

The Work of Rest and Worship

BY MILTON BRASHER - CUNNINGHAM

We are significant because God breathes significance into our lives. Our Creator's volitional act of love gives us value. The call to sabbath—to rest and worship—is a call to be still and get to know God, to wallow in the wonder of that love, to remember that we are not defined or determined by our culture.

Face it: God is un-American. Our 24-7-365-rent-a-movie-and-buy-cheese-enchiladas-in-the-middle-of-the-night-culture is not the place for a count the hairs, watch the sparrows, consider the lilies, take the seventh day off kind of God.

We cannot afford to let the competition get a leg up. We cannot afford to not be moving on to The Next Big Thing. We have convinced ourselves that we need to be able to buy anything anytime we want. We are the Keepers of Democracy, the Cogs of Capitalism, the Defenders of Truth, Justice, and the American Way. We are convinced we cannot stop because the world depends on us, revolves around us.

Yet the God who breathed us and our universe into existence said, "That was good," and took the day off. If our Creator does not have to be indispensable, why then do we?

The call of the sabbath is to remember the fundamental core of our faith: there is a God and we are not it. We are responsible but not indispensable. We are not even terribly significant, in human terms. The pages of human history have not left much space for the account of our lives. We are one in 6.5 billion living people, without even thinking about those who have come before, or who have yet to populate the planet. In the scope of

the expansive physical universe, we rank right up there with sand and the little plastic ring that seals the lid on the milk carton.

We are significant because God breathes significance into our lives. There is no reason for us to matter other than that God has willed it so. God's volitional act of love gives us value. The call to sabbath—to rest and worship—is a call to be still and get to know God, to wallow in the wonder of that love, to remember that we are not defined or determined by our culture.

Easier said than done. After all, we are Americans. Our culture fills every chard of silence with noise, with music, with activity. We are bombarded with the distorted "truth" that enough is not adequate, over-achieving is average, acquisitive is better than imaginative, networking is building actual relationships, and padding our resumes makes us more important. Hearing and heeding the Still, Small Voice is no easy task.

But hear what the voice is saying. The call of the sabbath is to rest, redemption, re-creation. Rest is the meaningful and sacred work of getting to know God. Rest is not the same as plopping in front of the ball game with a plate of nachos and the beverage of your choosing. God has not called us to be couch potatoes. The call to sabbath is to do more with our lives than work ourselves to death so that we can fall asleep watching reruns of "Everybody Loves Raymond," or holding our lives together all year so we can get two weeks away worrying about all we have to do when we get back home. The sabbath is a holy day, which is not the same as a holiday. It is sacred space and time.

What do you think God did on that seventh day? Slept in? Ran errands? Sat around wondering what to do for an encore? God walked in the garden at sunset, perhaps, now that there was a sun to set. The triune nature of our God points to One who infuses relationships with redemptive and re-creative power. God got to know Creation.

Jesus' activity on the sabbath was of like mind. When the Pharisees were quick to point out that he was not resting, Jesus responded that they were missing the point: meaningful, redemptive, relational work is what the sabbath is all about. What better redemptive act than to heal someone?

The call to sabbath is a call to paradox: active rest. Rest is the meaningful and sacred work of getting to know God. We are not called to be couch potatoes. The call to sabbath is to do more with our lives than work ourselves to death so that we can fall asleep watching reruns of "Everybody Loves Raymond."

If we are created in God's image, why should we not be about re-creating lives through love? The Pharisees were worried about people breaking the Blue Laws; Jesus was reminding his disciples that faith is not based on what you don't do.

The call to sabbath is a call to paradox: active rest. For the rested soul is the one who can find and share redemption.



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