

## The God Who Is Near (Part 3 of 7)

### Rest and Generosity

Exodus 35:1-29

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*"Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, 'These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.' Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, 'This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.'" (Exodus 35:1–9, ESV)*

*"Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD. And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them." (Exodus 35:20–23, ESV)*

Last week we learned about the glory of God in the face of Moses, and we were able to trace that theme through Exodus to the gospel and into our lives. We learned about the beauty of what it meant to "behold." In other words, we learned about the power of regeneration that allows us to "see the kingdom" (John 3:3) and the power of sanctification where we are "transformed from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18). I hope that you have had some "beholding moments" this week, and I hope that today will be that kind of experience for you in worship.

Two weeks ago we learned how gracious God is in His giving people a second chance. Exodus 34 was a text filled with repetitions of what God has said previously. God reiterated His covenant with His people even though they had sinned grievously with the golden calf. God gave them a second chance.

Both of these accounts are leading us to the culmination of the book in chapter 40 when God dwells among His people and inhabits the tabernacle the people of Israel construct for Him. Keep in mind that at this point in the text, there is no tabernacle, no ark, bronze altar, and no courtyard. The prescribed worship of God has not begun. The people's rebellion put that all in jeopardy.

## The “Hinge” of Exodus 35

Our text today serves as a very important transition that drives the book toward the moment when God comes near. It bridges or serves as a hinge between the offer of a second chance and the actual construction of the tabernacle in chapters 36-39, the chapters we will look at next Sunday.

In the story of Exodus, the people are between the promise of God and one of the most significant acts of obedience and faith in their history. They are about to build a facility which God has promised to inhabit, and they must build it exactly as God has said.

What is fascinating to me about this text is that before the actual construction begins, God gives them instructions about Sabbath and calls them to be generous. Why would God do that at this point in the narrative?

As I’ve read what others have written about this and as I have reflected on what is happening here, it seems that God is taking the over-arching obedience of the people and reducing it to something that needs to be embraced personally and weekly. The people needed to affirm that they were embracing the second chance that God was giving them. Twice in our text it says, “These are the things that the Lord has commanded you to do.” In verse one as it relates to rest and in verse four as it relates to generosity. I take that to mean that the people of Israel were to affirm their allegiance to God through rest and generosity that was intentional and personal.

Or let me put it this way: **Rest and giving are a celebration and affirmation of grace.**

By resting and by giving, the people of Israel affirmed and celebrated God’s covenant with them. And I would like to suggest today that this celebration and affirmation is still a very critical part of our relationship with God even though we are not living in the Old Testament.

So let’s look at rest and giving, and then I’d like to help us understand what rest and giving do for our souls.

### **Rest: Celebrating and affirming God’s design**

Moses delivered the commands of God to the people. That was the point behind the glowing face. And now we read that the first recorded command from God was about Sabbath observance. This was not a coincidence.

Moses laid out the basic command in verse two along with its penalty:

*“Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.” (Exodus 35:2, ESV)*

The word “Sabbath” simply means a stopping or cessation. Another word for Sabbath would be “rest,” and the intent was that there would be one day per week when one’s regular pattern of work would be intentionally interrupted. The purpose was to build a day for re-focus into the weekly rhythm. This pattern was an important part of the way in which God created the world.

*“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And 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, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” (Genesis 2:1–3, ESV)*

God “rested” on the seventh day even though He was not suffering from fatigue. There was something more to Sabbath than just a physical break, and that was why God made Sabbath a part of the creation of the world. So don’t make the mistake of thinking that the seventh day is not a vitally important part of the created order. God’s activity involved seven days and each day said something very important about who He is as God. Sabbath rest was and is a statement.

God designed each day to not only create the world, but to magnify His power and beauty as God. And the seventh day is a very important part of the creative design. Let me explain why.

A day of rest built into the system of creation communicates that creation is not ultimate. It communicates that there is something more important than creating and something more powerful behind the creation itself. Sabbath says as much about God in one day as what creation says about him in six days. God chose to rest even though He was not tired or bored.

He rested because He could. He rested because He was God.

Sabbath was a part of God’s design to clearly communicate that there was something more to creation than just creating the world. Sabbath is designed to be a conduit to the supremacy of God.

When Sabbath is laid down as a command, it is to connect the activity of God to the life of mankind. In the same way that the seventh day communicates something powerful about God, the command to rest also communicates something powerful about God. It is given as a reminder that life is not about constant creation, insatiable production, and unending labor. Intentional rest reorients hard-working humans on what is really important and who is really in control of everything. It mirrors the activity of God, and it affirms God’s place in the world.

Sabbath rest gives us a different perspective. I’m sure you have experienced this often in your lifetime. It may have been as simple as deciding that you were not going to make a decision on something until you had “slept on it.” There is something about disengaging that helps you to gain perspective. Or perhaps you’ve experienced a fresh creativity or a new vantage point on life or a problem while you were on vacation. A different location, a different rhythm, or a different schedule allows the mind and soul to think beyond the immediate and the intensity of daily life. Those seasons help you to put things in their proper place.

God has built the need for and the requirement of Sabbath rest into the fabric of the created order. He not only created human beings with the limitation of needing physical rest, but He also commanded that we rest one day a week.

God takes this very seriously. Notice that verse two indicates that 1) the day of Sabbath rest is to be “holy to the Lord,” and 2) violating this command was a capital offense. Verse three makes it even more practical by stating that they were not to make a fire in their dwelling which must have meant that their food was prepared the night before and that there was limited food preparation on the Sabbath.

Why was Sabbath so important? It celebrated and affirmed God's design. It affirmed that God's commands are more vital and authoritative to a person's life than work and production. Keeping Sabbath was a way of affirming God's plan and His design. But it also celebrated something. Sabbath celebrated God's grace and the freedom that it brings. Sabbath celebrates an identity that is linked to who God is and not what you do.

Tim Keller makes a very helpful connection for us between our identity, Sabbath rest and the gospel:

*All of us are haunted by the work under the work – that need to prove ourselves, to gain a sense of worth and identity. But if we can experience gospel-rest in our hearts, if we can be free from the need to earn our salvation through our work, we will have a deep reservoir of refreshment that continually rejuvenates us, restores our perspective, and renews our passion.<sup>1</sup>*

Do you see what is underneath the concept of rest? Do you understand why taking Sabbath is so important for the sake of your soul? Sabbath was an indicator that the people had embraced God's covenant. It was a regular affirmation and celebration of God's grace in their lives.

Can I drill this a bit deeper in your life? Let me ask you a few questions:

- Do you make rest a gospel-centered priority in your life?
- Do you schedule seasons for rest (like vacation), and do you use that time to really reorient and evaluate what is important?
- Do you make Sunday worship a priority in your life and in your home?
- Do you set the tone for a different focus and activity on Sunday?
- Do you plan the night before as to how the Lord's Day can be a different kind of work or a different kind of focus? Do you plan ahead so that the day is free of unnecessary hindrances?
- Do you prepare your heart, engage in worship, listen with attentiveness, and connect with people on the Lord's Day to fan into flame what is really important in your life?
- Are you basing the pace of your family – from your work schedule to your kid's schedule – on your value-set or on the value-set of your neighbors and peers?

Sabbath rest is more than just sleeping. It is more than just sitting around and relaxing. Sabbath rest is a different kind of activity; it is a celebration and affirmation of God's design. It declares your allegiance to him and your dependency on his grace.

Sabbath is a counter-cultural and faith statement: "My identity is rooted in God, not myself or my work." It is a celebration affirmation of God's design.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, Every Good Endeavor – Connecting Your Work to God's Work, (New York, New York: Dutton Publishing, 2012), 234.

## Giving: Celebrating and affirming God's provision

The second celebration and affirmation is evidenced through the people's generosity. They are instructed to give in order to provide the materials that are needed for the construction of the tabernacle. This is the second time we have seen the phrase "this is the thing that the Lord has commanded" (v 4). We saw this earlier in verse one. As with keeping Sabbath, generosity was a powerful statement about their allegiance to God.

Moses was to command the people to bring a contribution:

*"Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece." (Exodus 35:5-9, ESV)*

There are two things to notice in this passage. First, the kind of offering that was to be received was very broad. The people were to give out of what they possessed, and there was great variety in the kind of offering that was brought. Some of them had precious metals. Other had textiles or oil or spices. Others had the kind of wood or the precious stones that were needed. The point here is simply the fact that the people were to bring an offering out of what they owned.

These gifts were then put to good use. Verses 10-19 describe how the skilled craftsmen were used to construct every aspect of the tabernacle. All the God has previously commanded about the tabernacle was now to be accomplished by these God-appointed artisans. As you look at verses 10-19 you will see the following listed: the structure of the tabernacle, the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering, all the curtains, and the holy garments for Aaron and his sons. Everything we studied in chapters 25-31 is here. God used the contributions of the people to create the first formal worship center.

Secondly, it is important for you to see the importance of the heart motivation in the act of giving. It shows up first in verse five: *"Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the Lord's contribution"* (Ex. 35:5). God clearly commands that offerings are to be given, but He is not interested in an offering that comes from begrudging gifts. He invites the people to give, but the gift is immaterial unless it is a willing, joyful gift. Verse five is not the only place that this theme is evident:

- *"And they came, **everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him**, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting..." (Exodus 35:21, ESV)*
- *"So they came, both men and women. **All who were of a willing heart** brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD." (Exodus 35:22, ESV)*

- “All the women **whose hearts stirred them** to use their skill spun the goats’ hair.” (Exodus 35:26, ESV)
- “All the men and women, the people of Israel, **whose heart moved** them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD.” (Exodus 35:29, ESV)

The pattern shows a clear priority in how God views giving. Central to the beauty of the gift is the heart of the giver. Do you know why this is? It is because the gift was supposed to be an act of worship and love. So the heart – the willingness of the soul – is what makes the gift a gift!

This is the way that giving works, and this theme of a “cheerful giver” is highlighted in the New Testament as well.

*“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:6–7, ESV)*

Giving was not just about meeting a need; it was about worship. Giving celebrated and affirmed God’s provision. After all, God is the creator of everything. He has no needs, and it would have been very easy for Him to simply create the tabernacle for the people of Israel.

But giving provided an important opportunity for the people of God to affirm their allegiance to God and to celebrate the fact that everything they have is from Him. Their giving to the tabernacle would create an orientation of the heart that would not be present if God had simply gave it to them. Their heart would follow their money.

Jesus said the same thing in Luke 12:33-34.

*“Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:33–34, ESV)*

There is a direct connection between money and the heart. The Tabernacle need was more than just collecting the necessary materials for construction. God has designed giving to be something that is really helpful for the soul. Willing and joyful giving celebrates and affirms God’s provision.

Giving is a tangible expression our understanding and belief in who God really is – that He is the one who ultimately meets our needs and provides for us.

*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8, ESV)*

In light of this, let me ask you some questions to consider:

- Do see the connection between your understanding of who God is and giving?
- Do you realize that while God does not need your money, it is really good for you to give?
- Do you see how giving affirms your trust in God?

- Do you realize what an impact giving has upon the orientation of your heart?
- Are you a joyful, cheerful giver?

Giving is a powerful statement – one that God knows is really good for our souls. It celebrates and affirms God’s provision in our lives. Therefore, it was one of the “things” that God commanded His people to do after the renewal of the covenant.

## **The Spiritual Value of Rest and Giving**

I find it very fascinating that God bridges the “second chance” opportunity and the construction of the tabernacle with commands about Sabbath and giving. So what is the connection between them? What spiritual value do they offer?

### **1. They remind us that work and possessions are not ultimate**

Rest and giving are the God-given antidote to succumbing to the cultural pressure of a performance mindset. Work and possessions can easily become an obsession as we compare ourselves to others and love what success brings. The gravitational pull is toward materialism and getting your identity from what you do. Rest and giving shatters this false notion. When you rest or give, you are making a statement!

### **2. They create a “gap” which is filled by faith**

Both rest and giving create a gap in our life. Rest creates a work gap, knowing that you could be doing more work, adding more value, creating more security, and earning more money. Giving creates a gap by giving away money that could be used to meet your needs now or in the future. Giving decreases your ability to bridge the gap between your present situation and your future reality. And it must be filled with faith. Through rest and giving we indicate that our real trust in God.

### **3. They are tangible expressions trust and worship**

So much of our faith is intangible and hard to actually see. But rest and giving are very tangible. Rest involves the use of time and giving involves the use of money. Both are very specific and very real. How do you know if you are trusting God? Well, one answer is to look at your pattern of rest and giving. They are pretty good leading indicators of the condition of your soul.

### **4. They create community – something we do together**

Rest and giving are beautiful in that they provide a unique opportunity for the people of God to do something together. Part of Sabbath rest is corporate worship, and there is something really powerful and meaningful about being together on the Lord’s Day. But there is something powerful about the collective giving of the body of Christ as well. To think that collectively we are able to both worship and to provide a place to meet with God is really special.

## **5. They affirm what is really important to us**

The choice to rest and the choice to give are a powerful statement about what we really value, what is really important, and who God is in our lives. On a weekly basis, rest reorients our hearts toward what the gospel is all about. It reminds us that we are a rescued people, loved by God, and that we live by promise not performance. Rest preaches grace to our souls.

Giving affirms that life is not all about possessions, security, comfort, and a standard of living that is “normal.” Giving preaches the beauty of trusting God and believing in an economy of grace.

So maybe now you can see why the two things that God would command after giving the people a second chance were rest and generosity. They are both powerful statements about our belief and trust in God.

Rest and giving are both a celebration and an affirmation of God’s grace.