

A few weeks ago, I turned on Good Morning America to find an interview between George Stephanopoulos and the hip Grand Rapids pastor, Rob Bell. They were discussing his newest book, *Love Wins*, which was to be released later that week. The interview, which sparked my interest in reading the book, also reminded me that I have been staring at his earlier three books idly sitting on my bookshelf gathering dust for the past few months, not having been read.

Later that night, after feeling guilty about not having read the books, I picked up his first book, *Velvet Elvis* and began breezing through the chapters. If you have ever seen one of his 14-minute NOOMA videos, the book was quite similar and packed with thought-provoking ideas, questions and topics.

About half-way into the book, I found myself reading the same passage over and over again, and each time I felt more and more like Bell had written this particular passage for me and that God was saying "you need to hear this right now."

Bell writes:

*"There are so many layers to healing the soul. One practice that has brought incredible healing is the taking of a Sabbath. Now when we read the word Sabbath, most of us think of a day in the week, which is what it is. But I have learned that the real issue behind the Sabbath isn't which day of the week it is but how we live all the time.*

*I decided to start taking one day a week to cease from work. And what I discovered is that I couldn't even do it at first.*

*I would go into a depression.*

*By the afternoon I would be so... low.*

*I realized that my life was all about keeping the adrenaline buzz going and that I was only really happy when I was going all the time. When I stopped to spend a day to remember that I am loved just because I exist, I found out how much of my efforts were about earning something I already have.*

*Sabbath is taking a day a week to remind myself that I did not make the world and that it will continue to exist without my efforts.*

*Sabbath is a day when my work is done, even if it isn't.*

*Sabbath is a day when my job is to enjoy. Period.*

*Sabbath is a day when I am fully available to myself and those I love most.*

*Sabbath is a day when I remember that when God made the world, he saw that it was good.*

*Sabbath is a day when I produce nothing.*

*Sabbath is a day when I remind myself that I am not a machine.*

*Sabbath is a day when at the end I say, "I didn't do anything today," and I don't add, "And I feel so guilty."*

*Sabbath is a day when my phone is off, I don't check my email and you can't get ahold of me.*

*Jesus wants to heal our souls, wants to give us the shalom of God. And so we have to stop. We have to slow down. We have to sit still and stare out the window and let the engine come to an idle. We have to listen to what our inner voice is saying."*

*- excerpt from Velvet Elvis, page 117*

These three short paragraphs stopped me in my tracks, and I feel might also resonate with others as well. How many times do we go to bed at night thinking, "oh, I forgot to email so-and-so" or "I wish I had more time for - - -"? Maybe you can't even think of things like this because you are so exhausted from running around all day that as soon as your head hits the pillow you're fast asleep. Or, do you ever feel like your to-do list is magically growing by itself? As soon as you check one thing off, three more are mysteriously added? Are you sitting here right now making a mental note of what you need to get at the grocery store later tonight or what you need to do tomorrow?

We all fill our time with something.

And whatever we don't finish during the week, getting rolled into the weekends. Errands can fill our Saturdays and Sundays, and before we know it, the weekend is gone and it's back to work or school on Monday.

I have always been a very active person. I simply cannot remember not being involved in something. Between sports teams and clubs in high school, and then many organizations throughout four years in college, I was fully involved with campus life. My friends were always amazed when they actually found me in my dorm room and didn't have to leave a message on the door. I loved every minute of being a Resident Assistant, working for the newspaper, captaining a Relay for Life team, leading Alternative Spring Break trips. And today, I love working with our middle and high school students, serving as an elder, being a part of the web team, taking care of three little girls after school, the Farmington Hills Young Adult Bible Study Fellowship group, and working at Coach - well, maybe that last one I don't love so much as the others.

My plate was full in college as it is full today. So when Rob Bell admits that he thrived on "keeping the adrenaline buzz going", I thought to myself how much stress am I bringing into my life trying to stay busy? And, wait a minute, when was the last time I truly took a day of no work, no errands, nothing I **had** to get done.

If my reading those paragraphs over and over was not enough, a few days later I found myself talking a friend who I don't see very often. Since he doesn't live in the area, our weekly conversations are mostly about what we have been doing and what is coming up in the future. After I recounted to him the details of spending a few days with a couple of ill children, all about the middle school trip to serve meals downtown at the Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries, how I took the youth group kids to Mexican Town, tales from my shifts at Coach, and various other stories from the week prior, he asked me if I had a day off. I couldn't believe it. Again, with the Sabbath.

And, if God's timing and ways of speaking to us couldn't be any more perfect, our study this past week at Bible Study Fellowship was Isaiah 58 and 59. In Isaiah 58, God tells Israel that he is not happy with their outward acts of religion as a replacement for a genuine relationship with Him – which is a whole other message. But, the last two verses of the chapter jumped out at me on the page. Starting with verse 13, it says:

*“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

We know from Exodus that God commands for us to keep the Sabbath weekly, as one day intended for rest and refreshment patterned after God's rest in Genesis. Way back when God said, “On the seventh day thou shalt rest” the meaning behind it was simple: Take a break. Call a timeout. Recharge.

Somewhere along the line, however, this concept faded from modern consciousness. The idea of figuratively and literally unplugging once a week now feels tragically close to impossible. Who has time to take time off? We need eight days a week to get tasks accomplished, not six.

But in Isaiah 58:14, we see an amazing promise from God for those who keep His Sabbath – “You will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”

A few years ago, a movement called the Sabbath Manifesto began. It was developed by a group of people who felt a collective need to fight back against our increasingly fast-paced way of living. The idea is to take time off from deadlines, paperwork and everything else that fills our busy lives.

The Manifesto carves out one day per week to unwind, unplug, relax, and reflect. Its principles say to connect with loved ones, nurture your health, get outside, avoid commerce, find silence, give back and avoid technology. So yes, as painful as it might seem, turn off that cell phone, log out of your email, and refrain from checking your Facebook news feed or tweeting your thoughts in 140 characters.

So what does all of this mean? Stop, take a break, unplug. Maybe your work schedule won't permit you to do this on Sunday, but find another day of the week. Isaiah puts it quite plainly, those who keep His Sabbath with find their joy in the Lord, and who doesn't want that?

Amen.