



# REST AS A VIRTUE

## Theological Foundations and Application for Personal and Professional Life

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### INTRODUCTION

**Virtuous Rest** is the cultivation of the Sabbath heart - the orienting of our hearts and minds towards God, reflecting on His presence, enjoying His creation, and humbly admitting that He is sovereign

- Inward attitudinal respite and reflection on God
- Intentional practices that create restful space to be with God

Rest is often discussed in research literature as either:

- means to recharge in order to do more work
- strategy to avoid burnout (Farber & Heifetz, 1982; Grafanki et al., 2005; Heintzmann, 2008; Lawson, 2007; Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Rupert & Kent, 2007; Schaefer, 2012)

Jewish rabbis say that Sabbath, not man, is the pinnacle of creation, because the last creative act was on the seventh day when God made the sabbath.

- **Genesis 2:2 On the seventh day God ended his work, which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.**

God modeled and commanded Sabbath - to **remember** and to **observe** the Sabbath.

- **Exodus 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**
- **Deuteronomy 5:12 Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you.**

Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the concept of rest is most commonly discussed as the Sabbath. Sabbath rest is:

- more than absence of work - development of behaviors that lead to deeper awareness of and experience of God's presence.
- essential to emotionally-healthy spirituality
- an opportunity to begin to taste and appreciate eternity while still within time (Heschel, 1951).

#### Common Barriers to Rest:

- Lack of basic rhythms of life
- Pressure to be produce
- Guilt/Shame regarding lack of accomplishments
- Legalism
- Pride

#### Common Barriers to Rest Unique for Mental Health Professionals:

- Vocational isolation
- Chronic stress and Professional crises
- Multiple roles (therapist, administrator, professor, etc.)
- Consistent focus on needs of others
- Attitudes of workaholism, self-idolization, worry, etc.

ACA and APA Code of Ethics note professional responsibility to engage in self-care.

*Sabbath...is not predicated on the rewards of greater productivity or an increased, balanced client load. Keeping Sabbath is not a means to an end; it is a self-renewal practice that invites greater balance into our lives, for the sake of life (Snodgrass, 2014, p. 107).*

Few studies address the specific discipline or practice of virtuous rest or Sabbath-keeping and its benefits in an overall self-care plan for the mental health professional.

The current study seeks to explore therapists' experiences with rest and Sabbath-keeping practices and their contribution to a sense of well being.

### OBJECTIVES and METHOD

In light of these Biblical directives to rest and cultural pressures to perform, the current study was designed to learn more about mental health professionals' satisfaction with the rest they achieve in their lives. Quantitative and qualitative survey questions assessed participants' satisfaction with rest practices, barriers to rest, beliefs about rest, and positive experiences of Sabbath-keeping practices.

**Hypothesis #1:** Those who identified themselves as Sabbath-keepers would report greater satisfaction with their quantity of rest practices than those who did not identify as Sabbath-keepers.

**Hypothesis #2:** Sabbath-keepers would also report higher levels of satisfaction with their quality of rest than non-Sabbath-keepers.

A concept mapping approach was used to categorize qualitative data regarding barriers to obtaining rest and regarding positive Sabbath rest practices. Sabbath-keeping was operationalized in the survey question as "at least one day a week off from work". In order to better compare the results, the responses of the Sabbath question were categorized in three groups, 1 = yes, 2 = varied, and 3 = no. The "varied" category encompassed a range of responses from "most of the time" to "on rare occasion".

#### Participants

296 mental health professionals or students who were either associated with one of two Christian professional graduate programs or were CAPS members. 52% described themselves as clinical, 19% as students, 13% as academic. 68% were married, 32% were single or divorced.

#### Method and Procedure

A survey was developed for this study consisting of questions that addressed satisfaction with the amount and quality of rest in personal and professional life, specific barriers to obtaining rest, beliefs that seem to hinder acquisition of rest, and successes in obtaining rest as well as Sabbath-keeping practices. The participants provided 7 Likert scale responses and 7 open-ended responses. Data was collected via online survey.

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### RESULTS

#### Descriptive Data

- 23.7% were highly satisfied with their quantity of rest and 25.3% were highly satisfied with the quality of their rest
- 48.8% acknowledged keeping a Sabbath day-- "at least one day per week off from work."

#### Barriers to Rest in Personal Life most cited were:

- Too busy 26% Work Commitments 21% Family Needs 19%

#### Beliefs about Rest in Personal Life most cited were:

- I just need to catch up first, then I can really rest 36% If I don't do this, it won't happen 31%

#### Barriers to Rest in Professional Life most cited were:

- Internal pressure to produce/perform 26% Numerous/overwhelming work duties 16% Financial pressures 16%

#### Beliefs about Rest in Professional Life most cited were:

- If I stop, it will just pile up & there will be too much to do when I return 41% There is too much to do to pause and stop 19%

#### Quantitative Data

*Satisfaction with Amount and Quality of Rest Compared with Sabbath-keeping or non-Sabbath keeping*

| Post Hoc Scheffe Multiple Comparisons | (A) Regularly Keep Sabbath? | (B) Regularly Keep Sabbath? | Mean Difference (A-B) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Satisfaction with Amount of Rest      | Sabbath Keepers             | Varied Group                | .60**                 |
|                                       | Sabbath Keepers             | Non-Sabbath Keepers         | 1.13**                |
|                                       | Varied Group                | Non-Sabbath Keepers         | .52                   |
| Satisfaction with Amount of Rest      | Sabbath Keepers             | Varied Group                | .69**                 |
|                                       | Sabbath Keepers             | Non-Sabbath Keepers         | .84**                 |
|                                       | Varied Group                | Non-Sabbath Keepers         | .15                   |

#### Qualitative Data

The major themes that emerged as barriers to rest were: 1) lack of sleep or poor quality of sleep, 2) large obligations related to work, family and/or school, and 3) inner turmoil--anxiety, guilt or stress.

Types of activities that enhanced the experience of personal rest included: 1) sleep itself, 2) social connections, 3) outdoor or leisure activities, 4) reading for pleasure and 5) spiritual activities such as meditation, prayer, retreats, and worship. Rest at work was most often obtained thru: 1) lunch times and intentional breaks, 2) social time with colleagues and 3) prayer, meditation and mindfulness practices. Most popular Sabbath activities were church related or worship activities and family time followed by restorative or recreational activities.

### CONCLUSIONS

Professional organizations such as ACA and APA encourage self-care in their respective codes of ethics. However, high burnout rates suggest that adequate rest and self-care are difficult to obtain.

- Only approximately 25% of respondents in this study reported high satisfaction with their quality or quantity of rest.

Judeo-Christian teachings have placed Sabbath keeping as a core practice for a life with a balance of work and rest.

- In this study, those who did practice Sabbath keeping (defined as refraining from work one day a week) were significantly more likely to experience satisfaction with the quality of their rest.
- Sabbath keepers were also significantly more likely to experience satisfaction with their quantity of rest.

The findings of this study represent a call to professionals to reconsider how this ancient practice may be a healing force in our own lives. The intentional pulling away from the demands of work, the choice to pause and acknowledge God's purpose and power in our lives and in His world, these are powerful forces in our lives as Christian practitioners. These themes are worthy of our earnest personal reflection.

Additional research should further highlight the importance of rest and the specific practices which support that virtuous rest.

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