

Swoboda, A. J., *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2018)

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The Sabbath commandment begins with an odd word: it tells us to “remember.” Don’t forget how good it is to rest in the Lord, to be loved by the Lord, to hear his heartbeat. (p viii)

Religion is hostile to gifts. Religion hates free stuff. Religion squanders the good gifts of God by trying to earn them, which is why we will never really enjoy a sacred day of rest as long as we think our religion is all about earning.

This is nothing new: hostility toward the Sabbath has flowed in the church’s and the world’s blood for a long time. Many early church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, saw the Sabbath day as punishment for the Jews, who he believed needed a day of obedience to be reminded of their depravity. (p x)

A Sabbath proves an awkward fit in our fast-paced, work-drunk, production-obsessed world. Yet whatever skepticism we harbor toward Sabbath, such disdain is not shared by the Bible, Jesus, or much of church history. God’s story has fundamentally been a story about a simple gift of a day of rest. (p xi)

Theology cannot save anyone. It can only point us to the One who saves. Theology as such is only useful to the degree that it delivers us into formed people who know how to worship God and love people. (p xii)

Don’t underestimate the value of Doing Nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can’t hear, and not bothering. – Winnie-the-Pooh in *The Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh* (p 3)

Christian philosopher Dallas Willard agrees: “We live at the mercy of our ideas.” (Willard, Dallas, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999, 10)) Christ followers, for this reason, must awaken to their calling to critically examine each and every idea, eschewing any false security within the safe harbor of anti-intellectualism. We must, as Paul admonishes, “take captive” any idea opposed to Christ’s work (2 Cor. 10:5) with the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). As John writes we “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1). Avoidance of critically examining our ideas, in the end, is the worst (and least Christian) idea of them all.

Sometimes humanity lives its worst ideas and forgets its best ideas. In Scripture, God’s people often forget the ideas of God. (p 4)

So time poverty and burnout have become the signs that the minority church remains serious about God in a world that has rejected him. Because we pastors rarely practice Sabbath, we rarely preach the Sabbath. And because we do not

preach the Sabbath, our congregations are not challenged to take it seriously themselves. The result of our Sabbath amnesia is that we have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history. (p 5)

Our bodies wear ragged. Our spirits thirst. We have an inability to simply sit still and *be*. (p 5)

Diana Butler Bass draws a connection between God's rhythm and ours: "Our bodies move to a rhythm of work and rest that follows the rhythm originally strummed by God on the waters of creation. As God worked, so shall we; as God rested, so shall we. Working and resting, we who are human are in the image of God." (Butler Bass, Diana, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000, 48)) To image God is to work and rest as God worked and rested. (p 7)

To be a Christian was, and is, to reorient one's entire life and death around Jesus Christ. Sabbath is an orientation as well – an all-encompassing turning toward the Creator God that changes everything about our lives. Sabbath is that kind of complete reorientation of our lives toward the hope and redemption of Christ's work.

Sabbath baptizes our week into the grace and mercy of God. (p 9)

Theologian Henri Blocher writes, "Nobody reading the panoramic prologue of Genesis can miss the structural fact which gives the text its most obvious arrangement: the framework of the seven days." (Blocher, Henri, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, trans. David G. Preston Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984, 39)) That is, the framework of seven days is rich with divine intention. (p 10)

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, with God, an imperative is an indicative. (Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004, 42)) That is, what God commands us to *do* tells us something of who God *is*. God invites us to rest. And God rests. Are we stronger or wiser or better than God? As the creation story reminds us, the need for rest is built into the genetic makeup of the universe, and ignorance of such is like humanity trying to genetically modify the whole universe. We should learn from France – God's rhythms can never be tinkered with. As H. H. Farmer once said, "If you go against the grain of the universe, you get splinters." (Farmer, H. H., quoted in Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 200, 109)) (p 11)

But even if we *did* vacation well and took great amounts of time off for restorative rest, vacations are a poor substitute for a weekly day of Sabbath rest. I think the devil loves taking that which is of God and giving us cheap knockoffs. When God invents sugar, the devil makes Sweet'N Low. When God makes sex, the

devil comes up with adultery. The devil always twists the goodness of God. The Bible is silent on vacations. Why? Because if we keep a weekly Sabbath, we would not need vacations. Vacations are what Jürgen Moltmann has called the “Coca-Cola philosophy” of Western life. (Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Passion for Life: A Messianic Lifestyle* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1978, 70-71)) In the 1990s, Coca-Cola had a well-known campaign depicting people doing hard work, then popping open a cold bottle of Coke and taking a swig. We yearn for the “pause that refreshes.” Unfortunately, we try to refresh ourselves with empty calories, or vacations, which are not what we really need. Our souls stir, longing for Sabbath. Not for the fills of a can of saccharine drink, a sugary vacation. (p 18)

A biblical Sabbath is a day when we are spatially, and emotionally, not at work. “Days off” are actually, in the words of Eugene Peterson, “bastard Sabbaths.” (Peterson, Eugene, “The Good-for-Nothing Sabbath,” *Christianity Today*, April 4, 1994, 34) They are days when we are technically at home but really at work. This cultural crisis has led the French government to undertake drastic measures to outlaw employers from sending work emails after hours, barring an emergency. (Ibid) A business now faces stiff penalties if it requires employees to work when they are to rest. A day-off cannot sustain the human soul. Only a Sabbath can. By contrast, Sabbath is a day when our hearts are at rest from striving, doing, producing, and – most important – responding to emails. A Sabbath day is not merely stopping our work; it is also stopping our thinking and scheming about work. (p 19)

We do not love God because God is useful to us. We love God because God is worthy of being loved. “God is interesting,” writes Gunton, “in and of himself.” (Gunton, Colin E., *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM, 2002, 7)) Or to echo Karl Barth: “God is.” (Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1m ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957, 257)) (p 19)

Gerald May once lamented how a pragmatic culture often treats the Sabbath: “we know we need to rest, but we can no longer see the value of rest as an end in itself; it is only worthwhile if it helps us to recharge our batteries.” (May, Gerald G., *The Awakened Heart: Opening Yourself to the Love You Need* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991, 94-95) Sabbath is something enjoyed for its own sake, inviting us to play. And play is not undertaken to accomplish; it is undertaken for its own sake. Dorothy Sayers once argued that most legalistic Sabbath-keepers had added to “Thou shalt not work” the phrase “Thou shalt not play.” (Sayers, Dorothy L, *The Whimsical Christian: 18 Essays* (New York: Collier Books, 1978, 152)) God never outlaws Sabbath play. On the contrary, Sabbath is time for creation to play In the world of God once again – as re-creation. Sabbath is the celebration of God’s life and his work in our lives. But our overproductive lives have no space for play or celebration. Years ago, Harvard theologian Harvey Cox argued that the death of God in our culture related in some way to the fact that we no longer celebrate, or integrate festivity, in our culture. That is, our celebration deficit is part of our loss of God in culture. And when festivity and play ended, argued Cox, culture and

community began to erode at their very core. (Cox, Harvey, *Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969)) (p 20)

But the Sabbath is not a form of indulgent individualism dressed in religious piety. Sabbath is about delighting in God for his sake and the sake of the world. Marva Dawn has said that Sabbath is about four things: ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting. (The overall theme of Dawn, Marva, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*) It is in Sabbath the we enjoy, we delight, we relish in the goodness and generativity of God. We play. We feast, We rest, We echo with God, “It is good!” And in our Sabbath play, we discover that to play is to pray. (Peterson, Eugene H., *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987, 75-77)) Hear the words of Donna Schaper: “Sabbath keeping is a spiritual strategy: it is a kind of judo. The world’s commands are heavy; we respond with light moves. The world says work; we play. The world says go fast; we go slow. These light moves carry Sabbath into our days, and God into our lives.” (Schaper, Donna, *Sabbath Keeping* (Boston: Cowley, 1999, xii)) (p 21)

The pancakes are essential. I read at one point that some Jewish fathers, on the morning of the Sabbath, would give their children a spoon of honey. What a beautiful tradition! The idea was simple: that they would always remember the sweetness of the Sabbath for the rest of their lives. It is similar to the way the earliest Christians took Communion: with milk and honey. This symbolism was to remind them that in Christ they had come to the promised land. That is my hope – that when I am dead and gone and my boy is all grown up, if anyone even whispers the word *Sabbath* around my son, he will just start drooling. It is a Pavlovian experiment of the highest order.

Nathaniel Hawthorne once wrote that the Sabbath sunshine was unlike any other sunshine during the week – that sunshine is a “shadow of great truths.” (Hawthorne, Nathaniel, “Sunday at Home,: in *Twice-Told Tales* (n.p: Renaissance Classics, 2012, 10) Pancakes are a shadow of great truths.

All are welcome in, friends. The Sabbath awaits. Come and delight in it.  
I can almost see you drooling. (p 22)

Six days a week the spirit is alone, disregarded, forsaken, forgotten. Working under strain, beset with worries, enmeshed in anxieties, man has no mind for ethereal beauty. But the spirit is waiting for man to join in. Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (p 25)

“Achievement,” once wrote Mary Bell, :is the alcohol of our time.” (Quoted in Keller, Timothy, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* ( New York: Dutton, 2009, 74)) Work is our drug, our numbing agent, escape hatch, and anesthetizing behavior. Achievement makes us feel the semblance of some glow of heightened, idolized identity where we are what we do. In this modern world, we have become addicts to doing, making, producing, and accomplishing. Our modern dogma is that of Batman:

“It’s not who you are underneath. It’s what you do that defines you.” (*Batman Begins*, directed by Christopher Nolan (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005) How did it come to this? Why has our work taken center stage in our lives? (p 28)

Sin, in the words of Sandra Richter, causes work to become about “perspiration-inducing fear.” (Richter, Sandra L., *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008, 111)) Humanity ceases to work as God intended and starts to worry about its work identity. (p 30)

I could love others only to the extent that I could recognize God’s love for me. I could see to the needs of my community only to the extent that I admitted my own needs. I could care for God’s people only to the extent that I would allow him to care for me. In forgetting all this, I had neglected to care for the body God had given me, the spirit he breathed into me, this soul that he molded with his own hand. (p 33)

In our 24/7 world, I have never once seen someone *accidentally* keep a Sabbath. Sabbath is an action of great purpose, one that demands feisty intentionality. It requires us to live in a rhythm that squarely opposes the dangerous pulse and the habits of our world. Sabbath-keeping is not just a small vignette in the Bible. Page after page, story after story, book after book Sabbath comes to us. This is not a minor motif in the story of the Bible – it is one of the greatest themes of the Bible. Sabbath is not extra credit. It is a commandment, not a suggestion. (p 33)

Workaholism, in the end, is the result of our sense of self not fully coming into the light of Christ. Workaholism is very different from alcoholism – for the alcoholic there is no slowly reintegrating alcohol into their life after getting clean. They must go cold turkey; there can only be a clean break. Workaholism is different. For a workaholic, the issue becomes learning to live rightly in relationship to work. A workaholic will most likely have to get back to work. As for my work, studies continue to reveal that pastoral burnout is connected to the pastor’s sense of being and worthiness. I became a workaholic chiefly because I had not allowed the grace of Jesus to reside in the depths of the caverns of my soul. I even used to think the Sabbath was a break from ministry. Now I see Sabbath *as* ministry. It frees people. It helps others in the church. It establishes boundaries. And, above all, it proclaims the good news of Jesus. As I read Peterson, one question came back to me over and over again: How can I preach salvation by grace when my life is built on an altar of workaholism? (Peterson, Eugene, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, 66)) (p 34 – when I consistently overwork, I am denying the presence and reach of the grace of God)

We were not created just to work.  
Work is not our Ultimate. (p 34)

Rabbi Heschel ponders this very question: “Is it possible for a human being to do all his work in six days? Does not our work always remain incomplete?” (Heschel, *Sabbath*, 32) The Sabbath reminds us that nothing that is worth doing can be fully

achieved in one day. Indeed, our work is always incomplete. By the grace of God, Sabbath is not the result of all the work being done. Mark Buchanan brilliantly touches on this:

The rest of God – the rest God gladly gives so that we might discover that part of God we’re missing – is not a reward for finishing. It’s not a bonus for work well done. It’s sheer gift. It is a stop-work order in the midst of the work that’s never complete, never polished. Sabbath is not the break we’re allotted at the tail end of completing all our tasks and chores, the fulfillment of all our obligations. It’s the rest we take smack-dab in the middle of them, without apology, without guilt, and for no better reason than God told us we could. (Buchanan, Mark, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006, 93))

(p 36)

Early on, I experienced something extraordinary and unusual in my Sabbath-keeping. When I skipped a Sabbath, my week would go by in the blink of an eye, and I would be far less productive. It seems counterintuitive: the more days I had to work, the less I accomplished. But when I *did* Sabbath, it was as though God stretched my time. I once heard that some Jewish mystics believed that when we take a day of rest, as a gift, God literally stretches our time on the six days we do not work. I don’t know exactly how it works, but I can say from experience that it was almost as though God was finishing my work. He was putting the finishing touches on that which I had been doing all week long. It was as though God were multiplying the fish and the loaves of my work. Not only would there be enough – it was like there were leftovers. (p 37)

The ultimate work is the work of God in our lives. Martin Luther writes of Sabbath, “The spiritual rest which God especially intends in this commandment is that we not only cease from our labor and trade but much more – that we let God alone work in us and that in all our powers we do nothing of our own.” (Luther, Martin, “Treatise on Good Works,” in *The Christian in Society I*, trans. W. A. Lambert, rev. James Atkinson, vol. 44 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966, 72)) Sabbath is the day that we rest in God’s presence even when our to-do lists are not even close to done. We choose to enter rest even before the work is complete. Why? Sabbath is not a reward for a job well done. Sabbath is the result of a world that is oriented toward a good and generous and loving God. (As Gordon MacDonald writes, “We do not rest because our work is done; we rest because God commanded it and created us to have a need for it.” MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private Word* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003, 174)) (p 38)

Discerning the difference between a legitimate Sabbath emergency and something that can wait for an art form acquired over time. (p 41)

Again, Sabbath is ministry. My Sabbath-keeping helps others learn to minister to one another. (p 41)

More than the Jews have kept *Shabbat*, *Shabbat* has kept the Jews. Jewish saying, in Nina Beth Cardin, *The Tapestry of Jewish Time* (p 43)

The Sabbath is God's stand against the tyranny of always having to say yes. The Sabbath is God's gift of a no to us in our obsessive, compulsive pattern of living. The Sabbath is God's solution to FOMO anxieties. On the Sabbath we are "in" because we are *with* Jesus Christ. God is with us. And the world does not define us. We are never at its center anyway. The Sabbath, it turns out, is mentioned fifty-eight times in the Bible. God repeatedly invites us to say no to the world that we might say yes to God. (p 44)

Corrie ten Boom once wrote, "If the devil cannot make us bad, he will make us very busy." (ten Boom, Corrie: 10 Quotes from the Author of *The Hiding Place*," *Christian Today*, April 15, 2016, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/corrie.ten.boom.10.quotes.from.the.author.of.the.hiding.place/84034.htm>) Be they relational, occupational, or church responsibilities, we are each faced with a thousand daily choices about what we will and will not give our time and energy to. (p 44)

The root sin of busyness is sloth – that laziness of spirit in which the muscles of intention of discernment and boundary have atrophied. In sloth, we refuse to do "what we are created to do as being made in the image of God and saved by the Cross of Christ." (Peterson, Eugene, "Confessions of a Former Sabbath Breaker," *Christianity Today*, September 1988, 25. Peterson argues that the root sin of Sabbath-breaking is sloth) Sloth of spirit is the inability to say no and have boundaries. The Sabbath straightens up our spirits and awakens us from the lull of the eternal yes. Therefore, a no is the language of intention. No one accidentally says no these days. Except for laziness, a no actually comes from a place of self-knowledge, of self-restraint, of self-awareness. For the Christian, a no should be spoken with the discernment of what God has spoken yes over. We must be sensitive to what God has called us to in order to be free to say no to other prospects. We must have ground in our week that is fallow, free from commitments, free of obligations, a place where life can flourish. A no creates healthy margin in our lives. Have you said no to someone today? (p 45)

Being a Sabbath-keeper is basically the art of letting people down at a rate they can handle. There are times we cannot meet the needs of others. There are times we trust God to help others through others. Not every need represents God's will for our lives. How freeing! Sometimes we cannot do everything we desire, even if those desires are good and wholesome. Jesus is Lord – we are not. Paul had to learn that lesson through his Bithynia experience. If this remains true, we are freed from any kind of messiah complex that maintains that we must do something about everything. If Jesus said no, so can we. If the Spirit said no to Paul, the Spirit will probably say the same to us at some point along the way. (p 46)

But this is ministry done out of our own power, not resurrection power. "Sabbath ... is a little death," Barbara Brown Taylor once said. (Brown Taylor, Barbara, "Sabbath: A Practice in Death," video interview, 2:15, *The Work of the People*, <http://globalhealth.duke.edu/media/news/study-find-unique-positive-mental->

[health-factors-clergy](#)) The truthfulness of these words should ring true in our hearts, for they help us understand a little bit about what the Sabbath is all about. It is resting from striving. Sabbath wakes us out of solely existing to accomplish and compete. The life of Jesus, it turns out, brings full circle the Sabbath rest of God in creation. God rested on the seventh day when he created the world. Likewise, Jesus, as he re-created the world through his death and resurrection, rested on the seventh day – Holy Saturday. There, in a holy, borrowed grave, Jesus rested as his Father did at creation. Sabbath is, indeed, a little death, a secret station of the cross forgotten by culture and the church. It helps us embrace our finitude, humanness, and vulnerability. (p 47)

We submit to those rhythms of the One who knows us better than we know ourselves. “Only he who obeys a rhythm superior to his own is free,” writes Nikos Kazantzakis. (Kazantzakis, Nikos, *The Table of Inwardness: Nurturing Our Inner Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984, 78)) The Spirit is, in the words of Jesus. Life giving. ((John 6:63) As the Lord healed on the Sabbath in the Gospels, the gospel frees us to be healed by the Lord of the Sabbath. Sabbath brings about a new rhythm that is largely out of sync with the rhythms all around us. That is a good thing. The life of a Christian is not to be conformed to the patterns and timelines of the world. (p 47)

... as Henri Nouwen once suggested: “We aren’t rest-filled people who occasionally become restless. We are restless people who sometimes find rest.” The status quo of our lives is that we live in a Sabbath deficit. The result is that we sleep less, we are less interested in what other people have to say, and we have less gratitude. What if there is a direct connection between a Sabbath day and the biblical notion of peace? (p 48)

The words of Abraham Heschel ring true: “The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments.” (Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1951, 6)) (p 54)

Heaven is *why* we remain to serve the world around us. Heaven is not escapism. Neither is the Sabbath. Sabbath, if one desired, could easily be utilized as an escape hatch from reality. But it is not an escape from the chaos of our lives; rather, it is finding God in the chaos. The Sabbath is not a clever way to escape responsibility. It is not letting the world spin out of control into the oblivion of chaos. It is, however, taking a day to cease our work of trying to fix or control the world. We cannot “save” the world. To enjoy the Sabbath is to free ourselves from the temptation of total control over the world. To Sabbath is to crucify our desires for control over the world. (p 58)

Distress is the kind of stress that comes from our implicit belief that the future of the world depends on us saving it. Distress can be caused by thinking that if we were not here, continuing to work, fix, defend, end, or maintain, the world would not continue. These kind of stresses do not build us up; they tear us down emotionally. (p 58)



The Sabbath is an act of obedience to God to give up, for one day, carrying the burdens of the world and simply letting things be the way they are. When we enter the Sabbath, we become humbled by the fact that God cares far more for the broken world than we do. His lordship and care for the world do not cease when we choose to take a day to rest. We cannot help the world the way we are supposed to without moments of respite and holy indifference, when we turn our attention and compassion to the living God. (p 59)

But the Sabbath puts an end to that emotional crisis of compulsivity by protecting us from being enslaved to our instincts and impulses. If we had our way, we would continue to just do whatever we feel, “driven by every gust of enthusiasm;” to borrow from Lesslie Newbigin. (Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Good Shepherd: Mediations on Christian Ministry in Today’s World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, 111)) The Sabbath is a boycott against human compulsivity. (p 59)

Escapism is not altogether bad; it depends on what is being escaped. Sabbath is escapism from emotional slavery to our world, but it is not escapism from caring for the world. (p 60)

Our madly rushing, neurotic society needs the therapy of the silence and quietness that flows from a day kept holy, really holy. A day when our thoughts are of God, our actions are tempered by a desire to serve God and our families, a day that is so different from other days that it could make us different in our relationship to God and to our fellow men. Ernest R. Palezn, in Herbert E. Saunders, *The Sabbath* (p 65)

God’s intention for the Sabbath was, and is, that we would be drawn into the richness of community. (p 67)

Let me contrast these two kinds of community. A book club is a peg community. In this community, we gather with others around a shared commitment to something we all enjoy. As long as we like books and feel that the book club is delivering something beneficial to each of us, then the community will continue. A marriage, however, is an ethical community. I am in it :till death do us part.” If my wife were dying of cancer, I would stay. When things are hard, we work them out. We continue even when it is not the best emotional option. In peg community, I am in so long as it benefits me. In ethical community, however, we willingly give ourselves to a community whether it benefits us or not. Today, in a world where we can find whole communities of people who think like us, share our values, and have common likes, we are trading in our ethical relationships for peg relationships. The result is troubling. We do not really need to love anybody who is different if we do not feel like it. We can cower in the corner with all the people we agree with. (p 68)

The church is the church that Christ builds, not our shared interests. And we are called to live in covenant community where we live and die for each other. A peg

community is a place we go to feel alive. An ethical community is a place we go to die. (p 69)

The Sabbath is the gateway to God's dream community. (p 70)

But we fail to recognize that our absence is not the absence of God, and that God loves his church more than we do. Jesus is the head of his church. Sometimes, in order for God to accomplish what he wants to accomplish, he needs us to get out of the way. (p 73)

There is a terrific lesson about intentional absence in a little book by a missionary, Roland Allen, titled *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* Allen points out that when you examine the rhythms of Paul's pastoral life, he could easily be seen as one of the worst pastors in the world. Look at what Paul would do" he would start a church and then leave almost immediately to go elsewhere. But is this really Paul being a bad pastor? Allen makes a critical point about the life of Paul: Paul's absence was not a mistake or a sign of incompetent shepherding but was indeed intentional. Paul was aware that had he stayed, the new Christians would have soon begun to trust in Paul more than in the Holy Spirit. As a shepherd, Paul leaned on the Spirit in his absence. (This is the overall thesis of Roland Allen's revelatory text, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959)) (p 73)

A fanatic has been described as a person who, when unsure of his direction, doubles his speed. Charles Hummel, *Freedom from Tyranny of the Urgent* (p 83)

"Three days to look forward to Sabbath," Mains writes, "three days to reflect back on its wonder." (On this, see Pinchas H. Peli, *Shabbat Shalom: A Renewed Encounter with the Sabbath* (Washington, DC: B'nai B'rith Books, 1989, 77-78)) The entire workweek was set in this framework: we either find ourselves preparing for the next Sabbath of living in its glorious afterglow. Even the economy was Sabbathcentric – orbiting around the glory of God's day of Sabbath rest. (Chamberlain, Anne, "Israel on Rush, *Vogue*, July 1969, 11) (p 84)

"Prosperity," stresses Walter Brueggemann, "breeds amnesia." (as discussed through Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, esp. 71)) (p 87 – we forget, we become self-sufficient and we don't trust)

God never intended what he gave to us as a gift to become a tool of shame or guilt. The Sabbath is for us. We are not for the Sabbath. And in that reality we can experience freedom and joy. Remember Paul's words: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day" (Col. 2:16). Do not be judged, friend. Remember, no one has ever, save Jesus, kept a Sabbath perfectly. There is grace. Endless grace. All we have to do is "make every effort: to enter the Sabbath. (p 114-115)

My gut tells me that you will not be able to stop. In a decade of Sabbath-keeping, I have never met someone who *used to* Sabbath. Nor have I met someone who wished they had kept fewer Sabbaths. Once you start, you probably won't stop. It is profoundly life giving.

Change is hard. Do not expect Sabbath to come easily overnight. But the act of trying to do it is the most important thing. I taught a class once at a local university on ecopsychology, an area of study that relates ecology (the study of organisms in an environment) and psychology (the scientific study of the human mind). In the class, I presented some rather startling research on the relationship between our minds and the environment around us. The research asked what causes one to embrace a sustainable lifestyle. What the research revealed was that there is literally zero connection between formal education on the matter and caring for God's creation. That is, people did not begin to care for creation because they took a class on it or read a book about it. Rather, the most foundational thing that helped someone care for creation was their experience of actually doing it and being in creation. (Anja Killmuss and Jullian Agyeman, "Mind the Gap: Why Do People Act Environmentally and What Are the Barriers to Pro-environmental Behavior?," *Environmental Education Research* 8, no. 3 (2002): 239-60) The lesson: you cannot love something you do not personally know. The Sabbath cannot be loved as an idea: it must be loved in the doing. (p 115)

I love the Old African proverb "Truth is but a rumor until it lives in our bones." We must start to try truth – we must do it. How so we start keeping a Sabbath? Start here and start now. (p 116)

True life change comes by beginning to live out truth in a context of great grace.

"God's *kindness* is intended to lead you to repentance." Paul writes in Romans 2:4. Guilt trips do not lead to repentance. Neither does shame. Or more information. Repentance is the result of God's sheer grace and mercy alone – nothing else. .When you now you are loved even if you never change, then true change is possible. (p 116)

In the words of Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, "We have found that the men who know the most are the most gloomy." ("The Russell-Einstein Manifesto," Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, July 9, 1955, <https://pugwash.org/1955/07/09/statement-manifesto>) (p 127)

Sabbath dethrones humanity from its self-aggrandized place of lordship over creation by handing authority of the world back to the One to whom it already belongs. (p 127)

Compassion is feeling the pain of God in our guts and being moved to actually do something about it. In fact, I think our obsessive, overworked lives are situated in such a way that we do not have to feel the pain of the world. IN insulating

ourselves so, we do the world a disservice. We do what Douglas John Hall calls “psychic numbing” – we surround ourselves with activity to protect our hearts and minds from having to feel the compassion of Jesus for this world. (Hall, Douglas John, *The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, 37)) (p 129)

If you keep a bow always bent, it will break presently; but if you let it go slack, it will be the fitter for use when you want it. Aesop’s Fables (p 131)

I love that Harvey Cox translates the word *Sabbath* as “to catch one’s breath.” (This is pointed out in Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1992, 70)) (p 139)

... a dangerous lopsidedness. We have become modern-day gnostics who wrongly believe the invisible alone is good and the visible is bad. But God loved the *kosmos*, the world, the whole thing (John 3:16). I am convinced that separating the life of faith and the gospel from the realm of creation is precisely why creation groans as it does in our current ecological disaster – this separation has caused us to think that we are *above* the world, when in reality we are in it. We are placed here by God. And by refusing to integrate our love of Jesus with a passionate care for the world his Father created, we have envisioned chickens as mere egg-laying, meat-making machines for us to do with as we please.. But as my son would tell you, God is the maker of the chickens. God loves the chickens. And the Bible would agree: every creature God has made, God loves – so much so that God even has time to look after a sparrow.

The difference between humanity and the critters is that humans are moral beings. That is, we make decisions between right and wrong. The critters have no moral will. While animals do not have a responsibility to stand up to animal cruelties against humanity, humans *do* have a responsibility to stand up against cruelty toward animals.

Our chickens deserve our respect. I owe them my care and love. They need a day of rest just as much as I do. So on the Sabbath day, we do not bother our chickens. We do not collect any eggs on the Sabbath – we collect them the day before and the day after. We do not take any of their droppings for the garden. They get a day away from us. And I think they love it. I cannot say that they have ever verbally thanked us, but I can say that their eggs are always really, really tasty on the day *after* Sabbath. I think they like giving us a little extra as a thank-you. (p 156-157)

Submission to God is eternal rest. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (p 161)

The church is a place to learn how to rest. It is not the place we go to burn out. As I mentioned earlier, I used to get offended when someone fell asleep as I preached. Now that I am coming to appreciate the Sabbath, I have come to celebrate it. I love that someone could feel so at home, so safe, so welcome that

they can take a break and close their eyes during my sermon. It's a jungle out there. The church is a refuge. (p 166)

As the church enters Sabbath, it is embodying the rest of God for the world. And it is God's rest that the world needs. In the fourth century, St. Ambrose said that the church is like the moon: it has no light of its own; it simply reflects it. The church at rest is a sign pointing toward the risen Christ; it is not an end in and of itself. We are a light shining the life of Christ in a dark, tired world. Sabbath is countercultural living. IN a world where the overall sales of various energy drinks such as Monster Energy, Red Bull, and Rockstar have increased some 5,000 percent since 1999, embodying Sabbath will offer a witness and context for conversations of eternal importance with a broken, lost world. (Ferdman, Roberto O., "The American Energy Drink Craze in Two Highly Caffeinated Charts," *Quart*, March 26, 2014, <https://qz.com/192038/the-american-energy-drink-craze-in-two-highly-caffeinated-charts/>) (p 166)

I appreciate the words of Erin Lane: "Sabbath freedom is not the freedom to spend our time wisely. Instead, Sabbath freedom is the freedom to live large." (Lane, Erin S., *Lessons in Belonging from a Church-Going Commitment* (Phobe Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015, 93)) (p 170)

A well-spent Sabbath we feel to be a day of heaven upon earth. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, "I Love the Lord's Day (p 173)

That is what a discipline is – it is something we do consistently that changes our hearts and minds over time. This is reflected in Paul's admonition to "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14). What does it mean to put on Jesus Christ? The gist of what Paul commands is closely related to me dressing like a professor in order to become a professor. None of us are born into the world with the character of Jesus Christ. Character comes over time as we follow Christ. Disciplines are a way to "clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ." Disciplines, like worship, can include a variety of actions – prayer, fasting, contemplation, silence, service, reading Scripture. The hope is that by doing them our hearts are changed – that in dressing like Christ, we become like Christ. A discipline is putting on some attribute of Jesus in hopes that it changes the very makeup of our hearts and minds.

Sabbath is a discipline we put on. When we practice the Sabbath, it may feel a bit like we are putting on someone else's clothing. And indeed we are. Sabbath is foreign clothing – nay, heavenly clothing – and it may not fit for a while. But the hope is that, in doing it over a long period of time, it brings about real and substantive changes to our hearts, minds, and attitudes. In short, with a discipline, we dress for the character and virtue we *want*, not the character and virtue we *have*. Repetition has tremendous value for the formation of our hearts. (p 176 – there is no formation without repetition)

Architecture and topography and repetition became spiritual formation. As people made these journeys over and over and over again, the songs would have transformed their hearts. (p 176)

... as Marva Dawn puts it, “Sabbath rest is a foretaste of eternal life.” (Dawn, Marva, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 62) (p 184)

### **Sabbath and Discipleship**

There is perhaps no single thing that could better help us recover Jesus’ lordship in our frantic, power-hungry world than to allow him to be Lord of our rest as well as our work. Andy Crouch, *Playing God* (p 189)

Jesus never tried to hide his humanness. (p 189)

Vulnerability is a scary thing to look at. We can even feel repulsed by it – perhaps you feel that way thinking about God breastfeeding. But the vulnerability of others (particularly in Jesus) has the capacity to awake us to our own vulnerabilities. Flannery O’Connor once wrote about how the poor – the most vulnerable among us – wake up to our own needs by showing us a life that is not padded by material things and opulence. Most of us live with everything we need. We have food, shelter, and clothing. But the poor do not. They live, in O’Connor’s words, with “less padding between them and the raw forces of life” such as hunger, sleeplessness, and the cold night. (O’Connor, Flannery, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969, 132)) The vulnerable do not have the padding most of us do to protect us from the difficult forces of this world. (p 190)

Silence goes against what Henri Nouwen calls “the security of having something valuable to do.” (Nouwen, Henri, *Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006, 18)) Spending time in silence allows the things that crowd our existence to empty out. What effect does this have? Someone once described to me a lake that was being drained. When all the water was drained out, garbage and other debris were found at the bottom of the lake, which could then be leaned up. Silence is giving space to see what is at the bottom of our souls. (p 194)

... William Temple wrote that when we frame our entire lives on the love of God, we will be able to enter into rest. Before that, we will always struggle to rest. Temple writes, “That is the assurance that we need: that He with whom we know we have dealings is no e other than the eternal God. If my soul can hear that word, then it can rest...” (Temple, William, *Readings in St. John’s Gospel: First and Second Series* (New York: Morehouse Barlow, 1986, 67)) (p 194)

... this return to the love of God on the Sabbath can be a painful journey. Silence and presence often are painful. On the Sabbath, God helps us sort out our intentions and desires that lie in the foundations of our lives. Sabbath, for me, is

God's creative way of entirely undermining my overdeveloped drive to work, which is closely connected to my idolatrous desire to become famous. (p 195)

The Sabbath helps orient me back to the love of God by causing me to denunciate all my false desires. On the Sabbath, I cannot pretend to be anyone else before the living God. I have to be me. (p 195)

There are times God make us lie down. Embrace it. God is getting his loving way. One of God's greatest gifts is leading us into a scenario in which we are unable to resolve everything on our own. Unfixable situation are God's gift, for they force us to rest. (p 196)

Above all, Sabbath must be undertaken with great grace. Rigidity is not the solution. Whenever we see rigidity in the created realm, it is often a sign of death. As Gordon MacDonald writes, "There is no legalism here – rather a d=freedom to accept a gift. Frankly, I think some have destroyed the joy of Sabbath ... by surrounding it with prescriptive laws and precedents. That is no t our Sabbath. Our Sabbath was made for us, given to us by God. Its purpose is worship and restoration, and whatever it take to make that happen, we will do." (MacDonald, Gordon, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003, 204)) When rigidity rules, we become like the religious leaders in Matthew 12:9-14, who, when seeing the man with the withered hand healed, were so concerned that Jesus had audaciously healed on the Sabbath day that they were crippled from being able to experience the joy of the miracle. But Jesus does not obey the wishes of legalistic and hostile religious leaders. Despite Jesus's knowledge of their hearts, his desire is to bring healing.

Graceless Sabbath is legalism. That is why it is better to do the Sabbath poorly than never try. Make Sabbath mistakes. Learn from them. Then enter the next Sabbath with your lesson in hand. Learning how to fail at the Sabbath is a critical part of learning how to Sabbath. Let us have grace for ourselves and for others. Yes, questions about which day to Sabbath are important, but they are never ultimate. "I begin to think," says Brian Doyle, "that it does not matter how or when or how long we observe the Sabbath; it matters only that we do." (Doyle, Brian, "Give It a rest," *U.S. Catholic*, September 2001, 27, <https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-77660024/give-it-a-rest>) (p 202)