

When you hear the word *Sabbath*, what comes to mind? Maybe you think of the word meaning a day of rest, a day without work, a day to attend church, or a day to worship God, and all these understandings do relate to the word. The original Hebrew word *shavat* (שָׁבַת) means rest or ceasing from work and is related to the similar sounding Hebrew word meaning sitting or staying. The word Sabbath also sounds similar to the Hebrew word for the number seven, which stems from the idea that God rested on the seventh day after creating the heavens and the Earth, so we are also encouraged to not do any work on the seventh day of the week.

As we reflected on the meaning of Sabbath during Bible study this past week, some recalled childhood memories of spending time with family by playing board games or visiting relatives, taking a drive through the country, or going out to eat ice cream. Some suggested the best way to enjoy the Sabbath is by taking a nap or reading a book.

A few recalled how much easier it was to honor the Sabbath when stores were closed, and we were

not tempted to spend the day shopping. *What would it be like, someone wondered, if stores were closed on Sundays today?* I suggested that going out to eat at a restaurant may feel like Sabbath to those who don't have to cook, but your eating out forces someone else to not honor the Sabbath by cooking your meal. One person asked, "So, where do we draw line in what is Sabbath?"

Throughout history many have struggled to understand how to honor the Sabbath, such as

A young...pastor confronted a serious situation on a Sunday morning. A severe storm had hit during the night, and his church was located some distance outside the village. There was no way, it seemed, to get to the church for Sunday worship. But then an idea came to him. He could get to the church if he put on his ice skates and went by way of the canal which ran in front of his church.

When he began to think seriously about his plan, however, he concluded that it might not be such a good idea. The people of his church were fine folk, but they were also very strict about Sabbath observance. Skating was simply not to be done on the Sabbath. The young pastor thought about the matter and then made up his

mind. It was important that worship be conducted, he would therefore run the risk.

So, he put on his skates and made his way without difficulty to the church. Just inside the door the official board waited for him; no smiles welcomed him. They were obviously disturbed that their pastor had so clearly violated what they felt to be proper behavior on the Sabbath day. But if they were displeased, they were also uncomfortable. They were very fond of the young pastor, and they really didn't want to cause any rupture in their relationship. After considerable discussion, one of them asked the pastor a question. "Did you enjoy the skating?" he asked.

"No," said the pastor, "I didn't enjoy it."

A sigh of relief went up from the group. It was all right. Since there had been no joy in the incident, it was acceptable to the church people!¹

Some view the Sabbath as a day that limits them, restricting what they can or cannot do, but the Sabbath actually frees us by offering a day to step away from our busy lives, to pause and notice God. It seems like such an easy idea—take one day to stop and reflect on God's movement in your

life—but in today's fast pace society, some view taking a moment of rest as wasted time.

Tonia Tinkham would disagree that pausing is wasted time, for she knows the value of taking brief breaks, and she has used her artistic skills to encourage others to do the same. Taking her bag of sidewalk chalk, she strolls along the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. When she finds a vacate spot on the sidewalk, she uses her artistic skills on this concrete canvas, drawing images and words of hope. She said, "My hope is that if someone's in that place where they're not feeling great—they're down, they're stressed, they're frustrated, whatever it is—I can at least give them a moment in their day."

She calls her artwork CeMental Breaks, a play on words of cement and mental. Each piece of artwork begins with an open circle, the word *pause*, and an invitation to breathe and reflect, along with spots of color in her doodles. She hopes that busy people will pause and look at her artwork, suggesting,

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“Anything that can slow down most people’s 100 mph lives is always good.”²

You and I might wish for these CeMental images in our community, for have you ever found it difficult to pause in the middle of the day, wishing you could find refreshment in the midst of your busyness?

Pastor April Yamasaki wondered this same question after she came home refreshed after a vacation. She wrote,

What would it take to feel renewed every day? Instead of waiting for a vacation to smooth out the knots of tension from everyday life, instead of waiting until the end of the week to shed our weariness, what if we could take time out every day? Live a renewed life every day? Be refreshed by God every day?³

Her search for these moments in the middle of the day led her to write about what she calls *Sacred Pauses*. These moments are for

the busy professional caught up in paperwork and meetings, for the construction worker framing a house, for the young mother at home, for the student wondering about next

steps, for those who are retired or just plain tired. There is more to life than the things that occupy our immediate attention. We can pause, connect more deeply with ourselves and with God, and be renewed.⁴

In addition to the traditional ideas of reading scripture or praying, she suggests such sacred pauses as spending time in our relationships, making music, taking a walk in the woods, or having fun. When we invite God’s presence into these seemingly ordinary moments, they become holy moments, filled with God’s Spirit moving through these sacred pauses.

Writer Wayne Muller reminds us that

Sabbath time can be a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities, and accomplishments. Sabbath is a way of being in time where we remember who we are, remember what we know, and taste the gifts of spirit and eternity.⁵

I find it interesting to notice that of the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath gets the most emphasis. While the teachings on murder, stealing,

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and adultery get only two to three words each, the instruction on the Sabbath has over 50 words, more words than any of the ten commandments. This emphasis on Sabbath is not so much for God, but for us. Without rest and time to reconnect to God, our life begins to deteriorate emotionally and mentally and spiritually.

Immediately following the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, the sixth chapter summarizes these teachings by saying, “Listen up!”

Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength. These words that I am commanding you today must always be on your minds. Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting around your house and when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are getting up (6:5-7, CEB)

The biblical writer suggested these teachings are so important that you should attach them to your hand or forehead as a reminder. In addition, we are to write them on the doorframe of our houses so we can see the words each time we enter and exit our home, reminding us to take Sabbath on the run.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a Sabbath reminder hanging in our homes—something to see each time we enter our homes? I have such a reminder for you. Place this in your home, and whenever you find yourself needing rest, look at your reminder and take a Sabbath on the run.

¹ Hodgin, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 4622-4634). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #945.

² Katie Galioto, “Chalk art creations popping up on sidewalks to encourage mental health breaks,” *The Elkhart Truth*, September 21-22, C4.

³ Yamasaki, April (2013-02-01). *Sacred Pauses* (Kindle Locations 138-141). Herald Press. Kindle Edition.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 150-152.

⁵ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Days*, Bantam, 1999, 6.