

The Shutdown, the Sabbath and a Weekly Divine Reset

As inconvenient as this period of enforced shutdown has been, it has also been a time of reflection, a time of growth, a time of deepening. Some are even referring to the shutdown as a time of “divine reset,” and it is changing their lives for the better. What if God intended us for to have a divine reset every week? What if that was one of the very purposes of the Sabbath?

To be clear, my goal here is not to debate whether it is mandatory for Christians to observe the Sabbath. Even less do I want to debate whether it is appropriate for a Christian to set aside Sunday, rather than Saturday (or any other day), for the Sabbath.

Instead, I want to present an invitation to you. A sacred challenge. An open door.

The Jewish thinker Abraham Joshua Heschel classically described the Sabbath as “sanctuary in time,” noting that, “The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals, the Jewish equivalent of sacred architecture.”

What exactly did he mean?

He noted that, “One of the most distinguished words in the Bible is the word *kadosh*, “holy,” a word which more than any other is representative of the mystery and majesty of the divine. Now what was the first holy object in the history of the world? Was it a mountain? Was it an altar?”

This is a great question What is the first thing in the Bible described as “holy”?

Heschel answers, “It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which

the distinguished word *kadosh* is used for the first time: in the book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: 'And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.' There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness."

So, it is a day, a period of time, which is called holy. Those who enter into Sabbath rest enter into its holiness. It is, in that sense, a "sanctuary in time." What does this mean for us today?

During this enforced shut-down period, all my traveling engagements have been cancelled for a period of several months. This means that, more than any time in my life in decades, I am home on the weekends (along with some weekdays) rather than being on the road.

Last year, I was on the road about 200 days (including seven international trips). This was in addition to doing my daily live radio program. And writing more than 250 articles. And producing more than 450 videos (including our daily show). And publishing five books. And answering endless emails. And doing endless interviews.

You know the routine. You are busy too. Your life can be nonstop as well, with work and kids and hobbies and responsibilities and personal needs.

When you add things up at the end of the year, there has been a lot of activity but not a lot of rest.

I mean real rest. Reflective rest. Refreshing rest. Renewing rest. The kind of rest that invigorates and recharges.

I'm talking about the kind of rest when you get your head clear. When you get your priorities straight. When you rise above the fray of the busyness of life and see the big picture.

I'm talking about a divine reset on a weekly basis.

As expressed by Sheryl Miller in her book on the Sabbath titled *Rhythms of Rest*, "Rest provides fine-tuning for hearing God's messages amidst the static of life." Exactly.

Right now, I am doing my best to seize this unique moment in history when we are forced to shut down so many of our normal activities. I am seeking God for deep and lasting changes in my own life and for fresh and clear directives for future ministry.

And I am not only seeking to be more productive. I am seeking to be more still. Waiting. Listening. Resting.

Out of that will come deepening. Renewing. Refreshing.

But what happens when the shutdown ends? What happens when, if God wills, I start traveling again? The key is a weekly reset, a mini-shutdown of sorts. A Sabbath rest.

Can we see this as a gift from God rather than a burden?

In the 1970s, a friend of mine had a professor at Wheaton College who literally scheduled every hour of the week.

One week, to his surprise, he had an hour open and decided to do something completely spontaneous.

The next day, he joyfully told his students about his experience and said, "This was so wonderful that I have decided to schedule one hour a week for something spontaneous."

I smile as I write this, but I believe you get the point.

Let us do our best to schedule a divine reset in our lives on a regular basis. Perhaps, as we do, we will learn why God Himself called it holy. Perhaps, as we do, we can live out the lessons we are learning during this crisis.

Let us find this “sanctuary in time,” and let us benefit from it the rest of our lives.