

Sabbath
April 1, 2020
Rev. Julia Wright

When was the last time you felt truly rested? Not just that you had a good sleep and you didn't spend the day yawning, but really rested, in your spirit, your mind, AND your body?

Capitalism and the American Dream have told us that if we just work hard enough, and long enough, and sacrifice enough we can have it all, do it all and be it all. Our culture has cultivated a cult of busyness. We often mistake being overbooked with being successful, we praise those who run from meeting to meeting and event to event, and see being exhausted and frazzled as badges of honor. We define our self worth by how much we accomplish, how many people we've told about it, and how impressed they are by our hectic life pace.

Who are we if we are not defined by our productivity and activities?

I've spent the last week of our stay at home order watching a fierce debate on my social media platforms. Rosanne Cash reminded the Twitter world that Shakespeare wrote "King Lear" when the plague closed the theaters. The Washington Post had an article titled ["During a pandemic, Isaac Newton had to work from home, too. He used the time wisely."](#) Reminding readers that while still a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, he spent a year away from professors during a similar use of social distancing, continued his mathematical pursuits, made huge progress on his understanding of optics, and basically figured out gravity. No pressure friends.

On the other side of my social media is a cohort of my pastor friends describing this year as the "lentiest of Lents," encouraging people to use this time at home to go back to nature and plant a garden, pray, bake the same recipe for communion bread as the rest of the congregation, develop a spiritual practice. They are

advocating for less outward productivity and more inward self care and development. Further along this inward development self care line of thought is [#TheNapMinistry](#). I'll admit, I'm a bit obsessed with them. They advocate social, economic and racial justice by campaigning against "grind culture" and encouraging you to be kind to yourself and others and most importantly the "Nap Bishop" reminds you weekly to go take a nap!

How is your rest practice going?
Did you daydream yesterday? Will you nap today? Are you rebuking the obsession to be "productive" during a pandemic? Are you making space to grieve? Will you show yourself grace today?

The Nap Ministry
@thenapministry

But I don't think either side has quite the whole picture. Neither is entirely wrong... or right. We need to be productive AND we need to rest. Just like everything else in life there is a cycle, a give and take, a time to be productive and a time to not be productive. A time to nap and a time to get up and go. Each side benefited from the other. What is rest if that's all you do? A nap just makes you more tired if you have yet to get out of bed or put on clothes today. While conversely if all you do is work work work, you will run yourself down and eventually you physically won't be able to be productive and you'll never have any new ideas.

I'll be the first to admit that I do not have this whole cycle thing fully figured out, but I fully believe it's an important thing to wrestle with. So much so that I've been reading "Wrestling with Rest: Inviting Youth to Discover the Gift of Sabbath" by Nathan T. Stucky, Professor and Farminary Director at Princeton Theological Seminary. Dr. Stucky begins his book by reminding us that Sabbath rest was an invention, practice, and commandment from God. Gen. 2:1-3 tells us of the first Sabbath

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

He then continues his discussion by reminding us that God imposed Sabbath practice on the Israelites in the wilderness as they fled Egypt. When God provided them manna, food, in the wilderness they were only to gather what they needed each day, but on the sixth day they could gather a double portion so that they might rest on the seventh day.

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

22 On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.'" 24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. 25 Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none." Exodus 16:4-5, 22-26

Dr. Stucky reminds his readers of the trust required to follow this guidance. To gather only enough for the day ahead requires you to believe there will be more tomorrow. To gather a double portion on the sixth day requires you to believe that it won't spoil in the desert heat and that when the manna doesn't appear on the

seventh day you must believe that it will return the next day. Even when God is literally handing you a schedule for Sabbath it gets complicated and requires faith and discipline.

“So Julia, what IS our Spiritual Practice this week?”

Our spiritual practice this week is to wrestle with Sabbath. Look at your week, your schedule, your life and see where it ebbs and flows. See where work, even hard work is needed, and then see where rest is needed too. Taking a Sabbath is counter cultural for most of us. Where honoring the Sabbath is the cultural norm we tend to fill it with so many rules about what constitute rest that it is no longer restful, because we're so scared of violating it somehow. So breathe, acknowledge that it's hard, and find a time to rest. It doesn't have to be one 24 hour block (but wouldn't that be amazing?!?), but on your calendar or phone block off time to connect with yourself and the divine. Try taking a sabbath from technology, or social media, or the news. Take a sabbath to reconnect with a friend or loved one you're not allowed to see in person. Read a book for fun, go for a walk, a run, just sit in the sun.

Our practice this week is to take time to just be you, to find time to rest from our weekly labor. To not define yourself by what you are doing, or even by what you are not doing. Take the time to rest, reconnect and remember that you are a unique, beautiful, beloved creation, so that you may start next week rested.

Stucky, Nathan T. *Wrestling with Rest: Inviting Youth to Discover the Gift of Sabbath*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019.