

Spring 2021

RECLAIMING THE ART OF SABBATH: A BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FOR PASTORAL SABBATH-KEEPING

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RECLAIMING THE ART OF SABBATH:
A BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FOR PASTORAL SABBATH-KEEPING

MASTER'S THESIS

PRESENTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
IN THE BARNETT COLLEGE OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY
AT SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

BY

ROBERT D. ELLIOTT JR.

2020

THESIS COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

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ABSTRACT

Pastoral Sabbath-keeping is both a lost art and a vital part of the spiritual vitality of the twenty-first century church. A majority of pastors within the United States affirm that they do not take a time for weekly Sabbath, which in turn has led to higher cases of pastoral burnout and ministry ineffectiveness. This is intrinsically linked to a lack of pastoral spiritual health. The solution to this spiritually fueled problem is found in reclaiming the art of pastoral Sabbath-keeping.

Developing a well-rounded biblical theology of Sabbath-keeping practices will allow twenty-first century pastors to apply a biblically founded practical theology that will both equip the pastor and the church of the future for greater levels of effectiveness and impact within their communities.

To my wife, Megan

*Your encouragement and support in this work has been profound.
I am forever thankful to be your husband and for your partnership in life and ministry.*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Thesis and the Task

From the origins of humanity in the Creation narrative of Genesis through the Gospel narrative in the New Testament and even into Revelation, the theme and topic of Sabbath plays a central role in the life and praxis of the people of God. As pastors and leaders within local churches navigate the ever-changing challenges of life and ministry in a twenty-first century culture, the pace and race of ministry can be nothing less than soul scorching at times. Pastors face significant challenges both culturally and theologically when it comes to creating and maintaining rhythms of rest and Sabbath. Society moves at an increasingly fast pace. This cultural rhythm affects all facets of pastoral life and ministry and thus requires a foundational understanding of the importance and function of a weekly Sabbath, as well as the potential pitfalls to be avoided by keeping a healthy, biblical rhythm of spiritual renewal.

It is more pertinent than ever for pastors, and the people within their churches, to have a biblically rooted and theologically grounded foundation and practice of Sabbath-keeping. In a culture that appears to be moving forward at an unprecedented pace and speed, the call to Sabbath is nothing short of radically counter-cultural by nature. However, the church is not simply called to exist and survive within culture, but to be an agent of change and transformation within the surrounding community. This transformative work of calling people back to rest and renewal through Sabbath must first begin in the heart and life of the pastor. However, as will be seen throughout this work, there is a deficiency of spiritual health and vibrancy and, thus, a lack of ministry effectiveness in many pastors in the United States. These areas of spiritual deficiency often arise as a byproduct of overwhelming needs within any given ministry and a high-pace

culture combined with a lack of the spiritual renewal and restoration consistent and effective Sabbath-keeping practices provide.

This work seeks to provide a succinct, though certainly not all-encompassing, evaluation and practical theology of pastoral Sabbath-keeping to empower pastors to overcome the issues they face regarding spiritual health and burnout. This will conclude with a call to reclaim the lost art of pastoral Sabbath-keeping within the church in the United States. The heart of this work is for pastors to develop a personal, practical theology of Sabbath-keeping that is rooted in biblical sources and supported by theological truth in response to pastoral burnout and deficiencies in personal spiritual health. As pastors begin to better understand the focus, importance, and practice of regular Sabbath-keeping, the church as a whole and those who are called to lead it can step into greater levels of spiritual health and ministry effectiveness.

Structure and Flow of the Argument

The structure of this work will seek to provide a basis of understanding with regard to pastoral effectiveness and issues of burnout, while providing both a theological and biblical examination of Sabbath. This will then conclude with a proposed model of practice for pastoral Sabbath-keeping that is both flexible and principled in nature. This work will seek to aid in filling the research gaps that exist between biblical theology and pastoral theology in regard to Sabbath-keeping practices of pastors in the twenty-first century church context. Although the topic and discourse regarding Sabbath is too rich and abundant for a complete biblical basis of Sabbath, attention will be given to significant passages of scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. With regard to the New Testament, special focus will be placed upon Jesus' handling and observing of the Sabbath, as well as His teachings regarding Sabbath.

In Chapter Two, the foundation of the issues facing twenty-first century pastors will be established by evaluating the current state of pastoral spiritual health and Sabbath-keeping practices, as well as trends of burnout within the pastorate in the United States specifically. This chapter will look specifically at the issues facing pastors within the local church and how the discipline of Sabbath-keeping, or lack thereof, is contributing to pastoral burnout and matters of personal spiritual health. Specifically, this chapter will seek to outline the challenge this paper seeks to remedy in the chapters that follow. This chapter will also look at several theological perspectives regarding the practice of Sabbath keeping in the church today.

In Chapter Three, the goal will be to frame the challenges presented in Chapter Two by laying the foundation for a biblical theology of Sabbath. This will be done by examining what scripture speaks to the matter of rest and Sabbath-keeping in both the Old Testament and New Testament perspectives. Chapter Three will look to understand the practice of Sabbath from a theological and biblical basis in order to understand how Sabbath fits within the spiritual health and vitality of the pastor's spiritual life. Attention will be given to both the Old Testament perspective of Sabbath within the Jewish faith tradition as well as a New Testament perspective, including the teachings of Jesus surrounding the Sabbath.

Chapter Four will seek to provide a firm basis upon which a personal, practical theology of Sabbath can be crafted and implemented within the framework of pastoral ministry. This chapter will conclude this work by providing a map for the road ahead for pastors to develop and grow in their personal practice of Sabbath. This chapter will focus on key characteristics of Sabbath-keeping that must be contemplated and committed to in order for a genuine shift to occur in the lives of pastors, both presently and in future generations. Chapter Four will conclude with a call for current pastors and ministers to model and exemplify the art of Sabbath for an

emerging generation of young and future pastors, thus ensuring that future generations of pastors and ministers might experience a fullness and longevity of pastoral ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHALLENGE OF PASTORAL BURNOUT

Introduction

For the discussion of pastoral burnout, particularly within the context of the Christian church in the United States, it is helpful to first understand what is and is not meant by the term burnout. In a broad sense, burnout can be defined as “exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration.”¹ The root cause of any type of burnout, in a very generic sense, has to do with the exhaustion or depletion of a physical, mental, or emotional resource within an individual. This can affect people in a multitude of high-care, high-contact professions. For example, trauma nurses must navigate the mental and emotional toll that their roles demand and, when they are not renewed mentally and emotionally, issues such as compassion fatigue can begin to set in, affecting their overall health and role effectiveness.²

Pastors often find themselves in positions of guidance and care within a congregation that expose them to individuals who are personally navigating high-stress and high-need situations. This is characteristic of ministries in both large and small congregations. Funerals, hospital visits, counseling through marriage issues, and church conflict are all examples of these high-stress situations. These situations present opportunities in which a pastor makes spiritual and emotional deposits into challenging situations. These wide ranges of pastoral situations rarely make for an emotionally healthy and vibrant, life-giving ministry context. As such, it is

¹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “Burnout,” accessed October 14, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/burnout>.

² Katherine A. Hinderer et al., “Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, Compassion Satisfaction, and Secondary Traumatic Stress in Trauma Nurses,” *Journal of Trauma Nursing* 21, no. 4 (2014): pp. 160-169, <https://doi.org/10.1097/jtn.000000000000055>, 160.

absolutely vital for the pastor to know and understand these ministry rhythms of spiritual depletion and spiritual renewal.

Issues regarding compassion fatigue can face pastors and ministry leaders, and, although we are not explicitly discussing compassion fatigue, it is certainly an area of study and understanding that pastors must be familiar with. This is due to the high level of personal care required within pastoral work. Within the context of this work, burnout does not have to be equated to a pastor finally reaching an impasse in their personal life and ministry and deciding that he or she must leave their vocational ministry position within the local church. Rather, pastoral burnout can be better pictured as a state of personal, ministerial, and relational ineffectiveness within the life of a pastor that is rooted in a lack of spiritual health.³ As Diane Chandler notes, the constant outpouring of care can create a type of Messiah-complex, in which the pastors give out but do not refill their own emotional and spiritual needs.⁴ We will explore the specific ways in which pastoral burnout affects pastors, but it is first pertinent to our discussion to take a look at culture as a whole in regard to its role in the epidemic of pastoral burnout.

Pastoring in a Rest-Less Culture

Culture affects all aspects of life and society; it is encompassed by both the conscious and subconscious patterns of thinking and acting. Justo L. González defines culture in this way, “A system of symbols, attitudes, behaviors, relationships, beliefs and responses to the environment shared by a particular human group in contrast to others.”⁵ Defining, or at least working to identify, the prevalent culture of a church context is critical to effectively ministering to that

³ Diane J. Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-Taking, and Support System Practices,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 3 (June 2009): doi:10.1007/s11089-008-0184-4, 275.

⁴ Chandler, 274.

⁵ Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 42.

community. There are certain values and practices, as González remarks, that will create and set into motion the greater cultural narrative that is at work in shaping any given culture. This cultural identity embeds itself into the psyche of each person who inhabits said culture. In fact, A.J. Swoboda contends that Sabbath was designed to function in such a way that it keeps God as the center of culture, yet this notion runs in direct opposition to how our present culture and time operates. Of these juxtaposed images of culture Swoboda remarks, “Sabbath was to be the centerpiece of a society that reflected God’s heart. But modern society is anything but Sabbathcentric...Our society has become a place to produce, accumulate, save...but without a day of Sabbath, we are not able to enjoy our abundance.”⁶

The church is not impermeable to the shifts and changes that occur in the surrounding culture. Many of the same challenges that face people outside of the church also face people within the church. Of this relationship between culture and church, González remarks, “Christianity, as well as any other religion, always exists in a given cultural context and reflects the impact of that culture in its life, doctrines, interpretation of texts, and so on.”⁷ This is not a static relationship between church and culture but a changing pattern of understanding that must be constantly revisited and refreshed “as cultural contexts shift.”⁸ Within this relationship the church has with culture, church leaders and pastors must strive to understand and respond in a practical and relevant way.

Pastors are required lead and minister in a highly engaged culture that does little to slow down and more often than not lives in a state of constant stimulation and distraction. As we have discussed thus far, the pastoral calling is one in which we must embrace both the theological

⁶ A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2018), 84.

⁷ González, 42.

⁸ González, 42.

truth of scripture as well as the present realities of the surrounding culture. The same struggles and challenges that plague the world around us are likely walking through the door on Sunday morning, as well. The reality that faces many pastors in the United States is a reality of hurried, rest-less, and highly driven culture.⁹ This high-paced and never-quit ethos is deeply woven into the very cultural tapestry of the United States and, like many other cultural identities, it has made its way into the four walls of the church as well.¹⁰

It is important to note that emotional and mental fatigue is also a factor in burnout, and this is inherently linked to the warp-speed rhythms of American culture.¹¹ Unfortunately, the church is not immune to this cultural wiring and thus the work-life rhythms of pastors are also bent toward this high level of cultural pace that life often demands of them. The pace at which the world moves is enough to rattle even the most pensive and grounded people at times. Technological advances have led to an interconnected, always-on cult of connectivity like the world has never seen. Michael Greenberg brilliantly summarizes the emotional reality of this cultural moment in which we live:

Speed of light culture, rush-rush and go-go society, cranked up and compressed lives, everydayathon, monoculture of speed, and crisisliving mentality describe the way many of us live our lives. We feel stuck in high gear in work and at home, and life seems like a never-ending list of uninigorating things to do at an accelerating pace over which we have little control.¹²

Far too many people, pastors included, would read Greenberg's synopsis of the present cultural pace and climate and find themselves in a similar pattern of living. This is the cultural moment in which we find ourselves and from which we build the church. The patterns of this rapid paced

⁹ Kelvin J. Randall, "Clergy Burnout: Two Different Measures" *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 3 (January 3, 2013): pp. 333-341, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0506-4>, 333.

¹⁰ Randall, 333.

¹¹ Luisa J. Gallagher, "A Theology of Rest: Sabbath Principles for Ministry," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 16, no. 1 (2019): pp. 134-149, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891318821124>, 144.

¹² Michael Greenberg, "Neighborhoods: Slow Places in a Fast World?," *Society* 38, no. 1 (2000): pp. 28-32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-000-1003-4>, 28.

culture are exhausting to most all that exist within it, which is why our discussion of Sabbath is all the more important and pertinent for the church in the twenty-first century.

The speed at which information and communication can move across the globe is the narrative of science fiction only a few generations ago. This hyper-speed culture of communication is not isolated to technology alone; it has also forever shaped and transformed how the world thinks, works, and connects.¹³ The concepts of remote-learning and remote-working are also growing at unprecedented rates, allowing employees to work more hours and be available to clients and customers.¹⁴ This high-speed and hyper-connected culture has also flowed into the walls of the church as well. A clear ministerial challenge arises when a pastor is able to be contacted and easily work from wherever they happen to be. This rest-less nature and rhythm of culture has helped to reveal the expectation of always being available and ready to respond to the needs of the congregation.

A Rest-Less Calling

We have seen thus far in our discussion that the pace with which our world moves and operates is also pervasive within the local church. Within any given week, a pastor may be called upon to prepare Bible study classes, counsel a family through challenging times or crisis, meet with fellow staff members, discuss budgets and finances, and then to cap it off for the week prepare and preach a biblically-founded, theologically-rich, and action-inspiring sermon.¹⁵ It is no wonder why so many pastors simply find there is too much ministry left to do at the end of the week. In many cases for pastors in the local church, a healthy work-life balance that focuses on

¹³ Alexander Benlian, "A Daily Field Investigation of Technology-Driven Spillovers from Work to Home," *MIS Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (September 2020): 1259–1300, doi:10.25300/MISQ/2020/14911, 1260.

¹⁴ Benlian, 1260.

¹⁵ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 20002), 55.

both ministry effectiveness and Sabbath-keeping is all but a dream that cannot be seen clearly. Without a clear strategy and plan of how these needs are met and responded to, it is far too easy for pastors to face an overwhelming list of to-do's and ministry needs. Although it requires time, intentionality, and most importantly diligence, it is possible to craft a workable plan for weekly rhythms of Sabbath in pastoral ministry. This specific strategy and planning will be expounded upon in Chapter Four's discussion on developing a practical theology of Sabbath.

The ministerial role of pastor is also a complex one in which the pastor must embody a multitude of different skillsets and practices in any given week. As such, the pastor must fulfill numerous roles and functions that add to the overall weight of ministry and pastoring and often add to the patterns of restlessness and spiritual depletion. This duplicity of roles creates the opportunity for crossover into a variety of ministry focuses that operate at different paces, timeframes, and patterns. Pastors face pressures not just internally, but also with regard to the role that they are to fulfill by those within the congregation. In fact, of this multi-visual understanding to the pastoral calling and function, William Willimon contends, "Contemporary ministry has been the victim of images of leadership that are borrowed not from scripture, but from the surrounding culture...The culture's images of leadership can be the death of specifically Christian leaders."¹⁶

When faced with an overwhelming number of outside pressures and other factors, it is no wonder that so many pastors feel the strain and burden of ministry duties at such a tremendous rate.¹⁷ However, it is critical to understand the current state of pastoral Sabbath-keeping and the prevailing influences upon it. With regard to pastors, who are and are not keeping a regular rhythm of Sabbath and are critical to our discussion, what affects are those practices having? A

¹⁶ Willimon, 55.

¹⁷ Willimon, 74.

2018 published study performed with pastors within the United Methodist Church “sought to investigate the relationships between Sabbath-keeping and mental, physical, and spiritual well-being.”¹⁸ The results were quite dramatic:

Participants who reported keeping Sabbath three to four days/month were significantly more likely to report higher spiritual well-being scores...and quality of life scores...and were more likely to possess flourishing mental health...Further, participants who reported keeping the Sabbath three to four days/month were significantly less likely to have scores that qualified them for depression...or any of the three kinds of burnout.¹⁹

The reality that a scientific research-based perspective on Sabbath showed mental, emotional, and spiritual positive outcomes is both profound and eye opening for those in pastoral ministry. Sabbath is not just a matter of religious obligation, but a matter of mental, emotional, and spiritual health for pastors. However, as was noted previously, it takes more than research to correct a problem; behavior change “is very difficult; it requires compelling cognitive reasons, which can be made easier if there are structures in place to support the change.”²⁰ This is what Chapter Four seeks to provide.

This does not mean that other denominations have arrived at the same place regarding the problem of pastoral burnout. In fact, Kelvin J. Randall points out that, when looking specifically at priests in the Roman Catholic tradition in the United States, many “expressed the view that clergy burnout was a myth and pointed out that all through history and in all cultures—and long before the art of psychiatry was discovered— people have had old-fashioned nervous breakdowns... and burned out.”²¹ Such a perspective is not only dismissive of the real life issues

¹⁸ Holly Hough et al., “Relationships between Sabbath Observance and Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Health in Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 68, no. 2 (August 2018): pp. 171-193, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-018-0838-9>, 175.

¹⁹ Hough et al., 183.

²⁰ Hough et al., 187.

²¹ Randall, 334.

of burnout that are plaguing the pastorate in the United States but it is also a recipe for poor ministry effectiveness and diminished clergy health. Pastoral burnout can also be a diverse issue among pastors of differing perspectives and personal backgrounds. Kelvin J. Randall, later on in the discourse of his study on pastoral burnout, remarks on the wide range of people that ministry burnout affects:

Emotional exhaustion is a significant experience for a large minority of this cohort of male and female Anglican clergy. Experiences of feeling drained and experiences of fatigue and frustration are widespread. Such occurrences are as likely among female clergy as male, older clergy as younger. In such a situation, early diagnosis of proneness to burnout could be invaluable.²²

This significant aspect of Randall's research points to a problem that affects pastors across the wide spectrum of diversity found within the church. It is also significant to note that the issues of burnout, as noted in the study, affect both the older and the younger in ministry. One could argue that burnout is only a problem for those who have spent many years pastoring and leading throughout their lifetimes and only experience burnout in later years, yet Randall's specific research simply does not support this rationale. The fact that burnout affects both the young and old points to a problem that is not necessarily external in nature, so much as it is internal in nature.

The Root of the Problem

In order to address the root of rest-less culture invading pastoral ministry, we must first address the issues concerning the spiritual health and wellbeing of pastors. To understand any problem, it is essential to first understand the deeper issue at hand. Although it is certainly possible to take a day off each week for any non-ministry related activities, what we will seek to understand are the spiritual factors at play in the overall effectiveness of Sabbath keeping for the

²² Randall, 338.

spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of pastors and ministry. As we have already observed, instances of pastoral burnout, even if they go unnoticed for an extended period of time without clearly observable external signs, affect the pastor in a significant manner. However, to look at the issue of burnout as a simplistic and one-sided issue would be to miss entirely the deeper-rooted cause of burnout in the first place.

Unlike other roles that experience high levels of burnout, the uniquely spiritual perspective and religious nature of pastors' work and calling is a key reason burnout affects them in such a spiritual manner.²³ Chapters Three and Four of this work will specifically address both a biblical theological basis for Sabbath and a practical theology of Sabbath-keeping for pastors. First, it is important to address the root of this rest-less epidemic plaguing pastors in the United States. As the previous section discussed, there is a clear and undeniable link between a pastor's individual spiritual practices of Sabbath-keeping and his or her individual level of mental, emotional, and spiritual health.²⁴

As observed in this chapter, pastors are not the only professional field shown to have issues of compassion fatigue and work-related instances of burnout, but the spiritually driven component of pastoral work does add an additional layer of complexity that must be addressed. Dr. Diane J. Chandler, professor of Christian Formation and Leadership at Regent University, contends that there are three distinct areas of focus to observe in regard to cases of pastoral burnout and overall spiritual health of pastors: spiritual renewal, rest-taking, and support system practices.²⁵ These focuses present key areas of concern for the pastor to address and keep a close understanding of. However, Chandler points out that at the very heart of the matter regarding

²³ Chandler, 275.

²⁴ Randall, 333.

²⁵ Chandler, 273.

pastors and emotional stress, prolonged and pronounced spiritual dryness was shown to be the primary indicator of emotional exhaustion leading to eventual burnout in pastoral ministry.²⁶ This spiritual dryness is defined by Chandler as a type of “spiritual lethargy, a lack of vibrant spiritual encounter with God and an absence of spiritual resources”.²⁷ In fact, Chandler goes on to reference Henri Nouwen’s work in regard to pastoral spiritual practices stating that “Christian leaders must have a strong and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ...Time with God appears as a recurrent theme relative to a strong and vibrant biblical spirituality for pastors.”²⁸ Although it might come as no surprise that being connected to Jesus in a personal and intimate manner leads to greater pastoral health and effectiveness, it is an area that can become a struggle for pastors without intentionality and awareness. Having a set time of rest and renewal, and as we have seen thus far, lead to profound impacts in the spiritual and mental health of pastors. Chandler closes her research stating, “In summary, rest-taking leading to pastoral renewal has been anecdotally linked to burnout and stress resistance, resiliency, and productivity.”²⁹

A lack of spiritual health, not just emotional or mental health, has been shown to lead to a stronger connection and risk factor for burnout. Yet, how often is the state of our own souls and spiritual health the primary target for better pastoral care and ministry effectiveness? Perhaps what the church and the pastor need most is not another seminar or training but an intimate encounter with the God of the universe who knows, loves, and cares for them intimately and passionately. Remarking on his own ministry experience, Lance Witt, founder of Replenish Ministries, remarks, “My ministry became my first love. My ministry consumed all my spiritual passion...ministry (not Jesus) was my life. The unintended byproduct during those seasons was a

²⁶ Chandler, 273.

²⁷ Chandler, 274.

²⁸ Chandler, 275.

²⁹ Chandler, 276.

slow disconnect from Jesus.”³⁰ Ministry, for far too many pastors, has become a work of will and personal strength rather than an outpouring of God-given grace and life. We were not created nor intended to be the source of our own strength and health for our souls, rather it is the tender and consistent leading of the Holy Spirit into the deep well of God’s presence that is meant to refresh our souls for the work of ministry.

This reality reinforces the earlier discussion of spiritual renewal and the importance of keeping a close pulse on individual spiritual health and patterns of fatigue and burnout that begin to be formed. Physical rest is certainly important and must be noted, but the root of this work will focus on the spiritual renewal practices that take place through a biblically rooted Sabbath routine. As Witt remarks, it is vital for pastors to know the state of their soul and the state of their relationship with Jesus on a constant basis, knowing that all ministry flows from there.³¹ Pastoral burnout is not simply a physical or mental issue that must be overcome with more sleep or vacation time, but it is an inherently spiritual issue linked to a lack of theological and biblical practices of spiritual renewal and restoration through Sabbath. As will be observed in the sections to come, the regular rhythms of rest and Sabbath are vital to the life and longevity of pastoral ministry and are central to a thriving ministry life.

Summary

As we have seen in this chapter, the call to pastor and lead in the local church is not to be undertaken without an understanding of what is at stake, both corporately within the church and spiritually for the pastor. For far too many pastors, issues of burnout are not just ethereal talking points for theological debate and discourse; they are real life, right here and now challenges

³⁰ Lance Witt, *Replenish: Leading from a Healthy Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 29.

³¹ Lance Witt, *High-Impact Teams: Where Healthy Meets High Performance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 42.

being faced. However, that does not mean that there are not steps that can be taken to help understand issues of burnout. Understanding the culture of rush-rush and more-more certainly sets to tone and opportunity for our current pastoral burnout epidemic, but it does not mean that we are without hope for both present and future pastors.

At the foundation of our practical and theological work thus far is a foundation of understanding that there is indeed a problem for pastors and their own spiritual health and wellness. It is not just affecting a small subset of pastors but is a problem that stretches through multiple generations and ministry contexts. Yet knowing what the root of the problem is, that is spiritual dryness and a lack of intimacy with God, allows us to move from a place of problem to a place of addressing that problem with a theological response. Knowing cases of pastoral burnout are more intrinsically linked to matters of the soul, rather than the state of a sleep schedule, allows us to answer a spiritual problem with biblical solution. In God's goodness and grace, he has revealed an intimate aspect of his heart and nature within His word, specifically with regard to the rhythm, role, and purpose of Sabbath for the people of God. As we will see in Chapter Three, God has created a theological pattern of soul refreshment and renewal that draws us into a deeper intimacy with our Creator.

CHAPTER THREE

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SABBATH

Introduction

Sabbath is at the heart of God and at the heart of the biblical metanarrative. From the beginning of scripture in Genesis through the end of Revelation, there is a common ushering of the people of God into the rhythms of rest found in practicing the presence of God. This chapter will first look at the biblical rhythms of rest that are modeled throughout scripture and within the whole of creation. This will be followed by an in-depth look at the role Sabbath plays within the Old Testament theological themes and narrative. Finally, this chapter will seek to provide New Testament examples and dialogue regarding Sabbath and the specific teachings of Jesus in regard to rest and the Sabbath.

The goal of this chapter is to provide a biblical theology of Sabbath that will serve as the hinge on which to fix the practical theological discussion in Chapter Four. In other words, our desire is to allow the challenges associated with instances of pastoral burnout to be addressed first from a biblical theological framework to then inform and equip the later discussion regarding a practical theology of Sabbath-keeping. As we follow this pattern of discussion, the following chapter will explore specifically what scripture speaks of Sabbath in a general sense before beginning the work of practical theology that follows. Framing our discussion upon a foundation of sound biblical theology is a critical step in the development of the task at hand and paving a path forward for pastors in the twenty-first century context. As we begin this discussion, it is critical to keep a pastoral perspective while working through the chapter that follows. Such a perspective will allow us to better frame the discussion and keep the challenges of pastoral burnout in focus while also developing our biblical theology. Although pastors are

certainly leaders called to shepherd and care for the church, they are also sons and daughters of God called to walk in close intimacy and relationship with God first and foremost. It is the overflow and replenishment of this relationship from which pastors are called to lead and shepherd.

A Biblical Rhythm of Rest

The concept of rhythm is not something that comes naturally to all people. Just look around a dance floor at the next wedding you attend, and you will find that a natural musical rhythm is not engrained into the entire human population. Contrast that with image with that of a blues guitarist, picking and playing with precision and passion and you arrive at two distinctly different images. The same methodology used for the last imagery can be applied when looking to God and His nature. There are natural, God-designed rhythms found all around us in the world. Witt remarks of this natural trait and states that “we live in a universe that flows with rhythm.”¹

When we see rhythms played out within creation, we are actually witness to an attribute and characteristic of God. In the same way that God ordained rhythms for His creation, He also created rhythms within the context of His people as well. One of those rhythms that God has ordained is that of the weekly day of Sabbath; a weekly time of reflection upon God’s goodness, a time to refresh our souls with the rhythms of God’s grace and presence in our lives.² It is a rhythm that recalibrates our souls with the tempo of heaven and the pace of God’s presence. Donald K. McKim defines Sabbath in this way, “The seventh day of the week, set apart for

¹ Witt, *Replenish*, 99.

² Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 99.

worship and rest...Christian practice has been to observe Sunday for worship and celebration.”³ This is the foundational concept that will aid in forming our biblical theology of Sabbath. It is designed and ordained to be a time, specifically and intentionally, set aside for rest and renewal. It is not meant to simply be a day off from work in which nothing is done, but rather Sabbath is intended to be a time in which we fill the empty schedule with the presence of God and reset our lives to the rhythm of God’s leading.

However, this time of weekly Sabbath is not the only rhythm of rest that God instituted for His people. McKim goes on to discuss the sabbatical year in the Jewish tradition and remarks that this was “a designated period of one year in seven years in which the Jews were to let their ground be idle, release debtors, and let the poor gather from the fields.”⁴ Sun-Jong Kim also reflects this law of rest that God ordained for his people in Leviticus stating, “According to the sabbatical year law in Leviticus, the land of Israel must lie fallow during one year after six years of cultivation (Lev 25:2-5).”⁵ What we see is that God is the creator and originator of natural rhythms and order, whether it is in a weekly rhythm of rest or a sabbatical year of rest.

The concept of rest, refreshment, and renewal are close to the heart and nature of God. In fact, the command to observe a sabbatical year for the land can be seen as an extension of the Sabbath rest given to the people of God earlier in Exodus. Kathryn Schifferdecker comments on this intimate dance between God, humanity, and the land, remarking, “This extension of the Sabbath commandment to the land itself is an extension also of the radical trust that the Sabbath requires. God will provide on the seventh day.”⁶ Sabbath is both a rhythm of rest and refreshing

³ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2014), 244.

⁴ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 244.

⁵ Sun-Jong Kim, “The Group Identity of the Human Beneficiaries in the Sabbatical Year (Lev 25:6).” *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 1 (2011): pp. 71-81, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853311x542123>, 71.

⁶ Kathryn Schifferdecker, “Sabbath and Creation,” *Word & World* 36, no. 3 (2016): pp. 209-218, 211.

and also a weekly rhythm established by God as a reminder of our reliance and required trust in His leading and provision for our needs.

This concept will be expounded in greater detail and its specific application for the pastor in what follows. It is from this place of understanding that rhythms are within God's nature and part of His plan for His people that we move into the next portion of our discussion. We will look specifically at this relationship of God, Sabbath, and His people within the context of the Old Testament narrative.

Sabbath in the Old Testament

God's relationship with His people has always been an intimately connected relationship of care and, when needed, correction. One of the first emergent images of God that is that of Creator and sustainer. The Creator does not set His Creation carelessly into motion, but rather He is intimately involved from the earliest onset of the Creation narrative. Genesis 1 recounts the Creation narrative, days one through six, and Genesis 2 begins on the seventh day of Creation with the following verses:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.⁷

This intimate picture of rest on the seventh day, exemplified by the Lord, provides a critical area of focus in the Old Testament perspective of Sabbath. Although this account from Genesis does not explicitly mention Sabbath by name, it certainly points to and gives reference to the motif of Sabbath.⁸ What follows in Genesis 2 is a picture of the intimate relationship that God shares with

⁷ Genesis 2:1-3 (ESV)

⁸ Howard N. Wallace, "Genesis 2:1-3: Creation and Sabbath", *Pacifica* 1, no. 3 (October 1988): 235-50, <https://search-ebscohost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000808305&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, 241.

His creation and humanity specifically. We are given a look into the peaceful and restful Creation which the Lord has put in place, “His work in creation is beautiful and pleasing to both himself and humanity...they were free from pain and suffering. They enjoyed unlimited access to God’s wonderful presence.”⁹ In the foundational chapters of Genesis, outlining humanity’s relationship with the Creator, there is an imagery of rest in which God is fully present and active with His beloved Creation.

It is this imagery of God as Creator and sustainer of Creation that lays the theological foundation for the rest of our discussion. Marvin Wilson, Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Gordon College, observes of this perspective of God as Creator and writes, “The weekly Sabbath is a time of rejoicing as God is celebrated as Creator.”¹⁰ What is observed in Genesis 2 is that God is not only the originator and rhythm-creator of the Sabbath, but He is also the focus of the Sabbath that His people are called to follow Him in every week.¹¹ Sabbath was not simply created to be a time to cease from work, but to experience the presence of God, as Creator and Sustainer, in both a personal and corporate setting. God is not a far-off Creator, as the deist argument might contend, but rather He is intimately involved in the wellbeing and care of His creation. Sabbath, in its original essence, is reflective of the heart of God to be near and present with those He has created and formed.

It is critical that the first verses through which our lens of Sabbath and rest with the Creator are formed in the reading of Genesis 1-2. This narrative of Creation and rest provides a

⁹ Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999) 82.

¹⁰ Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 140.

¹¹ Chang Joo Kim, “Divine Rest and Sabbath in Genesis 1:1-2:4,” *Korean Journal of Christian Studies*, Volume 57 (May 2008), 41–57, <https://search-ebshost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI EYD161010000370&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, 54.

unique perspective and foundational theological framework for the rest of our discussion on Sabbath. Particularly in regard to the place of the pastor and the role of Sabbath as a time for intimacy and renewal with the Creator. As we will see, perhaps it is Sabbath in which we receive a glimpse of this redemptive glory of rest that awaits us in eternity. William A. Dyrness comments on this relationship of God and his Creation, stating that “Genesis 2:2-3 implies that in some sense God ended his work...this does not mean that God turned away from Creation...rather that he turned toward it.”¹² A central theme we will see throughout the biblical metanarrative, even into the New Testament discussion of Sabbath, is that “theologically this Sabbath rest becomes an important symbol of salvation...rest from one’s enemies.”¹³ Sabbath is intended to be more than a good day of rest, but it is a good day of rest with God at the center – these two are drastically unique and different. Sabbath is both a spiritual practice and a biblical motif for the future restoration of humanity.¹⁴

Moving on the creation narrative, Genesis 3 details humanity’s departure from this intimacy shared with the Creator and the ensuing brokenness that follows. While the Garden of Eden provided a pain-free and toil-less intimacy with God, Genesis 3 draws a sharp contrast to that of the Garden. Genesis 3:17-18 recounts this consequence of humanity’s fallen state, “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.”¹⁵ The narrative continues on in Genesis 3:23 and reads, “Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.”¹⁶ This fractured humanity has left the

74. ¹² William A. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977),

¹³ Dyrness, 74.

¹⁴ Dyrness, 74.

¹⁵ Genesis 3:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ Genesis 3:23 (ESV)

sacredness and rest of the Garden, their relationship with the Creator broken, and left to the toil and work of their hands for their livelihood and survival.

It is a stark contrast to that of the Garden and Creation narrative, yet its aftereffects are still seen in the world today. This inherited rest-less and toilsome human experience is commonplace and creates a longing for something more – something beyond the rest-less nature of humanity. With this departure from the Garden, humanity also exits their rest with God. Yet there is a call back to something deeper and more intimate than our present experience. Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley comments on a similar theological point, encouraging to “keep the whole Lord’s Day in a manner that honors God and profits your soul. God calls us to embrace the divine institution of the Sabbath with holy discipline, in order to delight in Christ and deepen our desire for the eternal Sabbath.”¹⁷ Therein lies the heart of the matter at hand – a call back to the rest and intimacy that humanity experienced in the Garden with the Creator and an ushering into the eternal rest that our souls so desire. A longing desire in the deepest part of our souls that writhes with discontentment with the rest-lessness of our world and longs for rest in the arms of the Creator. As Walter Brueggemann reminds us, “Sabbath is the discipline of pause that celebrates the world as God’s good place for life, and that relishes the human role in creation as “image of God.”¹⁸

That is not, however, the end of our discourse on Sabbath and a return to sanctified rest. We know that we have not yet returned to this realm of rest and restoration, though we will touch on this longing within us in later sections of this chapter. It is important to also discuss the role that the Sabbath pays in the Old Testament and within the framework of developing a biblical

¹⁷ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, “Delighting in God: A Guide to Sabbath-Keeping,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 11, no. 1 (January 2019): pp. 5-24, 6.

¹⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 49.

theology of Sabbath. Any discourse on Sabbath would be incomplete without also looking to the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, as an additional resource to better understanding the role of Sabbath within the context of biblical Israel and the people of God. A simple reading of the Gospels would point to the centrality that the Sabbath played in the weekly life and rhythm of Jewish culture in first century Judaism. This centrality of the Sabbath day of rest, though significantly complicated and misused in later generations, finds its guiding commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 and reads:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.¹⁹

Here in Exodus 20, we are given direction as to how we are to treat the Sabbath and what it means for the larger context of the community. It is important to note the role and purpose that Sabbath was designed to play in the life of God's people. The Sabbath was not a day meant for slothful inactivity and laziness, rather the Sabbath was meant to be a day set apart from the work and rhythm of the other days of the week and focused upon "spiritual service through religious observances."²⁰ Said another way, the Sabbath was not strictly focused upon physical activity, but upon spiritual renewal and refreshment for the soul.

The distinction of spiritual renewal and physical rest also plays a role in our understanding for the contemporary context of pastoral ministry. It is quite customary for workers in the United States to receive one, if not two, days off from work in every week. This is

¹⁹ Exodus 20:8-11 (ESV)

²⁰ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: an Expository of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 139.

usually a day that people spend working on projects around their home, spending time doing what they enjoy, or spending the day on recreation and other activities. This focus on doing, although not inherently bad, does not necessarily reflect the heart of what Sabbath is meant to be and the role Sabbath is to take in the spiritual renewal of a community.

Within the church this can also be the case; however, it is important to understand that ministry cannot be cleanly and neatly fit into the timeframe of a nine-to-five job. In fact, much of the ministry that happens within the local church occurs at the very times that those outside of ministry are not working. This is an important distinction for us to make regarding the work at hand. As we have already seen in Chapter Two of this work, the pastoral burnout epidemic of our time is more closely associated to a lack of spiritual health than it is to physical degradation alone. In our journey of reclaiming the heart and the art of Sabbath as a day for spiritual renewal, it is critical to our discussion to also look to the New Testament sources of discussion for additional context and clarity.

New Testament Perspectives of Sabbath

An important aspect of understanding the Sabbath within the New Testament context, particularly with regard to Jesus' handling of the Sabbath in the Gospels, is to grasp the heart of what Sabbath was intended to be and the role it was to play within the life of the people of God. One biblical assumption that will be presented early on in our discussion is that Sabbath observance was customary and assumed within the New Testament context. Sharon H. Ringe, Professor of New Testament at Wesley Theological Seminary, comments with a similar assumption, stating, "It is important to note at the outset that traditional Jewish concerns related to Sabbath observance are assumed at several points in the Gospels and Acts."²¹ As Ringe points

²¹ Sharon H. Ringe, "Holy, as the Lord Your God Commanded You!: Sabbath in the New Testament," *Interpretation* 59, no. 1 (January 2005): pp. 17-24, 17.

out, it was simply assumed within the context of the first century church that weekly Sabbath observance, at least from a Jewish perspective, was a cultural norm within the framework of the church. Ringe goes on to remark that the New Testament expression of Sabbath, including the Sabbath debates that Jesus engages with in the Synoptic Gospels, all point to “the subversive canonical memory that the holiness of God is always linked to God’s passion and compassion.”²² In other terms, Jesus’ role is not to remove the Sabbath but to restore the Sabbath to God’s intended purpose and passions for His people. Where humanity has become alienated from the heart of Sabbath, Jesus seeks to bring grace, truth, passion, and purpose back together within the Sabbath day.²³

The New Testament is of particular importance for the development of our pastoral theology of Sabbath-keeping in that Jesus offers a glimpse into the reclaiming of the Sabbath. There are two specific New Testament verses that will be evaluated and theologically applied in this chapter: Jesus’ teachings in Mark 2:27-28 and Matthew 11:28-30. The Sabbath teachings of Jesus provide a stark contrast to the Pharisaic religious practices that had become customary in first century Judaism. Some scholars point to the challenges and controversies pertaining to Jesus’ teachings on Sabbath. Yet, for the sake of our discussion, those specific challenges will not be addressed directly. Rather, we will mirror the perspective shared by Francois Viljoen in his work addressing thesis controversies; Viljoen remarks that “the debate in Matthew is not if the Sabbath law should be obeyed, but how it should be done...God’s intention with the Sabbath law must be recognized to assure true Sabbath observance.”²⁴

²² Ringe, 24.

²³ Gallagher, 141.

²⁴ Francois P. Viljoen, “Sabbath Controversy in Matthew,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia*, no. 418 (June 3, 2011): pp. 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v32i1.418>, 7.

Regarding Sabbath, it is important to remember that the New Testament and Old Testament should not be treated as individual and unrelated narratives but rather one continuous and on-going revelation of God's will and His plan for humanity. As such, it is also important to note that there is a continuity of both Old and New Testaments with regard to theological frameworks and foundations, including that of the Sabbath. Marvin R. Wilson contends, in regard to this reframing that "in early Jewish Christianity the 'Sabbath, Temple, Law, sacrifices are christologically reinterpreted by the One who is greater than them all.'"²⁵ Jesus is the one who takes the heart, message, and practice of Sabbath outlined in the Old Testament and exemplifies them within a New Testament perspective. This Christological reframing of Sabbath should not be seen as a replacement of the Sabbath teachings within the Old Testament, but a fulfilment and embodiment of them. In fact, Viljoen goes on to remark that Jesus' invitation to people regarding Sabbath was not to overthrow the entire concept and practice, but rather "to be liberated from the 613 legalistic commands which the Pharisees required them to obey."²⁶ Sabbath had become a cultural weight and burden that people had to bear in order to appease the Pharisaic rulers of the day. Sabbath had become more about obedience to religious rules rather than faithful worship unto God. What Jesus brought was a restoration of the heart of God and the heart of Sabbath in the life of the people of God.²⁷

The cultural weight and burden that came along with Sabbath stands in direct contrast to the heart of God that we saw in our discussion of the Old Testament rhythms of rest and Sabbath. It is also not reflective of Jesus' overall teachings regarding the law and the Sabbath. As such, Jesus came to bring clarity and point people back to the heart of the matter. Although this is

²⁵ Wilson, 55.

²⁶ Viljoen, 4.

²⁷ Gary M. Burge, Lynn H. Cohick, and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity*: (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 172.

often portrayed as a stark rejection of Sabbath law, it is in fact just a refocus back to the heart of the Sabbath law as it was intended to be practiced by the people of God. From a pastoral perspective, this is critical to our discussion. Pastors should not view Sabbath as the loss of something, or the burden of a set of practices that must be strictly adhered to, but rather an invitation into God's presence leading to spiritual renewal.

A refocus and reframing of pastoral Sabbath-keeping, similar to the refocusing that Jesus brought to the heart of Sabbath in the Gospels, is critical to creating a positive change. Jesus' teaching in Mark 2:27-28 reads as such "And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"²⁸ Scholars have acknowledged that this is a challenging verse that presents the opportunity for some to claim that Jesus is overthrowing the Fourth Commandment and standing in contrast to the law. Nicholas Ansell reflects upon this perceived interpretation and responds with the following:

I would like to propose that Mark 2:27 be understood as doing for the Old Testament sabbath legislation what the command to love God and neighbor does for the law as a whole, which is to summarize and reveal its true depth meaning...For all the newness that Jesus' claim brings into history, he is also telling us that the ancient call to "remember" and "observe" the sabbath and "keep it holy,"... is less a command than an ongoing blessing that cannot be heard within the demanding hermeneutic of the Pharisees.²⁹

What Ansell contends is that Jesus is not overthrowing the law but teaching about the heart of Sabbath as it was intended to be practiced and kept. Jesus recognized the natural leaning of the religious leaders and influencers of the day to make the Sabbath more about restriction and personal withholding of certain tasks than about the presence and worship of God. What Jesus urges is the Sabbath is less about what humanity does or does not do on the Sabbath and more

²⁸ Mark 2:27-28 (ESV)

²⁹ Nicholas Ansell, "On (Not) Obeying the Sabbath: Reading Jesus Reading Scripture," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 33, no. 2 (2011): pp. 97-120, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187122011x592993>, 101.

about the heart of Sabbath as it was intended. Even so, people have attempted to use Jesus' words as a way out of having to keep Sabbath. Mikeal C. Parsons responds to this notion and misconception of Jesus' words, remarking that "Mark 2:23-28 is less about human need (or desire) taking precedence over religious tradition than it is about the Lordship of Jesus over his followers and the religious rituals they observe."³⁰

Within the New Testament teachings of Jesus, Matthew 12:28-30 also presents a profoundly Christocentric view of rest and the heart of God for His people. Matthew 12:28-30 reads as such, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."³¹ Similar to Mark 2:27-28, this particular teaching of Jesus draws a large amount of criticism and discussion from scholars. In fact, Jesus does not explicitly refer to the Sabbath or a particular day of the week in this teaching. To attribute this teaching to a direct application about Sabbath would be challenging, but it does reveal a significant reality about the nature of God and the future 'rest' that is promised by Jesus. As you will recall in our handling of the Old Testament texts in Genesis regarding Sabbath, one key dimension of Sabbath that is reflected throughout scripture is the call back to the Edenic identity of rest and intimacy with God. This is again reflected in the words of Jesus here in Matthew, pointing not to just a present age, but rather the age to come. In fact, Samuele Bacchiocchi affirms a similar reading of Jesus' teaching and remarks that, within the New Testament that "the Sabbath rest and peace became a symbol of the Messianic age, often known as the 'end of days'."³² It is this future promise of eternal rest that Jesus embodies throughout His

³⁰ Mikeal C. Parsons, "Mark 2:23-28," *Interpretation* 59, no. 1 (January 2005): pp. 57-60, 57.

³¹ Matthew 12:28-30 (NIV).

³² Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus' Rest and the Sabbath," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 22, no. 3 (1984): pp. 289-316, 296.

ministry. This passage in Matthew 12 also affirms the teaching of Jesus earlier on in Matthew 12:1-14, where Jesus is being confronted by religious leaders regarding Sabbath keeping. His response in both instances affirm that Jesus “does not stand opposed to the Law, but he draws out its true intention or real meaning... A new community has arrived...and Jesus is its rabbi who interprets the Law for the community.”³³

Summary

Jesus’ calling back to the heart of Sabbath throughout the Gospels is clear, though certainly not without a level of controversy and disagreement. As we have seen, Jesus’ words and teachings have been used as both support for and support against keeping a weekly Sabbath. However, as we have also seen, much of Jesus’ teachings have more to do with how we are to Sabbath, rather than if we are to observe a Sabbath day. This urge back to the heart of Sabbath is part of God’s redemptive work and testimony of His church and the unique identity that He has placed upon His people. As both Christ followers and pastors, our identity is to be rooted and established in Christ and in His leading. Jesus focused not on the restrictions and rules of Sabbath, but on the heart of God for His people and the role that Sabbath was to play in their lives. That is why Jesus was unwavering in His determination to heal and minister to those in need on the Sabbath. Sabbath is a day in which we encounter God in a deeply personal manner; Jesus sought to bring that truth back to the people of God in a tangible manner throughout the Gospel narrative.

³³ John Mark Hicks, “The Sabbath Controversy in Matthew: an Exegesis of Matthew 12:1-14,” *Restoration Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1984): pp. 79-91, 90.

CHAPTER FOUR

A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF SABBATH

Introduction

Within our dialogue regarding issues of pastoral burnout and Sabbath, we have established that there is a lack of spiritual health among America's pastors, often connected with a lack of rest and spiritual renewal. We also observed the realities of what scripture speaks regarding the sacredness and necessity of Sabbath. Although we have been called to honor the Sabbath and keep it a holy and set apart day for spiritual renewal, far too often these weekly God-ordained rhythms of rest have simply passed by the majority of pastors in the United States. This has left a void of spiritual health that leads to unsustainable patterns of work without ceasing, that in time degrades the health of the pastor and congregation.

While having an understanding of Sabbath practices is a foundational step in this journey of renewal and rest, it is the application and implementation of our theological understanding that brings about legitimate and lasting change in our lives. The same is true of the pastoral relationship with Sabbath. In one sense, it is fully possible that a pastor can have a legitimate understanding of what the Sabbath is and its role in the life of the church, yet fail to faithfully and carefully steward the state of his or her own soul health. Our desire is not to run a sprint-like ministry that leaves us jaded and spiritually exhausted, but to take the words of Jesus seriously in Matthew 11 where He prompts, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."¹

Although there are certainly some pastors who observe and practice Sabbath, it is not reflective of the reality for many men and women in pastoral ministry. As we saw in the opening

¹ Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

discussion of this work, the majority of those in pastoral ministry fail to keep a regular rhythm of Sabbath in their personal lives. Far too many pastors simply do not feel as if they have the time to take a Sabbath and may face outside pressures and concerns from those within the church. Without a well thought out plan of practice and clearly communicated expectations from the pastor to those he or she leads, the chances of a regular Sabbath happening are simply not a realistic expectation.

The goal of this chapter is to move from a place of simply understanding Sabbath and its role within the life of the pastor and Christian alike and move into a practical application of Sabbath-keeping practices and the benefits that follow. This biblical understanding of Sabbath was established in our discussion of a biblical theology of Sabbath in Chapter Three, and in Chapter Four we will move into a fiercely practical, theological application of that biblical foundation. A variety of voices and thoughts, gleaned from both theologians and pastors alike, are vital to this discussion of practical theology. We will evaluate a variety of perspectives, as well as the clear rewards that occur when pastors begin to follow a regular rhythm of Sabbath-keeping. However, one key dimension of Sabbath will be emulated throughout, which is the centrality of pastoral health and longevity to the health of the church. It is challenging to maintain healthy churches without healthy pastors and leaders. This chapter will seek to aid pastors in staying healthy spiritually through Sabbath practices. Not only will churches be strengthened, but pastor's families will be also. One author remarks on these benefits of pastoral Sabbath-keeping and posits, "Sabbath creates extended time each week providing couples time together and parents time to spend with children where family members can share their affection

for one another.”² This in turn creates a powerful system of healthy community and positive family feedback that will only serve to strengthen the pastoral support system and regular rhythms of Sabbath-keeping. In other words, one healthy spiritual practice leads to another, that then feeds back into the initial positive practice, and so on.

How Pastors Can Develop Healthy Sabbath-Keeping Practices

Traditionally in the Christian faith, the Sabbath day has occurred on a Sunday – the beginning of a new week. However, when reading scripture, it is clear that the Sabbath day occurred on the last day of the week, Saturday, before beginning a new week ahead. Historians believe, based upon the testimony and accounts of some of the 2nd century church fathers, that the monumental shift to Sabbath occurring on Sunday happened some time in the early 2nd century.³ There were several aftereffects of this change, but most clearly would have been the distinction between the Jewish and Christian faith practices. Interestingly, this shift to a day of worship on Sundays served to dramatically shape and influence culture in and outside the church for centuries to come.

As pastors and ministers have traditionally led and pastored on Sunday, as well as the other subsequent days of the week, the question must be raised; how do you Sabbath when you work on Sunday? Are you allowed to take another time during the week to rest and restore your soul? What happens when an emergency occurs during your regularly scheduled Sabbath time? These are all important questions that pastors must wrestle with and develop a strategy for addressing. Ministry context will play a significant role in the individual contextualization of a Sabbath-keeping plan, but there must be a plan set in motion regardless of ministry context.

² Barbara Baker Speedling, “Celebrating Sabbath as a Holistic Health Practice: The Transformative Power of a Sanctuary in Time,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no. 4 (October 2019): pp. 1382-1400, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00799-6>, 1384.

³ Wilson, 79.

The pastoral calling is inherently tied to pastoral work occurring on Sunday, the day of the week most congregants take as their day of Sabbath and time for spiritual renewal. This does not mean that the pastor does not take time to Sabbath. It simply means that the day of the week and the expression of Sabbath for the pastor must take on a different form than that of everyone else within the congregation.⁴ In fact, many pastors take Mondays as a time for weekly Sabbath-keeping and much enjoys being in the presence of nature and hiking as a form of drawing near to God.⁵ Many other pastors will take other days of the week, such as Fridays, as their time for Sabbath. Although some pastors do attempt to practice Sabbath weekly, it should be noted that there are certainly cases in which pastoral Sabbath-keeping has been personally abandoned almost entirely.⁶ It is important to understand that ministry cannot be cleanly and neatly fit into the timeframe of a nine-to-five job. In fact, much of the ministry that happens within the local church occurs at the very times that others are not working, in school, or engaged in other daily activities.⁷ This natural shift of time in which pastors apply themselves to the work of ministry can create a challenge for schedules and developing weekly routines that coincide with ministry events and services. How do pastors find regular and consistent rhythms of rest within the ever-shifting whirlwind that ministry often creates?

This is a vital question that must be addressed within the church with the pastor, or pastors, of a congregation. Pastoral Sabbath-keeping requires a diligent and committed stance to keep what is most important in life in focus at a personal and professional level; in the case of this discussion, that means keeping rest as a central focus.⁸ This may look different depending on

⁴ Hough et al., 173.

⁵ Hough et al., 173.

⁶ Speedling, 1382.

⁷ Witt, *Replenish*, 58.

⁸ Andy Stanley, *When Work & Family Collide: Keeping Your Job from Cheating Your Family* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011), 130.

the ministry context, but there must be a space and time for discussion of Sabbath-keeping to occur. Discussion must not be the only step as there must also be a clear plan of how pastoral Sabbath can and will be honored at an individual basis. Without clarity and a clear focus on the dire necessity for pastoral Sabbath to happen with a weekly rhythm, it is far too easy to let burnout and spiritual dryness creep in undetected. Pastors will need to evaluate their congregational needs, church rhythms, and staff requirements to best develop a plan for rest each week. This plan can then be implemented within the other pastors and staff within the church. The goal of this section is to develop a clear and practical plan for pastoral Sabbath to become a hallmark practice within the local church. That being said, there is a need to point out that not every church and pastor will have the same plan and there will be differing practices of spiritual renewal and soul-keeping.⁹ There are several principles that will be laid out in order to setup pastors for success in creating space and opportunity for pastoral Sabbath to occur every week.

The first principle is hard but critical for pastors to understand: disappointment is bound to happen, and that is okay. If there is one common theme across the context of any church, pastor, or ministry setting, it is that, at some point, the pastor will have to disappoint someone, likely deeply cared for people, friends, or congregants. Lance Witt writes regarding these challenging situations of disappointment. Witt observes, “It’s unrealistic to try keeping everyone satisfied...this is a symptom of being an approval junkie...such codependency leads to dysfunctions in a church and takes a huge personal toll.”¹⁰ No one enjoys letting someone down or falling short of another person’s expectations or approval. Yet, it is this principle of saying “no” to certain opportunities that will open up the door of opportunity for pastors and church

⁹ Witt, *Replenish*, 128.

¹⁰ Witt, *Replenish*, 132.

leaders to take time to do work and care within their own spiritual life and soul.¹¹ As we have seen already, when pastors are leading and ministering from a place of a healthy soul, not only is it an antidote to burnout, but it will make them more effective and stronger ministers to the churches that they are leading.¹²

The second principle of pastoral Sabbath keeping is to develop a weekly rhythm of Sabbath-keeping, even if it requires changes to the weekly organizational rhythms of work. The term principle is used intentionally here. What is not needed is a good idea of Sabbath-keeping or even a theological agreement that Sabbath-keeping is a good habit to do. What is needed is a committed and principled stance that Sabbath-keeping is a nonnegotiable part of the pastor's weekly rhythm of life. Pastor Andy Stanley discusses this commitment to principle and remarks that "principles are powerful things... a principle influences everything in your personal life... You can break a rule, but not a principle. In fact, by failing to observe a principle, you can break yourself against it."¹³ Therefore, Sabbath requires that the pastor established it as a principle in their life first and foremost. Stephen Covey emulates a similar notion regarding forming healthy habits and specifically mentions spiritual renewals as being a crucial principle to life.¹⁴ Healthy spiritual habits and practices require principle and diligence, particularly the habit of Sabbath-keeping.

What does this look like practically? It means that for the pastor, there will be at least one day each week that is set aside for Sabbath, regardless of the state of ministry or life. This likely means that there will need to be another pastor or ministry leader that is the first line of pastoral

¹¹ Witt, *Replenish*, 129.

¹² Speedling, 1389.

¹³ Stanley, 16.

¹⁴ Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 304.

response for the church. Again, this will vary based upon the size of the church staff and the context of ministry. If a pastor is the only staff member within a congregation, this means finding, equipping, and releasing a high capacity church leader to help respond to church needs that arise on the pastor's designated Sabbath to help cultivate a conducive environment for rest.¹⁵ In a large church with multiple pastors, adopting a weekly rotation that covers each of the pastor's schedules each week to ensure everyone is able to take a Sabbath day may be a more realistic rhythm.

The critical piece is for Sabbath to happen each week, even if it means handing off responsibilities and pastoral duties to other people. As pastors and ministers, part of our calling is to do as Paul urges in Ephesians 4:12 and "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."¹⁶ The weekly Sabbath provides the opportunity for younger pastors to be developed while also allowing for pastoral Sabbath to occur regularly. For example, in a congregation with more than one pastor, the senior pastor might take Sabbath time on a Monday, and other pastors such as an associate or executive pastor would take Friday as a Sabbath time. In smaller congregations that do not have multiple pastors in paid staff roles, the pastor will need to select and empower a trusted, competent leader within the church who can provide pastoral coverage while the pastor takes time to Sabbath each week. This will not only develop another trusted leader within the congregation but will provide a buffer for the pastor in their weekly Sabbath. As pastors begin to develop a personal Sabbath plan, it is important to also communicate this plan to people and to normalize Sabbath within the culture of the church community. When people understand that pastoral Sabbath is critically important, they will be more likely to honor and respect the boundaries that have been established by those in ministry.

¹⁵ Gallagher, 146.

¹⁶ Ephesians 4:12 (ESV)

Why Sabbath-Keeping Matters for Evangelism

What if this weekly rhythm of rest and intimacy with God could actually serve a dualistic role? What if Sabbath was not just for the benefit of the pastor, but also served as an opportunity for invitation into a different calling of rest for those outside the church? The culture in which we live runs at full stride, seemingly nonstop. The prospect and promise of spiritual rest and refreshment, and true fulfilment in the presence of God is a concept that few people within today's culture would dismiss as unappetizing or unappealing. In fact, it could be the very aspect of faith that spurs people into deeper levels of interest and understanding of the Christian faith.

Nouwen proposes that contemporary generations are actually much more internally focused and concerned than previous generations, stating that "...modern generations are seeking desperately for a vision, an ideal to dedicate themselves to...but their paroxysmal actions and language are often misunderstood and considered more a threat than a plea for alternative ways of living."¹⁷ Although Nouwen was writing of previous generations, his concept of internal conflict and desire for more still rings true; people have a desperate desire to something more than the world has to offer them, even though that desire is often misunderstood and misrepresented externally. As such, the concept of Sabbath and rest, when unpacked in an evangelistic manner, can serve as a powerful evangelistic tool, both in practical ministry and in personal refreshment for the work of ministry.

This concept of Sabbath as a catalyst for evangelism is a notion that A.J. Swoboda builds upon as he specifically addresses the role of contextualizing the Gospel in the frame of twenty-first century restlessness. Swoboda gracefully presents the invitation regarding Sabbath as a mechanism for Gospel contextualization and comments, "We each are invited to preach the

¹⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 40.

ancient Gospel in such a fresh way that a twenty-first century audience can not only understand it but also experience it in a unique way at their unique time.”¹⁸ He goes on to state that this is a form of twenty-first century Gospel contextualization and opportunity for the church. The church must be a community that lives with a high level of intentionality and clarity within the desires and thirsts of our surrounding culture. In a sense, this type of intentionality could reclaim the heart of hospitality that was emulated in the early church and personified the Christian witness.¹⁹

Walter Brueggemann remarks of the role that Sabbath plays in the prevailing culture, as well, writing that “Sabbath-keeping is a way of making a statement of peculiar identity amid a larger public identity...maintaining and enacting a counter-identity that refuses ‘mainstream’ identity.”²⁰ What Brueggemann is offering is a type of alternate identity as the peculiar people that Christians are to be marked as. In a sense, Sabbath itself becomes a type of identifier of being set apart and different than the rest of culture. Not only does this allow for invitation into deeper levels of intimacy with God, but also levels of cultural identity as people that are set apart with purpose.²¹ As Philip Yancey comments, it is in this manner of peculiarity that the church can serve not only as a place of rest, but also serve as a lens through which the world can be viewed in a different and transformed manner.²²

The theological proposal here is for pastors and church leaders to evaluate Sabbath as an additional tool of evangelism that can be employed by both the pastor and the church. Think of the promise of Sabbath and the state of society in this way; if a person were to find themselves in a desert with no water to drink, even for a short time, the prospect of finding fresh, clean water to

¹⁸ Swoboda, 161.

¹⁹ Rodney Reeves, *Spirituality According to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 121.

²⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 21.

²¹ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 21.

²² Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 262.

refresh themselves with would be profoundly motivating and attractive. In a similar manner, many people in Western culture have found themselves with a desperate thirst for rest and renewal, only to never find that thirst to be satisfied by the prevailing culture that is offered to them. Sabbath offers both rest and renewal to a tired and desperate world. A clear theological and pastoral response to this is to have a grounded and active theology of Sabbath and the life-giving implications that follow for those that desire a true rest.

How to Model Sabbath-Keeping for Future Pastors

One of the most compelling reasons for developing a personal theology of Sabbath-keeping is the opportunity to model Sabbath to an emerging generation of church leaders and pastors. As we have already seen, far too many pastors do not finish strong in their ministry due to a lack of spiritual vibrancy and health, often rooted in instances of burnout.²³ This is often rooted in a lack of consistent and healthy Sabbath-keeping practices. As such, our heart for the church and those that will lead it in the future must be formed around theological concepts that emphasize the central importance of pastoral Sabbath-keeping. Sabbath teaches us to slow down from the pace of life and ministry and to form a type of spiritual focus upon that which is most important. Sabbath is a way in which we counteract the multitasking culture of our world and instead choose to focus on the One whose very presence brings life to our souls.²⁴

An integral part of the pastoral calling is to equip future generations to lead and pastor well. Part of the calling of current pastors is to intentionally develop a pattern of instruction and coaching for future generations. In the same regard that we must have those to whom we look to for guidance and instruction, we must also have those that look to us for guidance and instruction regarding pastoral ministry. This must be formed around two key coaching and modeling

²³ Gallagher, 137.

²⁴ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 88.

focuses: a theology of Sabbath and a principled practice of weekly Sabbath-keeping. Without a proper theology of Sabbath, it becomes just another day of the week that is either consumed by work or ministry. Without a principled practice of Sabbath, we have only formed a good theological idea without ever letting our theology lead and inform our daily lives. It simply becomes a theological concept without any practical application that cannot shape and transform the individual. Solitude and the hiddenness that Sabbath bring are also a theological response to the cultural pressures of our world. As Dr. A.J. Swoboda remarks, “Our modern world is intent on keeping us from silence and solitude, scheming against moments of quietness and prayer.”²⁵ This quietness that happens in Sabbath is an opportunity to emerging generations of pastors to learn the art of waiting before the Lord and learning to discern His leading.

The first focus we will discuss is that of developing a theology of Sabbath for future pastors. This theological focus must be introduced and formed within the pastor’s academic preparation and training for pastoral ministry. Colleges and universities have an integral role to play for future generations of pastors and their spiritual practice of Sabbath-keeping. Pastoral and theological education provide a tremendous impact upon a future pastor’s theological ideologies and practices. As such, formative theological education surrounding Sabbath is crucial to future generations of pastors. The church and the seminary are not two separate entities with differing goals, but rather one cohesive body that strives to move the church forward in strength and health. Regarding this educational task, James K. A. Smith remarks that “the Christian college is a formative institution that constitutes part of the teaching mission of the church.”²⁶ Although not

²⁵ Swoboda, 193.

²⁶ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 34.

a complete strategic plan for pastoral Sabbath-keeping, pastoral education and training must be an integral foundation of developing healthy habits for future generations of pastors.

The university must work to aid in laying the foundation of pastoral health and wellness centered upon healthy rhythms of Sabbath-keeping and spiritual renewal practices. This can then be supplemented and further reinforced through ongoing training, teaching, and pastoral discipleship within the local church. Luisa J. Gallagher urges for a similar focus to be made within education, remarking that “Christian educators must train pastors and lay ministers to embrace the practice of Sabbath rest with the same rigor that they adopt to prepare for the specific tasks and functions of ministry.”²⁷ Just as important as other spiritual practices, Sabbath-keeping is an integral role in the development of pastors and church leaders.

Beginning in the formative years of college education is vital to setting up future pastors for long-term vitality and success in ministry with regard to Sabbath-keeping practices.²⁸ In an age where productivity, task management, and leadership are paramount topics in church leadership, so too must Sabbath-keeping be placed in high regard and priority within the local church. In fact, as we discovered in Chapter Two, the ability to slow down and be refilled spiritually will bring about greater effectiveness in ministry. Put another way, if they want to become more effective in advancing the mission of the church, pastors and ministry staff must first be effective in their rest habits.²⁹ This not only provides an opportunity for greater levels of spiritual health among pastors, but also energizes the church to be more effective in its mission.

The second focus we will discuss is developing an early rhythm and practice of Sabbath-keeping. If matters pertaining to pastoral burnout can be addressed at an early age in a pastor’s

²⁷ Gallagher, 135.

²⁸ Gallagher, 134.

²⁹ Gallagher, 135.

ministry journey, instances of pastoral burnout later in life could be greatly reduced.³⁰ Beginning to teach and model Sabbath-keeping early on in a future pastor's personal discipleship journey is a significant part of their personal development. One study suggests that if Sabbath-keeping practices were instituted, attrition in pastoral ministry could be greatly reduced.³¹ In instances where mentoring and oversight is provided, mentors must not only teach but also model healthy Sabbath practices to those they lead. This can be reinforced through regular rhythms that are built into a young pastor's work week. Instead of viewing a younger pastor as someone who can just help to carry the weight of ministry, it is important to also model healthy ministry practices to emerging pastors and show them that there is a care for their own health and spiritual renewal.³² Of central importance is Sabbath-keeping and time for spiritual rest. Whether this occurs through a large-scale teaching to multiple emerging pastors and leaders or in individual mentoring environments will depend upon ministry scale and context. What is of vital importance is that there are early formations of healthy spiritual rhythms of Sabbath that help to shape a young pastor's perspective and practices early on in ministry.

Summary

Pastors, now more than ever, must have both a strong biblical understanding of Sabbath that is coupled with a deeply practical theology that helps to live out the biblical precedent. This biblical understanding of Sabbath will help to equip pastors to be the best they can be for their families and loved ones, as well as giving them a contextually effective means of reaching a rest-less culture around them. It is through this lens of twenty-first century rest-taking that evangelism and sharing of the Gospel to those who desperately desire rest can be done

³⁰ Gallagher, 137.

³¹ Gallagher, 137.

³² Witt, *Replenish*, 188.

effectively. Not only will this strengthen the pastor individually but will also serve as a means to make the church counter-cultural in living out its mission. This call to pastoral Sabbath-keeping must also remain steadfast and focused upon training and discipling a future generation of pastors to help equip them for a lifetime of successful and healthy ministry practices.

Each of these components come together to form a practical and biblical theological framework through which pastors in the twenty-first century can respond to both a professional crisis of pastoral burnout and a cultural longing for rest and renewal. As the church learns the unforced rhythms of rest that Jesus invites people into, the Gospel witness and spiritual health of the church will be strengthened and sharpened for greater cultural impact. Yet it must begin first with those who lead. To bring about greater levels of spiritual health within the church, the pastor must first commit to exemplify the biblical rhythms of Sabbath-keeping.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING THE ART OF SABBATH

Introduction

As we draw to a close in our discussion of Sabbath and its role in the spiritual health of pastors, one clear truth has emerged; although Sabbath may be counter-cultural in most regards and often runs in contrast to our cultural norms, it is vital to the health and vitality of our souls. We were not created nor intended to run nonstop without rest and respite. Sabbath reminds us not only of our humanity, but also of the divine intimacy with which we were created and designed to dwell within. As pastors within the church, we too must understand the limitations of our own humanity and accept first and foremost that we are called to be sons and daughters of God. Our pastoral calling and giftings are not the source of our spiritual strength or resilience. Rather it is from our identity as children of God, desperately in need of His presence and renewal, that we are equipped to pastor and lead. When those two roles become confused, burnout, stress, and anxiety are all but a natural and spiritual byproduct of living a life in reverse order from how God intends.

It is in the times of nearness and intimacy with the Father that we are then filled and restored to minister and care for His people well. We must embody what it means to live counter-culturally in our call to rest and restoration in a rest-less world. We must each embrace and embody what it means to Sabbath well so that we may lead both ourselves and the congregations we have been called to pastor. When we do this, we will see the blessings in both our families and the spiritual family that we are to lead. Leading from a healthy soul is vital to the health of the church, and what has been seen is that regular rhythms of Sabbath rest lead to

greater levels of intimacy with God and greater levels of spiritual health within the pastoral ministry.

Reclaiming the Art of Sabbath

This theological call to return to our God-ordained rhythms of rest goes out to those who feel tired and burned out. Return and reclaim the art of Sabbath that has been taken and restore it to its proper place within the personal pastoral rhythms. This is a call, and the title of this work is meant to reflect just that: a call to pastors to personally reclaim the art of Sabbath-keeping for themselves and their families. The church moves and goes as its leaders move and go. If our desire, as pastors and leaders, is to see a church that is both vibrant in personal discipleship and spiritual health, we must commit to our own spiritual health, as well. This requires pastors to begin leading with intentionality toward a personal time of Sabbath every week. It also calls for Sabbath-keeping practices to be passed on to future generations of pastors. This will not only strengthen the pastors who practice Sabbath but will also strengthen the churches that they lead and shepherd.

Art must follow and flow from the hand and leading of a skilled artist. Sabbath should be understood as an artform that is uniquely tied to the hand and heart of the Creator. It should not be mistaken as just a day away from responsibilities or work. Where the people of God have often damaged or distorted the role of Sabbath has occurred when confusing the principle of what Sabbath is meant to be through the improper lens of a science, rather than artform. This is not to urge that Sabbath is not commanded and instructed in scripture, but what it is urging is for pastors to take seriously the call to Sabbath-keeping and hear the heart of a loving Creator behind the leading and instructing. When Sabbath becomes about a weekly day off from work, rather

than a weekly rhythm of rest and refreshment found in the presence of God, it is made into a shell of what it is meant to be.

Summary/Conclusion

As we draw to a close in our discussion, the call to keep and maintain a biblical Sabbath is clear. Within a pastoral perspective, it is a weekly time of renewal that reminds us of our heavenly call of rest that awaits God's people in our eternal home. As we lead and pastor, Sabbath reminds us that our work is not to be done without ceasing and that we were created to walk in God's rhythms of rest while leading others into those same patterns of rest. As we have discussed, there is a biblical precedent for Sabbath and there is also profound impact both personally and communally when we live out that theology practically. God desires intimacy with his beloved creation. Although it is a simple calling, it is also one that will require us to run at a pace and rhythm that looks very different to the culture surrounding us. There will be opportunities for great growth spiritually, but also strongholds and patterns of ministering out of our own strength that must be broken off and retrained. Challenges will certainly arise and will create opportunities for further learning and growing in the art of Sabbath, but there will be spiritual fruit and blessing that comes by living within the rhythms of God's rest.

The Lord has rooted and established these rhythms of intimacy and rest within the very framework of His Creation and within His children. Pastors are both caretakers and shepherds within the church, and as such are called to faithfully lead God's people from a healthy soul. Leading from healthy souls require rest and refilling through time spent in God's presence. We were not meant to run and work without rest and when we are reminded of our humanity we are also reminded of our eternity. As we enter into our weekly rhythm of Sabbath rest in the

presence of God, we receive a glimpse and foretaste of what we will enter into in our heavenly eternal rest, restored fully in glory with our Heavenly Creator.

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