39.

Perhaps you need a Sabbath from social media—one day a week where you don't let everyone know where you've been, what you ate, what you did, thought, or felt. And just think, if you take a Sabbath from social media, all of your followers will get a Sabbath too—it's a win-win. If when we cease from compulsive activity our mind begins to race with all the things we need to do, or could do, sabbath is doing its work—it's bringing the toxins to the surface so that we can release them to God.

On the Sabbath, we set aside time to enjoy God, to listen to Him, to renew our allegiance to Him. On the Sabbath, we have extended time to pray, read the Bible, or engage in any number of spiritual practices that open our heart and mind to God.

b) Another element of Sabbath is spending time in the company of others—friends, family, neighbours, etc. Attending a church service is one of the ways that we are reminded that we are not alone—we are a part of God's family; we belong to others.

c) There may be something that is entirely life-giving for you—going for a walk, getting on your bike, painting, playing music, or gardening; if it feels more like play than work, it's probably something to be enjoyed on the Sabbath. But even things that are life-giving can become the place of compulsivity.

Over the past year I have been waking every morning, after 8-9 hours of sleep, utterly exhausted—I've got something going wrong with my thyroid and adrenal gland. I've going through the process of blood tests, medicating, and the like but during the latest visit to the doctor, she told me that for the next 6 weeks she does not want me to run for longer than 40 minutes at a time. *Only 40 minutes? I'm not*

going to meet my mileage goals, I'm not going to be ready for the races I'd like to do, I'm not going to beat George Canvin on the Strava Elevation Challenge!

We are far too easily mastered, we give ourselves to our desires and before long we can be ruled by them. Take care that what is meant to give life does not end up ruling you.

d) The last thing I want to mention is simple, but it can be implemented in hundreds of ways. Sabbath is a day to celebrate God's goodness. Get outside and marvel at what God has created. Write a psalm of thanksgiving. Enjoy a meal with friends.

Jesus once said, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" We were made for more than work, more than busyness—we were made for God. God ordered creation with a 6+1 rhythm. Sabbath was made for our rest and renewal—will you stop long ago to enter into His rest?

Worship

Benediction