

**Session 6: DISCOVER THE RHYTHM OF THE DAILY OFFICE
& SABBATH**

The present day spirituality of most people in our churches is marked, I believe, by a number of sad realities.

- We are busy, very busy.
- We live our lives “on the run”, squeezing God in where we can.
- We live off other people’s spirituality -- because we don’t have the time.
- We’re overloaded and exhausted.
- Words that describe our culture include: scattered, fragmented, un-centered, and distracted.
- We multi-task, so much so that we are unaware we are doing three things at once.
- We are always on the way to something or someplace else.

As a result, few people have the time to develop their own direct experience of God. We have a lot of head knowledge about God but we much of it has not penetrated our hearts. We sing and study about the love and goodness of God, but experientially, when things fall apart around us, we panic and act as if God doesn’t exist.

In fact, most people don’t really pray that much on their own. Studies have shown that even the average pastor prays only about 7 minutes a day. What does that say for the rest of our people? Is it any wonder that most people are not very intentional about pursuing Jesus? We live off whatever books, sermons, CD’s, or spiritual crumbs that comes our way.

We listen to sermons and read books about slowing down and creating margin in our lives.² We attend seminars. We talk about spiritual disciplines. But it is not enough.

We can't stop.

Remember it is the combination of emotional health and a slowed down, or contemplative spirituality, that releases a revolution of transformation in our lives. We need emotional health. But we also need some of the riches of the contemplative tradition, found in Scripture and history, to slow us down to be with Jesus.

This session introduces you to two ancient disciplines going back thousands of years—the Daily Office and Sabbath. Both of these are groundbreaking and counter-cultural. These two powerful disciplines provide a means for us to begin reorienting our entire lives toward a new center— God.

The first ancient practice is called the *Daily Office*. Most of us were taught to have quiet times or devotions.

I would spend time with God in the morning, for example, reading the Bible and praying. I did it to get charged up for the day and hopefully remain attentive to God throughout the day.

The problem, however, is that it was not enough. By midday was so wrapped up in the demands of the day that I wasn't even thinking about God, let alone having a conversation with Him or listening to Him. . It underestimated how many distractions that come our way, as well as the power of evil in the world, and my own stubborn self-will.

I purposely have changed the name from quiet time and devotions to the Daily Office for the sake of communicating something powerful and unique.

The focus of the Daily Office is to be with God, not to get something from Him. It is about communion, abiding, remaining in Jesus.

Moreover, the Daily Office is about meeting with God not once a day but pausing to be with him 2-3-4 times a day.

It means literally “the work of God”. It means that, like David in Ps. 27, my first work in life, regardless of my vocation or job, is to seek God and to be with Him (Ps. 27:4).**PP**

We know David practiced set times of prayer seven times a day (see Psalm 119:164). Daniel prayed three times a day (see Daniel 6:10). Devout Jews in Jesus' time prayed two to three times a day. We know that Jesus prayed early in the mornings, sometimes all night – yet most

scholars believe that Jesus followed the Jewish custom of his day of praying at set times during the day.

So why pause not 1x a day to be with God, but two or three. times? The answer - So that when I am active the other parts of the day, I am attentive to God and His voice.

This pausing to be with God can last anywhere from two minutes to twenty minutes to forty-five minutes. It is up to you. But the actual stopping is what makes the “practice of the presence of God,” to use Brother Lawrence’s phrase, a real possibility.

For me it has been life changing. Being with God in the morning and before I go to bed- easy. Midday prayer, however, has really changed me. To pull out to be with God sometime between 11 am and 2 pm. Whether I just read a psalm, pray the Lord’s Prayer, or am silent for 3 minutes before the Lord, it readjusts my heart, gets my will more with His—

- “Why am I pushing so hard to get through that agenda? This is not that important.
- I may be anxious about one of our children. Just the pause reminds me He is on the throne and I am able to release them to Him.

There are endless possibilities, and tools, for what you can do with your time God during these prayer times. God has built us each differently. What works for one person will not for another.

Yet four elements, I believe, need to be found in any Office, regardless of what approach you ultimately choose.

PP 23 (Possibly this will help to list these)

1. Stopping

This is the essence of a Daily Office. We stop our activity and pause to be with the Living God.

2. Centering

Scripture commands us: “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7a) and “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10a). We move into God’s presence and rest there.

3. Silence

Dallas Willard has called *silence* and *solitude* the two most radical disciplines of the Christian life. Henri Nouwen said that “without solitude it is almost impossible to live a spiritual life.”¹¹ And fourthly,

4. Scripture

A good rule to follow when dealing with tools and techniques is this: If it helps, do it. If it does not help you, do not do it—including the Daily Office.

To get started, use the Daily Office book that accompanies THE EHS Course called “EH Day by Day.” Let it help you step out of our 24/7 culture that never stops and develop a rhythm with God in your days.

The Second Ancient Treasure is Sabbath-Keeping PP

The Daily Office concerns itself with a daily rhythm. Sabbath-Keeping is about a weekly rhythm for our lives.

The word *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word that means “to cease, to stop working.” It refers to doing nothing related to work for a twenty-four hour period each week. **PP**

The reason this is so radical is our culture knows nothing of setting aside a whole day (twenty-four hours) to rest and delight in God. Like most, I always considered it an optional extra for most of my Christian life, not something absolutely essential to my discipleship. While I would not put Sabbath keeping on the par with murder or adultery, it is a critical spiritual discipline essential for spiritual formation. We are not saved by Sabbath but Christ. But as Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27). It is a gift from God we are called to receive.

Take a look at the 10 commandments with me. The longest and most specific of the Ten Commandments is the fourth: **PP read the 4th**.

- Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord our God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

There are two extremes to the way people approach Sabbath. On one extreme is legalism. This says, “If you don’t keep Sabbath, God is angry and it is like you have committed murder.” All kinds of rules and don’ts end up around this view.. The other extreme is one that treats Sabbath as irrelevant and there is no need to bother with it at all. (what I was taught).

The balanced, and I would argue biblical, position is that Sabbath keeping is a core spiritual formation discipline – like prayer and reading Scripture. We are saved by Jesus – not by praying or reading the Bible. In the same way we aren’t saved keeping Sabbath. God doesn’t love us more if we do certain things. But the fact is-- if we’re not praying or reading the Bible, we’re probably not growing very much. The same

applies with Sabbath. It is an indicator that we are too busy and that we are doing too much.

Practicing Sabbath is about setting a regular rhythm every 7 days for a 24-hour block of time. Traditional Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends on sundown Saturday. Others choose a day of the week like Saturday or Sunday all day. The apostle Paul seemed to think one day would do as well as another (see Romans 14:1-17). What is important is to select a time period and protect it!

For Geri and I, we normally Sabbath from 6 pm Friday night to 6 pm Saturday night. We will start by lighting a candle, special meal, and a prayer. Like the Daily Office, this has changed our marriage, family, and walk with God. It has helped us slow down for a rhythm in a world that keeps moving faster and faster.

The following are four principles of biblical Sabbaths that have served me well in distinguishing a “day off” from a biblical Sabbath. A secular Sabbath is to replenish our energies and make us more effective the other six days. A Sabbath is: to the Lord our God” and has certain qualities. Each of us has different temperaments, personalities, life-situations, and callings. So the way Sabbath gets worked out will be different for each of us. It will be a process of trial and error for you to figure out what works best for you. But the following are the principles to guide you:

The first is:

1. Stop (PP 26)

Sabbath is first and foremost a day of “stopping.”

Yet most of us can’t stop until we are finished whatever it is we think we need to do. We need to complete our projects, answer our e-mails, return all phone messages, and complete the balancing of our check books, finish cleaning the house. There’s always one more thing to do before stopping.

The Sabbath calls us to build the doing of nothing into our schedules each week. Nothing measurable is accomplished. By the world’s standards it is inefficient, unproductive, and useless. As one theologian stated, “To fail to see the value of simply being with God and ‘doing nothing’ is to miss the heart of Christianity.”¹⁵

We stop on Sabbaths because God is on the throne, assuring us the world will not fall apart if we cease our activities. God is at work taking care of the universe. He manages quite well without us having to run things.

The second quality of a Sabbath is:

2. Rest (PP 26)

Once we stop the Sabbath calls us to rest. God rested after his work. We are to do the same—every seventh day- resting from our paid and unpaid work. We rest from things like hurry, physical exhaustion, catching up on errands, technology and machines. Again, what is rest to one person may not be rest to another. When we stop and rest, we respect our humanity and the image of God in us.

3. Delight (PP)

A third component is perhaps the most important. A biblical Sabbath revolves around delighting in what we have been given. God, after finishing his work of creation on the first Sabbath, proclaimed that “It was very good” (Genesis 1:31). God delighted over his creation. He beamed with delight.

On Sabbaths we are invited to enjoy and delight in God’s creation and its gifts. That is why if the day turns out to be a lot of “Don't do this.” And “Don’t do that,” we have missed the point.

We are to slow down and pay attention to the innumerable gifts of life God has provided for us to enjoy. We are to take the time to see the beauty of a tree, a leaf, a flower, to taste our foods, and to really see the people God has placed around us. Finally...

4. Contemplate (PP)

That is – we see the invisible God in the visible creation. Because we are stopping our work, we intentionally focus on seeing and receiving God through all of life. We ponder His love as it comes through things like food and nature. We slow down to see His gifts. It is true we want to do this on all 7 days, but in particular, we want to train ourselves to see the invisible God in the visible world around us.

Pondering the love of God remains the central focus of our Sabbaths. For this reason Saturday nights to Sunday nights, or all day Sundays, remain the ideal time for Sabbath-keeping for most people whenever possible.

On every Sabbath, we experience a sampling of something greater that awaits us. Our short earthly lives are put in perspective as we look forward to the day when God’s kingdom will come in all its fullness and we will enter an eternal Sabbath feast in God’s perfect presence. There will be a day when we stop, rest, delight, and contemplate him fully when we see Him face to face.

We, along with our staff, will often say “How did we ever live without Sabbath!” The answer is – “We did violence at times to our souls!”

Sabbath-keeping and the Daily Office are two truly counter-cultural spiritual formation practices that enable us to slow down to God's rhythm. Most importantly, they help us stay tuned in to God's presence for our days and our weeks.

So as you go into this session, remember this is a radical shift for our lives in the 21st century. It will take a while for you to figure out how to do these things in your context. But let this session guide you in taking your first small steps towards a less hurried life that is more anchored and centered in the love of God.