

I have spent much of my life bumping up against limits and ignoring them. Twelve years ago, I took a forced break from the hectic pace of ministry as I was diagnosed with breast cancer. When I was recovering from surgery, I picked up a book from the stack on my nightstand and began to read **SABBATH: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives** by Wayne Muller. These convicting and life changing words on page 20 brought me to tears. “If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath – our pneumonia, our cancer, our heart attack, our accidents create Sabbath for us. In my relationship with people suffering with cancer and other life-threatening illness, I am always struck by the mixture of sadness and relief they experience when illness interrupts their overly busy lives. While each shares their particular fears and sorrows, almost everyone confesses some secret gratefulness. “Finally,” they say, “at last, I can rest.””

Needless to say, I read the entire book and thus began my weekly, life sustaining practice of Sabbath-keeping. On my Sabbatical the following year, I studied the practice even further. Why was this practice, instituted by God on the 7th day, mentioned over and over again in Scripture, ignored by our fast-paced culture and even our late 20th and early 21st century churches? Of course, our Christian churches promote the practice of Sunday worship as remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy, but that is pretty much as far as it goes. I have discovered that weekly Sabbath keeping is a Biblical lifestyle choice for honoring God and an essential practice for self-care. How do those in ministry keep Sabbath since we work on Sundays, evenings, weekends? It is an embarrassing little secret that seems to be a common characteristic among church leaders that we cannot let up on this busy pace (take our hands off the wheel or let up on the gas) or the church will be less effective. We probably need to be more honest about it. Buried deep in the psyche of many leaders is a Superman or Superwoman mentality—the idea that somehow there **are** a few of us that can function beyond normal human limitations and save the souls of the world. Or at least in our little corner of the world. This is a grandiosity that we indulge to our peril and I believe a sin of distrust in God’s sovereignty. Some time in Pandemic lockdown should have taught us there is another way. God’s church survived!

So how does weekly Sabbath keeping work in our busy lives? First of all, if one day a week is set apart, devoted completely to rest, worship and delighting in God and his good gifts, the rest of the week must be lived in such a way as to make Sabbath possible. Commit to it! Prepare for it! Get ready for it! I can tell you it is possible and God will bless your efforts and intention. When you get ready for it, you can enjoy a day without shopping, laundry, housecleaning, list making, social media, emails and generally catching up to get ready for the week ahead. Plan instead to take lots of long deep breaths, take a nap, spend the day with family and friends, FaceTime, real time, phone calls. Take a long walk taking in God’s beautiful creation, listening to the birds, the wind rustling the leaves. Be mindful, and intentional to notice and savor God’s abundant blessings. Start small with a Sunday afternoon and evening if you work in a church. Don’t schedule meetings after worship. Get your family on board. Encourage others in your congregation to join you in the practice. Accountability partners are so helpful. Decide what activities you will not participate in during your Sabbath practice and what activities you will engage in. I’ve attached my list just for fun. Check out some of these resources for helpful suggestions. Let me know if I can encourage you!

Sabbath by Dan B. Allender

Sabbath Keeping by Lynne M. Baab

Receiving the Day by Dorothy Bass

Sabbath as Resistance, Saying no to the Culture of Now by Walter Brueggemann

The Art of Stillness: Adventures in Going Nowhere by Pico Iyer

Sabbath Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in our Busy Lives by Wayne Muller

The Sabbath Experiment by Rob Muthian

24/6 by Dr. Matthew Sleeth

Mudhouse Sabbath by Lauren F. Winner (Chapter 1)

Deacon Kathy Paisley has been in ministry at Sheridan Lutheran Church in Lincoln, NE for 32+ years and has practiced Sabbath keeping for the past 12 years. Retired from full time ministry in 2020, Kathy continues to serve in a part time capacity taking on a new role in Care and Visitation Ministry in 2022 to fill a vacancy. She is married to Ben and they have 3 preschool grandchildren who live close by that are the light of their lives. She is a former LACE board member and a certified Spiritual Director. You can reach her at k.paisley@sheridanlutheran.org