

Called to Rest

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A restless author

It is nothing short of ironic that I have been asked to produce a white paper on the topic of rest. The news that I had been paired, in our Theology of Vocation Project, with this particular topic elicited wry laughter when it was first reported to a staff member in our Center for Urban Engagement. Friends and family reacted similarly. While I certainly enjoy rest, I haven't exactly earned a reputation for taking time off. The "napping corner" of my office – fully equipped with a backpacking air mattress, pillow, blanket, and airline-issued eye mask – probably testifies just as much to a lack of adequate rest as it does to my respect for rest. Indeed, even when I make use of that corner of my office, I'll often tuck my phone away nearby to be sure that fragment of rest doesn't prevent me from keeping up with important communications. While some have thought that part of my office means I know how to rest, many who know me best recognize it as a paradoxical sign of my shortcomings in this area. Tellingly, my napping corner points to both wishful thinking about and fragmented experience of rest. Equally telling is the fact that I have written most of this white paper on Sundays, justifying myself with a facile excuse: "nothing could be more appropriate than writing about the Sabbath on the Sabbath." But it is clear that time-fragmenting technologies, coupled with an expansive sense of calling and an affirmation of the worthiness of work, contribute to my neglect of rest. In other words, dysfunctions in my own understanding of calling and work sometimes keep me from resting well.

I know I'm not alone in my unintentional neglect of rest. I've heard from both colleagues and students whose spiraling responsibilities leave them with a sense that their time is too pressured or fragmented for proper rest, and that their agency in doing something about it is diminished by the circumstances of their lives and work. While I have spent countless hours with students experiencing trauma, grief, loneliness, abuse, and mental and physical illness, the one issue that comes up more often than any other is a near-constant experience of being overwhelmed and restless.¹ Many students are diffuse in their attention, trying to do

¹ I refer here to multiple aspects of restlessness, both the sense of anxiety, lack of focus, unceasing activity, and perpetual motion *and* the inability to remain at rest, the lack of rest, and neglect of rest that can accompany this perpetual motion.

everything, because YOLO.² Or because FOMO.³ But even those with a more focused approach to their callings as students often neglect rest. As is the case with my own negligence, my students with a dysfunctional relationship to rest tend to not be overvaluing it, but instead tend toward a hypertrophic sense of work's worthiness. Work, for them, has grown to unhealthy proportions in the scheme of their lives.

A better understanding of vocation may free us to find an otherwise elusive sense of focus and balance, but simply layering an emphasis upon career, work, calling, or vocation – as important as this emphasis is – on top of existing experiences of being restless or overwhelmed by our various commitments and responsibilities risks exacerbating dysfunctional perspectives, practices, and experiences of rest. Those with an overdeveloped sense of career, those who have devoted considerable time to vindicating work, and those who have taken on too many responsibilities due to insecurity or an underdeveloped focus *most* need a better understanding of rest.⁴

Rest is central to a theology of vocation for at least two reasons. First, any Christian understanding of calling that goes beyond work – and any Christian understanding of calling *must* go beyond work – should include all of the responsibilities and relationships to which God has called us.⁵ One such responsibility is rest. Moreover, rest is often central to honoring the relationships we have been given. Second, a right understanding of rest can correct for various

² "You only live once."

³ "Fear of missing out."

⁴ This paper on rest will not be focused on a vindication of work. Nor will it attempt to diminish enthusiasm for rest, leisure, and play, despite the fact that overenthusiasm for rest, leisure, and play can actually create alienation from work. The fact that rest cannot itself fulfill misplaced longings is not a vindication of some more expansive view of work. If limitations to rest, leisure, and play were somehow to serve as independent, if indirect, vindications of work, that would be analogous to suggesting that the Sabbath, which will be treated below, somehow serves as an independent, if indirect, vindication of working for six other days per week. We shall see below that Patrick Miller, drawing upon John Calvin, refutes that notion.

⁵ Here I am drawing upon the definition of vocation offered in the project on *Vocation and the Common Good* at the New City Commons, a Charlottesville-based think tank: "Vocation refers to a set of social relations and responsibilities through which we serve God and realize our agency. This means that it can never be unitary or totalizing. Vocation is always discerned as a response to God and neighbor and, as such, cannot be fixed once and for all time. It also means that, even though we are concentrating upon spheres of social activity that either are professions or sure look a lot like professions, we can't reduce vocation to the realm of paid work. We are all, each and every one of us, called by God to multiple relationships of different kinds; and to neglect familial, civic, or ecclesial duties in an attempt to emphasize 'vocation is to misunderstand vocation in its most basic and general sense. So, along with the best of our theological heritage, we affirm that *vocation is an ensemble of relations and responsibilities.*"

dysfunctions, faults, or perversions of the emphasis on vocation. Indeed, the central thesis of this paper is that a right view of rest not only offers rest to a restless world, but may help to save “vocation” from itself.

Our restless world

My students and I are not the only ones struggling to understand and experience a sense of agency with regard to the way we spend time. Political, economic, and technological developments of the past few decades have given us the illusion of control over our time while simultaneously, if slowly, stripping us of that control.

Political economic shifts have diminished the role of rest in the moral and political imagination. While increased free time was once assumed to be a natural result of economic progress, we have turned economic progress into an occasion to further colonize time and attention.⁶ As Benjamin Hunnicut notes, increased free time is the “forgotten American dream.”⁷ Instead of a worthy goal, rest is often treated as a purely instrumental good, merely the condition for sustaining high levels of work. We simply won’t be at our productive best if we allow ourselves to further erode the quantity or quality of the rest that is supposed to rejuvenate us for our work. To be certain that we’re leveraging our rest for greater productivity, we often subject rest to the same sorts of calculus that we apply to work. Whatever one thinks about the substantive merits of free time as the American dream, we should admit that this calculus, and our productivity-obsessed culture, leaves little room to consider the moral and political significance of rest.

More recent political economic shifts include the introduction of new sorts of instability, overwork, and a lack of (or false sense of) agency that come along with fundamental changes in work often described as the “gig economy” or “tumbleweed society.”⁸ Contingent, on-demand

⁶ In his 1930 essay, “Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren,” economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that economic progress would lead to 15-hour work weeks. John Maynard Keynes, “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren,” (1930); See also Tyler Cowen, *Why Hasn’t Economic Progress Lowered Work Hours More* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Department of Political Science, 2016).

⁷ Benjamin Hunnicut, *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

⁸ See Philip Lorish, “On Work & Dignity in a Tumbleweed Society,” *New City Commons*, <http://newcitycommons.com/culture-briefing/vol-34-on-work-dignity-in-a-tumbleweed-society>. See also the various sources cited and linked in Lorish’s commentary.

work, especially in a new “sharing economy,” disrupts stable structures and rhythms of employment, introducing both flexibility and unpredictability.

This instability of contingent work is increasingly accepted as normal feature of labor in the United States, and not only a hardship borne by the poor. Even in the middle class many work multiple jobs and take on additional short-term paid work. The flexibility of the gig economy reinforces a thin sort of agency – an agency that is often experienced only at the margins of our time. Those most heavily involved in the gig economy have gained some measure of control over fragments of their lives while giving up control over and stability in larger shares of their finances, time, and attention. While we should not conflate or confuse the situations of the poorest, who may work multiple jobs in hopes of mere subsistence, with those of middle class workers who choose to supplement their income with optional additional employment, we should acknowledge that changes in the way we work have contributed to an increasingly fragmented experience of time across socioeconomic groups.⁹

Changes in the landscape of labor have been joined by the pervasiveness of network technologies such as social media and infotainment web sites, as well as devices that keep us always potentially connected.¹⁰ Such technologies reward a constant openness to interruption that colonizes and fragments our time and attention.¹¹ While many of these innovations, and perhaps all of the technologies on which they are based, were meant to save time by speeding up processes, they have, paradoxically cost us time. As Mark C. Taylor writes of the technological changes that have sped up our lives, “The faster we go, the less time we have, and the less time we have, the faster we think we have to go.”¹²

⁹ Class differences in this area remain important. See Neal Stephenson, *Anathem* (New York: Harper, 2009). for a fictional account of class differences in the ability to control the amount and type of attention given to work.

¹⁰ It should be noted that these are by no means the first technologies to accelerate the experience of time or disrupt attention. Lewis Mumford points out that the mechanical clock itself was the most significant invention of the industrial revolution, because it allowed time to be ordered more precisely into hours, minutes, and seconds, and permitted the calculus of efficiency to dominate the experience of time. Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization, Renewal of Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1934).

¹¹ Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016); For more on the ways in which technological developments have affected our ability to give attention, see Nicole Mazzarella, ““We Wait”: Spiritual Disciplines in the Life of the Writer,” in *Faith and Learning Papers* (Wheaton, Illinois: Wheaton College, 2012).

¹² Mark C. Taylor, *Speed Limits: Where Time Went and Why We Have So Little of It Left* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

These shifting work patterns and new technologies often leave us with what author Brigid Schulte has described as “time confetti,” scraps of time so small that we can only watch them fall all around us and we find them impossible to stitch together into some more useful, meaningful, or coherent moment.¹³ The problem of time confetti affects us all differently, but it affects us all. Due to uneven divisions of household labor, women experience this fragmentation to a greater degree than do men. While the poorest experience it as a submission to a certain sort of necessity, the wealthy experience it as a false liberty. But however it is experienced, it is often eventually joined by a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency. As Schulte writes, “When you are overwhelmed, when you can neither predict nor control the forces shaping your time, when you don’t even have time to think about why you’re overwhelmed, much less what to do about it, you are powerless.”¹⁴

Not only powerless, but also restless. In our feverish movement from one job to the next, from one social network to the next, from one device to the next, truly restful time, in the form of sleep, leisure, and play, eludes many. Countless studies have demonstrated that we live in a sleep deprived society.¹⁵ We see leisure time dwindling. While some researchers have insisted that we have not lost leisure time – that the average resident of the United States has had 30 hours of leisure time per week for generations¹⁶ – we have a limited ability to recognize it, an even more limited ability to think carefully about it, and a still more limited ability to do anything worthwhile with it. Many are largely unfamiliar with play – unstructured time devoted to non-goal-oriented activities as inherent goods. In all of these manifestations, our restlessness is a missed opportunity to see how we might honor God by recognizing, understanding, and putting to worthwhile use our time.

Finding rest in a restless world

Just as the Christian faith provides us with a strong foundation from which to work out the various dimensions of calling, work, and vocation, it also provides us with a strong

¹³ Brigid Schulte, *Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time* (New York: Picador, 2014).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵ See, for example, National Sleep Foundation, "Bedroom Poll," (2012).

¹⁶ Schulte, *Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*.

foundation from which to address the topic of rest. The Christian tradition doesn't stop with validating rest, leisure, and play, but provides a thoroughgoing vindication of them. Scripture attests that God, in some sense, rests, that he provides rest, and that he enjoins his people to rest. Scripture offers rich resources that can bring rest to our restless world.

A Christian perspective on rest must begin with, but should not end with, the Sabbath Commandment,¹⁷ which appears in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Exodus 20:8-11 reads, 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 your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 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.

In Deuteronomy 5:12-15, the commandment is reiterated with slight, but important, changes in emphasis:¹⁸

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox,

¹⁷ This section will focus on commentary about the Sabbath commandment as it was received in the Old Covenant. Much more could be said about a biblical theology of rest and about developments with regard to the Sabbath commandment in the New Covenant, but this project has neither the time nor space to accommodate commentary on those developments. Readers are directed to Jon C. Laansma, *I Will Give You Rest* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015); D. A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Steve Bright, "Sabbath Keeping and the New Covenant," *Christian Research Journal* 26, no. 2 (2003). Notably, it would also be worthwhile to analyze, and apply to the issue of rest, Judeo-Christian conceptions of time itself. Likewise, it might be profitable to learn from cultures in which the concept of time is not characterized primarily by linearity or finitude. This project does not leave room for those endeavors, though they may be helpful ways to expand the project in the future.

¹⁸ Miller notes that "Of all the commandments, the Sabbath requirement is the one with the most variation in the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of the decalogue. Rather than being a problem, however, the variations serve to create a rich theological and ethical directive for the community of faith." Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, et al., Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

As the fourth commandment, the Sabbath commandment occupies a unique place in the Decalogue. It is, as Patrick Miller writes, the “crucial bridge” between the three opening commandments that focus on proper worship of God and the last six commandments, which focus on protecting and promoting the welfare of our neighbors.¹⁹ The Sabbath commandment itself enjoins both devotion to and imitation of God, on the one hand, *and* protecting and promoting the welfare of our neighbor, on the other. It is also one of only two commandments to explicitly focus on the good of the addressee, which means that it encompasses and comprehends commitments to God, to self, and to others.²⁰ The Sabbath commandment is the third most-cited or invoked commandment in Scripture, reinforcing its special place in the Decalogue. Indeed, Karl Barth went so far as to say that the Sabbath commandment “explains all the other commandments.”²¹ And Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel described the fourth commandment as “an epitome of all other commandments.”²²

The Sabbath commandment enjoins two pairs of activities. First, it requires both remembrance what God has done – in exercising restraint on the seventh day of creation and delivering his people from endless work in Egypt – *and* human observance of those same principles. Second, it requires devotion of the day to God and ceasing work.²³ There are both positive and negative, “doing” and “not doing,” parts of the commandment.²⁴ To observe the Sabbath commandment is cease work for a period. While the commandment requires God’s

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The Sabbath commandment is an appropriate place to focus efforts that mean to direct our ensemble of responsibilities and relations toward the common good in ways that integrate the interests of others into our own.

²¹ Church Dogmatics, III/4:53, cited in Miller, *The Ten Commandments*.

²² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005).

²³ Miller, *The Ten Commandments*.

²⁴ It is, according to Miller, the only commandment of this sort.

people to remember what God has done and to devote the day to God, it also requires suspension of “certain workday activities and ordinary busyness.”²⁵ Ceaseless work, even by those who understand well that work can be done to the glory of God, is a violation of the Sabbath commandment, which calls God’s people to stop their labors with regularity. The formulation and focus of the commandment suggest that regular cessation of work honors God, is good for us, and is good for our neighbors.

Contrary to some perspectives, the Sabbath Commandment should not be read as a back-door promotion, encouragement, or requirement of a certain amount of work. It is not intended to specify a minimum amount of labor or to valorize work, but to require rest. The point of the Sabbath is to punctuate our lives with a regular rhythm of restraint, regardless of the opportunities or demands of the season. Patrick Miller cites John Calvin on this point:

There is no reason to assume that [the Sabbath commandment] seeks to command work for six days and then stop for a seventh. “This must not be interpreted to mean that God commands us to work. Truly we are [already] born to that [end]” (Calvin, *Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, 116). Human toil is built into the system and the story of creation has made that clear (Gen. 2:15; 3:14-4:2). Work is required for human survival. The issue is not getting work done but making sure that it does not go on all the time and that one may let it go—and let it go regularly, “even in plowing time and in harvest time” (Exod. 34:21). The rhythm is unbreakable even when season and other external circumstances would seem to preclude the rest. Work may have its rewards, but only if its limits, pressures, and demands are set under the safeguard of the Sabbath.²⁶

It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to overstate the importance of the Sabbath safeguards in Jewish custom. The Sabbath, which Heschel described as a “palace” or

²⁵ Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁶ Miller, *The Ten Commandments*; See also Heschel, *The Sabbath*. Heschel believes that there is a duty to work for six days, and that it is “just as much a part of God’s covenant with man as the duty to abstain from work on the seventh day,” but these are nevertheless independent injunctions.

“sanctuary” “in time,”²⁷ symbolized the rest-giving presence of God for a people who had, under Egyptian rule, known only the relentless drive toward productivity and lean efficiency – more bricks with less straw. The constant toil under Egyptian rule was replaced by a rhythm of work and rest under God’s rule. Enslavement to the relentless drive toward doing all the work one could do was replaced with the paradoxical freedom of restraint. And, unlike the Egyptians who gained from the ceaseless toils of their Hebrew slaves, the Israelites were not to displace work onto others while they embraced leisure – everyone, including foreigners, beasts, and even the land itself²⁸ was to enjoy the benefit of restraint, or “refraining from doing everything that one has the power to do.”²⁹

The cessation of work does not mean that God’s people have been called to do nothing at all on the Sabbath. Indeed, the safeguards extended by the Sabbath are to be joined by attention to God, neighbor, and non-human creation. As Paul Heintzman writes,

The biblical Sabbath teaches us that leisure should not merely be an external cessation from work in the rhythm of human life but that it should also be an internal spiritual attitude. Like the Sabbath, our rest, leisure, and play should have not just a quantitative dimension (one day out of seven), but a qualitative dimension directed toward ‘wholeness and fullness’ of life for ourselves and for others.³⁰

As Michael Fishbane notes, the Sabbath involves sustained attentiveness to God’s *hesed* – his gratuitous kindness, unrequited care, and supererogatory acts – as a sort of training in extending that *hesed* to others.³¹

This element of *sustained* attentiveness is important. As Walter Brueggemann writes, authentic Sabbaths “resisted multitasking,” while “inauthentic Sabbaths” lacked “genuine work

²⁷ *The Sabbath*.

²⁸ The fact that the land itself enjoyed Sabbaths suggests that the Sabbath is also about sustained attention to and care of creation.

²⁹ Matthew Sleeth, *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life* (New York: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012).

³⁰ Paul Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015); Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work & Leisure* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

³¹ Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*.

stoppage” and true distance from “restless anxiety.”³² We do not honor the Sabbath commandment in five minute increments where we check our handheld devices to see the latest in our email inboxes, what’s trending in social media, or who has earned the latest headline in professional media. Authentic Sabbaths are an oasis of monotasking in a multitasking world.

Thus the Sabbath command deals two problems of a restless society – the lack of rest and the lack of focus. Those who practice the Sabbath don’t wonder where their leisure time went, as it is neither broken up into unrecognizable parcels nor diffuse in purpose. Those who practice the Sabbath have their time shaped by regular periods of sustained, uninterrupted attention to God, neighbor, and non-human creation. By both commanding cessation of work and redirecting uninterrupted attention toward God, neighbor, and creation, the Sabbath commandment both safeguards rest and gives it purpose.³³ The Sabbath deals with our problem of time confetti. It can knit together fragments of time, build a beautiful palace out of what seems to be the scrap heap of our time.³⁴

Saving vocation from itself

The Sabbath commandment not only provides rest for a restless world, but is an essential aspect of the conversation about vocation. Indeed, understanding the Sabbath correctly can help us to understand vocation – and even that dimension of vocation that we call work – better.³⁵

As we have said before, Miller and Calvin would not allow the Sabbath commandment to be colonized by impulses to prioritize work, to set a minimum amount of work, or to make

³² Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

³³ In "Confessions of a Sabbath Breaker," *Christianity Today* (1988), [this is an incomplete citation - needs exact date] Eugene Peterson describes the Sabbath commandment as the only commandment that is a spiritual discipline; For more on how spiritual disciplines can reshape our experience of time and attention, see Mazzarella, ""We Wait": Spiritual Disciplines in the Life of the Writer."

³⁴ In this way, the project of resting well and in accordance with the Sabbath commandment is somewhat like Nehemiah’s project of rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall from the “heap of rubbish” and “burned stones” that Sanballat describes in Nehemiah 4.

³⁵ Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989); *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006).

rest instrumental to work. Indeed, to do any of those would seem to dishonor the commandment, itself. The meaning of the Sabbath for vocation cannot be reduced to “here’s how Sabbath *principles* inform work.” To take rest seriously in the vocation discussion is to understand the ways in which the Sabbath commandment resists our worst instincts, restrains our impulses to do all that we can, and corrects some of the most serious problems of conversations about vocation.

Like any conversation, the conversation on vocation has its pitfalls, dysfunctions, and perversions. The anxiety of choice, the focus on career, and the problem of privilege are among the most serious of these perversions.³⁶ A commitment to Sabbath principles lived out in rest can help us to resist all of these perversions.

- Conversations about vocation are sometimes marked by orientation toward ***careerism and consumerism***. While there is nothing wrong with thinking about work and career, an overemphasis on career is sometimes acquiescence to an impulse toward unrestrained consumption. This is more obvious when “vocational discernment” amounts to an intense desire to pursue a career path that will lead to material wealth. But unrestrained consumption can also be consumption of other sorts, including consumption of experiences or the accumulation of power for selfish purposes. More often than not, this consumptive impulse is paired with a desire to possess and use all of these things to one’s own advantage. The Sabbath resists this perversion of the vocation conversation by emphasizing restraint and by requiring us to integrate the interests of others into our own.
- Conversations about vocation are often marked by ***choice and anxiety***. They often tend to suggest that choice is at the heart of vocational discernment. This emphasis on choice neglects aspects of calling that are somehow given, not chosen, including commandments to honor existing relationships and to rest.

³⁶ Evidence for these perversions and dysfunctions is both anecdotal and research-based. See the following sources for support of these claims. Bryan Dik and Ryan D. Duffy, *Make Your Job a Calling: How the Psychology of Vocation Can Change Your Life* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Templeton Press, 2012); Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

And the emphasis on choice can result in serious anxiety.³⁷ Introducing the Sabbath into conversations and curricula on vocation can help to correct for this emphasis on choice. We do not choose the Sabbath, but God, by choosing us, gives it to us as both gift and obligation. We are called to the Sabbath not after some period of anguished discernment, but because it is an integral aspect of the network of relations and responsibilities in which we already exist. A commitment to live our lives in ways that are regularly punctuated by persistent, God-honoring, creation-sustaining, and neighbor-loving rest can be a first step toward recognizing and acknowledging that significant aspects of our calling are not discerned through exploration of and choice between competing options, but are discerned by examining and fulfilling existing obligations. Recognizing these obligations as part of our vocations can stabilize our awareness of vocation and help us to avoid the sense that vocation is a singular choice about work that is largely untethered from existing relationships and responsibilities. Sabbath principles can also help to resist the anxiety that can plague vocational discernment when we wrongly believe that vocational discernment is primarily about choosing between largely open-ended possibilities. Finally, Brueggemann emphasizes that the Sabbath is partly about resisting anxiety by teaching us to acknowledge God's sovereignty and provision even in the midst of hardship, confusion, and want.³⁸ This same recognition can help to address our anxieties in the midst of vocational discernment pressures.

- Conversations about vocation are often characterized by problems of ***privilege and inequality***, related to this aspect of choice. "Vocational discernment programming" is chiefly available to the privileged, and conversations about vocation often emphasize the choice that comes with privilege. But historically, and even today globally, most people have not chosen whether they want to be a doctor, lawyer, teacher, actor, graphic designer, professor, or urban planner.

³⁷ See considerable research on "the paradox of choice."

³⁸ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*.

Instead, most have inherited responsibilities in their families and communities, and those responsibilities have defined their vocation. It would strip the dignity of calling from those people if we were to suggest that because they do not choose their vocations, they do not have vocations. We need to build a conversation about vocation that can, for example, understand *as vocation* the calling of an oldest child to care for their siblings after their parents have died of Ebola.³⁹ Such an understanding of calling must begin by taking seriously the fact that we are called to responsibilities that we do not choose, responsibilities like the Sabbath. And we are *all* called to the Sabbath. We are all called to rest that embodies the quantitative (a full day) and qualitative (sustained, uninterrupted attention to the needs of God and to others) dimensions of the Sabbath. It must not be hoarded by those privileged enough to rest nor denied by those with the privilege of important work, but should be shared by all. Just like the Sabbath was for everyone in the Old Testament, it is for everyone now. If we can affirm this as part of the conversation on vocation, then we will take one step toward opening the conversation on vocation to all, as well.

Concluding recommendations

For three reasons, rest consistent with the Sabbath commandment is integral, and not ancillary, to the discussion of vocation and calling. First, the Sabbath commandment can infuse our work and other aspects of our calling with a commitment to god, neighbor, and non-human creation. The Sabbath directs us to find our good in their good. Second, the Sabbath commandment makes non-work time both an obligation and a gift. Stewardship of that time is a sacred calling. Third, the Sabbath can help to correct for problems in the vocation discussion, itself. In all of these ways, Christian understandings of rest can help us to resist the worst

³⁹ I would like to acknowledge here that this idea of *given, and not chosen*, callings is deeply fraught. Too enthusiastic an embrace of this concept might, for example, deny women in some cultures access to education or a vision of work beyond the household. Specific ideas of given callings, then, must be the objects of careful examination and, sometimes, sustained critique. But the admission that the concept is fraught and some specific senses of given callings are problematic does not undermine the fact that some of our callings are, indeed, given, rather than chosen.

restlessness of the world that we live in and help us to resist the worst of the vocation discussion, too. If we accept this understanding of rest and the Sabbath, then our institutional and individual practices should reflect its principles.

- **At Wheaton College**, this should look like regular instruction in rest and preparation of students for a world in which shifting labor practices and new technologies fragment time and decrease the sense of individual agency with regard to its use. Programming on vocation and work should include instruction in rest not because work is not valuable, but because some shortcomings of vocational exploration and discernment programming can be addressed by taking rest as seriously as Scripture does.

But our institutional commitments should not only be taught. For at least two reasons, they should be embodied as practices. First, we should expect that the embodied practice of rest will teach us as much, or more, about rest, vocation, and God, as a lecture or reading might. (Another way to put this is that actually practicing the Sabbath is likely to teach us more than reading this paper.)

Second, the college as an institution has an embodied power and legitimate authority over members of its community. The Sabbath commandment, and its symbolism of deliverance from abusive relationships to work, requires those in authority to enjoy the rest of their community. For this reason, the college should resist programming and other sorts of work on Sundays, and should create structures that encourage all of its community members to devote their attention on those days to God, neighbor, and creation.⁴⁰

- **For students**, this should look like a regular cessation from work, despite the many and complex demands of a college education. It should mean getting some distance from and control over the technical forces – especially network technologies and devices – that fragment time and make it less likely that restful stretches of time are available to us. And while students are generally shielded

⁴⁰ For more specific recommendations about institutional life, especially, but not only, with regard to the professoriate, see Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber, *Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

from the political economic forces of shifts in the labor market, if students do not begin now, while it is relatively straightforward, to create habits that will help them to carve out time for rest, they cannot expect to do so when they have joined an increasingly precarious labor market sometime after graduation.

- ***For me***, this looks like devoting the Sabbath to rest, rather than to reading and writing about the Sabbath. If in the future I am ever again asked to contribute my thoughts on rest, hopefully it will not be as laughable a prospect as it was this year.

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