

Sabbath Gates
Melissa Miller
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SABBATH: An Acquired Taste

Sabbath: An Acquired Taste

Deborah Rundlett

There was a time in my life when I kept Sabbath faithfully. And I knew myself to be blessed. Then came a call to a context which neither understood, nor honored Sabbath. During that season, I lost the practice of Sabbath and with it I lost my center in Christ. The last several years have been a journey back to the center; back into the arms of God. It has been a journey of restoration and homecoming, a journey of rebirth.

It is hard for me to acknowledge how long it has taken me to recover the practice of Sabbath. If I'm honest, I have not yet fully recovered the practice. But I'm working~no living~toward it's (and my) recovery. Praise be to God! And with it, I am recovering my soul and the joy that lies within the divine embrace.

Sabbath is an opportunity to mend our tattered lives; to collect rather than to dissipate time. Abraham Joshua Heschel

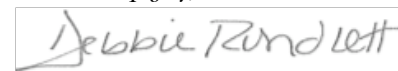
I am now “unplugging” weekly for 24 hours. I am setting aside intentional time to be both with God and with family and friends. I am saying no. But, it is just a beginning. I am still mending my “tattered life” and learning anew how to “collect” rather than “dissipate” time.

Within these pages, I invite you to join me on the journey toward Sabbath grace; to not only keep God's commandment, but delight in the practice of Sabbath. If Sabbath is indeed an acquired taste~as Rabbi Heschel suggests in his now classic book *The Sabbath*~then we must allow ourselves the means by which to develop such a taste. To do so will involve unlearning some habits in order that we might refine our taste buds. As with moving

from “junk” food to healthy eating, it might not initially please.

The poet has always understood this journey. “We shall not cease from our exploration and the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time” (TS Eliot, *Little Gidding*, *The Four Quartets*). May it be so. May we come to keep God's Sabbath command anew and thereby come to “know it for the first time,” for therein we will taste eternity and know ourselves to be loved.

With deep joy,



Jacob's Ladder 2,
Melissa Miller
2005

An Invitation... To Catch Your Breath

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living thing. Genesis 2:7

Jesus breathed on [his disciples] and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” John 20:22

Take a breath. A deep breath. And release. What does your breath have to tell you about the pace of your life? About the stresses you are experiencing? The tension in your body? Your level of energy? Your ability to be filled with the Breath of Life?

A recent survey of 20,000 Christians around the world revealed that busyness and constant overload is a major obstacle to “catching our breath.” We have become enslaved to busyness. We live in bondage to overload. Yet still we persist. Michael Zigarelli, who conducted the survey, describes a “vicious cycle” born of our present condition: 1) Christians are assimilating a culture of busyness, hurry, and overload, which leads to 2) God becoming more marginalized in Christians’ lives, which leads to 3) a deteriorating relationship with God, which leads to 4) Christians becoming even more vulnerable to adopting secular assumptions about how to live, which leads to 5) more

After the six days of creation--what did the universe still lack? *Menuha*. Came the Sabbath, came *menuha*, and the universe was complete. - Abraham Joshua Heschel

conformity to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload. And then the cycle begins again. Survey: Christians Worldwide Too Busy for God, Christian Post, July 30, 2007, Email Newsletter. We have forgotten how to breathe in the breath of the Spirit... the Breath of life.

Yet even science tells us that “following a period of activity, the body must replenish fundamental biochemical sources of energy... (called) “‘compensation’ from which energy is expanded and recovered.” Jim Loehr & Tony Schwartz, **The Power of Full Engagement**, New York: Free Press, 2003, pp. 29-30. Why then do we find it so challenging to rest? To balance work and rest? Doing with being? Time together with time apart? In stopping to catch our breath, to rest, we literally provide the means for living the active life.

Every breath we draw is a gift of God’s love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted. Thomas Merton

For some of us, the primary path to aliveness is the active life. The active life is an extraordinary mix of blessing and curse. The blessing is obvious... But the active life also carries a curse. Many of us know what it is to live lives not of action but of frenzy, to go from day to day exhausted and unfulfilled by our attempts to work, create, and care. Many of us know the violence of the active life... Action poses some of our deepest spiritual crises as well as some of our most heartfelt joys. Parker Palmer, *The Active Life*

Artwork: **The Creation of Man**, Marc Chagall, 1956-1958



An Invitation...

To Catch Your Breath

(continued)

Menuha is the Hebrew word for “rest.” Loosely translated, **menuha** means to “catch our breath.” Overtime, the failure to stop and “catch our breath” and breathe in the Breath of Life, results in spiritual death. From the beginning, physical breath and spiritual breath have been intimately linked. God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life and he lived. Even now God seeks to fill each one of us with that same breath of life. Sabbath keeping is God’s invitation to stop and “catch our breath” and be refreshed.

Don Postema speaks of the link between “catching our breath” and refreshment: “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth; and on the seventh day, [God] rested and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:17). He notes: “The phrase ‘refreshed’ is used only a couple of times in the Hebrew Scripture, and each time it speaks of an exhausted person’s energy being restored... (He further notes that) the Hebrew carries the idea that when we are exhausted, we lose our identity, our soul.” [Don Postema, *Catch Your Breath*, Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 1997, p. 41] May the words of the hymnodist become a living prayer for us as we learn to keep Sabbath anew: ***Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.***

Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect on the quote from Parker Palmer on the previous page. In what ways are you confusing “the active life” with a life of “frenzy”? If God were to ask you to stop something for 24 hours, what might it be?
2. Think back to a situation where you were forced to stop your normal activities. What did you find difficult? Was there a hidden gift? What did you learn?
3. Can you identify in yourself any tendency toward an addiction to busyness? Have you ever engaged in habits that helped you address that addiction? What habits make the addiction stronger?
4. What does it mean for God to be “refreshed”? What then are the implications for us to be “refreshed”?
5. Close by breathing in the Breath of Life. Then use the words of the hymn above to close in prayer.

Exercise: An Awakening to Time

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things in space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to the holiness of time. Abraham Joshua Heschel

Our first experiences of our awareness of time affect how we understand and experience time. This exercise has two related parts. It asks you to do some “memory work.”

First, think back to your biological family, your family of origin, or the circumstances in which you grew up. How was time experienced or discussed in your family? Was yours a leisurely family that was relaxed about time and didn't worry about deadlines or being “on time”? Was yours a “hurried” family, always behind schedule or rushing to catch up? Did you grow up in an institution where time was strictly regulated? Were you subject to the schedule of a boarding school? Was your family prepared and methodical in preparing for holidays or did you wrap Christmas presents at 3:30 am on Christmas morning?

What about your parents? Were they punctual? habitually late? It is instructive to think back about how time was actually “spent” and experienced in early life... In many instances the unspoken messages we received about time shape our behaviors with regard to it.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. Genesis 2:2-3

The second exercise... is for you to remember when time first became present to your consciousness. Have you had some experience that corresponds to an “awakening”? Was it dramatic? ordinary? How has it shaped your subsequent attitude toward and use of time?

While in some ways “origin is destiny,” and we are shaped by our early experiences, it is also true that we don't have to be what we were. And we certainly don't have to duplicate the patterns of our “first families.” Often the first step in changing behavior is to become aware of it. Our attitude toward time can change. To understand time differently we may have to get in touch with how we first experienced and understood it. These questions were designed to help you do that.

Source: To Everything a Season, Bonnie Thurston, pages 17-19

God created time and plenty of it. Irish Proverb

For a child, time in the sense of something to measure and keep track of, time as the great circus parade of past, present, and future, cause and effect, has scarcely started yet and means little because for a child all time is by and large *now* time and apparently endless. Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey*, p. 9

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3



Keeping Sabbath...

God's Command, Not a Polite Request

We need the Sabbath even though we doubt we have time for it. Dorothy Bass, Keeping Sabbath

A study of scripture reveals that Sabbath keeping is rooted in creation. From the beginning, God has modeled the gift of Sabbath as a time not only to “catch our breath” and delight in the gift of creation, but also to take time to nurture a deeper relationship with God. As Thomas Kelly, Quaker educator, missionary and scholar, wrote in **A Testament of Devotion**, “The deepest human need is not food and clothing and shelter, as important as they are. It is God.” At its heart, Sabbath keeping is about intimacy with God.

You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I the Lord sanctify you.

Exodus 31:13

Through Sabbath, God seeks to sanctify us. In keeping Sabbath, we are both set apart and purified; we are made holy. No longer slaves in Egypt, we have been set free (c.f. Galatians 5:1). For that reason, breaking the Sabbath in ancient Israel had serious ramifications. In Numbers 15, a man gathering up sticks on the Sabbath was ordered by God to be put to death. As Richard Lowery in **Sabbath & Jubilee** writes: “It is understandable~though chilling to modern sensibilities~that the Bible sometimes treats Sabbath

violation as a capital crime. Violating Sabbath is blasphemy because it attacks the very character of YHWH as a redeemer of Israel, the God who frees rather than enslaves, who offers lavish blessings, rather than endless toil. Sabbath is a deep symbol of Israel’s intimate relationship with God.” Yet still we become enslaved.

Parker Palmer in **Let Your Life Speak** reflects on five shadows, in particular, that enslave us:

1. Insecurity about identity and worth;
2. The belief that the universe is a battleground;
3. “Functional atheism,” that is, the belief that everything depends upon us;
4. Fear of the natural chaos of life;
5. The denial of death.

Sabbath becomes the means by which we come to remember both who and whose we are. Knowing that our core identity is rooted in Christ, we are then able to function as peacemakers rather than warriors. We know that together we are the body of Christ and that God alone is sovereign. We also know that God creates, heals, and redeems out of the chaos of our lives, and that death precedes resurrection.



Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exodus 20:8-11

Artwork: *Remember the Sabbath*, Michael Carter

Keeping Sabbath

God's Command, Not a Polite Request continued

Perfect rest is an art. It is the result of an accord of body, mind and imagination. Abraham Joshua Heschel

For Jesus, Sabbath keeping involved not only time with the Father, but also the exercise of justice toward others. The gospels record five instances of Jesus in conflict with the authorities because of healings that took place on the Sabbath. For Jesus, Sabbath keeping included inviting others out of bondage to that which enslaved them. Through such healings, Jesus modeled the Sabbath as a literal day of liberation. In another instance, when the disciples were criticized for plucking corn of the Sabbath, Jesus makes clear that “the Sabbath was created for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

With liberation comes joy. As Jesus elsewhere reminds us: “I have come that my joy might be in you and your joy complete” (John 15:11). It seems God’s command is not only for our own good, but that we might know joy in our deepest being. Are we ready for such joy?

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the Sabbath commandment for you? An imperative? An invitation? How do you respond to it? With guilt? With longing? With joy? By keeping it?
2. When you read about Jesus’ conflicts with the Jewish religious leaders over the Sabbath, what questions come to mind?
3. In what ways do you embrace--fail to embrace--the rhythm of time affirmed in scripture?
4. In what ways do you take comfort in rules or laws? Describe a time when you embraced the rules because you wanted to earn approval. Describe a time when you obeyed the rules in order to experience transformation through the Holy Spirit in your relationship with God.
5. Name those things which hinder an intimate relationship with God. Spend some time in

prayer and journaling reflecting on how you might “let go” of those things and nurture a deeper relationship with God.

Key Sabbath Texts

Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 2:1-3 And God rested

Ex. 16:26-7 Six days...

Ex. 20:8-12 Remember... Sabbath

Ex. 23:10-11 Year of Jubilee

Ex. 35:3 Holy convocation

Ex. 31:13-17 God rested... sanctify

Lev. 19:30 Observe...

Lev. 23:3 Holy convocation **Lev.**

25:2b-4 Year of Jubilee

Deut. 5:12f Observe...

Psalm 23

He makes me lie down

Psalm 46:10 Be still

Ecclesiastes 3 A time for everything

Isa. 30:15 In quietness & trust...

Isa. 58:13-14 If you refrain...

Jer. 6:16 Find rest for your souls

New Testament

Jesus & the Sabbath

Mt. 12:1-8 (plus Mk 2:23-8; Lk.

6:1-5;) Plucking ears of corn

Mt. 12:9-14 (plus Mk. 3:15; Lk.

6:6-10) Man with withered hand

Lk. 13: 10-17 Women bowed down

Lk. 14:1-6 Man with dropsy

Jn. 5:1-17 Man infirm 38 years

Jn. 9:1-41 Man born blind

Plus:

Mt. 11:28-30 Come to me...

Heb. 4:9-11 A Sabbath rest...



Sabbath time is to be viewed as a joy, as a celebration, as a time of great pleasure. Sabbath time is not to be endured as an obligation, but celebrated as a gift and an opportunity. Bonnie Thurston, *To Everything a Season*

Artwork: *Sainte Chapelle* (painted column and chancel windows), 13th century Gothic



Exercise: Breaking the Logic of Task Pursuit

Source: Deep Change

The logic of task pursuit is best illustrated by a parable. A hermit, who lived far out in the forest, would cut enough wood each summer to heat his cabin through the winter. One fall day, he heard on his shortwave radio that an early winter storm was coming. Because he had not yet cut enough wood, he rushed to his wood pile.

Examining his dull and rusty saw, he realized that it needed sharpening. But as he paused, he looked at the pile of uncut wood and instead of sharpening his saw, he began to cut. As he worked the saw became more dull and his work harder and harder. He told himself that he needed to stop, but he continued to cut anyway. At the end of the day, as the snow began to fall, he sat exhausted next to a sizable pile of uncut wood.

This man was not ignorant. He knew his saw desperately needed sharpening. He also knew that the more he cut, the duller the blade would become.

Yet he could not bring himself to stop and sharpen the saw. He was a victim of the logic of task pursuit.

We too are the victims of task pursuit. We know that we need balance. We know that Sabbath provides such balance. Yet still we continue in our frenzy. How can we break the logic of task pursuit? Below are five “prescriptions.” As you engage in this exercise you are to talk to no one, use no reading materials, and give yourself fully to the exercise.

1. Listen carefully.
2. Try reaching back.
3. Re-examine your motives.
4. Write your worries in the sand.
5. Now allow the wind of the Spirit to move over the sand and blow through the frenzy of your life. Receive the breath of God and live.

A Theology of Time

Making time... Wasting time... Living time

The Sabbath itself is a sanctuary which we build, a sanctuary in time. Abraham Joshua Heschel

If the heart of Sabbath is intimacy with God and those we love, how then are we to approach time? How will we build “a sanctuary in time”? Kathleen Norris in *The Cloister Walk* notes that “in our culture, time can seem like an enemy: it chews us up and spits us out with appalling ease. But the monastic perspective welcomes time as a gift from God and seeks to put it to good use, rather than allowing us to be used by it” (page xiii).

A study of both the Hebrew and Greek scriptures can help to inform our understanding of time. In the Hebrew scriptures, time is cyclical, rooted in the movement of creation. Even the rhythm of the Hebrew day, beginning and ending at sunset, creates a different rhythm. There is no clear sense of past, present and future. A point in time is simply understood as a “day” in which something happened. Central to the Hebrew concept of time is the understanding that we are but temporal; God is eternal, “our dwelling place in all generations” (Psalm 90:1). As the prophet reminds us, “The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of God will stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath, and from doing as your please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your holy joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. Isaiah 58:13-14

In the Greek scriptures, three words in particular inform our understanding of time: *alou* meaning age (from which our word eon comes); *chronos* referring to a space or period of time (a root word for chronological); and *kairos* or appointed time. As Christians, *kairos* moments as those times when the eternal breaks in, shaking and transforming us... creating us anew, often out of crisis. Jesus models how we are to respond to *kairos* moments through his own earthly journey, beginning with his incarnation. So rooted in the Father’s will was he that he could tell his disciples that “My *kairos* is near” (Matthew 26:18).

At the still point of the turning world... There the dance is... There would be no dance and there is only the dance... The inner freedom from the practical desire, the release from action and suffering, release from the inner and outer compulsion, yet surrounded by a grace of time.

The Four Quartets, TS Eliot

Artwork: **The Thinker**,
Auguste Rodin



A Theology of Time

Making time... Wasting time... Living time

Sabbath is about receiving holiness in time. Bonnie Thurston, *To Everything a Season*

Kairos moments are essential and defining moments when everything changes. They are moments when we see the heart of God at work and are called to respond. The parables of Jesus are clear that we will be called to give an accounting of our time, of how we have lived our lives. Matthew 25 alone presents three parables~the 10 Bridesmaids, the Talents, and the Sheep and the Goats~in which God's judgement depends upon how our time is "spent." Not only do we need to be attentive to those things which enslave us, but to how we live "our time" here on earth.

How we live out our *chronos* moments will prepare us for the *kairos* moments of our lives. Yet, our attitudes toward time are all too often reflected in our expressions about time. What are the associations you carry when you hear (or use) any of the following descriptors: spending time... keeping time... making time... taking time... marking time... wasting time... killing time? Living faithfully demands our living in the present moment. Ultimately, "the defining element of *kairos* moments is not how we feel about them, then or now, but our understanding that God is active even~or especially~in these times" (Thurston, p. 28).

Through the gift of Sabbath we learn to live the rhythms born of our *chronos* and *kairos* moments. We learn to live responsively, consciously, and intentionally. No longer are we swept up by the demands of the clock and external agendas, but by intentional honoring of the daily rhythms of our lives. By keeping Sabbath, we become more fully ourselves. We learn to listen more deeply and to breathe more deeply as

we discover "the still point of the turning world."

Questions for Reflection

1. Rabbi Heschel writes that the Sabbath itself is "a sanctuary in time." How will you build "a sanctuary in time" for yourself, your friends and family, and your congregation?
2. The Hebrew day begins and ends with sunset. How might such a rhythm change your understanding of time?
3. In what ways do you embrace the rhythms in time articulated in scripture?
4. How has your life been shaped by *chronos* and *kairos* moments?
5. What expressions do you use for describing time? How do they reflect your attitude toward time?
6. How might you come to live more fully in the present moment?
7. Commit one day over the next month to building "a sanctuary in time."

... Indeed, one can never truly know the inward feeling to the Sabbath without the outward form. The Sabbath is not a theory to be contemplated, a concept to be debated, or an idea to be toyed with. It is a day, a day filled with hours and minutes and seconds, all of which are hallowed by the wonderful pattern of living that the nobility of the human spirit has fashioned over the course of the centuries. Samuel H. Dressner, *The Sabbath*



The real and the spiritual are one, like body and soul in a living person. It is for the law to clear the path; it is for the soul to sense the Spirit. To find Sabbath peace you must keep the Sabbath holy. Abraham Joshua Heschel

Exercise: Time Log

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1

Source: **To Everything a Season**, Bonnie Thurston, pp. 36-38 & **Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership**, Ruth Haley Barton, pp. 134-5.

This exercise invites you to identify the *chronos* and *kairos* times in your life. You will need your datebook or calendar to remind you of what has happened over the past year.

Choose a specific time period. Make a list of the major events during that period. This is your *chronos* list. It is going to be a pretty straight forward accounting of your life during that period.

Now go back and circle or highlight the events in which God was especially present--when you either felt the presence of God or, in retrospect, you now believe God was working... leading you, calling you, molding you. Mark the defining events of this period. This is your *kairos* list.

Note that the *kairos* times are not always experienced as positive. Sometimes they are perceived at the time as being quite negative. The defining element of *kairos* moments is not how we feel about them, then or now, but our understanding that God is active even~or especially~in these times.

After you have established your list, ponder the following questions:

1. Is there any pattern to my *kairos* moments?
2. Are they likely to occur in similar circumstances or to be generated by particular kinds of events?
3. Do they happen as a result of what you plan or do, or are they seemingly “random”?
4. Try to discern whether there are any specific relationships between the *kairos* and *chronos* moments of your life. Does there seem to be some particular “place” God is leading you through your *kairos* moments?

Having pondered your *kairos* moments, now take a look at the rhythms--or lack of them--of your daily living during that same period. Consider the rhythms of solitude and community, of work and rest, of stillness and action, of silence and word, of engagement and retreat. How do these rhythms inform your living of *chronos* and *kairos* time? How do you experience them nurturing~or draining~you? What rhythms are missing? Is there a new rhythm to which God is inviting you?

There remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for all who enter God's rest also rest from their work. Hebrews 4:9-10

Artwork: **Abraham and the Three Angels**
Marc Chagall, 1960-1966 (from Genesis 18)



The Promise: There Remains a Sabbath-Rest

Do not give your heart to that which does not satisfy your heart. Abba Poeman

We give our hearts to so many things that don't satisfy. Why is that? Have we forgotten that we are the people of God? Have we lost our core identity in Christ?

Far too often, we allow ourselves to be defined by what we do, rather than who we are. We become our work. But the question must be asked: Who are we when we're not doing what we do?

Jesus never forgot who or whose he was. He modeled with his life a balance between being and doing, between life together and life apart. The gospels are a portrait of that balance as he intentionally takes time apart with the Father and the disciples. It is this balance of life that he offers to us when he says: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you my rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
Matthew 11:28-30, TNIV

Eugene Peterson in **The Message** captures the invitation to intimacy and the freedom

born of following in Jesus' way. "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. Walk with me and work with me--watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Jesus came to reunite us with the Father and help us find rest in God's loving presence. But to know the Father, we must know the Son, not just about him. For only in knowing the Son do we come to understand we are indeed more than our work. Our relationship with God in Christ shapes and informs our service. In John 15:1-5, Jesus reminds us that the key to bearing fruit is abiding in him. Our work and ministry is a byproduct of knowing God in Christ in a personal and intimate way.

Karl Jung, Swiss Psychologist, was once asked if he believed in God. His answer initially shocked his audience. "No," he said and paused. "I don't believe in God. I know him." At the heart of the Christian life is a journey toward union with God in Christ. Through

The Promise: There Remains a Sabbath Rest

One of the marks of divinity is that God knows when to stop working, when to rest, when to enjoy what has been created by work. Bonnie Thurston, *To Everything a Season*

kairos moments God positions us for a transforming encounters with God's very self. Sabbath is one of the contexts in which such encounters take place.

God created us for a purpose. And that purpose is rooted in relationship. We cannot become fully alive apart from God in Christ. Postema calls us to remember that "we have value beyond what we produce or achieve. In fact, we are accepted by God before we do or achieve anything important" (*Catch Your Breath*, p. 33).

Yet Sabbath remains for us "an acquired taste." So unaccustomed are we to the rhythms of Sabbath that we must relearn them. This will take time and intentionality. As Calvin Miller in ***Into the Depths of God*** suggests: "...the believer who wants an in-depth relationship with Christ must not allow clocks or ledger sheets to destroy that wonderful holy leisure by which we make friends with God. To be a godly disciple means that we must transcend the clock, because to be with God mandates that we give our life to become one who waits on God for the sheer pleasure of his company" (p. 57).

The invitation stands. We have only to take off our watches, ignore the ticking of clock, and RSVP yes with joy in our hearts. There does indeed remain a Sabbath rest.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you hear in Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30? How do you prepare for Sabbath?
2. Don Postema uses five words to describe the Sabbath: rest, refreshment, receptivity, release and refocusing. In what ways do you need each of these in your life?
3. Do you know how to rest?
4. Does our work always remain incomplete? How might you come to "rest on the Sabbath as if all your work were done"? What would it take to rest from even the thought of labor?
5. Who... what gives you refreshment? Are you able to receive refreshment from God? from others?
6. From what do you need release?
7. In what ways do you need to refocus?
8. What are your questions about the practical issues of Sabbath keeping? Identify the present obstacles to Sabbath keeping in your life. How might you address these obstacles?

The Sabbath is an example of the world to come... Unless one learns to relish the taste of Sabbath while one is still in the world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of the eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come. Abraham Joshua Heschel

Exercise: Keeping Sabbath

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath. Deuteronomy 5:15

Let us begin by taking off our watches that we might re-attune ourselves to the sacred rhythms and live into an attitude of restfulness. Tilden Edwards in **Sabbath Time** suggests that for most of us keeping Sabbath involves two steps: “letting go” and “letting ourselves be.” It seems being is dependent upon “letting go” of that which distracts, enslaves, and blocks our openness to receiving God into our lives. In “letting go,” we put aside our daily rhythms and schedules~our external world. In “letting ourselves be” in Sabbath time, we nurture an attitude of attentiveness to God.

The following questions are intended to help you think about how you can keep Sabbath:

1. How can I “find” time for Sabbath?
What odds and ends might be used for Sabbath focus? Does my work allow me appropriate time off? Can I begin immediately or must external things be

Rest on the Sabbath as if all your work were done... Rest even from the thought of labor. Abraham Joshua Heschel

addressed before I can fully “let go” and thereby “let myself be”?

2. What sorts of activities might be appropriate for keeping Sabbath? What things do I do that put me in touch with God? What things distance me? What gives me energy? What drains me? As I approach the idea of keeping Sabbath weekly, what do I experience as my own “needs” both physical and spiritual? How are both related to openness to God?
3. What are the practical issues that must be faced in my work and family? How can I make this a positive experience for all? How can I “keep Sabbath” if my work and family are uninterested in the idea? How can I meet the objections?

If we refuse rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it liberates us from the need to be finished.

Wayne Muller, **Sabbath**

Artwork: **Rest on the Flight from Egypt with John the Baptist**, c 1509, Fra Bartolommeo



Sabbath

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Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation. Richard Foster

Draw near to God and God will draw near to you. James 4:8

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A Closing Prayer

Sabbath is an intuition of eternity.

God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

-Revelation 21:4

Now,
O Lord,
 calm me into a quietness
 that heals
 and listens,
and molds my longings
 and passions,
 my wounds
 and wonderings
into a more holy
 and human
 shape.
 --Ted Loder, Guerillas of Grace



Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in the world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy a taste of eternity in the world to come. Abraham Joshua Heschel

Joram Ranaan,
2003

SABBATH: AN ACQUIRED TASTE

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