

Week 51

The Spiritual Disciplines of Giving and Sabbath

Sample lesson based on LifeWay Explore the Bible Curriculum

Key Verses

Luke 6:5 And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

2 Corinthians 9:7 Each person should do as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or out of compulsion since God loves a cheerful giver.

+ Things to Know

- The spiritual disciplines of Sabbath and Giving involve setting something aside to honor God.
- The "Halakha" was an addendum to the Old Testament, created by Jewish religious elites to apply the Scripture to particular, real-life situations.
- In Jesus' day, the Sabbath had 39 different rules on what kind of work one could and could not do.
- Sabbath stands for the Hebrew verb, *shabbat*, which literally means "to rest from labor."
- The Sabbath is not a literal "day" in particular; it represents the importance of an established, weekly rhythm of not working and deeply resting.
- The Sabbath points us to Jesus, the source of all true rest.

+ Introduction

The American culture is known for many things, one of which is the premium we put on our work and our bank accounts. Our cultural heroes do not wear capes, just suits, and ties. They are the ones who work long hours, arriving to the office before everyone else and leaving after everyone else is gone. They believe the American Dream can become a reality; the only Jacob's Ladder you will need to climb is a corporate one.

The digital age and the mobilization of technology have made work even more readily accessible than ever before. Work does not happen in a cubicle anymore; it follows you around in your back pocket. It is not defined to space or place any longer; it is now relegated to a cloud that hovers over you anywhere you go. When we are "out of office," like our automated Outlook would tell others, if we are honest, we are still working from home or from the beach on vacation. But even when we can manage to turn off the devices, we struggle to fully "turn off" from work ourselves.

Minister and psychologist Wayne Oates coined a term back in 1971 we are all too familiar with today: "workaholism," which he defined as "the compulsion or the uncontrollable need to work incessantly."¹

Like alcoholism, this work-addiction intoxicates us with a lust for more productivity well after we have crossed a sobering threshold. But unlike alcoholism, many people do not even realize they are addicted. Why? Because in our American society, we have normalized overwork and have exalted productivity to the extent that we do not even recognize a healthy work-life-balance even when it is modeled in front of us. Even worse, some businesses feed this addiction by incentivizing their employees with the reward of compensation for the days they did not take off!

Americans have a chilling tendency to inextricably tie our identity to our work as if the clearest marker of **who we are** is **what we do**. Right after we ask someone's name, we immediately follow with, "What do you do for work?" In America, our work has become not merely a job, but a vile addiction; not merely a role, but an entire identity. As a society and as individuals, we are overworked and under-slept perhaps more than ever before. Our work and our money have become idols in our lives that often keep us from putting God first.

This weekend begins our stewardship emphasis in Worship. Sabbath and Giving are two of many spiritual disciplines – practices and habits taught or modeled in Scripture that orient us toward our goal of becoming more like Christ. Before diving into our Luke 6 passage for today, let's take a look at Giving from a biblical perspective.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, we see passages regarding the spiritual discipline of Giving. Consider these verses:

LEVITICUS 27:30 *Every tenth of the land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.*

MALACHI 3:8-10 *"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me!" "How do we rob you?" you ask. "By not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions."⁹ You are*

suffering under a curse, yet you – the whole nation – are still robbing me. ¹⁰ Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way,” says the Lord of Armies. “See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.

LUKE 12:15-21 He then told them, “Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one’s life is not in the abundance of his possessions.” ¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: “A rich man’s land was very productive. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What should I do, since I don’t have anywhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ I will do this,’ he said. ‘I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. ¹⁹ Then I’ll say to myself, “You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.”’ ²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?’ ²¹ “That’s how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-5 We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia: ² During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ I can testify that, according to their ability and even beyond their ability, of their own accord, ⁴ they begged us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints, ⁵ and not just as we had hoped. Instead, they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us by God’s will.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8 The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each person should do as he has decided in his heart – not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work.

Sacrificial giving of our time, money and resources to the work of the gospel is to be a part of our daily life in Christ. As we go through our Luke 6 passage for today, keep in mind these four basic principles that apply to both Giving and observing the Sabbath:

- Obedience – God’s Word commands it.
- Commitment – It is to become part of our lifestyle.
- Action – It does not happen without our intentionality.
- Cheerfulness – We do it out of joy, not out of burden.

Let’s take a look at Luke 6, starting in verse 1.

LUKE 6:1 Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain.

Sabbath is a biblical idea that we should set aside one day a week to rest and not work. Sabbath stands for the Hebrew verb, shabbat, which literally means “to rest from labor.” This concept of Sabbath can be traced all the way back to the creation account in Genesis 1 where God rests – or shabbats – after six full days of work. Sabbath also significantly finds its place among the famous Ten Commandments, specifically the 4th, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

EXODUS 20:8-11 *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.*”

The Jews were to treat the Sabbath as a holy day, one that was set apart, to follow God’s example and rhythm of creating, working, and resting. Rooted in the creation account of Genesis 1 and in the 10 commandments of Exodus 20, God instituted a framework that would help humanity best relate to its work.

From the first two verses in Luke 6, we see that the Pharisees – the religious elite and scriptural scholars at the time – accused the disciples of violating the Sabbath.

LUKE 6:2 *But some of the Pharisees said, “Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”*

Now, in our western contexts, it would not seem like the disciples were breaking the Sabbath by simply plucking off a few heads of grain and eating them. But in that day, the Pharisees had developed the *Halakha*, which was a comprehensive and evolving set of practical laws that regulated the religious observances, daily life, and conduct of the Jewish people. ²

The Pharisees lived by the Halakha and strove to make more and more addendums to God’s commandments – not maliciously, but to practically guide the Jews in their daily lives. Also, to serve as a type of “hedge” preventing someone from breaking God’s laws or getting too close to doing so. They wanted to ensure God’s blessing on themselves and their community, so they “raised the bar” of God’s law as it were, making many addendums. Whether the Pharisees had a pure intent with the law, Jesus points out that they nevertheless missed God’s intent with the law:

LUKE 6:3-4 *And Jesus answering them said, “Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, ⁴ how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?”*

Jesus’ response might sound unrelated to the Sabbath, but the Pharisees would have immediately understood the reference. Jesus was essentially addressing a complicated and confusing situation in 1 Samuel 21 that had thrown a wrench in the otherwise mechanical, simplistic framework of how the Pharisees understood and related to the laws of God.

1 Samuel 21 documents a story where King David is running for his life, runs into the tabernacle, grabs the Showbread, which is only used for Worship, not for eating, and then proceeds to eat it. David does what appears to be an astonishing act of deliberate disobedience. But God's response is even more astonishing: God does not condemn him for doing so.

Surely, this story in the Hebrew Scripture stood at odds with the way the Pharisees generally viewed the Sabbath and their own Halakha laws around it. Perhaps it was one of 'those stories' they would rather not talk about or think about because it just made their tight categories for law regulation more complicated. Perhaps the Pharisees' Public Relations Team deemed it easier to put this story on the back burner because it made their job a bit simpler and clearer. It was a "this is right, this is wrong" scenario with none of the heavy liftings in the gray areas. And yet, Jesus brings 1 Samuel 21 to the forefront of this situation – not as a push-back against the Sabbath, but as a lens for better understanding it.

+ Misplaced Laws on a Misplaced Rest

Jesus is inviting the Pharisees (and us) to think thoughtfully – not mechanically or judiciously or simplistically – through the implications of David's apparent violation and God's surprising response. The clear rendering of 1 Samuel 21 – of God's response to David's 'lawlessness' – is that there are certain situations where Sabbath laws and worship laws can be set aside in the exception of a greater situation at hand.³

In other words, Sabbath laws, worship laws, priestly and sacrificial laws existed in Old Testament times to point to the Messiah who would come and fulfill what they intended to frame and point us to all along: Jesus.

| **LUKE 6:5** *And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."*

Notice that Jesus does not say that He has come to take the Sabbath away; but rather, that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. He is essentially telling the Pharisees, "I am the one to whom the Sabbath regulations all point. Everything that the Sabbath is designed to point you to for rest and restoration – I am. I am the Lord of the Sabbath."

Here, Jesus is not advocating lawlessness for a greater good. He is actually advocating for the true intent of the Sabbath law that the Pharisees have clearly misplaced. He is reframing the Pharisees' (and our own) sense of law and of rest. He is saying that the Sabbath law is not merely for following the regulation itself, nor is deep rest the reward for having kept the law. The Sabbath is designed to lead us to rest, much like a runway is designed for a plane to safely land on from the air. And Jesus is saying that these particular Sabbath laws – which the Halakha outline in depth – are obsolete because something greater is now at hand: Deep rest for the soul is found in Him and in His work for us.

What is deep rest, what does it look like, and how can we get it?

This leads us into the next section of verses in our text today of Luke 6:

LUKE 6:6-11 *On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. ⁷ The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him. ⁸ But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And he got up and came forward. ⁹ And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?" ¹⁰ After looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did so; and his hand was restored. ¹¹ But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.*

This story happens on *another Sabbath* where Jesus heals a man with a withered hand. Again, the Pharisees looked on, seeing what Jesus would do – whether He would violate a Sabbath law in the Halakha or not. Scholars say that the Halakha actually did include a provision for a doctor to work on the Sabbath if there were a great medical emergency. For instance, if someone was on the brink of death on the Sabbath, a doctor would not be condemned for laboring to save a life. ⁴

The medical case in the story above was not great or urgent; it was a medical condition that had persisted for some time, likely since birth. It did not "qualify" for the medical provisions made in the Halakha. So, when Jesus, who was known for His many miraculously healings, approached the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, the Pharisees looked on with condescending anticipation. They waited eagerly to see Jesus break their own law; they waited eagerly to accuse and to condemn Him. In the face of hostility, Jesus healed the man's withered right hand. And in doing so, He also exposed the Pharisees' withered souls.

Ironically, the Pharisees and the Halakha already knew there had to be provision because of something greater at hand. But they missed the "something greater" because they were only focused on the law itself, rather than what the law pointed to: **Someone greater**. Focused entirely on the law in general, they had no bandwidth to grasp what the law existed to uphold, in particular: human flourishing. Focused completely on the law's particularities, they had no general sense for not only something greater, but more importantly, Someone greater.

The Sabbath exists for humans to find rest and restoration. And this story illustrates how Jesus Himself brings the intent of Sabbath into fruition in our lives. Namely, He takes what is withered in our life, and He restores it to strength and vitality.

✦ Restoring the Withered Soul

The Bible tells us that humanity ultimately cannot find deep peace and hope in life, a sense of "shalom," not because our work is overbearing, but because we have sinned against God and are estranged from Him, the source of all peace and life. We often feel this deep dissatisfaction because we are trying to fix what is wrong deep down by means of our work. But only a right relationship with God can restore what is broken and withered.

It is important to note that in the Garden of Eden, before the fall of mankind and the introduction of sin into the cosmos, mankind was working. Work was a part of the paradise in which we lived.

Our sin, however, estranged us from the paradise of a right relationship with God and tarnished our relationship with the work He gave us to do. Therefore, work itself is not the problem; the problem lies in how and why we work. The problem is not the presence of work, but the absence of deep, spiritual rest underneath our work. ⁸ And the human tendency is to “work” to restore our deep inner turmoil, insecurities, and dissatisfactions.

Into this inherent human condition and existential dilemma, Jesus says, “I am the Lord of the Sabbath.” The gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that we cannot “work” our way through moral goodness back into right relationship with God. And we cannot “work” our way through worldly accomplishments to achieve deep feelings of acceptance, approval, and justification in our self-worth and self-image. A soul that has been forgiven and loved and restored can only happen when we trust in Jesus’ work for us on the cross, not our work for Him for ourselves. While our work will never be enough, He gives us a type of work that is finished.

MATTHEW 11:28-30 *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

Are you looking to your “moral work” to give you a sense of deep peace and relief that God really loves you and accepts you? Are you looking to your “vocational work” to give you a sense of deep peace that you matter and are significant? Both moral work and vocational work will not save our souls from existential dread. Only Jesus’ cross can. To our withered souls, He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus’ work restores our relationship with God, restores the way He relates to us, and the way we relate to Him – and significantly, **His work also restores the way we relate to our work.** But how?

+ Restoring the Withered Hand

How does Jesus’ work restore not only our souls but also our work? The gospel establishes that we are not God, that our identity is not in our work, and therefore, we can rest from our work. It is true that as Christians, we do not have the “rules” surrounding the Sabbath any longer, as the Old Testament or the Halakha outlines. But this does not mean we neglect the Sabbath altogether; after all, it is a moral law – one we can find in the Ten Commandments. The question is not what laws we follow regarding the Sabbath, but how we follow the intent of the Sabbath. God gave us the Sabbath to restore our withered hands, bodies, and minds for a continued, renewed sense of work. We must employ a structure and follow disciplines in our own lives to ensure that we have a day off from our work.

Timothy Keller, pastor emeritus of Redeemer Church in Manhattan, New York provides basic disciplines for his church to work a Sabbath routine into their busy, Big-Apple lives.

A. Take more Sabbath time.

Depending on your job, you could be required to work Saturdays or Sundays, whenever most people would typically “Sabbath.” Or perhaps, you do not work on Saturday or Sundays, but you are nevertheless always on your computer, phone, or tablet working on projects from home. When you look at your days off, are they actually “days off” in the truest sense of the word? Most of us need to practically forbid ourselves from working on our days off, prioritizing work on workdays, and resting deeply on our off days.

B. Balance your Sabbath time.

Keller mentions that to make the most of our Sabbath; we should approach our “off day” as follows: 1) Avocational: do some things you usually would not do. 2) Contemplative: remind yourself who God is and who you are. This is why we must worship on our day off. 3) Deactivate: make it a point not to structure your day. Let yourself be drawn into what you like to do instead of what you must do.

C. Be accountable for Sabbath time.

Keller recognizes the reality that it is impossible not to ever be overworked at some point. But we need to have an accountability system in our lives – a system of checks and balances – ensuring that overworking is only occasional and does not become our lifestyle. We need to have a community around us who knows us and who can hold us accountable to stop working when we are not honoring the Sabbath, not resting from our work, and not walking in step with God’s design for our work. ⁵

+ Giving and The Sabbath

The concept of honoring the Sabbath is to set something aside. It is an intentional choice. You could easily work seven days without setting any time aside for God or rest. However, God knows that you need to have that seventh day of rest to maximize the six days of work. This is the math of God.

It is very much like Giving. We are in a season of pledging for our church, which is a responsibility and an opportunity for obedience. Giving is similar to how we approach the Sabbath; it all belongs to God. Our work belongs to God. Our stuff belongs to God. Our time belongs to God. Our money belongs to God. We need to deliberately choose to surrender our time and our finances to God. And when we do, there is freedom in trusting in the Lord instead of in ourselves.

It comes down to choosing what we do with the Sabbath, our work, our stuff, our time, and our money.

+ Conclusion

God desires to bless our work. He desires that we not be slaves to our work. He desires our flourishing, which means a healthy balance of working hard and resting well. Only until we receive Jesus’ work down into our souls can we finally work from a sense of deep rest and not for a sense of deep rest. Until we believe the gospel, our work and our checkbooks will be a form of self-salvation that will

never truly help us, never completely assure us, and never finally fulfill us. Without the gospel, we will go through life 'doubly tired' – tired not only from our physical work, but tired from hoping our work and our money will resolve our spiritual needs. But in believing the gospel, we can find calm amid busyness (because our peace is deeper than our accomplishments); confidence to take up assignments (because our identity cannot be crushed by failure); and courage to put the work down and rest (because our life is ruled by God, not by our work); and commitment to be faithful with our tithe. We can find rest for the soul – and even rest in our work – when we rest in Jesus' work for us. He is the Lord of Sabbath, indeed.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2016/04/workaholism>.

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Halakhah>.

³ Timothy Keller, Work and Rest. March 23, 2003. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ux0_5zctrsl&feature=emb_title. ⁴

Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.