

Give yourself a break -- observe the Sabbath

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Growing up in my rural Catholic family, we always went to church on Sunday and refrained from work. My dad never even harvested wheat, our main source of income, on Sunday when many of the neighbors did. Talk about a witness of faith! I grew up knowing in my bones that Sunday was "different," a day of rest dedicated to God, family, and leisure.

Once in talking with a group of friends, we got on this topic, and almost everyone said Sunday was like any other day. I was stunned. I just assumed everyone else observed the Lord's Day like I did. My feeling was, "Oh, what a loss. You don't know what you are missing."

I wouldn't even think of discarding the practice of observing the Sabbath, as I find it so valuable and critical to rest from labor on Sundays. I can lay aside my "to-do" list with nary a twinge of conscience, and enjoy my favorite renewing activities. Besides church and meditation, that usually means taking a nap, reading, exercise, time in nature, visiting with family or friends, and perhaps watching a movie. It would never enter my mind to cut the grass, do laundry, pay bills, go shopping, or do other chores, no matter how busy I am.

I'm a firm believe that God doesn't want us to work ourselves to death, and rewards our taking time off for balance and leisure in our lives. There will always be work to be done, whether at home, in our job, or in helping those in need. But setting those aside for a day says that we trust God to provide for us and the world's needs.

When we observe nature, it doesn't anxiously strive and strain to fulfill its part in the divine web of life, wearing itself out in the struggle. There is an effortless flow and ebb to things, a joyous achievement of its purpose. I think it's because we humans have gotten so estranged from nature and our true spiritual purpose in life, that we have become a hyper-stressed, unhappy, workaholic species always striving for more of what cannot satisfy.

My heart goes out to those who, out of economic necessity, have to work on Sundays just to stay afloat. It points out the necessity for all of us to work for systemic change that will ensure a livelihood for all that allows time for leisure.

Jesus went about doing good on the Sabbath, much to the dismay of the legalistic religious leaders of his day. Jesus wasn't interested in the letter of the law, but in observing the spirit of it. So should it be with us. If we have to work on Sundays, then we can take time off for Sabbath on another day. Only we can decide what is restful and enlivening for us. The bottom line is to take the burden off our shoulders to perform, achieve and be in control, and instead to dedicate time to enhancing our relationship to God, others, nature, and ourselves.

God created and masterfully kept the universe going for billions of years before we came on the scene, so surely things will not fall apart if we rest from our labors one day a week.

If we simplified our lives, in terms of both possessions and activities, we might find it easier to keep the

Sabbath.

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