

LOOKING FOR REST AMID THE PRESSURES OF LIFE

It seems that we're almost always over-stretched with too much to do. We come to the end of each day tired, yet conscious of what we've left undone. There's always someone else we should have phoned, emailed, or attended to in some way. Our lives often seem like over packed suitcases, crammed to the brim, and still unable to hold all we need to carry along. What's wrong here?

Whenever we feel that way, it's a sure sign that we've lost the proper sense of time. Life is meant to be busy, but we're also meant, at regular times, to have 'sabbath time', to rest and enjoy.

When we look at scripture we see that God established a certain rhythm to time.

Biblically, this is the pattern: We're meant to work for six days, then have a one-day sabbatical; work for seven years and have a one year sabbatical; work for seven times seven years (forty-nine years) and have a Jubilee year; and finally work for a lifetime and have an eternity of sabbatical. The idea is that our pressured, hurried, working days should be regularly punctured by times of rest, celebration, enjoyment, non-work, non-pressure, and that ultimately all work will cease and we will have nothing to do except to luxuriate in life itself.

And what's supposed to happen on a sabbath? What constitutes sabbath time?

First, a sabbath is meant to be un-ordinary time, a time when our normal work and the everyday pressures of life are stopped. Partly this is meant to free us up for deeper things, but mainly it is meant to remind us that we do not live to work, but rather work in order to live and love.

Next a sabbath is meant to be a time for enjoyment, for high celebration. And this isn't abstract: On a sabbath we're meant to eat our best meal of the week, wear our best clothing, rest, enjoy the earth and each other. Our language still carries some remnants of this when, for example, we speak of wearing our Sunday best and having our Sunday dinner.

Finally, sabbath is meant to be a time for reconciliation, for forgiving debts, for giving up grudges, for making peace with our enemies. The cessation of work, the rest, the celebration, the drinking in of enjoyment, are all partly ends in themselves. The sabbath was made for us. However they are also in function of something else, namely, reconciliation, forgiveness. We only truly celebrate the sabbath, have a genuine holiday, if we forgive someone and it's because we don't do this that, so often, our vacations don't relax us for long. We're tired, go on vacation, get a good rest, get away from the pressures of our work, enjoy some unpressured time, perhaps even get some sun and a tan, but then come home and very soon, within hours or days, are just as tired as we were before we went on vacation. Why? Because we didn't forgive anybody and our hurts and bitterness are the deep roots of our tiredness. There's a statute of limitations to all debts, including our personal hurts.

Sabbath need not be a year or even a day. It can also be an afternoon, an hour, a walk, a dinner. Sabbath is a time when we drink, if only for a few moments, from the fountain of rest and delight. It is a time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing, and true.

If certain plant species do not lie dormant for winter, they will not bear fruit in spring. A period of rest, within which our roots quietly take in nourishment, is the key to health. Like plants, we too must have periods in which we lie fallow and silently nourish our roots.

We are almost always running, trying to catch the things that will make us happy when, in fact, those very things are trying to catch us!

-God said: "Remember to rest." This is not a lifestyle suggestion, but a commandment, as important as not stealing, not murdering, or not lying!

We need sabbath. We've all lived too long where we can be reached all the time!

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