

Some things to consider:

1. Should we try to go to worship when we are out of town traveling? If you can set aside time for it, absolutely. A side benefit to that is you may glean a good ministry idea from another congregation that would be worth us considering to do as well. Plus, if you are traveling with your kids, it is a demonstration that God is still important enough to worship even while on vacation. If you are out of town, it is commendable to find a place to worship God.
2. But Pastor Joel, I thought that you don't have to go to church to be saved? That is true and I have never said otherwise nor will I. However, what I have said and will stand by is this, "Going to Church every Sunday will not save your soul, but it will help." We are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus alone. Yet, His will for us is to gather to His presence with fellow believers. He promises to be present there in His Word and Sacrament, and in that sacred gathering He works to our benefit as we rest in Him.
3. I work on Sundays and cannot go to worship, or I have health issues that are keeping from worship what do I do? I am totally sympathetic to both these plights. First, do the best you can and go to worship when you can. Second, we do live in an age where you can find our service, or the sermon, posted online. I also recommend daily devotional readings from the Bible, and to pray in any and all circumstances. If your job is hindering you from going to worship, ask God in prayer to change your circumstance where you can maintain that same job and come to worship, or even find a better one that allows you to worship. You are not condemned to Hell for missing church worship. But It is God's will for you come to the gathering and hear His Word for your benefit.
4. My child's sports league (or any other activity plays its game or has practice on Sunday mornings. We don't want them miss out. We live in a busy world. I would caution you to remember this: B.U.S.Y., "Being Under Satan's Yoke." I love sports but I love God more. My question for you is this, "What is your child learning about making eternal salvation in Jesus Christ a priority, if we allow fun activities to constantly be a reason to neglect God's will for us? Jesus also said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them." My advice is, try to find another league and take it to the Lord in prayer.
5. Remember, you have permission from God to lay down your burdens at His feet and rest! The Sabbath is not about work, it is about rest and receiving God's grace and blessings.

Faith in the Home

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Mark 2:23-3:6 "The Point of Sabbath Rest."

"Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy," is a commandment from God for us to keep, and to keep for our benefit. God gave us six days a week for our labors, but on the seventh we are to rest, and to keep that day of rest holy. How is this day kept holy? It is kept holy by gathering with fellow believers to worship God and receive His Word. This is God's will for us, and His will has a purpose for us. It not at all about going through the motions of just showing up for an hour on Sunday. The fact this is a command from God should emphasize for us that keeping the Sabbath is important.

So why do we need a command to rest? In some respects, we may need rest from our usual forms of recreation. A case can be made that there is too much recreation. One pastor friend of mine pointed out to me that he often hears that people are so busy and that is why they are missing church.

Yet, their social media pages are littered with posts about recreational activities and what they are binge watching on Netflix. So, if God's people get too busy gather, you can see why He commands His people to gather for worship. On the other hand, God's people, be so legalistic in keeping the letter of this law that they completely miss the "spirit" of this law.

During Jesus' ministry there were a lot of rules added to enforce keeping the Sabbath. These rules had their points but just like with many rules and laws that are meant for good, they unfortunately become more burdensome instead of beneficial. In our text from Mark today, the pharisees get critical of Jesus and His disciples as they walked through a grain field on a Sabbath day. While they walked through it, they plucked heads of grain for eating. The Pharisees comparing this to a farmer harvesting grain for profit. Jesus reminds the Pharisees of David, while on the run from Saul was famished to the point where the priests offered him and his men the consecrated bread for them to eat.

This does two things, Jesus is claiming that He has the same right as David (He is David's son, the king), and also that the priests are to have compassion for the disciples who are hungry and need food, even on the Sabbath day. Jesus concludes by teaching the Pharisees that, "the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." Meaning that God made the Sabbath for our benefit, not for it to be a burden to us. Then he enters synagogue where there is a man with a withered hand sent to Jesus to see whether or not Jesus would "violate" the Sabbath by healing the man. Jesus of course healed the man for two reasons. One it was the right thing for Him to do. The Sabbath doesn't stop us from the need to do good. Two and most importantly, Jesus is God, and it His day to serve us, heal us, restore us, and sanctify us (make us holy).

God is not some harsh dictator for wanting us to worship Him just because He said so, but rather He is a loving Father wanting to bestow His blessings on us. If we are feeling stretched thin throughout the week, He invites us gather to Him so that He can give us the holy and proper rest and re-creation that we need. It doesn't just have to be one hour once a week. We can pray anytime to God. Sabbath rest itself, is a reminder that God does the work of salvation for us. Also, He knows we need rest from our labors. Keeping the Sabbath is an act of trust that God will fulfill all your needs, and furthermore it increases the likelihood of you being aware of what God has done for you, and is doing for you. God wants to bless us, but we are so sinful that He needs to have a command in His Law to receive His blessings. But the good news is that as Christ has changed our hearts, many of us want to go and take God's command more as an invitation. But however, you feel about the Sabbath and going to worship the point is that Jesus sets aside for us a day of rest to bless us. He said it Himself, "The Sabbath is for man, and not man for the Sabbath."