

**Reading Material for
PM 525
Tyndale Theological Seminary**

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III

Prayer Time

IT CAME as a surprise, when I entered upon my pastoral vocation, that on any day of the week an astonishing number of people, in and out of my congregation, wanted me to do something for them. I was expecting a rather quiet life of study and prayer, visitation of the infirm and the dying, with occasional interruptions at times of crisis. I had concluded from reading the sociologists that religion was low on the agenda of people's concerns these days and that except for those infrequent times when family pressure or community protocol required my presence people would treat me with benign neglect. For years I had heard quips with variations on the theme of the pastor who works only one day a week, and supposed that there must be some basis in reality for the long life of the taunt. (My favorite is of the Scottish pastor who was "invisible six days a week and incomprehensible the seventh.") Each week I walk home after conducting Sunday worship and get a personalized version of this as my neighbor, puttering in his yard, greets me with the jibe, spoken as if he had just thought it up, "Finished for another week, huh? Sure must be nice." I am congenial in my answer: "Yup, sure is." Inwardly, I am not so

good-natured: I mentally write out a description of my work-week that I will later take over and present to him, documenting evidence that will reassure him that I am not a parasite on the system, endangering the property values of the neighborhood with my indolence. He will register total shock and fumble out an apology. But after a long shower and some expertly phrased compliments from my wife on the prophetic originality of the morning sermon the sting is out of his barbs and I shelve my defense for another week.

Initially, the daily surprise of the demand-filled day was welcome. It continued to be welcome for several years. It is nice to be needed. More than nice: it is downright flattering. Nearly all the requests for my pastoral attention and presence were couched in the rhetoric of urgency. That, combined with the presumed connection in whatever I was doing with God or Eternity or Holiness, meant that even trivial actions got dressed out into affairs of Importance. It was also nice to know that the sociologists were wrong.

The edge began to wear off of the flattery when I realized that among the considerable demands on my time not one demanded that I practice a life of prayer. And yet prayer was at the very heart of the vocation I had entered. I was entrusted with nurturing a living conversation with the people with whom I was living and the living God. I had not knowingly signed on as a schoolmaster, pedantically instructing reluctant children in the three R's of God, but had accepted a call to be a companion to people on a pilgrimage that involved practicing the presence of God. I had not agreed to be a moral errand-boy doing the good deeds in congregation and community that the others in the press of their serious business of getting on in the world didn't have time for themselves, but had accepted responsibility for personally listening to and answering the word of God and guiding others into a similar listening and answering that constitute our mature humanity.

Busyness, of course, is not peculiar to the pastoral life; it is endemic to our culture. One critic complained that "most of us have taxi-meters for brains, ticking away, translating time and space into money."¹ But there are pastoral dimensions that require something other than a good scolding. We need a strategy that takes into account the daily dilemma of living between these two sets of demands that seem to cancel each other out, a strategy that accepts both sets without favoring one over the other. The first set of demands is that we respond with compassionate attentiveness to the demands of the people around us, demands that refuse to stay within the confines of regular hours and always exceed our capacity to meet them all. These demands often mask deep spiritual hungers and cannot be dismissed with a bromide or delegated to a committee. The lives of people hang by a thread on some of these demands and require discerning intelligence. The second set of demands is that we respond with reverent prayer to the demand of God for our attention, to listen to him, to take him seriously in the actual circumstances of this calendar day, at this street address, and not bluff our way through by adopting a professionalized role. This is a kind of attentiveness that we know from instruction and experience can be entered into only slowly and deliberately. There is a large, leisurely center to existence where God must be deeply pondered, lovingly believed. This demand is not for prayer-on-the-run or for prayer-on-request. It means entering realms of spirit where wonder and adoration have space to develop, where play and delight have time to flourish. Is this possible for pastors who have this other set before them daily? Is not this something for monks and nuns in monasteries, for hermits in

1. Wayne Oates, *Workaholics, Making Laziness Work for You* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1978), p. 59.

desert places, and for a few noble souls who manage to live beyond the limitations of our common mortality?

It is possible for pastors. Because there is a biblical provision for it, pastors across the centuries were able to integrate the two sets of demands instead of experiencing them, angrily and guiltily, as a dilemma. The name for it is *sabbath*. The single act of keeping a sabbath does more than anything else to train pastors in the rhythm of action and response so that the two sets of demands are experienced synchronically instead of violently.

An accurate understanding of sabbath is prerequisite to its practice: it must be understood biblically, not culturally. A widespread misunderstanding of sabbath trivializes it by designating it "a day off." Sabbath is not a day off and it is inexcusable that pastors, learned in Scripture and guardians of the sacred practices, should so misname it. "A day off" is a bastard sabbath. Days off are not without benefits, to be sure, but sabbaths they are not. Pastors are often persuaded by wives, husbands, children, and psychiatrists to interrupt their obsessive-compulsive seven-day week by taking a day off. They are often pleased with the results: they get more done on the six days than they used to on seven. Mind and body are not constructed for perpetual motion. Mental and physical health improve markedly with a day off. We feel better. Efficiency sharpens. Relationships improve. However beneficial, this is not a true sabbath but a secularized sabbath. The motivation is utilitarian: the day off is at the service of the six working days. The purpose is to restore strength, increase motivation, reward effort, and keep performance incentives high. It just so happens that the side effects of shored-up family harmony and improved mental health are also attractive. The nearly wholesale substitution among pastors of a day off for a sabbath is one more sign of an abandoned vocational identity. (A related

misnaming replaces "pastor's study" with "office," thereby further secularizing perceptions of pastoral work. How many pastors no longer come to their desks as places for learning but as operation centers for organizing projects? The change of vocabulary is not harmless. Words have ways of shaping us. If we walk into a room labeled "office" often enough we end up doing office work. First we change the word, then the word changes us.)



Sabbath means quit. Stop. Take a break. Cool it. The word itself has nothing devout or holy in it. It is a word about time, denoting our nonuse of it, what we usually call *wasting* time.

The biblical context for understanding sabbath is the Genesis week. Sabbath is the seventh and final day in which "God rested [*shabath*] from all his work which he had done" (Gen. 2:3). We reenter that sequence of days in which God spoke energy and matter into existence, and repeatedly come upon the refrain, "And there was evening and there was morning, one day. . . . And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. . . . And there was evening and there was morning" — on and on, six times.

This is the Hebrew way of understanding *day*; it is not ours. American days, most of them anyway, begin with an alarm clock ripping the predawn darkness, and they close, not with evening, but several hours past that, when we turn off the electric lights. In conventional references to *day* we do not include the night hours except for the two or three that we steal from either end to give us more time to work. Because our definition of *day* is so different, we have to make an imaginative effort to understand the Hebrew phrase *evening and morning, one day*. More than idiomatic speech is involved here; there is a sense of rhythm. Day

is the basic unit of God's creative work; evening is the beginning of that day. It is the onset of God speaking light, stars, earth, vegetation, animals, man, woman into being. But it is also the time when we quit our activity and go to sleep. When it is evening "I lay me down to sleep and pray the Lord my soul to keep" and drift off into unconsciousness for the next six or eight or ten hours, a state in which I am absolutely nonproductive and have no cash value.

Then I wake up, rested, jump out of bed full of energy, grab a cup of coffee, and rush out the door to get things started. The first thing I discover (a great blow to the ego) is that everything was started hours ago. All the important things got underway while I was fast asleep. When I dash into the workday, I walk into an operation that is half over already. I enter into work in which the basic plan is already established, the assignments given, the operations in motion.

Sometimes, still in a stupor, I blunder into the middle of something that is nearly done, and go to work thinking that I am starting it. But when I do I interfere with what is already far along on its way to completion. My sincere intentions and cheerful whistle while I work make it no less a blunder and an aggravation. The sensible thing is to ask, "Where do I fit? Where do you need an extra hand? What still needs to be done?"

The Hebrew evening/morning sequence conditions us to the rhythms of grace. We go to sleep, and God begins his work. As we sleep he develops his covenant. We wake and are called out to participate in God's creative action. We respond in faith, in work. But always grace is previous. Grace is primary. We wake into a world we didn't make, into a salvation we didn't earn. Evening: God begins, without our help, his creative day. Morning: God calls us to enjoy and share and develop the work he initiated. Creation and covenant are sheer grace and there

to greet us every morning. George MacDonald once wrote that sleep is God's contrivance for giving us the help he cannot get into us when we are awake.

We read and reread these opening pages of Genesis, along with certain sequences of Psalms, and recover these deep, elemental rhythms, internalizing the reality in which the strong, initial pulse is God's creating/saving word, God's providential/sustaining presence, God's grace.

As this biblical genesis rhythm works in me, I also discover something else: when I quit my day's work, nothing essential stops. I prepare for sleep not with a feeling of exhausted frustration because there is so much yet undone and unfinished, but with expectancy. The day is about to begin! God's genesis words are about to be spoken again. During the hours of my sleep, how will he prepare to use my obedience, service, and speech when morning breaks? I go to sleep to get out of the way for awhile. I get into the rhythm of salvation. While we sleep, great and marvelous things, far beyond our capacities to invent or engineer, are in process — the moon marking the seasons, the lion roaring for its prey, the earthworms aerating the earth, the stars turning in their courses, the proteins repairing our muscles, our dreaming brains restoring a deeper sanity beneath the gossip and scheming of our waking hours. Our work settles into the context of God's work. Human effort is honored and respected not as a thing in itself but by its integration into the rhythms of grace and blessing.

We experience this grace with our bodies before we apprehend it with our minds. We are attending to a matter of physical/spiritual *technology* — not ideas, not doctrines, not virtues. We are getting our bodies into a genesis rhythm.

Sabbath extrapolates this basic, daily rhythm into the larger context of the month. The turning of the earth on its axis gives us the basic two-beat rhythm, evening/morning. The

moon in its orbit introduces another rhythm, the twenty-eight-day month, marked by four phases of seven days each. It is this larger rhythm, the rhythm of the seventh day, that we are commanded to observe. Sabbath-keeping presumes the daily rhythm, evening/morning. We can hardly avoid stopping our work each night as fatigue and sleep overtake us. But we can avoid stopping work on the seventh day, especially if things are gaining momentum. Keeping the weekly rhythm requires deliberate action. Sabbath-keeping often feels like an interruption, an interference with our routines. It challenges assumptions we gradually build up that our daily work is indispensable in making the world go. And then we find that it is not an interruption but a more spacious rhythmic measure that confirms and extends the basic beat. Every seventh day a deeper note is struck — an enormous gong whose deep sounds reverberate under and over and around the daily timpani percussions of evening/morning, evening/morning, evening/morning: creation honored and contemplated, redemption remembered and shared.



In the two biblical versions of the sabbath commandment, the commands are identical but the supporting reasons differ. The Exodus reason is that we are to keep a sabbath because God kept it (Exod. 20:8-11). God did his work in six days and then rested. If God sets apart one day to rest, we can too. There are some things that can be accomplished, even by God, only in a state of rest. The work/rest rhythm is built into the very structure of God's interpenetration of reality. The precedent to quit doing and simply *be* is divine. Sabbath-keeping is commanded so that we internalize the being that matures out of doing.

The Deuteronomy reason for Sabbath-keeping is that our ancestors in Egypt went four hundred years without a vacation (Deut. 5:15). Never a day off. The consequence: they were no longer considered persons but slaves. Hands. Work units. Not persons created in the image of God but equipment for making bricks and building pyramids. Humanity was defaced.

Lest any of us do that to our neighbor or husband or wife or child or employee, we are commanded to keep a sabbath. The moment we begin to see others in terms of what they can *do* rather than who they *are*, we mutilate humanity and violate community. It is no use claiming "I don't need to rest this week and therefore will not keep a sabbath" — our lives are so interconnected that we inevitably involve others in our work whether we intend it or not. Sabbath-keeping is elemental kindness. Sabbath-keeping is commanded to preserve the image of God in our neighbors so that we see them as they are, not as we need them or want them.

It is of interest to note that the truth and necessity of seven of the ten commandments are obvious and need no clarification. The second commandment is difficult to keep and so is backed up by a warning. The fifth commandment is fatiguing to keep and so gets the support of a promise. But the fourth commandment appears neither necessary nor logical, and so reasons are given for it. It is one of the ironies of history that our age, which prides itself on its appeal to reason, is most disregarding of the one commandment that is supported by reason — a double reason actually, one historical, the other theological.

Every profession has sins to which it is especially liable. I haven't looked closely into the sins that endanger physicians and lawyers, woodworkers and potters, but I have had my eye out for the snare of the fowler from which pastors need daily deliverance: it is the sin of reversing the rhythms. Instead of grace/work we make it work/grace. Instead of working in a

world in which God calls everything into being with his word and redeems his people with an outstretched arm, we rearrange it as a world in which we preach the mighty word of God and in afterthought ask him to bless our speaking; a world in which we stretch out our mighty arms to help the oppressed and open our hands to assist the needy and desperately petition God to take care of those we miss.

And that, of course, is why so few pastors keep a sabbath: we have reversed the rhythms. How can we quit work for a day when we have reversed the rhythms? How can we quit work for a day when we have been commanded to redeem the time? How can we shut up when we have fire in our mouth? How can we do nothing for a whole day when we have been told on high authority to be urgent in season and out of season, and there is never a season in which the calls for help do not exceed our capacity to meet them? But that is also why the sabbath is *commanded* and not just *suggested*, for nothing less than a command has the power to intervene in the vicious, accelerating, self-perpetuating cycle of faithless and graceless busyness, the only part of which we are conscious being our good intentions.

It is diagnostically significant that of all the commandments not one is treated with such contemptuous disregard by pastors as this one. We are capable of preaching good sermons on it to our parishioners, and take great care to provide them a sabbath of good worship and holy leisure. But we exempt ourselves. Curious. Not many of us preach vigorously on the seventh commandment and then pursue lives of active adultery. Not many of us preach eloquently on the second commandment and then moonlight by selling plastic fertility goddesses in the narthex. But we conscientiously catechize our people on the fifth commandment and without a blush flaunt our workaholic sabbath-breaking as evidence of an extraordinary piety.

Sabbath: Uncluttered time and space to distance ourselves

from the frenzy of our own activities so we can see what God has been and is doing. If we do not regularly quit work for one day a week we take ourselves far too seriously. The moral sweat pouring off our brows blinds us to the primal action of God in and around us.

Sabbath-keeping: Quieting the internal noise so we hear the still small voice of our Lord. Removing the distractions of pride so we discern the presence of Christ “. . . in ten thousand places, / Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his / To the Father through the features of men's faces.”²

Sabbath: Uncluttered time and space to detach ourselves from the people around us so that they have a chance to deal with God without our poking around and kibitzing. They need to be free from depending on us. They need to be free from our guidance that always tends toward manipulation.

Sabbath-keeping: Separating ourselves from the people who are clinging to us, from the routines to which we are clinging for our identity, and offering them all up to God in praise.

None of us have trouble with this theologically. We are compellingly articulate on the subject in our pulpits. Our theology is orthodox and biblical in these matters. It is not our theology that is deficient, but our technology — sabbath-keeping is not a matter of belief but of using a tool (time), not an exercise of heart and mind but of the body. Sabbath-keeping is not devout thoughts or heart praise but simply removing our bodies from circulation one day a week.

We are, most of us, Augustinians in our pulpits. We preach the sovereignty of our Lord, the primacy of grace, the glory of God: “By grace are ye saved. . . . Not of works, lest any man

2. Gerard Manley Hopkins, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire,” in *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 51.

should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9, KJV). But the minute we leave our pulpits we are Pelagians. In our committee meetings and our planning sessions, in our obsessive attempts to meet the expectations of people, in our anxiety to please, in our hurry to cover all the bases, we practice a theology that puts our good will at the foundation of life and urges moral effort as the primary element in pleasing God.

The dogma produces the behavior characteristic of the North American pastor: if things aren't good enough, they will improve if I work a little harder and get others to work harder. Add a committee here, recruit some more volunteers there, squeeze a couple of hours more into the workday.

Pelagius was an unlikely heretic; Augustine an unlikely saint. By all accounts Pelagius was urbane, courteous, convincing. Everyone seems to have liked him immensely. Augustine squandered away his youth in immorality, had some kind of Freudian thing with his mother, and made a lot of enemies. But all our theological and pastoral masters agree that Augustine started from God's grace and therefore had it right, and Pelagius started from human effort and therefore got it wrong. If we were as Augustinian out of the pulpit as we are in it, we would have no difficulty keeping sabbath. How did it happen that Pelagius became our master?

Our closet Pelagianism will not get us excommunicated or burned at the stake, but it cripples our pastoral work severely, and while that is not personally painful, it is catastrophic to the church's wholeness and health.



The two biblical reasons for sabbath-keeping develop into parallel sabbath activities of praying and playing. The Exodus reason directs us to the contemplation of God, which be-

comes prayer. The Deuteronomy reason directs us to social leisure, which becomes play. Praying and playing are deeply congruent with each other and have extensive inner connections, noted and commented upon by a wide range of philosophers and theologians.³ John Calvin filled his sabbath with both. His reputation for humorless austerity doesn't prepare us for the facts: he led his congregation in prayers in the morning and in the afternoon went among the people of Geneva and played skittles.⁴ In our own time the poet W. H. Auden was alarmed that we are losing two of our most precious qualities, the ability to laugh heartily and the ability to pray, and he pleaded on behalf of a sane world for better prayer and better play.⁵

Psalm 92 is the one biblical Psalm specifically assigned to the sabbath. Its opening lines put the normative sabbath actions in parallel:

It is good to give thanks to Yahweh,
to play in honour of your name, Most High.
(92:1, Jerusalem Bible)

What is it like to pray? To play? Puritan sabbaths that eliminated play were a disaster. Secular sabbaths that eliminate prayer are worse. Sabbath-keeping involves both playing and praying. The activities are alike enough to share the same day and different enough to require each other for a complementary wholeness. But combining them is not easy. It is easier to specialize in an "Exodus sabbath" or a "Deuteronomy sabbath." George Sheehan once wrote that "man playing is almost as

3. Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

4. Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), p. 20.

5. May Sarton, *Journal of a Solitude* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973), p. 98.

difficult a subject as man praying.”⁶ But children do both all the time, showing that playing and praying are not alien habits that we have to acquire but rather the recovery of something deeply essential within us that we “have loved long since and lost awhile” (Newman).

A Rembrandt etching shows Jesus teaching a group of adults who are before him rapt and reverent. Off to the side a child is absorbed in playing with a string and top. Rembrandt doesn’t tell us what Jesus is saying. I think he is teaching us how to pray. The child is showing us how to play. (A twenty-year-old memory carries a similar juxtaposition. I opened my eyes after leading my congregation in intercessory prayers and saw my infant son crawling across the center of the sanctuary in pursuit of a ball he was playing with while I and the congregation were praying. My initial response was of embarrassment. I later repented. Was his playing less to the glory of God than our praying?)

Psalm 92 sets praying and playing in tandem and then elaborates the parallel actions with three metaphors, providing us with a triptych of sabbath-keeping.

The first metaphor is musical: we pray and play “to the music of the zither and lyre, to the rippling of the harp” (v. 3, JB). Playing and praying are like the musicians’ art that combines discipline with delight. Music quickens something deep within us. Our bodies assimilate the sound and rhythm and experience aliveness. Melody and harmony draw us over the boundary of the tuneless grunts and groans of daily discourse, the demands and complaints that fence us into the corral of self. When played well, musical performance seems effortless, yet behind the easy spontaneity is an immense discipline. This

6. George Sheehan, *On Running* (Mountain View, CA: World Publications, 1975), p. 196.

discipline, while arduous, is not onerous, but is the accepted means for taking us beyond our plodding exterior selves into perceptions and aspirations that stretch us into beauty. And any time we are beyond ourselves, by whatever means, we are closer to God. Surely it is significant that nearly all the prayers in the Psalter carry evidence within them of being played musically. Karl Barth once declared that the music of Mozart led him “to the threshold of a world which in sunlight and storm, by day and by night, is a good and ordered world.”⁷

A clever and learned atheist showed up in ancient Rome, badgering the people with his arguments and reasoning that there was no God, no purpose, no meaning, and that therefore anything was permitted. He picked on a rude shepherd in the town square as a foil for his arguments, thinking to make sport of him before the spectators. He cut him up with his razor logic, befuddled him with his narcotic eloquence. He concluded with a flourish: “What do you say to *that*!” The shepherd took out his flute and played a lively tune. Within minutes all the people in the square were dancing for joy.

A second metaphor is animal: praying and playing are like the ox’s wildness: “you raise my horn as if I were a wild ox” (v. 10, JB). Animal wildness is unfettered exuberance. We are delighted when we see animals in their natural environments — leaping, soaring, prancing. A golden eagle plummets to its prey; a grizzly bear carelessly rips through alpine turf, lunging on tubers; a white-tailed deer vaults a stream. Praying and playing are like that: undomesticated. We shed poses and masks. We become unself-conscious. We *are*.

Erik Erikson expounds on this:

7. Karl Barth, “A Letter of Thanks to Mozart,” in *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, trans. Clarence K. Pott (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 22.

Of all the formulations of play, the briefest and the best is to be found in Plato's *Laws*. He sees the model of true playfulness in the need of all young creatures, animal and human, to leap. To truly leap, you must learn how to use the ground as a springboard, and how to land resiliently and safely. It means to test the leeway allowed by given limits; to outdo and yet not escape gravity. Thus, wherever playfulness prevails, there is always a surprising element, surpassing mere repetition or habituation, and at best suggesting some virgin chance conquered, some divine leeway shared.⁸

Substitute the word *pray* for *play* in that passage; it reads the same.

The third metaphor is sylvan: persons who pray and play

... flourish like palm trees
and grow as tall as the cedars of Lebanon.
Planted in the house of Yahweh,
they will flourish in the courts of our God,
still bearing fruit in old age,
still remaining fresh and green.

(Vv. 12-14, JB)

Praying and playing share this quality: they develop and mature with age, they don't go into decline. Prayerfulness and playfulness reverse the deadening effects of sin-determined lives. They are life-enhancing, not life-diminishing. They infuse vitalities, counteracting fatigue. They renew us, they do not wear us out. Playing and praying counter boredom, reduce anxieties, push, pull, direct, prod us into the fullness of our humanity by getting body and spirit in touch and friendly with each other. "Man," wrote Schiller, "only plays when in

8. Erik Erikson, *Toys and Reasons* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 17.

the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays."⁹

Johann Huizinga wrote a long and learned book, *Homo Ludens*, showing that culture is healthy only when it plays.¹⁰ Play is a distinctive mode of activity for humans. When we repress or neglect play we dehumanize culture. Huizinga writes to warn. As our civilization has advanced, it has lost touch with the distinctively human, and so while we show off a breathtakingly wealthy technology, our collective humanity has dipped well below the poverty level. We are less ourselves. Unpraying and unplaying, we deteriorate into skid-row consumers, life meagre with mere *getting*. Pastors must be in the avant garde of sabbath-keepers, reforesting our land, so savagely denuded by the humorless bulldozers, with playgrounds, prayergrounds.



These three metaphors combine to characterize sabbath-keeping with a kind of audacious, necessity-defying insouciance. The context brings this out: the three play/pray metaphors are developed in a psalm that is centrally concerned with the enormous fact of evil. Bounded on one side by prayerful play and on the other with playful prayer, the psalm center has this:

Great are your achievements, Yahweh,
immensely deep your thoughts!
Stupid men are not aware of this,
fools can never appreciate it.
The wicked may sprout as thick as weeds
and every evil-doer flourish,

9. Quoted in Norman Brown, *Life against Death* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 33.

10. Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

but only to be everlastingly destroyed,
whereas you are supreme for ever.
See how your enemies perish,
how all evil men are routed.

(Ps. 92:5-9, JB)

This sabbath-psalmist is not off smelling the flowers, dreamily detached from the awful plight of the people. He is appalled that the wicked are "thick as weeds." He is dismayed that evil-doers flourish. But he goes ahead and keeps a sabbath of praying and playing. Pastors who keep a weekly sabbath know full well the ruined state of the world. They play and pray anyway — not because they are heartlessly selfish or trivially giddy, but because they are convinced that these practices are God's will not only for them but also for the battered world. There is a devil-may-care recklessness that sets the day aside for praying and playing despite compelling pressure to do something practical — and then discovers that this was the most practical thing of all to do.

The technology of sabbath-keeping is not complex. We simply select a day of the week (Paul seemed to think any day would do as well as any other; Rom. 14:5-6) and quit our work.

Having selected the day we need also to protect it, for our workday instincts and habits will not serve us well. It is not a day when we do anything useful. It is not a day that proves its worth, justifies itself. Entering into empty, nonfunctional time is difficult and needs protection, for we have been taught that time is money.

Our secularized age is so fragmented that no consensus in the details of sabbath-keeping is possible. We cannot prescribe a practice for each other. But lest the command dissolve into a fog of good intentions, I will risk autobiography. The risk is that someone will try to imitate the details of my practice,

or (more likely) will say, "That's sure dumb; I don't see the point of that" and dismiss the whole business on the basis of my inept practice. I excuse my example giving with Thoreau's precedent: "I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience."

Monday is my sabbath. Nothing is scheduled for Mondays. If there are emergencies I respond, but there are surprisingly few. My wife joins me in observing the day. We make a lunch, put it in a daypack, take our binoculars, and drive anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour away, to a trailhead along a river or into the mountains. Before we begin our hike my wife reads a psalm and prays. After that prayer there is no more talking — we enter into a silence that will continue for the next two or three hours, until we stop for lunch.

We walk leisurely, emptying ourselves, opening ourselves to what is there: fern shapes, flower fragrance, birdsong, granite outcropping, oaks and sycamores, rain, snow, sleet, wind. We have clothes for all weather and so never cancel our sabbath-keeping for reasons of weather any more than our Sunday church-going — and for the same reason: we need our sabbath just as much as our parishioners need theirs. When the sun or our stomachs tell us it is lunchtime, we break the silence with a prayer of blessing for the sandwiches and fruit, the river and the forest. We are free to talk now, sharing bird sightings, thoughts, observations, ideas — however much or little we are inclined. We return home in the middle or late afternoon, putter, do odd jobs, read. After supper I usually write family letters. That's it. No Sinai thunder. No Damascus Road illuminations. No Patmos visions. A day set apart for solitude and silence. Not-doing. Being-there. The sanctification of time.

We don't have any rules for preserving the sanctity of the day, only the commitment that it be set apart for being, not

using. Not a day to get anything done but a day to watch and be responsive to what God has done.

But we have help. Sabbath-keeping cannot be carried out as a private enterprise. We need our congregation's help. They need our help to keep their sabbath; we need their help to keep ours. From time to time I say something like this to my elders and deacons: "The great reality we are involved in as people and pastor is God. Most of the people around us don't know that, and couldn't care less. One of the ways God has provided for us to stay aware of and responsive to him as the determining and centering reality of our lives in a world that doesn't care about it is by sabbath-keeping. At regular intervals we all need to quit *our* work and contemplate *his*, quit talking to each other and listen to *him*. God knows we need this and has given us a means in sabbath — a day for praying and playing, simply enjoying what he is. One of my tasks is to lead you in the celebrative keeping of sabbath each Sunday. But that is not a sabbath for me. I wake up on Sunday morning with the adrenalin flowing. It is a workday for me. Monday is my sabbath, and I need your help to observe it. I need your prayers; I need your cooperation in not involving me in administration or consultation; I need your admonitions if you see me carelessly letting other things interfere with it. Pastors need pastors too. One of the ways you can be my pastor is to help me keep a weekly sabbath that God commanded."

And they do it. They help. I don't think there are many congregations who would not help us do it if they knew we were committed to it and needed their help to carry it out.

My wife has been keeping, off and on, a sabbath journal for the fourteen years that we have been doing this. The journal is labeled "Emmaus Walks." You wouldn't be greatly impressed, I think, if you read the sporadic entries. Bird lists, wildflowers in bloom, snatches of conversation, brief notes on

the weather. But the spareness records a fullness, a presence. For sabbath-keeping is not primarily something we do, but what we don't do.

We got the phrase "Emmaus Walks" in conversation with Douglas V. Steere, who told us the story of an old Lutheran retreat master he once knew, very Prussian, whose speech was thick with German gutturals. He specialized in men's retreats. As the men would come into the lodge, he would make them open their suitcases, from which he would confiscate all the whiskey. Then he would pair them up and send them off on what he called *ee-mouse* walks. Steere told us that for a long time he wondered what *ee-mouse* walks were, and then realized one day that the old Prussian drillmaster was sending his men out on Emmaus walks: two disciples walking and talking together and Jesus, unrecognized, with them. But afterward they knew: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). It is the kind of unobtrusive alteration in perception and prayer that happens quietly but cumulatively in the practice of sabbath-keeping. We get the rhythms right. And with the rhythms right, we realize that without directly intending it, we have time to pray.

