

Subject: To our Colleagues in Personnel
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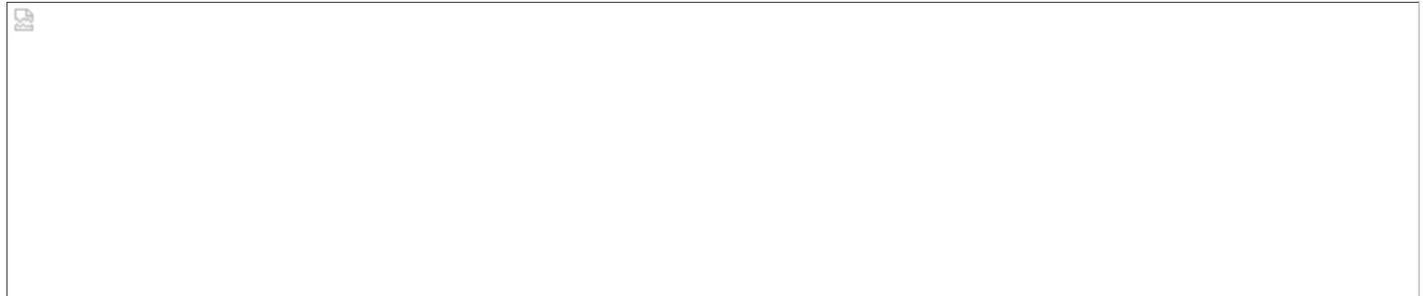
To our Colleagues in Personnel. . .

- 1) This monthly "resource tool" is designed to provide encouragement for personnel workers in ministry-related areas. If you would like to be removed from the list (or a friend would like to be added), please let me know ... kenroyer@linkcare.org or kenroyer@aol.com.
- 2 Link Care's Program of Restoration and Personal Growth: If we may come alongside and consult (no cost) or help by providing counseling services, don't hesitate to contact us. You might also check the web site, linkcare.org/restoration.
- 3) Next year's conference, "Building Skills for Member Care with Excellence," will be January 7-11, 2013, Hume Lake, California. Save the dates...
- 4) Focus this month: From our dear friend and colleague in ministry, Mike Gaston, come insights on the "Intentional Sabbath." I have a hunch that for many of us (me too!) a closer honoring of the Sabbath would bring tremendous blessing. Thanks Mike for sharing...

Have a good month.

Ken Royer, for your Link Care Friends

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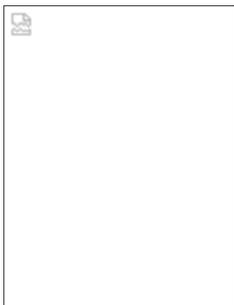


INTENTIONAL SABBATH

by Mike Gaston, Outreach Pastor

Grace Baptist Church, Santa Clarita, California.

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I have begun practicing a new spiritual discipline that has enriched me more than just about anything else I've done over the last 10 years. It's new to me, but definitely not new to God's program. In fact, it's as old as the seventh day of creation. I have become a Sabbath-keeper.

Let me explain how I got here. First, you should know that I have always been an advocate of the day off. In a vocation where some see vacations and days off as somehow suspect, I have always pushed myself and my ministry colleagues to see our lives as a marathon rather than a sprint, and to pace ourselves along the way. In each season of my ministry, overseas and stateside, it has been rare for me to go even a couple of weeks without a day off.



We all know that days off tend to fill up quickly with bill-paying, errands, and home-based responsibilities, and on the occasion when I didn't have lots of those on my plate, they tended to become opportunities to "veg" in front of the TV. Although they usually provided a valuable break from the day-to-day ministry, and could even be physically restful, they didn't provide spiritual refreshment and rejuvenation. I wasn't disappointed in that, because that was not my expectation for my day off. My spiritual refreshment tended to come more from corporate activities like worship services, and maybe from the occasional personal quiet time (which was rarely an area of my life in which I was especially satisfied). I had a vague sense that something needed to change, but didn't know what to do about it.

I was first challenged about this when Grace sent me and Murf to a pastors' retreat center in 2008 as we grieved the loss of four family members in 6 months. The Sabbath Rest track at this self-directed retreat caught my eye and seemed to be what we needed, and some reading during that week brought me to an important conclusion: while I was good at taking days off, I was lousy at Sabbath. I returned home determined to change things. But predictably (and sadly), I fell quickly back into the same routines.

We went to a similar retreat center last Fall, and once again I was challenged about the lack of true Sabbath rest in my life. I felt like I was being given a second chance to take action. I couldn't be guaranteed a third one, and since I was on sabbatical and knew that it would never be easier for me to establish new habits, I came home determined to embrace Sabbath in ways I never had before.

I am now five months into what has so far been a successful (and unexpectedly exciting) rebuilding of my weekly schedule. I have been intentional about Sabbath observance on a weekly basis since last November. I'm not overly attached to a specific time period -- I rarely have a full day, and tend to be satisfied with a half-day (though my current reading is challenging that idea, and I may change my mind). Nor am I attached to a specific day of the week -- I try to make it happen on Saturday or Sunday, but have used Monday several times after full weekends that don't provide the necessary time.

My Sabbath so far has taken the form of Sabbath Hikes, an idea I got from a book by Eugene Peterson called Working the Angles. I pack a lunch in a backpack, bring along my camera and an iPod with over 400 worship songs, find a trailhead near Santa Clarita, and basically take a walk with God. I find that either the music or nature, or both, bring me to a place of worship and communion with God on a depth that I rarely find in the rest of my life. These worship walks have become a place for me to meet God, enjoy Him, revel in what is true and good about Him, remind myself why I love and serve Him, and basically revitalize my spiritual life. I find myself looking forward to them the way a kid looks forward to an outing with his dad!

Let me point out a couple of key ideas that I have learned as I have walked this path (pun intended):

Sabbath rest is a gift from God, not a duty or an obligation.

Jesus said "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). There is something in it for us, something that we need. We are designed to crave it, the same way we crave food and water. When we deprive ourselves of it, we cut ourselves off from a gift that God designed for our good and for His glory. We are poorer when we neglect Sabbath, and richer when we honor it.

Sabbath reminds us of who we are, and who God is.

All of the reading I have done on the Sabbath points this out. We live under the self-centered illusion that our world needs us to be active and productive 24/7, that we are somehow too important to disconnect and stop. Sabbath reminds us how silly that is. Mark Buchanan in The Rest of God gives this definition of Sabbath: "imitating God, so that we stop trying to be God."

Sabbath is more about what you do than what you don't do.

Some who grew up in strict Sabbath-observing families tend to have negative memories of long, boring Sundays with nothing to do because everything is forbidden. It's true that a Sabbath day is meant to be different from the others, but it can be different in what you add to your day, not just in what you take away. I hike, others read, make music, take naps, enjoy family and friends -- the options are many, as long as the goals of rest, spiritual reflection and refreshment, and connection with God are kept in the forefront. I find I need to resist the Pharisee in me who wants to make the Sabbath all about rules and prohibitions -- I try to make it about God and His gifts in my life.

Sabbath rest impacts the whole week, not just the day.

One rabbi encourages his people to spend the first part of the week basking in the glow of the previous Sabbath, and the second half of the week eagerly anticipating and planning for the next one. That has become my experience, as the delight of my Sabbath hikes splashes out into the rest of my week. Like the mud that is still on my shoes from last Sunday's post-rain hike, the benefits of that time with God have stuck with me. And I've spent the last couple of days eagerly anticipating my next walk with God this afternoon.

I've found these words of Mark Buchanan to be true: "Sabbath is the stranger you've always known. It's the place of homecoming that you've rarely or never visited, but which you've been missing forever. You recognize it the moment you set eyes on it. It's the gift that surprises you, not by its novelty, but by its familiarity ... It's been asleep in you all this time, waiting for the right kiss to wake it."

I highly recommend Buchanan's book as a great resource for potential Sabbath observers. And I hope that this short article will be the "right kiss" that will wake in you a desire to begin to experience the Sabbath rest that God designed for you.