

Disengage

"Seasoning the Spirit" Series, August 16 & 17, 2025 | Exodus 16:22-30

Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

Disengaging does not come easily to me.

I turned down a chance to study with Dallas Willard because it required me to be silent for a weekend.

Dallas Willard's name may or may not mean anything to you, but he is an author, philosopher, and theologian who has deeply influenced my life.

While I was doing doctoral work, I had a chance to take a class with Dallas.

But it involved a two-week residency with a 48-hour silent retreat in the middle.

At that point in my life, I couldn't stand the thought of being without people or of being alone with my own thoughts for that long. So, I didn't take the class.

Disengaging like that makes my sin nature scream.

But as we think about God the Master Chef cultivating the flavors of heaven in us, I am reminded that a good steak needs to rest five minutes after cooking before it is eaten.

Last week, some of you wondered how much I cook. Not much.

But I do like to grill. Some things. I particularly like to grill steak.

And I've learned about steak that resting makes a lot of difference.

Steak is best if it comes to room temperature before you cook it.

And steak needs five minutes to rest after you take it off the heat if you want it to be at its best.

The steak keeps cooking for a little while, and the juices start to settle.

Disengaging can be as important as engaging when it comes to cooking, and the same is certainly true as God seasons our spirits.

Disengaging can pull against a tug inside of us that turns "I want" into "I need."

Our list of wants always grows.

If we reach the corner office, we want the upstairs corner office.

If we travel the country, we want to travel the world.

We want more food, more entertainment, more love, more respect.

We even do this to our kids! Rarely are we satisfied without a state championship, an elite college, and a big scholarship.

Pretty soon, we convince ourselves that we don't just WANT more. We NEED more.

We can't survive without more. So, we end up living lives that are out of control.

Disengaging says "no" to that tug inside of us and starts pulling in another, better direction.

Disengaging can put us in the place where God can season our spirits.

God is like a Master Chef, taking the raw ingredients of our lives, adding the seasoning of the Holy Spirit and the heat of life experiences to make us into finished dishes flavored like heaven.

Last week, we said that engaging in some practices puts us in God's kitchen.

Disengaging can be an even more direct route to the Master Chef's stove.

We disengage to rest.

In Exodus 16:22-23, God provides so that Sabbath rest can happen.

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' "

God had recently rescued the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt in miraculous fashion.

He was leading them through the wilderness where food and water were scarce.

God provided food for them miraculously. Each evening, quail would fly into camp. Each morning, sweet bread called manna would appear on the ground like dew. The people would gather it to eat, but if they kept some for the next day, by the morning it would be rotten.

Except on the sixth day of the week. God told the people on the sixth day of the week to gather twice as much as they needed and to set it aside for the next day.

Miraculously, it did not rot overnight. Their food needs were met on the seventh day without work, so they could rest.

Sabbath is the gift of rest.

On the Sabbath, God's people were commanded not to work.

It's not a rest that says, "I need to get back to work." Instead, it's the rest that says, "God has provided, and all is well."

Sabbath is a command in the Bible, but as Jesus reminded us, the Sabbath is a gift.

Imagine being an escaped Hebrew slave in the wilderness. You have worked every day for most of your life with few breaks. All of your labor went to provide a lifestyle for someone else. Now, you are given a day with no work. A day to rest. Would you be able to contain your joy?

That's what Sabbath rest is like!

On Sunday afternoons, I nap.

After preaching, napping comes easily to me. I know not everyone can nap, but I like to nap, and on Sunday afternoon, I usually don't set an alarm. I have slept three hours straight before.

That part of resting comes easily to me, but when I wake up, I like to get back to work.

Occasionally, I've mowed my lawn on Sunday afternoons. I like to sit on the back of my lawn tractor and mow. It's relaxing to me. But, if I'm honest, I'm not doing it to rest. I'm doing it because I didn't get it done the rest of the week. I don't feel very good about that.

Legalism has no place in our Sabbath observances. But neither do excuses.

Sabbath is an invitation to rest. Disengaging means truly setting something aside.

Disengaging may not come easily, but it is natural.

When He created, God worked for six days, creating heaven and earth, everything, and us.

Then on the seventh day, He rested and said that human beings were to do the same—work six days and rest the seventh.

That is His nature, and we are created in His image, so it is our nature, too.

After being clear about Sabbath-keeping, God said why in the Ten Commandments, in **Exodus 20:11**:

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

It's a matter of holiness and a matter of our nature. We may think that constantly toiling is our true nature, but it isn't. Sabbath is our true nature.

What would Sabbath rest do to your Monday morning?

Of course, having rested one day a week would make Monday much, much better!

But resting one day a week would mean changes to every other day, too.

Having a day of rest a week means being prepared for it.

And having a day of rest a week also means disengaging from some other things along the way that also have to go. Which would leave us much, much healthier. Much, much more human. And much, much more seasoned with the flavors of heaven.

We disengage to trust God.

God was teaching Israel to trust Him.

He provided them with food each day, but it would not last overnight.

Then on the sixth day, He provided them with twice the food and a promise it would last.

That's on top of miraculously delivering them from Egypt.

And it's on top of providing them with water in a waterless place, protection, and His presence.

The Master Chef had the Israelites in His kitchen, seasoning their spirits with trust.

Sabbath-keeping still applies to Christians, just in fresh ways.

You might think that Sabbath-keeping is a tradition that doesn't apply to Christians, as is the case with things like dietary laws. However, Sabbath-keeping is one of the Ten Commandments. It applies, but how?

We keep Sabbath on the first day of the week because that's when Jesus rose from the dead.

And we avoid becoming either legalistic or so loose that we miss what God meant for us.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day..." We are called to disengage.

But it turns out that there were some self-reliant people in Israel we easily recognize.

They saw everything God provided and heard everything.

Still, when the seventh day came, they went out to gather manna.

And let's be honest—we get it! If we were there, that might be us! We trust—in ourselves.

Disengaging makes it difficult to maintain the illusion that we're self-reliant.

Disengaging in ways like keeping the Sabbath means that we trust God and His provision.

We are no longer relying on ourselves exclusively, and it's hard to be proud when you are relying on someone else! Disengaging is good for the soul!

We disengage to hunger for God.

God created space for Israel to hunger for Him.

God had set the table for the people of Israel.

He was frustrated that some refused to trust Him and His provision, but He re-affirmed that He had given them everything they needed. That's the essence of manna.

Then God made His will simple and clear: stay home on the seventh day.

Then we read in Exodus 16:30: So the people rested on the seventh day.

With their food needs met, it was a chance for everyone to sense their true hunger for God.

Wendell Berry writes that in Sabbath, we find what we most want.

Wendell Berry poetically celebrates the simple, authentic world around us.

He has written a number of poems about Sabbath, some of which have touched me deeply.

In one titled "Sabbaths 1999, VII", he talks about going into the forest on a Sabbath.

Berry writes, "...Even in me,
the Maker of all this
returns in rest, even
to the slightest of His works,
a yellow leaf slowly
falling, and is pleased."¹

In the small details of an unhurried moment, we can find God.

Otherwise, we are unconsciously accepting what Wayne Muller calls "some horrific wonderland."

Wayne Muller does not write from an exclusively Christian point of view, but he looks at the Bible and at culture, and he sees that we are missing something.

He calls human beings to find a type of oasis of sacred time, like the Sabbath.

Otherwise, he writes, our souls are shredded by life as we experience it.

His examples are dated, and you can't help but think of cell phones and social media as making the problem more profound, but listen to what he writes:

When we are in the world with our eyes wide open, the seductions are insatiable. Hundreds of channels of cable and satellite television; phones with multiple lines and call-waiting, begging us to talk to more than one person at a time; mail, e-mail and overnight mail; fax machines; billboards; magazines; newspapers; radio. For those of us with children, there are endless soccer practices, baseball games, homework, laundry, housecleaning, errands. Every

¹ <https://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/Poets/B/BerryWendell/Sabbaths1999/index.html>

responsibility, every stimulus competes for our attention: Buy me. Do me. Watch me. Try me. Drink me. It is as if we have inadvertently stumbled into some horrific wonderland.²

That captures our world. In some ways, it's a wonderland; in others, it's horrific.

In calling us to Sabbath, God invites us to a life that is wholly other and wholly better.

Sabbath is a time to worship in the fullest sense, not just to stop work.

We stop work in order to come into God's presence.

Yes, we come together into God's presence and worship. That's public worship.

But our time of rest also empties our agendas and clears our minds so we can focus on Him.

When we focus on God, He is already there in the moment, waiting for us.

As our loving Father in Heaven, He wants to be with us.

We encounter Him—His glory and holiness. And we are reminded that we want nothing more!

Augustine of Hippo reminded us that we have an insatiable appetite for God.

He wrote, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." – *Confessions*

I haven't always understood it, but that's what my spirit longs for. That's my deepest longing.

That's what your spirit longs for, even when you can't name it.

Disengaging helps us to recognize what we miss when we're trapped in a horrific wonderland.

We disengage from distractions to engage with God.

When God invites us to disengage, He is calling us away from normal life, routines, and distractions.

God calls us away from the wonderland so that we can see and remember that it's horrific.

He calls us away from our daily routines so that we can experience His wonder.

He calls us away from the distractions that surround us to be with Him.

You might try any of these four classic ways to disengage: Sabbath, fasting, simplicity, and confession.

Sabbath is what we've been talking about today, and it is an important way to disengage, but it is only one way to disengage.

Fasting is when we disengage from eating regularly for a season so that we might focus on God. When we fast, our hunger for food powerfully reminds us of our hunger and need for God. Plus, there are lots of ways to fast. You might consider fasting from technology, for instance. Imagine the time that would free up and the hunger for God that would awaken!

Simplicity is disengaging from consumption so that we might live more generous lives. Simplicity declutters our lives to create space for God.

² https://www.waynemuller.com/cool_stuff/wednesdays/whatever_happened_to_sunday (Adapted from Sabbath: Remembering the Sacred Rhythm of Rest and Delight, by Wayne Muller. Copyright ©1999 by Wayne Muller. Bantam Books, a division of Random House Inc.)

Confession is when we leave our sins behind so that we might be pure before God and not carry a burden of guilt around with us.

There are resources in the lobby to help you learn more about all of these disengaging practices and more. Is there one that God is calling you toward today?

Psalms 42 reminds us that we don't just hunger for God; we thirst for Him. Verses one and two say:

As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God?

Summer reminds us that there are times when we are hot, sweaty, and desperately thirsty. Plunging into a cool pool of fresh water when we're hot and thirsty helps in a way to understand how our spirits long for the presence of God.

But there is a quieter kind of thirst that strikes us at times as well. Sometimes when we're thirsty, our bodies don't know exactly what's going on. We think we're hungry instead and look for food when what we need is water. Dieters know that hydrating helps.

We do the same kind of thing with God. Our spirits are thirsty, longing for God, but sometimes our brains tell us that we want something else—more success, more excitement, more companionship, more, more, more.

Underneath, what we want—what we need—is God. My soul, my spirit thirsts for God. Even when I can't hear my spirit speaking to me.

The point of disengaging from distractions is to engage with God.

Disengaging itself isn't really the point. Sabbath, fasting, simplicity, and confession all have direct benefits for us, but that's not really why we engage in these kinds of disciplines.

When we disengage, we are systematically silencing the voices that mask our need for God.

We disengage so that we can hear and follow the longing inside us for God and so we can engage directly and deeply with God. That's what our spirits long for.

If I could go back in time, I would take that class with Dallas Willard and do that silent retreat. Eagerly.

I've learned a lot about myself since the time in my life when I turned down that opportunity.

I've probably grown up a little bit, too.

I'm more comfortable in my own skin. More comfortable with myself. More comfortable in silence. Because that is the space where I can focus on the voice of my Father and Creator.

That's when I can engage more deeply with Him. I pray the same blessing for you.