

5 PRACTICAL THOUGHTS ON REST

Tim Keller » Worship Health Wisdom Planning

In practical terms, how do we figure out how much time we need for Sabbath rest, and how do we spend that time? The following are a few suggestions or guidelines, by no means exhaustive.

1. TAKE SOME TIME FOR SHEER INACTIVITY

Most people need some time every week that is unplanned and unstructured, in which you can do whatever you feel like doing. If your Sabbath time is very busy and filled with scheduled activities of “recreation” and ministry, it will not suffice. There must be some cessation from activity or exertion. This pause in the work cycle is analogous to Israel’s practice of letting a field lie fallow every seventh year to produce whatever happened to grow ([Lev. 25:1–7](#)). The soil rested so over-farming would not deplete its nutrients and destroy its ability to keep producing. Whatever came up in the soil came up. You need some unscheduled time like that every week to let come up—out of the heart and mind—whatever will.

2. TAKE SOME TIME FOR AVOCATIONAL ACTIVITY

An avocation is something that is sheer pleasure to you, but that does require some intentionality and gives some structure to your Sabbath rest. In many cases an avocation is something that others do for “work,” which is analogous to occasionally planting a different crop in a field to replenish the nutrients and make the soil more fertile for its normal crop. Include these elements:

You need some *contemplative* rest. Prayer and worship are a critical part of Sabbath rest, from any perspective. Regular time for devotion, reading the Scripture, and listening to God forms the basis for inner rest and provides time away from the more exhausting exertions of life.

You need some *recreational* rest. The Puritans and others were rightly skeptical of recreations that required spending a great deal of money and time and exertion, because those types of recreations exhaust people. Be careful that recreation really refreshes.

You need to include *aesthetic* rest. Expose yourself to works of God's creation that refresh and energize you, and that you find beautiful. This may mean outdoor things. It may mean art—music, drama, and visual art. God looked around at the world he made and said it was good, so aesthetic rest is necessary for participating in God's Sabbath fully.

3. CONSIDER WHETHER YOU ARE AN INTROVERT OR AN EXTROVERT

When planning your Sabbath rest, ask yourself what really “recharges” you. This self-assessment can help you determine how relational your Sabbath time should be. Introverts tend to spend their energy when out with people and recharge their batteries by being alone. Extroverts tend to spend energy in personal work and recharge their batteries by getting out with people. If you are a real introvert, be careful about trying to maintain all of your community-building relationships during your Sabbath time. That would be too draining. On the other hand, relationship-building could be one of the greatest things a true extrovert could possibly do. Don't try to imitate an introvert's Sabbath rhythms if you are an extrovert or vice versa! Recognize that some avocational activities take you into solitude, while some take you out into society.

4. DON'T NECESSARILY COUNT FAMILY TIME AS SABBATH TIME

Do a realistic self-assessment of “family time” and how it affects you. Family time is important, but parents need to be very careful that they don't let all of their regular Sabbath time be taken up with parental responsibilities. (Introverts especially will need time away from the kids!) Keeping all of these things in good balance may be virtually impossible when your children are very young, but this too will pass.

5. HONOR BOTH MICRO- AND MACRO-RHYTHMS IN YOUR SEASONS OF REST

Israel's Sabbath cycles of rest-and-work included not only Sabbath days but also Sabbath years and even a Year of Jubilee every 49 years (**Lev. 25:8–11**). This is a crucial insight for workers in today's world. It is possible to voluntarily take on a season of work that requires high energy, long hours, and insufficient weekly- Sabbath time. A new physician has to work long hours in a residency program, for example, and many other careers (such as finance, government, and law) similarly demand some sort of initial period of heavy, intense work. Starting your own business or pursuing a major project like making a movie will require something similar. In these situations you have to watch that you don't justify too little Sabbath by saying you're "going through a season"—when in actual fact that season never ends.

If you must enter a season like this, it should not last longer than two or three years at the most. Be accountable to someone for this, or you will get locked into an "under-Sabbathed" life-style, and you will burn out. And during this "under-Sabbathed" time, do not let the rhythms of prayer, Bible study, and worship die. Be creative, but get it in.

This post is excerpted from Dr. Keller's article "Ministry and Character."