

Sabbath Reader

Scripture: Gen. 2:2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ex. 31:12-13; Is. 58:13-14, Ecc. 4:6; Ps. 46:10; Heb. 4:9-11, Mk 2:27

Sabbath Reader: Read through the quotes slowly. What stirs in you as you read? Journal your thoughts

“How did we get so terribly lost in a world saturated with striving and grasping, yet somehow bereft of joy and delight? I suggest that it is this: We have forgotten the Sabbath.”¹

“The practice of Shabbat, or Sabbath, is designed specifically to restore us, a gift of time in which we allow the cares and concerns of the marketplace to fall away. We set aside time to delight in being alive, to savor the gifts of creation, and to give thanks for the blessing we may have missed in our necessary preoccupation with our work. Ancient texts suggest we light candles, sing songs, pray, tell stories, worship, eat, nap, and make love. It is a day of delight, a sanctuary in time. Within this sanctuary, we make ourselves available to the insights and blessings that arise only in stillness and time.”²

“*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.* Sabbath rest invites us to step back, and *see that it is good.* Sabbath is a day we walk in the forest, walk among the fruits of our harvest and ruins of our desperations, and see what lives. On the Sabbath, we rest. And see that it is good.”³

“Whatever is foreseen in joy
Must be lived out from day to day.
Vision held open in the dark
By our ten thousand days of work.
Harvest will fill the barn; for that
The hand must ache, the face must sweat.
And yet no leaf or grain is filled
By work of ours, the field is tilled
And left to grace. That we may reap,
Great work is done while we’re asleep.
When we work well, a Sabbath mood
Rests on our day, and finds it good.

Wendell Berry⁴

“Just so, during Sabbath, the Jews, by keeping sacred rest, could maintain their spiritual ground wherever they were, even in protracted exile from their own country. *It was not Israel that kept the Sabbath*, it is said, *but the Sabbath kept Israel.*”⁵

¹ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*, p 5

² *ibid.*, p 26

³ *ibid.*, pp 41, 45

⁴ *ibid.*, p 232

⁵ *ibid.*, p 9

“Nothing less than a command has the power to intervene in the vicious, accelerating, self-perpetuating cycle of faithless and graceless busy-ness, the only part of which we are conscious being our good intentions.” Peterson describes the Sabbath as that uncluttered time and space in which we can distance ourselves from our own activities enough to see what God is doing. If we are not able to rest one day a week, we are taking ourselves far too seriously.”⁶

“One of the delights of Sabbath practices for me is that ceasing our work and concentrating on spiritual resting create the possibility for deeper caring about the persons whom God brings into our day. There is no need to hurry—for there is nothing that *we have to do*. There are no tasks that demand our time. Time is a gift to us, and we can in turn pass that gift on to others. Moreover, if we are resting in grace, then we can enfold others in its freedom, too.”⁷

“Furthermore, when we experience being enveloped by Sabbath time, we become people who are not enslaved to time. As we embrace time, then, we squander less and less of it for the things of space. We get in touch with eternity and bring eternal values into all the days of our week.”⁸

“To keep the Sabbath means to cherish it, to honor it as the Queen of our days, in consort with the King of the Universe. To develop the habit of Sabbath keeping requires some intentionality on our part, but ultimately it sets us free from any sort of legalism. It’s ordering sets us free to be creative. Its ceasing enables us to rest; its feasting enables us to embrace afresh. All the great motifs of our Christian faith are underscored in our Sabbath keeping. Its Ceasing deepens our repentance for the many ways that we fail to trust God and try to create our own future. Its Resting strengthens our faith in the totality of his grace. Its Embracing invites us to take the truths of our faith and apply them practically in our values and lifestyles. Its Feasting heightens our sense of eschatological hope—the Joy of our present experience of God’s love and its foretaste of the Joy to come.”⁹

“The Sabbath teaches us grace because it connects us experientially to the basic truth that nothing we do will earn God’s love. As long as we are working hard, using our gifts to serve others, experiencing joy in our work along with the toil, we are always in danger of believing that our actions trigger God’s love for us. Only in stopping, really stopping, do we teach our hearts and souls that we are loved apart from what we do.”¹⁰

“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*¹¹

“Jewish tradition emphasizes the difference between the words *remember* (used in the Exodus command) and *observe* (used in Deuteronomy). Rabbis teach that on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday we are to remember the preceding Sabbath, experiencing joy while we look back at the lovely day of rest as a gift from God. On Wednesday through Friday we prepare ourselves to observe the next Sabbath, looking ahead with joyful expectation. Thus the Sabbath flows into the whole week bringing its sweetness and fragrance to every day.”¹²

⁶ Eugene Peterson, “The Pastor’s Sabbath,” *Leadership* Spring: 1985, pp 55-56.

⁷ Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, p 122

⁸ *ibid.*, p 123

⁹ *ibid.*, p 203

¹⁰ Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping*, pp 17-18

¹¹ *ibid.*, p 35

¹² *ibid.*, p 40

“Sabbath...is a time for “useless” poetry and other arts; a time to appreciate a tree, your neighbor, and yourself without doing something to them; a time to praise God as an end in itself. Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time*.¹³

“Good Sabbath-keeping includes both praying and playing. Prayerful Sabbaths without play or playful Sabbaths without prayer are only half-sabbaths. Prayer without play can degenerate into a dutiful and cheerless religion. Play without prayer can become mind-numbing escape. Don Postema¹⁴

“Jewish families light two individual candles as the Sabbath begins. These candles represent how they feel going into the Sabbath: God is present but seems a bit separate because of the weeklong focus on accomplishing tasks. As the Sabbath ends, the family lights a braided candle. After a day of resting in God, life is once again intertwined with God, and the braided candle symbolizes that reconnection and intimacy. It represents the desire upon reentering the workweek to experience the intertwined reality every day.”¹⁵

“The Sabbath is about rhythm, intentionality and expectation. We embrace a rhythm God designed intentionally setting aside our work for a day so we can rest in the God who created and sustains the universe. We expect that this commitment to God’s rhythm will teach us things about him, and we expect that we will experience his goodness in a way that transcends words. Spontaneous Sabbaths are better than no rest at all, but the biggest gifts of the Sabbath come over time through a consistence pattern of six days of work and one day of rest.”¹⁶

“Sadly, everything about us works against slowing down. Our compulsion to produce and not waste time invades the space God gave for us to rest. Children’s athletics, national sporting events, round-the-clock accessibility to work, email and stores also fill up the sabbath day, so we never stop. When you get indignant over how seemingly incompatible sabbath is with the tiring and relentless demands already facing you, consider what our tiredness means. Animals don’t think about how tired they are. And they don’t have a sabbath they set aside for rest. It’s humans who recognize the difference between work and rest. The fact that we make distinctions between being tired and rested is an indication that we need to do both. Made in the image of God, we are like God, who on the seventh day “rested” from all his labor.”¹⁷

“Light a candle, alone or with friends. Let each of you speak about those things that are left to do, and as the candle burns, allow the cares to melt away. Do not be anxious about tomorrow, said Jesus. The worries of today are sufficient for today. Whatever remains to be done, for now, let it be. It will not get done tonight. In Sabbath time we take our hand off the plow and allow God and the earth to care for what is needed. Let it be. Wayne Muller”¹⁸

“The truth is, sabbath keeping is a discipline that will mess with you, because once you move beyond just thinking about it and actually begin to practice it, the goodness of it will capture you, body, soul and spirit. You will long to wake up to a new day that stretches out in front of you with nothing in it but rest and delight. You will long for a simple way to turn your heart toward God in worship without much effort. You will long for a space in time when the pace is slow and family and

¹³ *ibid.*, p 72

¹⁴ Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping*, p 82

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p 86

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p 102

¹⁷ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, pp 41-42

¹⁸ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*. P 132

friends linger with one another, savoring one another's presence because no one has anywhere else to go."¹⁹

"During the week, your whole self will strain toward the sabbath with thoughts like *I know I can make it because the sabbath is coming*. You will emerge from sabbath with renewed energy and hope thinking, *I can face my life now because I have rested*. The Sabbath will become the centerpiece of your work, the kingpin of your spiritual rhythms. And when even an hour of it is robbed from you, you will grieve its loss. When you miss it, it will hurt."²⁰

"There is something deeply spiritual about honoring the limitations of our existence as human beings—physical bodies in a world of time and space. A peace descends upon our lives when we accept what is real rather than always pushing beyond our limits. Something about being gracious and accepting and gentle with ourselves at least once a week enables us to be more gracious and accepting and gentle with others. There is a freedom that comes from being who we are in God and resting in God that eventually enables us to bring something truer to the world than all of our doing. Sabbath keeping helps us to live within our limits because on the sabbath, in many different ways, we allow ourselves to be the creature in the presence of our Creator."²¹

"*If you do not go your own way, you will find your joy*. We keep Sabbath by both a refusal and a pursuit; we refuse to go our own way, and yet we pursue our own joy. Legalism wants to name, in every jot and tittle, both that refusal and that pursuit. It seeks to pinpoint the precise nature of what we're to shun and what we're to run after."²²

"*Stop doing what you ought to do*. There are six days to do what you ought. Six days to be caught in the web of economic and political and social necessity. And then one day to take wing. Sabbath is that one day. It is a reprieve from what you ought to do, even though the list of oughts is infinitely long and never done. Oughts are tyrants, noisy and surly, chronically dissatisfied. Sabbath is the day you trade places with them; they go in the salt mine, and you go out dancing. It's the one day when the only thing you must do is to not do the things you must. You are given permission—issued a command, to be blunt—to turn your back on all those oughts. You get to willfully ignore the many niggling things your existence genuinely depends on—and is often hobbled beneath—so that you can turn to whatever you've put off and pushed away for lack of time, lack of room, lack of breath. You get to chuck the *have-tos* and lay hold of the *get-tos*."²³

"God is always speaking. "There is no speech or language/where [his] voice is not heard" (Ps. 19:3). But we're not always listening. We don't make the effort and so fail to go boldly into his throne room to receive what we need; a word that can pierce, and cut, and heal. Here's the paradox: If we don't listen, we never enter his rest. Yet if we don't enter his rest, we never listen.

Practice a deeper listening during Sabbath. Most other days, by necessity as much as by choice, we live amid a clatter of noise. I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips. Certainly, our lips are busy. But Sabbath is when we stop. We slow down. We play, we rest, we dream, we wonder. We cease from that which is necessary and turn to that which gives life. And in the hush that descends, we listen."²⁴

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p 133

²⁰ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, p 134

²¹ *ibid.*, p 138

²² Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, p 112

²³ *ibid.*, p 126

²⁴ *ibid.*, p 188