

## The God Who Is Holy (Part 4 of 6)

### Spirit-anointed Work and Rest

Exodus 31:1-18

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*"The LORD said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do." And the LORD said to Moses, "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.'" And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." (Exodus 31:1–18, ESV)*

I'm sure that many of you have seen the classic film *Chariots of Fire*, the story of the runner Eric Liddell. Beyond the memorable soundtrack that gets stuck in your head, the story of a likely gold-medal runner who struggles to make it to the Olympics only to turn down an opportunity to run a race because it is on a Sunday is an inspiring film. Eric Liddell was fast, and he told his sister, who questioned his love for running, that "I believe that God made me for a purpose, but He also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure." Yet, Liddell didn't need the gold medal like others did. Tim Keller, in his book *Every Good Endeavor*, makes this insightful comment about the contrast between Liddell and other runners:

*"... one man ran in the Olympics literally to 'justify my existence,' while another man {Liddell} had such deep rest in Christ that he could miss a likely gold medal by not running on Sunday. The first*

*man had to get a medal . . . the second man, the devoted Christian Eric Liddell, did not care in the same way whether he won Olympic medals or not. He was at rest.”<sup>1</sup>*

Eric Liddell was a man who found the beautiful balance of divinely given work and rest. He felt God’s pleasure in his running, but his “work” wasn’t his life.

Today I want to invite you to think with me about two subjects: work and rest. This is something that relates to every one of us, regardless of our age, experience, education or background. We are going to talk about something that is a critical part of our humanity – something that is a vital part of our lives. However, the commonness of our subject does not necessarily assume that we do it very well.

Everyone works and everyone rests. But the question is about “how” we work and “how” we rest. And underneath that question is an even more important question about “why” we work and “why” we rest.

In our journey in Exodus, we have come to the final instructions regarding the construction of the Tabernacle. We’ve looked at the intricate detail related to the construction of the Tabernacle, including the dimensions, the materials, the articles inside and outside, the garments of the priests, and the sacrifices in order to consecrate them. And we’ve also seen the beautiful connection between Tabernacle worship, the life and death of Jesus, and the Gospel.

This section regarding the Tabernacle ends with some very helpful instructions regarding work and rest. So I want to walk you through Exodus 30-31 and talk about the Biblical vision for work and rest.

### **The Pleasure of Work**

Chapter 31 shifts the focus from the details of the design to the giftedness of the people who will construct the Tabernacle. In particular we learn about two men who are specifically empowered by God to build this worship space.

Their names are Bezalel and Oholiab. And they are more than craftsmen. They are men who are gifted by God for the task of building a worship center for the people of Israel. The selection of these men and what is said about them is as important as all the other details previously mentioned.

First, these men are specifically called by God for this task. Verse two says, “See I have called by name Bezalel.” Verse six says, “I have appointed with him Oholiab.” So there is a very clear sense that God has a very particular calling on these two men and the rest of the artisans who will work on the Tabernacle. These men are not *just* craftsmen; they are divinely appointed craftsmen. We’ll come back to this later, but just take note of their calling.

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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), 239.

Second, the men are filled with the Spirit of God for this task. Verse three states it unequivocally: "I have filled him with the Spirit of God." Verse six points us in that direction: "... I have given to all able men ability that they may make all that I commanded you."

A few weeks ago I mentioned that some Old Testament scholars see a creation motif in the building of the Tabernacle. They see the Tabernacle as a renewal of the created order, a place of order in a world of chaos, and a taste of what is to come in the New Heavens and the New Earth. If the Tabernacle is in fact a mini-recreation, then it would make sense to see the Holy Spirit involved, since He was a vital part of the first creation (see Gen. 1:2).

Third, these men expressed their calling and divine enablement through very tangible skills and abilities. Here's a list of the skills identified in verses 3-5: ability, intelligence, knowledge, craftsmanship, artistic design, work in fine metals (i.e., gold, silver and bronze), cutting stones, carving wood, and the ability to work in every craft. Verse six simply says that God had given to all able men "ability." The gifts and the abilities that are given are as specific as the colors, fabrics, dimensions, and design. In other words, God not only intentionally identified the materials for the creation of the Tabernacle; He also provided the skilled people in order to make it a reality.

Verses 7-11 list all of the accoutrements of tabernacle, and included in that list are three things listed in Exodus 30:

- **The Altar of Incense** – a stand in the Holy Place for the burning of specially prepared incense as a daily offering to God (30:1-10)
- **The Bronze Basin** – a large bowl for a priestly cleansing ritual (30:17-21)
- **Anointing Oil and Incense** – specific instructions are given regarding how the oil and incense is to be made and its restricted use (30:22-38)

Everything in the Tabernacle would be ultimately used by God for the glorification of Himself through the worship of His people. But every bit of it would be constructed by people with God-given abilities. The work was prescribed by God, and it was empowered by God. The Tabernacle would be physically built by the power that God supplied.

So here's my question: Is that how you think about "ability, intelligence, knowledge, craftsmanship, artistic design, work in fine metals, cutting stones, carving wood, and the ability to work in every craft?" Do you see physical work and skill and craftsmanship as empowered by God in the same way as preaching, worship leading, counseling, and other ministry areas?

It is remarkable and thrilling to me that one of the first evidences of the filling of the Holy Spirit comes not to a preacher, singer, or teacher, but to craftsmen and artisans. Before God ever filled the Tabernacle with His presence, He called and filled gifted people to make a place for Him to dwell.

One of the revolutionary ideas coming out of the Reformation was the doctrine of "vocation." Martin Luther called the people of God to celebrate the beauty of what God was able to do through them and to see those daily activities as a vital part of what it means to be human and

spiritual. For years the Catholic Church had taught that spiritual perfection was found in withdrawing from the world through monasticism. This belief was rooted in a wrong understanding of the Gospel. Since works were the basis of one's salvation, and since the work in the Church was the only work considered truly good, then you can imagine how easily a dichotomy could develop between the secular and the sacred, between the common and the holy, or between the laity and the clergy.

But Luther called the Church to see every work activity as a part of our "calling" from God. He called the things that we do as the "masks" through which God does His work in the world. He famously said, "God milks the cows through the vocation of milk maids." In other words, God has a calling on the life of every Christian. Talents, abilities, and skills are gifts given by God, and the place that we use those gifts is a calling from the Lord.

*Luther understood that the Christian is genuinely bi-vocational. He is called first through the Gospel to faith in Jesus Christ and he is called to occupy a particular station or place in life. The second sense of this calling embraces all that the Christian does in service to the neighbor not only in a particular occupation but also as a member of the church, a citizen, a spouse, parent, or child, and worker. Here the Christian lives in love toward other human beings and is the instrument by which God does His work in the world.<sup>2</sup>*

This is reflected in Eric Liddell's statement "God made me fast . . . and when I run I feel His pleasure." It is an acknowledgement that our "vocations" or our callings are part of the "good gifts" from God that the Bible talks about in James 1:17. God empowered the artisans and the craftsmen who built the tabernacle as much as He filled Aaron and his sons.

Therefore, all of us have been gifted by God, and we have been called. But do you see life through this lens? The Gospel – believing that God has graced us with forgiveness – frees us to not work for our salvation but to see our work as a part of God's grace. The Gospel allows us to see that everything we have is a gift and that we are the means by which God is working in the world. We are the "masks of God."

The implications of this are sweeping, but let me highlight two:

1. **This infuses mundane activities with spiritual significance.** With this lens there are no insignificant activities or expressions of your gifts. This means that how we express our singleness or marriage or parenting or labor or engagement in the culture are all a reflection of something very important. It means that God has gifted you for what you do. The passions, the talents, and the skills that you have were given to you. So use them and celebrate the God who gave them to you.
2. **This changes the focal point of "ministry" and "worship."** In other words, where is "real spirituality" expressed? Many people think that it is expressed on Sunday and inside the church. We think that ministry happens on Sunday or in the context of the church facility. But God's ultimate aim for Israel was to make them a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). The Tabernacle

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var2=881>

was not the end-game, it was the means to the end of reaching the world. In the same way, what happens here is designed to propel us into ministry every day.

We are to use our gifts and our calling as the platform to glorify God. We need to see the beauty of God expressed in the myriad of gifts that He has given, and we need to pursue our God-given gifts with passionate excellence. We need to see and savor the power of divinely empowered pleasure in our work.

When God built His tabernacle, He gave very detailed instructions. But He also gave skillful people whose work and craftsmanship were part of the beautiful story. And God has placed you where you are and given you the gifts that you have so that you can be a part of your “calling” in the world. So that you can say “When I \_\_\_\_\_, I feel His pleasure.”

### **The Faith to Rest**

After all this intricate detail about how the Tabernacle was to be constructed, and after the specific calling and gifting of Bezalel and Oholiab, you might think that everything is about work. But that could not be further from the truth. Immediately following all of this instruction, God gives a final word about the importance of Sabbath rest.

Verse 12 begins with the statement “And the Lord said to Moses . . .” This seems to be a parallel to the creation-theme (“And God said” – Gen. 1) and brings to completion the instructions regarding the creation of this piece of heaven on earth. God appears to end this creation in the same way that He ended the first creation: with rest.

God’s statement in verse 13 is really important:

*“You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.’” (Exodus 31:13, ESV)*

Notice three things here:

1. **There is more than one Sabbath.** Rest is embedded into the fabric of human existence. We have to rest every day, and the people were commanded to rest one day per week. But fields were to be rested every seventh year, and every fiftieth year – the Year of Jubilee – was a time for corporate rest and the restart of all property and indebtedness (see Exodus 23:10-12 and Leviticus 25).
2. **Sabbath connects people to their Creator.** In other words, there was a principle of Sabbath which said something important to the people about their relationship with God. The text says “this is a sign between me and you . . .” Sabbath was a statement. It was a reminder that God had brought them out of bondage and into rest. It was a declaration of freedom! Why? Because slaves do not rest.

Tim Keller says the following about this truth:

*Anyone who cannot obey God's command to observe the Sabbath is a slave, even a self-imposed one. Your own heart, or our materialistic culture, or an exploitative organization, or all of the above, will be abusing you if you don't have the ability to be disciplined in your practice of Sabbath. Sabbath is therefore a declaration of our freedom. It means you are not a slave – not to your culture's expectations, your family's hopes, your medical school's demands, not even to your own insecurities. It is important that you learn to speak this truth to yourself with a note of triumph – otherwise you will feel guilty for taking time off, or you will be unable to truly unplug.<sup>3</sup>*

Sabbath is celebratory rest that points you toward God!

3. **Sabbath reinforces God's sanctifying power.** There is a purpose statement at the end of verse 13 that is very important: "that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you." The point of Sabbath is to be reminded that all of life depends upon God. Sabbath reinforces that it is God's power and God's provision that makes life possible. Human beings are totally dependent, but our work can slowly convince us that we are autonomous. We can be persuaded that by working harder and harder that we take care of ourselves.

Remember when we talked about the daily provision of manna in Exodus 16? Every day enough manna was supplied for the people's needs. If they gathered too much, it became spoiled. But the day before the Sabbath, they were able to gather twice as much; it didn't spoil, and there was no manna on the Sabbath day. All of it was designed to reinforce to Israel their daily dependence upon God ("Give us this day our daily bread" – Matt. 6:11), and blow away any sense of self-autonomy.

Sabbath is a statement about your trust in God and not in yourself. It is a rest that says, "My life is dependent upon you, God!" That is why verses 14-17 are loaded with such strong warnings and why Sabbath is to be something that is practiced from generation to generation. To violate the Sabbath was to essentially disregard God's role in one's life. It was an act of self-centered dependence. The choice to not rest was a choice to be one's own God.

To practice Sabbath means that you are being regularly reminded that you are not the center of the universe and that your work, while good and right and excellent, is not what really keeps you afloat financially, provides for your family, or helps you add value and keeps you in good favor with your boss. Sabbath also is a statement that you cannot get good grades, find the right mate, make your house a haven, raise godly kids, maintain your health, or have enough money in retirement on your own. Sure, there is a lot for you to do, but nothing can be done on your own. It is beyond your ability to keep your life together.

Unfortunately, there are many of you who are functionally declaring that life depends upon you. You are filled with anxiety because all the loose ends in life are driving you crazy. Others are angry

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<sup>3</sup> Keller, 236.

because the way that they try to regain control is by emotions that force the situation to be bent your direction. Others of you are stingy. You hoard your money or your stuff because you either like what your stuff says about you or you like the security that it brings. You don't give because your money makes you feel powerful. Can you imagine having a field and intentionally not using it for an entire year? What a waste!

Sabbath rest – the intentional stopping of normal activities – is a great antidote to this self-made, self-protection which we are prone to embrace. Sabbath is a reminder of what is really important and what is really valuable. It was what convinced Eric Lindell that not running was more valuable than a gold medal. He valued what Sabbath said more than what a gold medal said.

So as much as I want to call you to use your vocation, your calling, and your giftedness, for as much as I want you to work really hard at mastering the God-given skill that you've been given, for as much as I want you to experience the pleasure of God in what you do – please remember the Sabbath principle. Remember that your value, your identity, your purpose, and the definition of success are not based upon what you do. Your value, identity, purpose, and definition of success are rooted in your relationship with God.

### **The Gospel Brings Rest and Good Work**

The Israelites were former slaves who had been rescued by God. That orientation and mindset changed everything about their lives, and it also became the hallmark story of God in their history. God rescued them, and it marked them forever.

The full story of redemption is revealed in the life of Jesus who comes as the New Israel, lives perfectly under the Law, dies for the sins of those who would receive Him, and rescues people who are powerless to change their slavery to sin. This is the Gospel – the good news that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And the Gospel changes why you would do good things. If doing good things is the way that you are made right with God, then it leads to a life of perpetual fear, exhaustion, and a performance-based mind-set. Right now we are praying for 1.5 billion people who are celebrating Ramadan in the hopes of making themselves acceptable to God. Ramadan doesn't bring joy. However, the Gospel brings joy beyond imagination.

That God forgives sinners based upon the finished work of Christ, and that He does so permanently and completely is amazing grace. The fact that we are no longer condemned but are chosen, loved, and sealed for all of eternity is absolutely stunning.

Therefore, anything good that we do is 1) a gift from a God who has already been so gracious, and 2) is something that points us back to God in gratitude. Good works are truly good when they are practiced through Him and to Him. In this way the gospel transforms every aspect of our humanity into an act of worship. It makes us living sacrifices!

But the Gospel also makes rest possible. If your life depends on you, then there is no way that you can ever rest. Oh, you may be able to vacation or sleep or take a nap, but your soul will be constantly striving to meet some spiritual deadline. You will run and run and run and run. But the finish line will never appear.

True rest begins by resting in Christ by understanding deep within your soul that “you are not your own, you were bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). It frees you to not work hard but to rest happy.

In this way, Sabbath is deeply rooted in the Gospel.

*All of us are haunted by the work under the word – that need to prove and save 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>4</sup>.*

So feel the beautiful pleasure in your work. But be sure you make time to not work, lest you think that the pleasure of work is ultimate.

“I feel his pleasure when I run . . . but I won’t run on Sunday.”

God has made work and rest. Both are meant to point to Him.

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<sup>4</sup> Keller, 234.