

SABBATH PRACTICE AT HIGHLAND

In 2020, Highland's leadership lead the community into a monthly rhythm of keeping a sabbath. Instead of gathering for worship on a Sunday morning, Highlanders were encouraged to take a "24-hour deep breath." Liturgies were provided to help Highlanders intentionally begin and end a time of rest and recreation.

THE RATIONALE FOR OUR SABBATH PRACTICE

Some people have asked, "Why do you shut down church for a weekend? People already see church as optional, aren't you capitulating to the culture and encouraging indifference?" Our reasons for embracing this practice can be sketched out as follows:

- Our pastoral elder frequently reminds us that it's inaccurate to say that we "go to church." Rather, Christians *are* the church wherever they may happen to be at any given time. The church gathers (typically) on a Sunday morning for worship, but then the church is sent out to "worship" through acts of service in homes, neighbourhoods, and so on. From that perspective, worship gatherings are a *practice* of the church. So, when Highland plans a 24-hour sabbath, we are simply using that practice in lieu of a worship gathering. In a sense, sabbath keeping is another expression of worship, just not corporate in the same way that a worship service is.
- While it's true that there's a trend in which people give it hardly any thought to "skip worship" in order to sleep in, or go for a walk in the forest, or go to a sporting event, choosing to stop and rest for a day is actually a demanding exercise that requires intention, thoughtfulness, and preparation. Keeping sabbath is as much of a disruption—if not more so!—than a worship gathering. As you'll see below, keeping sabbath is a "thick" practice.
- At its core, observing Sabbath is about becoming faith-fully present to God, to the world, to yourself, and to your neighbours. Sabbath is a "beautiful fast" in which we stop what we're doing in order to become attentive to the ways in which the Spirit is present and working to bring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Lots of very, very good things take place as we enter a rhythm of keeping sabbath:
 - *We come home to God:* God keeps sabbath; God rests (see Genesis 1:31–2:3, Exodus 20:8-11). Furthermore, God describes Sabbath as a covenant, which is relational language (see Exodus 31:12-17). So, when we do what God does, we find ourselves relating to God, and getting to know who God is (see John 15:9-10). Observing Sabbath is about being attentive to God.
 - *We come home to ourselves:* We tend to feel dis-integrated within ourselves. The drive to earn, buy, sell, own, or accomplish more is fueled by the desire to make something of oneself. Questions about identity, and the growing popularity of therapy and self-improvement techniques reflect a search on people's part to come home to a sense of wholeness. Sabbath allows us to step back and consider the illusions and delusions that enslave us (see Jeremiah 6:16, Psalm 127:2). More importantly, Sabbath helps us to see *Who*

we belong to, so we can begin to see and rest in who we truly are: fully alive human beings made to freely bear the image of God in the likeness of Christ (see Matthew 11:28-29).

- *We come home to community:* Human beings that lose sight of their human kindness—or ignore the humanity of their neighbours or disregard the creatureliness of the world—are arguably the most destructive force in the universe. To remedy that dehumanizing tendency, God prescribes Sabbath. As Israel was about to enter the promised land, the people are reminded that they were once slaves. To avoid enslaving others, God says, “Every 7 days, stop and see your neighbours for who they are: fellow creatures” (see Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Practicing sabbath prevents us from bulldozing our friends, our family—or, for that matter, trees (see Isaiah 28:12). In other words, Sabbath fosters a humble posture of attentiveness to others; we are re-membered as part of a community.
- *We come home to the Kingdom:* Sabbath is a gift from God (see Mark 2:27) in which we discover and learn how to live on earth as citizens of heaven (see 1 Kings 8:56, 1 Chronicles 23:25, Psalm 116:7). The flow and lifestyle that characterize citizenship under the lordship of Jesus are different from our typical postures and practices. For example, Sabbath rest frees us from the tyranny of the urgent. Instead of us scrambling to fix things, we are called to repentance and rest (see Isaiah 30:15)! In short, Sabbath rest is the practice that makes the patterns of kingdom living permanent in our lives.

Is practicing sabbath easy? Not always. But in the long run, it’s worthwhile. Observing Sabbath makes us more observant of a host of things: God, ourselves, others and our world, and Kingdom of Heaven. As we keep sabbath, little by little we find that Sabbath keeps us. As Hebrews 4:9-11 says, “A sabbath rest still remains for the people of God, and anyone who enters God’s rest will also rest from their labours, just as God rested from God’s work. So then, let’s do our best to enter that rest.”

Amen/Yes!

To explore and practice Sabbath more deeply, visit these resources:

ONLINE RESOURCES WORTH A LOOK

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2020/05/a-whole-day.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2016/09/work-rest-repeat-aka-trust-training.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2016/10/work-rest-repeat-aka-belonging-training.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-move-to-freedom.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2014/02/24-hour-deep-breath-or-why-is-sabbath.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2012/06/rest-expected-and-elusive.html>

<https://www.lakenokomisp.org/uploads/2/9/8/7/29872037/2015juneptkeepingthesabbath.pdf>

<https://www.lakenokomisp.org/horizons-2016-article.html>

<https://faithandleadership.com/kara-k-root-stop-rest-come-back-real-life-reason-sabbath>

<https://faithandleadership.com/minneapolis-congregation-finds-new-life-through-ancient-practice-keeping-sabbath>

<https://www.lakenokomisp.org/uploads/2/9/8/7/29872037/sabbath-gift-of-rest.pdf>

NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying NO to the CULTURE OF NOW*.

Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*.

Justo L. Gonzalez, *A Brief History of Sunday: From the New Testament to the New Creation*.

Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*.

Lauren F. Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline*.