

## The Rest We Need

Genesis 2:1-3

“On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done,  
and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.  
So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.”

The creation story ends on a surprising note.

For six days God had been bringing the entire universe into existence—effortlessly and tirelessly. Now on the seventh day, he stopped and rested. This “resting” of God teaches us an important lesson about our own work and the rest God wants for us.

### 1. God’s purpose for rest.

Why—after his work of creating the world—did God *rest*? Certainly not because he was tired. And not even because he didn’t intend to do any more work. Throughout the remainder of the Bible we read about the “wonderful *works* of God” (Acts 2:11). Jesus himself said, “My Father is always at his *work* to this very day, and I too am *working*” (John 5:17).<sup>1</sup> If God’s rest was not a cessation from all activity, or to replenish his exhausted reserves of energy, what was it for?

- a. The Garden of Eden provides us with a vivid illustration of God's purpose for rest. According to the Genesis narrative, humans were tasked with tending and cultivating the garden (Genesis 2:15), but this labor was meant to be carried out in the delightful company of God (see Genesis 3:8).
- b. God's purpose for rest is also evident in the fourth commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). This commandment comes in the context of Israel’s harsh and miserable labor during their enslavement in Egypt. God had liberated them from this bondage to establish a life-giving relationship with them. To ensure they never forgot this, he gave them a precept: to honor the Sabbath (a day of rest) as a special day. By abstaining from regular labor every seven days, they would remember how God released them from slave labor and freed them to serve and delight in him (Deuteronomy 5:15; Ezekiel 20:12).

Thus, by resting after creating the universe—by beginning a seventh “day” that has no end—God is telling us that all life is for serving and delighting in him, and that is what rest really means.

### 2. Our need for rest.

Our bodies and minds naturally require rhythms of rest, whether it be through napping, sleeping at night, or taking a weekly day off work. However, this physical weariness is only a surface manifestation of a more profound exhaustion we tend to feel. Without the rest that comes from God, we toil tirelessly like slaves. In light of this, we should ponder the question posed by the prophet Isaiah to his people: “Why spend your labor on what does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:2).

### 3. God’s provision of rest.

When Jesus ministered on earth, he was criticized for working to heal people on the Sabbath day, but he insisted that this was actually the point of the Sabbath: to do good! (Mark 3:4). It enraged his

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<sup>1</sup> It is significant that Jesus spoke these words on the Sabbath day—the day intended to remind God’s people of the meaning of rest.

adversaries to hear him say that he is “the Lord of the Sabbath,” because he was really claiming to be the one to bring true rest to people’s souls (Matthew 12:1–8, Mark 2:23–28 and Luke 6:1–5).

Jesus healed people on the Sabbath (rest) day to show that he had genuine authority backing up his loving invitation: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29).

But the ultimate proof that Jesus was really the “Lord of the Sabbath” came near the end of his earthly ministry. When his work of redemption was completed on the cross, he cried, “It is finished!” And just as God rested on the seventh day after completing the first creation, so did Jesus. On the Sabbath, his body rested in the tomb. The following day was more than just the first day of the next week: it was the first day of a new creation in which people who came to Jesus for rest could now *rest* in his finished work and *work* for God’s glory.

## **Discussion**

1. How has this study on rest challenged the way you view work and rest?
2. What kind of habits tend to sap your energy instead of refreshing our focus on and enjoyment of God?
3. How should your approach to serving God be shaped by Jesus’ finished work on the cross?
4. What changes can you make in your work and daily routine to prioritize rest and make space for delighting in God?
5. How can you use the principle of Sabbath rest to cultivate a deeper appreciation for God's sovereignty, provisions, and work in your life?