

SABBATH RHYTHMS: The Gospel Gives Us Every Day Rest

John Calvin is often quoted as saying, “from birth, our hearts are idol factories.” We hit this planet in pursuit of the created searching for what can only be found in the Creator. When I ask people how they are doing they often reply “busy.” We define ourselves by what we do rather than by what Christ has done. The result is that we are weary and restless. We need more than just a day off. I find myself coming back from a week’s vacation needing a vacation from my vacation. A day (or week) off is not enough to give my soul the deep rest it longs for. Jesus gives us this invitation in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” I find within my soul that I am weary and heavy laden by the endless pursuit of idols. Every idol promises you life and life to fullest, but in the end causes you to sacrifice everything in pursuit of it. The cost is often seen in everyday weariness. What we really need to do is rest in a savior who has sacrificed everything for us up front and can give us life and life to it’s fullest every day, as well as for eternity.

WORKING FROM A POSITION OF ACCEPTANCE

The gospel gives us that rest. The pursuit of idols is a relentless and endless pursuit of acceptance whereas the gospel gives us a position of acceptance in Christ Jesus. We already have in Christ Jesus all the acceptance, security and hope that every idol promises, but can never deliver. **The gospel frees us to work from a position of acceptance versus in pursuit of acceptance.** The first leads to rest, the latter to restlessness.

We can live our lives in one of four ways:

1. **Reactionary** - passively dominated by urgencies and pushy people. Your life is dominated by the tyranny of the urgent. This results in a life that is a frazzled mess, disorganized, without a sense of priorities, half finished tasks, running late, and a frantic lifestyle. This is a life in which our compulsion cause us to exceed our calling.
2. **Conformity** - succumbing to the fear of man and just being and doing what everyone else wants, which is not necessarily following God’s will for you and your family. This results in a boring life where everyone but God is pleased and the person who is easily pushed around keeps busy and seemingly productive, but not passionate or free.
3. **Independence** - nonconforming rebellion in the name of freedom marked by doing only what you want and ignoring godly authority over you. This results in a life of defiance, independence, immaturity, self-reliance and foolishness.

The gospel frees us to live our lives out in a radically different way.

4. **Gospel Identity** - when we live out our lives from a position of acceptance instead of pursuit of acceptance we allow the King of the universe to be Lord of our calendars. We live in response to who Christ is and what He accomplished for our on cross. We allow the Lord of the Sabbath to set our schedules versus the tyranny of the urgent. This gospel truth empowers us to say no to our compulsions and say yes to Christ (1 Peter 5:2). This gospel truth frees us to love people more deeply because we don’t need them for our own acceptance. It frees us to love people when they are least capable of loving us and when they need our love the most.

THE GOSPEL AND PRODUCTIVITY

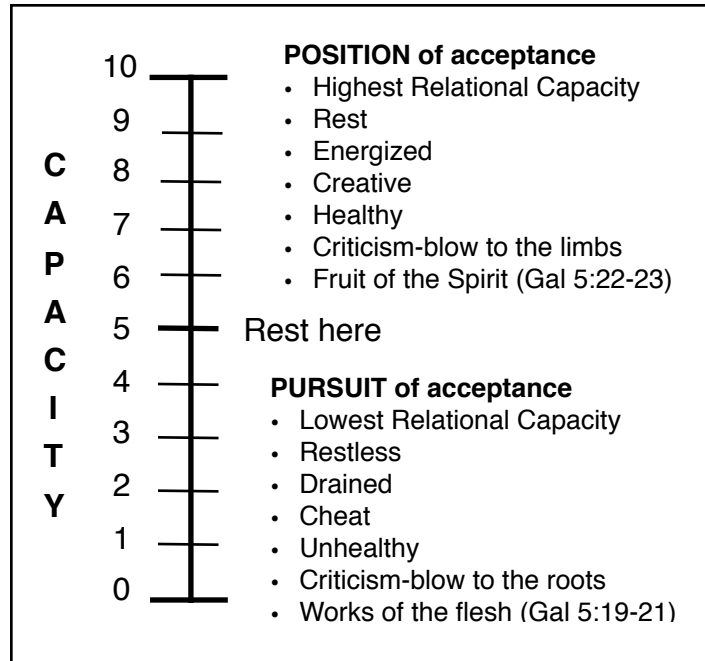
One of the great myths we all fight is that if we take frequent time off we will be less productive. The opposite could not be more true. We all have limited physical, emotional and spiritual capacity. On a scale of 1 to 10, we are most productive when we are operating from the overflow of our emotional barrel rather than from the bottom of the barrel. We are most productive between 6 and 10 and less productive between 1 and 4. Typically we let ourselves drain out to a 2 or 3 (or worse) and then take a day off or a vacation. The problem is that typically a day or even a week off can only renew you up 2 or 3 points. So if you wait to rest at

SABBATH RHYTHMS: The Gospel Gives Us Every Day Rest

a 1 or 2, a day off only gets you up to a 3 or 4. You are still operating at your lowest productivity and creativity levels. The key is to rest at a 5 so that you can recover and operate at a 7-8 or higher. Resting in your gospel identity will empower you to establish Sabbath rhythms in your life that prevent you from draining out below a 5. The result is that you will operate most often at your highest levels of productivity and have the ability to love each other out of the abundance of the heart.

The best way to gauge whether you are working from a position of rest is to ask: "What is my relational capacity?" Am I often frustrated, impatient, anxious or angry? If so you are operating below a 5. When I am working from a position of rest I find myself filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

When I am working in pursuit of acceptance I found just the opposite takes place in my soul. The gospel reminds us that Jesus is enough, more than enough, so rest.



CONSTRUCTING SABBATH RHYTHMS

Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter wrote, "We must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well. We must think and think again, how to **compose our lives**, as well as our sermons." ¹ Living a life of gospel intentionality is to allow the King of all creation to be Lord of your calendar. It begins with by establishing Sabbath rhythms. Think through your daily, weekly, trimester and annual rhythms.

1. **Daily Rhythms:** Divide your day into modules (4 hour periods). What are peak energy times for you to do your most important work? What time will you go to bed? Get up? What are priority times for your family that you need to guard? I do my best thinking in the morning so I schedule more meetings / admin work in the afternoon.

Module One: 9:00am - 1:00pm

Module Two: 1:00pm - 5:00pm

Module Three: 5:00pm - 9:00pm

2. **Weekly Rhythms:** shape your weekly rhythms around your priorities and energy peaks. For example, Monday is a recovery day so I do administrative work. Have guidelines to adhere to - questions to consider ::

- What unique circumstances do you have that you need to plan around?
- What are the most important times/things in your week that you need to guard?
- What are the maximum nights a week you will work?

¹ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, p. 64

SABBATH RHYTHMS: The Gospel Gives Us Every Day Rest

- What day will be your sabbath?
- When will you get a date with your spouse weekly?
- How many meals will you eat together as a family?
- How many meals will you eat with others in community?
- How will you participate in biblical community (community group)?
- How often and when will you exercise?
- When will you read your bible and pray?
- How much time will you devote to kids activities?

3. Trimester Rhythms: it is important to build your Sabbath rhythms around the natural rhythms of your roles and your culture. Trimesters are a natural way to calendar a year (the school calendar is also a helpful way to plan if you have kids in school). Know what you have to do in each season and if overall it is a busy or slower season. Here is an example of a broad trimester calendar :

T1 (January - April): busiest season of my year - High growth season for the church.

T2 (May - August): slowest season of my year. A season of deepening our church and training new leaders to launch for the Fall.

T2 (September - December): moderate growth season for our church. Typically December is a slow season for us.

Have specific times you plan into each trimester ::

- Take two full days to pray, study and work “on” your life vs. “in” your life
- Marriage Sabbath: take one extended weekend each trimester to work on marriage, family and calendaring.
- Plan and schedule out the next trimester. Plan out every day for the next 120 days.
- Set personal and vocation growth goals for the next trimester.
- Plan out weekly work schedule based upon personal and vocational growth goals.

4. Annual Rhythms: Intentionally get longer stretches of rest each year. Plan during slower seasons of work / school schedules etc (summer, end of the year, etc.)

- How many vacation days do you have? How and when are you going to use them?
- How can you get extended time away to work ‘on’ your vocation vs. ‘in’ your vocation (conferences, annual trainings, focused time away to evaluate, plan, dream etc.)

SABBATH RHYTHMS: The Gospel Gives Us Every Day Rest

Tips

- ‘Define what’s most important in your life based on what God says, not first on what you (or others) think. This is the only way to build a life that lasts and thus is truly productive (Matt. 7:21–27; Proverbs 3:5-6; 14:12)’ (What’s Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done, Matt Perman)
- ‘If you have more to do in a given week than you can get done, you are doing things God hasn’t asked you to do’ (paraphrase from a message by Tim Keller)
- What are avenues that stir your affections for Jesus* - schedule those daily, weekly, monthly, yearly (*see ‘Sacred Pathways’ list below)
- Work through your rhythms in community to get input, feedback and accountability
- Continually come back to and evaluate your rhythms (particularly in new seasons of life)
- Count the cost of major changes on your normal rhythms (move, new job, further education)
- Have intentional time daily, weekly, monthly and yearly to go over your schedule
- Recognize ‘seasons’ of tiredness (busy work time, illness in family, new baby) - but monitor and plan so ‘seasons’ don’t become habits

SACRED PATHWAYS (From ‘Sacred Pathways by Gary Thomas)

What is a “sacred pathway”? Put very simply, it describes the way we relate to God, how we draw near to him. Do we have just one pathway? Not necessarily. Most of us, however, will naturally have a certain predisposition for relating to God, which is our predominant spiritual temperament. The Nine Sacred Pathways ::

Naturalists: Loving God Out of Doors

Sensates: Loving God with the Senses

Traditionalists: Loving God Through Ritual and Symbol

Ascetics: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

Activists: Loving God Through Confrontation

Caregivers: Loving God by Loving Others

Enthusiasts: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration

Contemplatives: Loving God Through Adoration

Intellectuals: Loving God with the Mind