

UNIT 1: WORK AND REST

Lesson 1

June 7, 2026

Laws for Work and Rest (The Law): Rhythms of work and rest are blessed by God.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

Beginning with God's example and continuing through His commands to Israel in the Law of Moses, this lesson looks at the topic of work and rest. The Bible reveals that work was not designed as punishment or a curse for humanity, but rather as one way in which the male and female reflected the image and likeness of God in the world. Before humans were created on the sixth day, God was at work, and then He rested on the seventh day. This rhythm of work and rest became the model for humanity. Because of sin, human work becomes more difficult, but work itself is not a curse. Work and rest are two parts of a fulfilling life that mirrors the image and likeness of God.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

God created humanity with the capacity, desire, and ability to work. He created a beautiful garden called Eden (Genesis 2:8). He places man (Adam) in "the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (v. 15). The first chapter of Genesis states that God created "male and female" in His "image" (v. 27) and told them to "replenish the earth ... subdue it ... have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (v. 28). God gave the couple meaningful and fulfilling work to do before the curse of sin tainted human labor.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. GOD EXEMPLIFIED WORK AND REST: Genesis 1:1, 31 through 2:3; Exodus 20:9,11.

- A. God's Work, No Sweat (Genesis 1:1, 31-2:3)
- B. Humanity's Work and Rest (Exodus 20:9,11)

2. GOD COMMANDED WORK AND REST: Genesis 2:5, 15; 3:17-19; Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

- A. Blessed Work, Cursed Work (Genesis 2:5, 15; 3:17-19)
- B. The Continuing Command for Rest, (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

3. RELIGIOUS SEASONS FOR REST: Leviticus 23:4-8, 15, 21, 23-25, 27-28, 33-36.

- A. Passover and Pentecost, (4-8, 15, 21)
- B. Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles, (23-25, 27-28, 33-36)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. GOD EXEMPLIFIED WORK AND REST: Genesis 1:1, 31 through 2:3; Exodus 20:9, 11.

A. God's Work, No Sweat, Genesis 1:1, 31 through 2:3.

Given that God has infinite power, when the Bible says God “works,” it does not mean that anything God does requires any effort on His part. To say that God works is to say that He is doing, creating, or accomplishing something. The opening verse of the Bible reveals this truth: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Nothing existed until God spoke it into existence. This was His work, but He was never strained or stressed in the act of creation.

God could have created everything instantaneously if He chose, but He took six days. It seems God enjoyed systematically creating everything in perfect order to prepare for the creation of man and woman, who were made in His likeness (vv. 26-30). According to Genesis 2:1, “the heavens [the universe] and the earth were finished” by the end of the sixth day. “And He rested on the seventh day from all His work” (v. 2). Saying God rested from His work means that He paused His creative activity, it does not mean God was tired and needed to take a break. Even in His “rest,” God was sustaining creation, but on the seventh day, with everything finished, God paused and “sanctified” (v. 3) His creation.

B. Humanity's Work and Rest, Exodus 20:9, 11.

The Ten Commandments, as recorded in Exodus 20, address the topic of a “sabbath” in verses 8 through 11. God said one day in six was to be set aside as a day of rest from work. This reveals that humanity needs to take regularly scheduled breaks from their work. God designated “the seventh day” (v. 10) as a holy day, which He blessed when He sanctified creation while resting from His work. The word ‘sabbath’ is from the Hebrew word ‘sabat’ meaning “intermission” or “to cease,” as in “to cease working.” The term was used to designate the seventh day of the week in the Hebrew calendar. This day was set aside to cease all work, enjoy rest, and honor God.

The foundation for this command was the example of God, who ceased His work of creation on the seventh day. The cycle of work and rest is not only a holy directive, but godly instruction for humanity. Studies show that humans need regular periods of rest. God designed us this way and established a divine pattern so we could give our best in employment, ministry, and family. Research indicated that labor or mental activity without regular breaks leads to reduced productivity and often to physical, emotional, or spiritual decline. Therefore, the seventh day was blessed and set aside for us to worship God and acknowledge His as the Creator our source of strength.

When the Pharisees saw Jesus' disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath and eating it, they criticized Jesus. However, the Sabbath was to be a blessing, not the burden the Pharisees had made if it with their many rigorous rules. Jesus said, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). God provided the Sabbath as a day of rest for humanity and not a day to be idolized. The Apostle Paul, therefore, told the Christians at Colossae, “Let no man

therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days” (Colossians 2:16).

2. GOD COMMANDED WORK AND REST: Genesis 2:5, 15; 3:17-19; Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

A. Blessed Work, Cursed Work, Genesis 2:5, 15; 3:17-19.

Before sin entered the picture through the disobedience of Eve and Adam, the work of the couple in the Garden of Eden was fruitful, fulfilling, and pleasant. The earth yielded its fruit, and their labors were always productive. Even before they were in the Garden, before humanity tilled the land or planted seeds, the earth produced all they needed to thrive. It was a paradise for human existence. However, after creating man, God placed him in the Garden of Eden with a job description: Dress and keep the garden (2:15). This was not punishment for anything Adam had done wrong; it was an honor bestowed upon Adam as a reflection of God’s creative power. Participating with God in His creation was fulfilling and pleasurable for Adam and Eve.

After succumbing to temptation and engaging in disobedience, however, the picture changed. Work would require toil, labor, blood, sweat, and tears. God told Adam that because of his sin, the ground that had once yielded fruit with little effort was now cursed, and “in sorrow [toil] shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” (3:17). Their sin resulted in the thorns and thistles that Adam would struggle with as he tried, through the sweat of his brow, to produce harvests to sustain himself and his family (vv. 18-19). While most people no longer need to engage in farming to provide food for the table, the result of sin was that humanity’s work, which once was a pleasure, became laborious. Work itself is not a curse, but the resistance faced in a fallen world can make our work difficult, resulting in physical or mental stress requiring regular periods of rest. Still, as redeemed humanity, we can find joy even on the job.

B. The Continuing Command for Rest, Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

In the second reading of the Law to the generation who came out of the forty-year wilderness wandering, the people were again commanded, “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you” (v. 12 NKJV). The cycle of work and rest was to be repeated, with the seventh day to be a day of rest for the people of God, their animals, any foreigners living within their borders, and even the servants (vv. 13-14). In the wilderness, the Israelites were not even to collect manna on the Sabbath: “Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none” (Exodus 16:26). On the Sabbath, even God suspended His provision of manna. The day was to be sanctified, meaning it was set apart from all other days as a holy (special and unique) day.

In addition to being a day of rest, the Sabbath was set aside for the people to remember their deliverance. God wanted the second generation of Israelites to remember that they were brought out of Egyptian bondage by God’s strong arm (v. 15). Likewise, we should express heartfelt appreciation for God’s deliverance from sin through “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). In a cycle of work and rest, Sunday is set aside by most

Christians as their day of worship. Jesus was resurrected “very early in the morning the first day of the week” (Mark 16:2), and the early church soon began to observe Sunday as their sabbath, their “seventh day” of rest and worship. In this way, the church continued to honor the spirit of the Law, which gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Sunday is sometimes called “the Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10), though that phrase is used only once in the Bible. However, as Jesus told the woman at the well, the primary thing God seeks is people who worship Him “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23); therefore, every day should be dedicated to the Lord by His people, Just as it is not a matter of this mountain or that mountain, it is not a matter of this day or that day. However, we are created with a need to observe periods of rest and worship, and the Biblical pattern is a seventh-day rest, wherein we suspend our work to thank God for His provision and our salvation.

3. RELIGIOUS SEASONS FOR REST: Leviticus 23:4-8, 15, 21, 23-25, 27-28, 33-36.

A. Passover and Pentecost, Leviticus 23:4-8, 15, 21.

In addition to weekly Sabbaths, during which no work was to be done, there were additional days, referred to as “holy convocation” (v. 4), during which normal work was suspended and the Jewish people dedicated themselves to the Lord. There were seven Jewish festivals identified in the Law.

Each spring, the people were instructed to observe “the Lord’s Passover” on “the fourteenth day of the first month” (v. 5) according to the Hebrew calendar, which corresponds to March/April on the Gregorian calendar. The Passover meal, with the Passover lamb, was set aside by the Jews as a day to remember that God protected their firstborn sons from death while using the plaque to deliver them from Egypt. The next day and for seven days following Passover, they were to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During this week, they were to eat only unleavened bread, do no ordinary work, and give “an offering made by fire unto the Lord” (v. 8).

After “seven sabbaths” and a day (v. 15), or fifty days after the day of the Passover, the people were instructed to observe the “feast of harvest” (Exodus 23:16), which is also referred to as “Pentecost” in Acts 2:1. (Pentecost is from the Greek word for “fiftieth.”) This was also a holy convocation requiring the people to bring meat to the temple as a “wave offering” to the Lord (Leviticus 4:15). As on the Sabbath, the people were to do no servile (ordinary) work on this day (v. 21). It was a holy day of rededication and a renewed commitment to God. The critical point to remember is that God included days of rest and rededication throughout the year for His people.

B. Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles, Leviticus 23:23-25, 27-29, 33-36.

In the autumn of the Hebrew calendar, the Feast of Trumpets is on the first day of the seventh month (late September). It was also referred to as “a sabbath” (v. 24), and no work was done. Instead, rams’ horns and the priests’ silver trumpets were blown. This festival celebrated the harvest and announced the preparation for the Day of Atonement. Once again, “servile

[customary] work” (v. 25) was suspended so that the people could focus on their observance of this holy day. This emphasized the need to prioritize worship in their lives.

The Day of Atonement was “on the tenth day” (v. 27) of the same month as the Feast of Trumpets. During this time, the people ceased work to “afflict [their] souls, and offer an offering ... unto the Lord” (v. 27). The priests performed religious rituals, strictly adhering to the Law, to atone for the people’s sins. The word translated “atonement,” from the Hebrew noun ‘kippur,’ means “to wipe out.” Through this annual ceremony, the priests interceded for the people, asking God to purge them of their sins. It was a sacred day when no one was to work (v. 28).

Five days later (v. 34), the people were to observe the Feast of Tabernacles, one of three pilgrimage festivals, along with Passover and Pentecost. It commemorates the Jewish people’s journey through the wilderness following their deliverance from Egypt. The people were to build and live in booths or tents for seven days. They were not to do any of their regular work but make an offering by fire to the Lord.

Significantly, Jesus was a devout Jewish man who observed these holy days on the Jewish calendar. However, even as He observed them, He was fulfilling all the Law and the Prophets (Luke 22:44). During His ministry, Jesus instituted three significant rites or ordinances: water baptism (Matthew 5:17), the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:14-20), and foot washing (John 13:1-17). These ordinances remind the church of Christ’s work in our salvation from beginning to end. Such events should be practiced reverently and solemnly.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

As Christ’s disciples, we follow His example. If the Son of God took time to step away from the crowds to refresh and renew His spirit, then we should too.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Without sounding judgmental, encourage others to prioritize a regular day of rest. Resting from work while revitalizing our spirit is a Biblical principle.

Work, Labor, Toil, and Rest

The definition of work, in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary is lengthy. But the concise definition of work is, 'activity in which one exerts strength or faculties to do or perform something.'

In the Bible, the Hebrew and Greek terms translated "work" mean an occupation. It is something one is assigned to do, implying duty, obligation, and responsibility to complete the assignment.

The word "work" is found in the English (KJV) Bible 427 times; 360 in the Old Testament and 67 in the New Testament.

Another word for work found in the Bible is "labor." This word is found 80 times in the Old Testament and 51 times in the New Testament. The Hebrew and Greek terms translated "labor" can mean any kind of work, including work done by a slave or work done as punishment. Generally, labor can mean any kind of hard work that drains a person's strength.

Also found in the King James Version is the work "toil" as a word for work. This word occurs only two times in the Old Testament (Genesis 5:29; 41:51), and only four times in the New Testament (Matthew 6:28; Mark 6:48; Luke 5:5; 12:27). The word toil means work of the worst kind that makes a person weary and sad.

In the Bible, the Hebrew and Greek terms translated "rest" means cessation from work; relief from work, labor, and toil, not only for the body but also for the spirit and soul. (See the invitation given by Jesus Christ in Matthew 11:28-30).

The word "Sabbath," found in both the Old and New Testaments, means "rest," and it is by its very meaning a commandment of God to rest.

Because work, labor, and toil are constants of human experience, it is necessary for our physical and spiritual well-being that we also rest. This is the moral and ethical principle enunciated by the Sabbath.

WORKSHEET

How Americans View Their Jobs

Below are results from a 2023 Pew Research survey ([pewresearchcenter.org](https://www.pewresearchcenter.org)).

_____ of employed adults saying they are extremely or very satisfied with

- Their job overall 51%
- Relationship with co-workers 67%
- Relationship with supervisor 62%
- Day-to-day tasks at work 51%
- Job benefits 49%
- Their salary 34%
- Opportunities for promotion 33%

Ecclesiastes 3:22 says, “So I saw that there is nothing better for people than to be happy in their work” (NLT).

If you are currently employed, are you happy in your work? Put a check next to each part of your job that you are extremely or very satisfied with:

- _____ Your job overall
- _____ Relationship with co-workers
- _____ Relationship with supervisor
- _____ Day-today tasks at work
- _____ Job benefits
- _____ Salary
- _____ Opportunities for promotion

What does Proverbs 12:11, 14 say about the significance of work?