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**Time for Joy: Gritty Sabbath Rest with Adolescents
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ABSTRACT

Though every experience of joy could be measured by how long it lasts, time is not a natural friend of joy. The possibility exists for us to experience prevailing joy—that which is not susceptible to time or adversity—when the source of joy is a vibrant relationship with God. His unfailing love and provision renders time as more gift than constraint, a faith perspective that can inject every moment with hope. Against the backdrop of their hectic lifestyles and dysfunctional relationships, adolescent followers of Jesus Christ can experience enhanced joy by keeping Sabbath. Assuming they understand the essence of Sabbath's theological promise, they can become wary of common distortions in thought and practice that fail to deliver authentic and joyful rest with God. The authors suggest that social science research findings about *grit* explain the clarity of passion Christ-followers need to persevere in the practice of Sabbath keeping. Multi-disciplinary inputs combine to shape adolescent-friendly Sabbath keeping as a potential keystone habit, faithfully applying God's intent to help human beings enjoy him—and life with him—throughout all time.

Introduction

Time is of the essence. It regulates every relationship, constrains every conversation, and is one way to account for the energy expended in every effort. One evening, as the pizza supply dwindled, those who had gathered for a conversation about joy were growing impatient with one young adult's insistent repetition: "*Who's to say?*"

Such a question is charitable, sensitive and admirable. But it's not very useful when the group task is to come to a common understanding. The 27 teens and adults pounding pizza together wanted to get at a definition of joy they could agree upon. *They were, literally, trying to say!*

The clock was ticking, like it always does. If the group couldn't get past this "*Who's to say?*" filibuster we wouldn't have time to explore some of the other interesting contributions from the room. Four high school girls had recently won their first lacrosse game of the season; they wanted to dissect how that experience helps explain joy. An earnest father described the routinely horrible Washington D.C. traffic near a particular intersection. When he located where, exactly, he had been driving, the room visibly shifted in empathetic frustration. They'd been there, too. His conviction was that real joy has to help us rise above traffic jams. The room leaned in. Here was something *else* to think about, to discuss, to debate. If only we had the time.

This meeting was not regularly scheduled and its guests were specially invited for just this occasion. We'd asked for two hours from persons scattered about the DC area and, while Ebonie was a recognizable host to many in the room, Dave was a visitor who had flown in for this meeting. No wonder impatience was growing. This moment in time was soon going to slip away.

That's time, for you. Happy occasions move too fast and suffering drags on endlessly slow. We squeeze our lives through the portal of time allotted us, accepting the reality that time evaporates with every experience. The rule of time is like the law of gravity, except that we somehow feel entitled to our frustration when the moments slip away. Dorothy Bass observed that our days are often "*lost to smallness.*"ⁱ We agree, though we wince in our acknowledgement. If we only have so much time to work with we hate to see it wasted. Whether a planned pizza conversation about joy in Washington DC, an unplanned traffic slowdown, a rained-out family picnic, a long-winded neighbor, or a long-winding check-out line at the local Walmart, our quickening heart beats tap into our internal clocks. Time is of *our* essence.

Into the moments slipping away around shared slices of cheese and pepperoni on that Thursday night we tossed a biblical 'stun grenade': we can *always* experience joy.ⁱⁱ Whatever else may

be true about its properties, God intends that our access to joyful living be unlimited. The room perked up. This is welcome news, however infrequently we hear it from one another.

In the pages ahead let's tackle the prospect that young people (all of us, really) can experience joy that prevails regardless of time's uncertain deliverables. We trust God to lead us into fruitful thinking in this, and every endeavor.ⁱⁱⁱ Inside time's natural constraints we hope to worship God in every act and guard our hearts from idolatrous pursuits. Teens, novices in their identity journeys, are a bit more naïve about the formational dangers of their *'who's to say'* worldview. Their vulnerability requires workable solutions for their world. Obsessed with how young people can thrive, we've come to see Sabbath as God's premier transformational learning strategy. It's a perfect fit for adolescents in the launch stage of their identity quest. Properly understood and habitually practiced, Sabbath leverages time with Jesus Christ to form us into his totally consumed followers. We will benefit from applying research about "grit" to its practice. Sabbath can shape us for prevailing joy with God. Let's think deeply, even *urgently*, about this journey. Tick-tock.

Life-Giving Relationships Take Unhurried Time

Neither of us grew up in the tradition of Reformed theology, but we sure like how the Westminster Shorter Catechism answers its first question: *Our chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.* Jesus' response to a 'what's most important' question, rooted in Israel's history, is equally compelling, even when paraphrased: *Love God with all you've got, and love others as you love yourself.*^{iv} None of life's big purposes can be pursued without dedicating time to our efforts. Relationships are certainly no exception.

Our God is relational and we were created in his image. The three persons of the Godhead relate to one another in timeless unity, full of love and joy. Amazingly, God intends that we enjoy this life with him. In the Creation Story, God's first full day of relationship with Adam and Eve is his day of rest. Life was effortless in the Garden; love, joy and peace were normal. But sin's curse spilled out of Eden and now burdens humankind with extra efforts inside every broken relationship. We have to work harder to coax fruit-bearing harvests from the earth. Relational strain with others is common. Our sense of self is fractured. And, of course, we are alienated from God. We experience this relational dysfunctionality with every passing moment.

A day is defined by earth's rotational spin, a year by earth's orbit, a month by the moon's circuit. Seasons of growth and bounty are followed by seasons of death and scarcity, and all of this is beyond our control, as Jesus taught.^v If we pay attention we can hear God's rhythmic reminders

everywhere in nature, tapping out life through moments tethered to our heartbeats. Relationships can seem vulnerable to time on some days. On other days, especially as they accumulate, they feel relentlessly demanding. God’s awesome grace and unfailing faithfulness woo us, enticing us to be reconciled with our Creator, and the entire package—the wooing, the wooing, the winning—all occurs as time flies by.

Insistent minutes themselves are neutral, like the Greek concept of *chronos*. *Kairos*, on the other hand, accounts for time’s high stakes. This is when sin does its damage and we experience relational loss. It’s also when God comes through for us, bringing joyful reconciliation. God intends that every moment with him is full of meaningful joy and eased by his companionship. *Kairos* infuses *chronos* with life, death, and everything in between. One day, *chronos* will cease counting days and *kairos* will be saturated with the endless, immeasurable love of God.

For now, let’s recognize how every effort of ours inside every relationship is tethered to time. Relationships take place in personal dyads and complex, multi-layered systems,^{vi} all exponentially complicated by the designed capacity limitations built into life. Isn’t it fascinating to realize that, while many units of time find their basis in nature, the 7-day week isn’t one of them? We engage this unit of time, so useful in the practicality of life management,^{vii} because God punctuated his magnificent generativity with an exclamation point of joyful, celebratory rest. Sabbath was built into creation as part of life’s quality-control design.

The Fourth Commandment was lovingly delivered by our trustworthy God. It provides for our restful relationship with him. Still, we largely fail to recognize this as a gift. "It's easy...to spend most of your life breaking Sabbath and never figure out that this is part of the reason your work's unsatisfying, your friendships patchy, your leisure threadbare, your vacations exhausting."^{viii} We’re commonly clueless about the life-enriching potential of Sabbath keeping. So are teens.

Life-Sucking Relationships Also Take Time

Time chomps away at our lives relentlessly. Consider a painting from Francisco Goya, called ‘*Saturn Devouring His Son*’.^{ix} Saturn is the Romanized version of the Greek god named *Kronos*, a word from which we derive words like “chronology” and “chronometer”. Goya’s horrifying image captures what far too many of us feel: that time is a consuming force, an unassailable titan that devours us. To the extent that time is a means for idolatry to gain a foothold, this is true. Jesus warned us about the thief that comes only to steal and kill and destroy.^x

When so many of us serve a cultural god of **consumption**, we unwisely choose *restlessness* over *restfulness* as a way of life.^{xi} Brueggemann wrote, "The gods of this system are the gods of market ideology, that summon to endless desires and needs that are never met but that always require yet greater effort."^{xii} Demands from those deities have hit adolescents especially hard; they spend an average of nine hours per day consuming media for leisure.^{xiii} Time is more than a *means* for idolatrous relationships; it also *measures* what we deem most important. Every pursuit—the good, the bad, and the ugly—can be accounted for in a time log.

Imagine the teen who spends too many waking hours in online game competition. Whatever else might be said of this person, the time investment reveals a potentially idolatrous heart tilting away from glorifying God, loving him, and enjoying him forever. As a practical matter of ministry with young people, helping them reckon with time is fundamentally crucial.

In the midst of time's incorrigible expressions, giving voice to what's possible, are Jesus' words, "*Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*"^{xiv} Our Lord's counter-offer to the life-sucking time bandits is to form us into his followers, shaping us for lives of abundance and rest. And while all of us need rescued from idolatrous relational restlessness, teens are especially at risk. They are easy prey to the time bandits of this culture, who pounce on them as they first explore the personal responsibilities and commitments of adulthood.

Please note that young people are not just vulnerable because of what they *have* to do; they're exposed to harm by what they *want* to do. They're vulnerable because they have been deceived into thinking that consuming media for nine hours a day will be genuinely restful! A recent study indicated that social media users like adolescents touch their phones about 5,000 times per day.^{xv} This tactile twitching frequency looks like the pattern of an addict, not someone exercising leisure options. Time bandits come to steal, kill, and destroy adolescents deceived by their attachments. Teens will have to search hard to find elders who can guide them to safety. The fear of separation from a mobile device has become so pervasive that it reportedly afflicts 66% of *adult* Americans.^{xvi}

Our idea of leisure is also a particularly deceptive time bandit. Vacations have become *evacuations*, where we frenetically chase hollow experiences without gaining meaningful benefit. "Leisure has become septic in our age, enslaving us and exhausting us, demanding more than it gives."^{xvii} Adolescent culture is ripe with evidence to support this assessment. Think about fantasy sports leagues, online chat sites, and Instagram-type mobile phone apps that essentially pull us away from an experience in order to share the experience with 'attentive' friends. For too many teens *virtual* reality under the guise of leisure is irresistible and *actual* reality is a bother.

Years ago, David Elkind coined the term *“imaginary audience”* to describe adolescents’ extreme self-consciousness. They assume everyone around them notices everything about them.^{xviii} Today’s smartphones fuel this developmental crisis by giving teens the means to strut or fret, depending on whether their friends are watching or not. No wonder one study asserts that “FoMO [Fear of Missing Out] elevates anxiety levels in teens and may contribute to depression.”^{xix} Our culture’s petri dish grows new strands of stressors routinely.

All of this adds up to what might be called “an anxiety causing system.”^{xx} Anxiety breeds widespread restlessness. In our flailing about for solutions, we have confounded God’s centuries old provision, entangling our Sundays with “...legalism and moralism and blue laws and life denying practices that contradict the freedom-bestowing intention of Sabbath.”^{xxi}

If Sabbath keeping comes across as another joyless, unwelcome obligation, how can it possibly help adolescents escape idolatrous bandits and learn the restfulness of trusting God? Time gnaws away as they strain to maintain unending social obligations through emoji shorthand. We have to find a way to help kids deal with what enslaves them and robs them of the joy they’re meant to have with Jesus. Sabbath keeping needs a teen-appealing facelift that feeds their natural attraction to freedom. Mark Buchanan is right on target when he frames this challenge for us all:

Sabbath was given to us in part to remind us of the liberation from Hebrew slavery under Pharaoh and that we are all, in fact, entitled to this liberation. The refusal to rest amounts to us living as though the task masters still hover and glower over us, ever ready to thrash us for the smallest sign of slowing down...Slaves don’t rest. Slaves can’t rest. Slaves by definition have no freedom to rest. Rest, it turns out, is a condition of liberty.^{xxii}

Pleading the Fourth for Teens

Is there a way to communicate God’s Sabbath intent with this generation of young people in mind? Consider whether the beauty of a prophet’s plea can be translated for adolescents:

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honorable, if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD...^{xxiii}

Too ambitious? Maybe. But we think that God gave it the weight of a commandment and kept prodding rebellion-prone Israel to remember Sabbath for the same reason that Jesus offers to tutor

us in restful living with him. God wants to form us into people who glorify him and enjoy him forever. We must lose ourselves in him as Jesus taught,^{xxiv} trusting him to stitch our identities into the time fabric of our lives. This relationship with God, above every other relationship, requires our attention. That's what setting aside time is all about. The Fourth Commandment provides *chronos* space to cultivate *kairos* attentiveness with God.

God aimed his inaugural Sabbath rest directives at those who had to *unlearn* the restlessness pounded into them by their Egyptian slave-owners over 450 years.^{xxv} The nation of Israel, having been dramatically rescued by the LORD God, still needed to discover how to rely on him to provide for the daily, even mundane, needs of life. Perhaps that explains why the LORD God introduced Israel to Sabbath rest before issuing the Decalogue.^{xxvi} For the next forty years God tutored these escapees in pilgrim living. His teaching strategy established an unforgettable habit at the heart of their journey under his care. Insisting that each seventh-day gets special treatment and provision after collecting manna for six days each week of each year for 40 years is a formidable routine.

Sabbath rest is risky business unless God is trustworthy, and slavery-skittish people are understandably guarded when it comes to trust. They had to learn what we all need to learn about God: that he is unfailingly faithful. Dedicating a weekly Sabbath day to his agenda subdues time, allowing us to welcome each new moment as a surfer does with the next ocean wave. Every surfer was once a toddling child who experienced the unpredictability of each wave. They had to learn how much better it is to ride the waves than be tossed around by them. Without intentionality, time is co-opted by an unfriendly cultural undertow, routinely disrupting our efforts to love God and live gratefully with him. Remembering Sabbath is how we can be formed to live restful lives, contentedly appreciative of the time we've been given. If we're not mindful about this journey of thankfulness, the culture, as Dorothy Bass reminds us, will not be mindful for us.^{xxvii} Culture's primary orientation stirs up desire and demands productivity, hungry to grow, acquire and endlessly accumulate. These forces breed the restlessness of contemporary culture and give birth to time bandits. God wants us to enjoy another way, a narrow road of restfulness. Most have not been raised to recognize and choose this path. Now, as in Jesus' day, we need tutoring in this restful way of life with God.^{xxviii} Sabbath formalizes a routine of reflective rest so we can learn to walk this trail of trust.

The Fourth Commandment is unique among the Ten. The first three address our preeminent relationship with God; and the last six speak to our relationships with one another. Both require intentionality and time; these are Sabbath specialties. God's intent for us stands in contrast with the

consequences and relational estrangement wrought by sin. Restoring our relationships necessitates reordered priorities, where time gets recalibrated. It takes time to leverage time.

Properly observed, Sabbath keeping gives God a fulcrum to elevate who we are and help us thrive. It's a catalyst, transforming six days a week by protecting one day a week. Sabbath can bring order to every other day. Three days anticipate the restfulness to come; three days appreciate the refreshment just enjoyed with God. This holy day contributes to a way of thinking about time.

How wise of our loving God to insist we set aside a day each week where we can *reset the operating systems of our lives!* This habit can keep one bad week's damaging cache from spinning us toward an out-of-control crash. It can also help us see the little ways that our lives with God are bearing fruit so we can reinforce these efforts. Far from being a stand-alone religious observance, it is a holy habit, protecting the space we need to be intentional with God about our lives. "Before we keep a Sabbath day, we cultivate a Sabbath heart. A Sabbath heart sanctifies time."^{xxxix} Being 'on the clock' *with God* transforms every moment into a joyful opportunity, a gift, as many who have been acquainted with illnesses can testify. Sabbath is no empty ritual if it helps us acquire and sustain this perspective.^{xxx}

As with all of God's law, we need Jesus' teaching if we're to understand the deeper realities at work in Sabbath rest. Though he clashed frequently with the religious gatekeepers of his day over this practice,^{xxxii} his intent was to fulfill, not abolish God's law.^{xxxii} How does he do this? *By transforming a weekly holy day into a constant holy companionship.* Jesus is the Alpha and Omega^{xxxiii}—unrestrained by time—in constant relational joy with the Father and Holy Spirit.^{xxxiv} We are privileged to enjoin ourselves to this Loving Trinity, letting Christ rule our hearts with *kairos* joy and peace regardless of what may come our way in the next *chronos* moment.^{xxxv} Jesus' offer to tutor us is not a casual life-improvement option. As was true for Israel under Egypt's captivity, this is a rescue mission that requires nothing less than a total identity makeover.

Gritty Sabbath Rest with Teens

Angela Duckworth's social science research about "grit" describes how some people achieve great things when so many languish.^{xxxvi} Succinctly stated, grit combines passion and perseverance to predict successful goal achievement and personal breakthroughs. How can understanding grit help us leverage Sabbath to weaponize teens with an advantage in battling their time bandits?

Grit unleashes the clarity of passion

Gritty people ask themselves, “*How much do I care about the things that I say I really care about?*”^{xxxvii} They bring scrutiny and light to the habits and routines that constitute so much of their lives. The awareness they gain motivates them to change how they spend their time; they want their minutes to reflect what they care about.

The first fruit (not yet the best fruit) of Sabbath rest emerges when gritty people set aside a day each week for whatever God wants for us. In that space we can submit our busyness to weekly reflection, fully aware that time bandits can steal what’s most important to us. Busyness can especially rob us of “knowing God the way we might.”^{xxxviii} We gain intensity in our vigilance and learn to recognize distractions that hinder what’s most important.

This protected time yields a second fruit (also not yet the best fruit). Gritty people become crystal clear about the object most worthy of their passion. This is how grit picks up steam as a force for change. When we recognize what’s most important we can channel our time in the right direction, ruthlessly focusing our rigorous efforts. Sabbath rest is such an effort. It also secures the time we need to contemplate the value of every other effort. Adolescents who are already field-testing what they want in life will welcome the liberation that comes from answering this critical question: “*What gets my ultimate passion?*” The Christian faith pulls us into a transformational answer: *Every day with Jesus...enjoying him, glorifying him, loving him and others.* Forgive us if this summary trades precise wording (we can’t seem to agree upon *exactly* how to express this) for a clearly understood target. Here’s how Luther’s Small Catechism answers the question about the meaning of the First Commandment: “*We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.*” As an example of gritty clarity, responses to questions about every other commandment begin with the phrase, “*We should so fear and love God as...*” We want to keep the main thing the main thing.

This clarity of passion may be a major difference between those of us who follow Christ today and those in the very first cadre of believers. They could draw upon the profound experience of being *with Jesus*. The hours they spent at his side *converted* them, even “ruined”^{xxxix} them! Their acquired learning was simple and profound: they logged countless hours figuring out *that being with Jesus* was the Big Point.

Scripture’s signposts are everywhere. Jesus “...appointed twelve...so that they might be *with him* and he might send them out to preach.”^{xl} Jesus punctuated his Great Commission with these words: “And behold, *I am with you always*, to the end of the age.”^{xli} After Peter and John appear in front of the Sanhedrin to defend their miraculous ministry, their accusers observed “...they were uneducated, common men...and they recognized that *they had been with Jesus.*”^{xlii} Jesus promised never

to leave them alone and that he would send the Holy Spirit as *Paraclete*^{xliii}—a Greek word derived from the words *'para'* (alongside of) and *'kaleo'* (called to). This alerted the apostles that, going forward, their companionship with God was to be the ongoing and fundamental source of their life, strength and prevailing joy.

Love God. Love others. With every fiber of our being and every ounce of effort we are to make this Great Commandment the clear, compelling object of our passion. Like 120 believers huddling together in Jerusalem waiting because he said so, we re-order our lives to make *being with Jesus* our first cause. This can be challenging for Americans, especially, who pay homage to utility as the god of the age.^{xliv} But we dare not enter into Sabbath rest because it is *effective*; relationships resist that characterization. By securing life with God as the object of our passion, Sabbath rest asserts its unique status as the original “gritty habit!” We seize upon protected time to rest with God as a tenacious expression of lives that are consumed and fulfilled by his presence.

PLEASE NOTE: Not every Sabbath effort that *references* God is as clearly and passionately focused on *living with* God. Misdirected passions lead us to disfigure how we relate to God, as Skye Jethani points out.^{xlv} As a result, some Sabbath keeping efforts fixate on legalistic patterns. Like the myopic Pharisees of Jesus’ day, what’s most important gets lost in operational details. These misguided Sabbath keepers are so obsessed about precise religious observance they fail to enjoy God’s restful companionship.

Others misconstrue Sabbath as useful advice from a distant God. Balance-seekers adopt its principles to gain time margins. But reducing Sabbath to God’s time-as-life management utility for teens distorts its intent and subverts its power. They need more than technique-coaching and dabs of wisdom. “Sabbath is not simply the pause that refreshes. It is the pause that transforms.”^{xlvi} Jesus’ tutorial offer targets our need for life-changing restfulness and joy.^{xlvii} Sabbath is *his* space.

Many of us—teens and adults alike—are hot-wired to accomplish great things for God. When this is the tilt of our passion we mis-shape Sabbath into a mostly unwelcome pit stop where we grab new tires to sustain our hard-driving race pace. We acknowledge its necessity, but only begrudgingly, and are disinclined to let God re-wire our hearts for joy and restfulness. The great risk to our souls is, of course, that “we can be very busy for God and still not know him.”^{xlviii} Multi-tasking our way through Sabbath and faking rest yields a divided self without giving God our full attention.^{xlix} “The rest of God—the rest God gladly gives us so that we might discover that part of God we’re missing—is not a reward for finishing. It’s not a bonus for work well done. It’s sheer gift. It is a stop-work order in the midst of work that’s never complete, never polished.”¹

There is a last Sabbath twist that is especially dangerous to adolescents who approach God with a sense of personal entitlement. It contorts Sabbath into a weekly spa experience—a deserved *Me Day*. “Whom is the contemporary Sabbath designed to honor? Whom does it benefit?” Lauren Winner asks. “Why, the bubble bath taker, of course! The Bible suggests something different...”^{li} Jesus’ assertion that Sabbath is made for man^{lii} does not justify the way *‘selfie adolescents’* see God as their personal happiness concierge.^{liii} God uses Sabbath to teach us to trust him and his ways, not bless our ways. It’s crucial to forming teens as selfless followers of Christ.

Grit perseveres to find a way for the sake of passion

Note how important the clarity of our passion is to the second big element of grit: perseverance. A passionate goal does not yet account for how we spend our time. But gritty people are *so clear-minded about what’s most important to them* that they persist in applying their best efforts to their cause, patiently pursuing the object of their passion. Their dedication to learn, practice and sustain ways to achieve what’s most important sounds like St. Paul’s confessed passion to become one with Christ.^{liv} That’s the gritty focus we’re talking about!

Dorothy Bass maintains that we need a “patient learning of new ways” in order to “resist the ‘inhumane rhythms that shape contemporary life’.”^{lv} Our efforts must include both “critical mindfulness of the patterns within which we presently live and expectant attention to the possibility that God might have something better in mind for us.”^{lvi} By recognizing what makes us restless—and therefore, what we want to avoid—we might make conscious efforts to close our laptops on Sundays and put our phones on airplane mode. Since urgent necessity often hijacks Sabbath rest, we won’t cut the grass on Sunday for any other reason than the joy it offers. This is how gritty people leverage Sabbath for learning. They learn to pay attention to what God is doing in their lives.^{lvii} They capture details, seeing things they might otherwise miss. Bass wrote, “Loss of attentiveness plays into loss of memory...we simply don’t remember what we never stopped to notice.”^{lviii} Sabbath propels us into joyful gratitude because it sets aside the time needed with God to remember what he has done, notice what he is doing, and anticipate what he will do. Sabbath keeping enhances our attentiveness to the loving, active presence of God in our lives.

We can’t do justice to how adolescents learn best without considering the importance of exemplars in their lives. Kenda Dean called out the elephant discovered in the church by way of the *National Study of Youth and Religion*.^{lix} If kids have been poorly formed to engage with Jesus for their faith identity journey, they were poorly formed by us. We adults were supposed to show them the

way. When it comes to Sabbath rest and joyful living with Jesus who can serve as exemplary models to our young people?

Youth form opinions about what's possible by observing others' faith practices and hearing them explain their actions.^{lx} Ready or not, kids will follow our lead. Who can *we* look to for help?

Since we've advocated for constant companionship with Jesus (he gifts us with restfulness and joy) to represent the clarity of our passion, maybe we should consider 17th century monk, Brother Lawrence, who earnestly *practiced of the presence of God*. This humble dish-washer warrants scrutiny as we look to show adolescents—who have never known a world without cyberspace—how to enjoy rest with Jesus as a way of life. His passion was to experience every moment in conversational companionship with Christ and we know him by his reflections about what worked and did not work to accomplish this goal. He models the grit we hope to capture for Sabbath practice. Consider two excerpts that reveal persistent learning efforts:

"We should not wonder if, in the beginning, we often failed in our endeavors, but that at last we should gain a habit which will naturally produce its acts in us without our care and to our exceeding great delight."^{lxi}

After doing something, he says that he "...examined himself how he had discharged his duty. If he found well, he returned thanks to God. If otherwise, he asked pardon and, without being discouraged, he set his mind right again. He then continued his exercise of the presence of God as if he had never deviated from it."^{lxii}

Brother Lawrence's insights about how to press into life with Christ represent grit. They also capture two of grit's well-researched achievement cousins, *flow*,^{lxiii} and a *growth mindset*.^{lxiv} 'Flow' is described as 'being in the zone', like when Stephen Curry can't miss a basketball shot or a jazz musician plays a jaw-dropping riff. It describes optimal performance, and Brother Lawrence's grit rewards him with transcendent flow. A 'growth mindset' expects to find a fruitful upside in everything. The humble monk wasn't anxious about his failures. Rather, he used them as a reflective learning opportunity so that he could develop his full potential. It's as if he adapted Ignatian spirituality's daily *examen* practice to seize 'in-the-moment' benefit.

Brother Lawrence was keenly aware that time must be tamed for life's ultimate purposes. He demonstrated what a life of continuous joy and rest with God might look like. His example fortifies our own hope. It proves that '*always joy*' is possible, with persistent practice.^{lxv}

Duckworth has asserted that gritty people do more deliberate practice than do others. They aren't grinding out effort without joy; payoffs flow their way, reinforcing the value of their

disciplines.^{lxvi} Seen in this light, weekly Sabbath keeping is a habitual effort of gritty persons whose greatest passion is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Personal breakthroughs favor the gritty; they ‘find a way.’ “Sabbath keeping is more art than science. It is more poetry than arithmetic...done with discipline and imagination and passion, it both captures and enhances life.”^{lxvii} Grit gets fueled by passion, is expressed through disciplined efforts, and persists to breakthrough by unleashing imagination.

Grit’s best fruit is to reinforce identity

Our identities are to be shaped by God, for God. We must come to see ourselves as ‘all in’ followers of Christ. Why devote such time and attentiveness to this relationship if it doesn’t define who we are? Therein lies the formational power of habits, repeated over and over again. “Often, our passion and our perseverance do not spring from a cold and calculated analysis of the cost and benefits of alternatives. Rather, the source of our strength is the person we know ourselves to be...And that’s exactly why culture and identity are so critical to understanding how gritty people live their lives. The logic of anticipated costs and benefits doesn’t explain their choices very well. The logic of identity does.”^{lxviii} Grit explains what Sabbath rest is intended to be, why it’s so important today, and why God first introduced it with the force of a commandment. Our very identities are wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ. Such a relationship thrives in attentiveness and dedicated time. It ultimately “ruins” us, consumes us, defines us...and yields prevailing joy!

Get Gritty with Jesus and Seize the Day

Gritty people thrive on challenges. They believe they can change and so they do, through repeated, diligent practice efforts.^{lxix} The way forward demands a fierce commitment to learn, one that we youth workers can embrace. We will more authentically establish ourselves as supportive models by attacking habit practices alongside the teens we love, sharing together in authentic transparency, exploring how Sabbath keeping might help us all experience joy with Jesus Christ. Frankly, the learning ahead of us will require experimentation and innovation. Patience is needed.

"The days we embrace in this practice are like manna: they cannot be hoarded...Jesus taught his disciples to ask God for bread for this day, not for all of them."^{lxx} Practicing and persevering in Sabbath rest will open doors of discovery with kids as we all share how God is changing us.

Sabbath keeping can make sense, even in our contemporary culture, far removed from the wilderness escape route where Hebrew slaves first heard about this commandment-as-keystone-habit. Time in minutes, days and weeks become cherished gifts. This is the fruit and the aspiration

that we're seeking for young people via Sabbath keeping, that they might embrace "...a peculiar identity amid a larger public identity...maintaining and enacting a counter-identity that refuses 'mainstream' identity."^{lxxi} Life with Jesus is all-consuming and transformational. It's what we want.

Mark Buchanan wrote, "God, out of the bounty of his own nature, held this day apart and stepped fully into it, then turned and said, 'Come, all you who are weary and heavy-laden. Come, and I will give you rest. Come, join me here.'"^{lxxii} Such a passion infuses Sabbath with perseverance—however clumsy or elegant our efforts—seizing upon God's promise of prevailing joy with him.

Suggestions for Growth, Questions for Reflection

Like Brother Lawrence, we believe there is no more reliable source of prevailing joy than God's steady companionship with us through life. Gritty Sabbath rest can fortify this preeminent relationship with him. Uniquely designed to leverage existing weekly time management rhythms, we think that supporting Sabbath with two additional keystone practice habits can help us see fruit from our efforts to help adolescents reclaim their limited capacities for a joyous life with God.

A first specific discipline, daily Bible engagement, puts us in a reflective posture with God, opening our innermost selves to his transformational work in us. It tackles our limitation of focus, appreciating that every thought also takes time. When we linger with God over Scripture we gain immediate benefit and swallow seeds of truth that the Holy Spirit uses when we establish even more of our life space—like a Sabbath day—to enjoy the Lord.

A second supporting discipline is especially strategic for socially-wired adolescents. It insists that young people prioritize a few peer friendships of encouragement in their lives with God. As both Sabbath rest and Scripture engagement habits are practiced, a small cadre of two or three friends can share their stories of success, failure, and breakthrough with one another. Triangulating all three as life routines will help each become grit-growing contributors to lives of joy with God.

Questions for Reflection

We conclude by offering five questions^{lxxiii} that can give parameters to Sabbath rest habit practice. They work very nicely when used weekly among adolescent friends who also want to become 'identity allies' with one another. The goal is to encourage their every effort to practice gritty Sabbath rest, gain more time for joy with God, and become the best version of themselves.

1. Did you protect an entire day for **REST**?
2. Were you able to **R**eceive the past week gratefully, as a gift from God?
3. Were you able to **E**njoy who you are and Whose you are?

4. Were you able to **S**top doing what makes you restless?
5. Were you able to **T**ake hope with God into your next week?

A Variation on the Five Questions

We've considered whether the following slight adjustments might take advantage of familiar car-driving imagery to make the five questions more easily remembered and '*back pocket friendly*' for young people. Let this example unleash your own imagination to be helpful to teens:

1. Did you protect an entire day for **R**EST, taking an unhurried Sunday drive with God?
2. Did you **R**eflect in last week's rearview mirror, thankful for how close God really is?
3. Did you **E**njoy God, celebrate how he enjoys you, and tell him you trust his direction?
4. Did you **S**top doing what makes you restless, hitting the brakes to be attentive to God?
5. Did you **T**ank up with hope so you're refueled for next week's road trip with God?

Our Favorite Sabbath Keeping Resources

Bass, Dorothy. *Receiving the Day*. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000. (Bass unpacks God's time-for-joy master design.)

Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014. (Brueggemann describes culture's opposition as we seek restfulness.)

Buchanan, Mark. *The Rest of God*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006. (Buchanan spurs our imagination about what's possible when we join God in rest.)

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ⁱ Dorothy Bass, *Receiving the Day*, (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 16.

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- ⁱⁱ See Philippians 4:4 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Contemplate the vine and branch relationship in John 15:5 for both writing *and* reading that is fruitful!
- ^{iv} Mark 12:28-31.
- ^v Mark 4:26-29.
- ^{vi} Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebystine King and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self - 2nd Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 114-118.
- ^{vii} See, for example, Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1989).
- ^{viii} Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 61.
- ^{ix} "Saturn Devouring His Son," Wikipedia, last modified June 25, 2017, accessed July 26, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Saturn_Devouring_His_Son&action=history.
- ^x John 10:10.
- ^{xi} Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 12.
- ^{xii} Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 13.
- ^{xiii} "Landmark Report: U.S. Teens Use an Average of Nine Hours of Media Per Day, Tweens Use Six Hours," Common Sense Media: Ratings, reviews, and advice, accessed December 13, 2016, <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/aboutus/news/press-releases/landmark-report-us-teens-use-an-average-of-nine-hours-of-media-per-day>.
- ^{xiv} Matthew 11:28 (NLT).
- ^{xv} Michael Winnick, "Putting a Finger on Our Phone Obsession" *The dscout blog* (June 16, 2016), accessed December 22, 2016, <https://blog.dscout.com/mobile-touches>.
- ^{xvi} Tim Elmore, "Nomophobia: A rising trend in students" *Psychology Today* (Sept. 18, 2014), accessed December 23, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/artificial-maturity/201409/nomophobia-rising-trend-in-students>.
- ^{xvii} Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 35.
- ^{xviii} David Elkind, *All Grown Up & No Place to Go* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1984), 33.
- ^{xix} Dijana, Damjanovic and Isabel Dayman, "#FOMO leading to higher levels of depression, anxiety" *ABC News*, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-08/wellbeing-survey-finds-teens-feeling-left-out-on-social-media/6921780>.
- ^{xx} Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 17.
- ^{xxi} Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 20.
- ^{xxii} Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 90.
- ^{xxiii} Isaiah 58:13-14 (TNIV).
- ^{xxiv} Matthew 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24.
- ^{xxv} Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15.
- ^{xxvi} Manna instructions are given in Exodus 16 and the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.
- ^{xxvii} Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 59.
- ^{xxviii} Matthew 11:29.
- ^{xxix} Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 33.
- ^{xxx} Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 33.
- ^{xxxi} Matt. 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; 7:16-24.
- ^{xxxii} Matt. 5:17-19.
- ^{xxxiii} Rev. 22:13.
- ^{xxxiv} Luke 3:21-22; 10:21-22; John 15:9-11; 17:11-13; 20:19-22.
- ^{xxxv} Rom. 5:3-5; Phil. 4:4-7; Col. 3:14-16; James 1:2-4.
- ^{xxxvi} Angela Duckworth, *Grit* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2016).
- ^{xxxvii} Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 45.
- ^{xxxviii} Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 45.
- ^{xxxix} This apt and inventive word choice has been used by Rick Lawrence, editor of *Group* magazine and author of *Jesus Centered Youth Ministry*, to describe Peter's response to Jesus in John 6:68.
- ^{xl} Mark 3:14 (ESV).
- ^{xli} Matt. 28:20 (ESV).
- ^{xlii} Acts 4:13 (ESV).
- ^{xliii} John 14:16-18.
- ^{xliv} Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 138.
- ^{xlv} Skye Jethani, *With* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011).
- ^{xlvi} Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 45.

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- xlvi Matt. 11:28-30.
- xlviii Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 181.
- xlix Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 67.
- ¹ Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 93.
- ² Lauren Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003), 11.
- ³ Mark 2:27.
- ⁴ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-170.
- ⁵ See Philippians 3:7-10.
- ⁶ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 12-13.
- ⁷ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 12-13.
- ⁸ Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 50.
- ⁹ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 200.
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- ¹² Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Fourth Conversation.
- ¹³ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Fourth Conversation.
- ¹⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1990).
- ¹⁵ Carol Dweck, *Mindset* (New York: Ballantine Books, Random House, 2008).
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- ¹⁷ Duckworth, *Grit*, 131.
- ¹⁸ Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 111.
- ¹⁹ Duckworth, *Grit*, 247-250.
- ²⁰ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 25.
- ²¹ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 25.
- ²² Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 21.
- ²³ Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 220.
- ²⁴ These five were incited as a result of the generous conversational sharing of a dedicated Sabbath-keeper, Reverend Kara Root (March 20, 2017).