

Leader-Telegram Clergy Column

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Sometimes I sits and thinks, and sometimes I just sits. That famous phrase has rattled in my head for decades reminding me of the rest we all require but rarely acquire. The human spirit is not designed for constant labor and busy-ness, but we have suffered a societal drift in that direction as we simultaneously define people more and more by what they produce. Our work days grow longer. Many are expected to be on the phone or email while on vacation. We have less and less time to enjoy the fruits of our labor because of pressure to keep producing. I hear people lament a lack of free time for play and rest. Our time gets consumed with chores, errands, and responsibilities, as well as the too-distracting time-wasters of email, cell phones, and text messages which we feel compelled to proffer instant response, even when doing something else. We are multi-tasking and over-programming ourselves into bad health, slaves to the anxiety that maybe we are not making enough bricks for Pharaoh.

But we have a Biblical witness that this is not God's way for us. In the Bible's first creation story, God takes a day of rest after making everything. The act of creation was followed by an act of recreation. God rested. If you need an excuse for a rest day, you can tell your boss, "Even God needed a day off !" God knows the importance of rest. In fact, it is so important that the command to take a weekly rest day comes in at number 3 (or 4, depending on how one numbers them), preceded only by the commands to have no other gods and not to make wrongful use of

God's name. God cites the day of rest after creation as one reason. More importantly, God says many times that the reason for sabbath is because the Hebrew people had been slaves in Egypt. The sabbath was not just for the Hebrews, either, but for their animals and their slaves as well. After centuries of slavery, God's gift is permission, worded as a command, for rest.

Our other great biblical witness of sabbath is Jesus. He left his disciples numerous times to pray and be alone. Not even Jesus could go full-throttle 24/7. I take much relief in knowing that! If he needed rest time, maybe we need it and should allow it to others, too. Imagine a world in which we all slowed down once a week. When I was very young, no businesses were open on Sunday in my hometown. We did not miss anything by it, but we did gain family time. Lazy Sunday afternoons of reading and playing, visiting friends, then a big family meal.

I missed those restful days, and so about a year and a half ago I began striving to carve out a sabbath day each week. Since I'm a pastor and work on Sundays, I have been choosing Friday as my day to unplug and slow down. I turn off the radio, TV, Internet, and phone. I don't shop, drive, or spend money. The computer stays off (that's tough!). No house cleaning, errands, or chores. I read the Bible and other books, write (with pen and paper), pray, enjoy my non-technological hobbies, and think. And a lot of the time I just sits. I do nothing, allowing room so that God can enter. By removing the noise, I can hear God again. God dislikes competition, I think, and refuses to shout. This is perhaps why it seems that God is not speaking. God speaks, but we drown it out with our noise. I admit, I do not always succeed in taking these sabbath days.

Interruptions come, other responsibilities pop up. But when it works, my other days are more

productive and flow more easily because I am better rested, more focused, and calmer. More incredibly, though, I feel a deeper grounding in God, the source of our being. I recommend sabbaths. They are truly gifts from a generous and loving God. And maybe, just maybe, one of the most prophetic acts we people of faith can do in a world which demands we keep making bricks for Pharaoh, is to stop, take a day off, and *_just sits_*. Sits and spend time with ourselves, our loved ones, and with God, and remember who and whose we really are.