

go over and engage someone in conversation.

When they sing in church, I let go. I worship God. I don't worry about what people around me are thinking. I'm singing to Jesus, and to my Father, through the Holy Spirit. When church is over, I enjoy fellowship with people.

In the afternoon, I may take a nap or watch TV. I read and study all week, so on Sundays, I like to zone out. Then, towards evening, my wife and I have dinner at home, and we spend some time talking about what's going on. Then, I usually go to bed early so I don't wake up with rest-interval dysfunction on Monday morning.

That's how I spend most Sundays, and for the most part, I think I've found a balance between law and license. However, I also race sports cars, so about one weekend per month I wake up at a race track, but I still find time to worship and pray. We often have a chapel service at the track.

I've found liberty. You and your men can find it too—but it will require discipline until it becomes habit.

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR™

EQUIPPING LEADERS IN THE BATTLE FOR MEN'S SOULS

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The Lost Art of Sabbath

*Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines for Men (Moody Publishing)
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Pat Morley

John glanced at his watch. *This meeting is running a lot longer than I expected. I've got to go. How on earth am I going to finish everything? Finally, it was over.* "Your wife is on line two," his assistant reported as he rushed past. "Hi, what do you want," he said quickly as he picked up the phone. "Just wondered if you'll be home for dinner." "Doesn't look like it," he said. "But that's a whole week now. The kids are starting to forget what you look like." "I've gotta go." John checked his email. Two messages from operations—requests for more information. *Why can't people figure out anything without my help?* John is sailing into dangerous water. Let's coin a new term: he's suffering from what we might call *rest-interval dysfunction*. His life is out of balance, and he needs to take a break. He needs a Sabbath.

What is Sabbath?

The word "Sabbath" literally means to cease activity or to rest. We get our word "sabbatical" from this root. Through the ages controversy has swirled around the Sabbath commandment. For the purpose of this article, I simply want to make this point: *we all have a responsibility, and also a privilege, to enjoy regular intervals of rest.*

Check out what the Bible says in Deuteronomy 5:12, the fourth commandment:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it Holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. 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, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox,

your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Biblically, the Sabbath had purpose. Certainly, it's for resting and refueling. But it's also for remembering. It's a day that is set apart. We don't work. We don't require others to work. The Sabbath is a beautiful gift. God has made it legal for us to set apart one day a week for rest.

Why should we honor Sabbath as a spiritual discipline?

For some of us 21st century hard-chargers, rest really requires an act of discipline. I see at least four reasons to practice the discipline of Sabbath:

1. *The Sabbath is integral to Orthodox Christianity.* It is included in the Ten Commandments - arguably the most important pieces of legislation ever recorded.
2. *The Sabbath expresses our trust in God's provision.* By resting we say, "I believe (have faith) God will take care of me. I don't always have to be scrambling."
3. *The Sabbath protects us from ourselves.* Many years ago it was said that when Frenchmen in Paris stopped observing the Sabbath, suicide rates increased. During that time, the suicide rate in Paris reportedly became the highest of any city in the Christianized world.
4. *The Sabbath is badly misunderstood, often abused, and frequently neglected.* One student trying to draw attention to the neglect of the Sabbath in our generation wrote a satirical tract called, "I believe in all nine of the Ten Commandments." The title might make you smile, but take a moment to really think about the implications.

Here's the bottom line—a man who doesn't honor the Sabbath, who doesn't celebrate his place in God's family, will

succumb to stress. He will become spiritually isolated. He will make poor decisions. And the church will be weaker because of his absence.

Admittedly, it's not always easy to take a Sabbath. That's why it's a discipline—something you work into your lifestyle through training. God legalized a day of rest. If every Sunday night you compulsively take an hour or two to plan out your week, you may want to reexamine your commitment. If you feel you can't get by without working on the Sabbath, you may want to ask yourself, "Am I trusting God and, if not, what am I afraid of?"

Suggestions for pursuing this discipline

If you work at physical labor all week, then perhaps Sunday afternoon is good for a nap. If you have a sedentary job, you may want to exercise. The key is balance. If you have a little rest-interval dysfunction, it might be helpful to have a picture of what a Sabbath can look like. Here's how I typically celebrate a day of rest:

I wake up at the normal time, but I don't roll out of bed right away. I lie there for an extra fifteen or twenty minutes, and I pray. I thank God for the Sabbath, and I think about this special day in God's economy. Then I consider the reason for a day of rest—God wants it to be holy. He wants me to remember. He wants me to worship. He wants to have fellowship with me.

So, I get up and have a time of personal devotions. I review the previous week, thanking God for His protection and provision. I remember a few things I didn't get finished, and I pray about them, too. Then I pray through the week to come. I ask God to watch over me, to give me favor and to bless me, to guide me, to give wisdom.

Next I look at how much money came in the past week and figure how much we're going to give. I write out the check at home before I leave for church, then I pray and offer to God a sacrifice of praise.

Before I leave home, I think about brothers and sisters in the fellowship who are hurting. When I get to church, I might look around for somebody with drooped shoulders, or someone who's standing off in the corner. I pray for those people. I might