

Reading Plan

August

Communing with God

Week Eighteen

Monthly Description

YHWH not only desires that we would live with loyalty toward him, but that we would also experience his presence, communing with him as children flourishing in his household. This month we are walking together through what the whole story of Scripture has to say about communing with God.

Sabbath

Note: Daily descriptions in **bold**.

Weekly Description:

After YHWH finished setting creation into motion in Genesis, the creation story tells us that he rested on the seventh day. In this day of rest, God reflected on the beauty of his creation, and declared the day to be set apart or “holy”. Since that time God’s people have modeled their weekly rhythms around that same pattern of Sabbath observance. For Christians, this day is a gift for us to reflect, rest and celebrate the coming of our Savior, King Jesus (Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5). Throughout this week we will explore different principles we can learn from Scripture about the Sabbath and how God uses the Sabbath to commune with his people.

Weekly Video:

The Messiah

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/the-messiah/>

Day One: Sabbath as Rest

Genesis 1-11

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/genesis-1-11/>

Today’s reading walks through the creation story, detailing how YHWH spoke the cosmos into existence during the first six days followed by a seventh day, which he set apart as a day of rest. To the ancient Hebrews, something was thought to “exist” when it was set apart for a purpose.¹⁰In this light, when we approach the creation story in Genesis, we see that God not only called creation into existence in a material sense, but that his creation was also set apart for a special purpose. Part of God’s purpose for his human creation was that the Sabbath would be a day of refreshing and reflection.

When we image God by observing the Sabbath as he did, we call to mind his power as Lord over the universe and our dependence upon him. It reminds us that we can do more in six days of work through dependence upon God than we can in seven days working in our own strength!

¹¹Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

Genesis 1:1 – Genesis 2:3 (ESV)

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars.

¹⁷And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

³⁰And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ³And 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. ⁴ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

To read more about Sabbath as rest, see Exod. 20 and Isa. 58.

Day Two: Sabbath as Family Stability

Earlier this month in *The Whole Story* we’ve discussed how the Ten Commandments are not a set of arbitrary rules. Instead, they are to be a framework given to God’s people to understand how to flourish in covenantal relationship, loyal to him. The commandment for the Sabbath acts as a hinge that connects both the first three commandments about loyalty to God and the following commandments about living as God’s people in covenant with one another. This emphasizes the significance of the Sabbath in the rhythms of grace that come from walking with God. This rhythm directly impacts the stability of God’s family, regularly calling them back to reorient their priorities around God.

Exodus 20:1-17 (ESV)

¹And God spoke all these words, saying,

²“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³“You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

⁸“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made heaven and 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.

¹²“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³“You shall not murder.

¹⁴“You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵“You shall not steal.

¹⁶“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

To read more about Sabbath as family stability, see Gen. 1-2 and Isa. 58.

Day Three: Jesus, Our Sabbath Rest

Jesus makes an incredible claim in today’s reading that has enormous implications for how we, as the Church, honor the Sabbath. In Matthew 12, Jesus refers to himself as the “Lord of the Sabbath.” Making such a claim was equal to claiming to be YHWH, as it was YHWH who instituted the Sabbath in Gen. 1-2. It stands to reason that Jesus’ self-proclamation stirred some controversy among the religious leaders.

In our new covenant, the call to honor the Sabbath still applies, though we enjoy liberty in its observance. It is a gift from Jesus our Messiah rather than a millstone to be hung around our necks (cf. Mark 2:27). When we welcome King Jesus into our home, as Lord of the Sabbath, we submit control of our home to his kingdom. We recognize that only when we submit to his lordship in the daily moments of our lives do we begin to flourish in wholeness as his people.

Matthew 12:1-14 (ESV)

At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ²But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” ³He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?

⁵Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? ⁶I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

⁹He went on from there and entered their synagogue. ¹⁰And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse him. ¹¹He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?

¹²Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. ¹⁴But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

To read more about Jesus as our Sabbath rest, see Gen. 1-2, Mark 2, and Heb. 10.

Day Four: The “New Work” of the Kingdom

The Gospel of Mark

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/mark/>

As we read the events that followed the crucifixion, it is important to stop and notice the parallel between the timeline of events in the creation story (Gen. 1-2) and in the Passion story of the gospels. The parallel between these two events is very clear in the words of Jesus as recorded by John: “It is finished” (John 19:28). Just as God finished his created work in Genesis before the Sabbath, so too God finished his redeeming work in Jesus on the cross before the Sabbath. You can also read, that just as God observed a Sabbath rest in Genesis, the body of Jesus also rested on the Sabbath of Holy Saturday. Following that first Sabbath in Genesis, God took up the work of overseeing his creation. And then, as you will read in today’s reading, “when the Sabbath was past” we find in the resurrection of Jesus, work began again.

This shows us that the Sabbath is not only a day to reflect, but also a day to anticipate what is about to happen. It is the link that connects us to God’s past faithfulness so that our faith might be strengthened that he will continue to be faithful. Sabbath gives us a taste of the new creation begun in the resurrection of Jesus and completed in his return.

Mark 16:1-19 (ESV)

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large.

⁵And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.

⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

⁹Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

¹²After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. ¹³And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

¹⁴Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. ¹⁵And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

¹⁹So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

To read more about the “New Work” of the Kingdom, see John 19.

Day Five: Jesus, Our Most High Priest

One of the descriptions Scripture gives of Jesus is that he is our Most High Priest. While it may not seem like it at first glance, this title is directly related to Jesus’ role in our lives as our Sabbath rest. In Hebrews 4, you will notice that the theme of Jesus as our rest is a consistent. To pledge loyalty to King Jesus is to enter his rest, and a component of this rest is found on the Sabbath. Like our spiritual ancestors, we can find rest in God’s covenant faithfulness to us. We aren’t exiled to toiling in our own strength but instead, we find strength in relationship with him (Isa. 40:31).

He is our Most High Priest because he is the perfect and holy representation of sinlessness before the Father. Jesus offered sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people—the sacrifice of his own body on the cross. Because his holiness extends access to the presence of God, we can come to the throne of God and find grace and mercy. Within God’s grace, we find our rest. We are able to observe weekly Sabbath *because we have access to the grace of God through Jesus, our Most High Priest.*

Hebrews 4:1-16 (ESV)

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

“As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest,’ ”

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” ⁵And again in this passage he said,

“They shall not enter my rest.”

⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

To read more about Jesus as our Most High Priest, see Jam. 1, Heb. 10, and 1 Pet. 2.