

SABBATH AS A COUNTER-FORMATIONAL PRACTICE IN A CULTURE OF BUSYNESS

MELISSA DAVIS*

Abstract: *Culture is a formational entity developed to meet specific needs and desires. It forms people toward a vision of the good life and shapes people's identity. However, culture often stands at odds with the kingdom of God. It is the role of the church to offer counter-formational liturgies that shape people for the kingdom of God. This article contributes to sabbath scholarship by providing a careful reading of the formational impact of America's 24/7 busy culture and offers sabbath as a counter-formational practice. To achieve this, it brings sociological scholarship on busy culture into conversation with the practice of sabbath through the lens of cultural liturgy. First, drawing from the work of James K. A. Smith, this article discusses the formational power of ritual and liturgy. Second, it assesses busy culture as an idolatrous cultural liturgy and explores its formational impact. Finally, it argues for sabbath practice as counter-liturgy for busy culture.*

Key words: *sabbath, busy culture, cultural liturgy, rest, Jewish praxis, Christian praxis, time pressure, ritual, idolatry*

In 1951, Rabbi Abraham Heschel wrote:

Technical civilization ... is man's triumph over space.... Space is exposed to our will; we may shape and change the things in space as we please. Time, however, is beyond our reach, beyond our power. It is both near and far, intrinsic to all experience and transcending all experience. It belongs exclusively to God.... Time, then, is *otherness*, a mystery that hovers above all categories.¹

Despite massive technological advances, humanity has yet to master time. Time can be bought, borrowed, saved, managed, wasted, shared, squandered, spent—but not made. The realities of time pressure, time famine, and hurry sickness betray humanity's submission to time. Time is humanity's most valuable non-fungible resource, one Paul commands us to redeem (Eph 5:12 KJV). Recognizing its value and deeply influenced by the Protestant work ethic,² the United States has become a “nation

* Melissa Davis is a PhD candidate at Regent University School of Divinity, 1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23464. She may be contacted at melida1@mail.regent.edu.

¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 98–99.

² The phrase *protestantische Ethik* or Protestant work ethic was coined by Max Weber, a German sociologist, economist, and politician. He argued that Northern Europe was deeply influenced by the Protestant (particularly Puritan) work ethic during the industrial revolution. This ethic encouraged busy work and the complete avoidance of the frivolous waste of time. See Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik, und Der Geist des Kapitalismus* (1904–1905; repr., Berlin: Hofenberg, 2016).

of clock watchers”³ and a “culture of overwork,” where long work hours signal productivity, achievement, and worth.⁴ Yet, at what cost? Has American culture set a sustainable pace? Further, what is the formational impact of busyness on a person’s identity and vision of the good life? If this pace is ultimately unsustainable, is there something the church offers as an antidote to the “hurry sickness” of busyness?

This paper examines the formational impact of America’s 24/7 busyness culture on the individual and offers sabbath as a counter-formational practice. Specifically, it argues that sabbath is necessary for renewal because it is a formational rhythm of *imitatio Dei* that breaks bondage to idols. God established the necessity of sabbath for humanity at the foundation of the world (Gen 2:1–4a), and its practice is one of the ways God set Israel apart from the nations as his people (Exod 31:13–14). However, Christians are often hesitant to practice sabbath, reacting against legalism or assuming they no longer need it. Many see its practice as untenable, given the frenetic pace of today’s world. And yet, the invitation to God’s sabbath rest remains.

Christian scholars have approached the topic of sabbath in two primary ways. In one approach, scholars exegete the scriptural context of sabbath and draw implications for contemporary practice. Walter Brueggemann’s *Sabbath as Resistance*, D. Thomas Lancaster’s *From Sabbath to Sabbath*, and A. J. Swoboda’s *Subversive Sabbath* are recent examples of this approach.⁵ As exemplified by Marva Dawn’s *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* and Dorothy Bass’s *Receiving the Day*, the other approach focuses on the historical and contemporary practices of both Jewish and Christian sabbath and their connection to Scripture and daily life.⁶ While scholars of both approaches provide erudite observations of the current cultural context, they often fail to exegete culture. This article contributes to sabbath scholarship by carefully reading the contemporary busyness context using recent sociological and psychological scholarship on busyness. It begins by addressing the formational power of ritual. Then it examines the rituals of busyness through the lens of idolatry. Finally, it addresses how sabbath practice begins to break the idols of busyness.

I. THE FORMATIONAL POWER OF RITUAL

The formational power of ritual has been well established in the literature. As Dru Johnson writes, “We are ritualized creatures, designed to understand every-

³ Anat Keinan and Ran Kivetz, “Productivity Orientation and the Consumption of Collectable Experiences,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 37.6 (2011): 936.

⁴ Benjamin H. Snyder, “From Vigilance to Busyness: A New-Weberian Approach to Clock Time,” *Sociological Theory* 31.3 (2013): 261.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014); D. Thomas Lancaster, *From Sabbath to Sabbath: Returning the Holy Sabbath to the Disciples of Jesus* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2016); A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018).

⁶ Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

thing ... through ritual performance.”⁷ Liturgical rituals provide the space for Christians to proclaim and participate in the mysteries of faith. The rhythms and rituals give shape not just to services but to the whole life. “The mature faith of mystagogy is an awareness that one’s life is being progressively transformed by the holy mysteries being celebrated.”⁸ Christian rituals shape us for participation in the kingdom of God.

Liturgical rituals are not confined to places of worship. In his Cultural Liturgies Project and *You Are What You Love*,⁹ James K. A. Smith develops the concept of cultural liturgy. First, he argues that humans are lovers who “inhabit the world as affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world by feeling our way around in it.”¹⁰ Being affective creatures, humans center their actions on their loves. These may be minor “loves” like pizza, significant “loves” like family and friends, or ultimate “loves,” which define the core identity of people and impact how they interact with the world.¹¹ Their ultimate love is what they worship as their vision of the good life and teleological focus. Thus, humans are intentional, aimed toward a specific vision of the good life.¹²

This focus shapes human action and decision-making. According to Smith, habits weave a vision of the good life into the very fabric of a person’s being.¹³ Habits can be good (virtues) or bad (vices) and range from “thin” and mundane to “thick” and meaningful.¹⁴ Rituals are routines of thick and thin habits, the most significant of which are identity-shaping liturgical “rituals of ultimate concern.”¹⁵ Liturgies, a person’s “thickest” practices, shape people for an image of the good life. Smith argues that liturgy is essential to human nature, “ordering and reordering ... our material being to the end for which it was meant.”¹⁶ Christian liturgy is motivated by and draws us into the life of God, “generating Christian action as we go.”¹⁷ However, liturgy is not the sole property of religious tradition. One’s image of the good life can be equally shaped by religious traditions, secular institutions

⁷ Dru Johnson, *Human Rites: The Power of Rituals, Habits, and Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 6.

⁸ *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 64, as quoted in Joe Paprocki and D. Todd Williamson, *Great is the Mystery: Encountering the Formational Power of Liturgy* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2012), 24. *Great is the Mystery* focuses on the formational power of the Roman Catholic liturgy. David DeSilva offers a similar treatment of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* in David Arthur DeSilva, *Sacramental Life: Spiritual Formation Through the Book of Common Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016); Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

¹⁰ Smith, *Desiring*, 47.

¹¹ Smith, *Desiring*, 50–51.

¹² Smith, *Desiring*, 48.

¹³ Smith, *Desiring*, 55.

¹⁴ Smith, *Desiring*, 82.

¹⁵ Smith, *Desiring*, 85–86.

¹⁶ Smith, *Desiring*, 143.

¹⁷ Smith, *Imagining*, 153.

(such as education or the shopping mall), personal philosophies, and other aspects of culture through repetitious and often unconscious habits and rituals. Busyness is a liturgical framework shaped by the tasks that fill our time and how we approach them.

Liturgical habits function on a nonconscious level. Research by John Bargh and Tanya Chartrand demonstrates that a person's conscious self-control is limited and that most "moment-to-moment psychological life" occurs nonconsciously.¹⁸ Some studies suggest that a person's conscious self-control causes action a maximum of five percent of the time.¹⁹ As conscious self-control is such a limited resource, the mind automates perception, decision-making, and the resulting behavior as nonconscious processes.²⁰ This automation process is often used strategically for skill development (such as driving a car, playing a violin, language acquisition).²¹ It also regulates emotions, moods, and responses to the world.²² To consciously process each moment is a slow and exhausting process. This explains why building new habits is so challenging. However, nonconscious, automatic processes "are unintended, effortless, very fast.... Most important, they are effortless, continually in gear guiding the individual safely through the day."²³ Once acquired, habits become second nature, and we engage in them without thinking. While they are automatic, they are not deterministic. They are acquired, habitual processes that can be reshaped by regular and repetitive embodied practices and habits.

The authors of *Busier Than Ever!* make similar observations from their ethnographic study of busyness in the family. They note that values and coping mechanisms function on a hidden or tacit level in addition to the tasks that fill our time. The work of busyness, including the tasks themselves and the work of "deciding how to adjust to immediate realities and distant future, is both largely tacit and enormous in its consequences."²⁴ Busyness has shaped us to engage with the world automatically and uncritically. It forms us to be a certain kind of society. We ought to ask who we have become through its rhythms and rituals.

The nonconscious operation of these liturgies makes them insidious. It is easy to develop habitual patterns that teach us to crave something other than the God we claim to worship. As Smith writes, "To be human is to be animated and oriented by some vision of the good life, some picture of what we think counts as 'flourishing.' And we *want* that. We crave it. We desire it."²⁵ This language suggests the satisfaction of appetites, particularly when aimed at "flourishing" rather than God

¹⁸ Unconscious means something that is usually conscious, that is currently unconscious. Nonconscious refers to something that is never conscious. John A. Bargh and Tanya L. Chartrand, "The Unbearable Automaticity of Being," *American Psychologist* 54.7 (1999): 462.

¹⁹ Bargh and Chartrand, "Unbearable," 464.

²⁰ Bargh and Chartrand, "Unbearable," 465.

²¹ Bargh and Chartrand, "Unbearable," 468.

²² Bargh and Chartrand, "Unbearable," 469–73.

²³ Bargh and Chartrand, "Unbearable," 476.

²⁴ Charles N. Darrah, James M. Freeman, and J. A. English-Lueck, *Busier Than Ever! Why American Families Can't Slow Down* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 256.

²⁵ Smith, *What You Love*, 11.

himself. Liturgies directed at something other than God are practices of idolatry. Likewise, when left unchecked, busyness as a habitual liturgical rhythm shapes us for a vision of the good life opposed to the realities of God and his kingdom.

II. BUSYNESS AS IDOLATRY

Christopher Wright observes that while the Bible testifies that idols are nothing compared with the Lord, they were meaningful to the individuals and communities that served them.²⁶ They were a source of trust and power apart from God. Idols had formational power, despite being made of wood and stone by human hands. G. K. Beale similarly argues that “we become what we worship.”²⁷ Indeed, this is the witness of Scripture. When God’s people stray, we “go after worthlessness, and become worthless” (Jer 2:5). Busyness is more than a state of having many things to do. When it becomes second nature, busyness is the pursuit of idols that “promise” security, salvation, and significance.

1. *Busyness as security.* Busyness as an idol of security arose gradually as a response to economic needs and aspirations. Before the industrial era, the production of goods occurred through cottage industries. Workers set their level of work engagement, working enough to meet their needs before opting for leisure.²⁸ However, the rise of factories dismantled the cottage industry, removing the worker’s choice in work and leisure. The factory owners set expectations for working hours and quotas, and rising job competition meant the workers had to accept these new parameters.²⁹ Marxist economists saw this as evil because factory “clock time” broke from a “more humane premodern temporal order.”³⁰ Those who set the schedule control their workers. While history is replete with cruel factory owners, work in factories also brought reliable income, resulting in greater financial security.

Many mid-nineteenth-century thinkers, surveying explosive technological and economic progress, were convinced that scarcity would become scarce. They believed that once the economy produced enough for everyone’s needs, the economy would enter a “stationary state” where “growth and striving would cease.”³¹ They based this view on the assumption that material needs were limited and that once needs were met, people would opt for leisure. In the late 1800s, British economist Alfred Marshall (1842–1924) argued,

[The] coming generation is interested in the rescue of men, and still more women, from excessive work.... It is true that fewer know how to use their leisure

²⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *“Here Are Your Gods”: Faithful Discipleship in Idolatrous Times* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 10.

²⁷ See G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

²⁸ Gary Cross, “A Right to Be Lazy? Busyness in Retrospective,” *Social Research* 72.2 (2005): 263.

²⁹ Cross, “A Right to Be Lazy?,” 264–65.

³⁰ Cross, “A Right to Be Lazy?,” 267.

³¹ Cross, “A Right to Be Lazy?,” 268.

well than know how to work effectively, [but] it is only through freedom to use leisure as they will that people can learn to use leisure well.³²

Due to lack of opportunity to rest, people did not know how. But economists were convinced that given a chance, people would choose leisure over work.³³ The “problem” of busyness was one of opportunity, not desire. Leisure, or rest, was a skill that could be learned.

However, the economists did not anticipate the cultural shift from work for satisfaction of needs to work for satisfaction of wants. Technological advances created plentiful, new consumer and leisure goods. Increased revenue, paired with more products, encouraged workers to work more to attain more.³⁴

After World War II, economists began to assert that needs were unlimited and relative. Even leisure provided an economic opportunity for consumption and productivity.³⁵ Since then, rising incomes for many created, for the first time, disposable income. Manufacturers have become experts in convincing consumers that they need the newer, higher-quality versions of the products they already own.³⁶ So-called “time-saving” technological advances have made the world busier.³⁷ The economic need for sustenance has been replaced by the hurried consumption of time—in both work and leisure.

Economic and technological “busyness” has dramatically impacted the world. The computer and internet have created a 24/7 world with a global economy that never closes. Advancements in communication and transportation have conquered geographical barriers. Agricultural developments have lessened the impact of the whims of nature on food production. Electricity means the day lasts long past sunset. Much of this is the fruit of human culture-making. Work, advancement, and productivity can be good things. God created humans to work as his vice-regents, caring for the earth as his image-bearers (Gen 1:26–30; 2:15; Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15). The fruit of recent culture-making has provided technological and cultural advancements that enabled business, education, religious worship, social interaction, and medical care to continue even in the face of a global shutdown.

³² Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (1892; London: Macmillan, 1920), 694, as quoted in Cross, “A Right to Be Lazy?,” 268.

³³ For instance, Marxist Paul Lafargue (1842–1911) thought that busyness was the “false doctrine” of modern capitalism. He wrote, “Capitalist morality, a pitiable copy of Christian morality, curses the flesh of the worker by a solemn ban; its ideal consists of reducing the needs of the producer (i.e., of the real producer) to the lowest minimum, to smother his pleasures and his passions, and to condemn him to play the part of a machine out of which work is exploited *ad libitum*, without rest and without thanks.” Lafargue argued that once liberated, workers would seize their “right to be lazy.”

³⁴ Cross, “A Right to Be Lazy?,” 268.

³⁵ Cross, “A Right to Be Lazy?,” 278.

³⁶ John P. Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey, “Busyness as Usual,” *Social Research* 72.2 (2005): 408.

³⁷ Several sociological studies have demonstrated that while technology creates the sense of greater autonomy, connectivity, and productivity, overall this creates a greater burden if people do not manage their level of responsiveness. See Ward van Zoonen and Ronald E. Rice, “Paradoxical Implications of Personal Social Media Use for Work,” *New Technology, Work and Employment* 32.3 (2017): 228–46; Melissa Mazmanian, Wanda J. Orlikowski, and JoAnne Yates, “The Autonomy Paradox: The Implications of Mobile Email Devices for Knowledge Professionals,” *Organization Science* 24.5 (2013): 1337–57.

However, there is a cost. In a culture focused on productivity, 24/7 gives way to 25/8, “an amount of time we cannot actually live in, a pace of life that passes us by, a rush of demands and information that leaves us struggling, impossible to keep up. It signifies a frenzied culture that cares little for human limits or human thriving. It is a social force that overwhelms, suffocates, crushes.”³⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this experience of 25/8 time. At the height of the pandemic, nearly half of Americans were teleworking. The ability to work remotely is a blessing, as it enables steady income. However, in long-term situations, it can lead to greater professional isolation, less organizational commitment and productivity, and higher levels of stress and exhaustion as the work-life balance blurs.³⁹ Additionally, parents who were able to work remotely needed to juggle parenting and employment work.⁴⁰ In a world that is always on, when is it possible to rest?

Dorothy Bass considers 24/7 time in light of the emergency room and 7-Eleven stores. Necessity drives the rhythms of the emergency room. Work must continue around the clock to heal the sick and save lives. However, convenience masquerading as necessity drives the rhythms of the 7-Eleven.⁴¹ Bass observes that in a 24/7 world, time loses shape and becomes formless as it untethers natural rhythms, and necessity is confused with convenience.⁴² In a 24/7 convenience world, life becomes seasonless, ever-present abundance focused on instant “need” gratification.

Busyness becomes an idol to security when we feel like our lives depend on continuing. The situation in Pharaoh’s Egypt was similar. The Israelites had to keep producing, had to keep pushing forward—making more bricks, with less straw, and less time. When the God of Israel, through Moses, demanded that he let Israel go so they could worship, Pharaoh demanded, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?” (Exod 5:2).⁴³ As Brueggemann observes, “The economy reflects the splendor of the gods who legitimate the entire system, for which cheap labor is an

³⁸ Robert A. Muthiah, *The Sabbath Experiment: Spiritual Formation for Living in a Non-Stop World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 1.

³⁹ Many chief financial officers plan to keep at least 20% of their workforce remote to cut costs. See Katherine Guyot and Isabel V. Sawhill, “Telecommuting Will Likely Continue Long after the Pandemic,” *Up Front*, 14 September 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/upfront/2020/04/06/telecommuting-will-likely-continue-long-after-the-pandemic/>; Hannah de Vries, Lars Tummers, and Victor Bekkers, “The Benefits of Teleworking in the Public Sector: Reality or Rhetoric?” *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 39.4 (2019): 570–93.

⁴⁰ One study notes, “On average, parents are doing childcare during 9 hours of the day, and housework during 3. Among all parents, paid work now takes up an average of just 3 hours, partly driven by the large losses in employment. By contrast, comparable figures from 2014/15 suggest that, on a regular school day, parents did 5½ hours of childcare and 6½ hours of paid work. Furthermore, parents are now often doing at least two activities at the same time.” Alison Andrew et al., “How Are Mothers and Fathers Balancing Work and Family under Lockdown?,” Institute for Fiscal Studies publication, 27 May 2020, <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14860>.

⁴¹ Dorothy C. Bass, “Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest,” *Int* 59.1 (2009): 33. Bass draws this illustrative contrast from Noelle Oxenhandler, “Fall from Grace,” *The New Yorker* (16 June 1997), 68.

⁴² Bass, “Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest,” 32.

⁴³ Translations of Scripture are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

indispensable footnote!”⁴⁴ A busyness economy demands we keep up, always moving, consistently producing, continually consuming, constantly connected to be secure regardless of the cost to its citizens. Busyness is no longer simply a state of having many things to do. It is the way we establish our security in a relentless, frenetic world.

2. *Busyness as salvation.* If busyness establishes our security, it is also a source of our salvation. To speak of busyness as salvation is to identify the morality and ethics behind the way in which we use time. Benjamin Snyder suggests that there are two time-related disciplines: regularity and density. Regularity refers to how we structure time. Density refers to how we fill time. Density includes the volume and variety of tasks in a person’s day.⁴⁵ While individuals have a certain level of autonomy over their time, the surrounding culture ultimately defines the moral dimensions of these disciplines. Snyder identifies two approaches to time that have been significant in the Western world: vigilance and busyness.

First, vigilance. Time vigilance finds its genesis in the practices of the Benedictine order, often called the “first scheduled people.”⁴⁶ Their focus on godly living required strict discipline. The *Rule of St. Benedict* states:

As for the desires of the body, we must believe that God is *always* with us.... We must then be *on guard* against any base desire, because death is stationed near the gateway of pleasure.... If *at all times* the Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see whether any understand and seek God ... and if every day the angels assigned to us report our deeds to the Lord day and night, then, brothers, *we must be vigilant every hour* (7:23–29).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 4.

⁴⁵ Snyder’s work builds off the work of social geographers Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift. They argue for three disciplines of time: standardization (how one’s time is disciplined to be the same as another); coordination (how one’s time is disciplined to coordinate smoothly with another’s); and regularity (the discipline of repetitive routine in one’s time). A factory, for instance, uses all three of these time disciplines. Snyder adds “time density” to this triad as “the degree to which a person’s time is disciplined to be full of activity.” This density provides the motivation for social and moral action. For the purposes of this essay, regularity and density are likewise the key disciplines that dictate spiritual and moral ethic. This does not negate the disciplines of standardization or coordination; they are simply beyond the scope of this work. See Snyder, “Vigilance,” 244–50. See also Paul Glennie, and Nigel Thrift, “Reworking E. P. Thomson’s ‘Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,’” *Time and Society* 5 (1996): 275–99, and Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, *Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales 1300–1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Snyder, “Vigilance,” 253.

⁴⁷ St. Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), 17–18, italics added. A similar passage reads, “Live in fear of judgment day and have a great horror of hell. Yearn for everlasting life with holy desire. Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die. Hour by hour keep careful watch over all you do, aware that God’s gaze is upon you, wherever you may be. As soon as wrongful thoughts come into your heart, dash them against Christ and disclose them to your spiritual father. Guard your lips from harmful or deceptive speech. Prefer moderation in speech and speak no foolish chatter, nothing just to provoke laughter; do not love immoderate or boisterous laughter. Listen readily to holy reading, and devote yourself often to prayer. Every day with tears and sighs confess your past sins to God in prayer and change from these evil ways in the future” (4:44–58) (13).

The Benedictines saw their hearts as fickle things that could easily lead them astray. So they built their lives on constant spiritual vigilance through the rhythm of eight daily prayer offices called “canonical hours.”⁴⁸ All other tasks of the day—chores, meditation, reading, sleeping, and eating—fell between the offices. The goal of the rhythm was to form the community for God’s work and protect them from sinful distractions.⁴⁹ They had a keen awareness that God was intimately familiar with how they used their time. Therefore, they must be vigilant to ensure its proper use.

For the Benedictines, clock time was very regular, consisting of a highly routinized schedule designed for spiritual formation. Their rhythm was temporally dense with a high volume of prayer and study but a low variety of mainly spiritual actions. Max Weber termed this a “world-rejecting asceticism” (*weltablehnende Askese*) focused on an “other-worldly calling” (*äußerliche Beruf*).⁵⁰ The rhythms of prayer and work shaped the Benedictines as a community whose time belonged to the Lord.

This approach to clock time came to dominate the Western world, with clocks and schedules becoming a tool for society at large. By the Middle Ages, the time discipline of regularity impacted every aspect of society. Snyder writes that “watchfulness of time, sleeplessness, and constancy are still important virtues [in the medieval world] ... but not because they cultivate a singular focus that guards against sinful distraction.”⁵¹ Italian Humanist Leone Battista Alberti (1404–1472) is illustrative of the new use of time: “He who knows how not to waste time can do just about anything; and he who knows how to make use of time, he will be lord of whatever he wants.”⁵² Salvation no longer rests in living into God’s calling. It is achieved by mastering time for success and productivity.

The culture of busyness coincided with the rise of the Protestant work ethic. Busyness shifts from *weltablehnende Askese* to an “inner-worldly asceticism” (*innerweltliche Askese*). The world is no longer rejected but embraced with regular, rigid routines that stretch over many domains, including personal moral development, business pursuits, and worldly success.⁵³ Weber notes that in the Middle Ages, due to

⁴⁸ The daytime offices are Lauds, Prime, Tierce, Sexts, None, Vespers, and Compline. Vigils is at night. See 8:1–4; 10:1–3; and 16:1–5.

⁴⁹ Vigils, the night office, was the first office of the day, so its timing was very important. However, in a world without clocks it was also very difficult. Prior to the world of clocks, one monk would need to stay awake to signal to his brothers that the time for Vigils had arrived. The goal of keeping the sacred hour of Vigils perfectly, spurred them on to experiment with timekeeping technology, and they were the first to create a mechanical clock. Snyder, “Vigilance,” 253.

⁵⁰ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1963), 166; Weber, *Protestantische Ethik*, 52.

⁵¹ Snyder, “Vigilance,” 257. Carter Lindberg notes that medieval Catholic theology was dominated by an “if ... then” approach to time. They taught that *if* one strove to love God to the best of one’s ability, *then* this would prompt God to reward one’s effort with the ability to do better. Salvation became an economic proposition as people were prompted to work hard to earn money so they could purchase indulgences to further their progress on their journey to heaven. This resulted in anxiety and financial burden. It also shaped the Catholic approach to time. See Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 58.

⁵² Snyder, “Vigilance,” 257.

⁵³ Snyder, “Vigilance,” 244–45.

the Protestant influence, the “fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs” became the highest form of moral activity. This gave everyday worldly business religious significance for devout Protestants, making *äußerliche Beruf* a task of *innerweltliche Askese*.⁵⁴ God was glorified by how they went about their affairs. Further, it exalted activity because “what is morally reprehensible is *resting* upon one’s possessions. Only *activity*, not idleness and enjoyment, serves to increase his glory.”⁵⁵ Idleness and the wasting of time were sinful because they wasted an opportunity to glorify God in the everyday. Busyness clock time featured regular schedules with a high volume and variety of activities. For Christians, this included prayer and study. It is easy to see why, beginning in the late fourteenth century, *busy* took on its modern meaning of being “constantly occupied with many things.”⁵⁶

The busyness culture owes its value of regular schedules, which avoid “sinful sloth,” laziness, and too much rest, to the Benedictine liturgy of vigilance. But busyness prioritizes doing many *innerweltliche* things to fill time. Today, people will purposely engage in activities purely to avoid idleness.⁵⁷ In the Middle Ages, the inner-worldly ascetics of busyness were still tied to an *äußerliche Beruf*. However, the rise of the Enlightenment unpinned *innerweltliche Askese* from *äußerliche Beruf*. Culture asks, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?” The purpose is no longer to glorify God by daily tasks but to secure success and worldly salvation.

Salvation is no longer found in God but in self-fulfillment secured by busyness. As sociologist Jordi Cabos notes, “Modernity appears to have eradicated the heroic dimension of life.... ‘People no longer have a sense of a higher purpose, of something worth dying for.’ Instead, they try to find purpose in the possibilities offered by their individual lives ... reasons that may make their lives worth living.”⁵⁸ In a 24/7 world that has become disconnected from its godly center, the fulfillment of “the self” is the central goal. Cabos notes that “self-fulfillment betokens a life well-lived, a life that is deeply satisfying, fruitful, and worthwhile.”⁵⁹ Therefore, if one’s life is to be purposeful and fulfilling, individuals must do everything possible to satisfy their needs and desires to prove their worth.

Salvation in a busyness culture is secured by experiencing more life per life. A full, well-managed life is more meaningful and valuable. However, self-fulfillment is a nebulous goal. How is fulfillment measured? Combined with busyness-as-security, this approach to time reduces the value of time and humanity to their instrumental

⁵⁴ Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 40.

⁵⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Revised 1920 Edition*, trans. S. Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 159–60 (italics his), as quoted in Snyder, “Vigilance,” 249.

⁵⁶ Before this time, being busy meant concentrating on a particular activity. Snyder, “Vigilance,” 258.

⁵⁷ Adelle X. Yang and Christopher K. Hsee, “Idleness Versus Busyness,” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 26 (2019): 15–18; Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Joanna A. Christodoulou, and Vanessa Singh, “Rest Is Not Idleness: Implications of the Brain’s Default Mode for Human Development and Education,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7.4 (2012): 352–64.

⁵⁸ Jordi Cabos, “Sometimes I Hear Life Going: On the Remoteness from Life in Modernity,” *Critical Horizons* 17.3–4 (2016): 330.

⁵⁹ Cabos, “Sometimes I Hear Life Going,” 330.

value. Time and life are measured by how they are filled, not for their intrinsic value. Further, the value of a given moment or a person's life is not in the now but resides in the "not yet." "As a consequence, the immediate life is never recognized as such; it never satisfies, and life turns into a sequence of moments that never seem to be meaningful enough."⁶⁰ In this paradigm, rest is impossible because it is not seen to reach fulfillment. It is also an approach to life that harms those who cannot live a "full life" due to physical, emotional, or mental limitations, whether due to disability or aging.

3. *Busyness as significance.* Busyness is also an idol of significance. The famous "I think, therefore I am" of René Descartes has given way to "I do, therefore I am." Busyness has the power to define a person's purpose and identity. According to Melanie Rudd, a meaningful life requires three things: (1) purpose, (2) mattering, and (3) comprehension.⁶¹ Purpose defines a person's direction, goals, or mission. It leads to the sense that life exhibits purposeful growth rather than aimlessness.⁶² People understand their lives to matter in connection with others. Mattering focuses on the legacy or the contributions people make that extend beyond themselves. This also drives people to develop strong relationships with one another.⁶³ Finally, people have comprehension when they understand they are part of something greater, that they are a small (but important) part of a larger whole. This provides coherence and direction as people are not left to wander through life.⁶⁴

Closely tied to purpose is a sense of hope. Victor Frankl noted that those who survived the concentration camps did so because they had hope.⁶⁵ The close connection between hope and purpose is highlighted by Frankl's statement that "suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds meaning."⁶⁶ So what a person needs is not a "tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task ... a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him."⁶⁷ However, in a busyness culture, the "freely chosen task" is often striving to accomplish *this* moment so that we can get to the next.

Sociological studies demonstrate that Americans now use time conspicuously. Sociological theorists argue that busyness has become a "badge of honor" and "status symbol."⁶⁸ Social media is replete with humblebrags of over-full schedules. To-

⁶⁰ Cabos, "Sometimes I Hear Life Going," 328.

⁶¹ Melanie Rudd, Rhia Catapano, and Jennifer Aaker, "Making Time Matter: A Review of Research on Time and Meaning," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 29.4 (2019): 684–85.

⁶² Rudd, Catapano, and Aaker, "Making Time Matter," 682.

⁶³ Rudd, Catapano, and Aaker, "Making Time Matter," 686.

⁶⁴ Rudd, Catapano, and Aaker, "Making Time Matter," 687.

⁶⁵ Victor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon, 2014), 76. The German original was published as *...trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (Vienna: Verlag für Jugend und Volk, 1946).

⁶⁶ Frankl, *Meaning*, 106.

⁶⁷ Frankl, *Meaning*, 98.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Gershuny, "Busyness as the Badge of Honor for the New Superordinate Working Class," *Social Research* 72.2 (2005): 287–314; Silvia Bellezza, Neeru Paharia, and Anat Keinan, "Conspicuous Consumption of Time: When Busyness and Lack of Leisure Time Become a Status

day, busyness is “now a characteristic of the best-placed individuals in society.”⁶⁹ The inference is that busy people are valuable because they are competent and ambitious. Thus, by being busy, people become scarce and valuable resources.⁷⁰ When busyness is an identity marker, people are no longer intrinsically valuable for who they are. They are merely instrumentally valuable for what they do.

Research by Keinan and others demonstrates that Americans are consistently focused on productivity, progress, and doing more in less time in every aspect of life. They have labeled this as a “production orientation.” This orientation is linked with “hyperopia,” or excessive farsightedness and overcontrol, which overemphasizes work and production at the expense of pleasure and leisure.⁷¹ However, the need for productivity impacts leisure as well. Leisure is no longer for rest and contemplation but is actively spent in exercise, yard work, or social experiences.

Further, productivity orientations make leisure an opportunity to collect experiences. Unusual and novel experiences build an “experiential CV,” which people document and share with others via social media.⁷² Multiple studies have shown that experiences bring greater happiness than possessions.⁷³ This is because people often tie their experiences to their sense of identity.⁷⁴ By building an “experiential CV,” they increase their instrumental worth as people who “do” exciting things.

In a world where we create our security through what we do and find salvation through self-fulfillment, busyness shapes our significance and identity. We perceive ourselves as valuable and worthy if our schedules are full. Whether in work, leisure, or ministry, we are what we do.

4. *Busyness as a liturgy of self.* While busyness is the prominent idol, it points to another lurking below the surface, the idol of self and ego. We fill our time as we do because of what it does for us. And Christians are not immune. In *Subversive Sabbath*, A. J. Swoboda describes the twin fears of intentional sabbath practice for pastors. First, “we often fear what will happen when we are absent. But we fail to recognize that our absence is not the absence of God, and that God loves his

Symbol,” *Journal of Consumer Research* (2016): 118–19; Anat Keinan, Silvia Bellezza, and Neeru Paharia, “The Symbolic Value of Time,” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 26 (2019): 59.

⁶⁹ Gershuny, “Busyness as the Badge of Honor for the New Superordinate Working Class,” 311–12.
⁷⁰ Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan, “Conspicuous Consumption,” 121; Yang and Hsee, “Idleness,” 15–16.

⁷¹ Keinan and Kivetz, “Productivity,” 936.

⁷² Examples of collected experiences include staying in an ice hotel, visiting all the state parks in America, and eating novel food combinations. See Keinan and Kivetz, “Productivity,” 935; Keinan, Bellezza, and Paharia, “The Symbolic Value of Time,” 59.

⁷³ One study showed that younger people, who see their whole life ahead, gain more happiness from novel, extraordinary experiences. As a person ages, this shifts. Older people tend to find greater happiness in ordinary moments. While “extraordinary” experiences are self-defining for all, adults increasingly define themselves by their day-to-day lives. See Amit Bhattacharjee and Cassie Mogilner, “Happiness from Ordinary and Extraordinary Experiences,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 41.1 (2013): 1.

⁷⁴ Travis J. Carter and Thomas Gilovich, “I Am What I Do, Not What I Have: The Differential Centrality of Experiential and Material Purchases to the Self,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102.6 (2012): 1304.

Church more than we do.”⁷⁵ Do we trust God’s faithfulness to us enough to rest? Or does the siren song of busyness feed our belief that everything depends on us?

The second fear is that the practice of sabbath will reveal that we are “not as necessary as [we] once thought.”⁷⁶ If we are what we do, then who are we when we rest? While Swoboda’s comments are targeted at pastors, these are fears that many share. Subconsciously, busyness teaches us that we can and should do everything and that we fail when we do not. In other words, busyness offers us the opportunity to be “gods” of our own domains, mastering the world through our use of time. This is the fruit of the uncritical adoption of a busyness lifestyle. Uncoupled from a spiritual ethic, busyness becomes an end in itself. Unchecked, these rhythms devalue people and time. The “good life” becomes living as much as possible in order to prove by what we have done that we are individuals of worth and value.

III. SABBATH AS COUNTER-FORMATONAL LITURGY

The rituals of busyness form us to its own ends. However, sabbath practice teaches us to approach God, time, community, and creation differently, thereby forming us for life in God’s kingdom. In *Sacred Attunement*, Jewish theologian Michael Fishbane writes that a “central task of theology is to bring its ideas and values into the everyday of life, where they may be enacted and put to the test.”⁷⁷ Our thoughts about God, his world, and ourselves renew us when they re-form us as image-bearers. Sabbath practice is not a silver bullet to fix everything discussed thus far. However, it powerfully unites our theological values and daily lives. Brueggemann, calls it a “soul receiving” practice.⁷⁸ Or, as Marva Dawn observes, as we cease, rest, embrace, and feast on the Sabbath, we are enculturated into the rhythms of God.⁷⁹ Through regular sabbath practice, we cooperate with the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, who has the power to break idols.

1. *Sabbath renews human significance.* The Sabbath command in Exodus 20:8–11 reads:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 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.... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth ... and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

The command to remember (*zēkr*) the Sabbath is linked with the pattern of creation established by God. For six days, God worked for the world, imbuing it with his creativity and goodness. On the seventh, he ceased (*šbt*) his labor and engaged in Sabbath work “to celebrate, to bless, to consecrate ... a living, active, priestly *doing*

⁷⁵ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 73.

⁷⁶ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 181.

⁷⁷ Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 108.

⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 85.

⁷⁹ Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Whole*.

and not merely a laying aside of action.”⁸⁰ According to the rabbis, this priestly doing included the creation of *menuha*. *Menuha* is more than just a cessation of work or freedom from toil. It has positive and substantive connotations. It is, according to Heschel, “*tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose.*” *Menuha* is the “essence of the good life” and points to eternity.⁸¹ When God blessed (*brk*) the seventh day, he implicitly invited humanity into his rest.⁸²

In remembering the Sabbath, we not only recollect something that happened but anticipate and live into the future.⁸³ Sabbath is remembrance as *imitatio Dei*, as God worked for six days and rested one, so do his people. God designed humans to rule as a reflection of the character of God. Just as God brought order to chaos, humans were to rule the earth, bringing order to the wild places. Just as God created and filled the earth, so too, he commands humans to be “fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”⁸⁴ From the beginning, the rhythm of productive work was good. This affirmation confirms the goodness of human culture-making and productivity. However, the fall introduced corruption and death to the world. Work, designed to reflect the Creator and bring fruitfulness, brought sweat and blood. As sin distorted the goodness of human work, it also made work a ritual of ultimate concern. “I work, therefore I am” was born in the fall.

On the seventh day, God made time holy, which means to take it “out of its worldly relation, and to devote it to God.... In six days’ work had God condescended and given Himself up to live for the world; on the sabbath, He ordains that the world must live for God.”⁸⁵ God removed the seventh day from the sphere of the mundane and endowed it with his purposes. Sabbath renews time by reminding us that time belongs to God. We meet God in the sacredness of time. As Heschel writes, the seventh day is “*a palace in time ... made of soul, of joy, and reticence.*”⁸⁶

In Exodus 19:6, God declares that the Israelite community will be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” In establishing Israel this way, God ordained blessing for all the nations of the world. In a fallen world, imitation of God’s rest redeems work by recentring identity and purpose in him. It recognizes that hu-

⁸⁰ The primary meaning of *shb* is to cease or come to an end, with rest as secondary. Every usage apart from reference to the Sabbath itself refers to the cessation or conclusion of a lengthy process. See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis-Be-resbit: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 15, italics added; John Peter Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 1: *Genesis, or, The First Book of Moses: Together with a General Theological and Homiletical Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. Tayler Lewis and A. Gosman (New York: Charles Scribner, 1868), 175–76.

⁸¹ Gen. Rab. 10:9 as quoted in Heschel, *Sabbath*, 22–23, italics his.

⁸² G. K. Beale notes that *brk* is usually restricted to living beings and not bestowed on something solely for God’s sake. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 778.

⁸³ Hermann Eising, “זָכַר zākhār,” *TDOT* 67–69.

⁸⁴ Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 776.

⁸⁵ Lange, *Genesis*, 176.

⁸⁶ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 14, italics added.

manity's most essential relationship is with God.⁸⁷ People are of worth not for what we do but because of whose we are.

The formational pattern of *menuba* rest and work reminded Israel and others that the world is not aimless; it is advancing toward something beyond this life, its eschatological *telos*. By welcoming the Sabbath every seventh day, Israel celebrated the end of a week of work and looked forward to entering the consummative rest that God had entered.⁸⁸ The Sabbath reminds us that salvation rests not in our own doing but in the culmination of God's creative and salvific work.

Shlomo Joseph Zevin describes two kinds of rest. The first is rest from weariness, which brings relief to the body for more work. This is the rest of vigilance and busyness cultures—we rest so that we can work. The second rest occurs at the completion of a goal. It brings a sense of achievement, delight, and joy. There is relief but also satisfaction, peace, and tranquility.⁸⁹ The Sabbath brings the second sort of rest. It is a weekly gift of God's grace, not payment for work well done.

Formationally, this approach to rest has several implications. Smith notes that “technological rituals reinforce a ... [world] in which I am the center of the universe, only related to others as an audience for my display, [but] Christian worship is an intentionally decentering practice, calling us out of ourselves into the very life of God.”⁹⁰ Likewise, the rhythm of sabbath creates space to reclaim the sacred dimension of life and relearn our identity. “The Sabbath expresses the truth that the Only God is the Creator and Master of all and that man, together with all else, has been called to service of the Only God.”⁹¹ By laying down the work of the week, sabbath creates space for people to take up practices that remind them of who they are. It centers them in the story of God's grand narrative of history, thereby redeeming the work of the other six days by placing them in proper orientation to God. It celebrates human limitations and expresses gratitude for God's providence and provision. Sabbath practice recognizes that God is still sovereign, and if God could rest while there is still “so much to do,” then so can humanity.

Therefore, one day a week, humans cease the good work of culture-making and enter the holiness of time to enjoy *menuba* rest.⁹² The cessation of work is not a restriction but a “glorious release from weekday concerns, routine pressures, and

⁸⁷ Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 58.

⁸⁸ Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 777.

⁸⁹ Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life* (1972; repr., New York: Basic Books, 1991), 69.

⁹⁰ Smith, *Imagining*, 149.

⁹¹ Donin, *To Be a Jew*, 66.

⁹² Work is anything that involves the production, creation, or transforming of the created world. Donin, *To Be a Jew*, 67. Biblically prohibited labor during the Sabbath was defined as gathering and preparing food (Exod 16:22–30), plowing and harvesting (34:21), gathering wood and lighting fires (Exod 35:3; Num 15:32–26), buying and selling (Neh 10:31; 13:15–18; Amos 8:5), making wine (Neh 13:15), and transporting goods (Neh 13:15; Jer 17:21, 24, 27). The rabbis of the Talmudic period expanded this list to 39 principal categories based on the instructions for building the Tabernacle. However, these Sabbath prohibitions are suspended when human life is in danger. Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 187–88.

even secular recreation. It is a day of peaceful tranquility, inner joy, and spiritual uplift, accompanied by song and cheer.”⁹³ Just as God’s Sabbath rest was “to celebrate, to bless, to consecrate . . . a living, active, priestly *doing* and not merely a laying aside of action,”⁹⁴ so is ours.

Being busy with many things is not a bad thing until it becomes unmoored from the spiritual realities of the world. Sabbath enables an intentional, focused engagement with the Creator of all things by disengaging from busyness. It allows people to look back at a week well-lived and celebrate the productive culture-making that has occurred. It provides an opportunity to reconnect with their source of identity and purpose. Worship, meditation, prayer, food, festivity, and delight are equally at home on the Sabbath.

2. *Sabbath renews community.* The Sabbath command in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 reads:

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God 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. . . . You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

In Exodus, Israel “remembers” the Sabbath. In Deuteronomy, Israel “observes” and “keeps” the Sabbath. “Remember” and “keep” are complementary terms. “In the mind, one must remember it. In actions, one must observe it.”⁹⁵ It is not enough to cognitively remember that it is the Sabbath or to know that one’s identity rests in God; one must also practice the reality of the Sabbath.

There is also a shift in the reason for sabbath. In Deuteronomy, the focus shifts from the *imitatio Dei* to the freedom and equalizing of all people. Israel suffered as slaves in Egypt, crying out to God for liberation. Each sabbath celebration recalls Israel’s previous enslaved conditions and provides rest for everyone—male and female, slave and free, national and foreigner, human and animal. Sabbath is the great liberator for all.⁹⁶

In Judaism, the concept of slavery is not limited to oppressive, forced labor. It recognizes that “you yourself can be your own cruelest taskmaster,”⁹⁷ and sometimes we are “slaves to [our] own pettiness.”⁹⁸ Disengagement from work and commerce teaches that those masters are not the source of identity. Further, weekly intentional disengagement teaches “how to live with people and remain free, how to live with things and remain independent.”⁹⁹ As people learn to welcome the

⁹³ Donin, *To Be a Jew*, 62.

⁹⁴ Lange, *Genesis*, 175–76, italics added.

⁹⁵ Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah: With a New English Translation [and the Hebrew Text]* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 582.

⁹⁶ Donin, *To Be a Jew*, 70.

⁹⁷ Donin, *To Be a Jew*, 68.

⁹⁸ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 89.

⁹⁹ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 89.

Sabbath, they learn to disengage from the compulsion to perform, produce, check in, and share. It releases a person from the endless drive of culture to prove who you are by what you do. If one cannot walk away from work, devices, or “experience collection,” they are in bondage. Rest and celebration are gifts of freedom.

The “democratic” nature of sabbath underscores God’s heart for the poor and oppressed and the call on his people to bless the world. It is easier for those with higher incomes to rest. Therefore, it is incumbent on them to enable others to rest by not requiring others to work. Rest is extended to those in need by inviting them to the Sabbath table. What would it mean for churches to find creative ways to extend rest to the single parents, to those working multiple jobs to pay the bills, to those who cannot rest due to mental illness or injury? How can employers set business policies that allow employees to disconnect from the relentless stream of emails, texts, and calls that flood their work weeks?

A good friend has taught me creativity in extending rest to others. Ed is a retired Army Ranger who suffers from a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder. He is also a trained chef. However, due to the progression of his TBI, many parts of cooking are now overwhelming. He knows what to do but struggles to keep the steps and timing in order. But he loves to cook with my husband Mac, his “sous-chef.” Ed tells Mac what needs to happen when, and my detail-oriented husband makes sure it happens. Mac’s support removes the stress and anxiety, which allows Ed to rest in the joy of cooking. At that moment, he is at peace with his disability.

Intentional community conquers the oppression of isolation. Intentional, unconditional inclusion of others in sabbath observance combats the cultural rhythms that suggest some are less valuable than others. We gather around the Sabbath table for the joy of it, appreciating one another’s company and who they are, not what they bring to the table.

3. *Sabbath as joy and discipline.* But how is this done? Simply taking one day off a week is no silver bullet. It takes deliberate, regular practice of disengaging from the week’s work to engage in the “nonwork” of sabbath. Three Jewish orientations help build a sabbath liturgy.

First, people must engage with *Kavanah*, or intention. Jewish law prohibits the simple recitation of prayers. Instead, people must “know before whom you are standing.” The practice of sabbath, like praying, is intentional. *Kavanah* is progressive. First, those who pray must direct their hearts to heaven, recognizing God’s presence. Second, they must know and understand what they are saying. Third, they must attempt to free their minds of all distracting thoughts to concentrate on the prayer. Finally, they should meditate on the deeper meaning of what they are saying to spark more profound devotion.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, people must intentionally enter sabbath and the presence of God, understanding why they engage in its liturgy. The guiding question is “How do I prepare my heart and mind to enter the

¹⁰⁰ Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Pray as a Jew: A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 18–19.

Sabbath?” No one sabbaths by accident. It is an intentional, affective, embodied practice.

Second, rabbinic Judaism describes the Sabbath as a bride, *Shabbat HaKallah*. The bride captures the spirit (or affect) of the day. Wedding guests eagerly await the arrival of the bride. When she comes, the joyful celebration begins. When the wedding is over, and the bride departs, the guests of the wedding “feel an afterglow of delight and satisfaction from their time in her presence, and a longing for the next time they will see her.”¹⁰¹ Likewise, the Sabbath is a day marked by joy and delight. It is a celebration of God’s goodness and provision. Ceasing from work, it is a day to celebrate the world as it is with gratitude and peace. It is a day of feasting, friends, and family. At the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Jews greet the Sabbath with prayer, song, and dance. It is a joyous celebration anticipated all week! For those who are married, it is a good day for sex.¹⁰² Sabbath is a day of delight. In preparing for the Sabbath as Bride, the guiding questions are “Is this life-giving or life-taking?” and “Does this foster joy and celebration?”

Third, rabbinic Judaism describes the Sabbath as a queen, *Shabbat HaMalkah*. The queen brings structure, order, and majesty to the day.¹⁰³ If a human queen were to visit, one would ensure proper house preparations and food were in order. One would also learn proper greetings and behavior for her presence. The work of the week is prescribed to enable *Kavanah*. Alongside the joyful engagement with the human community is the humble engagement with the Creator through prayer, study, and meditation. In preparing for the Sabbath as Queen, the guiding question is “How do I best honor God and others through my Sabbath practice?”

Kavanah, Bride, and Queen hold the day together. Without *Kavanah*, the Sabbath becomes a mindless filling of time. Without the Queen, it would be a day of self-gratification. Without the Bride, it would be a day of legalistic rule-following. Together they form a joyful liturgy of intention, formation, and refreshment.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article has read the American culture of busyness in light of current sociological research. Busyness is an insidious cultural liturgy that teaches us to bow down at the idol of self. It teaches us that security, salvation, and significance are defined by what we do. Sabbath offers a robust, formative rhythm that breaks the idol of busyness in renewal.

For Augustine, substantive sabbath practice was unnecessary because Christians spiritually rest in Jesus daily. He wrote, “The rest of the Sabbath we consider no longer binding as an observance, now that the hope of our eternal rest has been revealed. But it is a very useful thing to read of, and to reflect on.”¹⁰⁴ Reflections on sabbath are helpful indeed but not enough. We need to practice sabbath, allowing

¹⁰¹ Muthiah, *Sabbath Experiment*, 3.

¹⁰² Bass, “Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest,” 29–30.

¹⁰³ Muthiah, *Sabbath Experiment*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Reply to Faustus the Manichean* 6.4 (NPNF² 4:168).

its rhythms to re-form us. As we lean into sabbath, it teaches us to set aside time once a week to “rest” in God’s presence in a “priestly and active” doing. It is a dedicated day that provides space for communion with God and the community. It is a gift in the midst of a world that is always on the go, with to-do lists that never end. As a formational practice, it leads to renewal by ceasing “work” so that we may be with God and others for the joy of it.

Further, engaging in weekly sabbath practice teaches us to spiritually rest in Jesus the rest of the week. If we are so busy during the week that we cannot rest for a day, are we truly able to rest in Christ throughout the week? Do we know how to step out of the whirlwind enough to commune with God? To Augustine and others, I would suggest that the regular day of intentional sabbath practice enables the spiritual practice of sabbath through the week.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ This article is dedicated to Pastor John Hagee, CUFI, the Israel Collective, and the Dean Regent University School of Divinity Dr. Corné Bekker in humble thanks for the invitation to welcome the Sabbath at the Western Wall in Jerusalem during the early stages of research for this project.