

This is the third week of our 5-week Breathe series. And throughout these 5 weeks we are focusing on this truth: 'It's God's desire that we live refreshing and freeing lives... lives that are first-and-foremost characterized by trusting God and filled with meaningful work that leads to wholeness and peace.' And before I say another word about any of this we know full well '*a refreshing and freeing life that is characterized by trusting God and is filled with meaningful work that leads to wholeness and peace.*' sounds pretty pie-in-the-sky... And to be honest, we knew, even as we were initially considering this Breathe series, that what I just described is so antithetical to the achievement-oriented culture we all live in, that it might be difficult for us to say anything that has a practical, real-world ring to it at all. That is why Dave started the series by talking about the reality of our overworked, burned out, and anxious culture. Dave zeroed in on how much of what we experience in life today is exactly the opposite of what God intended for us. And we also knew that when we talk about the concept of Sabbath, the first thing that usually comes to most people's mind is that Sabbath is simply time taken to rest from work and we knew that we'd need to clear this misconception up... this is why last week Barry showed us that God actually created us **to** work, but the work that we were created for is work that brings us peace and wholeness. We were well-aware that even talking about sabbath and rest and work and fully trusting in God's care, would be a difficult discussion in the unending frenzy of our cultural realities. So, if you haven't heard what Dave and Barry had to say I suggest that listen to their messages because what they said is foundational to all that we will say in the rest of our series... a series which, at its core, is meant to show how Sabbath can create in us a deeper trust in God.

And today we are going to look at the very first moment in the Bible where the concept of our lives being characterized by trust that comes from Sabbath rest is found... and we find this in Exodus 16, interestingly, in the story of God first sending the Jewish people manna. Let's all turn to Exodus 16 together. You can find this on page 60 in the house Bible. But before we get into this passage I have some background information to share with you... information that is related to what we will be reading in Exodus 16. So, let's get going!

Throughout the timeline of the ancient world, and by this I mean everything from the rule of the Babylonians all the way through to the Roman Empire, a period of over 2000 years, from 1895 BC to 476 A.D., the single most difficult group of people for any ruling nation to deal with was the Jewish nation. History has left us plenty of information about the problems the Jewish people caused for literally every nation that tried to rule over them. In fact, the Jews were such a difficulty for the Romans that being assigned to any official Roman administrative position in Judea was considered a punishment. And there were lots of reasons for this; first off, the Jewish people lived by very specific, stringent dietary rules that were in direct contrast to almost all other cultures... no pork, no shellfish... etc. Secondly, the Jewish people also had strict rules related to who they would associate with... and in general, Jewish people wouldn't associate with anyone who wasn't Jewish; thirdly, the Jewish people didn't believe that any other religion had merit, relevance, or value, which seemed extremely condescending. But one of the biggest givens of the Jewish people that completely irked everyone, believe it or not, was the Jewish demand that there was such a thing as a 7-day week. No other culture in the world had a 7-day week. Most cultures organized their lives around the seasons and the stages of the moon. And to be honest, there is absolutely nothing logical or intuitive about the 7-day week, but the Jews demanded that their lives had to be based around a 7-day week... and beyond that, something that really infuriated the people in the rest of the world, the Jewish people also demanded that every 7th day was a day when they wouldn't work at all. I can't emphasize enough how having a sabbath day off every seventh day, and not just for free people, but for slaves and animals as

well, seemed ridiculous to the rest of the ancient world. Now, I know that it is impossible for us to think about life in any other way than Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday... and we also just assume that someplace in that 7-day week everyone should have some time away from their regular work tasks, but the truth is there is absolutely nothing about this system that makes any logical sense at all... except, that is, to those of us who know about the creation story in Genesis. Most people have *some* notion that the first chapters of the Bible describe God's creation of the world in terms of God working 6 days and then having a day of rest. And it's easy to assume that this 7-day week notion with a day of rest each week was a part of people's lives from the very beginning. But the truth is, the creation story wasn't even recorded for the Jewish people until sometime after their release from slavery in Egypt.... the creation story with its 7-day week may have been talked about around Jewish campfires; it might have been something the Jewish people generally knew about, but we can't be certain about this. We can be certain that the Jewish people didn't live by a 7-day week when they were the Egyptians slaves, and they certainly didn't get one day a week off then! The Egyptians would have found that utterly ridiculous... slaves and animals getting a day off! That's absurd! In fact, once the story of creation ends in Genesis 2 verse 3, from that point onward, all the way through the rest of the Genesis stories about Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and then all the way into Exodus and the stories of the 10 plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea, we never hear one word about a 7-day week or the need for a sabbath day. That is until the 16th Chapter of Exodus. Here is where we first find the idea of a sabbath day of rest becoming an aspect of Jewish life... and surprisingly, it isn't found in a story that starts out like it's going to lead to telling us about the importance of Sabbath in any way like Dave and Barry talked about sabbath! And one last important fact before we read this chapter, all that we are going to look at today happened **before** God gave Moses the law. The Jewish people had not yet heard anything about remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy... the passage that Barry talked about last week. This wouldn't happen for at least another month or so. So, with all of this in mind, Exodus 16:1 tells us: *'Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. ² There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron. ³ "If only the LORD had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death.'* I don't know if I can emphasize enough how crazy it was, and the text clearly says, that 'the whole Jewish community,' **as in everyone**, was complaining that God, through Moses, had brought all the plagues on the Egyptians and he'd even parted the Red Sea for one reason: to get all the Jewish people nation out into the wilderness so he could starve them to death. I'm just saying!

Well, God talked to Moses about this complaining, without addressing their insolence by the way, but he'd clearly heard their complaint about missing meat and bread! He simply said to Moses, *'Look, I'm going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual.'* Okay, this is where we get our first hint about 7-day week with a sabbath day! And in the next 4 verses, Moses tells Aaron to announce to the Jewish people the following, 'God, the one who brought you out of slavery in Egypt, has heard your complaints and he's taken them personally, by the way, and now he is going to give you meat

this evening and bread tomorrow morning' And then Aaron ended his announcement by adding, 'Get yourselves ready for this, people.'

Then God acts in verse 13! *That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp.* (By the way, we don't hear anything about these quail in Exodus again, but we know from other sources that it was a ton of quail! So much so that they got sick of quail!) *And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew.* ¹⁴ *When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground.* ¹⁵ *The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. "What is it?" they asked each other. They had no idea what it was. And Moses told them, "It is the food the LORD has given you to eat. I'm sure that many of you know that the Hebrew for 'What is it?' is Man-hoo... from which we get man-na. Now, we could talk a long time about manna... what it literally was and how it became a huge metaphor in the life of the Jewish nation and how it was even a way that Jesus used to speak of himself when he called himself the Bread from Heaven... but for our purposes today related to sabbath, let's look at what happens next in this story. In verse 16 Moses continues on instructing the Jewish people about this manna: He says,* ¹⁶ *These are the LORD's instructions: Each household should gather as much as it needs. Pick up two quarts for each person in your tent."* ¹⁷ *So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little.* ¹⁸ *But when they measured it out, everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed.* Okay, the manna coming each morning with the dew is amazing, but **everyone** having just enough makes this miracle all the more amazing! ¹⁹ *Then Moses told them, "Do not keep any of it until morning."* ²⁰ *But some of them didn't listen and kept some of it until morning. But by then it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell.* Ok, now we are getting into issues of trusting that God knows what he is talking about... and it makes sense that next we read that *Moses was very angry with them.* ²¹ *After this the people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared.* ²² *On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual—four quarts for each person instead of two. Then all the leaders of the community came and asked Moses for an explanation.* What this tells me is that even the leaders of the community had absolutely no concept of the Sabbath before this moment. Even they needed an explanation! ²³ *He told them, "This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day set apart for the LORD. So, bake or boil as much as you want today, and set aside what is left for tomorrow."* ²⁴ *So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor.* ²⁵ *Moses said, "Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the LORD. There will be no food on the ground today.* ²⁶ *You may gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath. There will be no food on the ground that day."* I think it's interesting that the actual Hebrew here in verse 23 says this: 'tomorrow a rest, a rest holy, to the Lord' (mahar shabaton shabotquodesh yahovah); did you notice that the concept of rest is mentioned twice in succession here? One important thing to always remember when you are reading the Bible is that anytime you get two things that are the same next to each other that means, 'Listen up! This is important!' And what this doubling of the word 'rest,' or 'shabot,' tells me is that the setting aside of this 7th day is important! But, of course, people trusting that God knows what he is talking about has always been a problem! Look at what we read next. Verse 27 ²⁷ *Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food.* ²⁸ *The LORD asked Moses, "How long will these people refuse to obey my commands and instructions?"* ²⁹ *They must realize that the Sabbath is the LORD's gift to you. That is why he gives*

you a two-day supply on the sixth day, so there will be enough for two days. On the Sabbath day you must each stay in your place. Do not go out to pick up food on the seventh day.” ³⁰ *So the people did not gather any food on the seventh day.* ³¹ *The Israelites called the food manna. It was white like coriander seed, and it tasted like honey wafers.* (I have notes on how special honey was in the app).

Now, we could say a ton about this passage, but what really speaks to me was God saying, ‘The Sabbath is the Lord’s gift to you.’ I have been thinking a lot about this... about what it is that would have made the Sabbath a gift to these Jewish people... and I’ve thought of a few things... First, having one day every seven that is a day away from work gave order to their lives: for 6 days they were to do the work that made life possible... work that was meaningful and sustaining. For those specific Jews living in the wilderness that meant rising each morning and collecting what their family needed. This was work that gave new purpose to their rising in the morning and allowed them to participate with God in his care for them. Plus, this was order that also included stopping and resting... and even more than that, it was a day of rest that happened often enough to become a part of a regular routine... the rest day wasn’t something that occasionally happened... the gift was regular, purposeful work coupled with regular, purposeful rest... all built into life; they could plan for it and count on it. And that was a gift! Secondly, Sabbath was a gift because it was something only free people could choose to do. The Jews had been slaves for 400 years and their lives had been controlled by their Egyptian masters. Yet God, through freeing them from slavery, gave them the ability to choose to take time away from labor and rest... the Sabbath spoke of freedom and how they had been given that freedom... and that was a gift as well. Thirdly, the Sabbath gave the Jewish people time to think about the many ways God was showing them his love and concern for them... the **gift** was the space to think about things other than the details of the daily grind... things like God both freeing them and feeding them in such miraculous ways. The schedule-free nature of the entire Sabbath day was a gift! Fourthly, the Sabbath was a gift because it opened up time each week, having taken the time to think through all that God had done for them, to thank God for his ongoing care... six mornings a week they could see God’s deep love for them right there on the ground around them. And the Sabbath gave them the opportunity and the time to thoughtfully thank God together for his care. And finally, the Sabbath was a gift because it gave the Jewish people the opportunity to reorient their lives around trusting God. Each Friday morning, they saw the 6th day’s double portion... and let’s not forget this went on every 6th day, for 40 years! The Sabbath was a gift because as they ate the double portion they had gathered the day before they could see that God was still present with them, he was looking out for them, that he loved them, and they could trust him! I think all of this was a wonderful gift.

And I can’t help but think that these gifts are still being given to us through Sabbath as well. First, building sabbath into our lives brings order... I certainly know from experience that meaningful work with the regular expectation of rest is very different from work without any expectation of a time of rest. I’ll be honest, there have been very few seasons in my life that included regular rest as an expectation... but what a gift that would be! I know that Sabbath in some regular, scheduled, expected pattern would bring order to my life. And something that I hate to admit, but is true, the only reason I haven’t generally had an ongoing expectation of regular Sabbath is because I have allowed other ‘priorities’ to overtake the freedom I’ve been given to choose to include Sabbath in my life. Here’s what I have been thinking. Sabbath is a gift that we can only fully receive from God when we choose to make it a priority. God has given me the freedom to choose what I do with the time he’s given me... this freedom is a gift and it’s a

gift I shouldn't take lightly. I know that rest and trusting God isn't one of our culture's priorities, but I have the freedom to make it one of mine! I also know that filling my days with doing as much as is possible without building time into my life to simply stop, keeps me from thinking about some very important things... my mind is often just a jumble of details and names and situations and responsibilities and worries. Sabbath would give me the gift of time to think about other important things... things like the ways God is involved in all the details of my life... and if I make the time to think about these things, my bet is that I would end up thanking God for his goodness to me. I just recently had a very wise, older pastor tell me that he believes the prayer God loves the most is pure thanksgiving. I'm inclined to agree with him... Sabbath is a gift because it can lead to prayer that will warm the heart of God. And finally, Sabbath is a gift, at least to me, because it can be a time that shows me that God is continually looking out for me, that he loves me, and I can put my trust in all that he has promised to me. I know that we don't have manna on the ground 6 days a week, but we still do 'gather' in other ways from the hand of God. My experience over the long haul is that God is trustworthy... taking one day a week to rest in and focus on God's faithfulness seems appropriate... I'm just saying! Barry is going to talk a great deal about this in the next two weeks of our series, but in the meantime we can see from this story that God intended to weave sabbath rest and all that that can mean into the lives of his people... and I can't help but conclude that God did this as a way to continually and regularly build into our lives time to think about his deep love and care for us and to create within us a deeper capacity to trust him... to trust the one who may not still send manna each morning but **does** still care for us in ways that often, when we take the time to step back and think about it, are as equally miraculous. We may not be finding manna outside on the ground each morning, but we still have great reasons to get up each morning and do the work that God has called us to do.

I'm going off script for a minute. It might seem that it's easy for me to say that the work I have to do as a pastor is obviously work God has called me to do. But as many of you know I wasn't always a pastor doing 'God's work.' for more than 2 decades I worked in the landscaping industry, and I came to the conclusion a long time ago that I was just as much a pastor then... to my workers and clients and suppliers and such as I am today. That work, which honestly isn't held in too terribly high esteem was sacred work. God provided for my family through it and it gave me an opportunity to be about God's work of healing broken places and lives that I'd never have known had I always worked at a church. What those decades taught me is that all work, anything, can be sacred and life-giving. All honest work can be a calling that is worthy of rising up morning by morning and doing in the name of Jesus. And when we also take God's Sabbath seriously that opens up the time to help us see that God **is** continually present with us, he **is** looking out for us and that he does deeply loves us and seeing all of this faithfulness makes it possible for us to trust Him. And when we truly trust God it makes it possible for us to rest... rest both now in the midst of all that is going on around us and to anticipate the rest God has promised will be ours for eternity... Now that is a gift!

