

**JUST STOP****DEUTERONOMY 5:12 – 15***by Mark Buchanan*

*This was a talk presented by Mark Buchanan on December 1, 2022 as part of Arrow Leadership's Ministry. You can watch the video [here](#).*

There was a TED talk about six or eight years ago by Sir Ken Robinson. He's a British educator – very bright. And the talk is on why the current education system in most countries is failing our students. The very things we're trying to call out of students – their creativity, their wonderment, their curiosity, their collaborativeness... many of the ways we've designed curriculum for classrooms actually stifles all of that. There's a story that he tells that illustrates this. The story intrigued me enough that I did a little bit of further research into it. It's the story of Gillian Lynne.

Gillian was born in the 1930s in London, England. She was very close with her mother, but there was something off about Gillian. She couldn't sit still, couldn't concentrate, she was easily distracted. We would now diagnose her with some kind of attention deficit disorder, but nobody knew about that then. In grade two, she was expelled from school because she was not learning, and she was disrupting the learning of others. Her mother took Gillian to a doctor, and the doctor recommended she go to a specialist. So, Gillian Lynne's mother found her a specialist. And the specialist sat down and talked with Gillian, with her mother present, for several moments. And then he said to Gillian, "I need to talk to your mother privately in another room. Would you mind sitting here while I do that?" The doctor took the mother outside of his visiting room, but he had no intention of talking to the mother privately. What he wanted to do was sneak back and poke his head around the doorframe and watch Gillian when she didn't know she was being watched. As he left his office, he turned on some music. He went out of the room and then tip toed back to peek around the doorframe, where he and Gillian's mother watched her unaware.

Until this point, Gillian was sitting there, fidgeting, restless, squirming, but the music was flowing out of the radio. After a few moments, Gillian got up and she did the most astonishing thing: she began to move seamlessly, elegantly, beautifully, poetically to the music. The doctor looked at Gillian's mother and said, "Your daughter's not sick; she's a dancer. You should take her to dance school."

The mother found a dance school in London, England – a dance school that had a whole educational program. It turned out Gillian was not stupid. Gillian was not backward. Gillian was not a bad student. She was a genius. She thrived. She not only turned out to be brilliant, but she helped other students learn.

When Gillian was 13, her mother died tragically in a car accident. It was through dancing that Gillian found her deepest consolation. When Gillian was in her late teens, she was recruited to the Royal Ballet School, and she became one of their soloists for several years. As she reached the end of her peak period as a dancer, she started her own choreography company. And if you've seen *Cats* or *Phantom of the Opera*, you've seen her work.

You're not sick. Maybe you're a dancer. Maybe you're an artist. Maybe you're a poet. Maybe you're a dreamer.

I want to talk to you today about rest. Specifically, I want to talk to you about Sabbath, but the argument I'm going to make in these next few minutes is that Sabbath is about more than rest.

If I took a poll, I would imagine most of you are weary and some of you would even say you're bone weary. More is flying at you than you know what to do with. This is one of the beautiful gifts God gives us, first in the creation and then in the Covenant, where he simply says, "Stop." And we say, "We're not done." He says, "I don't care. This is the time to stop."

That's actually what Sabbath means. It doesn't describe a day of the week. It means cessation of activity. This is the time you stop. And what a gift that is, in and of itself. But I'm going to make the argument that the Sabbath is more than just the gift of rest. It's a gift of restoration. And the primary thing that gets restored when you enter on a regular basis, in other words, six and one, and six and one, and six and one, fifty-two times a year... You receive this gift of stopping that gives you back yourself. I'm going to show you how that works in the fourth commandment.

This was a gift – the gift of Sabbath – to people who had been 400 years in slavery. They didn't know they were dancers; they didn't know they were worshipers; they didn't know they were the people of God. They had only one identity that had been imposed on them by their culture. It was a massive act of identity theft that Egypt pulled off with the people of Israel. They completely obliterated any sense of who they were. I think we live a moment where there's some of that cultural identity theft going on. I think that our culture is telling us a couple of things: we are what we produce, and we are what we consume.

You may be familiar with the work of the late Trappist monk, Basil Pennington. Pennington built a lot of his work off an insight into the three temptations of Christ.<sup>1</sup> He recognized that they were unique in targeting something in the mission of Jesus, but he also saw that the three temptations overlay into our moment – our story. This is how Basil Pennington described the three temptations for each of us.

He said the first temptation, to turn bread into stone, is to define ourselves by what we do. The second temptation, to bow the knee to the Evil One so that we can receive all the kingdoms of this world, is to define ourselves by what we have. And the third temptation, to leap from the tower so the angels will swoop down and catch you, is a public spectacle that many would witness, and so, Basil Pennington says, it is a temptation to define ourselves by what others think of us.

I think he's on to something.

I teach at a seminary, and even though these students are learning divinity (which is a strange thing we call it; some of them are going to become masters of divinity – I didn't know you could master God, but apparently you can), as we come near the end of a semester, students who are

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<sup>1</sup> [Matthew 4:1 – 11](#).

really godly students – prayerful, thoughtful, reflective students – they want a high GPA, and if I return their paper and it has less than what they were hoping, often they’ll book a meeting with me to ask why they didn’t get the grade they wanted. My first response is to ask why it matters so much.

I think it matters so much because this deep narrative of *you are what you do, you are what you have, and you are what others think of you*, runs very deep in us.

So here’s the gift of Sabbath. Of course, rest. I love that. But the real gift is that you get yourself back. You come back into your true identity. The Sabbath defines us as: *we are whose we are*.

## What Sabbath Gives...

*You are whose you are*



It draws us back into that fundamental, grounding, over-arching, all-pervading relationship that we have with the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and reminds us of that. I’m going to show you how that actually works in the fourth Commandment – this is the fourth Commandment in Deuteronomy.<sup>2</sup>

It’s interesting that the Ten Commandments show up right at the beginning of the time of the people’s wandering in the desert, as these former slaves stumble their way out of Egypt, confused, bewildered, not knowing who they are, and then they are repeated at the end, as the people are about to enter the Promised Land. It actually says the generation before had died out, so these are the children and grandchildren of that generation that came before, and the historical

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<sup>2</sup> [Deuteronomy 5:12-15](#)

moment has changed in a number of ways. If the first group who heard the Ten Commandments had lost some memory of being Covenant people – people under the loving watch, care, and guidance of God, the people going into the Promised Land had become complacent about that. Their forgetting was a different kind of forgetting. This is a generation that’s wondering why the wi-fi isn’t any good in this place out in the desert. This is the youth complaining about not being able to get the kind of jeans they want, etc. Having said that, here is the fourth Commandment in Deuteronomy (chapter 5):

*<sup>12</sup> Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor the son or daughter, nor the male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey, or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. <sup>15</sup> Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.*

There are many things we could observe in this Commandment that I think would enrich our understanding of the gift of Sabbath. We might notice, for instance, that this is a fourth Commandment. It doesn’t say so, but the three before it all have to do with God and who and what kind of God we know and love and serve, and who is present to us. And then the six Commandments that flow out of this all have to do with community, starting with parents and moving into workplaces and marriages and children and the like. So, we might notice that the Sabbath actually pivots, or it intersects somehow, as a hinge piece between a relationship with God and relationship with others.

We might notice in this that there’s a wordiness to it. If I had printed this out with the entire Ten Commandments, you would immediately see that this is the longest of all the Commandments. The Sabbath Commandment actually takes up one third of the decalogue – the Ten Commandments. It’s the longest of them all.

We might notice a scope of this Commandment – that it is creation wide – it’s envisioning the entire community, really the whole earth. There’s a rest that is for the animals. There’s a rest to make sure that the girl from Thailand or Vietnam who serves you coffee at Tim Hortons, that somehow she’s to be caught up in the beauty and the gift of Sabbath with you.

But the thing I really want to focus on is the last line. Have a look at the last line from Deuteronomy 5 and the last line from the Exodus account of the fourth Commandment. I want you to notice something.

*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.  
Exodus 20:11*

*Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that  
the Lord your God brought you out of there  
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.  
Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.  
Deuteronomy 5:15*

Forty something years before, Israel heard the fourth Commandment – all the Ten Commandments. Some years later, as they are about to go into the Promised Land, they hear a full account of the Ten Commandments read to them again. Of course, it'd be familiar and they'd be steeped in them. But those are the two massive events that define and bookend the life of Israel. And what we notice is something very strange: the rationale for the Commandment to observe the Sabbath, given to the people coming out of slavery, is different from the rationale given in Deuteronomy.

The Exodus account doesn't go back to the days of slavery because it's still such a traumatizing, vivid, visceral memory for them. It goes back to something they've probably forgotten – the creation story. And then we get to Deuteronomy – this generation that's forgotten and is complaining about the wi-Fi – and that rationale takes them back to the slavery – the Redemption. *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.*

Two different reasons are given for why we should keep the Sabbath. Exodus tells us we should keep the Sabbath because of the creation story. Deuteronomy tells us we should keep it because of our Redemption story.

So, I said that the real gift of Sabbath isn't just rest, it's a restoration of identity. It's giving us back our identity after we suffered this massive cultural identity theft and we've been told we're sick. We've been told we're slaves. We've been told we're producers. We've been told we're consumers. We've been told *we are what we do*, or *we are what we have*, or *we are what others think of us*. And the Sabbath comes and says, "No, you are *whose* you are." And then God builds into the very structure of the Sabbath, the two defining stories of not just Israel's life, but yours as well. You are the created of the Lord, and you are the redeemed of the Lord. You are the one made in the image of God – bearing the image of God, reflecting the glory of God, involved in the world that God has created, involved with him – alongside him – in the beautifying – the restoring – of that world. You were once a slave; you were bound over to death and God, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm (Israel always pictured God reaching out like a Shepherd to rescue a lamb, but we all have a vision of other outstretched arms that rescued us). You are the created of the Lord. You are the redeemed of the Lord.

And here is a beautiful thing: all you need to do is stop. You don't have to sit there and contemplate in your Sabbath, "Who am I? Who am I?" You just have to take Sabbath, receive Sabbath, enter Sabbath, enjoy Sabbath. You just need to stop. And built into the very structure of Sabbath is a gift of giving you back your true identity.

I'm going to close with this: Some years ago, when I was in pastoral ministry in a town called Duncan, one of the pastors came to our ministerial gathering and he shared a story that had happened that week. He was interim pastor at a small church, and one of the legendary Sunday School teachers had died. She'd been teaching for 48 years every year, faithfully showing up and teaching. I think it was a grade four class. She was beloved. She was renowned. And at the heart of what she did was teach her students to memorize huge portions of scripture. When she died, people from all over – from the 40 something years of teaching – came for her funeral. She was teaching a class of grade fours when she died, and this pastor thought it would be great if the current class got up and recited the scriptures they'd been learning under her. It was a small class – three students or something. It wouldn't take long. So, in the funeral, that's what happened.

The pastor calls forth the first boy, and he gets up. But he didn't expect so many people, so he freaks out and he just goes blank. He's been memorizing Psalm 23. So he says, "Mmm, Oh... The Lord is my shepherd." And then he goes blank. He stumbles. He hums and ha's. And then he sputters out again, "The Lord is my shepherd," and then he goes blank again. He makes a third attempt. "Okay, okay, okay. The Lord is my shepherd." And he can't remember any more. And then he says, "The Lord is my shepherd, and that's all you need to know."

The Lord is your Shepherd. The gift of Sabbath is it gives you back yourself. Where a culture moment wants to tell us *you are what you do, you are what you have, you are what others think of you*, the Sabbath says, "You are *whose* you are – the created of the Lord and the redeemed of the Lord. All you need to do to remember that and live into it is, every seventh day, just stop.