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Sabbath practice for Silicon Valley

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SABBATH PRACTICE

FOR SILICON VALLEY

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an exploration of the Protestant Work Ethic as experienced in the Silicon Valley of California and the impact that Sabbath practice may have on that community. The demanding schedules of this local culture push out many of the aspects of "normal" life, such as running errands, participating in social groups, family life, and even religious practice. Burnout is an ongoing problem in the high tech industry.

It is my position that engaging in Sabbath practice may be a blessing to this community by providing a balance of sacred time with the competitive demands of work life. As a United Methodist I am drawn to the tradition of small group ministry as the method for introducing this practice to the community. Within that covenanted community, the participants can learn about their inherent worth outside of the work they do and hopefully find Sabbath practice as a means of experiencing God's grace.

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Introduction

I serve a United Methodist Church in the heart of Silicon Valley. The community around me is filled with high tech workers and their families. People in this field are highly sought after for their unique skills and are often working in jobs that demand a great deal of them. In an industry where innovation is required to survive, there is a strong drive to compete at the highest level.

In the highly competitive technology sector of Silicon Valley business, working hard is most highly valued and is seen as a measure of character as well as the means to building a company. Executives and venture capitalists look for a work ethic that shows complete devotion to the work of the company. Anyone who does not show this complete devotion is likely to be replaced with someone who does.

The value placed on work in Silicon Valley reflects larger cultural attitudes towards work in American culture. This culture draws from the U.S. tradition of the Protestant Work Ethic, an ethic that says work is valuable not just for its practical product, but also for the life regulation it gives the worker. Hard work is valued for forming the hard worker and, therefore, competes with other ways to spend time. Silicon Valley takes this ethic to the point of competing not only with

hobbies and family time, but also with faith itself. Jobs in Silicon Valley are not simply a means to a paycheck. The jobs here are advertised as a way to change the world. Here, work is a source of life meaning.[1] Hard Work has become the religion of Silicon Valley.

This religion of Silicon Valley can be fulfilling for some of those working at particular positions within successful companies for a period of time. Silicon Valley's religion has serious blind spots, and not just for those outside the bubble of executives. Some do not find the kind of success they expect within the bubble. Being a start-up bought out by a big company is the ultimate dream of many in Silicon Valley, like winning the lottery—and the odds are about the same. "There's a .00006% chance of building a company that will grow to be worth more than a billion dollars. . . . And the probability of making nothing is 67%."[2] Many more will burn out from the stress of such a demanding environment.

A clear line exists between folks inside the tech industry and outside. If you leave the ranks of Silicon Valley executives, you leave the faith and your community. Many of the people here do not have extended family nearby, nor do

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[1] Carolyn Chen, *Work, Pray, Code: When Work Becomes a Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 4.

[2] David Friedberg, "There's a .00006% Chance of Building A Billion Dollar Company: How This Man Did It" interview with Review; https://review.firstround.com/Theres-a-00006-Chance-of-Building-a-Billion-Dollar-Company-How-This-Man-Did-It.

they have friends outside of their work. They typically lack connections to other organizations like faith communities. When they step outside the bubble, there is little social support system to carry them.

The religion of work in Silicon Valley is one that does not provide much room for prophetic voice, a core part of much religious practice. The focus for faith practice within the Silicon Valley work environment is on performance and what may enhance it. Companies in Silicon Valley "treat religious tradition—their practices, rituals, and teachings—as tools or technologies to optimize their work performance, like problem-solving apps."[3] Those religious leaders who choose to share their practices within companies must leave part of their witness at the door. "To sell a Buddhist product in tech's secular territories, they must pay a tariff: they must renounce meditation's association with Buddhism."[4] The prophetic voice of faith is not utilitarian for the company, so it is discouraged. It is that excluded prophetic voice that teaches about justice. It is that prophetic voice that calls on people to think beyond themselves.

This work culture leaves little time and energy for things outside of work, including community. "Work in Silicon Valley is what Lewis Coser calls a '*greedy*

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[3] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 131.

[4] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 162.

institution.' It vies for 'exclusive and undivided loyalty,' outmuscling family and religion when they get in its way."[5] Carolyn Chen found that "for 70% of my respondents, work is a vortex that devours everyone in its path."[6] Juliet Schor observes, "Many people would like to devote more time to their churches, get involved in their children's schools, coach a sports team, or help out at a soup kitchen."[7] Unfortunately, the demands of their work life just do not allow them to participate in the unpaid labor that nurtures the family and community. The paid labor pushes out everything else.

"When we take Sabbath seriously, we are taking community life seriously, and that implies a meaningful consideration of social reality."[8] When we do not have time for community, it becomes more challenging to connect to the social realities in our community and to advocate for those in need. Sabbath rest proclaims the value of life beyond work and the value of people outside the workplace.

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[5] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 40.

[6] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 43.

[7] Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: the Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books 1992), 161.

[8] Marva Dawn, "Sabbath Keeping and Social Justice," in *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend: Managing Time in a Global Culture*, ed. Edward O'Flaherty, S.J. & Rodney L. Petersen, with Timothy A. Norton (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 18.

In this environment we see the greatest wealth divide in society.[9] Silicon Valley has the highest number of extremely wealthy individuals. It also has the highest number of homeless residents. Poverty, especially lack of housing, is blooming in a place with more money than has ever been gathered into one place. One of Chen's respondents shared that "living in the 'high-tech bubble,' it's easy to forget that most of the world does not share this material privilege and to get caught up in the area's status seeking and materialism."[10]

My project is to counter this ethic of all-consuming work with Sabbath practice. Humanity was not made for the sole purpose of toil. We were crafted in the image of the Divine for community with one another and God's own person. Our value does not come from our labors. We are valuable before we can ever be productive.

We have value regardless of our employment or lack thereof. We have value regardless of our wealth or lack thereof. Sabbath practice teaches us our own value and the value of one another beyond the work ethic driving Silicon Valley. Sabbath practice makes room for the prophetic voice of God that notices the marginalized and advocates for justice.

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[9] Alejandro Lazo, "Silicon Valley's Vast Wealth Disparity Deepens as Poverty Increased," from CalMatters, https://calmatters.org/california-divide/2023/02/silicon-valley-inequality/.

[10] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 49.

My proposal is to form small groups within the congregation to study Sabbath and its practice. People will be invited to come together weekly and consider the biblical commandment to keep the Sabbath. They will then be asked to share about their own relationship to Sabbath. Do they have any time that is theirs to just connect with their deepest selves and know joy? Through the small group process it is hoped that people will "try on" Sabbath keeping in their own ways and share those experiences with their group. The goal is to inculcate an intentional practice of Sabbath customized to the demands of modern life in Silicon Valley which makes room for connection to God. Fruit of that connection is expected in part to be an awareness of the economic disparities in our society and advocacy to overcome them.

Chapter 1

Current Culture of the Protestant Work Ethic

The context of this project is in Silicon Valley of California. It is a hub of high-tech innovation. People come from all over the world to work here. The environment is highly competitive, and the stakes are very high. Companies pay large compensation to people who have the unique skills needed for this work. Millions of dollars are invested in the companies. Sometimes the technology developed in the Valley has changed the way people live their lives all over the world. It produces a pressure cooker of a community.

This high pressure environment puts a strong emphasis on "working hard." It is a level of pressure that goes beyond being productive. It is a mark of being the right kind of person. This particular ethic of hard work equated with being a good person is derived from the larger Protestant Work Ethic of the American culture. Max Weber explored the religious threads of the American work culture and posited that the unique religious heritage of the United States led to the acceptance and progression of capitalism in the country.

In discussing Luther, Max Weber identifies "at least one thing was unquestionably new: the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as

the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume."[11] This ethic has enabled a certain level of success in the history of the United States. It has also, in my perspective, stunted our ability to know each human being as beloved of God and to work effectively towards the Beloved Community. Rest and spending time with God has become associated with the ways of monastics. In Luther's view, "the monastic life is not only quite devoid of value as a means of justification before God, but he [Luther] looks upon its renunciation of the duties of this world as the product of selfishness, withdrawing from temporal obligations. In contrast, labor in a calling appears to him as the outward expression of brotherly love."[12] Sabbath practice then becomes indulgence instead of faithfulness. Delight becomes a luxury instead of the normal rhythm of life.

Understanding work in a vocational calling as being a way to care for one another is valuable, but making this the primary way we understand care becomes problematic. We need to know the value of a person outside of their work product or work effort in order to love them fully and justly. Sometimes

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[11] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Wauwatosa, WI: Charles River Editors), 31, iBooks.

[12] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 32.

our work ethic blinds us to the other aspects of ourselves and others that are precious in God's sight.

I argue that Sabbath practice is a helpful counterbalance to the Protestant Work Ethic. It balances the need to do work with the need to rest and enjoy the world God has freely given us. We need Sabbath to know our own inherent worth as well as to recognize the worth of others. We are not justified by our work in a calling any more than we are justified by work in spiritual disciplines. How hard we work does not make us any more lovable or deserving of care. In trying to correct one type of justification about works, we seem to have replaced it with justification by work.

Weber is clear that "we cannot maintain that the pursuit of worldly goods, conceived as an end it itself, was to any of them [Calvin and other founders of Puritan sects] of positive ethical value."[13] They sought a rhythm of daily life that gave a positive regulation, a structural support to living well. Sabbath rest can be a part of that supportive structure. It can help us stay in connection with our highest ideals and nurture our ability to love one another well.

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[13] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 37.

Culture of Productivity

The culture of productivity may be epitomized in Silicon Valley, but it did not begin there. American culture has been formed by the Protestant Work Ethic from the first Protestant settlers. Hard work was necessary for survival, but that was never its only purpose for them. Hard work was a badge of honor.

Max Weber studied this ethic and credits it with encouraging modern capitalism within the country. The Protestant Work Ethic holds that people must work, not only for the output of their efforts, but also to regulate their lives. Hard work is of value for how it forms the one doing the work as well as for the outcome.

Weber says of writings by Benjamin Franklin, "Truly what is here preached is not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but of a particular ethic. The infraction of its rules is treated not as foolishness but as forgetfulness of duty. That is the essence of the matter. It is not mere business astuteness, that sort of thing is common enough, it is an ethos."[14]

Franklin is quoted by Weber as writing, "Remember, that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one

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[14] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 20.

half of that day, though he spends but, sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, rather thrown away, five shilling, besides."[15] Making money is not to fund a time of leisure, but rather the purpose in and of itself. Work is necessary for the way it orders life. It is a duty of the individual to work as much as possible to set the pattern of work, to be kept too busy for vice, and to be an example of hard work for the rest of the community. The direct result of the work is valued but not its full purpose.

Juliet Schor expands on this idea when she states, "The work ethic itself was in some sense a time ethic. When Benjamin Franklin preached that time is money, he meant that time should be used productively . . . Money buys time and time buys money." The problem with that equation is that "When time is reduced to money, the Sabbath becomes unaffordable."[16] Many people in the Silicon Valley community do not feel they can afford time away, whether it is purely financial or whether they feel a responsibility they cannot lay down even once a week.

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[15] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 18.

[16] Ruy Costa, "The Weekend: Labor and Leisure in America," in *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend: Managing Time in a Global Culture*, ed Edward O'Flaherty, S.J. & Rodney L. Petersen, with Timothy A. Norton (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 147.

There is a sense within the Protestant Work Ethic that all people must work in order to be in right relationship with the larger community. All are called to work in some unique way. Max Weber talks about the usefulness of this call to work to a faithful life. "A man without a calling thus lacks the systematic, methodical character which is, as we have seen, demanded by world."[17] This sense that not working hard equals ill-formed character impacts the way we see ourselves and others, especially those who are not working hard for whatever reason.

The Protestant Work Ethic comes out even in how people treat themselves when they are in need. In her book *Eat, Pray, Love,* Elizabeth Gilbert shares the journey of a year of travel; a year where she is not "working," but is following her heart in order to heal from hurts within her life. When she arrives in Italy (the Eat phase), she finds that this need to work in order to be in right relationship is not universal. People in Italy celebrate her ability and decision to take the year for herself. Critics in the U.S. before and after the publication of the book found her time off self-indulgent and irresponsible. Even the fact that this year's journey was intended to produce a book did not prevent the rest and pleasure from feeling undeserved.

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[17] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 113.

> Americans don't really know how to do nothing. . . . Italians have traditionally always been hard workers, . . . but even against that backdrop of hard work, il bel far niente has always been a cherished Italian ideal. The beauty of doing nothing is the goal of all your work, the final accomplishment for which you are most highly congratulated. The more exquisitely and delightfully you can do nothing, the higher your life's achievement. . . . while the Italians have given me full permission to enjoy myself . . . during my first few weeks in Italy, all my Protestant synapses were zinging in distress, looking for a task."[18]

Elizabeth Gilbert felt that she needed a task, regardless of the product of that effort. In contrast to this Puritan instinct to tasks, the work she needed to do for her healing required that she give up the need to do a task. She needed to receive grace without earning it or proving it.

Tricia Hersey in her Nap Ministry found that Elizabeth Gilbert is not alone in her experience. She shares the stories she hears all the time in her work: "thousands of people privately come into our social media in-boxes monthly and courageously share the deep guilt and share that they feel about resting . . . 'I feel worthless when I'm not checking off things on my to-do list.' . . . 'I feel lazy and unworthy if I have a day full of leisure.'"[19]

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[18] Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything across Italy, India, and Indonesia* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 61–62.

[19] Tricia Hersey, *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* (New York: Little Brown Spark, 2022), 113.

Some of this focus on earning your place in the U.S. might come from the history of homesteading immigrants. In order to survive, you had to not only do what was needed for today, but also craft the structure of the whole community. Those who had a strong work ethic survived and thrived. Those who were unable to work hard enough, for whatever reason, did not. It was a practical reality. Elizabeth Gilbert talks about her own Puritan family history as she acknowledges her need for help with the challenges of her life. "I don't think a woman in the whole history of my family had ever done that before, had ever sat down in the middle of the road like that and said, in the middle of her life, 'I cannot walk another step further—somebody has to help me.' It would not have served those women to have stopped walking. Nobody would have, or could have, helped them. The only thing that would happened was that they and their families would have starved."[20]

On the other hand, other places have had struggle for survival and while they encourage the work needed to live, they do not value work beyond meeting needs. What gives this deeper need to work beyond the need to survive and thrive in a new world? Like Elizabeth Gilbert, Benjamin Franklin was raised by Puritan parents, even though he maintained a deist perspective himself. The

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[20] Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love* , 50.

Puritan heritage supported the idea of work as life regulation from a theological perspective. The Puritan understanding of salvation underscored this value of the well-regulated life.

Calvinism, of which Puritanism is a descendant, holds that God has already chosen "the elect," the persons who will receive the unearned grace of God, who will receive salvation. Nothing you do or fail to do in this life achieves or earns salvation—but one does want to know if they are saved and can feel assurance of their fate. Puritans believe that only those who have a pattern of a well-regulated life have received this grace. Therefore, living that well-regulated life allows one to feel secure in their own salvation. "In order to attain that self-confidence intense worldly activity is recommended as the most suitable means. It and it alone disperses religious doubts and gives the certainty of grace."[21]

Those who show weakness by their place in life or their lack of discipline in business are not just unable and to be pitied, but are revealing their status of salvation, their value for the Divine, which is not to be challenged. "This consciousness of divine grace of the elect and holy was accompanied by an attitude toward the sin of one's neighbor . . . of hatred and contempt for him as

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[21] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 71.

an enemy of God bearing the signs of eternal damnation."[22] We reflect that belief in our current society when we look at folks at risk who are involved with illicit drugs, criminal activity, or rampant sexuality. The need they have results from their status reflected in their risky (disordered) behavior and, therefore, does not garner the compassion needed for effective social justice ministry.

Even the practice of Sabbath rest becomes a way to prove one's salvation through life-regulation. Walter Brueggemann calls the U.S. understanding of Sabbath a reflection of "the most stringent disciplinary faith of the Puritans which . . . translated into a moralistic prescription for a day of quiet restraint and prohibition,"[23] which is in stark contrast to the impression he gets of Sabbath from the Exodus story in Genesis, "the restfulness of YHWH effectively counters the restless anxiety of Pharaoh."[24] Puritans practice Sabbath for anxiety's sake when Brueggeman believes it is intended to be an alternative to anxiety.

Puritans understood Sabbath not only to be a day of rest, but the *only* day of rest. "The Puritans launched a holy crusade against holidays, demanding that only one day a week be set aside for rest. Their cause was aided by the changing

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[22] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 79.

[23] Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying NO to the CULTURE OF NOW* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), ix.

[24] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, xiii.

economic incentives of the market economy, particularly the growing commercialization of agriculture which resulted in more year-round activity."[25] Sabbath keeping was a maximum limit on the leisure a faithful person could enjoy rather than a minimum.

This idea of work being more about showing uprightness than about productivity continues in the Silicon Valley culture. Gary Vaynerchuk, a leader in the Tech community with 1.5 million Twitter followers, proclaims people should be working eighteen hours a day with no vacations.[26] Studies show us that working such long hours does not add to productivity and, yet, "the point may be less about productivity than about demonstrating commitment and team spirit."[27] There is ongoing pressure to work even harder. Michael Moritz, a partner at Sequoia Capital, a venture capital investment firm, wrote an article for the *Financial Times* extolling the 996 work ethic of China and predicted that "the habits of western companies will start to seem antique."[28] The 996 model is named for working from 9am to 9pm six days a week. Mr. Moritz comments that

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[25] Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, 51.

[26] Dan Lyons, "In Silicon Valley 9 to 5 is for Losers," *New York Times,* Aug 31, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/31/opinion/sunday/silicon-valley-work-life-balance-.html.

[27] Lyons, "In Silicon Valley 9 to 5 is for Losers."

[28] Michael Moritz, "Silicon Valley Would Be Wise to Follow China's Lead," *Financial Times*, Jan 17, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/42daca9e-facc-11e7-9bfc-052cbba03425.

"the soul-sapping discussions [in California about work-life balance and paternity leave] seem like unwarranted distractions."[29] One critic of the Silicon Valley work culture, David Heinemeier Hanson, says "There's an ingrained mythology around startups that not only celebrates burn-out effort, but damn well requires it."[30]

Chen writes, "In Silicon Valley, overworking is 'just what you have to do.'"[31] There is a downside to the extreme pressures of the Silicon Valley tech work: burnout. "Burnout is a problem because it exacts a financial toll on companies . . . It is the literal depreciation of company assets."[32] Chen reveals, "During the course of my research, I asked people in human resources whether employee stress, unhappiness, and burnout could be solved in other ways: by giving employees more time, say or lowering expectations. . . . Of course, no one took my suggestions seriously. They insisted that the workload was reasonable, or they ignored the question altogether."[33] While burnout is a serious issue, it is

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[29] Mortiz, "Silicon Valley Would Be Wise to Follow China's Lead."

[30] Nitasha Tiku, "The Gospel of Hard Work According to Silicon Valley," *Wired Magazine*, June 3, 2017, https://www.wired.com/2017/06/silicon-valley-still-doesnt-care-work-life-balance/.

[31] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 56.

[32] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 57.

[33] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 84.

an issue because of its impact on productivity. Lowering expectations does not appear to increase productivity, so it is not even an option on the table.

The result is a loss to all involved. The individuals burn out and the company losses its most valuable assets. They hire new folks and go through the cycle again. It looks very much like our environmental challenges; we use up the resources for the short-term gain while hobbling our own long-term security. This is not the kind of life promised in the Christian faith.

The question is not, "Does work have value?", but, "Is there value beyond our work?" Dawn points out "How easily we cuddle our accomplishments as a security blanket to remind us that we matter, instead of trusting God's assurance poured upon us in baptism that we are His beloved."[34] If we are assured through our work, what happens to the burned out employee? What happens when one's company gets beaten to market? There is a high risk of suicide in men in middle age[35] due to a lack of other points of connection. These men are often unmarried. Their children are now grown. Extended family are far away. They have not had the camaraderie of unions or sports leagues to build friendships, and when they

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[34] Marva Dawn, *The Sense of Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 20.

[35] Julie A. Phillips, Ashley V. Robin, Colleen N. Nugent, Ellen L. Idler, "Understanding Recent Changes in Suicide Rates Among the Middle-aged: Period or Cohort Effects?" Public Health Reports (Sept-Oct 2010) National Institutes of Health, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2925004/.

suffer a loss, they have no safety net to catch them. We can value our work, but it is a trap to see our worth as defined by our work.

Work Ethic and Social Justice

Studies show people in the United States have a meritocratic understanding of resource distribution. Studies show that "we are content only when rewards and contributions are in balance. . . . Desert is the equilibrium condition."[36] People see those who have worked in the past as being in a more right relationship with the community than others who have not done so, regardless of the reasons. The understanding that a strong work ethic *should* result in having what you need gives motivation to act when that work ethic has not given the expected result. "What we know is that the most important moral consideration is justice, by which we mean giving people what they deserve. Sufficiency is of secondary importance. And efficiency is the weakest part of the moral triad."[37]

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[36] Thomas Mulligan, "Justice and the Meritocratic State," *Political Philosophy for the Real World*, ed. Jason F. Brennan (New York: Georgetown University, 2018), 45.

[37] Mulligan, "Justice and the Meritocratic State," 47.

The flip side of this understanding about the social contract of work ethic is that some are less motivated to offer mercy to those who have not worked. Their lack of work, regardless of reason, is seen to be an understandable reason why they do not have their needs met and so the understanding of the world is not challenged by their deprivation. People do not often come out and say that children are less deserving than the retired, but the poverty of the retired is addressed better than the poverty of children,[38] even though their needs for food and shelter are similar. We have been effective in lowering the rates of significant poverty for the retired, but the culture doesn't focus as much on the young children who have not yet worked.[39]

Even if satisfying the need of a group benefits the larger community, some are hesitant to give what has not been merited. Providing more resources to underperforming schools would reduce the need for prisons, saving the broader community not only the cost of prisons themselves, the services inmates' families need during their incarceration, etc., but also would reduce the level of crime and

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[38] Poverty Rate by Age, KFF, Children in Poverty: 21%, Over 65 in Poverty 10%, kff.org/other.state-indicator/poverty-rate-by-age/.

[39] Poverty Rate by Age, KFF, Children in Poverty: 21%, Over 65 in Poverty 10%.

victimization in the community. Yet still, people sometimes choose to spend the money on prisons rather than on schools.[40]

A school district in Waukesha, Wisconsin chose to decline federal funding for free school lunches. The logic given was that students could "become spoiled"[41] by having easy access to food for one meal a day on schooldays, which suggests that children *should* worry about how they will be fed. The concern was enough for the district to turn away funding that could support the local economy even without satisfying a need for children. Children going hungry was a less concerning consequence than kids feeling confident they would be fed.[42]

In a similar debate on the funding of "Meals on Wheels," a senior nutrition program, there is no such concern about seniors being spoiled by consistent food support. In fact, lower scores of loneliness, an emotional outcome of the program, is considered a positive outcome alongside the others such as improved nutrition.[43]

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[40] Books through Bars, "Education Versus Incarceration," July 25, 2016, booksthroughbars.org.

[41] Maria Luisa Paul, "A School District Briefly Opted Out of a Free-Meals Program, Citing a Desire to Return to a Pre-pandemic 'Normal'," *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/08/27/waukesha-wisconsin-schools-reject-federal-program/.

[42] After significant backlash, the school district did change its decision.

[43] Aaron E. Carroll, "The Cost Can Be Debated But Meals on Wheels Gets Results," *New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/upshot/the-cost-can-be-debated-but-meals-on- wheels-gets-results.html.

Studies are being done on the effects of Universal Free Meals (UFM), the program being considered in Waukesha, Wisconsin. One study finds "a positive effect of UFM on the test scores of middle school students, both poor and non-poor, with the largest increases for non-poor students"[44] in both math and ELA, representing the equivalent of several weeks of additional instruction. Making the funding universal instead of requiring people to apply based on need, increased participation by 5.395% for poor and 10.974% for non-poor students.[45] If we wish to judge nutrition programs based on outcomes, nutritional and otherwise, this example suggests that Universal Free Meals are an effective investment. Perhaps "spoiling" children with consistent food availability is a reasonable price for improved learning.

There is one exception to our demand for work effort: wealth. A person with money to spend is exempt from the demand for work. The lack of work is not deplored, but instead the spending of their resources is praised as if the spending, which encourages the work of others (therefore, providing jobs) were itself work. It appears the culture is more concerned with the increasing of

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[44] Amy Ellen Schwartz and Michael W. Rothbart, "Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance," *Center for Policy* at the Maxwell School, https/www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/working-papers/wp-203-let-them-eat-lunch.pdf?sfvrsn=efae783d_8.

[45] Schwartz and Rothbart, "Let Them Eat Lunch."

economic activity than it is concerned with meeting the needs of individuals by that economic activity.

A woman who is staying at home to raise children is praised as doing challenging and important work only if she has the wealth to support herself. A wife of a high-earning husband is praised for her work. A poor woman on her own or with a lower-earning partner is not given the same praise for their efforts or value of outcomes. While the workload of each mother working in the home is similar, the household economic activity is less. There are programs that will pay a mother to work outside the home and leave her children to whatever care can be arranged[46], but the system will not pay a low-income mother to do the work of caring for her own children, though that may be the most effective use of resources. The desire is for that woman to work outside the home no matter the economic sense it may or may not make.

This issue relates to a companion piece in American culture . . . the value of consumerism. Juliet B. Schor in her analysis on why so many Americans chose long hours over leisure time is that the increase in spending ability is praised in the community. She observes "for many Americans escaping the trap of overwork will also entail stepping off the consumer treadmill, which requires

altering a way of life and a way of thinking."[47] Those who are wealthy are able to spend money without working. That ability to spend is treated as work itself because it participates in the economy growth.

In contrast, the law to allow everyone rest on the same day together put everyone on equal footing. Dawn notes "It is an enormously significant statement to declare that on this day, the Sabbath day, we are all equal."[48] It is out of this equality that we can do justice for one another. Until everyone can be accepted to be equal, regardless of work, there is no hope in doing justice fully.

The exhaustion of this work ethic has its own challenge for social justice. "Many people would like to devote more time to their churches, get involved in their children's schools, coach a sports team, or help out at a soup kitchen."[49] They simply do not have the time left over to be involved in their family and local community, let alone impact social justice on a systemic scale. The "Good Samaritan Study" by J.M. Darley and C.D. Batson showed that those who are in a hurry are less likely to stop and help someone in need. "A person not in a hurry may stop and offer help to a person in distress. A person in a hurry is likely to

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[47] Schor, *The Overworked American,* 157.

[48] Dawn, "Sabbath Keeping and Social Justice," 37.

[49] Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, 161.

keep going. Ironically, he is likely to keep going even if he is hurrying to speak on the parable of the Good Samaritan, thus inadvertently confirming the point of the parable."[50] When one's whole life is lived in a hurry with pressure to get to the next place or to accomplish the next task one can lose the bandwidth to show empathy even when they would normally do so.

This is the scarcity mindset of the American culture. Americans with this mindset tend to believe that there is not enough resource for everyone to have what they need, so people compete to make sure their needs are met first and then look to see who deserves the leftovers. The Christian faith teaches that this is not true. God supplies enough for everyone to have what they need and, therefore, the project of justice is making sure those resources are fairly distributed.

Those who live in the scarcity mindset see justice as a limited resource. Therefore, it must be given out with care. Full justice for all is not within the culture's framework. "The idea of justice being unrealistic is deeply embedded in our psyche."[51] If true justice is unrealistic then we do not need to strive for it.

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[50] John M. Farley and C. Daniel Watson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27, no. 1, (1973): 107.

[51] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 184.

Injustices can be accepted because one cannot imagine a world that is completely just. The importance of injustices are ranked, and folks tend to those they think can be accomplished or that make folks feel productive in caring. In Silicon Valley this comes out in the way companies and individuals give to charity. "Many Silicon Valley founders are fans of effective altruism, for instance, which seeks a way to make their money do the most good which often means spending it in the developing world."[52] There are serious problems in the Silicon Valley area including homelessness and hunger that could use support, but the majority of charitable dollars leaves the area to go to where impact can be maximized. Justice for those felt unworthy or unable to use the care effectively is abandoned.

God provides more than enough for everyone. There is enough. We simply need to learn to share better, to be better stewards of resources, and to trust in that providence enough to not strive to have more than our neighbor. If there can be justice for everyone then we must seek justice for everyone; for those who we think deserve it the most and for those who do not meet our guidelines for deserving help.

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[52] Alana Samuels, "Tech Billionaires' Obligation to the Citifies Around Them," *Atlantic*, accessed July 25, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/11/tech-billionaires-donations/574735/.

If we can trust that there is enough to go around, and if we can accept that God is the source of all we have rather than our own merit, then perhaps we can learn to share with one another in true generosity. Then we can know the perfection that is heaven on earth.

Value of a Person

The "Protestant Work Ethic" suggests the value of a person is in their right relationship to the community. That relationship is based on their contributions, financial spending, particular talent, or hard work. The cultural focus is on the hard work portion of right relationship. If you are working hard, regardless of the product, you are in right relationship. If you are in right relationship, the community feels you *should* have your basic needs met. If these needs are not met, then the community responds with passion to fulfill the societal contract of hard work.

One of the problems with this calculation is that working hard is not always the most productive situation. Studies now show that working past a certain point is counterproductive. Studies such as one in Iceland have shown

that "worker wellbeing increased across a range of indicators"[53] with a reduction in hours while "productivity and service provision remained the same or improved across the majority of trial workplaces."[54]

This is not a new discovery. In 1930 the Kellogg company was looking for a solution to unemployment and went to a six-hour work week. "According to W.K. Kellogg 'the efficiency and morale of our employees is [sic] so increased, the accident and insurance rates so improved, and the unit cost of production is so lowered that we can afford to pay as much for six hours as we formerly paid for eight.'"[55] Working six hours was found to be as effective as working eight hours. Imagine the transformation that would be possible if everyone worked six-hour days. What could we do with that extra time and energy? What would family life look like? How would volunteerism be impacted? In places, including Silicon Valley, there are people working to burnout in order to be valued as in right relationship to the community. It is not healthy for the person or for the productivity of the system.

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[53] Guomundur D. Haraldsson and Jack Kellam, "Going Public: Iceland's Journey to a Shorter Working Week," Autonomy, June 2021, https://autonomy.work/portfolio/icelandsww/), 7.

[54] Haraldsson and Kellam, "Going Public: Iceland's Journey to a Shorter Working Week," 6.

[55] Schor, *The Overworked American*, 154–55.

Another problem with this calculation is that there are many reasons someone may not be able to "work hard." This understanding of right relationship leaves out precious children of God. Children are left out, disabled folks are left out, and those who have been laid off or simply cannot find work are left out. The society not maintaining a contract with those who cannot work hard leaves them vulnerable and not properly valued by the community.

The American culture does not value all work equally. We discovered during the COVID-19 pandemic that what we considered our "essential workers" were often people we paid the least. "Essential workers are overwhelmingly low paid: About half of the 44 million workers earning less than $15 an hour."[56] Domestic work such as cleaning and childcare, both dominated by women, is paid substantially less that other types of work. Whereas the median wage for workers in the country is nearly $20 an hour, it is barely $12 for domestic workers."[57] Full time work does not always give enough resources with which to live. In Silicon Valley those who do not work in high tech jobs often find it difficult to impossible to afford to live in the area. People commute from

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[56] Irina Ivanova, "Most Companies Haven't Given Essential Workers Pandemic 'Hazard Pay.' One City Is Changing That," *CBS News*, June 9, 2021, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/oxnard-california-hazard-pay-stimulus-american-rescue-plan/.

[57] Angela Garbes, "The Devaluation of Care Work is by Design," *Atlantic*, May 13, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2022/05/unpaid-domestic-labor-essential-work/629839/.

farther and farther away because the high cost of housing is too much for many people working ordinary jobs.[58]

Women with young children are caught in a uniquely difficult situation. "Many women find themselves between a rock and hard place after they have children. If they return to paid employment, they may net very little income because of the high costs of childcare."[59] Single mothers face the tightest squeeze. These women may work the longest hours of all, between their paid work and the unpaid work at home, and still not be able to make ends meet.

Wages have remained stagnant over the past forty years even as productivity has increased.[60] More of the resources are going to the top of the wealth ladder. CEO pay has risen by 1,460% since 1978. In 2021 "the ratio of CEO-to-typical-worker pay soared to 399-to-1 . . . the highest ratio on record."[61] In this situation the markers by which we value work (wages) are not accurate measures of what work we contribute to the whole. Hard work is not reflected in

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[58] Sabrina Greenway, "Long Commute to Silicon Valley Increasingly the Norm for Many," Peninsula Press, March 28, 2015, *KQED*, https://www.kqed.org/news/10467044/long-commute-to-silicon-valley-increasingly-the-norm-for-many.

[59] Judith G. McMullen, "The Catch 22 of Childcare," *Marquette University Law School Faculty Blog*, Aug 21, 2013, https://law.marquette.edu/facultyblog/2013/08/the-catch-22-of-childcare/.

[60] Lenore Palladino, "Financialization at Work: Shareholder Primacy and Stagnant Wages in the United States," *Competition & Change*, 25 (2021): 382

[61] Economic Policy Institute, Press Release Oct 4, 2022.

the wages one receives, which can lead the community as well as oneself to thinking they are not working "hard enough" to pay for their place in the community. Hersey advises "Do not let your lack of money and possessions make you feel negative about your worth as a human being. Do not let your credit score, man-made poverty, and/or racism define your extreme power."[62] Many people contribute so much more than they are paid to do. It is only through naming this fault in the system that the myth of hard work can be broken.

The Christian faith proclaims that human beings are of sacred worth before they do anything. People are made in the Divine image[63] and are heirs of God's kindom[64] just by their very existence. Leaving anyone out of the societal contract violates this basic understanding of human value. The bottom line proclaimed by the Christian faith is that "We are worthy because we are loved by God."[65]

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[62] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*,148.

[63] Genesis Chapter 1, NSRV.

[64] Romans 8:17.

[65] Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting (*Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 21.

This is a challenging concept even when applied to oneself. In a confessional prayer, Father Richard Rohr admits "I just cannot let anybody love me 'for nothing.' I insist on being worthy and deserving. And then I demand the same of others too."[66] No matter how often we say we are already worthy, we struggle to believe it in day-to-day life. The voice of this culture is *that* strong. Henri Nouwen says "there are many other voices, voices that are loud, full of promises and very seductive . . . They want me to prove to myself and others that I am worth being loved."[67]

People want to be worthy so they buy into the cultural value of hard work. They proudly brag about how hard they work on social media. Sometimes folks even brag that they have not had a day off in ages. Since not keeping the Sabbath is a violation of the Ten Commandments this is quite odd. What other violations would be boasted about in this way? Would folks "humble brag" that they had committed adultery or stolen something that belonged to another? Of course not. Violating the Sabbath is not seen as a genuine sin because the belief is working hard is more important to being a good person.

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[66] Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (New York: Convergent Books, 2019), 156.

[67] Angela Williams Gorrell, *Always On: Practicing Faith in a New Media Landscape* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 90.

A common practice in her Nap Ministry is Hersey thanking the participants.

> During a Nap Talk exchange, a woman started weeping loudly. I asked if she wanted to share the root of the emotion and she confessed that she has never had anyone say 'thank you for living' to her. She went on to say that for weeks she has been depressed and feeling unworthy.[68]

When one feels they must earn their place in the community and in the world one can worry that they do not meet this bar. People are not enough to justify their existence if they do not feel successful, and this culture works hard to keep people shopping for the thing that will give that feeling, always being one purchase away.

In contrast the choosing of the spiritual practice of Sabbath affirms that, "Human beings are seen and recognized as valuable by God, without any work necessary."[69] In the creation story human beings are declared "very good" before they perform any task. It is a declaration of their inherent value.

The culture has taught to evaluate the world by what it can add to our economic system. The natural world is seen this way as well as the human beings that live within it. "Everything is sacred, says Erigena, but we live in a state of

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[68]Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 112.

[69] Gorrell, *Always on*, 90.

forgetfulness of what is deepest in us and in everything that has being. The more we forget our true identity, the less we treat one another as sacred."[70] We must recapture the ability to see the sacred in every thing and every one in order to enjoy the blessings we have been gifted. We must learn to see the natural world and human beings as being of sacred worth without the promise of work to be done or resources to be extracted, because when we strip every thing for its economic gain, we lose the true value that was put there by God.

One of the ways we have of describing the Divine is that God is love. Not productivity, but love. Not economic activity, but love. Can we lean on that character of God to guide our ways of valuing life all around us? "My belief that God is love, that love is everything, our true destiny, sustains me."[71] Love is that ultimate value. It is a value we can chose to exercise or not. The choice is up to us.

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[70] Philip J. Newell, *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul: Celtic Wisdom for Reawakening to What Our Souls Know and Healing the World (New York: Harper Collins, 2021)*, 88.

[71] bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: Paper Collins, 2000), 83.

Chapter 2

God's Culture of Belovedness

The temptation in American culture is to live to work. All efforts become about being a better worker rather than work supporting a fuller life. Post 1940s, "after progressing in tandem for nearly a century, the United States veered off into a trajectory of declining leisure, while in Europe work has been disappearing."[72] While businesses in Silicon Valley try to reduce chores and errands by providing services like having your oil changed at the office, these perks keep employees from leaving the building. These offerings remove the distractions of daily life and keep their employees laser-focused on their work, but they also radically shrink a life. They eliminate the parts of life where we may find connection to others or simple enjoyment. It makes the productive work the whole focus of their lives.

Productive work may be the focus of American culture, but it is not the focus of God's intention for our lives. Walter Brueggemann reflects that, "I have come to think that the fourth commandment on Sabbath is the most difficult and most urgent of the commandments in our society, because it summons us to

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[72] Schor, *The Overworked American*, 1–2.

intent and conduct that defies the most elemental requirements of a commodity-propelled society that specializes in control and entertainment, bread and circuses . . . along with anxiety and violence."

God's ecology has always been quite different. God called humanity "very good" in the very first chapter of Genesis, the first book of Scripture. Before humanity had done anything, we were already defined as "very good." We carry the image of God and are worthy and deserving for that reason alone. That is the beauty of God's grace.

God gave the commandment to Moses on Mt. Sinai to honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy. We are told in the very first story of the Bible that God worked to create the world in six days and on the seventh day God rested and enjoyed the Creation that now existed. Father Richard Rohr writes "The Divine pattern is set: Doing must be balanced out by not-doing . . . All contemplation reflects a seventh-day choice and experience relying on grace instead of effort."[73] God invites the people of God, made in God's own Divine Image, to keep that same pattern of life.

God did not rest because of exhaustion and a need to prepare for the next project on the Divine To-Do list. God enjoyed the goodness of creation for its own

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[73] Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (New York: Convergent Books, 2019), 59.

sake. We know that proper rest does make us more effective in our working lives. Our productivity and creativity improve with life balance. Yet our ideal is not based on these practicalities. Practicalities are a place where we can see the impact of rest, but not the point of rest itself. God took a day of rest to enjoy Creation. We are asked to enjoy the presence of God and goodness of Creation once a week, not so we can do more work next week, but as a way to worship the Lord our God.

Abraham Heschel writes that space is the purview of humanity, but that time is the purview of God.[74] We are given six days to build civilization; to plow fields, to construct bridges, to code software, to build businesses. On the Sabbath we stop building. Honoring God's command for Sabbath rest honors God's authority over time in our lives. We choose a way of living that puts God first and all other pursuits second. We put our trust in God instead of in our own efforts. "[Sabbath practice] declares in bodily ways that we will not participate in the anxiety system that pervades our social environment. We will not be defined by busyness and by acquisitiveness and by pursuit of more, in either our economics or our personal relations or anywhere in our lives."

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[74] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951), 3

My argument is not for modern Silicon Valley parishioners to adopt ancient understandings of Sabbath. The suggestion is that we can find in the tradition of Sabbath observance the kind of time that allows us to "honor our bodies via rest [so] we are connecting to the deepest part of ourselves."[75] By practicing the spiritual discipline of rest we can begin to experience some of the benefits of drawing closer to our God. There is a spiritual difference that is available to us when practicing Sabbath. It is that difference I hope to introduce to my folks. We are formed by our practices, which is understood by my people. I believe finding out how we are formed by Sabbath practice will be a powerful experience for the participants.

Brita Stendahl likens Sabbath to a hot bath:

> Sabbath leisure and ordinary leisure differ in the same way as taking baths differ from taking showers. When difficulties arise and you are not sure how to cope, then you take a bath in the hope that while luxuriously soaking in the calm, warm, and soapy waters, your thoughts will order themselves and a solution will turn up. A shower does not serve that purpose. You take a shower when exhausted from a tennis match, when you feel sweaty and in need of getting clean . . . You don't take a bath merely to get clean. That is secondary. The first benefit is the relaxation and reorganization of thought.

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[75] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 27.

God invites us to take the equivalent of a nice hot bath and let our being relax and be nurtured by the presence of God. "To celebrate the Sabbath is to rejoice in God's presence."[76]

Biblical Illumination on Sabbath

Creation Story: Genesis 1:26 - 2:4 (NRSV, edited)

The first five books of the Bible are known as the Torah, the Law. While parts of that narrate a history, there is a whole other section of the Bible for regular history. This portion is mythic history, stories that tell us why the world is the way we find it. Scripture begins with the story of the beginning of life and our relationship with the Divine. Over six days God creates the whole of the world we know. Creation is crafted with intentionality in an orderly manner. At each stage God declares that the Creation is good. Humanity is made in God's own (plural) image and given authority over and responsibility for the creation.

Once the work of creation is done, God takes a day of rest on the seventh day. This is the basis of taking Sabbath. God took Sabbath, and we are made in God's image, therefore, we are to take Sabbath as well. God did not take a

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[76] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 24.

Sabbath out of weariness. God takes a Sabbath to enjoy what has been created the first six days. We are, therefore, not invited to take Sabbath out of weariness, but to enjoy all that we have been given. Creation is given to humanity. It is a gift. We are invited to enjoy it as God enjoys it.

This example sets a pattern that is seen in not only Sabbath observance, but also in many purification rituals that also follow a seven-day pattern. Samuel Meier observes, "A seven-day progression a creation from sterility to fertility, from dark chaos to a state of 'very good,' corresponds to the dominant purification cycle where seven days mark the transfer from death to life."[77] He notes that "although every Sabbath day is a seventh day, not all seventh days are Sabbath days."[78] Renewal takes seven days by this tradition. Whether or not your cycle places the seventh day of restoration on the traditional seventh day of the week, there is something very real about the timing. We need regular restoration to be fully alive. Sabbath reminds us to continue to seek restoration and to continue to be fully alive.

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[77] Samuel Meier, "The Sabbath and Purification Cycles," *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. and William Shea (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 7.

[78] Samuel Meier, "The Sabbath and Purification Cycles," 6.

In fact, Abraham Heschel notes that there is something created on that seventh day. "Just as heaven and earth were created in six days, *menuha* was created on the Sabbath."[79] He quotes the ancient rabbis when he says "'Came the Sabbath, came *menuha*, and the universe was complete.'"[80] Creation was not done until the unique blessing of the Sabbath was established. That Sabbath is not just established as a day in time, but the whole concept of *menuha*, the experience of Sabbath was made. "To the biblical mind *menuha* is the same as happiness and stillness, as peace and harmony." "The essence of good life is *menuha."*[81] Peacefulness is made through the creation of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is the first to be called Holy, "qadosh." Heschel says, "How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: 'And God blessed the seventh *day* and made it Holy.'"[82] It was not a place or a thing that was first pronounced to be Holy. It was a moment in time.

Father Richard Rohr finds this example a support for the practice of contemplation. "The Divine pattern is set: Doing must be balanced out by not-doing, in the Jewish tradition called the 'Sabbath Rest.' All contemplation reflects

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[79] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 33

[80] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 33

[81] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 34.

[82] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 20.

a seventh-day choice and experience, relying on grace instead of effort.[83] Contemplation allows us to deeply experience the blessings of life and the gifted-ness of it all. The sun rises each morning and we do not make it happen or earn it in any way. Sitting with that reality reminds us that creation has been given to sustain us and we can be sustained through a time of rest.

John Primus in discussing Karl Barth's views mentions "Although the Sabbath was the seventh day for God—following his work—it was the first day for man and woman—preceding their work."[84] Therefore, "the movement is not from work to rest, but from rest to work, not from service to freedom, but from freedom to service."[85] Humanity is invited into God's rest first and foremost. We are made and at first invited to enjoy the Creation of God with the Divine. Work comes later, once the creation has been appreciated.

Humanity is not crafted for the purpose of work. Humanity is crafted for the experience of life. Work is a part of life, but not its purpose. There is loving and caring to be done. There is beauty to be noticed. There is rejuvenation to be

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[83] Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*, 59.

[84] John Primus, "Sunday: The Lord's Day as Sabbath," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. and William Shea (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 117.

[85] Primus, "Sunday: The Lord's Day as Sabbath," 118.

received. The rest of the week prepares for a moment of enjoyment. The Sabbath is the purpose of the work itself.

This Divine pattern is not just an aspect of the Divine, but a defining characteristic. "At the taproot of this divine commitment to *relationship* (covenant) rather than *commodity* (bricks) is the capacity and willingness of this God to rest."[86] Walter Brueggemann argues that this taking of rest puts rest in the center of our lives. "YHWH is a Sabbath-keeping God, which fact ensures that restfulness and not restlessness is at the center of life."[87] When we honor the Sabbath we are putting God at our center and choosing to reflect that commitment God has to relationship at the center of our living. When we ignore the Sabbath, we are ignoring the center of our own identity.

Dawn writes, "Sabbath rest is not the rest of exhaustion or an escape from boredom, but a rest of delight, even as God delighted in his creation when he rested on the seventh day."[88] If we take the time to delight in creation it will also transform our relationship to creation. Humanity has in recent centuries made everything a commodity; not only our efforts in work, but also the blessings of

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[86] Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 6.

[87] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*,10.

[88] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly,* 96.

creation. The impact our industrial revolution has had on the Creation itself has been catastrophic. We are facing the unraveling of the systems that support life. Certainly our failure to take the time to find delight in Creation has been a part of our blindness to our impact upon it. It is those who have focused on this beauty who have been raising the alarm that the way we are using up the gifts of creation to fuel a life that is about more and more work and more consumption is leaving not only the humans exhausted, but the whole of the earth exhausted as well.

Norman Wirzba writes, "Sabbath rest is not simply the inactivity associated with taking a break. . . . It is about stopping the frenetic activity that supposes people must always do more, have more, be more."[89] When we practice Sabbath we center in the "enough" that we have been given and let go of always striving for improvement or increase. We cannot delight in what is given when we are striving for more.

Sabbath is inherent in the crafting of creation. The world was created to be enjoyed. God's first action is to spend time enjoying all that has been created. We, as made in God's image, are called to also enjoy the world God has crafted. When we follow this pattern we are our most authentic selves possible. This is an

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[89] Norman Wirzba, "Can We Live in a World without a Sabbath? Rethinking the Human in the Anthropocene," *ABC Religion & Ethics* (Weds 28 Nov 2018).

argument I suggest will be compelling to the folks in Silicon Valley. It coincides with the culture of self-optimization. If we are living in tune with the way we are crafted then logic suggests that we will be at our most effective.

As Chen observes:

> It is this same ethos of self optimization that many tech workers adopt the practice of meditation. . . . 'Scientific' claims abound that there's a clear cognitive advantage to meditation: improved focus, clarity, efficiency, confidence, and creativity, as well as reduced blood pressure and stress levels. Who doesn't want a competitive edge?[90]

The *menuha* created on that seventh day is valued within the Silicon Valley community for its centeredness and, therefore, the suggestion that we have been made with that rhythm in place can be a compelling felt need to live within that rhythm for maximizing our human potential.

The process of this project is to move folks from this felt need for centering to the greater possibilities of Sabbath practice that transcend making us effective in our work. "Sabbath is not simply the pause that refreshes, It is the pause that transforms."[91] Participants may initially be interested in centering for effectiveness or resting out of exhaustion. Our goal is to move to a place where

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[90] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 130.

[91] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 45.

"we are not resting to be productive. We are resting simply because it is our divine right to do so."[92]

Giving of the Ten Commandments: Exodus 20:1–11 (NSRV)

A further explanation of the Sabbath is given in Exodus where the requirement is spelled out. One argument for taking Sabbath is "because God said so." Following the leaving of slavery in Egypt, God makes a covenant with the people. Very early in that covenant is the command to keep Sabbath. It is foundational in the relationship between God and people.

The rule to keep Sabbath is one of the first the people of God are given in their covenant. You shall have only one God; you shall not misuse the name of this God; and you are to spend time enjoying the gifts your God has given you. The Sabbath is a way to honor that God is the authority in our lives above other demands placed on us. Keeping Sabbath honors our orientation to the Divine and, therefore, our ignoring of Sabbath is a way of putting other things in God's place. "We must note that the day is 'a Sabbath to the Lord'; in other words, it is a ceasing in order to honor the covenant God."[93]

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[92] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 62.

[93] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 6.

Not only is the commandment to keep the Sabbath included early in the giving of the Ten Commandments, but God gives this particular commandment a great deal of time. "How strange to use the most airtime at the mountain on the Sabbath command."[94] It suggests that this commandment is not a mere technicality, but an important part of the covenant with God. God seems to wish that this commandment gets special attention.

Walter Brueggemann suggests that this is not just about honoring God, but is about setting our relationships with one another properly. It is an ongoing theme, particularly among the prophets, that we honor God by our proper care of neighbor. "[T]he Sabbath commandment is drawn into the exodus narrative, for the God who rests is the God who emancipates *from slavery* and consequently *from the work system of Egypt* and *from the gods of Egypt* who require and legitimate that work system."[95] We honor God when we allow one another to rest from labor. Making room for rest is a justice issue for God and when we do justice, we please God. "Not only do we want to develop Sabbath practices of thanking God, but also we are helped enormously if we stop trying to be God."[96] When we keep

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[94] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 27.

[95] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 2.

[96] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly,* 27.

Sabbath we are honoring that we live not by our works, but by the grace of God. If we are always depending on our own efforts, we begin to think that is from where our life comes. It is only when we pause from that effort that we are reminded that our life comes from the Divine.

When we realize that it is grace and not our efforts that give us life, then we are less likely to judge ourselves by our works. We can see ourselves beyond our productivity. In kind, we can begin to judge others less by their works. When we release judging one another's productivity we can see the fullness of them; we can see God's image in their being. We see human beings as the beloved of God instead of as instruments of productivity.

This argument is less compelling to the Silicon Valley constituency. Following edicts from ancient texts is not part of the value system within the tech industry. Newell says "When work replaces religion, [she] argues, religion takes on the instrumental logic of work."[97] Only those aspects of a faith that support the corporate culture are encouraged or even allowed. Placing authority in anything beyond the company's direct interests is in competition with the culture. This is also the crux of the challenge. Do we allow the working culture of

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[97] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 135.

Silicon Valley be the authority in our lives or do we let the God of rest be the authority in how we live?

In the command to keep Sabbath is the reminder that once upon a time we did not have Sabbath as an opportunity to rest and enjoy. There was a time when the people of God were enslaved and had to work every day. It was a time of oppression and a time where the people prayed for deliverance. We remember the pain of that era in order to understand the freedom we are given in Sabbath. Working constantly prevents us from thriving in the fullness of life. We once had no choice. Now we have a choice. "When we remember that we were slaves in the land of Egypt . . . and that the Lord our God 'brought [us] out from there' . . . the strong implication is that we would never, ever want to be the source of anyone else's oppression."[98] In keeping Sabbath ourselves and making it available to others we are honoring the gift that was given to us when we were brought out of slavery. Keeping Sabbath is not a choice when it was not an option before. We cannot take that for granted if we wish to be healthy and whole.

Throughout history the people following this covenant have been seen as separate from the larger population, often in particular because of their Sabbath observance. It is a marker of living with different values than the larger society

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[98] Dawn, "Sabbath Keeping and Social Justice," 37.

and has often been a point of tension with that society. This is perhaps a greater challenge in the Silicon Valley culture than anywhere else as productivity is upheld so much as a value in and of itself.

Exodus 23:10–11: Letting Land Lie Fallow

In a section of the Law about justice and mercy, the people of God are commanded to let the land rest. This is followed by a requirement to extend the weekly Sabbath to one's animals. Sabbath is not just for the people. Sabbath is the way for all life in our care. As Wirzba states, "understood within the agricultural context of ancient Israelite life, this message is a ringing reminder that we depend on each other for our own well-being and that to damage creation is at the same time to damage ourselves. . . . The protection and rest of land and animals thus become a major concern."[99]

We have been given "dominion" over the land and animals in the creation text, but how we use that dominion will impact the wholeness of creation and since we are dependent upon creation, it will eventually impact us as well. Today

[99] Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 146.

in our world we are facing a climate catastrophe[100] that is very much created by our own hands. We have used the earth's resources in a way from which it cannot recover. If we do not change course, the earth's ability to provide for our needs will be compromised. Our only hope is to change our behavior so that the earth can be restored and replenished. Our very survival as a species is dependent upon our ability to learn this biblical precept to acknowledge the limits of the land and to respect the land's need for rest as well.

Isaiah 58: True Fasting

The prophets speak time and again of the contrast between the way the Lord calls on us to keep Sabbath and the ways we often do keep Sabbath. In this passage in Isaiah, we are shown that the proper keeping of Sabbath is inextricably linked to the patterns of justice we are called to live every day. Sabbath is a time of rest not just for the wealthy, but for the whole community. This includes the professionals, the day laborers, the slaves, and even the foreigner who may be of a differing faith. Everyone is entitled to the rest, to the enjoyment, and to the beauty of Sabbath. "Sabbath is a great day of equality

[100] United Nations website, https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/climate-change#:~:text=Climate Change is the defining, scope and unprecedented in scale.

when all are equally at rest. . . . Because this one day breaks the pattern of coercion, all are *like you*, equal—equal worth, equal value, equal access, equal rest."[101]

God is angered by the exploitation of workers rather than disrespect for a rule. It is the impact not keeping a proper Sabbath has on the least powerful that most upsets the Divine. We are not to do "as you please" but "spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry." It is the justice denied in their practice that appears to be of most concern. Keeping rules in name only does not please God. Keeping rules in their full intention is what God expects in our ongoing covenant relationship. Remembering our own liberation is meant to keep us working toward the liberation of the whole community. We heal the whole community by sharing in a time of Sabbath together.

Wirzba comments on the beginning of the Book of Isaiah: "If in our daily work we dishonor God and creation, how can we expect that God will take seriously our Sunday efforts at worship?"[102] He believes "Our entire life, and thus also our work, must be understood and carried out the orientation to and

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[101] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 40.

[102] Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 97.

conversation with God."[103] Sabbath is to lead us in our weekday lives rather than be an escape from them.

If we wish to craft a world of justice we will need to include rest for everyone. "How can we imagine a world without police if we are unable to imagine a world that includes rest for all? How can we build systems of care if we don't even care for our own bodies and the bodies of others?"[104] The justice that God invites us and commands us to create requires a regular keeping of Sabbath.

The keeping of Sabbath is not just a remembrance of what God has done in the past. It is also a foretaste of what God has in store in the future. As Samuele Bacchiocchi puts it, "[Sabbath] directs us to the past perfect creation and it points constantly to the future ultimate restoration."[105] God 's intention is to bring the world back to wholeness and when we participate in Sabbath we are imagining what that might be like. We are practicing the wholeness of the world. We are living into the fullness of time. "Through the lens of the Sabbath we can

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[103] Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 96.

[104] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance,* 147.

[105] Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Remembering the Sabbath: The Creation - Sabbath in Jewish and Christian History," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. and William Shea (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 76.

glimpse the Jewish vision of eternity."[106] The more we glimpse that vision, the better we can see the implications for our lives.

Abraham Heschel writes about this passage, "Call the Sabbath a delight: a delight to the soul and a delight to the body . . . 'I have surely given you the Sabbath for your pleasure.'"[107] God's restoration of the world is grounded in delight. "Rest uplifts and boosts our Spirit, allowing us to know the we are enough, and the care of our souls deserves a role in our healing plans."[108] Perhaps as we practice wholeness in Sabbath we learn to live in wholeness, and perhaps the world is restored by our common rest. The more fully we live Sabbath, it may be the more fully the world is brought to liberation.

Sabbath Violation:

Plucking Grain on the Sabbath: Matthew 12:1–16

The Man with a Withered Hand: Mark 2:27

Then he said to them,
"The Sabbath was made for man,

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[106] Robert Goldenberg, "Sabbath in Rabbinic Judaism," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. and William Shea (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991) 43.

[107] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 29.

[108] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 34.

not man for the Sabbath."

These moments where Jesus does work on the Sabbath can be taken to suggest that the Sabbath is not an important tradition to Jesus. Wirzba takes it differently. He says, "A better explanation is to see the miracles as specific people, creation in miniature, being set right to be what God intends."[109] The purpose of Sabbath is to set the world right and, therefore, work that accomplishes that goal is not a true violation of the Sabbath requirements. Jesus is showing us what God's desire is for us. "Jesus is communicating God's continuing creativity in the world, a creativity informed by divine love and care."[110] This is what Sabbath is for; it is for the world to be brought to wholeness.

People who have kept Sabbath in a traditional way have sometimes found the rule a burden to maintain. Women in particular must prepare for the Sabbath by getting food and such ready in advance. They then do not get the same rest as their male counterparts because children still have to be cared for, supervised, fed, and cleaned. God did not intend Sabbath to be a burden, but a required joy. Jesus helps us in this passage to understand the purpose of the law by defining

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[109] Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 45.

[110] Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 45.

its limits. The law was made for the people, not the people for the law. When the law gets in the way of Beloved Community, then the loving of one another should be paramount. The whole purpose of Sabbath is for us to understand the love God has infused into our world. We must release one another from the yokes that bind us in order to enjoy that love. Sometimes this means we must violate the strict rule of the law in order to fulfill the purpose of the law.

This may be particularly necessary in the community of Silicon Valley. While many people I know in the larger world find rest a welcome privilege, the personalities of many in the tech culture find rest to be a burden. Sitting in quiet contemplation is their idea of torture. This is where we need to expand our understanding of what constitutes Sabbath practice.

Dawn argues that "Sabbath keeping is not a dry duty or an oppressive obligation. It is a delight, a feasting on that which is eternal. . . . Instead of trying to create our own security, we worship the one who is our security."[111] Riding a bicycle, for example, is not allowed by most communities who take Sabbath practice seriously. It is, however, a popular leisure activity in Silicon Valley. It is a relief to do something physical for those whose work time has been spent sitting at a computer for long periods. In this environment, it offers a chance to enjoy

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[111] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 164.

great beauty among the hills and valleys and is seen as relaxing. Letting go of the former definition of work to recognize the relief of cycling makes the concept of Sabbath more understandable to Type A personalities.

Likewise, the timeline of Sabbath may need to be flexible for this community. Sundown on Friday evening is not necessarily a moment when people can step away from their weekday responsibilities. Taking a full twenty-four hours at once may not be a doable starting point for those who have been working sixty plus hours a week. Family needs and personal progress may require a different structure to their Sabbath.

Hersey talks about the ways we can create Sabbath practice for ourselves:

> Reimagining rest looks like so many things. The possibilities are endless and infinite. Rest looks like tapping in and listening to what your body and soul want. It's extra time while bathing, even an extra ten minutes of concentrated silence. Rest is taking a leisurely walk and dancing. Rest is a tea ritual allowing you to meditate while breathing in each warm sip.[112]

Individuals will need the freedom to determine what constitutes Sabbath for them both in terms of activities and timeline.

This requires the ability to discern the purposes of Sabbath rules so they can apply the purposes if not the ancient rules to their practice. It will take experimentation to find what truly gives the experience of Sabbath, and there

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[112] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 142.

will be trial and error in the process. This is where the support of our community will be so very helpful.

Biblical Authority on the Sabbath

We stand in a long line of people of faith who have discerned their pattern of living from these texts. Over that time there has been great debate about their relative importance. "[The Anabaptists, leftist Puritans, Quakers, Mennonites Hutterites, etc.] have generally claimed that Sabbath is not a creation ordinance but a Mosaic institution which Christ fulfilled and abolished."[113] "Churches in the Reformed tradition (including Methodists) . . . adopted what might be called a 'compromise position' on the one hand acknowledging the Sabbath as a creation ordinance, while on the other hand defending Sunday as a legitimate substitution of the Sabbath accomplished by the church."[114]

My argument is in line with this Reformed tradition in acknowledging the need for Sabbath and yet the freedom to place it where it fits best. Sunday has been argued as that day by virtue of the resurrection. In the context of a diverse community, like Silicon Valley, it may be that further freedom is required. I argue

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[113] Bacchiocchi, "Remembering the Sabbath," 82.

[114] Bacchiocchi, "Remembering the Sabbath," 83.

that any day, any time, set aside for Sabbath is faithful. I do not believe God requires everyone to take their Sabbath in tandem. In a world where not even a whole day of rest is normal, I believe any time, even less than a whole day, set aside for rest and restoration can be a powerful act of faith. We cannot allow the quest for perfection to get in the way of improvement. The best time to take Sabbath is when you *can* take Sabbath. As a community we must make room for everyone to have the right to rest for as the prophet Amos says "A society that refuses Sabbath restfulness for all is bound to fail."[115] As a diverse society we must also let them choose the manner that works best for them.

I agree with Craig Blomberg when he asserts "How liberating it could be for many believers if more churches reassured them that God is equally pleased with his people's worship and rest whenever it occurs."[116]

Experiences of Sabbath

The experience of genuine Sabbath is a precious gift that is rare in the Silicon Valley. The hope of this project is that once people experience it here and

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[115] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 67.

[116] Craig Bloomberg, "The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. and William Shea (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 127.

there, that it will draw them into fuller practice. Experience is a much valued source of authority in this context. Innovators believe what they see for themselves. They try things. If those things work, Silicon Valley folks are willing to pursue them.

Dawn describes the goal this way, "Our Sabbath keeping is also truly delightful especially because the process of ceasing from work uncorks our spontaneity and frees our childlike ability to play."[117] That is an image Silicon Valley folks can find enticing. Play is valued for the innovation it can inspire. Many in Silicon Valley understand their work as transforming everyday life and making the world a better place.[118] This understanding of their work gives their efforts there great meaning. While improved work performance is not our goal in this project, it is a felt need in the community to which we are ministering.

Another factor in experiencing Sabbath is the focus on relationships. This may be a challenge in Silicon Valley and yet one of the most powerful aspects of the practice. This is an environment of extreme competition with a population that tends to not have strong social skills.[119] It is also a place where one of the top

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[117] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly,* 15.

[118] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code, 29*.

[119] Steve Silberman, "The Geek Syndrome," *Wired,* Dec 1, 2001 https://www.wired.com/2001/12/aspergers/.

concerns of residents is feeling lonely.[120] People come from other places to work here and so do not have much social connection built in. Working the hours demanded here does not allow for much leisure to meet people outside of work either.[121] Here "the pressure to stay relevant and competitive is amplified in tech's rapidly changing industry, where workers are painfully aware of their growing obsolescence."[122] It is difficult to develop close bonds when you are always competing.

Sabbath rest is an opportunity to invest in relationships that can give our lives deeper connection and meaning. The time away from work allows people to meet folks outside their work environment. Something as simple as taking a dog to a dog park gives the opportunity to meet people and share common interests. "The activities of the Sabbath day encourage family unity, leisurely conversation, and growing friendships."[123] The time afforded within Sabbath allows for us to invest in the people we may meet. We can spend time involved in hobbies and

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[120] There were conversations on local radio and news about the high rate of loneliness in San Jose long before the pandemic. Most resources available now discuss the pandemic's impact on loneliness.

[121] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code, 196*

[122] Chen, *Work, Pray, Code*, 128

[123] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 75.

common interests. We can spend time leisurely eating together. We can spend time just in conversation sharing our thoughts and experiences with one another.

Susannah Heschel describes the experience of Sabbath in her family home with her father, Abraham Heschel. "My mother and I kindled the lights for the Sabbath, and all of a sudden I felt transformed, emotionally and even physically."[124] She says "Shabbat comes with its own holiness; we enter not simply a day, but an atmosphere."[125] She paints a picture of time with her parents that few families these days experience. The family would sometimes visit her mother's brother following the Sabbath. "The house had a large swimming pool just outside the music room, and my father and I would float in the water, read a book, and listen to the music while my mother played."[126] While this moment followed the Sabbath (her mother would not play music on the Sabbath itself) it shows the kind of time together that Sabbath practice engenders.

Wirzba proclaims that "*the experience of delight is what the Sabbath is all about.*"[127] He specifies, "Delight is always delight in another . . . as we see others

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[124] Susannah Heschel, Introduction, Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951), 3, www.fsgbooks.com.

[125] Heschel, Introduction, *The Sabbath,* 11.

[126] Heschel, Introduction, *The Sabbath,* 8.

[127] Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 52.

for what they truly are, concrete expressions of God unfailing love, they can become occasions for our care and celebration."[128] Sabbath is meant to give us the space to know one another beyond our productivity and usefulness. When we have that kind of contact we can begin to see one another the way God sees us, and can, therefore, love one another a little more like God loves us.

Time with friends and family can be rare in our culture. "How many times have you attempted to connect with a friend or loved one but a brutal work schedule and a pull to hustle more have severed the connection, stolen your time together, or made it impossible to bond?"[129] Long lunches with friends are not common. Even when not at work, many folks are so exhausted from their workdays that they are not enjoying time with family once they do get home.

Communities are built on connections of caring. "[Americans] need the time to give to others . . . caring for children caring for sick relatives and friends, caring for the house. Today many haven't got the time to care."[130] There is a great deal of unpaid work that is getting pushed to the side. When we are living a balanced life, we can be there when those in our lives need extra attention. We

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[128] Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 53.

[129] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 87.

[130] Schor, *The Overworked American*, 160.

can care for the environment in which we live and be a part of our larger community. This improves the lived experience on many levels. We get the momentary experience of caring for those we love. We get the benefits of living in a nice home space. We get the deeper connections over time of being able to be present for one another when needed.

Sabbath becomes a space in our schedule to attend to our spirits. "[T]he heart of the Jewish Sabbath, a secret place, so to speak where strict regulation of behavior and rigorous enforcement of taboo were combined with a kind of serenity and gratification of body and spirit that would have been the envy of the world if only the world had discovered it."[131]

Experiencing this joy can be seen as a radical act. Hersey talks about her own practice of Sabbath in such a way. "My Sabbath is a personal, spiritual, and political practice."[132] She sees her own practice as a rejection of the grind culture that has dehumanized people. When she rests she is acknowledging her own dignity as she tends to her own spirit. This enacts a bit of justice that is rare in our current reality.

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[131] Robert Goldenberg, "The Place of Sabbath in Rabbinic Judaism," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions,* ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. and William Shea (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 32.

[132] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance,* 163.

This use of Sabbath can also be related to the climate crisis we are facing. Norman Wirba talks about Sabbath economics where our practice of Sabbath is part of our devotion to healing the creation. "The desire to practice a Sabbath economy is . . . a desire for the creation of a just world in which the flourishing of the land and all its inhabitants is achieved."[133] Our practice is nurturing the flourishing of all.

Walter Wurzberger has a very active understanding of the purpose of Sabbath when he says "physical rest must be utilized for all-out spiritual efforts to the challenge posed by the dynamic ideal of holiness which constantly beckons us toward ever greater heights of religious and moral perfection in the never-ending quest for *imitation Dei."*[134] This seems to me to be a big goal for a day of rest. John Primus in his discussion of Calvin's view goes to the other side of the spectrum stating that "the call to a Sabbath rest is a call to abandon the works of the law as the basis for humanity's relationship to god, for that relationship is ground in grace. . . . The Sabbath represents spiritual rest." My guess is that the truth is in the middle. We must make room for God to work in our lives and hearts; but it is God who is doing the working.

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[133] Wirzba, "Can We live in a world without a Sabbath?"

[134] Wurzberger, "Jewish Theology and Philosophy of the Sabbath," 147.

While the practice of Sabbath makes a genuine difference in the world and in our beings within it, we are not called to achieve these things. We allow these blessings because we get out of our own way. We allow ourselves to receive the love and healing God is holding for us. "We want to wrap ourselves in a blanket made of hope. We will rest. Joy is our birthright. Pleasure is our balm. Rest is our resistance."[135]

Practicing Sabbath is a chance to spend time with God in the midst of our loved ones and in a spirit of rest and restoration. Abraham Heschel references the way the rabbis have understood the Sabbath as a queen or bride. This brings images of celebration and communion. "The Sabbath is the presence of God in the world, open to the soul of man. It is possible for the soul to respond in affection, to enter into fellowship with the consecrated day."[136] Sabbath is an opportunity to spend time in the presence of God with intentionality and delight. There is nothing we must do to earn this moment and no work to do within it. It is a gift of being loved and enjoyed by the One who crafted us in the first place.

The reality we come to know in Sabbath practice is that God longs for us. Heschel says "At the beginning of time there was a longing, the longing of

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[135] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 34.

[136] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 65.

Sabbath for man."[137] If Sabbath is God's presence of God in the world and the Sabbath longed for humanity, then God longs for humanity. We are valued simply in our being. How extraordinary is that!

Creating the Kindom through Sabbath

One of the purposes of our faith journey is to be a part of the work God is doing to bring the world into wholeness. The United Methodist Church has a purpose of "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."[138] We will have a greater ability to transform the world when we practice Sabbath. God works with us and through us to create heaven on earth, the kindom of God. "[A commitment to a spiritual life] requires conscious practice, a willingness to unite the way we think with the way we act."[139] Sabbath practice can be a part of the work to bring the world to wholeness.

Sabbath is about right relationship. When we practice it regularly we are living into the kind of world God has envisioned. We allow balance to be

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[137] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 59.

[138] United Methodist Church, https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-movement-continues .

[139] bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: Paper Collins, 2000), 77.

restored. We allow God to be in charge. We get to experience life rather than striving our way through it. We can truly live as opposed to just survive.

First of all, when we chose to practice Sabbath and rest we are healing our own bodies and minds and preaching the value of human life in and of itself.

> This is healing work. This is justice work. When we are aligned against the ideas of the oppressive culture, we understand we didn't arrive on Earth to be a tool for the capitalist system . . . You were born to heal, to grow, to be of service to yourself and community, to practice, to experiment, to create, to have space, to dream, and to connect.[140]

So many of us carry woundedness that we have not taken the time to let heal. That woundedness impacts our ability to love ourselves and our neighbor. It can be a large trauma or the accumulation of small things. We must take the time to heal in order to be a centered and loving presence in our world. God desires healing for us and seeks to make us whole.

There is so much more to people than the work they produce. We have so much more to offer than work. Our focus on work sometimes blinds us to that reality. It is only through reclaiming those parts of ourselves that we will be able to recognize them for others. We are people with interests other than our professions. We have unique perspectives. We have the capacity for a much fuller life than our work could ever encompass. "Sabbath is the regular, disciplined,

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[140] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 122.

visible, concrete yes to the neighborly reality of the community beloved of God . . . Sabbath is taking time . . . time to be holy . . . time to be human."[141] Who we are is as needed in this world as what we do.

Taking time for Sabbath allows God to work on us. "Resting provides the necessary time for the Spirit's molding of our characters."[142] We are changed by the way we spend our time. If we spend all our time working, that forms us in one way. If we spend intentional time being in Sabbath delight, time with our God, time with the people we love, it forms us very differently. It develops an ethics of becoming rather than an ethics of doing. "An ethics of character concentrates instead on what kind of people we are becoming."[143] We can only fully become the people we have been crafted to be if we give God the time to work within us.

One of the parts of our lives that benefits from Sabbath rest is our relationships. Studies are now showing that loneliness is an epidemic that threatens our health.[144] A regular practice of Sabbath changes our approach to

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[141] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 87.

[142] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 97.

[143] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 96.

[144] Centers for Disease Control, https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html#print.

relationships. "Observing the Sabbath gives us the intentional time for deepening the bonds of our community and enfolding each of us more foundational in the values we share."[145] We can only invest in relationships by spending time with one another. Sabbath is a perfect opportunity to make that investment. "Making space for Sabbath is making space for meaningful dialogue and the growth of community."[146]

At a deeper level, when we practice Sabbath not only do we have more time and energy and bandwidth to care for others. We have more love. We need love in order to craft the kindom. The practice of Sabbath enables us to love fully. "All the great social movements for freedom and justice in our society have promoted a love ethic. . . . If all public policy was created in the spirit of love, we would not have to worry about unemployment, homelessness, schools failing to teach children, or addiction."[147] Loving one another is a benefit of the work God does during Sabbath rest.

Sabbath practice changes how we relate to the broader world as well. "To cease our productivity and need to be accomplished also lessons our need to be

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[145] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly,* 118.

[146] Rodney L. Petersen, "Seeking Sabbath: Keeping the Lord's Day in a Global Culture," *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend: Managing Time in a Global Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2010), 18.

[147] hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, 98.

better than the next guy."[148] Constant work drives a competitive spirit with one another, which taken to the extreme, as seen in Silicon Valley, prevents developing deeper bonds. When we can let go of being competitive for a moment, we can see one another as blessings rather than competitive obstacles.

We can participate in the larger community more fully if we have taken Sabbath rest. When we are constantly busy it is hard to be actively interested in bringing the world to wholeness. It is just too overwhelming. Hersey asks, "How would our justice work look different if all involved were not sleep deprived?"[149] When we are caught in the treadmill of our culture, we do not have the ability to imagine beyond it. We are working so hard to keep up that we cannot get ahead of it. This is why the answer is not to work harder or longer but to rest. Wholeness cannot be achieved by exhaustion. We need the mental space of Sabbath and the rejuvenation it offers to effectively engage the issues of our time and place. "As rabbinic teaching on the Sabbath developed, it became clear that one of the primary purposes of Sabbath teaching is to restrain a grasping, hoarding impulse within people"[150] We are tempted to always want just a little

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[148] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 92.

[149] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 160.

[150] Wirzba, "Can We live in a world without a Sabbath?"

bit more. Sabbath practice is the antidote to this drive within us. It provides some of the limits we so desperately need.

Our tendency to seek value through work has formed our impact not only on our people, but also on the creation. We have a drive that has pushed our creatures and our environment to the point of collapse. While we have seen the dramatic impact of human activity in recent decades, even in Biblical times there was a concern about the temptation that drives our current behavior.

Sabbath rest can also set us in right relationship with the Creation. "As we cease from our steady toil, we learn the valuable lesson that the whole of creation does not exist exclusively for us and to meet our desires. Creation belongs to God."[151] When we take time to delight in God's creation, we are reminded of the precious gifts we have been given and have been taking for granted. Our drive to work is connected to our drive to acquire which is connected to our drive to use resources voraciously. When we practice Sabbath we are put back into the right frame of mind to care for creation the way it cares for us.

Taking the time to step back from striving and be content with enough allows us to be attentive to the world around us. We can notice which behaviors are healthy and which behaviors are undermining the world in which we wish to

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[151] Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 40.

live. We can evaluate the difference between need and desire. We can do the creative work of imagining a life that is contented and whole.

It would be lovely if the ancient ideal of a full community taking a full twenty-four hours to rest together was possible. It may be in the perfection of the world. At this point in history, however, we have to find a starting point that works for us. The folks of Silicon Valley are not prone to "rest" of any kind and will therefore need to discern what it can look like for them. "[The idea of rest as resistance] is honoring a day, a week, a second for Sabbath. It's reimagining what a Sabbath can look like based on your own history."[152] This is a time for you to connect with your God and your deepest being. Any time that can be set aside has value if it is renewing for you.

Wirzba writes, "To move in this direction will require creative and improvisational skills that are inspired by God's own abiding *Shabbat*. It will require of people that they slow down, pay attention, and come to know the places and creatures of their life as worthy of their cherishing care."[153] There is work that God does when we rest; healing, inspiring work. If we wish to be a part of the healing of all creation then we will need the resources only God can

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[152] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 192.

[153] Wirzba, "Can We live in a world without a Sabbath?"

give us to make it happen. We have to let go of doing it all ourselves and let God lead.

There is not just one way to practice Sabbath. In order for Sabbath to be liberating and life-giving it must be authentic to the persons practicing it. We need to explore what creates the experience of Sabbath for ourselves. We need to experiment and see what helps us thrive. "Rest uplifts and boosts our Spirit, allowing us to know that we are enough and the care of our souls deserves a role in our healing plans." In such a diverse community with so many traditions, what cares for our souls may be very diverse as well. Some find cooking a burden while others find it a joy. Some like to work in the garden while others dread pulling weeds. Introverts may appreciate time alone reading while extroverts may desire a party to get together with friends. We need to value whatever it is that uplifts and boosts our spirit.

This creative aspect of the project will entice the Silicon Valley community. Finding new ways to do things is their strong suit. Reimagining regular life is what they do every day. Trying new things is their preferred method. In Silicon Valley there is the advice to "fail fast," by trying something and seeing if it works. If not, you have new information and can move on to the next idea. The faster you fail, the faster you learn and the closer you get to the idea that works.

Changing the world is also in line with the Silicon Valley culture. All the tech they are working on and all the work they are doing is talked about as world-changing. Having an impact on the world matters to these folks and the idea that how they step away from work may impact the world may help them value the experiment.

Chapter 3

Community Building for Transformation

My context within Silicon Valley is a United Methodist congregation. It is within that tradition that I shall look for a process with which to encourage members of this community to begin explorations into the possibilities of Sabbath. In particular, the tradition of small group ministries is of interest.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, discerned a new middle road of spirituality: "viewing human life as a response to and cooperation with the activity of God, Wesley mediated two strains of spirituality sometimes thought to be at odds with one another: the 'holy living' tradition and the 'salvation by [grace through] faith' tradition."[154] Wesley understood "God's rejuvenating work in our lives is a process."[155] God's grace allows us to begin a journey of growing towards Christian Perfection in grace. Grace is not just forgiveness, but "in normal situations our initial justifying faith is intended to be salvific in the broader sense of activating our deliverance from the power of as well as the guilt

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[154] David Trickett, "The Sense of God's Presence: Spiritual Vision and Discipline in the Early Wesleyan Witness," in *Modern Christian Spirituality* (Pearl River, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989), 167.

[155] Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 160.

of sin."[156] We have the opportunity to live differently because of the abilities given by God's grace. In our baptismal vows we affirm that we "accept the freedom and power God gives [us] to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves."[157]

Wesley found that there were practices one could do that would cooperate with God's intentions and make growth in faith more likely; a model of living in accountable community. Our denomination's name comes from being teased about having a "method" to Christian living. Our model looks like most traditions in that it includes Bible study, prayer, fasting, and weekly worship, usually on Sundays. It also includes the disciplines of Acts of Mercy and Christian Conferencing. These last two disciplines are primarily exercised within the small group. "Wesley saw that a person could be led to trust the means of grace, a step at a time, while undertaking a spiritual pilgrimage within a relatively small group."[158]

Our unique characteristic is the primacy of meeting in small groups, originally called class meetings, of about a dozen people. The primary purpose of

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[156] Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology,* 171.

[157] *United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 34.

[158] Trickett, "The Sense of God's Presence: Spiritual Vision and Discipline in the Early Wesleyan Witness," 176.

these substructures of the Methodist societies was to support members' *responsible* participation in the transforming work of God's *grace*."[159] This group checks in on a weekly basis to share how it is going with their souls. They share what spiritual disciplines they have kept over the week and how that has impacted their faith journey. "To make progress in one's path of discipleship, Wesley found, was to make the spiritual journey with other pilgrims. One of the most effective vehicles of spiritual discipline Wesley ever encountered was the small group meeting."[160]

As Kevin Watson describes it, "a class meeting is a small group that is primarily focused on transformation and not information, where people learn how to interpret their entire lives through the lens of the gospel, build a vocabulary for giving voice to their experience of God, and grow in faith in Christ."[161] People gathered to reflect on the ways they were seeking to follow Jesus and share with one another the successes and failures of their ventures.

The traditional spiritual disciplines are prayer, Bible study, Acts of Mercy, spiritual conferencing, corporate worship, fasting, and the sacrament of

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[159] Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, 212.

[160] Trickett, "The Sense of God's Presence: Spiritual Vision and Discipline in the Early Wesleyan Witness," 168.

[161] Kevin Watson, *The Class Meeting* (Wilmore: Seedbed Publishing, 2014), 23 www.seedbed.com.

communion. The disciplines kept through the week are carefully arranged to engage private and public actions, the intellectual and incarnational, general practices, and those that are unique to the Christian story. The aim is for these disciplines combine to give one a well-balanced spiritual life.

This project is to add the keeping of Sabbath to the list of useful practices that allow God to work in our lives in a new and powerful way. The Book of Discipline does say that "We believe the Lord's Day is divinely ordained for private and public worship, for rest from unnecessary work, and should be devoted to spiritual improvement, Christian fellowship and service."[162] Sabbath is not specifically encouraged as its own discipline, but as an observance that facilitates others.

Methodism is not free from the Protestant Work Ethic and is often focused on the practical things we can do. We look to meeting the basic needs of others. We are focused on matters of justice. We recognize Sabbath practice of the Jubilee Year as a matter of justice, and the 2016 Book of Resolutions references this practice. We are quick to declare the need for the forgiveness of debts and the right to rest. The Book of Resolutions says: "throughout Scripture, God orders life together based on right relationships, shared resources, and economic justice.

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[162] United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 139.

In the act of creation, God demonstrates time for work and rest."[163] The idea of rest as spiritual discipline is not focused upon. Yet it is a traditional practice of Holy Living we may find helpful if we give it a try. The restoration of the earth by a seventh year of rest for the land and the forgiveness of debts is important. I suggest that we must first practice Sabbath rest for ourselves if we are to effectively proclaim these other aspects of Sabbath for the whole community.

Core to the "method" of Methodism is the means of grace. A means of grace is an activity that puts one in the flow of the Holy Spirit. It is something that opens us up to the grace of God. We have a set of traditional spiritual practices, but the range of possibilities is almost endless. My project here is to encourage Sabbath practice to be on our list; not just to clear space for the others, but to be within itself a way of being present with God and receiving the Holy Spirit. I believe that if we try Sabbath practice, we will find that it facilitates our experience of God. We may find that Sabbath practice is, in fact, a means of grace in and of itself.

The foundation of Methodist discernment is a four-legged table. The four posts are Scripture, Reason, Tradition, and Experience. Scripture has a privileged place in this method, but the other sources balance it. It is by taking all these

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[163]United Methodist Church, *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 466.

pieces into consideration that Methodists discern our path forward. We will use these four posts to develop our expectations for this project.

Tradition is not just a privileging of past habits, but using the wisdom of past spiritual journeys as a way to begin our own. People have been doing these traditions for a long time for a reason. Practices that were not helpful were discarded over time. We may find some more helpful than others. We may need to change how we practice a particular tradition. There may be some traditions that just do not impact us well. Tradition is a starting point. We take from it what we find helpful, and can faithfully leave behind some pieces that do not facilitate our journey.

Reason is our second post because God did not give us brains without an intent that we would use them. God has sought to connect with us and wishes us to understand how to be faithful in the world. Jesus came to show us what a life lived in connection to God could look like. God would not hide from us what we need to be faithful disciples of Jesus. If something is not making sense to us, we need to figure out why and discern the best way forward by using the reason God has given us.

Experience is our third post as God is still in connection with us. We have not just been given the Bible and left to our own devices. God continues to reveal

the divine self to us through the experiences of our lives. We encounter Jesus in one another, especially when one is in need. We experience the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the first followers did and can be faithfully guided by her. God will use the life we live in order to guide us in our journey. We learn from what we live.

Scripture is the last, but not the least source of authority. We have been given the Bible and Methodists affirm that it contains all that we need for salvation.[164] The stories of faith tell us about Jesus himself. They share with us his teaching and his ministry. They also give us the scriptures that Jesus had used in his own learning about God. We learn about his context and his understanding of God by knowing the tradition in which he was raised. God is shared with us in Scripture, and, therefore, is a powerful part of our tradition in which we learn the reasoning and experience the faith of Jesus.

Wesley's Class Meetings

"Tradition"

Tradition is one of the four legs of the Methodist discernment table. Methodists consider tradition to be a reliable source as these are the patterns that

[164] United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 194.

have proved helpful over the years. It has been a foundational tradition of the Methodist movement to gather in small groups of accountability in order to develop our faith in community. "Wesley [said] that if the class meeting was threatened, then the 'very root' of Methodism itself was in danger."[165]

The beginning of the Methodist movement was in a small group setting at Christ Church College at Oxford University.[166] John Wesley gathered with some young men, and they studied together. Over time there became more gatherings and their activities developed alongside John Wesley's theology. "John's methods and activities, perhaps best characterized as meditative piety, were all designed to promote 'holiness of heart and life' (in the typical terminology of the religious societies) in himself as well as in others."[167]

The Methodist movement did not begin as a separate church. The participants were members of the established church. John Wesley himself was an ordained priest in the Church of England.[168] For a significant portion of our history the gathering of small groups was the identity of the Methodist

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[165] Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 44.

[166] Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 39.

[167] Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 43.

[168] Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 36.

movement. "The phrase that best captures what the Methodists believe was so important about the class meeting was 'watching over one another in love..'"[169] The small group is a format in which we are able to love one another well. We can listen to the stories of each other, bearing witness to the journeys happening in our midst. We learn enough about what fellow members are going through to be able to support one another with prayer and wisdom. Too often our time together is focused externally on a task to be accomplished. Small groups give a structured space in which to focus internally.

Being accountable to a small group of people serves multiple purposes. It is a group small enough for everyone to be able to share each gathering. It is large enough to have a variety of perspectives at the table. One can hear the stories of others and be heard well. Checking in each week supports the professed pursuit of spiritual disciplines. It is much easier to keep to commitments that are shared with others. It is also an emotional support to journey with others who may have wisdom and experience that is helpful to you. In turn, your own journey can be of support to someone else. There is no way to quantify how powerful it is to impact the journey of fellow beloved.

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[169] Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 43.

The expectation is still upheld in the United Methodist Book of Discipline under *The Call to Ministry of All the Baptized.* Every person who has received baptism is called to be an active participant in the ministry of the church. "Participation in disciplined groups such as covenant discipleship groups or class meetings is an expected part of personal mission involvement."[170] These group are the core place of personal spiritual development. They should be "communities in which people of all ages experience God's active presence in their lives; foster healthy, non-violent relationships within the congregation and community; testify to the reconciling love of God through Christ; and live out their faith in the world as witnesses to the coming reign of God."[171]

Taking on the discipline of small group participation is practicing our tradition and investing in our time with God. We can center ourselves in our faith when we take this kind of time. This kind of regular gathering without a "productive" agenda is countercultural in Silicon Valley. Folks are much more comfortable at a Finance or Trustees Meeting where they know what is to be accomplished and how to get it done. Spending time with God, including

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[170] United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 372.

[171] United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church,*, 434.

spending time in Sabbath, means letting go of the usual agenda. This is a big step in and of itself for Silicon Valley residents.

Learning in Community

"Reason"

One of the pillars of Methodist discernment is to use the ability to reason that God has given us. John Wesley used a method for which he found scriptural support, a method that had been effective in his own faith journey, and a method that simply . . . seemed to work. John Wesley looked at other movements around him and took the parts that made sense to him.

Our approach is best understood as a Shared Praxis approach to ministry education. Thomas Groome defines it as "a group of Christians sharing in dialog their critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith."[172] People will gather together to reflect on the ways they are seeking to live out their faith in order to become more faithful in the way they live their lives.

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[172] Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), 184.

John Wesley's own experience had showed that people who were gathering in small groups had the most effective experience of faith development. People who pursued faith on their own simply did not have the same experience. The meeting gave a structure in which members could care for one another through their rough times and share in each other's celebrations during good times. As Kevin Watson puts it, "the Christian life is not primarily about *knowing* the right things. It is about *living in Christ*."[173] And so the best way to help one another in that journey is to share about living in Christ with one another.

A recent study of United Methodist Clergy in North Carolina found 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."[174] The correlation was not necessarily between the Sabbath-keeping itself, but possibly between the social support that was correlated to Sabbath-keeping. "It is possible

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[173] Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 25.

[174] Hough, Holly, Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, Xin Liu, Carl Weisner, Elizabeth L. Turner, and Jia Yao, "Relationships between Sabbath Observance and Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Health in Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology*, 68 (2019) https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-018-0838-9, 183.

that pastors spend time during their Sabbath days fostering support."[175] "[T]he class meeting was the primary structure in early Methodism that was designed to keep every person connected to the rest of the movement, to make sure that people were doing all that they could to cooperate with the grace that God had given them and to ensure that no one was forgotten or left behind."[176] In other words, the class meeting was a space in which to develop social support.

The class meeting provided another opportunity, and that was a place to work out one's own theology of living like Jesus. bell hooks reminds us: "Another source of spiritual growth is communion and fellowship with like-minded souls."[177] The people of the class meeting were "like-minded souls" who could walk side by side with one another and be a sounding board for questions, doubts, and epiphanies. Each person was important to the group, even if they did not feel important anywhere else. That experience of being cared about was transformative.

Working in a group is an interactive experience. Instead of passively receiving information about faith, the participants in a small group engage in a

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[175] Hough, Proeschold-Bell, Liu, Weisner, Turner, and Yao, "Relationships between Sabbath Observance and Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Health in Clergy".

[176] Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 44.

[177] hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, 78.

higher level of participation. In working with students in a school setting, Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz found that "It seems that students engage in such behaviors [off-task, interactive] because they *need* peer interaction in the learning process for their own cognitive and social development."[178] Working as a group interactively deepens our connection with the material and therefore our spiritual growth.

Learning Through Practice

"Experience"

Core to John Wesley's theology is the power of experience. His life was transformed by an experience of Divine grace which became a hallmark of his preaching from then on. After a scary boat trip, John Wesley became concerned that his own fear meant that he was not properly a person of faith.[179] He began to look for Divine assurance. "After weeks of relentless searching, Wesley finally found the experience he sought at a Moravian group meeting on Aldersgate in

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[178] Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz, "Understanding Interactive Behaviors: Looking at the Six Mirrors of the Classroom," in *Interaction in Cooperative Groups: The Theoretical Anatomy of Group Learning*, ed. Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz and Norman Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 89

[179] Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 58–59.

London."[180] This experience transformed Wesley's understanding of faith and his own relationship to the Divine. He finally felt the full assurance of God's grace and the joy he experienced there lit a fire that became the whole Methodist movement.

Throughout his ministry Wesley looked to his own experiences in ministry as a guide to how best organize the people for whom he cared. "[Wesley] was always ready to try new methods and equally quick to abandon them if they did not work."[181] Each incarnation of the small groups he led involved the learning he had encountered by observing others and seeing what did and did not work before. Each incarnation became more and more effective in developing a community of people growing in faith.

Wesley felt that every Christian was to seek personal growth along their journey. It was not just the few who were to pursue faith development. "To Wesley's thinking, Christian growth was normative for every member of the congregation, not just a zealous elite."[182] Therefore, every member of his societies was a member by virtue of their participation in a class meeting small group.

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[180] Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 55.

[181] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 76.

[182] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 45.

The purpose of the class meetings was not a purely intellectual exercise either, but an opportunity to develop faith by actively living it. Wesley learned by watching the experiences of other religious groups experimenting with how to live out faith as well. One of his influences was the Monr. de Renty. "de Renty concentrated on personal growth by ministering to the needs of others."[183] This dovetailed well with Wesley's own experience of living out the Sermon on the Mount. His own Holy Club at Oxford had nurtured their faith by seeking to live out the implications of faith.

Our goal in this work is to allow the Good News of the Gospel to have an impact on the lives of those who participate. Healing is one of the ways the Gospel acts on our life. "Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion."[184] We need one another in order to experience the fullness of transformation waiting for participants in this process. Rose Mary Dougherty notices in group Spiritual Direction that, "There is a collective wisdom available for each person . . . a group affords the possibility of many faces of truth being uncovered in any given situation."[185]

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[183] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 50.

[184] hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, 215.

[185] Rose Mary Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), Chapter 4, EBSCOhost.

Henderson writes, "The focus [of a love-feast] was clearly on experience—it was not a matter of discussing what should happen, but what was happening in the lives of those who attended."[186] Faith is more than ideas we believe. Faith is life shaped by those ideas. For Methodists the practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in covenanted community are means of grace; they are ways we make room for the Holy Spirit to act on us and transform us. When we go through these actions, we believe that something real happens in those moments. God's grace is experienced.

We believe in resurrection. We believe in new life. We believe that practicing spiritual disciplines impacts who we are and how we behave in the world. "Methodism was not just a message to be proclaimed, it was a lifestyle to be embodied."[187] When one visits the prisoner, takes communion, feeds the hungry, prays to God, studies the Bible, and shares in communal worship we are changed by the experience. Living a life steeped in these disciplines is a life transformed.

The experience of fasting is a good example. We are invited to occasionally deny ourselves a meal in order to give the funds we would have spent on it to

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[186] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 93.

[187] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 32.

feed another. We experience hunger in the process which makes the hunger of others more visceral to us. We are choosing to be connected to the hungry by solidarity in our experience and in our giving to feed another. "Spiritual life is first and foremost about commitment to a way of thinking and behaving that honors principles of inter-being and interconnectedness."[188] We change not only ourselves in our journey. We know that our behavior impacts others and can impact the world in very powerful ways.

Our journey itself can be impactful. One of the powers of covenanted community is getting to experience the journeys of one another. Seeing the change in our community members can be a source of encouragement and proof that grace is really active in our midst. Experiencing the support of our community when we are in need is an experience that can show us the love of God.

Love and Accountability

"Scripture"

John and Charles Wesley grew up in a home founded in faith with parents who were focused on living according to their beliefs. Home was the first school

[188] hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, 77.

for both men. "Their learning environment was not at first the university classroom, but the kitchen hearth; their mentors were godly parents who viewed their offspring as sacred trusts."[189] Education was a part of life and not just school for the Wesley family. This continued throughout their lives and ministry. At college, the Holy Club provided a community of like-minded people to consider the implications of faith. "Once the personal implications of a concept were clear, the Holy Club members mapped a strategy for a real life experiment."[190] Faith was never just a thought process for the Wesley family. It was always a lived reality.

When John Wesley was setting up the Society of Fetter Lane the question of validity of this way of doing faith was questioned. "[Wesley] would argue that his particular group structure was not only allowed, but also prescribed, by the Bible."[191] He saw this particularly in the accounts of the early church formation found in the Book of Acts. "The class meeting encapsulated several key principles of New Testament Christianity: personal growth within the context of

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[189] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 39–40.

[190] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 43.

[191] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 68.

an intimate fellowship, accountability for spiritual stewardship, 'bearing one another's burdens,' and 'speaking the truth in love.'"[192]

Leviticus 19:18 says "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." This comes in the midst of several prescriptions for living in community justly. The practicalities of living in community are lifted up as part of what it means to be holy. The Wesley Study Bible has a note on "Social Holiness" with this text. It says" Holiness is essentially social for very basic reasons. God is social, the personal tri-unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Humans are social, created in God's social image. Holiness concerns the God-ordained relationships among people, God, and the land, our environment for serving God."[193]

For example 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing." The Wesley Study Bible has a note on "Classes" near this passage telling that "Classes and class meetings were the bedrock of early Methodism . . . Wesley regarded them as a prudential particular means of grace."[194]

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[192] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 14.

[193] Mary Catherine Dean, ed., *Wesley Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 146.

[194] Dean, *Wesley Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, 1455.

Also, 1 Peter 4:8 says, "Above all, maintain constant love for one another for love covers a multitude of sins." In the Wesley Study Bible this scripture is next to a note on John Wesley's term "Social Religion:"

> Wesley is famously quoted as writing 'The gospel of Christ knowns of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.' Religion cannot be limited to an individual, private, inward piety if it is true Christianity. . . . Christians should exhibit the kind of community seen in the 'Acts' church. But in addition to this understanding of social religion as sharing and meeting material needs, Wesley also maintained that Christians need mutual accountability to spur them onto holiness.[195]

Following Jesus is an inherently communal task. You cannot love one another without one another to love. We need the encouragement of fellow disciples to keep on this journey of faith. People who are invested in our becoming more fully who we have been crafted to be are critical to us. In our support of one another we get a chance to practice that great commandment to Love One Another.[196] We are developed by our offering of love as much as we are developed by the support offered to us. Being in relationship is a mutual opportunity to grow in faith.

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[195] Dean, *Wesley Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, 1510.

[196] John 13: 34–35.

Chapter 4

Curriculum Landscape

Core to the Methodist understanding of faith lived and faith development is that faith is done in community. There are pieces you can do on your own, but there are also pieces that require a covenanted community of folks on the same discipleship journey. We need one another to live fully.

The classic unit for Methodism is the Class Meeting. A group of six to twelve participants covenant to meet on a regular basis and share their journeys of being people of faith. "Small group work invites student dialogue."[197] This group has a facilitator, but the structure is one of a gathering of equals. For a first round of small groups I, as the Pastor, expect to lead the small group. Ideally, once the first round is over prior participants can begin leading new rounds of small groups. It is ideal to have two leaders so that they can balance each other's gifts and be accountable to one another in maintaining the safe space and structure of the small group. I may ask a seasoned lay leader to join me in leading the initial small group. Regardless of leader, no one is bringing the word from on high. "Comprehension processes—making meaning—are inseparable

[197] Lara J. Handsfield and Patricia Valente, "Pedagogies of Closeness: Humanizing Small-Group Comprehension Instruction," *Language Arts*, 98, no.4 (March 2021): 203.

from socially and historically grounded process of making selves and making worlds."[198] Everyone is bringing their biblical understanding, experiences, traditions, and reason to the process. All those perspectives need to be respected and received without judgment.

Meeting an hour a week or two hours every two weeks has proven to be the best way to bond as a group and be able to support one another effectively.[199] This gives time for everyone who wishes to do so to speak and to make the time manageable for those gathering. As we have noted, time is a precious commodity in the Silicon Valley cultural context. A twelve-week commitment is manageable. It does not feel too long to try a new thing. It gives time for people to bond and develop their understandings of Sabbath that may be new for them. It also gives time for folks to practice some different Sabbath keeping options. It gives time to try some things that do not work and hopefully find ones that may be particularly powerful for them.

At the end of twelve weeks, it may be that those participating are interested in forming new groups to continue the journey. Part of the process of the small group will be raising up new leaders for future rounds of small groups.

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[198] Handsfield and Valente, "Pedagogies of Closeness: Humanizing Small-Group Comprehension Instruction," 203.

[199] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 133.

Multiplying groups is part of the process. As people participate, they will likely find the structure nurturing to their faith journey and life in general. Relationships are developed within the group that will hopefully continue to bless the participants after. Maintaining those relationships is best nurtured by keeping up with a small group, whether as a continuation of the prior group or by splitting to form two or more new groups to welcome others to the table.

This curriculum will be a transformative learning experience for the participants. "Transformative learning is a process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising our perspectives."[200] Our participants will be reconsidering their views on work and how they understand their own value based on the work they do. The process for that will be the discussions within the group. "We need to engage in conversation with others in order to better consider alternative perspectives and determine their validity."[201] This is a vulnerable process for most folks. While it can be exciting to learn new perspectives, letting go of the way you have always thought of the world can be difficult. Leaders "need to be aware of learners' needs for supportive and

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[200] Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and promoting Transformative Learning* (Sterling: Stylus Publishing, 2016), 18.

[201] Cranton, *Understanding and promoting Transformative Learning*, 27–29.

challenging feedback during transformational learning."[202] We must make room for people to come to their own conclusions and develop their own understandings of what Sabbath practice means to them.

How Is It with Your Soul?

Our Stories

The traditional question in Methodist gatherings is "How does your soul prosper?" In modern times Methodists paraphrase this question as "How is it with your soul?"[203] It is an intentionally deeper way of asking how you and your faith journey are doing. Core to our discipleship process is the accountability and support of sharing our journey with a close group of friends. It keeps our journey in the front of our minds. We are challenged by our group about where we are avoiding something. We have the support of a group of folks on the same journey who have encountered some of the same challenges.

Faith is incredibly personal. Each person's journey is unique to them. When we gather, we gather up all our differing perspectives, histories, and

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[202] Cranton, *Understanding and promoting Transformative Learning*, 52.

[203] United Methodist Church, https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/blog/asking-the-question-how-is-it-with-your-soul.

understandings into one body in order to discern how God is moving in our lives personally and as a group.

Confidentiality is critical in creating a safe space for people to share their personal journey. Those within the group must agree to keep what is said in the meeting within the meeting. It often takes time to develop the trust required. Consistent meeting makes building that trust possible. Once the trust is established, people will be able to go deeper into the question of "how is it with your soul?"

Part of the introductory portion of the process will be to share our social locations. "When the experiences of individuals in a group are diverse, the variety of perspectives in the stories naturally leads to awareness of alternatives and consciousness-raising."[204] While there is a dominant Silicon Valley culture, there are many subcultures within it. Not everyone who works in this context writes code. Some skill sets are more sought after than others. People come from around the world to work here. We will consider questions such as, what home culture is part of your understandings of the value of time and work and rest? Most workspaces in Silicon Valley are male-centered spaces, yet the church is

[204] Cranton, *Understanding and promoting Transformative Learning*, 113.

often more female than male. How does expectation of gender roles influence your own sense of worth and relationship to rest?

One activity is to finish the statement "I come from . . ." with particular parts of your upbringing. Complete the phrase with favorite foods of your family, sayings you grew up, etc. "I come from fish fries and 'I could spit nails.'"[205] People will resonate with parts of each other's statements and begin to understand the culture from which others come.

Another activity is to describe your perfect day, addressing questions such as: What would it include? What would be absent? Who would be present? What would it feel like? Once folks have described their day we could move to questions about when was the last time you had a day that felt like that? How often do you get to feel like that? Why?

Getting a little closer to the center could be asking how do you describe yourself? Have everyone write an introduction of themselves of about a paragraph. Have everyone share their introductions. What do you include? Do you mention work or family? Do you mention faith or politics? Are there hobbies that make it into your introduction? What adjectives do you use? Do you feel you are "hard working?" How much does that matter to you?

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[205] Circles Activity PICO training, San Jose PACT Clergy Meeting (People Acting in Community Together).

When we can go deep with our central question we are then looking to see where God has been at work in our lives. When has God's presence been felt? What difference has it made for you? God is not only revealed in scripture. God is revealed in each of our lives. This can be a revelation to someone who has not thought about this before. Just because they were not on a committed journey of faith does not mean that God has been absent. God is present and active even when we are not paying attention. Sometimes it may take hearing the sharing of others to begin to see where God has been in our own lives.

Each of our experiences of God will be unique. Our specific social location, our history, and our place in our journey will all make for differing experiences. We need not compare ourselves to one another. God is at work in our lives as God sees our need and that need may be different from others in the group. The variety of experiences is a blessing. By each of us seeing God from a different point of view, we see the whole God much better.

We must learn to claim our stories. We need to know that they are valuable for ourselves and for one another. Your story may be just what someone else needs to hear to continue their journey of going deeper in faith. We pledge in the United Methodist Church to uphold the ministry of the church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, *and our witness*. No matter whether

our story seems routine or odd, it is a testimony to the presence of God, and that testimony is much needed.

Readings

Stories of Others

We want to reach out to the experiences and perspective of others in our small groups. While we have differing humans in the small group, the likelihood is that our social location will be somewhat similar. We need to engage farther out. Reading is an excellent way to peek into the life and perspective of others. "Resonant texts should include themes or key moments that address issues of human drama and joy and invite authentic human connections."[206]

In the small group we will read pieces from a variety of sources. Some will be more academic, such as excerpts from *Sabbath* by Abraham Heschel. Others will be more personal such as excerpts from *Rest as Resistance* by Tricia Hersey. We will also read portions of scripture. "Regular personal study of Scripture was at the top of Wesley's list of private exercises."[207] These pieces will be used to

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[206] Handsfield and Valente, "Pedagogies of Closeness: Humanizing Small-Group Comprehension Instruction," 203.

[207] Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology,* 214.

prompt conversation about the nature of Sabbath and then to reflect on our own relationship to it. Are these ideas new to folks? Do they make sense or are they foreign concepts? The hope is that as we encounter the perspectives of others we will go deeper into our own consideration of Sabbath practice.

At the Home of Martha and Mary

> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"
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> "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one.[f] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."
>
> Luke 10:38–42 NIV

Scripture will be a part of the readings we will include in the small group. Scripture as authority is not very strong in my context, so coming at the experience of what Sabbath practice may feel like for folks is more likely to engage our participants than beginning with the commandment. This passage from the Gospel According to Luke is not specific to Sabbath practice, but it does speak to the way we live. Mary is commended for spending time with Jesus while Martha is attending to the practicalities of welcoming guests. It speaks to

our temptation to focus on what needs to be done instead of on enjoying the presence of the guest themself. Do we feel affinity with Mary or Martha on our first glance reading? If Jesus came to visit our home, would we be distracted with making things nice or would we sit at his feet? When we welcome guests to our homes now, how do we behave? When we read this story in the light of Sabbath practice do we develop more understanding of Mary's choice? When you visit with friends which choice would you rather they made?

Brueggemann and the Ten Commandments

The next passage that could be shared would be from Walter Brueggemann's book *Sabbath as Resistance*. He speaks of Sabbath practice as a way to live differently in order to craft the world in which we wish to live.

> YHWH nullifies that [Egyptian] entire system of anxious production. . . . The limit is set by the weekly pause that breaks the production cycle. And those who participate in it break the anxiety cycle. They are invited to awareness that life does not consist in frantic production and consumption that reduces everyone else to threat and competitor. And as the work stoppage permits a waning of anxiety; so energy is redeployed to the neighborhood. The odd insistence of the God of Sinai is to counter *anxious productivity* with *committed neighborliness.* The latter practice does not produce so much; but it creates an environment of security and respect and dignity that redefines the human project.

Brueggemann claims that the keeping of Sabbath is to facilitate our being in right relationship with one another, to let go of the anxious competition of slavery in Egypt. Have you ever thought about your own rest in terms of your ability to be in relationship with others? Do you notice a difference in your temperament when you are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired? In twelve step groups these four factors add up to "HALT."[208] You are to wait a moment when you feel one or more of these and tend to your own needs before engaging others. In your work or life do you feel more anxious or centered? Do you feel more connected or competitive with the people in your life? What difference might it make to your relationships if you were centered and well rested more often?

"And I Shall Give You Rest"

Another scripture to consider is in the Gospel According to Matthew 11:28–29.

> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.[209]

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[208] Alcoholics Anonymous, https://alcoholicsanonymous.com/how-using-the-halt-concept-prevents-alcohol-relapse/.

[209] Matthew 11:28–29 (NIV) .

People in Silicon Valley are not necessarily looking for rest. They are driven by the goals they have and tend to be Type A personalities. Resting in a sense of sitting quietly is often seen as torture rather than renewal to some of the folks with whom I work. Laying down of burdens might be scary to someone trying to change the world. How do you feel in hearing this scripture passage? Is it something that gives you relief? Does it make you anxious? What burdens do you need to lay down? What would it be like for you to let them go?

A Sabbath Vision

Another helpful reading would be from Barbara Brown Taylor's book *An Altar in the World*. In her chapter on "The Practice of Saying No" she talks about Sabbath rest and our resistance to it. She says, "I think it is good to have a sabbath vision even if it seems impossible to you right now."[210] She then goes on to describe a day of sabbath as she imagines it:

> Stay home not because you are sick but because you are well. Talk someone you love into being well with you. Take a nap, take a walk, take an hour for lunch.[211]

Our reading would end with her reminder:

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[210] Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World* (New York: Harper One, 2009), 138.

[211] Taylor, *An Altar in the World*, 139.

> and when you get anxious because you are convinced that this [that you are precious without working] is not so, remember that your conviction is not required. This is a *commandment.* Your worth has already been established, even when you are not working. The purpose of the commandment is to woo you to the same truth.[212]

What might your vision of Sabbath be? Who would you invite to spend time with you? Is there something you love to do but never get the chance because you just don't have the time? What would feed your soul?

Each of these readings bring an image to mind for the participants. They give opportunities to consider what could be. They provide a place to begin imagining a different way of living.

Ritual

Practices of Sabbath & Compassion

Cranton writes, "A part of developing critical thinking is imagining alternatives."[213] Part of this small group process will be to practice Sabbath along the way. We wish to experiment with the experience of Sabbath rest in order to see how it changes the way we experience the world and our relationship to our God.

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[212] Taylor, *An Altar in the World*, 139.

[213] Cranton, *Understanding and promoting Transformative Learning*, 131.

At first these experiments can be small in nature. Someone can take an afternoon to read for fun, or ride their bike in the morning. The key is to take time to do something one enjoys without thought of productivity. Over time the group will be asked to increase the time and regularity of Sabbath experiments. What activities are meaningful? Do some become their own kind of "work?" What feelings come up about setting aside time for enjoyment? Experiments will give the experience needed to go deeper about the cultural pressures we feel to be productive at all times. They will also, hopefully, show the value of time spent simply in the presence of God.

The community to which we are reaching is not likely to choose quiet or restful activities for their Sabbath practice. This is a community dominated by Type A personalities who find refraining from activity burdensome. Each participant will be encouraged to discern what makes for "Sabbath" for them. For people who often sit indoors at computers, Sabbath may be physical activity, especially outside. People who often spend time working in their head may find that activities that draw them into their bodies may create a sense of balance. The challenge will be finding activities that give the sense of rest to a community that does not seek rest directly.

Slowly the participants will be challenged to set aside more time for Sabbath and to think more intentionally about how to use that time best. Where are places of resistance? What gets in the way? What happens to your responsibilities when you take time to rest? Do you find you look for "productive" ways to spend your Sabbath time such as getting exercise or completing a project? What would it mean to not be productive in any way?

The expectation is that practicing Sabbath will bring up feelings and memories that will need to be processed. Resistance or the temptation to make Sabbath "productive" is likely to be significant. Questions are raised about our core values and sense of vulnerability. "Transformative experiences can lead to many changes in a person's life, some of which are difficult, personal, and hard to integrate into the fabric of being."[214] We will need to be ready for such challenges and be there to support one another when they come up.

Silicon Valley is very competitive so it can be scary to step out of the grind. Hersey proclaims, "Grind culture is violence and violence creates trauma."[215] How have we been traumatized by the grind culture around us? How will integrating Sabbath into our lives impact our work in this community?

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[214] Cranton, *Understanding and promoting Transformative Learning*, 136.

[215] Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 113.

What are the implications of the changes we might experience and how can we cope with them?

What is the fear that keeps us in the grind? And does our faith offer an answer to that fear? "One of the most basic and profound things that these groups can help us to do is to remind us to look to God for salvation, instead of trying to save ourselves."[216] This idea of depending on God's grace is at the core of faith. It is counter to the culture of Silicon Valley where people change the world all the time. The whole idea of salvation coming from outside us will be challenging and perhaps quite freeing.

Reflection

How the Pieces Combine

As the small groups go through this process of sharing their stories, hearing the stories of others, and practicing experiences of Sabbath, there will then be new personal experiences to share, new perspectives on the stories heard, and new ways of Sabbath to be tried out. Each gathering this cycle will continue and go deeper providing a feedback loop of sharing, listening, and practicing.

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[216] Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 142.

This is the unique benefit of a Methodist small group. People share in the practice of their faith and reflect together on how they are doing with it.

Over the course of the small group, people will have the opportunity to try different experiments with taking Sabbath. Some will have not worked while others may have been powerful. Those moments of experiencing the presence of God will encourage the participants in their faith journey. As these experiences are shared within the small group and reflected upon people, will be able to determine what activities are effective in developing that sense of God's presence that is Sabbath.

In hearing the stories of each other's experiments, the participants will have encouraged one another with creative ideas. What did not work for one person might be just the thing to be Sabbath for someone else. As folks go through challenges they have one another to know they are not alone in the journey. Frustrations can be shared and joys can be multiplied.

Practice makes perfect. As participants find the practices that work for them, they begin to make those part of their routines. The hope is that the blessing of Sabbath will further encourage folks to invest in their Sabbath practices with their time and focus. People in Silicon Valley do value practices that help them be their best selves, which dovetails with the hope that

faithfulness will be a blessing. Hersey says, "Rest uplifts and boosts our Spirit, allowing us to know that we are enough, and the care of our souls deserves a role in our healing plans."[217]

As people learn to value their own Sabbath practice, we hope that they will experience the "heart strangely warmed" experience of John Wesley. He understood in a moment that God's love for him was not limited by his own faithfulness. He felt God's grace in a powerful way. This changed the way he preached, taught, and lived. Perhaps they can find a sense like Hersey, that "my Sabbath is a personal, spiritual, and political practice."[218]

At the end of the small group season participants will be asked once again about their own relationship to Sabbath. The hope is that people will have developed a new relationship with the concept and practice of Sabbath. This project will be successful if participants have found a level of Sabbath practice that they can maintain in their own lives. an intentionality that values time to just "be."

The further hope is that this ongoing practice will encourage participants to see their own value not from their works, but from the grace of God. The

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[217] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 142.

[218] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 163.

culture of Silicon Valley is tough on the ego. A hope of Sabbath practice is to know that we are crafted in God's own image and we are beloved before we ever accomplish work.

Conclusion

In a context of intense work and long hours this project seeks to inspire a practice of Sabbath observance. In a place of high rates of loneliness this project seeks to inspire covenanted community. This paper has argued that the current work practices of Silicon Valley are detrimental to individuals and the community. It leaves the individuals exhausted and burned out. It leaves the community depleted.

People work like this because there is a sense in American culture that working hard makes one a responsible member of society. It is more than trying to accomplish good work. People are willing to work long hours even when it reduces productivity in order to have the status of a "hard worker."

One of the effects of seeing those that work hard as the epitome of responsibility is that it tempts the community to reckon a person's value based on their productivity. This can devalue those who cannot "work hard." People who are disabled, elderly, or too young cannot achieve the needed status in the community. When people's needs are not met, the Protestant Work Ethic can prioritize those who have had the opportunity or ability to at some point "work

hard." This work ethic devalues the needs of those who are not able to earn their place in the community.

In contrast is the beloved community God intends for us. It is a community that is nurtured and nourished and able to see one another as fellow members rather than competitors. One of the keys to crafting this beloved community is Sabbath practice. Observing the Sabbath centers one in their inherent worth. It centers the spirit in God's presence. It forms us. When a community practices Sabbath together they have time to just enjoy the company of one another and can develop deeper bonds.

When we are not in competition with one another we can see one another more clearly. We can enjoy genuine community. We get a foretaste of the coming kindom. Laying down our daily burdens makes room for us to connect with our God in a uniquely deep way. Sabbath practice takes us from surviving to thriving.

Scripture lays out the traditional understanding of Sabbath practice. We are told in Genesis that God crafted the world for six days and then took the seventh as a day to enjoy all that had been created. We are told in Exodus that God commands us to follow this pattern ourselves, that being made in God's own image, we must follow God's pattern. We learn from the prophet Isaiah that

God's purpose is just community, a beloved community. Our rest is meant to form us as people who can see one another as fellow beloveds and treat one another with justice and care.

Jesus challenges the way Sabbath had begun to be practiced, as more important than the people doing the practice. He re-centers Sabbath as a gift for people rather than as a burden on people. He affirms that healing is part of what God is hoping for in our Sabbath. We are to use Sabbath as a way of loving and not as an excuse to ignore the needs of others.

We have found that healing power in the practice of Sabbath. We have experienced rejuvenation and restoration in the time we set aside to enjoy the created and our Creator. It has proved gift and blessing to those who practice it. It has formed us well.

We then wish to use this gift and blessing to continue to form as fellow beloveds and craft the world God intends for us. We have the choice to use this tool to bring about the kind of community that God hopes for and craves. Sabbath practice is the needed counter-balance to our work ethic. We can work for a time, but then we need to rest for a time as well. The time spent will allow us to bond together and build the community structure that nurtures beloved community.

The context of this project is a United Methodist congregation. One of the keys of the Methodist tradition is the gathering in small groups. It is a foundational way of spiritual formation. Therefore this project seeks to use the tool of small groups to explore the practice of keeping Sabbath.

This choice is supported by four "legs" of the Methodist discernment "table." It is a part of our tradition. It fits with what we know of how people learn. We have experienced transformation within these groups. And scripture supports the support of one another in this way.

Within these small groups we will begin where folks are. Many of the participants work long hours and feel defined by the work they produce. They value being formed as better versions of themselves. People will also come to this project with their own histories and experiences around rest. Sharing our social locations and histories will facilitate reflection and bonding within the group.

Reading the stories of others, both from scripture and from modern life, will help expand the possibilities participants can imagine. In this reading the assumptions with which folks begin will be challenged bit by bit in the hopes of inspiring them to consider a new way of understanding their value and knowing community.

The word "Methodist" comes from a focus on the way members of the congregation live out their faith in their daily lives. The small group has been a place where people share how their spiritual life is going and support one another in developing practices that nurture their growth. The participants in this project will be encouraged to try out Sabbath practice and support one another in their explorations. Trying out different ways to honor Sabbath gives participants the opportunity to figure out what makes for Sabbath rest for them, taking ownership of their chosen practice. Those experiences can then be shared within the small group for reflection and inspiration.

The end product will hopefully be a group of participants who take Sabbath rest more seriously. They will have found ways to do Sabbath that work for them and have incorporated it into their routine of spiritual practices.

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Vita: