

# (God and Man) Entering God's Sabbath Rest

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the importance of entering God's Sabbath rest through obedience, understanding one's calling, and serving from a place of peace in Christ.*

**Duration:** 33:21

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 21:2-6, Psalm 46:10, Psalm 119:105, Matthew 4:4, Matthew 11:28-30, Hebrews 4:9

**Topics:** "Sabbath"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal experience of dedicating Wednesdays and Saturdays to fasting and prayer. He and another brother would spend hours in prayer after their half day of work, and then go out to the streets to preach the gospel and sell gospels. The speaker also reflects on the importance of sacrifice and blood in approaching God, highlighting how Jesus' death brought an end to the need for animal sacrifices. He encourages the audience to come up higher and approach their actions from a place of rest and love, rather than from a legalistic mindset. The sermon also references Exodus 20 and discusses the concept of Sabbath rest and the freedom of a Hebrew slave after six years of service.

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## Transcript

It's going back 40 years ago in India and the Lord saved me. I surrendered myself totally. It wasn't a two-stage affair where I first accepted him as saviour to escape hell and then years later made him Lord.

It was total right from the beginning. I was about 19 or 20 years old, 19 and a half. And immediately, I had great ambitions in the Navy, but immediately I said, Lord, I'm willing to give up my job.

I'm willing to quit to serve you anytime, but I want you to call me. When you do, I'll quit. I'm ready right now.

And five years after I was saved in 1964, on the 6th of May, 1964, God called me very clearly to quit my job. And my desire was to be an evangelist. I wanted to go to some place where the gospel had never been preached in India, in the North.

And the years during that time when I was in the Navy, I was, after I was converted, one of the first things, I took baptism and then one of the first things I began to do was study God's Word intensely. Every spare moment I used to carry a New Testament with me if I was standing in a bus stop or sitting somewhere. Study it, study it, study it, study it right through.

And the second thing I began to pray for earnestly was that I would be filled or baptised to the Holy Spirit. Because I knew that it's not just the knowledge of the Word, I need power, power to serve God. I knew the secret was this, if I was really going to live for God, I needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit and I needed to know God's Word.

The Navy didn't accept my resignation because you're supposed to serve for, you know, I'd gone through all the four and a half years of military academy training and they spent a lot of money on these cadets and they don't expect you to quit. We had to serve for a minimum of 20 years. And by that time, I had served just for five.

So they just turned on my, you see, I just said in my resignation, Jesus Christ has called me to serve and I don't desire to serve my country anymore. And that didn't make sense to the naval headquarters in Delhi. So they said nothing doing.

Well, so I spent my time preaching in the streets in the city where the naval base was located twice a week. We used to work full day on all days of the week. It said Wednesday and Saturday were half days.

So Wednesday and Saturday, I would fast and after our half day of work was over, spend two, three hours in prayer with another brother. And every evening at four o'clock prayer time, prayer was over. I'd go out to the streets with just one other brother.

Two of us would stand and preach the gospel, sell gospels on the streets. Many, I think I covered every street in the town of Arunachalam where my naval base was located. Rain or sun, we'd go out.

And I spent a whole year like that. And in the local church, I would share what God had begun to teach me from his word. And over a period of time, you know, it became clear to me that God hadn't given me the gift of being an evangelist.

I didn't see souls being saved like other people. I had a desire. I did everything possible.

And I said, Lord, I'll never do what you don't gift me to do. God kept me for too long. Again, I applied for my release two or three times.

And finally, in the sovereignty of God, I think as far as I know, I was the only naval officer in the Indian Navy ever to be released without completing 20 years of service. It was just like Israelites coming out of Egypt. When I was finally released two years after God called me in 66, I was convinced that God had called me.

It was confirmation to me because I was in an assembly where nobody supported my call. They thought I should stay on in the Navy and be a Christian there. I was willing if that was what God wanted me to do.

But I learned something there at that time, that an obstacle in the way is not a signal to retreat, a challenge to our faith. I was terribly discouraged when the naval headquarters refused to release me. I thought, how is that possible? I mean, Almighty God called me and who are these people to say no? All the other believers, every single one of them without exception, my local assembly said, see, this is the proof that God doesn't want you to leave.

God guides us by circumstances. And here is a clear indication that you're mistaken. You were sincere.

You desired to serve the Lord, but you were mistaken. And it's very difficult when I was, 24 years old. I'd just been born again for five years.

And here were all these much older believers, elders in the church saying all that. It wasn't easy to say, you fellows are all wrong. I was confused.

Well, I used to get along in my room and say, Lord, if I'm wrong, just show it to me. I'll say I was wrong. Maybe it wasn't a call from God at all.

I began to see God, Lord, what do you want me to do? And it was a word that the Lord spoke to my heart. What did Moses do when Pharaoh said no? Did he doubt whether God had spoken to him? That was my answer. And you see, everybody in Israel doubted Moses.

This can't be God. But Moses knew and he went back. That was my answer.

And that's the time when I began to learn that for every problem any man in any country, in any century ever faces in his life, there is an answer in Scripture, if you know where to find it. But if in that time of pressure and crisis, you don't know the Scriptures, then of course you don't know the answer to every temptation that came to Jesus. You remember Jesus said, yeah, but it's written this, so I'm not going to do it.

And even when the devil quoted Scripture to him, he said, but it's also written. So I see from Jesus' example that here was a trial and there was an answer in Scripture. Then there was another trial, there was an answer in Scripture.

And then there was another trial, there was an answer in Scripture, which teaches me that for all of my life and everything I face, there's an answer in Scripture if I know where to find it. And Jesus knew because he spent years meditating and he didn't even have a Bible at home. He listened carefully in the synagogue when the Scriptures were read.

He knew it so thoroughly by the age of 12. There's a secret, there's an answer in the Scriptures to every problem we can ever face, whatever it is. As I said, I mean, I wanted to go to Rajasthan or someplace like that.

And I was ready and when I quit the Navy, I spent, again, weeks fasting, praying, seeking God, Lord, what do you want me to do? God never opened the door for me. I was ready to go anywhere, but he never opened the door for me to be an evangelist or a missionary as I wanted to be in some part of India that hadn't heard the Gospel. I've never lost in my heart that burden.

I say, okay, if God didn't call me, I can fellowship with other people who are doing that work, which I wanted to do, but I couldn't do. Pray for them, encourage them. I get different missionary magazines in my home and read them, different groups working in different parts of India.

And I realized that, you know, evangelism is exciting to hear a report like that and to see people healed, even buffaloes healed. Wonderful. A healing ministry is exciting.

A teaching ministry is not so exciting. You don't have buffaloes healed or anything like that. It can be a bit drab.

You don't have statistics to report and things like that. But I've discovered one thing through the years. In my younger days, it used to bring me a lot of unrest.

What am I doing for the Lord? I hear a whole lot of people that need to be reached with the Gospel. What am I doing? And I've discovered something through the years that you have to do that thing in the body of Christ that God called you to be. I cannot do what I want to do.

I must be willing for anything. God prepares me for something. Now, if I'm unwilling to do something because it's difficult or it involves a lot of sacrifice, then it's a different thing altogether.

If I'm willing for anything and then God doesn't give me what I want, then I have to accept whatever God gives me. And that's not second best. That is the very best for me.

And in the body of Christ, this understanding has really helped me never to be in competition with any other believer. I say that sincerely. I cannot honestly think that I've even been tempted to be jealous of another brother's ministry or his success, even if he's far younger.

I've just wholeheartedly rejoiced because I've seen my place in the body of Christ. And I see all jealousy and competition, and there's a lot of that, unfortunately, in Christ's body. It's because we're not secure in God and the place he's called us to fulfill.

See, when we think of the different functions of the body, there's no part that's competing with another. There's no part of this body that's jealous of another. The left hand is not jealous that the right hand does all the signing checks and important jobs like that.

It just rejoices. Even though it knows it'll never sign one check in all its life. I can support another one who's doing a job that I can never do.

And it's not inferior because of that. It doesn't have to feel inferior. You know, the moment you begin to feel inferior, you're going to get into competition, one day or the other.

You've got to recognize that there's no ministry in the body of Christ that's inferior. It's not just pulpit ministry that's important. The Bible speaks about apostles in 1 Corinthians 12.

It speaks about helps. Hardly anybody seeks for that gift. There are different functions.

And one day when we stand in eternity, we'll discover that just like in the human body, a whole lot of small little things fulfill a tremendous function. You know, a small little vein or an artery where it gets a little blocked, and a man dies, got a heart attack. If he'd lost his hand, he wouldn't have died.

He could have still lived. But this small, teeny weeny little blood vessel got a block and he died. That's how important that small little blood vessel is in the body of Christ too.

Shouldn't have anything blocking the free flow of the life of Jesus Christ. It's very easy for us even in Christian work to be at unrest. Unrest.

For many years I was in Christian work and I was in unrest. I was in unrest because I wanted to accomplish something. I wanted to show that I was doing something.

And as long as I was in that desire to impress and to show and to prove, and we are like that when we are young, I was in unrest. I came to rest when I didn't want to impress anyone anymore. I didn't want to show that I was serving God.

I didn't want to show anybody anything. Then I came to rest. And then I understood why in the Old Testament there was this tremendous importance given to the Sabbath day.

We have our Seventh-day Adventist friends today who believe that, some of them are real believers, who believe that the important thing is to keep that Sabbath, literally. I disagree with that. That's not what the Sabbath is meant for.

It was an Old Testament command which was teaching a great New Testament truth. Let me turn you to a verse here in Exodus chapter 31 verse 12 to 17. The Lord spoke to Moses, as for you speak to the sons of Israel saying you shall surely observe my Sabbaths for this is a sign to me and you throughout your generations you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.

And then the last part of verse 24 it says anyone who does any work on the Sabbath day that person will be cut off from among the people. And the last part of verse 15, whoever does any work on the Sabbath day will be put to death. Now you can understand a man being put to death for murder or perhaps for rape, but for not keeping the Sabbath, that's really something.

And there's an instance in the last verses of Numbers 15 where a man was put to death just for picking up sticks on the Sabbath day. That's all he did. He didn't light a fire or anything.

He just went out to collect some sticks. And you read about that in the last few verses of Numbers 15. The man was put to death.

God was trying to impress upon those people in the Old Testament. You know like sacrifice for example. Every day in the temple, in the tabernacle, an animal was being killed.

Every single day, number of them. And if you went around to that brazen altar it was all splattered with blood, blood, blood for 1500 years. God drills something into their head.

You cannot approach me without sacrifice. Without blood there is no remission of sins. And it finally came to an end when Jesus died.

And people understood this is it. This is what it was all pointing towards. The sacrifice of the cross, the blood Jesus shed on the cross, which is the only way any man can approach God.

Now it is the same with the Sabbath. For 1500 years they had to shut down their work on Friday sunset right up to Saturday sunset. They counted their days from the evening to the morning.

And that was their Sabbath. Everything was shut down. I don't think we see it anywhere.

It is not even seen among the Seventy Adventists. There is nowhere the type of complete cessation from work. There must be something very, very important that God was trying to stress.

Which I doubt whether even Christians, believers have understood like they have understood what God was trying to stress through the sacrifice of the brazen altar every day. I believe it is just as important. Jesus said, come to me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will bring you into this Sabbath.

That is the meaning of that verse. I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.

Learn from me and you shall find that Sabbath in your soul. Well, I give you my testimony. I was born again, baptized, baptized in the Spirit.

I hadn't come to rest. I was laboring. I was heavy laden.

I was laboring to impress. There was unrest. And there was a verse of scripture that was true of my condition in those days.

And that verse is in Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 9. There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. This is not for unbelievers. Matthew 11, 28, come to me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

I always used to think it was for unbelievers, but I found a lot more believers who labor and are heavy laden and weary who need to come to rest. There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people. I needed a Sabbath rest which I didn't have.

God calls us to a life of rest in him and from there to serve him. And that's when I first saw in scripture how when God created Adam his first day was a day of rest. Because Adam was created towards the end of the sixth day.

That would be Friday afternoon. And immediately after he was created and he had his wife, when the day began in the evening and the morning were the seventh day, it was a day of rest. His first day on earth was a day of rest.

There remains that Sabbath rest for the people of God. It says God rested from his work. Verse 4, Hebrews 4, somewhere it says, And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.

Verse 10, The one who has entered his rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Have you understood that verse? What does that mean? That the one who has entered his rest has rested from his works as God did from his. It can mean many things.

You can find your application for it in your own life. What does it mean to rest from my works? I do something and I rest. I'm not waiting to compare that with somebody else's work.

I'm not waiting for somebody to appreciate it or approve it. Anything. I've rested.

I've done it before God and I'm at rest. We can apply it like that. We could apply it to resting from working in my own strength without the power of the Holy Spirit.

You know, like the disciples went out fishing and they toiled all night. That was their work. Their work, work, work, work from six o'clock in the evening till maybe five o'clock next morning.

Caught nothing. And they rested. Said, Okay, we're finished.

We give up. God says, Okay, now I'll fill your net. They entered into rest.

See, that's the point at which God comes to us. When we're not out to impress anyone, we're not out to compete with anyone. We're not in unrest because I can't do what somebody else does.

I used to be in unrest, you know. I'd hear all these exciting stories out in the mission field and I'd say, Oh, what am I doing? And I'd get into unrest. And that didn't help what God wanted to do through me.

So I said, Praise the Lord. I'm so excited that that brother is doing that. But I'm not going to get in unrest.

I'm just going to rejoice with him. I'm going to do my little part. Maybe my part's not as exciting as his.

I want to do my little part for the body of Christ, faithfully till the end of my life. You know, in Exodus chapter 20, we read of the Ten Commandments. And one of the commandments was about the Sabbath.

And it's very interesting. You have all these, thou shalt, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not. This is the Ten Commandments.

That's all there is. It's basically, this is what you must do. This is what you mustn't do.

You must do this. You shall do this. You shall not do that.

You should not do. It's very easy for our Christian life to become like that. For many Christians, for me anyway, it was like that for many years.

I was supposed to do certain things. I was supposed to read my Bible every morning. I was supposed to pray for a certain time.

I was supposed to witness. I was supposed to go for meetings on Sunday. It was a bunch of rules and regulations.

I was not supposed to watch movies. I was not supposed to do this. I was not supposed to do the other thing and a whole lot of things.

And if I kept it all, I was a good Christian. Actually, I was just a good Pharisee. That's all.

That's the result of keeping commandments. Whether you keep these Ten Commandments or the Ten Thousand Commandments we can have today in Christendom. And it always brings unrest.

It often leads to depression, discouragement, competition, jealousy. There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. Exodus chapter 20.

Then the Lord gave another instruction. It's very interesting. It comes immediately after that.

Chapter 21. He said, If you buy a Hebrew slave, he serves you for six years. In the seventh, he must go free.

That's a law. And if he comes alone, he goes out alone. If he comes to the wife, he goes to the wife.

But verse 5. Now this is the important part. If the slave plainly says, I love my master, I will not go out free. He is free.

He doesn't have to serve anymore. He's been released from that bondage. But he voluntarily chooses.

There's no thou shalt. For six years, it was thou shalt. You've been purchased.

You're a slave. Thou shalt. Thou shalt not.

Thou shalt. Thou shalt not. Thou shalt.

Thou shalt not. He heard that for six years and he had to do it. He never got any salary.

He never got any benefits, no bonuses. Nothing. For six years.

And then the seventh was the Sabbath. He was free. The Sabbath brought freedom.

Jesus came to set us free. Now he's completely free. And he can go where he likes.

There's no thou shalt. No thou shalt not. You don't have to go and clean the restrooms anymore.

You don't have to sweep the floor. You don't have to go and cook the food in the kitchen. You can go free.

You can do completely. Do whatever you like. And he says, no, I'm not going to go.

I love my master. He's been so good to me. I will not go out free.

And then his master will bring him to God. It says in verse six, my translation. He'll bring him to the God, to the judges who acted in God's name.

And bring him to the door. Verse six. And his master will pierce his ear with an awl, indicating this ear is from now on going to listen only to one master.

And he shall serve his master, not for six years. Not for 66 years. Permanently.

Now this is different from the first six years. The first six years was thou shalt, thou shalt not. Don't do this.

Don't do this. Don't do this. And many times he must have wanted to have a little freedom.

He couldn't. Oh, I have to do this. I'm a slave.

But now it is different. Now his service was in an altogether different basis. I'm free.

I can go out if I want. But I choose not to go. This is the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant.

Exodus 20 is the old covenant. And Exodus 21 is the new covenant. Isn't it interesting that the Lord put it just next to each other for those who want to see it.

This is what brings us to rest. I love my master. I will not go out free.

I don't have to serve. There is no thou shalt in my life anymore. I have come to rest.

There is no thou shalt not see dirty pictures or thou shalt not do this. It's gone. I've entered into rest.

Those were in the first six years. I love my master. There is no asking like Peter.

Oh Lord, do I have to alone have to live this life of sacrifice where my hands will be stretched out and somebody else will take me where I don't want to go? And what about John? Is he going to have a cushy life? There are no more questions like that. Why is he having it easy and why am I going to have a tough life? Those are all in those first six years of thou shalt, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, whatever comparison. Is my life more difficult and am I getting as much as him? All this is old covenant.

There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people. Come to me all you who are weary and weighed down with this yoke. Take my yoke for it's easy.

It's love. Love is, it can be there and the sad thing is it can go. It went in the case of the elder in Ephesus.

We read the Lord told him, you've left your first love. It's gone. And when love goes, you're back under the old covenant again.

You're back under rules and regulations and unrest and competition and jealousy and comparison and all the wretched things that there were. Jesus never expected us to live by the old covenant. The old covenant was only there to show how man should not live, how he cannot live.

You cannot live like this. The old custom and the law was, you read that in Deuteronomy 28 especially. If you do this, I'll bless you here, here I'll bless you.

I'll give you prosperous. I'll give you many children. I'll bless your cattle, your business, everything.

And if you don't do this, you're going to get sickness and madness and blindness and your children will suffer. And so people obeyed. They obeyed out of the threat of punishment and the expectation of reward.

But when Jesus came, he never said anything like that. He said, if you love me, keep my commandments. That's all.

This is the new covenant. There's no threat of punishment and there's no giving out rewards. He said, if you follow me, you'll be persecuted.

You will be rejected by the world like I was rejected. You'll be hated. You'll have to die.

You want to come? Come and die. I invite you. And here and there, people say, I love my master.

I don't have to do this, but I'm going to do it. I don't have to sacrifice. I'm not living under thou shalt sacrifice if thou shalt be a wholehearted Christian.

That's the law. I know there are people who come to missionary work with certain Christian organizations on that basis. And I think they're the most miserable, most unhappy people.

They'd be far better off going and doing some other secular work because they're trying to live under the old covenant. There's only one basis on which we can serve the Lord. I love my master.

I will not go out free. I said that to the Lord 40 years ago, and I have fought a battle through the years to keep on saying that to the Lord year after year after year. And it's brought rest into my life.

As I said, I'm not in competition with anyone. I praise God for every ministry. Some I don't agree with, but Christ is being preached.

Some souls are being saved. Praise the Lord. I rejoice.

I can fully understand what Paul said when he said Christ is being preached out of envy. Well, praise the Lord. Christ is being preached.

Somebody's getting saved. I'm not here to criticize another person who does it in a different way. In the days of unrest, there's a lot of this criticism.

Everybody must do it my way. Thou shalt because I had laws for myself and I had laws for other people. But we finish with all that.

I want to encourage you, dear brothers and sisters, come up higher. It's an invitation. It's not thou shalt go up higher.

It's an invitation. The Lord wants us to do the same thing we're doing, but from a completely different motivation, from a completely different standpoint. Come up higher from a position of rest.

There is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest near to the heart of God, a place where temptations to jealousy, competition, backbiting, criticism, tearing down others, pulling down others, trying to show that I'm better and trying to impress, cannot molest near to the heart of God. There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people and any of us can enter it. It's not a matter of time.

You don't have to be a believer for 20 years. It says, let us strive to enter into this rest. That's what Hebrews 4 says.

Lest any of us fail, lest any of us get so occupied with serving. Oh, there's a need, there's a need. We got to work.

Six days is not enough. We got to work the seventh day as well. God says, come to rest.

Your life will be far more effective if you serve me from a place of rest, says the Lord. Let's seek with all our hearts to enter in. The Holy Spirit has come to bring us to rest.

There's a lovely verse in Isaiah 63, I think it says, the Spirit of God led him to rest. Isaiah 63 verse 14, the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. That's what the Holy Spirit's come for.

Let's pray. Jesus says, come to me, those who are weary and heavy laden, trying to live up to a certain standard that you can never attain to, trying to impress, trying to achieve something. Let your work remain as a memorial long after you're gone.

The Lord says, give up all that. Let's come to rest in me. Just love me and do what you can.

You're not in competition with anyone. Heavenly Father, help us all. We're a needy people.

We live in a world full of unrest. Help us to demonstrate to this ungodly generation that life of rest you called us to. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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The Lord bless you richly.

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