

Sabbath: The Gift That Keeps On Giving

We were finishing up our chicken curry at the local Thai bistro when the conversation shifted from the events of our lives to the state of our hearts. The question we were asking each other, in view of the demands of life and leadership, was how do we keep our hearts full. Like a gas tank in a Chevy Tahoe, how do you keep your heart topped-off?

As we vetted the question, we quickly locked on to a common theme. As if reading from the same script, each of us started talking about the importance—make that the indispensability—of Sabbath: the spiritual practice of devoting a day out of the week to God for the purpose of rest, renewal, and relationship. I like to think about Sabbath as that stand-alone day of the week where things that you’ve “got to do” give way to things you “get to do”.

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Following our alfresco lunch, I continued to reflect on the life-giving gift of Sabbath. First, I considered my own journey in the pursuit of this spiritual practice. Without debate, it is one of most meaningful rhythms in my life. Among its many benefits, God has used it to remind me that who I become is more important than what I accomplish—a reminder that I need constantly.

And second, I found myself chasing down the insights and perspectives of those who have come to understand, embrace, and most of all, inspire my practice of a Sabbath day.

Allow me to walk you through some of their thoughts.

▪ What Sabbath Is

Sabbath provides for us now an additional rhythm for an entire reorientation of our lives around the living God. On Sabbaths we imitate God by stopping our work and resting.

—Peter Scazzero

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.

—Mark Buchanan

The Sabbath is like a governor on the speed of life. All week long we work, we play, we cook, we clean, we shop, we exercise, we answer text messages, we inhabit the modern world, but finally we hit a limit.

On the Sabbath, we slow down; more than that, we come to a full stop.

—John Mark Comer

▪ Why Sabbath Is Important

Sabbath keeping is the linchpin of a life lived in sync with the rhythms that God himself built into our world, and yet it is the discipline that seems hardest for us to live.

—Ruth Haley Barton

God instituted Sabbath to give people rest, which involves more dimensions than just physical relief. In biblical terms the day is designed to disrupt life's usual routines to allow people the opportunity to remember and to reflect.

—Reggie McNeal

If my private world is in order, it will be because I have chosen to press Sabbath peace into the rush and routine of my daily life in order to find the rest God prescribed for Himself and all of humanity.

—Gordon MacDonald

▪ What Sabbath Involves

In this practice of Sabbath we debrief our decisions, our attitudes, our relationships, our leadership, our goals, our achievements, and our challenges.

—Reggie McNeal

What do we do to replace all we are now stopping during our Sabbath time? The answer is simple: whatever delights and replenishes you.

—Peter Scazzero

▪ How to Think About Sabbath

A Sabbath heart sanctifies time. This is not a ritual. It's a perspective. And it's not a shift in circumstances—you still have the same job tomorrow, the same problems with your aging parents or wayward children, the same battle looming in the church. But you make a deliberate choice to shift point of view, to come at your circumstances from a fresh angle and with greater depth of field. You choose to see your life otherwise, through a different lens, from a different standpoint, with a different mind-set.

—Mark Buchanan

Over the years, as I look at the game film of my own life, it is very clear that during seasons where my practice of Sabbath was neglected or compromised, life and leadership were more grind than joy, more duty than privilege. I have learned—at times the hard way—that the gift of Sabbath is an indispensable rhythm that allows my body and my soul to be refreshed and renewed, allowing me to anticipate the week of work that lies ahead.

What does a day of Sabbath look like for you?