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Sabbath Intentions

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Sabbath Intentions

Abstract

"I found myself continually challenged and increasingly convicted that I needed to change my personal Sabbath practices."

Posting about understanding Sabbath rest from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/sabbath-intentions/>

Keywords

In All Things, Sabbath, busyness, practice, wholeness

Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Sabbath Intentions

 inallthings.org/sabbath-intentions/

Teresa TerHaar

It's ironic, really. I started out my semester of studying the Sabbath by preparing for my first Sabbath presentation – on the Sabbath. I sat at my desk at 3:30 that Sunday afternoon in January thinking “there is something wrong with this picture.” I regularly came home from church and planned an afternoon with my family that included “mom time” – in other words, getting ready for classes on Monday. Of course, while working, I would feel appropriately guilty and tell myself, “I'll plan better this coming week. I won't do schoolwork next Sunday.” And then the next Sunday would roll around and there I was again. Sitting at the desk in the office making lesson plans and feeling guilty. I confess that I have a long-term problem with Sabbath-keeping.

So, when the opportunity to join the teaching team for the a capstone course called [*Calling, Task, and Culture*](#) presented itself and I discovered that I could select my own topic to investigate with my students, the topic of Sabbath was high on my list. My pastor had preached a sermon series on Sabbath earlier that fall and I found myself continually challenged and increasingly convicted that I needed to change my personal Sabbath practices. If not for myself, then for my family. Did I want my two girls to grow up thinking that Sabbath was a day to “catch up” on work? To pick up the pieces from a busy week? To worship God in the morning and “things to do” in the afternoon?

Students, friends, and colleagues encouraged me that the topic was a good choice. So, off I went, with the best of intentions. To get started, I began reading. My [pastor](#) sent me his favorite resources from his sermon series. I also read blogs, articles, and books that revolved around the topic of Sabbath, busyness, productivity, and rest.¹ I watched videos of authors, pastors, and self-help gurus all of whom were trying to speak into a culture which thrives on multitasking and technology (which turns out to be a dangerous combination). Two of my favorite books from this early reading were [*Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*](#) by Marva Dawn and [*Crazy Busy: A \(Mercifully\) Short Book about a \(Really\) Big Problem*](#) by Kevin DeYoung.

In *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Dawn argues that Sabbath is about much more than just going to church. She draws on both biblical theology and Jewish religious practice to propose a Sabbath that is about joy and freedom at the same time it is about discipline and worship. In *Crazy Busy*, author and pastor Kevin DeYoung writes powerfully and practically about his struggles with busyness and how it can rob our hearts and souls of joy. DeYoung writes, “Busyness does not mean you are a faithful or fruitful Christian. It only means you are busy, just like everyone else. And like everyone else, your joy, your heart and your soul are in danger.”²

In fact, I found DeYoung's *Crazy Busy* to be so insightful that I assigned it to my class. The juniors and seniors in the class came with different preconceptions of what the Sabbath is. Some spoke about the legalism with which they equated Sabbath-keeping. Some relayed rich family traditions of keeping the Sabbath. Still others struggled when our class proposed a model of Sabbath that was “customizable” to each individual. During our time together we challenged each other to both think more deeply about the Sabbath *and* practice Sabbath-keeping more intentionally in our lives.

I experienced another ironic moment the evening before my class presented their work in the class. I began reading Chuck DeGroat's book, [*Wholeheartedness: Busyness, Exhaustion, and Healing the Divided Self*](#).³ Two chapters into my reading, I kept finding myself saying over and over “this is the book we needed to read for class.” And then even more significantly, “this is the book I need to read.” His focus on the idea and practice of “wholeness” quickly captured my imagination and then my heart. In a way, DeGroat's book transcends the practical and aims right at the core of our exhausted, perfectionist, multitasking selves. You can glimpse the power of his writing in the article he wrote for [iAt yesterday](#). While not about “Sabbath” directly, his thoughtful exploration of why we feel so divided and how our divided lives affect every piece of us connects powerfully with how we conceive of and practice Sabbath.

DeGroat writes, “And while disciplines and boundaries and wise life choices are building blocks of a life well-lived, we learn wholeness, more often than not, when our boundaries are shattered, when our disciplines fail us, when our

theologies stump us, when our supposedly wise choices betray us.”⁴ Here’s the irony, I spent a carefully planned and well-reasoned six weeks with my students trying to “learn” some of the principles of wholeness DeGroat explores in his book. Yet I kept feeling that we were staying firmly in the “safe zone” of our ideas about Sabbath. It wasn’t until the evening before the presentation that I found the words to describe how I was feeling – in the pages of DeGroat’s *Wholeheartedness*.

In the last section of the book, DeGroat presents the reader with reflective exercises intended to tap into the reader’s true self. As I worked through these exercises, I found myself returning again and again to the idea and practice of Sabbath in my life. I’ve begun to recapture Sabbath in my life by being intentional. By stopping and thinking about my personal choices in regards to what Marva Dawn terms, “keeping the Sabbath wholly: ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting.” Most significantly, I’ve challenged myself to consider that I can find “wholeness in the midst of brokenness.”⁵

Footnotes

1. Some helpful resources: Walter Brueggeman, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, “The Gift of Rest” by Aaron Baart on iAt (March 24, 2016); and John Koessler and Mark Galli, *The Radical Pursuit of Rest: Escaping the Productivity Trap*

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3. Chuck DeGroat is a counselor, pastor, and professor at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. *Wholeheartedness: Busyness, Exhaustion, and Healing the Divided Self* is published by Eerdmans.

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5. DeGroat 125ff