

Sabbath and Longevity in Global Work and Vocational Ministry

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2022

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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April 20, 2022

Abstract

Sabbath is a scripturally mandated pattern that was established by God in Genesis and continues to be practiced in vocational ministry, global ministry and in society as a whole. In past ethnographic research, there is a correlation between practice of Sabbath and a simultaneous decrease of attrition and increase of effectivity of ministry in global work. The same impact of Sabbath practice is also found for those in vocational ministry. The question is how the practice of Sabbath impacts the ministry and longevity of vocational ministry work. By partaking in Sabbath practice, both weekly and longer periods of sabbatical, rates of burnout and attrition decrease, and the effectivity of ministry increases. A connection was found between practice of Sabbath (whether on the mission field or vocationally in the States) and more efficient overall ministry.

Introduction

Sabbath is a concept that is manifest all throughout Scripture, from the Old Testament to the New Testament. God establishes Sabbath in the first pages; in the Creation account, “God blessed the seventh day by resting.”¹ He implements Sabbath as law in Old Testament living and continues to model it as Jesus walks human life in the Gospels. As heavily as this concept is seen in Scripture, it must have weighty implications in the lives of believers. This seeks to understand the impact that this scripturally mandated rhythm has on the lives of vocational ministry workers and their ministry itself; it will also build upon prior ethnographic research that sought to find the correlation between the regular practice of Sabbath and the longevity and effectiveness of global work by comparing the larger bibliographic research with past ethnographic study. These will be compared to determine the impact of regular practice of Sabbath in global contexts versus vocational ministry.

Throughout church history, keeping of Sabbath has been heavily discussed and implemented. Sabbath is seen in the lives of the apostles to the beginnings of Protestant Christianity and into the twenty-first century. This pattern is seen today in not only the church but in many aspects of human culture as well. The author of this thesis has done prior research regarding Sabbath and global work asking the question, “How does the practice of Sabbath create longevity among global workers?”² In understanding Sabbath principles and the ways in which Sabbath is seen to affect many different avenues of both secular and religious lives, the

¹ Barbara Cordelia Hart Yorks, “The Understanding and Practice of Sabbath,” (Order no. 3481925, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2011), 17.

² Delaney Schauble, “Sabbath and Longevity in Global Work,” (Presented at Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, April 30, 2021), 8, unpublished.

question remains: How does practice of Sabbath impact those in vocational ministry and is this consistent with the prior study regarding Sabbath in global work?

This research observes Sabbath practice in vocational ministry and the secular world in general (including the workplace, health, and other religious settings). This research utilizes literature to delve into the topic of Sabbath and the way that it is practiced in the United States, more specifically focusing on vocational ministry. It asks, “How does the practice of Sabbath impact the ministry and longevity of vocational ministry work?” In utilizing sources such as biblical scholars and biblical journals, research will be compiled to discover themes regarding Sabbath. The research will conclude with a comparison of the themes of increased effectiveness and decreased burnout and attrition due to Sabbath practice among vocational workers and prior findings involving global workers.

The Study of Sabbath

Defining Sabbath

Sabbath is a general term that can refer to a variety of specific practices. *The Macmillan Encyclopedia* includes multiple definitions of Sabbath and the way it is practiced. To begin, “In Judaism, [Sabbath is] the seventh day of the week, ordained by God in the Pentateuch as a day of rest for the benefit of his people.”³ The role of Sabbath for Orthodox Jews is “the sabbath is a day on which no work or casual activity is allowed.”⁴ Lastly, “The early Christian Church soon substituted Sunday as the Christian day of rest and worship because Christ’s resurrection took place on the first day of the (Jewish) week.”⁵ Wirzba describes deeper emotional and spiritual

³ Sabbath, *The Macmillan Encyclopedia*, London: Macmillan, 2003.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sabbath, *The Macmillan Encyclopedia*.

implications associated with Sabbath: “Rather than being simply a ‘break’ from frenetic, self-obsessed ways of living, the Sabbath is a discipline and practice in which we ask, consider, and answer the questions that will lead us into a complete and joyful life.”⁶ John Mark Comer, former pastor of Bridgetown Church, explains that “The word *Sabbath* comes to us from the Hebrew Shabbat. The word literally means ‘to stop.’ The Sabbath is a day to stop: stop working, stop wanting, stop worry, just stop.”⁷

Practicing Sabbath can look different ways for different people, such as a day in nature or a day without the use of technology. In his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, the pastor and author John Mark Comer talks about the unique ways in which his family practices their day of Sabbath rest. During the day that they choose to set aside as Sabbath, they put their phones in a basket and keep them away in a cabinet. In this way, they are detaching from many of the demands of life in order to better engage in intentional rest. This does not mean that Sabbath and the use of technology are mutually exclusive; that is the specific choice of Pastor Comer and his family. One parish pastor describes that “A way to practice Sabbath, especially for busy young families is to insist on protecting and sanctifying the family meal. Parents can be intentional about blocking out those activities that interfere with the family preparing food and enjoying it together and perhaps sharing it with others.”⁸ Yet, at the same time, others choose not to cook on days they practice Sabbath. Extended periods of Sabbath could look like a week off work or vocational ministry, but that does not mean that spontaneous ministry cannot take place. The

⁶ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 26.

⁷ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Great Britain: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019), 112.

⁸ Pamela Fickenscher and Norman Wirzba, “Sabbath for pastors,” *The Christian Century* 122, no. 23 (Nov. 15, 2005): 43.

principles of Sabbath are the same, but the tangible practices of it differ for each individual church, family and person.

Sabbath in Scripture

Sabbath was created in Genesis 2⁹, when God rested on the seventh day of Creation. “On the seventh day, God stepped off the Director’s throne and fell in love with the world.”¹⁰ This is the first time Sabbath is practiced or spoken of, and it set the pattern and precedent for the way in which God’s people should live. Bernstein gives insight to this original time of Sabbath rest: “While God’s work yields tangible gifts on the first six days (earth, water, planets, fish), god’s rest on the seventh day yields intangible gifts: time and rest to enjoy the creation.”¹¹ Sabbath is later seen in the lives of the Israelites, a reminder that they have specifically been chosen to be God’s people. “In a discussion of Sabbath in Exodus, God says that the Sabbath is a sign between Himself and His people: ‘You shall surely observe My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.’ (Exodus 31:13, New International Version).”¹²

In prior ethnographic research, many global workers pointed to Genesis 2 immediately when asked about where they saw the model of Sabbath in Scripture. Mike Chip, a global worker in Western Europe explains that “It is not necessarily that God was tired, but He was enjoying and appreciating His creation.’ He likened this to taking a day to reconnect, another assertion

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the English Standard Version.

¹⁰ Ellen Bernstein, “Celebrating God, Celebrating Earth: Psalms, Sabbath, and Holy Days,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37, no. 5 (October 2010): 382.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jama L. White, Amanda M. Blackburn and Mary K. Plisco, “Rest as a Virtue: Theological Foundations and Application to Personal and Professional Life,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 43, no. 2 (Summer, 2015): 100-101.

many global workers made when describing their understanding of Sabbath.”¹³ Understanding these principles is instrumental to the ways in which many of these global workers practiced Sabbath, and similarly, greatly impact how those in vocational ministry practice Sabbath.

In the Old Testament, Sabbath describes a day, a season, and even an entire year of rest. In Genesis 2, Sabbath is first introduced. Verse 2 states “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all that he had done.” Hamilton describes that “By virtue of being sanctified, one day of rest is set apart from six days of activity. It is divine designation alone that marks the seventh day as holy.”¹⁴ Then God, in “Having completed the work of creation, God ‘rested’ or ‘ceased from work.’ Then He determined to set aside that seventh day as a special day for Himself. His resting became the basis for the commandment to man to observe the Sabbath.”¹⁵ He commands that they “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...” (Exodus 20:8-10a). Bernstein describes this fourth commandment: “Observe the Sabbath; keep it holy by insuring its integrity, its wholeness.”¹⁶ Leviticus even discusses the land that grows crops requiring a Sabbath: “but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard” (Leviticus 25:4). Sabbath practice in the Old Testament is structural for the lives of God’s people.

¹³ Schauble, “Sabbath and Longevity in Global Work,” 12, unpublished.

¹⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 143.

¹⁵ Howard F. Vos, *Genesis- Everyday Bible Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 20.

¹⁶ Bernstein, “Celebrating God, Celebrating Earth: Psalms, Sabbath, and Holy Days,” 383.

Jesus Himself practiced Sabbath in moments when he stepped away from the crowd, and even those close to Him, to pray and sit with the Father. Luke 5:16 states that “he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.” In Matthew 26, hours before His crucifixion, Jesus is alone in the garden praying and pleading before the Lord. Wilson and Hoffman outlines the model that Jesus invites His disciples into for rest as well; He calls them to retreat “By yourselves to a quiet place.’ In the midst of a strenuous day of ministry, Jesus encouraged his disciples not to neglect their own personal needs... caring for ourselves is actually caring for the temple of the Holy Spirit within us (1 Corinthians 6:19).¹⁷ These are just a few of the places where the life of Jesus demonstrated the act and value of practicing Sabbath rest.

The underlying principle of Sabbath is this: Rest from work is required to move forward in work that is more efficient, effective, and honoring to the Lord. The day of rest was originally about worship: “Ultimately it became a day of positive worship of the Deity, characterized not only by complete abstention from all ordinary occupations and activities but also by assemblage in temple or synagogue and sacrifice or prayer or ritual observance there.”¹⁸ The Israelites had to take a day of rest for the Lord to remind them of His role as Provider and Sustainer. The fields had to take a year of rest every cycle to be more fertile for future crops.¹⁹ In this same way, believers need time away from work so that they may live and work in ministry in a more effective manner. Westermann discusses the importance of Sabbath institution in the lives of believers: “The sanctification of the Sabbath institutes an order for humankind according to

¹⁷ Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Failure: A ShepherdCare Guide for Pastors, Ministers and Other Caregivers* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 125.

¹⁸ “Sabbath,” in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4 (New York/Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 135.

¹⁹ Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 135.

which time is divided into time and holy time...By sanctifying the seventh day God instituted a polarity between the everyday and the solemn, between days of work and days of rest, which was to be determinative for human existence.”²⁰

Sabbath in Society

While Sabbath is a concept that finds its origin in Scripture, there are holistic benefits to it as well. Sabbath, whether for spiritual reasons or an intentional time of rest aside from work, has mental, psychological, and physical benefits and implications as well. The term often used to describe extended Sabbath in church settings is sabbatical; similarly, this is a concept that is often utilized in the workplace: the concept of vacation. Jessica de Bloom makes the point that “Participants’ health and well-being improved during vacation on five indicators: health status, mood, tension, energy level and satisfaction.”²¹ In further studies, it is seen that even short periods of rest or fun are beneficial to an individual’s health. A study describes that, “Inspection of regression coefficients showed that a high amount of time spent on work-related activities had a negative impact on an individual’s well-being before going to sleep, whereas time spent on low-effort, social, and physical activities had a positive impact on well-being.”²² While not exactly Sabbath, these practices of rest and vacation in the secular world represent sabbath-like principles. This is an addition in reviewing the literature, as similar benefits are seen from both secular sabbath-like practices and purposeful practice of Sabbath in vocational ministry and religious circles.

²⁰ Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 171.

²¹ Jessica de Bloom et al., “Effects of Vacation from Work on Health and Well-being: Lots of Fun, Quickly Gone,” *Work and Stress* 24, no. 2 (04, 2010).

²² Sabine Sonnetag. “Work, Recovery Activities, and Individual Well-Being: A Diary Study,” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 6 (3, 2001): 203, Doi:10.137/1076-8998.6.3.196.

Sabbath exists in society in ways that have become so natural and expected that the principle of it is often forgotten. For example, mail is not delivered on Sundays. Originally, “The early nineteenth century saw a nationwide campaign to end postal activity on Sundays.”²³ While this was not immediately effective, it began movement towards practices that would one day come to fruition. Chick-fil-a is a well-known Christian, fast food organization, and they are known for being closed on Sundays. Many privately owned businesses, even those that do not identify as Christian, choose to close on Sundays and give their employees the day off. Sabbath is often imbedded into the fabric of society in ways that are so second-nature they can be so easily overlooked. The Judeo-Christian influence on this society has often led to practice of Sabbath without the spiritual meaning behind it.

In the history of Sabbath in society, many Christians fought to have this sacred day.

According to the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*,

Founded in 1828, the general Union for Promoting the Observance of the Christian Sabbath was a national organization that promoted Sabbatarianism through publications such as... one, which consists of a printed address and the minutes of its 1828 meeting. Although the General Union ceased to exist in 1832, its brief existence served as an example to statewide organizations such as the Virginia Society that picked up its mantle and worked for the sanctification of the Sabbath. (*Virginia Historical Society*)²⁴

Sabbath has not always been as established into culture and everyday life as it is today; the implications of the work done in the early 1800s to honor the Sabbath day and this intentional practice are seen throughout the pages of this research. Many in the country’s religious history fought to honor the Sabbath, and this reveals many of the implications of those efforts.

²³ Forrest L. Marion, “All That Is Pure in Religion and Valuable in Society,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 109, no. 2 (2001): 190.

²⁴ Marion, “All That Is Pure in Religion and Valuable in Society,” 197.

Principles of Sabbath

In a statement that encompasses Sabbath, Childers notes that “Sabbath rest was embedded in the religious and cultic observance of time...Sabbath as a practice was entrenched into the nature and fabric of God’s intention for Israel’s life together with God, others, and Creation.”²⁵ Bass emphasizes that “The Christian practice of keeping sabbath embodies a theology of creation, liberation, and resurrection. Keeping Sabbath forms persons and communities in faith and fosters resistance to distorted ways of living and inadequate views of human identity.”²⁶ Further, “In contrast to a single ‘act’ or even an ongoing ‘activity’ or ‘discipline,’ a Christian practice... is encompassing enough to address a need that is fundamental to human existence as such-in the case of Sabbath observance, the need for rest and communion with God-in ways that reflect God’s purposes for mankind.”²⁷ Philo, a Jewish philosopher, sees “sabbath rest as of the highest importance”²⁸ This is a weighty topic that has not been taken lightly in history, and the importance of it continues to be seen in many different avenues of life and religion.

The necessity of Sabbath is a point that cannot be emphasized enough. John Mark Comer points to a description of the necessity of Sabbath: “The Korean-born German philosopher Byung-Chul Han ends his book *The Burnout Society* with a haunting observation of most people

²⁵ Jeremiah V. Childers "A Reintroduction of Sabbath as a Biblical Practice for the Spiritual Formation of Inman First Baptist Church Inman, South Carolina," Order No. 10792041, Gardner-Webb University, 2018: 38.

²⁶ Dorothy Bass, “Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest: A Journal of Bible and Theology,” *Interpretation* 59, no. 1 (01, 2005), 25.

²⁷ Bass, “Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest: A Journal of Bible and Theology,” 27.

²⁸ Heather A. McKay, “The Sabbath as a Day of Worship: The Evidence Prior,” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1992), 109.

in the Western world: ‘They are too alive to die, and too dead to live.’”²⁹ Byung-Chul Han describes that “The Sabbath, too—a word that originally meant *stopping* [*aufhören*—is a day of not-to...a day free of all *in-order-to*, of all care.”³⁰ Sabbath is an invitation to slow down in order that life may be enjoyed more fully. Comer points directly to Scripture as he discusses his “favorite invitation of Jesus”³¹ in Matthew 11:28; Jesus says “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” John Mark Comer continues to point to Scripture and the life of Jesus as a model of the necessity of rest as well as the fullness of life that results from proper Sabbath.

While it is seen that rest is beneficial and holds positive implications for every human, there is an aspect of Sabbath unique to those walking with the Lord. Sabbath stems out of a supernatural and divine creation, and there is certainly an aspect of Sabbath that supersedes the natural and impacts the spiritual. Sherman describes it in this way: “Observing Sabbath affirms that God remains Lord over all time, so that our competing and often conflicting secular understandings of time are shown to be encompassed by a larger, divine purpose and goal. For Christians, practicing Sabbath rest is not a spiritual exercise in a temporal vacuum, but rather an eschatological gift that actually anchors our time.”³² There are instrumental aspects of Sabbath that can only be understood on a spiritual level, because they are, in their nature and genesis, spiritual and divine. Bass describes these deeper spiritual aspects: “good Sabbaths make good Christians by regularly reminding us of God’s creative, liberating, and redeeming presence, not

²⁹ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 17.

³⁰ Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015): 33-34.

³¹ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 17.

³² Robert Sherman, “Reclaimed by Sabbath Rest: A Journal of Bible and Theology,” *Interpretation* 59, no. 1 (01, 2005): 50.

only in words but also through a practice we do together in response for that presence.”³³ There is a renewal and rest for one’s spirit in the practice of Sabbath, but the depth of this is only experienced by those that are practicing Sabbath with the Lord, because it is not an exercise to be done and moved on from; it is a lifestyle of resting in the Lord.

There is a dynamic distinction between legalism regarding Sabbath and the biblical practice of Sabbath, and this distinction must be addressed. Throughout church history, Sabbath has often been associated with the strict rules of what you *cannot* do on Sabbath. One journal describes that “As a result of this strict and threatening regimentation, Sabbath-keeping often became a matter of observing a set of rules rather than an opportunity to grow in faith and experience abundant living.”³⁴ This same legalism is seen in Scripture and especially highlighted in Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisees. In multiple instances, such as Matthew 12 and Mark 3, the Pharisees seek to catch Jesus doing something “wrong” on the Sabbath. Jesus challenged their legalism in Mark 3:4 when he asked them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” Conversely to this legalistic perspective, “Biblical texts, in which the institution of Sabbath is discussed, describe the Sabbath as a divine gift that empowers humanity to continually grow deeper into the relationship.”³⁵ Throughout history, Sabbath has often become about strict rules, but the principle of Sabbath is that of resting and honoring the Lord (not that of legalism).

³³ Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith a Way of Life for a Searching People*, (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1998): 88.

³⁴ Pieter G. R. de Villiers and George Marchinkowski, “Guidelines for the Spiritual Practice of Sabbath-Keeping,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 77, no. 2 (2021): 3.

³⁵ Villiers and George Marchinkowski, “Guidelines for the Spiritual Practice of Sabbath-Keeping,” 3.

Holistic Rest

As mentioned above, Sabbath is a concept that has infiltrated the secular world as well as Christian and religious circles. There are many studies looking at different aspects of this kind of rest that will be further explored. While Sabbath was introduced in Genesis, as a principle and pattern created by the Lord, a similar concept has evolved in society that can be described as rest, time off, vacation, and the like. Research has been conducted which demonstrates how effectiveness and efficiency in work improve when this intentional rest is engaged in. De Bloom notes that when rest and work are properly balanced, factors such as mood, fatigue, energy level and sleep quality fluctuate accordingly.³⁶ One study looked at over thirteen hundred individuals and how the frequency of their practice of Sabbath impacted their spiritual health as well as their overall health. Their results showed that “Participants who reported keeping Sabbath three to four days/month were significantly more likely to report higher spiritual well-being scores... and quality of life scores... and were more likely to possess flourishing mental health.”³⁷ Additionally, those practicing Sabbath at this frequency reported lower levels of depression, anxiety and burnout (including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment).³⁸

The principle of Sabbath and its benefits can extend to the secular world as well. In the similar vein of rest and the workplace, one study noted that vacation or time off alone was not a guarantee for better health, rather the way that one chooses to utilize their time off has the most

³⁶ Jessica de Bloom et al., “Effects of Vacation from Work on Health and Well-being: Lots of Fun, Quickly Gone,” 196.

³⁷ Holly Hough et al., “Relationships between Sabbath Observance and Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Health in Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 68, no. 2 (04, 2019): 183.

³⁸ Hough et al., “Relationships between Sabbath Observance and Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Health in Clergy,” 183.

impact. They explain that “Having enough time for one’s self and one’s needs, exercising, getting good sleep, and socializing in a warm vacation climate facilitate recuperation, especially in vacationers reporting higher levels of prevacation mental strain.”³⁹ Dein points out that “From a psychological point of view, rituals reduce anxiety and uncertainty...create meaning in life, foster personal identity and overcome ambivalence and ambiguity.”⁴⁰ Once again, in all of the studies represented, this biblical concept of intentional rest is being implemented in secular circles, and the benefits of this rest that are seen in Scripture are present throughout these studies and results as well.

An interesting, and relatively new perspective has arisen regarding Sabbath and its relationship to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yahya Wijaya, at Duta Wacana Christian University in Indonesia, discusses the relevance of religious traditions such as Sabbath in a world of the COVID-19 pandemic. Wijayna points to the periods of mitigation and quarantine as almost forced versions of Sabbath, although not all individuals are religious and recognize it as such. In looking at these two factors, Wijayna concluded that “Pandemic and religious traditions of self-restraint should be comprehended as a synergetic collaboration between nature and culture, a warning about the vices of productivism, and an appeal for a more just and balanced yet realistic lifestyle.”⁴¹

³⁹ Strauss-Blasche, Gerhard. “Effect of Vacation on Health: Moderating Factors of Vacation Outcome.” *Journal of Travel Medicine*. 12, no. 2 (2005): 100.

⁴⁰ Simon Dein and Kate M. Loewenthal, “The Mental Health Benefits and Costs of Sabbath Observance among Orthodox Jews,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no.4 (12, 2013): 1383.

⁴¹ Yahya Wijaya, “Sabbath, Nyepi, and Pandemic: The Relevance of Religious Traditions of Self-Restraint for Living with the ‘New Normal,’” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 34, no. 4 (November 2021): 543.

Sabbath in Religious Circles

Since Sabbath was introduced first by God as a model to His Creation, the assumption would be that the practice of Sabbath would have the most drastic impacts on those practicing it purposefully, in the way that it was taught. The general principle of Sabbath (which is set aside rest from work) has beneficial impact on those who set aside rest in any way but not necessarily for the intentions of being obedient to the Lord; consequently, how does the practice of Sabbath for believers and those in ministry practically impact those lives?

Sabbath is a pattern, a regular, consistent practice of purposeful rest. Again, this is often weekly practice, but it can also refer to regular patterns of extended rest (such as bi-yearly sabbaticals or a week off every three months). The specifics of the ways in which Sabbath is practiced are not as significant as the practice itself and the effects. Dein speaks specifically of Orthodox Jews and their practice of Sabbath, which they refer to as “Shabbos.” One informant described Shabbos as a “withdrawal, disengagement from the mundane and the pursuit of the spiritual plane. On Shabbos I am not trying to expand my empire. I am stepping back, appreciating what I have.”⁴² This study on how Orthodox Jews practiced Shabbos showed an increase in relational depth: “the freedom from work and weekday commitments, and the involvement in celebratory meals with family and/or friends was said by many to improve and deepen the quality of family and other social relationships.”⁴³ Here it is seen that not only the personal mental and spiritual well-being is impacted by Sabbath practice but the horizontal, community relationships as well.

⁴² Dein and Loewenthal, “The Mental Health Benefits and Costs of Sabbath Observance among Orthodox Jews,” 1386.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1388.

In prior ethnographic research, the author's research pointed to a much lower chance of burnout for global workers when they were actively partaking in weekly and extended Sabbath. Burnout can be described as "a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy."⁴⁴ "Some individuals pointed out that extended periods of Sabbath have protected them from ensuing burnout that was progressing towards more attrition."⁴⁵ One of the informants of this study shared a personal story regarding this. James Sanchez, a global worker in Western Europe, was on the verge of burnout when a woman that he went to church with offered him money and encouraged him to take an extended period of Sabbath.⁴⁶ In practicing this several-week, extended period of Sabbath (or sabbatical), Sanchez was able to avoid a potentially devastating burnout. This time of Sabbath also increased the longevity and effectivity of the ministry that Sanchez was directly involved in among churches and unbelievers in Western Europe. Burnout is not only a phenomenon on the field in the context of global work, yet it is prevalent and relevant in vocational ministry among church leaders and ministry workers.

One dissertation was written specifically on burnout cases among church leaders, specifically clergy-those in vocational ministry. This research was put together as a result of the fact that since prior to the early 2000s, "scholars have recorded increased workload, unending conflict, and high levels of stress in clergy across a wide range of denominations, which has resulted in high levels of burnout."⁴⁷ Fee outlines connections between burnout and higher

⁴⁴ Scott Dunbar et al., "Calling, caring, and connecting: burnout in Christian ministry," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* (2020).

⁴⁵ Schauble, "Sabbath and Longevity in Global Work," 14, unpublished.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁴⁷ Craig Fee, "Causes of Burnout among Church Leaders: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Pastors" (Order No. 10792545, Walden University, 2018), 77.

mortality rates, heaving drinking, depression and more.⁴⁸ Another study describes that “approximately 65% of the clergy in their study were either suffering from burnout or on the verge of burnout.”⁴⁹ Swoboda contrasts burnout and Sabbath explaining that while Sabbath was the model the Lord created humans to partake in, burnout is the opposite.⁵⁰ He summarizes this when he says, “The result of our Sabbath amnesia is that we have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history.”⁵¹ He speaks of Sabbath amnesia in that we have forgotten and do not practice this Sabbath principle, so these are the implications to follow our forgetting.

Burnout is not a favorable experience, so how does Sabbath keeping affect this phenomenon of growing rates of burnout? According to MacKenzie, pastors experience burnout “similar to the levels of those in the social work or teaching fields but at higher burnout rates than counselors.”⁵² This author’s previous ethnographic research supported this idea that burnout often leads to decreased ministry. Mackenzie’s research shows “45.5 percent of pastors say that they have experienced... burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.”⁵³ It is seen here that in vocational ministry as well as global work, burnout can lead to having to step away from ministry, which ultimately decreases the effectiveness of the ministry.

⁴⁸ Fee, “Causes of Burnout among Church Leaders: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Pastors,” 54.

⁴⁹ Scott Dunbar et al., “Calling, caring, and connecting: burnout in Christian ministry.”

⁵⁰ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵² Michael MacKenzie, *Don’t Blow up Your Ministry: Defuse the Underlying Issues That Take Pastors Down*, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 37.

⁵³ MacKenzie, *Don’t Blow up Your Ministry: Defuse the Underlying Issues That Take Pastors Down*, 40.

There is a present debate regarding Sabbath in religious circles that has to do with the specific calendar day it is practiced on. In a study relating to Seventh-Day Adventist pastors, the issue of the specific day of Sabbath arose. Many individuals of this affiliation hold to the belief that Sabbath *must* be practiced on the traditional Friday to Saturday of Sabbath: Friday evening to Saturday afternoon. This need for specificity provided stress when it came to partaking in Sabbath. “So on the one hand the Sabbath was restful, but on the other hand it was stressful. Likewise, the Sabbath was both energizing and draining; it was a delight and it was drudgery.”⁵⁴ In the ethnographic research previously cited, one missionary, James Wyatt had a unique insight regarding the specific day of practicing Sabbath. He discussed Genesis 2 and points out that the concept of rest had nothing to do with days or weeks. Wyatt talked through the six days of creation and likened them to being the inauguration of God’s temple. “Then, when talking about Sabbath, it can be seen as talking about a temple...’The Sabbath is when [God is] done building the temple, and now He’s moved in and is beginning to do the work He’s been intending to do all along for the temple.’”⁵⁵ From this global worker’s standpoint, the focus is on the principle of Sabbath, not the calendar date that it takes place.

Many studies point to practice of Sabbath and patterns such as these as things that decrease burnout: “Chandler’s study demonstrates the positive role of Christian spiritual practices on pastoral burnout.”⁵⁶ Another interesting preliminary study “suggest(s) that there may be an association between Sabbath keeping and better health. Anson and Anson (2000, 2001) analyze recorded deaths of Israeli residents and found a significant reduction in the number of

⁵⁴ Erik C. Carter, "The Practice and Experience of the Sabbath among Seventh-Day Adventist Pastors" *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (02, 2013).

⁵⁵ Schauble, “Sabbath and Longevity in Global Work,” 13, unpublished.

⁵⁶ Scott Dunbar et al., “Calling, caring, and connecting: burnout in Christian ministry.”

deaths among Jews toward the weekend, culminating in fewer death on Saturday (Sabbath) and more deaths on Sunday.”⁵⁷ Another interesting study showed that the “Odds of obesity are 92% lower for pastors who take at least one day off each week.”⁵⁸ The study went on to show that the “Odds of obesity are two times lower for those who have been on sabbatical within the past ten years.”⁵⁹ It is notable that the pattern seen is consistent for both weekly Sabbath and extended periods of sabbatical.

Sabbath in Vocational Ministry

Sabbath has long been a practice among those in Christian circles. In *Subversive Sabbath*, A. J. Swoboda describes that

Historically, Christians have kept some form or another of the Sabbath for some two thousand years. But it has largely been forgotten by the church, which has uncritically mimicked the rhythms of the industrial and success-obsessed West. The result? Our road-weary, exhausted churches have largely failed to integrate Sabbath into their lives as vital elements of Christian discipleship.⁶⁰

Christianity is unique from other religions in this way. “We worship the God who invented the weekend... The biblical creation account essentially served as a theological rebuttal of all other ‘gods’ who never allowed anyone to rest. In a restless world, Yahweh *required* rest.”⁶¹ God created humans to require rest to function, so when they do not feed this innate need to rest, there are consequences and gaps that remain. To begin, burnout is often a crippling effect of a lack of Sabbath.

⁵⁷ Devon J. Superville, Kenneth I Pargament & Jerry W. Lee, “Sabbath Keeping and Its Relationships to Health and Well-Being: A Meditational Analysis,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 24, no. 3 (2014).

⁵⁸ “Why Protestant pastors need a Sabbath,” *Christianity Today* 59, no. 2 (Mar. 2015): 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

A friend communicated the necessity of Sabbath in vocational ministry when reflecting on a conversation with the CEO of an international, Christian ministry. This CEO discussed burnout she had seen in past leaders and noted that she was on a similar path. Sources have shown that in vocational ministry, “relational ministry workers may be at particular risk for developing burnout as a result of spending the majority of their time ministering to, or caring for, others.”⁶² In a vocation where the week is full of conference calls with field leaders, she found that the weekends could be a time for grant-writing and donor communications. She made the unexpected connection that in the year she spent the most hours working, she also had the *lowest* funds in all her tenure. In stepping back and implementing time to Sabbath, the ministry funds and effectiveness shifted in miraculous ways. In this testimony of someone in long-term vocational ministry, there appears to be a direct correlation between the practice of Sabbath and the longevity and effectiveness of this work being done.

Angela Reed noted that a “major concern for ministers is Sabbath-keeping and other time off,”⁶³ meaning this is something that they highly prioritize and value. While ministers work on the traditional Sabbath day, they place emphasis on setting aside a separate day of Sabbath rest for themselves. On top of weekly Sabbaths, Reed also went on to mention that the “Longer periods away from the church are fulfilled by sabbaticals.”⁶⁴ Many of these sources are pointing to both types of Sabbath: regular, weekly Sabbath and extended periods of sabbatical. In the ethnographic study, both regular and extended Sabbath were themes that emerged. One missionary in Europe discussed a period in her life where she was seeking clarity on steps

⁶² Candace Coppinger Pickett et. al, "Social Networks among Ministry Relationships: Relational Capacity, Burnout, & Ministry Effectiveness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 45, no. 2 (Summer, 2017).

⁶³ Angela Reed, “Rooted in Relationship: Longevity in Congregational Ministry,” *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 3 (August 2016): 313.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

forward in her life and ministry. Reed's supervisor suggested possibly taking a sabbatical, and during this year-long sabbatical, Jaime found great guidance into her next step after seventeen years of overseas ministry. Sevier describes that "most pastors who have taken sabbaticals find that they return to their churches physically refreshed and spiritually renewed in ways that a normal vacation cannot provide."⁶⁵ These consistent themes among vocational ministry and global work seem to point to the idea that a combination of both forms of Sabbath rest (regular and extended) is the most effective way to utilize this Sabbath rest. These practices prevent burnout attrition while simultaneously providing time for recharging and clarity.

Attrition is when someone leaves ministry for any reason, and attrition is often a result of burnout. As Sabbath and effect on ministry is being observed, its effect on longevity is also being observed. Pastors are leaving ministry by attrition, so is Sabbath something that can shift this pattern? Elkington states that "Statistics... indicate that three pastors leave the ministry in North America every day, and significant numbers experience ministry burnout."⁶⁶ The study Elkington discusses was conducted with 51 pastors all across Canada, Netherlands, France, Germany, Norway, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States.⁶⁷ In this study, statistics showed that "67% stated that they had faced exhaustion and sadness in their ministry tenure."⁶⁸ Another study regarding social networks and ministry showed that often in ministry,

⁶⁵ Melissa Bane Sevier, "The Healthy Practice of PASTORAL SABBATICALS," *Presbyterian Outlook*, (2017), 33.

⁶⁶ Robert Elkington, "Adversity in Pastoral Leadership: Are Pastors Leaving the Ministry in Record Numbers, and if so, Why?" *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013): 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

higher levels of burnout and lower levels of ministry effectiveness are directly related.⁶⁹ As referenced from the ethnography, it was found that “extended periods of sabbath have protected [global workers] from ensuing burnout that was progressing towards attrition.”⁷⁰ Clearly, attrition and burnout are a present factor in vocational ministry, and it has been seen throughout the pages of this research that increase in Sabbath directly correlates to decrease in burnout. Reed describes that “Sabbath and sabbaticals rank high on the list of recommended self-care practices enabling clergy to sustain ministry, especially in one context, over a long period of time.”⁷¹

Childress discusses a group of friends, six pastors, and their collective and unique practices of Sabbath. From men who led such different lives, congregations and stories, this article provided a lot of insight into the perspective and benefit of partaking in extended Sabbath. They discuss that the concept of Sabbath is difficult, because it takes a lot of faith to step away from their congregations and their church when there are always tasks to be done. One noted “I have learned, for example, that good sabbaths not only make good Christians; they make good pastors and good churches too. Practicing sabbath has allowed me to loosen my grip on running the church. It’s not my church anyway. It’s God’s church, and God and God’s people are perfectly capable of taking care of business.”⁷² In first investing time with the Lord, church leaders are able to more effectively lead the church that they are called to serve, trusting that the Lord is ultimately sovereign.

⁶⁹ Pickett et. al, "Social Networks among Ministry Relationships: Relational Capacity, Burnout, & Ministry Effectiveness."

⁷⁰ Schauble, “Sabbath and Longevity in Global Work,” 14, unpublished.

⁷¹ Angela Reed, “Introduction to Special Issue on Pastoral Longevity,” *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 3 (August 2016).

⁷² Childress, “Company of friends: six pastors make a sabbath.”

Final Comparison

It appears that among religious communities and in vocational ministry work, this pattern of Sabbath rest decreasing burnout remains consistent with the global findings. It is important to note that in the ethnography, there was a distinction noted in the circle of global work: “Much of the information in connection to protection from burnout directly adjoins to longer periods of sabbath: weeks or months of intentional rest.”⁷³ Many sources have pointed to increased rest and decrease in burnout from Sabbathing one day a week. Additionally, missionaries, such as Jaime Reed, suggested extended periods of Sabbath rest as instrumental in reducing burnout and ultimately attrition.⁷⁴

In the *Christian Education Journal*, Gallagher had incredible insight and research on this topic. “There are multiple factors that make pastoral and ministry workers at risk of burnout. Prolonged stress and fatigue are inherent in ministry and pastoral work, based on high relational stress, limited social support, isolation, unhealthy expectations, and ambiguity of the role.”⁷⁵ Gallagher points out that one of the unfortunate effects of burnout among pastors is an increase in attrition.⁷⁶ This remains constant with the author’s prior ethnographic research. This research concluded that in global work, higher levels of burnout increased risk of attrition. The ethnography noted that “the practice of Sabbath not only impacts the longevity of ministry but the ability to conduct ministry well. Several informants pointed to sabbath as a discipline that

⁷³ Schauble, “Sabbath and Longevity in Global Work,” 14, unpublished.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁵ Luisa J. Gallagher, “A Theology of Rest: Sabbath Principles for Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (04, 2019): 137.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

decreases the risk of burnout and preventable attrition.”⁷⁷ Gallagher’s article also was synonymous with the ethnographic study in that its conclusion showed that practice of Sabbath not only lowered rates of attrition and burnout, but it increased the effectiveness at which ministry was done: “In conclusion, a practice of Sabbath rhythm and a theology of rest can greatly impact how ministers approach their work, developing healthy ministry practices and strengthening their daily awareness of the presence of God.”⁷⁸ This theology of rest is one that reflects the biblical pattern of Sabbath in the regular life of a believer.

Conclusion

Sabbath is first introduced to the world in Genesis 2⁷⁹, is reinforced throughout the Old Testament law and practices, and is modeled in the life of Jesus through the Gospels. Jesus demonstrated Sabbath in the way He lived and sought solitude alone with the Father and in the way He shepherded His disciples to do the same. Sabbath was created by God, so in its origin it is supernatural. There is a spiritual aspect of Sabbath that is powerful and beneficial for those who practice it and are living as a Christ follower. Despite this supernatural facet of Sabbath, those who do not know the Lord can still benefit from these principles of rest. As Bass pointed out, this concept of Sabbath and rest “is encompassing enough to address a need that is fundamental to human existence.”⁸⁰ Humans were designed to need this rest, so those not walking with Jesus Christ can still benefit in their health, relationships, and mental health by partaking in this principle of set aside, intentional rest. Correlations are seen between improved mental health, longevity in life and the workplace, and improved work ethic when rest (a day off)

⁷⁷ Schauble, “Sabbath and Longevity in Global Work,” 10, unpublished.

⁷⁸ Gallagher, “A Theology of Rest: Sabbath Principles for Ministry,” 147.

⁷⁹ Francois P. Moller, “Three Perspectives on the Sabbath,” *Die Skriflig* 53, no.1 (2019).

⁸⁰ Dorothy Bass, “Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest: A Journal of Bible and Theology,” 25.

is practiced weekly. In religious circles not specific to Christianity, these same benefits are seen as well.

In conclusion, the findings are consistent with those of the former Sabbath and global work ethnography. When applied, this biblical principle of regular Sabbath practice reaps many of the same rewards in both global work and vocational ministry. Similarly, when Sabbath is neglected, many of the same pitfalls and consequences follow. For ministry workers, the regular practice of Sabbath, as well as taking extended periods of rest, decreases levels of burnout and rates of attrition. At the same time, engaging in these Sabbath practices increases the effectiveness of ministry, whether that is in a global context or in vocational ministry here in the United States. This research could be furthered by conducting interviews with vocational ministry workers, specifically with pastors, church staff and Christian non-profit employees. Gallagher describes that “rest brings renewed energy to the work of ministry professionals, and it is given to God’s followers as a divine gift. In the Kingdom of God work and rest are in harmony.”⁸¹ Whether in professional roles in ministry, living life as a Christ-follower or a human living in society, set aside Sabbath and intentional rest is shown to be beneficial to ministry, health, community, and the self. While this may present itself differently in practice, due to the differences in location and vocation, the underlying principles of rest and the implications of Sabbath are present across all areas of ministry.

⁸¹ Gallagher, “A Theology of Rest: Sabbath Principles for Ministry,” 142.

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