

**We are Not in Egypt Anymore**  
**By Amanda A. Nevin**  
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Last week I talked about the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment and the importance of the Sabbath day. For Israel they had suffered for years under the cruel hand of the Pharaoh and when they asked the Pharaoh simply for a day of rest to worship God, the demands on them were increased. When God freed the Israelites it was to set them apart to live differently than the cultures around them. God wanted them to learn to trust that He would provide for their every need, including manna/quail water and land, even if they didn't work one day a week. In last week's passage the author instructs the people to "remember the Sabbath." In our Deuteronomy passage today notice the nuance it says "observe the Sabbath and keep it holy as the Lord your God has commanded you." Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt. We are not in Egypt anymore. We live though as a people who believe that we are stuck in Egypt with no way out, no option but to fill our lives with busyness and exhaustion, to go from one thing to another without taking time to focus on the things that really matter: faith, family, rest. One author Mark Buchanan writes this: "Exodus gives theological rationale for rest, and Deuteronomy historical justification for it. One evokes God's character, the other his redemption. One calls us to holy mimicry—be like God; the other to holy defiance—never be slaves again," (Buchanan, pg 87)<sup>1</sup>.

For many of us I think that the reason we don't take time for Sabbath renewal is multifaceted, we all have our reasons: but I think that at its core is fear and pride: We either are fearful that God is not all powerful, not able to care for us, not as powerful as the bosses who demands much from us, or as powerful as the culture that whispers lies to us about what is "truly satisfying". Or it is pride: I am successful, I have a great education, I can manage my own life and while faith and God are important components of my life they are only one aspect of who I am instead of being at the center! Author Mark Buchanan writes "Pride usurps God. Pride inverts the universe's deepest truth: that we need and serve God. Pride gets this exactly backward. Pride is the delusion that God, if he exists, is awfully lucky I've shown up and should mind his p's and q's lest I change my mind. The twin of pride is despair. It is to collapse into a sense that not even God is good enough or big enough or smart enough to sort out the mess I've made or stumbled upon. In despair, we are consumed by the lie that God, if he exists, is too inept or distracted or apathetic to even notice us, let alone come to our aid," (Buchanan, pg. 72). These realities put an emphasis on ourselves and not on God. Our fear, our pride our despair places personal confidence in ourselves: our education, pedigrees, abilities, our lives as a whole in the things of this world, and we live in the fear that we won't have enough, be enough or be able to be successful if we don't take matters in to our own hands. I wonder if we have done harm to ourselves, our creation, our families, our communities by not taking time to carve out sacred space and time to be in rest! "Studies have shown that we in the US are working longer and longer hours and are enjoying it less and less. Not only that, we are doing far less than we used to do when we worked fewer hours. We vacation less, we play less, we volunteer less, we join groups less frequently, we have less sex, we eat more fast food and grow healthier. In short we work more for less reward in human terms" (pg 55-56 "Preaching the Texts: The Ten Commandments, by John C. Holbert). So why do we continue to put our trust in those

things and not in our faith? Sabbath though invites us to learn how to trust more in Christ, it invites us to yes to time with God, our faith and our spiritual growth while saying no to the world around us.

This is hard! We hear the nagging voices in our own heads that say “you are taking a few minutes to sit down? How quaint, how charming, don’t you know that you need to get those bills over there, drive the kids to practice, make dinner from scratch, get to that to do pile that you have neglected for a week, you are so weak, pathetic, really, you should feel incredible guilty for taking that rest! There are a thousand things that still need to be done! There are a million and one things to worry about. Get of your lazy bottom and get to work!” We have created a culture where rest must be “stolen, savored on the sly, and of course then it’s not rest: worry about getting caught doing nothing plunders our rest’s restfulness” (Buchanan, pg. 91). The truth of the matter though is this: the work’s never done, we can always be doing more, our homes will always need to be cleaned again, our dishes will always need to get done, the dinner will always need to be made, we will never get all our work done each day at work; we will always have that phone call to make, that friend to check in with, the family relationship to repair; the point is that God longs for his people to carve sacred space in our day, week and month to rest despite our to do lists! This is God’s gift to his people when he gave the commandment and for us today!

Sabbath keeping is more than just having good time management. It is a fresh orientation on time, when we think with holy imagination about how our lives intersect with eternity, with kingdom hope and purpose we begin to have a different set of priorities. In Psalm 90 Moses asks God to “teach us to number our days correctly so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Sabbath time is learning how to structure our days and time to be more focused on God’s plan for us and for his creation than to worry about what does and doesn’t get done! It is learning to make room in our hearts and our lives to be surprised by the Holy interruptions of life, but if we are so focused on time as defined by our culture then we may end up missing those interruptions where God is wanting to teach us something. Author Mark Buchanan puts it this way “ work out where time and eternity meet. Pay attention to how God is afoot in the mystery of each movement, in its mad rush or maddening plod. He is present in all of that. But too often we are so time-obsessed we take no time to really notice,” (p76-77). He also says this “Drivenness may awaken or be a catalyst for purpose, but it rarely fulfills it, more often it jettisons it. A common characteristic of driven people is that, at some point, they forget the purpose. They lose the point. The very reason they began something—embarked on a journey, undertook a project, waged a war, entered a profession, married a girl—erodes under the weight of their striving. Their original inspiration may be noble. But driven too hard, it gets supplanted by greed for more, or dread of set back or force of habit” (pg 77).

Sabbath rest, is as much about us learning how to play again, how to be silent, how to listen to God’s voice, how to be in rest, how to have deeper and abiding relationships with folks by carving out sacred time with one another without time constraints or agendas; Sabbath is about worship, and stewardship, about giving and caring, it is about stopping/ceasing the normal work that we do to make time to be fully present and fully alive in the graces of Christ! There will always be things to do, always things that won’t get done, that is part of the trust process that is required in fully living in to the hope and promise that God is all sufficient and powerful and when we say no to the culture around us, God will say yes to us in new and holy ways. Sabbath is learning to turn over to God all those things in our life that possess

us—our money, work, status, reputations, plans, projects—that we’re otherwise tempted to hold on tightly to and release them into God’s hand so that we are freed from fear of what the world thinks about us, and learn to be defined by how God sees us as beloved and holy children, precious in his sight, worthy of life, worth of dying for!

So how do we do Sabbath? It can start off in small ways: Walt Campbell told me last week that at his work he has these little pop-up windows up that show up on his computer with little messages like “have you gotten up from your desk in the last hour? If not, get up! Or take 20 seconds and move your head from side to side and up and down.” In many ways those pop-up windows on a computer are an image for ways in which we can begin to incorporate Sabbath moments in our day. It’s like learning to have a pop up window in your brain in which as you are going about your day when you see something that makes you smile instead of continuing on you stop and give thanks to God; when you see someone (even someone you don’t know) who looks like they are struggling you whisper a blessing over them like in your mind: “Lord surround that person in your love; bless that person as they go about their day; or Lord surround that person in peace.” For parents it can be as simple as saying a blessing of your son/daughter as they leave the house or climb out of the car to go to school, a simple hand on the shoulder and in your mind you are offering them a prayer “Lord protect my child today, Lord watch over my son/daughter as they interact with others; Lord send your spirit into their hearts today, etc. Sabbath moments are holy moments in which we stop, we recognize the Lord of the universe, where we breathe in life, breathe in the gracious love of our savior, even for a moment, a second. The more we take in these small moments the more our hearts begin to be filled with God and the more we begin to make room in our hearts for God moments throughout our day the more I believe we long for extended Sabbath time with God.

A Sabbath day can begin with the lighting of a candle at the beginning of a meal to mark that this time, this meal is different than other meals of the week. Sabbath can be a lavish celebration where you invite a few people over for a meal that you have prepared and readied for the day before or earlier in the day, a crock pot meal or a lasagna, where the preparation has been done, and you begin with talk around an appetizer and you languish for a couple of hours sharing stories on a topics like your favorite child-hood story; the story of the best Christmas present you got, etc and as you get to know those friends/family more intimately you begin to go deeper; how is God working in your life; where are you longing to see more of God; the conversation starts with a purpose and meanders over the stories unbounded by time; the meal goes late into the evening with the only purpose to share in one another’s lives. A Sabbath day can be a retreat into the hills, bring a friend and covenant to walk in silence for an hour together observing the creation listening to the sounds that surround you or what God is speaking in to your heart and then break for lunch breaking your silence by breaking bread and sharing what wonders you have seen, experienced, how God was speaking to you in the silence. Sabbath can be done while doing things that bring your joy, if you like to crochet or knit or sew as you doing it, think about the person for whom it is going to (friend, loved one or unknown stranger), pray over it, pray love in to it as you weave the yarn together, ask God’s hand to be with that person who will receive it, give thanks to God that you have ability to create such a wonderful gift, be mindful and then see where God’s spirit opens your heart and your mind and imagination, share that with the recipient of the gift if you know

them. Sit down with a pen and paper for a few minutes and look at your surroundings and then write a poem inspired by something that you see. While on my Sabbatical I wrote a poem about our couch because I happened to be sitting on it when I was reading about this practice in one of my books. Is it a great poem, probably not, did it give thanks to God? Yes because as I wrote it I thought of those people who have sat on that couch, my parents, in-laws, my children, my friends, the spaghetti stained spilled meals when I was eating alone before I was married, the cracker crumbs from my children who eat on the couch when they aren't supposed to; the friends who spilled wine because we forgot the glass on the floor with a toddler running around; then it brought me to thanking God for all those blessings in my life, for those peoples, the gift of my husband and children, those stories. That is Sabbath. It is a mindful worship of God in the midst of life where we pause to give thanks, to be in prayer, to worship our creator, to be filled by the Holy Spirit because we have opened our hearts to the majesty and wonder of God by carving out time in our day and our week to be with our Lord. The more we engage with our faith I truly believe the less our hearts are concerned by what may not get done in our lives and the more we become concerned about the things that matter to God—God's people, God's children, God's planet, our lives, others coming to faith in Christ, becoming Kingdom people with kingdom perspective in our daily existence and life. Find time this week to engage in a Sabbath moment or Sabbath hour or a Sabbath day and see how God's Spirit is working in your heart!

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<sup>i</sup> All quotes from Mark Buchanan come from "The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul By Restoring Sabbath," Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2006.