

Sabbath

Week 3: Resting

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.
Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.
O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!
Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed.
For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.
For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.
O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Psalm 84

"A second meaning of the Hebrew verb *Shabbat* is 'to rest.' In the Hebrew Scriptures to desist from labor is associated with resting – for God, people, animals, even the land...

We might wonder how anyone can possibly truly rest when there is so much to do... A day of complete physical rest gives us extra strength and zeal for the tasks of the other six days. Moreover, a day especially set aside for worship teaches us to carry the spirit of worship into our work. Furthermore, to give ourselves a day's break from emotional and intellectual problems enables us to come back to them with fresh perspectives, creative insights, and renewed spirits...

Complete resting of our whole being is more than mere physical rest without labor. To rest utterly in the grace of God is the foundation for wholistic rest."

an excerpt from "Keeping the Sabbath Wholly" by Marva Dawn

"Pick up any glossy women's magazine from the last few years and you'll see...that Sabbath has come back into fashion; even among the most secular Americans, but the Sabbath we now embrace is a curious one. Articles abound extolling the virtues of treating yourself to a day of rest, a relaxing and leisurely visit to the spa, and an extra-long bubble bath. *Take a day off*, the magazines urge their harried readers. *Rest*.

There might be something to celebrate in this revival of Sabbath, but it seems to me that there are at least two flaws in the reasoning. First is what we might call capitalism's justification for Sabbath rest: resting one day a week makes you more productive during the other six...And while that may be true, rest for the sake of future productivity is at odds with the spirit of Sabbath.

We could call the second problem with the current Sabbath vogue the fallacy of the direct object. Whom is the contemporary Sabbath designed to honor? Whom does it benefit? Why,

the bubble-bath taker herself, of course! The Bible suggests something different. In observing the Sabbath, one is both giving a gift to God and imitating Him.”

Winner, Lauren. *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline*. 2003

Psalm 84 invites us to rest – to be comforted by the peace of coming close to God. This can be really good news on days where we feel like we are just being carried along by caffeine and the stress of the next big project. To rest, really rest, is something God calls us to enjoy with regularity.

Here are some questions to talk about with your group:

When you go on vacation, how many days does it take you to finally rest?

What prevents you from resting?

How do you “down shift” or calm down?

Why is rest important? Daily rest, weekly rest, seasonal rest?

How do you rest...

- Your mind? (can you remember a time when your mind/heart was at peace?)
- Your body? (rarely stopping and always being busy can contribute to sickness)
- Your soul? (consider a life-giving hobby)

How can others help you rest?

Are you too addicted to being busy that you find it difficult to rest?

What do you turn to when you need a break from work or school? Do you go to nature? Do you read something else?

When do you get stuck in your own thoughts? How do you get out?

Closing Prayer:

Help us, Lord, to know ourselves in this Sabbath time. We often run away from the quiet, preferring the noise of our lives to your still, small voice. Our schedules are often so full that when we finally stop, we fall asleep; but even in our sleep we toss and turn. We are restless, Lord, and need to find our rest in you. Help us to know ourselves and draw close to you. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, Amen.

(Closing prayer adapted from “Christian Reflection: Sabbath” www.ChristianEthics.ws)