

Our Advent Sabbath retreat continues.

On the seventh day, God rests. Jewish texts prohibit thirty-nine specific acts during Sabbath. If God could rest in creating the universe, God's people could rest. Tasks such as sowing, plowing, reaping, threshing and winnowing are prohibited. So are grinding, sifting, kneading and baking.

But over time, the Sabbath has become overly legalistic; not only for our Jewish brothers and sisters, but also for Christians. Rather than a time of sensuality and delight, it became restrictive and depressing. Sabbath restrictions were so severe that some actually prefer to work rather than be forced into such dry and gloomy rest.

Let's get beyond the legalism is the ideal that by saying no to work, something else happens; deep permission arises for other things to happen. When we cease our daily labor, other things — love, friendship, prayer, touch, singing, rest — can arise in the space created by our rest. Walking with a friend, reciting a prayer, caring for children, sharing bread and wine with family and neighbors — these are the intimate graces that need precious time and attention.

But as Jesus reminds us, "we were not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath is made for us." The God who made the Sabbath is not a cranky school master, always forbidding, coercing obedience and watching. No, our Sabbath comes from a kind, wise teacher who does not like to see us suffer. Let me make it easier for you, God says. If you work all week and forget to rest, you will become brittle and hard, and lose precious nourishment and joy. Forgetting the Sabbath is like forgetting to unwrap the most beautiful gift under the tree.

Our readings this weekend speak of joy. Joy that is found in our Advent Sabbath. This time invites us slow down, to rest. It reminds us of those we love, our family, our friends, our God. It invites us to be awed by the natural wonder all around us. In this Season, God invites us to remember to rest. God invites us to not waste this wonderful gift. So

God has given us the command: Remember to rest. This is not a life-style suggestion, but a commandment — as important as not stealing, not murdering, and not lying. But it is also an invitation to have fun and play.

So, a couple of suggestions for this week, but again remember, no guilt -- just invitations. Remember to play. Remember to bless. Remember to show love. Remember to eat with those you love. Remember to take comfort in this gift of sacred rest. Set aside some time this week for play. Set aside a regular period for enjoying your children, your friends, your spouse, your parents. Advent is a season of delight. Nourish that delight and engage in “purposeless” enjoyment of one-another. Harvest the sweet fruits of life!

Prepare an Advent meal, alone or with family or friends. Shop for the ingredients, choose things that bring you the most pleasure. This food is not so much about survival as for sheer, savory delight. Put on some music, turn off the phone. Take as much time as you need. Decorate the table, light the advent wreath. Say a prayer. Give thanks to God. Enjoy!

Based upon *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*, by Wayne Muller.  
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