

Sabbath

Romans 14:5-6 - One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord.

Mark 2:27 - Jesus said, "Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"

Exodus 31:16-17 - The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

Matthew 11:28 - Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Mark 6:31 - Jesus said, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

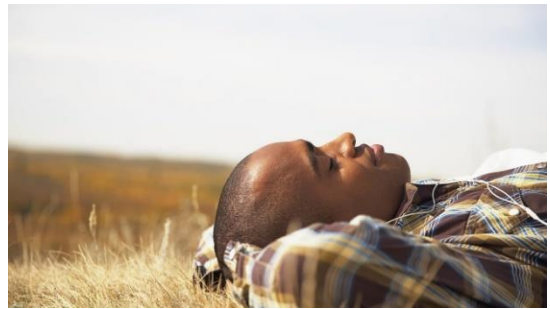


The Real Reason We Don't Take Time for Rest ... and It's a Core Spiritual Issue

By Mark Brouwer from lastingleaders.com

"Sabbath ceasing means to cease not only from work itself, but also from the need to accomplish and be productive, from the worry and tension that accompany our modern criterion of efficiency, from our efforts to be in control of our lives as if we were God, from our possessiveness and our enculturation, and, finally, from the humdrum and meaninglessness that result when life is pursued without the Lord at the center of it all."

- Marva J. Dawn



Doing service in the world -- whether it's ministry in a church context, volunteering in your community, or doing work that makes a positive difference in people's lives -- is fulfilling and rewarding. Engaging our talents to serve others and meet needs brings a sense of purpose, and when we see positive things happening, an unmatched sense of satisfaction and joy. But it can also bring its own challenges. The work can be exciting and fulfilling, but sometimes it's just too much.

In Jewish and Christian teaching, an important antidote to the stress, anxiety, and fatigue of our busy lives is the observance of Sabbath: taking one day each week for rest and spiritual renewal. The well-lived life is built around a rhythm -- an oscillation -- between whole-hearted engagement and work, tempered with times of disengagement and rest. The writer of Genesis portrays this pattern of work and rest as something built into the very fabric of creation itself.

Whenever I talk about this practice of observing the Sabbath, one question or concern always comes up. In various forms, people express this fear: *"If I were to take a whole day off from working, how could I get everything done?"* In other words, "I'm busy enough as it is and struggle to get everything done when I'm working seven days. How could I get it all done in six days?"

This question gets to the heart of the matter. The decision to live with a rhythm of work and rest requires us to accept the limitations of our energy and productivity ... but it also forces us to deal with our anxiety. What will happen if I don't do "X" tomorrow because tomorrow is a time set aside for rest, renewal, and spiritual reconnection? Spiritually speaking, it's a matter of trust. This is true about taking time in the morning or evening for spiritual reconnection through prayer, meditation, and Scripture reading ... it's also manifestly true about observing a weekly Sabbath.

I used to respond to people's anxieties about Sabbath by saying, *"If living with rhythm by observing Sabbath is something that God wants you to do, don't you think God will help you? It's a spiritual principle ... if you follow this teaching, God will help you get more done in six days than you would in seven."*

I still agree with that, but these days I have a more straightforward answer: **Try it.** You don't have to believe me. Just try it and see for yourself.

Observe Sabbath for at least a month and watch what happens. I promise you will:

- (a) notice that you have an increased sense of well-being
- (b) not notice a drop-off in productivity

If that doesn't happen, stop listening to me -- and other teachers like me who advocate for Sabbath-keeping -- and go back to your old habits. It's that simple.

I have some experience with this. There have been times I've found myself drifting away from Sabbath-keeping when the demands on my time have piled up. At some point, I realize what's happening and recommit myself to this practice. Those two promises have held true in my life every time. I've also seen them work in the lives of people I counsel. I've taught this a lot over the years ... and made these promises to many people. No one has ever come back to tell me it didn't work.

SABBATH-REST IS AN ACT OF FAITH

Do we really commit ourselves to self-renewal? Do we really believe that God wants us to do this, and that God will help us get everything done? Sabbath keeping is really a discipline. It's a matter of trust. Trusting that, even if I'm not working to "make things happen" and to finish all this important work that is mine to do, God will be at work. There's always more we should be doing, so we are forced to trust.

I'd like to end with an extended quote from William Britton. In this section he talks about the spiritual requirement of "patient waiting." What he says here gets to the heart of this issue of trusting in God by observing Sabbath, rather than feeling the need to always keep working, to keep trying to control things, move things along:

"Simone Weil considered patient waiting to be 'the foundation of the spiritual life.' And John Ortberg condemns hurry, which is the rejection of patient waiting, as 'the great enemy of the spiritual life.' Obviously, for me to flourish spiritually will require that I learn to wait, and like with anything else, that will require practice.

"I can practice waiting as I refuse to take matters into my own hands (being controlling or vengeful)—and instead wait on God to do as God sees fit. I can practice waiting as I refuse to indulge in despair or cynicism—instead looking for evidence of God's coming yet present Kingdom. I can practice waiting as I refuse to forge ahead when I don't know what to do—admitting my limitations and need for help. (From the outside my waiting may look like doing nothing—but really it's creating a space for God to do what only God can do.)

"I can practice waiting as I refuse to give in to temptation—refusing to insist on what I want, or feel I need—trusting the one who knows better than me what I need. I can practice waiting as I refuse to complain bitterly (or worse) curse angrily—reminding myself that things aren't necessarily supposed to go as I planned. I can 'sit tight' in anticipation of something transcendent—something that transcends my oh-so-important strategy.

"I can practice waiting as I refuse to make happiness my primary motivation for the day. God invariably has something better than happiness in mind for me—and it's not about me anyway.

Finally, I can practice waiting as I refuse to worry. I can remind myself that God is always at work for good, that my worrying won't add anything to that, that my rushing ahead will only make a mess and create a lot of needless anxiety."

- William Britton

I write and speak at events as director of Renew Resources. I also am leader and teacher at Loop Church in Chicago. If you're ever in the area, come join us on a Sunday morning! Places to find my writing:

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