

Sacred Rhythms

Chapter 8 ~ Sabbath: Establishing Rhythms Of Work And Rest

Funny story...I've been feeling a little behind lately and thought I'd use some time on my day off (Friday) to catch up. So I started reading this chapter. Well, about three pages in it dawns on me that I'm reading about Sabbath as I'm working on my day off (which theoretically is my day to Sabbath). So I stopped, put the book down, and decided I'll pick it up again on Monday.

Well, it's now Monday...I feel rested and ready to get to work. But I share this because, as wonderful as Sabbath is, it's not an easy practice to incorporate into our lives. There's always something clamoring for our attention. It has to be protected, otherwise things (even good things) creep in. That was the gentle reminder I received this week. It also brought to mind the underlying question of this book...What do I want? I want to be well formed. This chapter describes how the regular practice of Sabbath lends toward that end.

- What is your initial thought/impression of the idea of Sabbath? (Or, perhaps, what were your thoughts/assumptions about Sabbath before reading this chapter, and what new thoughts have emerged since reading this chapter?)
- What of RHB's description of Sabbath sounds questionable or challenging or idealistic, and what of her description sounds enticing and desirable?
- If Sabbath is a regular practice for you, what have you found beneficial about it? What have you found challenging about it? How is it forming you? What practical tips can you offer those who are just beginning to make this a practice?

We find the foundation of Sabbath on the very first page of the Bible (Genesis 2:2-3) when God Sabbath-ed/rested on the seventh day. God, in His wisdom and goodness, created and modeled a weekly rhythm. It is significant that the first "sacred rhythm" we find in Scripture is Sabbath...not prayer, or worship, or study, or fasting, etc...but a gift of ordering time well so that we can be formed well, out of which all the other practices/disciplines can be utilized and find their proper place. But like all gifts, it must be received.

Moving on in the Scriptural story we see Sabbath enshrined within the Covenant as the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), and, within the explanation for it, it harkens back to the Creation story. For a Jewish person, Sabbath was/is a key element of their identity as a people. It was one of the key markers of being "God's people".

Sadly, like any/all gifts God has ever given, we (humans) have a knack for misusing/abusing it, corrupting/twisting it, or ignoring it/taking it for granted. Not keeping Sabbath is one of the issues God regularly brought against Israel, through the Old Testament prophets. (For example, check out Ezekiel 20:13-26) Conversely, we know Jesus had regular conflicts with the Jewish religious leaders over the Sabbath as they thought Jesus wasn't keeping Sabbath because He healed on the Sabbath. On one such occasion Jesus famously said, *"The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is Lord even of the*

Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27-28) So, quick review, God created, and practiced, Sabbath as evidenced in the creation narrative. God commanded the Israelites to remember the Sabbath. As a good Israelite (and God in the flesh and the ideal human), Jesus practiced/kept the Sabbath. Hmm, it seems to me that the Sabbath is something we need to pay attention to.

John Mark Comer, who we were reading last year at this time (his book *Live No Lies*), states in his book *The Relentless Elimination Of Hurry*, “...Sabbath is more than just a day; it’s a way of being in the world. It’s a spirit of restfulness that comes from abiding, from living in the Father’s loving presence all week long.” And as Old Testament professor, scholar, and theologian Walter Brueggemann states, “People who keep sabbath live all seven days differently.” This tells me that Sabbath isn’t about religious observation but about being formed correctly, which you may recall is the same purpose of prayer and all other spiritual practices.

- In your church experience, how has Sabbath been emphasized (or not)? What do you recall learning in regards to the Sabbath?

RHB writes, “*The point of the sabbath is to honor our need for a sane rhythm of work and rest. It is to honor the body’s need for rest, the spirit’s need for replenishment and the soul’s need to delight in God for God’s own sake. It begins with a willingness to acknowledge the limits of our humanness and take steps to live more graciously within the order of things.*”

- How have you run up against the limits of your humanness? Would “sane” be a word you could use to describe the rhythm and pace of your life? (If not, what word would you use?) How does your life reflect (or not) God’s good order of things?

RHB continues, “*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 our doing. Sabbath keeping helps us to live within our limits...*”

That statement has me wondering to what degree do I want peace, and how much do I desire to be more gracious, loving, and gentle? Or would I rather be known as someone who produces, who gets results, who gets things done? What’s really important to me? What am I becoming? I invite you to explore that rabbit trail as well.

I (Meg) have to admit that I am not particularly good at Sabbath. I am working on getting better, but historically it has been a real challenge. I am even bad about relaxing on vacation. If you followed my Seattle trip on social media, you probably noticed that I filled those four days as full as humanly possible. I am going to Florida in February and I have intentionally only scheduled one activity. The rest of my time will be spent on the beach, by the pool, with a book, going slowly... Someone hold me to this because accountability is good for us.

- On the matter of accountability, what might accountability look like for you around Sabbath (or any of the disciplines/practices/rhythms we've looked at through this study)? Additionally, how do we leverage accountability in a healthy way so as not to become legalistic or performative about it?

It seems that more and more thinkers, writers, and teachers are speaking out about the importance of Sabbath. Honestly, this topic is one that deserves more than one chapter and one week's worth of consideration. If this is a topic you'd like to do further reading and exploration of, I would encourage you with some suggested resources. This link will take you to a whole list of good books on the subject... <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/sabbath>

Another aspect of Sabbath that RHB doesn't really get into, but which is nevertheless worth discussing, is Sabbath as resistance...as a practice that speaks to justice. Interestingly, when the Ten Commandments were given at Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 20), the Fourth Commandment of remembering the Sabbath is linked to the Creation narrative, to the order and rhythm that God designed for us and all that He made. Fast-forward forty years to when Moses is re-reading the Covenant to Israel as they are preparing to enter the Promised Land. Here the commandment of observing the Sabbath is linked to God's deliverance of them from slavery in Egypt. (see Deuteronomy 5). Hmm, interesting. Sabbath keeping is not only a way to get into harmony with the divine order of things; it is also a way of resisting oppressive empires and economies. (SO MUCH MORE can be said about this. I again point to the link above with the list of other resources. But for now, it's important to consider that Sabbath and Social Justice actually go together.)

But how do we practice Sabbath keeping? The second half of this chapter outlines some practical matters to keep in mind. RHB frames the practice with three important points.

1. *"First, the heart of sabbath is that we cease our work so that we can rest and delight in God and God's good gifts."* (emphasis added) Notice, rest AND delight in God...not just simply rest. There is an intentional focus upon God. Now, if focusing upon God sounds like "work" to you, that may be an indicator that your understanding of God could use a little adjusting. God loves you, delights in you, enjoys you. Resting in God is what we were made for.
2. *"Second, it is important to establish a regular rhythm if at all possible."* The fact of the matter is, we prioritize what matters to us. An approach of "I'll-fit-it-in-when-I-can" is not a priority. Pick the day of the week that works best for you and your family. You may want to consider an evening to evening day as opposed to a morning to morning day. For example, perhaps 6:00 pm Friday until 6:00 pm Saturday (or Saturday to Sunday). But make no mistake, hard choices will have to be made...they will always be "opportunities" that draw our attention. And we can DO stuff on our Sabbath...we simply want to make sure it's stuff that brings joy and life and rejuvenation as opposed to producing and obligation.

3. *“Third...sabbath keeping is not primarily a private, self-indulgent discipline. It is and always has been a communal discipline...”* Remember, the Sabbath was instituted to form a people, an entire nation in fact.
 - A good question to discuss comes from that third point: how can we make Sabbath keeping a communal practice and rhythm here at CUMC? What would/could that look like? What would it take to make that happen?

RHB includes a couple helpful sections on what to consider excluding and including in our practice of Sabbath. These are offered not in a spirit of legalism but rather as practical tips and considerations.

- As you consider the exclusions and inclusions suggested, what do you feel drawn to, or what do you think is important in order to practice Sabbath keeping well? What do you think will be challenging or perhaps unhelpful/unnecessary?

As we wrap up for this week, I have a few closing thoughts that this chapter triggered for me. I think the idea of Sabbath can be scary for some people for a few reasons. The first, and this could hold true with all the spiritual disciplines, is the fear of legalism or performative-ism (thinking we need to perform for God, or to be seen by others). So a gauge that might be helpful to overcome this (potential) fear is simply to ask ourselves, *“Is this practice leading me toward more joy and freedom and a deeper experience of God. And if not, why not?”*

A second possible concern that we may or may not be willing to admit is F.O.M.O. (the Fear Of Missing Out) F.O.M.O. is a real fear people carry. If they stop one day a week to simply rest and delight in God, won't life just pass them by? They might miss something. I think the counter to that line of thinking is to ask the question, *“What will I miss out on if I DON'T Sabbath? Will I have the wherewithal to enjoy life if I'm out of sync with the rhythm God designed?”*

A third possible concern that I'm pretty sure very few people can admit is F.O.N.B.M. (Yes, I just made that up, but it stands for a real concern people have—Fear Of Not Being Missed) RHB states, *“We cling to some sense that we are indispensable and that the world cannot go on without us even for a day.”* This fear actually speaks to the issue of significance. We want to know we matter..and this is NOT a bad thing...it's actually a God-designed longing. The problem is that we often think our significance comes in our production, contribution, and achievement. But it does not. Rather, our significance comes from God. We are significant because we are...because we exist...because we bear God's image...because God says we matter...period. The way to become confident of that truth, to know it deep in our bones, is by setting aside an entire day a week to set aside for the Lord, from Whom our worth comes.

- Do you suffer from any of the above mentioned fears: legalism/performative-ism, F.O.M.O., or F.O.N.B.M.? How so? What makes you aware of this? How might the actual practice of Sabbath help you overcome those concerns?

- What questions still linger for you around the practice of Sabbath (either conceptually or practically)?

Below are a couple of resources (links) you might enjoy or find helpful.

- This is a talk Ruth Haley Barton gave, that I was actually able to see/hear in person, on Sabbath.
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rR22Ou7_1JU
- This is a short video on Sabbath from our friends at the Bible Project.
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/sabbath-video/>

Soul Training Exercise ~ Sabbath Keeping through Lent

Lent is right around the corner. And what better time to begin experimenting with Sabbath. The invitation is to take one day per week during the season of Lent and give Sabbathing a try.

Paraphrasing some of RHB's questions as we consider accepting this invitation...

- Where do you feel a keen desire for the rhythms and practices described in this chapter?
- Where do you feel resistance?
- (If you don't really feel anything about it, notice that too, and perhaps explore why.)

Practically, for preparation and planning purposes, should you decide to accept this invitation, RHB suggests asking ourselves...

- *“What activities will I refuse to engage in so that it is truly a day of rest, worship and delight?”*
- *“What activities bring me delight, and how will I incorporate them?”*

One final Suggestion from RHB...

- *“Put the date on your calendar, and pray that God will help you to honor this Sabbath and keep it holy.”*

Remember, it doesn't have to be “perfect”--it never will be, nor needs to be. (I intentionally used the words “experimenting” and “try” earlier for a reason.) Give yourself some grace and enjoy the process of developing a new practice/habit.