

Diserahkan: 07 Maret 2020

Diterima: 11 April 2020

Diterbitkan: 07 Mei 2020

## A Healthy Rhythm of Rest: Why a Sound Theology and Spiritual Praxis of Rest Matters to Life and Ministry

**Richard Peck Woon**

Firstlight Church, Perth, Western Australia

*richard.tanpw@gmail.com*

### *Abstract*

The article is for full-time Christian professionals to consider the importance of constructing a sound theology and spiritual praxis of rest in the context of life experience and practical ministry. It seeks to answer two critical questions from the perspective of the Sabbath, "What is the meaning of rest from a biblical perspective?" and "what is the role of rest in life and ministry". The intent is for ministers to value rest in the form of a sabbatical life that combines worship, work, and service within an essential relationship with God. A rhythm of rest is produced when our values and priorities are integrated into God's sovereign purpose. This is essential for the busy pastor who is actively engaging in ministry without enjoying God. If God is apparently absent in our relationship, then ministry loses its spiritual meaning and quality. It becomes a form of self-idolatry. A healthy faith restores our true rest.

**Keywords:** *rest; sabbath*

### INTRODUCTION

This article for pastors and full-time Christian workers<sup>1</sup> will focus on the need for constructing a sound theology and spiritual praxis of rest in the context of life experience and practical ministry. By sound theology, we mean a system of belief that can coherently nurture and support a spirituality of rest that sustains and nourishes us. By spiritual praxis, we refer to a sustainable practice of rest that produces mental, physical and emotional well-being. To fulfil our task, two major questions immediately came to mind: the first being "*What is the meaning of rest from a biblical perspective?*" and the second, "*What is the role of rest in life and ministry?*"

---

<sup>1</sup> We will use the term, "minister" or "ministers" to incorporate both groups of Christian professionals throughout this article.

We will first briefly explain these two questions and shall expand our discussion later.

The biblical idea of rest is connected and encapsulated in the unique activity of the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup> It was first mentioned in the Genesis account when God rested (shabath) on the seventh day after six days of creation (Genesis 2:3). Later, the Sabbath was institutionalised by the Mosaic Law (Exodus 16:23-30) for the Jewish people to mark their deliverance from Egypt. The Jews observed the Sabbath with great care as a day of rest from their physical labour. In giving them Sabbath, God was keeping His people from overworking and wearing down.

The Sabbath was, however, perverted by the Pharisees and other legalistic teachers of the Law. They turned the Sabbath from a blessing into a burden.<sup>3</sup> The manner as to how the Sabbath should be kept was a point of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees. On one of those occasions, Jesus declared, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" (Mark 2:27) In saying that, Jesus was correcting some deficiencies that subvert holy and healthy rest. His intention was to bring everyone back to the foundational understanding of "experiencing" the Sabbath not as a day of the week but as a way of life.

To Jesus the Sabbath was not created for its own sake; it was a gift of God to the human race. Its purpose was not to put humans in a kind of straightjacket. Rather, it was for their good—to provide rest from labour and opportunity for worship.<sup>4</sup>

Any attempt to construct a theology and praxis of rest must take into account this understanding of the Sabbath. While the Pharisees revised the Sabbath into something counterproductive and ultimately destructive—Jesus restored the Sabbath into a living experience and more fruitful practice. The Sabbath Jesus was bringing about was a much deeper rest than just a day of the week.

As our Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:17-18) Jesus saw His mission of redemption (Luke 4:18-19) as a fulfilment of the Messianic rest typified in the Old Testament Sabbath rest. His finished work on the cross changed the nature and texture of the Sabbath, from the Old Covenant day of physical rest to the New Covenant way of perpetual rest. Our rest is

---

<sup>2</sup> There are numerous articles and books on the topic of Sabbath and its place in the Christian life. Since space does not permit a detailed discussion here, I shall provide a few of the most salient points for our consideration.

<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees and religious legalists evolved a system of more than 450 restrictions governing the Sabbath which became more authoritatively demanding than the commandment of God.

<sup>4</sup> Walter W. Wessel, ed. Frank E. Gaebel, "*Mark*" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 638.

spiritual, not physical, and is in a Person, not in a day.<sup>5</sup> This perpetual rest is available to all who are in Christ—not for the future but is to be experienced as a present reality. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews was exhorting believers to be diligent not to forsake this rest but to strive to enter this rest (Hebrews 4:1-11). He tells us that we can only enter into this rest by faith apart from all works of self-effort.

This rest, of course, is not just the perfect rest of salvation found in Christ but also the day-to-day rest of dependence upon God. It is with the point in mind that we are to nurture a sustainable lifestyle where God actively involves Himself personally with us on a daily basis.<sup>6</sup> I describe this lifestyle as the "sabbatical life" where a person is well sustained by a spiritually healthy rhythm of rest<sup>7</sup>.

In practical terms, the sabbatical life combines worship, work, and service within an essential relationship with God—where God is the *raison d'être* for our being and doing.<sup>8</sup> In giving God access to every part of our lives, even the parts we are fearful of, embarrassed by and intensely defensive about, we will experience an authentic reordering of values and priorities that integrate us to God's sovereign purpose.<sup>9</sup>

This relationship with God produces a rhythm of rest when what we want to do and what God wants to do is not in conflict or competition. Rather, it generates synergy—when our active cooperation with God is met by the full participation of God. We become positive and productive human beings when our being (identity) and doing (activity) are fully integrated—likened to Jesus when He was on earth.

This rhythm of rest is about doing life with God and not compartmentalizing God to one aspect of life. It is about being aware of His Presence and engaging and experiencing Him in everything.<sup>10</sup> Understood in this way, this rhythm of rest energizes us to act with vision and generosity because we are intimately connected to and being care for by a loving God. As this

---

<sup>5</sup> John Phillips, *Bible Explorer's Guide: How to Understand and Interpret the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1987), 96.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time with God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship with God* (Dower Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 152.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York, MA: Bantam, 2000), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavour* (London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012). This is a call back to our deepest sense of purpose when work is not a distraction but an expression of our trust in God.

<sup>9</sup> John Mark Comer, *Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2015)

<sup>10</sup> Bruce G. Epperly, Katherine Gould Epperly, *Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry* (Hendon VA: Albans Institute, 2009).

rhythm is both the inflow and outflow of our love from and for the Father, we ought to be learning more about receiving from Him.

Bernard of Clairvaux gives us an excellent suggestion here:

If then you are wise, show yourself rather as a reservoir than as a canal. For a canal spreads abroad water as it receives it, but a reservoir waits until it is filled before overflowing, and thus communicates, without loss to itself, its superabundant water. In the Church at the present day, we have many canals, few reservoirs.<sup>11</sup>

Christ Jesus is our perfect exemplar of one who lives a sabbatical life.

All the time, while He was engaged in ministry, He was meditating on the Father. Because Jesus was living in constant communion with the Father and being fully assured of His identity and place as the Son of God, He could fully surrender Himself to do the Father's will. This explains why He is always focused and fruitful because He does what the Father is doing.

Without the gospel revelation of our sonship and acknowledging God as our Father<sup>12</sup>, our ministry is often reduced to just some religious functions or activities. When we put more weight on what we do than who we truly are in Christ, we act more like slaves and spiritual orphans than being actual sons and daughters of God. Then, our enjoyment of God is, to be sure, imperfect and limited. Eventually, we suffer because the intensity of ministry will reveal, not about what we do for God but who we are with God.

When rest is about engaging and experiencing God's divine presence in daily activities, we become the reservoirs of Bernard's imagery where we are overflowing seamlessly with the fullness of God<sup>13</sup> in everything we say and do. Then ministry is not a hapless chore but a gift of love we receive—and give. It is through enjoying this supernatural hospitality of God's love that we can expand and extend the same hospitality towards others.

In “*Finding God*”, Larry Crabb says,

With his generous heart overflowing, he refuses to withhold anything from us that will help us know Him better. In His own sovereign way, without consulting us, he patiently arranges things in our lives so that we experience

---

<sup>11</sup> Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 193.

<sup>12</sup> Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 3:14-19.

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 3:19; Colossians 2:9.

him as the satisfaction of our souls, as our loving bridegroom, as a good God who never intends anything but our joy.<sup>14</sup>

When God is our truest source of satisfaction, a healthy rhythm of rest brings creativity and authenticity into our articulation and expression of what we believe we are in Christ. Our intimate connection to Christ makes us imitators of Christ where ministry is not a busy flurry of activities but the unique activity of listening and speaking to God, not with the lips but in the heart. Jesus modelled this approach to life and ministry on many occasions in the four gospels.<sup>15</sup> He aptly described it to His detractors (when they were plotting to kill Him for not only breaking the Sabbath but also for calling God as His Father).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>19</sup> But Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing alone. **The Son does only what he sees the Father doing** [Emphasis mine] because the Son does whatever the Father does.<sup>20</sup> The Father loves the Son and shows the Son all the things he himself does. But the Father will show the Son even greater things than this so that you can all be amazed. John 5:19-20, New Century Version

The more we are engaging and experiencing the Father's presence and pleasure, the more we are enabled to move into effortless cooperation with God. This is one of the most delightful fruits of our day-to-day rest. A healthy rhythm of rest emerges when we immerse ourselves in knowing who we are and what we have in Christ amid a broad range of experiences and emotions in actual everyday life and ministry. This revelation of our identity and life in Christ provides an essential and dynamic context in how we perceive and do ministry. That is, ministry is not about doing things for God, but being with God. In short, rest is not the absence from activity but in the presence of divinity.

### **The Crisis of Piety**

In dealing with the demands of the pastoral ministry, many ministers give little personal time for rest, spiritual nourishment and self-care. If, however, they were to orient both life and ministry around a theological understanding and spiritual experience of the sabbatical life, they will have a more integrated approach in how they are living and what they are doing.

God ordained rest to all who are made in His image and thus, a sabbatical life is about

---

<sup>14</sup> Larry Crabb, *Finding God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 106.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 5:16, Matthew 7:21, Mark 14:36; Luke 24:49; John 4:4; John 6:38, John 11:41 and John 12:49.

<sup>16</sup> John 5:18.

enacting a holy and healthy rhythm of rest which shows we belong to Him. Yet, most see this rest as an afterthought rather than as a means for spiritual growth and well-being.

These ministers usually take a disconnected approach toward worship, work, and service. That is, they worship on weekends and work on weekdays. Without integrating all aspects of ourselves to our life in God, we experience conflict in where we should give time and energy. When life and ministry gets busy, the tyranny of the urgent<sup>17</sup> always wins over the important every time—and rest is often the first thing to get neglected and sacrificed.

A genuine and continuing relationship with God is the foundation for an authentic understanding of ministry. We belong to God and He is the source of our ministry wholeness and integrity. Our primary ministry is to minister to God first (and that includes being ministered to by God Himself) before we minister to others. It is about cultivating a continuous awareness of God's love in Christ and our constant response to Him. This produces synergy and oneness with God, which is the experience of effortless receptivity to God and what His love is doing in and through us so that we, in turn, can serve one another in love.

Without this viable rhythm of rest, ministry devolves from an obedience of the heart into an obsession of duty. Then we become more driven about achieving goals and meeting deadlines than creating personal time and space to grow intimately and have better connectivity with God. Sooner or later, this unhealthiness stuns or paralyzes spiritual growth and creates a barrier to a healthy engagement with God.

When we function under the illusion that other pressing matters take priority and importance over our relationship with God—we become confused about ministry. In usurping the role of God and relying on our arrogate power, we are building both life and ministry on crumbling foundations. This is because we have no standard and source of authority for why we do it and what we believe about why we do it. Then, it becomes easy to replace God with our ingrown idea of what ministry is and what it is to be a minister. This deviation of ministry into a faulty ideology of overwhelming hard work with an underwhelming engagement with God creates a crisis of piety.

This crisis of piety often consigns spirituality into a secondary position, making it a functional necessity during ministry but not placing it at the very heart of ministry. We can see two examples. We study the Bible to prepare a sermon or a Sunday school lesson and not for the sheer joy of reading God's Word. We use prayer to start and end a church board meeting to "Christianise" it, but much of our discussion may lack an authentic Christian spirit of charity.

---

<sup>17</sup> Charles Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent, Revised and Reedited* (London, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

Here, we are so-called using God to achieve our goals and do our bidding and not because we love God and want to glorify Him in all we say and do.

In his book, *"With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God"*, Skye Jethani describes four different postures people are relating to God.<sup>18</sup> Each has its inherent strengths and weaknesses. Each has its variation of fear and control. The only way to resolve these tensions caused by fear and control is to learn the way Jesus relates with God.

This posture of *"Life With God"* is about enjoying communion with God and an ever-deepening relationship with Him. If we learn to live *"Life With God"*, as Jethani suggests, we break the cycle of fear and control that plagues the other four postures.

Life with God is different because its goal is not to use God; its goal is God. When God becomes our goal, He ceases to be a device we employ or a commodity we consume. Instead, God himself becomes the focus of our desire. But before we can really desire God, we must have a clear understanding of who He is and what He is like. The reason most people gravitate to one of the other four postures is because they've never received a clear vision of who God really is, and so they settle for something less.<sup>19</sup>

An unhealthy imbalance of worship, work and rest coupled with the displacement of a genuine posture of *"Life With God"* serve to worsen this crisis of piety. A minister can be a "prime endorser" advocating the importance of spirituality and spiritual well-being without necessarily being an "end-user" himself or herself. Here the same minister can actively engage in ministry without realising he or she can be doing God's work without really enjoying God. We become spiritual schizophrenics when our practice of intimacy contradicts our precept of intimacy.

It is difficult to enjoy God when we let busyness define our worth and value. The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves and we imagine, to others.<sup>20</sup> The good news is we feel we are somebody because of the work we are doing. The bad news is this feeling is a form of self-idolatry. We need to learn to recognise the difference between working compulsively to earn approval, love, and acceptance and working healthily with

---

<sup>18</sup> Skye Jethani, *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011). The four postures are: (1) "Life From God" describes those who want God's blessings and gifts but not God Himself. (2) "Life Over God" describes those who abandoned God in favour of organizational principles, proven formulas and controllable outcomes. (3) "Life For God" describes those who believe a significant life is the one expended to accomplishing great things in God's service. (4) "Life Under God" describes those who see God in simple cause-and-effect terms, that is if we obey Him and He will bless us.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 97-100.

<sup>20</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York, MA: Bantam, 2000), 2.

godly motivation.<sup>21</sup>

Much of what we consider as Christian fervour and service for the Lord could well be ignited by a self-consuming drivenness to work. We work hard in hopes of a day when God will reward us for our efforts and this idea of "earning rewards from God" justifies the need to achieve, accomplish and be recognised and respected. Needless to say, a minister just couldn't do enough for God where faith is all about hard work and sacrifice. Such an approach to ministry will cause you to neglect yourself (and others) and your health.

Busyness has nothing to do with God. It has everything to do with activity-driven ministers who concoct a false spirituality that serves self rather than honour God. They formulate a harmful belief system where how busy they look in front of others becomes more important than to be who they are before God. Think about it. How often do our conversations focus on our busy schedule and sleep-deprived we are?

The curse of busyness robs us from the blessing of rest. In his book, *Subversive Spirituality*, Eugene Petersen warns us of the effect of busyness in our spiritual life.

Busyness is the enemy of spirituality. It is essentially laziness. It is doing the easy thing instead of the hard thing. It is filling our time with our own actions instead of paying attention to God's actions. It is taking charge.<sup>22</sup>

We can disguise our workaholic addiction with hyper-spiritual words and actions but in the end, our family and the church suffer for our malady. The root cause for our drivenness may stem from an over-inflated ego and low self-esteem and perhaps the fear of becoming unimportant and thus leading us to think that if we do not put in more time and effort into our ministry—God's work will suffer.

This frantic busyness for God is nothing more than a pathological need to be valued or esteemed. Resentment develops when our desires for validation or appreciation are not met. Furthermore, this problem is exacerbated when the church workplace culture promotes and pushes a lifestyle and habit of busyness that leaves many ministers feeling stressed, exhausted and broken.

---

<sup>21</sup> Colossians 2:23.

<sup>22</sup> Eugene Petersen, *Subversive Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997,) 237.

## Back To The Rhythm Of Rest

The disintegration of healthy ministry into a harmful belief system will produce a toxic faith that undermines spirituality instead of building it.<sup>23</sup> It is by returning to a genuine, healthy faith that we recover our true rest. When faith is healthy, our dependency on God becomes a godly dependency.<sup>24</sup> Healthy faith is about a relationship with God, not about religion. It is fostering a relationship that is well-grounded and deeply rooted in Christ.

<sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

<sup>29</sup> 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**. [Emphasis mine] <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30 (NASB)

In contrast to a religiously complicating and rather burdensome way of relating to God, Jesus promises rest<sup>25</sup> to those who would take up his yoke<sup>26</sup> and learn from Him. The yoke of Jesus gives "rest to the weary and heavy-laden", that is, people who are burdened and damaged by a toxic belief system. To take up the yoke and learn from Him is an invitation to discipleship. The Greek word for "learn" is *manthanō* (to understand, to increase in knowledge) which is also the root word for "disciple". I will postulate here that the mark of true discipleship is about learning to rest ourselves in Christ's finished work for us. It should be the most central meaning for the definition and habit of a disciple of Jesus.

In an earlier part of this article, I spoke of our task in constructing a sound theology and spiritual praxis has given rise to two critical questions, "*What is the meaning of rest from a biblical perspective?*" and "*What is the role of rest in life and ministry?*" These two

---

<sup>23</sup> Gary R. Collins, *The Soul Search: A Spiritual Journey to Authentic Intimacy with God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 123.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Arterburn, Jack Felton, *More Jesus, Less Religion: Moving from Rules to Relationship* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2010)

<sup>25</sup> What was the context of this promise of rest? Jesus had just completed his mission in various cities and towns in and around the region of Galilee. There he encountered resistance and rejection and He openly denounced the three cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for failing to receive and believe Him. (Matthew 11:20-24) The people of these cities were so steeped in religious traditions and strong opinions that even though they witnessed and experienced most of Jesus' mighty miracles, they didn't turn away from their sin and find rest in God. After His denunciation, Jesus said a remarkable and profound prayer to God. (Matthew 11:25-27) In that prayer, He understood why the Father would conceal the truth from those who pride themselves on being so wise and learned (in the vein of the Scribes and Pharisees) and how the Father willingly reveal the truth to those who are likened to uncomplicated and simple children (like His disciples).

<sup>26</sup> In biblical context, a yoke is a wood frame that joins two animals together so that they can move together and work together, particularly to pull heavy loads. If a yoke is made and fits well, it efficiently distributes the weight of the heavy object in a way that makes it easy and light to pull. In rabbinic writings, however, "a yoke" is a figure of speech used to describe a master's teaching in regards to the Torah and Wisdom writings. Therefore, "to put on a yoke" denotes a disciple's obligatory obedience and subordination to his master by living out that the values that his teachings represent and imitating his example.

questions orient us towards a sabbatical life that is characterised by a spiritual healthy rhythm of rest. The question we want to explore now is, *"How do we carry out this rhythm of rest daily?"*

With the principle of the Sabbath as the constituent element for our rhythm of rest, we shall succinctly look at three overarching Scriptural principles of the Sabbath that will contribute to the clarity of our thought and practice.

### 1. Sabbath As Creating And Resting With God

When God rested on the seventh day from His work, He was not tired (Genesis 2:3). God rested because He knew when to stop creating and start resting. God was communicating an important message to the original readers and its abiding impact on us. If God would not stop creating, it would mean He was not satisfied with what He has created. Perhaps this is our situation. When we find it hard to stop working, it may not be because we have too much to do but because we get too little satisfaction from what we are doing. Since God was working from a momentum of creating and resting, the onus falls on us to emulate His great example. Then, we will not collapse under the extraneous demands and expectations of life and ministry.

A careful reading of Genesis 1 shows that Sabbath did not take place only on the seventh day. The inclusion of those repetitive phrases, "there was evening and there was morning" was to sink into our consciousness that God took a "little break" at the end of the evening after He deemed each day of His creative work as "good". This set the backdrop as to why the Jews start their new day at sundown. It serves as a reminder that each day begins with resting and not working. What God is conveying here is that our identity lies with who God created us to be and not in what we do. This is seen in the creation of Adam.

Adam was created on the sixth day, and as such, his first day coincided with God's seventh day of sanctified rest. Here we see the kernel idea of the sabbatical life. In fellowship with God and enjoying Him, Adam was learning the momentum of creating and resting so that he could serve God from a rightful posture and position of rest. This is God's truest intent for us. We are made to rest. We are to work from rest rather than work to rest.

Imagine what will happen if we start to see the value of our work is determined by our rhythm of rest (in contrast to our culture's expectation, in which how much work we do determines how much we get to rest). A good way to do so is to start and close each day with a Sabbath. This daily rhythm of rest centres our focus on God and being aware of His presence from the beginning of every day till the end of it. We can also expand our rhythm of

rest to a full day, once a week and perhaps a full week in a year, just encountering and embracing new experiences of God and then culminate it into a sabbatical year once every seven years.

## 2. Sabbath As Identifying And Dignifying Our True Selves In God

In Deuteronomy 5:14-15, Moses taught his people because God liberated Israel, the Sabbath was to demonstrate their liberation from their endless work in Egypt when they were under bondage. This day of liberation gave them a perspective to the whole of their lives, particularly to their work. It was a weekly reminder that their ultimate identity was not wrapped up on their work but in their relationship with God.

This newly-given and much-needed identity was critical from these ancient people—for they were previously slaves and their worth and value was based on how much they produced. Rest restores their dignity and puts them on the path of discovery that they are more than their work. Abraham J. Heschel tells us that Sabbath is given as a reminder that a person is "not a beast of burden, and the rest is needed for the purpose of recovery of lost strength...or for the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of one's work."<sup>27</sup>

Sabbath is not a negation of work—merely the cessation of work.<sup>28</sup>

Often ministers treat their day off or the weekend as their Sabbath. Sabbath, however, is more than taking a day off. Taking a day off does not necessarily mean we abandon our busy activities. Often, ministers would spend their day off to pursue leisure of some kind. Yet, most of our recreational games are designed to be highly competitive. We either run against each other in frantic paces or we seek to outmanoeuvre one another through game rules that maximise excitement by minimising the playing time. From this perspective, the minister brings the "rush hours" of life from work into leisure and if so, can we honestly say the minister is practising Sabbath on his or her day off?

The rhythm of rest is about shifting our focus from work to activities not related to work.<sup>29</sup> It is to break the monotony of work by doing something different, new and spontaneous. Instead of being slaves to our workplace, we must regard work as the mean to

---

<sup>27</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Message for Modern Man* (New York: Rarrat, Straus & Giroux, 1951), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Howard A. Synder, *A Kingdom Manifesto: Calling the Church to Live Under God's Reign* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 60.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Morris, *Taking the Day Off: Receiving God's Gift of Rest* (Nashville, TN: Faithworks, 2019). In Chapter 6, Morris listed activities we can enjoy rest both physically and spiritually.

provide us the financial means and resources to truly enjoy those things of true values like building up relationships both within and outside our family and community, doing good and sharing goods and more importantly resting unceasingly in God's grace and love to do all things.

In a practical sense, to cease working is more than just staying away from our workplace or spend our day off relaxing and doing absolutely nothing. It involves putting away the positive feelings (personal accomplishments and career progress) and the negative feelings (anxiety, worry and tension) of work.<sup>30</sup> How we feel about work should not define our worth before God.

The sabbatical life is subversive, radically counter-culture but essential for the minister. It is more of a character issue than a time management issue. When we learn to value the dignity of our identity given to us by God and dedicate ourselves to celebrate His gift of rest from carnal perceptions of life and ministry—God's presence and power is made more apparent to us.

### 3. Sabbath As Receiving And Resting On Christ's Finished Work

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us that despite their Sabbath-keeping, the children of Israel never managed to enter God's rest because of their unbelieving hearts (Hebrews 3:12-19) Then he tells us that this promise of God's rest still stands and we are invited to enter it (Hebrews 4:1-2). God's rest, in the context of this epistle, is receiving and resting on the gospel of the finished work of the Person of Jesus Christ. This is vital information because it reminds us again that we are working from rest, and not towards rest.

God has done everything for our salvation and our sanctification through Christ's finished work on the Cross. If we learn to possess by faith all the benefits and privileges of Christ's finished work, we grow a new vision that ministry is "active resting" on Christ to do all things through His mighty power at work in and through us (cf. Ephesians 3:20). In this sense, the ministry is not our work but Christ extending His finished work to us and our response to Him. If this is so, then ministry is God's gift to us and we are to give and release to others what we receive from Him. It also means that we need to let God take the strain by casting our burden on Him and cease to carry it ourselves. The rhythm of rest affirms our being and directs our doing so that we become more fully the people God calls us to be in Him. This frees us from feeling demoralised, undervalued or uninspired even when nothing

---

<sup>30</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989). This is an excellent book that provides valuable insights about keeping the rhythm of Sabbath.

seems to be happening our way or when we even may feel forgotten.

When ministry is not our work but God's work through Christ in and through us, we will stop measuring success by the overwhelming amount of tasks we do or by the responsibilities we are compelled to take on. Rather, the real measure of success is service to others—not out of a sense of obligation as to what we must do but out of the spirit of revelation as to who we are to God.

## CONCLUSION

Having a sound theology and spiritual praxis of rest provides us with an ever-renewing sense of purpose and wholeness in our life and ministry. We work because our Father is working. In doing so, we are rendering to God His rightful place so that what we think and do and pray is to His glory and thus, in turn, for our own good and well-being.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abraham J. Heschel. 1951. *The Sabbath: Its Message for Modern Man*. New York: Rarrat, Straus & Giroux.
- Bruce G. Epperly, Katherine Gould Epperly. 2009. *Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry*. Hendon VA: Albans Institute
- Charles Hummel. 2013. *Tyranny of the Urgent*. London, UK: InterVarsity Press.
- Dom Cuthbert Butler. 2001. *Western Mysticism: Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Eugene Petersen. 1987. *Subversive Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Gary R. Collins. 1998. *The Soul Search: A Spiritual Journey to Authentic Intimacy with God*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Howard A. Synder. 1985. *A Kingdom Manifesto: Calling the Church to Live Under God's Reign*. Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- John Mark Comer. 2015. *Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- John Phillips. 1989. *Bible Explorer's Guide: How to Understand and Interpret the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel.
- Klaus Issler. 2001. *Wasting Time with God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship with God*. Dower Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Larry Crabb. 1993. *Finding God*. Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House.

- Marva J. Dawn. 1989. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Robert Morris. 2019. *Taking the Day Off: Receiving God's Gift of Rest*. Nashville, TN: Faithworks
- Skye Jethani. 2011. *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Stephen Arterburn, Jack Felton. 2010. *More Jesus, Less Religion: Moving from Rules to Relationship*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press.
- Tim Keller. 2012. *Every Good Endeavour*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Walter W. Wessel, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. 1984. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Wayne Muller. 2000. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives*. New York: Bantam.