

Sabbath

I got out of bed this morning because I *wanted* something. Quite a few things, actually.

I wanted to watch the sunrise over a cup of coffee...

I wanted to spend time alone with God before the three-headed chaos monster (that is, Jude, Moses, and Sunday) was out of its lair and needed to feed...

I wanted to make my writing deadline for this book, to make a living, to put food on the table for my family...

My point is, I woke up with all sorts of desires, and those desires are what got me out of bed on a cold and dark winter's day.

Desire is a great motivator. It's the engine of our lives; its function is to propel us out of bed and out into the world.

But.

If at any point desire is no longer under our control and is instead driving our lives, we're in trouble. Because when you take a closer look at the dynamics of desire, you realize desire is one of those things that is never, *ever* satisfied.

As far back as 1000 BC, the Qoheleth of Ecclesiastes said:

The eye is not satisfied with seeing.¹

A more recent poet simply said:

I can't get no satisfaction.²

Same idea.

That towering intellect of the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, once asked the question, What would satisfy our desire? What would it take to *feel* satisfied? The answer he came up with was this: everything. We would have to experience everything and everybody and *be* experienced *by* everything and everybody to feel satisfied. Eat at every restaurant; travel to every country, every city, every exotic locale; experience every natural wonder; make love to every partner we could possibly desire; win every award; climb to the top of every field; own every item in the world; etc. We would have to experience it *all* to ever feel...okay, that's enough. Sadly, even if we had access to unlimited funds, time and space still have a pesky way of getting in the way.

Karl Rahner, who was one of the most important Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, had this haunting line:

In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable, we learn that ultimately in this world there is no finished symphony.³

I love his word picture of an unfinished symphony. For those of us a little more lowbrow, think of a Chance The Rapper song cut off right before the end. Can you imagine it? The *argh*.....? The frustrated sense of incompleteness? Of a melody unresolved? Not at rest?

That feeling *is* the human condition.

What these poets and prophets and preachers are all tapping into is the reality that *desire is infinite*. It has no limit. No point at which it's ever satisfied. The problem is, *we are finite*; we have all sorts of limits, remember? So the result is restlessness.

Or in the language of math: infinite desire – finite soul = restlessness.

We live with chronically unsatisfied desires. Like an itch that no matter how many times you scratch doesn't go away. No matter how much we see, do, buy, sell, eat, drink, experience, visit, etc., we always want more.

The question for us as apprentices of Jesus, or really as humans, is simple: What do we do with all this pent-up, unsatisfied desire? This restlessness?

The Jesus tradition would offer this: human desire is infinite because we were made to live with God forever in his world and nothing less will ever satisfy us, so our only hope is to put desire back in its proper place on God. And to put all our other desires in their proper place *below* God. Not to detach from

all desire (as in Stoicism or Buddhism), but to come to the place where we no longer need _____ to live a happy, restful life.

One of the most famous lines of the way of Jesus post–New Testament is from Saint Augustine. Writing at the fall of the Roman Empire, the bishop of Hippo said this:

You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.⁴

More recently, Dallas Willard put it this way:

Desire is infinite partly because we were made by God, made for God, made to need God, and made to run on God. We can be satisfied only by the one who is infinite, eternal, and able to supply all our needs; we are only at home in God. When we fall away from God, the desire for the infinite remains, but it is displaced upon things that will certainly lead to destruction.⁵

Ultimately, nothing in this life, apart from God, can satisfy our desires. Tragically, we continue to chase after our desires ad infinitum. The result? A chronic state of restlessness or, worse, angst, anger, anxiety, disillusionment, depression—all of which lead to a life of *hurry*, a life of busyness, overload, shopping, materialism, careerism, a life of more...which in turn makes us even *more* restless. And the cycle spirals out of control.

To make a bad problem worse, this is exacerbated by our cultural moment of digital marketing from a society built around the twin gods of accumulation and accomplishment.

Advertising is literally an attempt to monetize our restlessness. They say we see upward of four *thousand* ads a day, all designed to stoke the fire of desire in our bellies. Buy this. Do this. Eat this. Drink this. Have this. Watch this. Be this. In his book on the Sabbath, Wayne Muller opined, “It is as if we have inadvertently stumbled into some horrific wonderland.”⁶

Social media takes this problem to a whole new level as we live under the barrage of images—not just from marketing departments but from the rich and famous as well as our friends and family, all of whom curate the best moments of their lives. This ends up unintentionally playing to a core sin of the human condition that goes all the way back to the garden—envy. The greed for another person’s life and the loss of gratitude, joy, and contentment in our own.

And when our innate human restlessness collides with the digital age, the result is a culture-wide crisis of emotional unhealth and spiritual death.

So...

Is there a practice from the life and teachings of Jesus to mitigate against the chronic restlessness of our condition and culture and to tap into Jesus’ rest for our souls? You already know the answer: *heck* yes. Many, but at the top of the list is Sabbath.

The Sabbath

The word *Sabbath* comes to us from the Hebrew *Shabbat*. The word literally

means “to stop.” The Sabbath is simply a day to stop: stop working, stop wanting, stop worrying, just *stop*.

Think of the images that come to us through lifestyle advertising—in our social media feeds or that trendy magazine on the coffee table. The couple lounging in a king-size bed over breakfast and coffee, organic linen spilling onto the floor; the photo-perfect picnic at the beach with wine, cheese, and that trendy bathing suit; a twentysomething playing guitar on the couch while watching the rain fall. Whether they are selling a new bathrobe, a down comforter, or a piece of furniture, almost all of them are images of Sabbath. Of stopping.

The marketing wing of Blue Dot or *Kinfolk* and *Cereal* magazines know that you ache for this kind of a stopping-rich life, *but you don’t have it*. And they are tapping into your restlessness, hoping to cash in. The irony is, to get this feeling, you don’t need to pay \$99.99 for a terry cloth bathrobe or \$69.99 for a handmade throw blanket. You just need to Sabbath, to stop. You just need to take a day of your week to slow down, breathe.

But Sabbath is more than just a day; it’s a *way of being* in the world. It’s a spirit of restfulness that comes from abiding, from living in the Father’s loving presence all week long.

You could frame it like this:

Restfulness	Relentlessness
Margin	Busyness
Slowness	Hurry

Quiet	Noise
Deep relationships	Isolation
Time alone	Crowds
Delight	Distraction
Enjoyment	Envy
Clarity	Confusion
Gratitude	Greed
Contentment	Discontentment
Trust	Worry
Love	Anger, angst
Joy	Melancholy, sadness
Peace	Anxiety
Working from love	Working for love
Work as contribution	Work as accumulation and accomplishment

Which list best describes you? If you resonate more with list B, again, zero guilt trip. Human nature and the digital age form a foreboding alliance *against* a spirit of restfulness. We all struggle in this area.

No wonder the writer of Hebrews, speaking of Sabbath and its spirit of restfulness, called us to “make every effort to enter that rest.”⁷ Notice the irony of that command; we are to work hard to rest well.

There is a discipline to the Sabbath that is really hard for a lot of us. It takes a lot of intentionality: it won’t just happen to you. It takes planning and preparation. It takes self-control, the capacity to say no to a list of good things so you can say yes to the best. But Sabbath is the primary discipline, or practice, by which we cultivate the spirit of restfulness in our lives *as a whole*.

The Sabbath is to a spirit of restfulness what a soccer practice is to a match or band practice is to a show. It’s how we practice, how we prepare our minds and bodies for the moments that matter most.

Walter Brueggemann has this great line: “People who keep sabbath live all seven days differently.”⁸ It’s true. Watch out for the Sabbath. It will mess with you. First it will mess with one day of your week; then it will mess with your whole life.

To clarify, Sabbath isn’t *less* than a day; it’s a whole lot more. Hence, it was woven into the fabric of Jesus’ weekly routine.

Jesus on the Sabbath

It was a lazy Saturday afternoon: hot with clear skies overhead. Jesus was hiking through a cornfield with his apprentices, like you do. It was the Sabbath, and this is one of many stories about Jesus and the seventh day. Built into Jesus’ life rhythm was a core practice—an *entire* day, every week, set aside just to slow down, to stop.

But on this particular Sabbath, Jesus got in trouble with the Pharisees. They took issue with how Jesus and his friends were celebrating the day, royally missing the heart of God behind this practice. In a loving rebuke Jesus simply said:

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.⁹

What a stunning line. Here we are, thousands of years later, reading and rereading it. Yet sadly, often *misreading* it. In context, Jesus was beating up on a legalistic, guilt-heavy religious culture that had totally missed the Father's heart behind the command to slow down one day a week.

Translation: a culture that was (in this area) the *exact opposite* of our own.

First-century Jews needed to hear the second half of that command: "The Sabbath was made for man, *not man for the Sabbath*." They had it backward, cart before the horse and all that.

Fast-forward to the twenty-first century: we aren't legalistic about the Sabbath—most of us don't even practice Sabbath *at all*. A day off? Sure. Sunday worship? When I can. But *Sabbath*? Very few of us even know what that is, exactly.

The Sabbath isn't a new idea; it predates Jesus by millennia. It's just new *to us*.¹⁰

My fellow Portlander and dear friend A. J. Swoboda wrote this:

[The Sabbath] has largely been forgotten by the church, which has uncritically mimicked the rhythms of the industrial and success-obsessed West. The result? Our road-weary, exhausted churches have largely failed to integrate Sabbath into their lives as vital elements of Christian discipleship. It is not as though we do not love God—we love God deeply. We just do not know how to sit with God anymore.

He continued:

We have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history.¹¹

I would argue that twenty-first-century Americans (and, yes, to all my friends in the UK and Australia and Iceland, you too...) need to hear the *first* half of that command: "The Sabbath was made for man." It was created, designed, by God himself. And it's "for" us. A gift to enjoy from the Creator to the creation. To gratefully receive.

In his iconic one-line teaching on the Sabbath, Jesus was tapping into a practice as old as the earth itself. A practice that goes all the way back to Genesis 1.

In the beginning...

So the story of the Bible starts with, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But after six days of hard work to get the universe up and running, we read the following:¹²

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.¹³

Did you catch that?

God rested.

“Yeah, I’m not really into the Sabbath. I’m an extrovert and I just like to stay busy and...”

God rested.

“Yeah, I get the Sabbath thing, but I work a demanding job that I love, and I just can’t make the time because...”

God rested.

“Yeah, but I have two little kids at home, and it’s just not really doable right now. Maybe later when...”

Do I need to say it again?

God rested.

And in doing so, he built a rhythm into the DNA of creation. A tempo, a syncopated beat. God worked for six, rested for one.

When we fight this work-six-days, Sabbath-one-day rhythm, we go against the grain of the universe. And to quote the philosopher H. H. Farmer, “If you go against the grain of the universe, you get splinters.”¹⁴

I’ve had people laugh off the call to Sabbath with a terrible cliché: “Yeah, well, the devil never takes a day off.”

Ummm, last time I checked, the devil loses. Plus, he’s the *devil*.

The last time a society tried to abandon the seven-day week was during the revolution in France. They switched to a ten-day workweek to up productivity. The rise of the proletariat! And? Disaster—the economy crashed, the suicide rate skyrocketed, and productivity? It went *down*. It’s been proven by study after study: there is zero correlation between hurry and productivity. In fact, once you work a certain number of hours in a week, your productivity plummets. Wanna know what the number is? Fifty hours. Ironic: that’s about a six-day workweek. One study found that there was zero difference in productivity between workers who logged seventy hours and those who logged fifty-five.¹⁵ Could God be speaking to us even through our bodies?

My point: This rhythm isn’t the by-product of human ingenuity—the ancient version of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*—that we’re free to adapt or change as we see fit for the modern era. It’s the way a brilliant mind designed our souls and society to flourish and thrive.

Fight it, fight God.

Fight God, fight our own souls.

Now, what does the writer of *Genesis* mean by “rested”? Was God tired? Burned out?

As I’ve said, the Hebrew word *Shabbat* means “to stop.” But it can also be translated “to delight.” It has this dual idea of stopping and also of joying in God and our lives in his world. The Sabbath is an entire day set aside to follow God’s example, to stop and delight.

To delight in the world...

In our lives in it...

And above all, in God himself.

If you're new to the Sabbath, a question to give shape to your practice is this: What could I do for twenty-four hours that would fill my soul with a deep, throbbing joy? That would make me spontaneously combust with wonder, awe, gratitude, and praise?

Dan Allender, in his book *Sabbath*, had this to say:

The Sabbath is an invitation to enter delight. The Sabbath, when experienced as God intended, is the best day of our lives. Without question or thought, it is the best day of the week. It is the day we anticipate on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday—and the day we remember on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Sabbath is the holy time where we feast, play, dance, have sex, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk, and watch creation in its fullness. Few people are willing to enter the Sabbath and sanctify it, to make it holy, because a full day of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone a week.¹⁶

And all this is rooted in God. He rested. He stopped. He set aside an entire day just to delight in his world.

But notice what else God did: he “blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” Two things worth noting here.

First, the Sabbath is “blessed.” In the *Genesis* story, three things are blessed by God.

To start with, God blessed the animal kingdom with an invocation: “Be fruitful and multiply.”¹⁷

Then he blessed humanity the same way: “Be fruitful and multiply.”¹⁸

And *then* God blessed the Sabbath.

Wait, so God blessed animals, humans, and then...a *day*?

Mmm.

What does that mean?

It means that the Sabbath—just like an animal or a human being—has the life-giving capacity to procreate. To fill the world up with more life.

Life is tiring. (Case in point, most likely you read that line and sighed...) You get to the end of the week, and even if you love your job, still you're worn down on every level—emotionally, even spiritually. The Sabbath is how we fill our souls back up with life.

Recently I read a survey done by a doctor who cited the happiest people on earth. Near the top of the list was a group of Christians called Seventh-day Adventists, who are religious, literally, about the Sabbath. This doctor noted that they lived ten years longer than the average American.¹⁹ I did the math:

if I Sabbath every seven days, it adds up to—wait for it—*ten years* over a lifetime. Almost exactly. So when I say the Sabbath is life giving, that's not empty rhetoric. If this study is to be believed, every day you Sabbath, you're (statistically and scientifically) likely to get back an elongated life.²⁰

From now on, I'm Sabbathng three days a week...

And not only will you live longer; even more importantly you'll live *better*.

So first, the Sabbath is "blessed."

Secondly, it's "holy."

Have you ever thought about that? How a day could be called "holy"?

This would have been jarring to the original audience. In the ancient Near East, the gods were found in the world of space, not of time. They were found in a holy temple or on a holy mountain or at a holy shrine. But *this* God—the one, true Creator God—is found not in a place but in a day. If you want to go and meet with this God, you don't have to make pilgrimage to Mecca or Varanasi or Stonehenge. You just have to set aside a day of the week to Shabbat, stop long enough to experience him.

So there is a day that is *blessed* and *holy*. A rhythm in creation. Six and one. And when we tap into this rhythm, we experience health and life.

But when we fight this rhythm—ignore it, suppress it, push past it, bully it, make excuses, look for a way to get out of it—we reap the consequences.

Consider the mind: we grow mentally lethargic, numb, uncreative, distracted, restless. Emotional unhealth becomes our new normal. Irritability, anger, cynicism, and its twin, sarcasm, overwhelm our defenses and take control of our dispositions.

Or consider the body: we get tired and worn out; our immune systems start to falter, miss a step. *Another* cold. It's like our nervous systems are trying to get our attention.

Yet we push on. Until, inevitably, we crash. Something in our minds or bodies gives out, and we end up flat on our backs. I have my story; I told most of it at the beginning of this book, but I left out the part about my being a type A workaholic, running off ambition (or what do we call it now, *drive?*), with no clue how to rest. I had a weekly day off, sure, but I spent it catching up on all the work I never got paid for (bills, the yard, etc.), as well as things like shopping and entertainment.

Sabbath wasn't even in my vocabulary, much less my vernacular. But we all come to Sabbath, voluntarily or involuntarily. Eventually the grain of the universe caught up with me, and I crashed, *hard*. My sabbatical was like playing catch-up on a decade of missed Sabbaths, come to collect with interest.

I'm guessing you have a story too.

If not, *you will*. Sabbath is coming for you, whether as delight or discipline.

Maybe that's why God eventually has to *command* the Sabbath. Does that

strike you as odd? It's like commanding ice cream or live music or beach days. You would think we'd all be chomping at the bit to practice the Sabbath. But apparently there's something about the human condition that makes us want to hurry our way through life as fast as we possibly can, to rebel against the limitations of time itself. Due to our immaturity, dysfunction, and addiction, God has to command his people to do something deeply life giving—rest.

There are a number of Sabbath commands in the Bible. Let me show you the two most important ones.

Command one: Sabbath as rest and worship

Setting: Israel was camped around Mount Sinai. Fresh out of Egypt. They were about to become “a holy nation,”²¹ the people of God. But first things first; they needed a manifesto for how to live in the new reality. So God laid out the Ten Commandments, of ACLU courthouse fame. And one command was longer than all the rest. *Way* longer. If you were to configure the Ten Commandments as a pie chart, this one would take up over 30 percent of the pie. And what was the command?

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.²²

I love the opening word, “Remember.” It's easy to forget there is a day that's blessed and holy. Easy to get sucked into the life of speed, to let the pace of your life ramp up to a notch shy of insanity. To forget: Creator (not me), creation (me).

Remember that life as it comes to us is a gift.

Remember to take time to delight in it as an act of grateful worship.

Remember to be present to the moment and its joy.

Humans are prone to amnesia, so God commands us to remember.

Then God said this:

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God.²³

Notice that key line: “a sabbath to the LORD.” That can also be translated as “set apart for the LORD” or “dedicated to the LORD.”

So the Sabbath isn't just a day for rest; it's also a day for worship. By *worship* I don't necessarily mean singing at church (though that's a great example); I mean whole-life orientation toward God.

Take note because this next line is crucial: *the Sabbath isn't the same thing as a day off.*

What's the difference?

Eugene Peterson had a name for a day off; he called it a “bastard Sabbath.”²⁴ The illegitimate child of the seventh day and Western culture. On a day off you don't work for your employer (in theory). But you still work. You run errands, catch up around your house or apartment, pay the bills, make an

IKEA run (there goes four hours...). And you play! You see a movie, kick the soccer ball with friends, go shopping, cycle through the city. And that's great stuff, all of it. I love my day off. But those activities don't make a Sabbath.

On the Sabbath all we do is *rest* and *worship*.

When I Sabbath, I run each activity through this twin grid: Is this rest and worship? If the answer is "No," or "Kind of, but not really," or "Umm..." then I simply hold off. There are six other days for that. What's the rush? After all, I'm not in a hurry...

And notice how easy and free and spacious and non-legalistic this command is. "Rest" and "worship" are broad categories. Plenty of room for interpretation based on your Myers-Briggs type or stage of life. There's no formula or checklist or schedule. Sabbath will look very different for, say, a thirtysomething introverted pastor raising a family in a busy city, like me, than for a twenty-year-old single girl living in a college dorm or empty nesters living on a farm. That's great. You do you. The important thing is to set aside a day for nothing but *rest* and *worship*.

Often people hear "worship" and assume that means singing Bethel songs all day while reading the Bible and practicing intercessory prayer. That's all great stuff. But I mean worship in the wide, holistic sense of the word. Expand your list of the spiritual disciplines to include eating a burrito on the patio or drinking a bottle of wine with your friends over a long, lazy dinner or walking on the beach with your lover or best friend—anything to index your heart toward grateful recognition of God's reality and goodness.

Then the command ended with the why, the driving motivation behind the Sabbath:

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.²⁵

The Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commandments with a "why" behind it. God doesn't say, "Don't murder, and here's why it's bad..." Or, "Don't steal, and here's why it's not a good idea." But for Sabbath, God goes back to the *Genesis* story, calling his people into the "rhythms of grace."

In fact, I find it fascinating that the Sabbath is the only "spiritual discipline" that makes it into the Ten Commandments.

Not church or Bible reading, not even prayer. Sabbath is the anchor discipline of the people of God. So crucial that God lovingly commands us to remember to rest.

That's command one. Let's do another.

Command two: Sabbath as resistance

Setting: Israel on the edge of the Jordan River, a stone's throw from Canaan. It had been forty years since Mount Sinai. A few things went horribly wrong, and Israel hit a forty-year delay. As a result, Moses had to give the Ten Commandments *again*, to the next generation. Most of them weren't at

Mount Sinai, or if they were, they were too young to remember. So it was time for a refresher course. But in Moses's second edition, there's a subtle shift. It's easy to miss, so pay close attention:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God.²⁶

Did you catch it? Yeah, the first word is different. Instead of "remember" the Sabbath, Moses says to "observe" it.

Meaning what, exactly?

Think of how we observe a holiday like Christmas or Easter. We gear up for it, plan out the day in advance, do all we can to make it special, approach it with anticipation. The Sabbath is like that: a holiday every week, but without all the stress and family drama. A once-a-week celebration of all that is good in God's world.

Other than that, the command was pretty much the same, until you get to the end, where it's been edited, this time radically so:

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.²⁷

Whoa...

That's not a minor tweak; that's a totally different rationale behind the command.

What the heck was Moses up to?

Let me parse it out for you.

In Exodus the Sabbath command is grounded in the creation story. In the rhythm that God built into the world. A rhythm we tap into for emotional health and spiritual life. That's the reason to Sabbath.

But in Deuteronomy the command is grounded in the exodus story. In Israel's freedom from slavery to Pharaoh and his empire. That's a whole *other* reason to Sabbath.

Why the change?

Well, this was the first generation to grow up in freedom. Their parents were slaves. And their grandparents. And their *great*-grandparents. Slaves to an empire that had been devouring human beings, one brick, one pyramid, one edifice at a time, for centuries. An empire with an appetite so ravenous that they had to build "store cities"²⁸ just to store all their extra stuff. An empire driven by lust for *more*.

And Egypt, like every empire since, was an economic system built on the backs of the oppressed. To get to the lavish, opulent luxury of a pharaoh, you need cheap labor. You need slaves grinding their bodies into the ground until there's nothing left but ash and dust.

Slaves don't get a Sabbath. They don't even get a day off. They work all day, every day, until they die. Slaves are subhuman. A line item on a spreadsheet. Bought and sold like a commodity, a means to whatever end the rich and powerful see fit. All that matters is the bottom line.

And Egypt, my friends, is alive and well.

We live in the thick of it.

We live in a culture of *more*. A culture of gaping, unquenchable lust. For everything. Lust for *more* food, *more* drink, *more* clothes, *more* devices, *more* apps, *more* things, *more* square footage, *more* experiences, *more* stamps on the passport—*more*.

We have so much crap we don't need; we, like Egypt, have to build our own supply cities. We call them storage units, and they are a \$38 *billion* industry in the US alone,²⁹ taking up 2.3 billion square feet, enough for every single American to have over seven square feet to themselves.³⁰ Meaning, we could practically house our entire nation—in *our storage units*.

Pharaoh would love the USofA.

Just like Egypt, we're an empire built on the oppression of the poor. In America's case (and many other nations), literally. What's more, we've found a way to do slavery guilt-free. We like to think slavery ended in 1865, but the reality is, we just moved it overseas. Out of (our) sight; out of mind. There are twenty-eight million slaves in the world today, more than were *ever* trafficked in the transcontinental slave trade of the eighteenth century.³¹ The odds are,

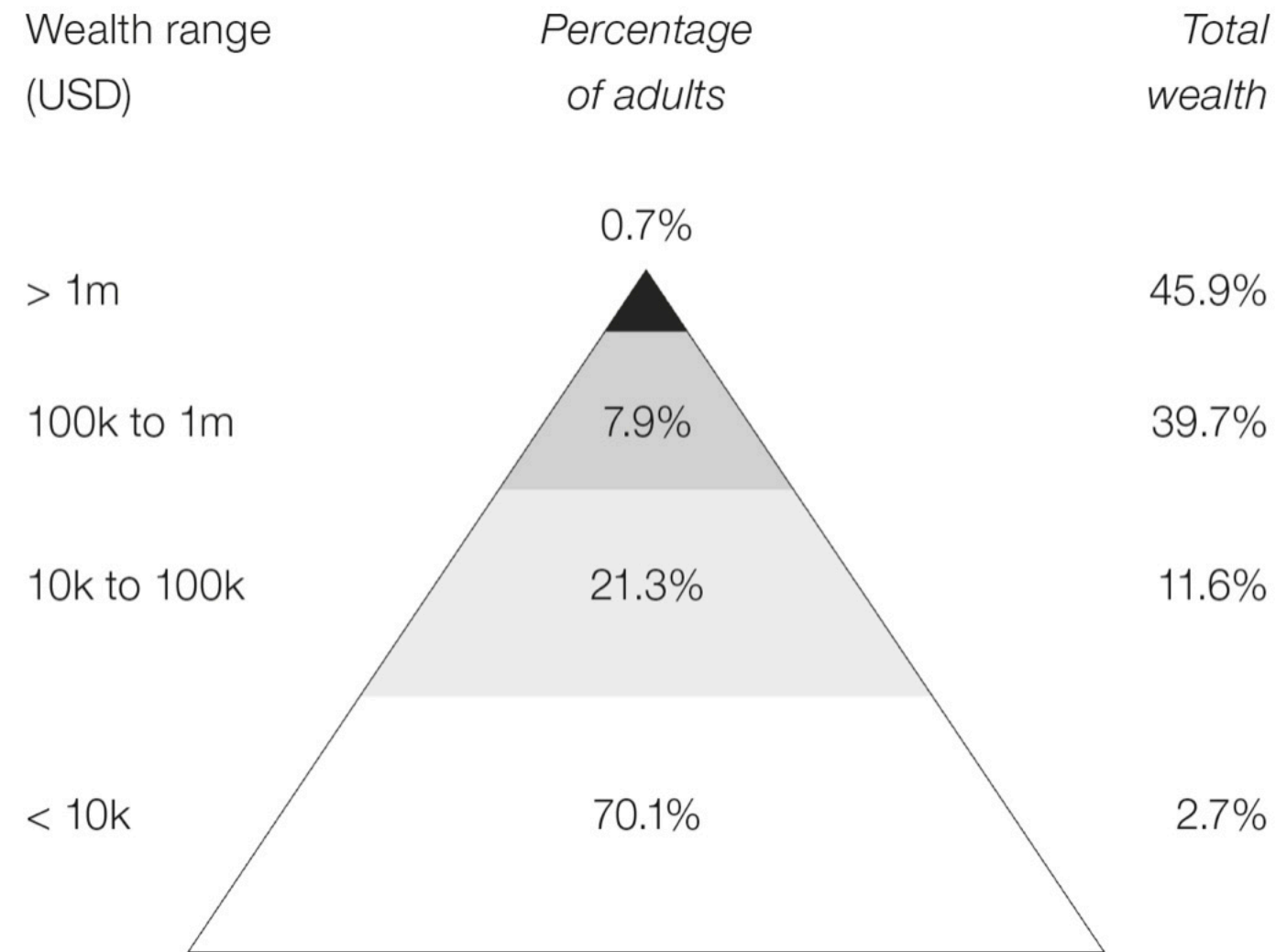
your home or apartment is full of stuff they've produced: a T-shirt, a pair of kicks, that clock on the wall, those bananas.

In fact, when economists draw up an image of our global economic system, they draw a pyramid. Some even call it the "Global Wealth Pyramid."

Notice, at the top is 0.7 percent of humanity, weighing in with 45.9 percent of the world's wealth. Those *crazy* rich people who, you know, drive a car, own a computer, have more than one pair of shoes (and possibly are reading this book over a latte that cost five dollars).

At the bottom? A little over 70 percent of our world, with a meager 2.7 percent of our wealth.³² The vast swath of people in Southeast Asia and all through Africa. The people who make our socks and shoes, our smartphones and our Star

Global wealth pyramid#



Wars lunch boxes. Many of them working seven days a week, twelve hours a day, in the sweltering heat of a factory in Vietnam or the cold of a cotton field in Uzbekistan, just to survive. Many against their will. Still under the boot of empire.

The odds are, if you're reading this book, you're near the top, not the bottom. That's the tricky thing about Egypt. It's hell if you're a slave, but it's not half bad if you're an American.

I mean, Egyptian.

Now, what does any of this have to do with the Sabbath?

So much.

Sabbath, as the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann so famously said, is "an act of resistance."³³ It's an act of rebellion against Pharaoh and his empire. An insurgency and insurrection against the "isms" of the Western world—globalism, capitalism, materialism, all of which sound nice but quickly make slaves of the rich and the poor. Sabbath is a way to stay free and make sure you never get sucked back into slavery or, *worse*, become the slave driver yourself.

My friend A. J. calls it "scheduled social justice." Often, when I hear about overwhelming injustice in the world or even the growing socioeconomic disparity in my own country, I'm deeply troubled and think, *What in the world can I do?* Well, one thing I can do is do nothing, one day a week.

Can you imagine what would happen to our society if all commerce stopped once a week? If 24-7 stores went 24-6? Websites stopped receiving orders. Amazon warehouses closed for a day. Restaurants powered off the oven. Can you imagine what that would do for the poor in our cities? Creating space for them to rest and spend time with loved ones? Not to mention what it would do for the rest of us. If only we could go an entire day without buying anything.

We can. A few Christian-owned businesses have already taken this

courageous step to close their stores and websites on Sundays (for which they are regularly mocked), and while you or I might not head a corporation, by practicing Sabbath, we can still play our small part toward justice in the world.

Sabbath is a way of saying, “Enough.” Buying things isn’t always bad, but most of us have more than enough to enjoy a rich and satisfying life. As the psalmist said, “I lack nothing.”³⁴

That’s why under the Torah all buying and selling was off-limits for the Sabbath. This wasn’t a legalistic rule from the Old Covenant that we’re now “free” from. It was a life-giving practice from the way to break our addiction to the West’s twin gods: accomplishment and accumulation. Again, accomplishment and accumulation aren’t evil in and of themselves, as long as they don’t take advantage of the poor (which usually they *do*...). But there’s a limit. At some point you have to draw a line in the sand and say, “I’m good. I don’t need *another* pair of shoes, *another* decorator item for my bookshelf, *another* toy for my garage, *another* day at the spa.”

I have enough.

What I really need is *time* to enjoy what I already have, with God.

The Sabbath is like a guerrilla warfare tactic. If you want to break free from the oppressive yoke of Egypt’s taskmaster and its restless, relentless lust for more, just take a day each week and *stick it to the man*. Don’t buy. Don’t sell. Don’t shop. Don’t surf the web. Don’t read a magazine: ooh, that bathtub would be nice upstairs...Just put all that away and *enjoy*. Drink deeply from

the well of ordinary life: a meal with friends, time with family, a walk in the forest, afternoon tea. Above all, slow down long enough to enjoy life with God, who offers everything that materialism promises but can never deliver on—namely, contentment.

In the words of Ronald Rolheiser, who I feel should get royalties on this book:

So much of our unhappiness comes from comparing our lives, our friendships, our loves, our commitments, our duties, our bodies and our sexuality to some idealized and non-Christian vision of things which falsely assures us that there is a heaven on earth.

When that happens, and it does, our tensions begin to drive us mad, in this case to a cancerous restlessness.³⁵

Oh man, that phrase, “cancerous restlessness.” He continued:

True restfulness, though, is a form of awareness, a way of being in life. It is living ordinary life with a sense of ease, gratitude, appreciation, peace and prayer. We are restful when ordinary life is enough.³⁶

So what will it be? A “cancerous restlessness” that’s as old as Pharaoh? Always comparing your life to the next person’s? Itching for the next purchase to ratchet your way to the top? Or a healing contentment from an unhurried, unharried life?

What if ordinary life is enough?

A governor on the speed of life

Speaking of a cancerous restlessness and buying things we don't need, when T and I were first married, back in the glory days of DINK (double income, no kids), she bought me a motorcycle for Christmas.

Yes, the wifery is awesome.

So naturally, I had to reciprocate. A few months later, for our anniversary, I bought her a Vespa. Brand-new, sky blue, happiness on wheels.

I had to get a motorcycle endorsement on my license before I could even test-drive my bike, but not T. Her Vespa had this device called a "governor" on it. You know what that is? I didn't. Turns out it's a little cap on the engine that keeps it from going over fifty miles per hour. Under Oregon law, as long as a moped can't go over fifty, you don't need a motorcycle endorsement.

You see where this is going.

The Sabbath is like a governor on the speed of life.

All week long we work, we play, we cook, we clean, we shop, we exercise, we answer text messages, we inhabit the modern world, but finally we hit a limit. On the Sabbath, we slow down; more than that, we come to a full stop.

One of the surprising things I learned when I began to practice Sabbath is that to really enjoy the seventh day, you have to slow down the *other* six days. You can't go ninety miles per hour all week, running the pedal to the floor,

harrowing your soul to the bone for six days straight, and then expect to slam on the brakes for Sabbath and immediately feel zen awesome. You have to find the rhythm. As we used to say when I played in indie rock bands, "Find the pocket."

Because the Sabbath isn't just a twenty-four-hour time slot in your weekly schedule; it's a *spirit* of restfulness that goes with you throughout your week. A way of living with "ease, gratitude, appreciation, peace and prayer." A way of working from rest, not for rest, with nothing to prove. A way of bearing fruit from abiding, not ambition.

As Brueggemann said so eloquently:

People who keep Sabbath live all seven days differently.³⁷

That's why the Sabbath is on day seven, not day three or four. It's not a break in the week to rest up so we can get back to what really matters: work. It's the climax, the apogee, what the entire week has been leading up to.

If you aren't practicing the Sabbath, you're missing out on the best day of the week, bar none.

So.

Deep breath.

Almost done.

To wind down this chapter, let me just speak from the heart. I deeply enjoy

the practice of Sabbath. For me it's not a legalistic hangover from some fundamentalist shtick but a practice from the way of Jesus, a delivery system for *life*.

There are all sorts of debate and controversy about whether we still have to keep the Sabbath as followers of Jesus. I'm in a minority that thinks we do. It's one of the Ten Commandments, after all, and Jesus did absolutely nothing to annul it. Yes, the early church moved it to Sunday, but up until the 1950s, Sunday was "the Lord's day," and that meant a lot more than church for two hours; it meant an entire day of rest. But honestly? I wouldn't really care if I don't have to keep the Sabbath anymore. I *want* to keep the Sabbath. Even if the Sabbath is no longer a binding command, it's still the grain of the universe. It's a gift—and one I want to open and enjoy.

Nine times out of ten, Sabbath is the best day of my week, no exaggeration. Every Friday night, after Sabbath dinner, we bake a giant cookie in a cast-iron pan, a full square foot of chocolate yumminess. Then we dump a carton of ice cream on the top, let it melt a little, and eat it all straight out of the pan—it's some kind of symbolic nod to both our unity as a family and our collective love of sugar. As we indulge, we go around the table and share our highlight of the week. I feel like a broken record because I almost always say, "Last Sabbath!" Something spectacular usually has to go down to beat out the previous week's Sabbath for joy.

The Sabbath is the day I feel most connected to God. Most connected to my wife and family. To my own soul. It's the day I feel most *awake* and yet most at peace. The day I expect joy. The day that sets the tone for my entire week.

On Wednesday or Thursday I find myself saying under my breath, "I can do this," because *I know the Sabbath is coming*.

On Sunday or Monday I find myself thinking, *I can do this because I'm living off the Sabbath*.

When I remember my life before the Sabbath, I shudder. I never want to go back to Egypt. Never want to become slave or slave driver again. I'm *free*. I want to stay that way.

And I want you to experience this day of unhurried love and joy and peace.

You know you want it...

If your story is anything like mine, Sabbath will take you a little while to master. After all, *Shabbat* is a verb. It's something you do. A practice, a skill you hone. It took years of trial and error for me. As our kids age into their teens, our practice continues to adapt and iterate.

Point being: this practice is *so* foreign and alien to our culture, even our church culture, that it might take you a while to dial it in. That's okay.

Remember, you're not in a hurry.

To begin, just set aside a day. Clear your schedule. TURN OFF YOUR PHONE. Say a prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to pastor you into his presence. And then? *Rest* and *worship*. In whatever way is life giving for your soul.

My family and I do this every week. Just before sunset on Friday, we finish up

all our to-do lists and homework and grocery shopping and responsibilities, power down all our devices (we literally put them all in a box and stow it in a closet), and gather around the table as a family. We open a bottle of wine, light some candles, read a psalm, pray. Then we feast, and we basically don't stop feasting for the next twenty-four hours. It's the Comer way! And, I might add, the Jesus way. We sleep in Saturday morning. Drink coffee. Read our Bibles. Pray more. Spend time together. Talk. Laugh. In summer, walk to the park. In winter, make a fire. Get lost in good novels on the couch. Cuddle. Nap. (The Jews even have a name for the Sabbath nap—the *Shabbat shluf!* We shluf hard on Sabbath.) Make love.

Honestly, I spend a lot of time just sitting by the window, being. It's like a less stressful Christmas every week.

And something happens about halfway through the day, something hard to put language to. It's like my soul catches up to my body. Like some deep part of me that got beat up and drowned out by meetings and email and Twitter and relational conflict and the difficulty of life comes back to the surface of my heart.

I feel free.

Free from the need to do more, get more, *be* more. Free from the spirit—the evil, demonic spirit—of restlessness that enslaves our society. I feel another spirit, the *Holy* Spirit, of restful calm settle over my whole person. And I find that my ordinary life is enough.

And on Saturday evening when I turn my phone back on and reenter the

modern world, I do so *slowly*. And, wow, does that ever feel good.