STOPPING TO BREATH THE AIR OF ETERNITY

Finish these phrases:

I'm ready to throw in the…

I'm at the end of my…

I'm just a bundle of…

I'm falling…apart

I'm at my wits…

I feel like resigning from the human…

Scuba Diving – Aliwol Shoel diving in Cathedral with Ragged Tooth Sharks. There are very strong currents, and it has been said that if you can dive at Aliwol you can dive almost anywhere in the world. If the bottom gets disturbed visibility drops dramatically. You have a rope attached to a buoy which the boat can follow as you drift with the current. In my Master dive at 30 meters I think we drifted 5km.

Many of us have lost our way, spiritually, in the currents swirling around us. Currents stir up sand and visibility is minimal when we say yes to too many things. Between demands from work and family, our lives fall somewhere between *full* and *overflowing*. We multitask, so much so that we are unaware we are doing three things at once. We admire people who are able to accomplish so much in so little time. They are our role models.

At the same time many of us are overscheduled, tense, addicted to hurry, frantic, preoccupied, fatigued, and starved for time. Cramming as much as possible into our phones, day planners and to-do lists, we battle life to make the best use of every spare minute we have.

Yet not much changes. Our over productivity becomes counter-productive. We end our days exhausted from work and raising children. And then our "free time" on weekends becomes filled with more demands in an already-overburdened life.

How often have you heard yourself saying:

I'm to busy, It's been all go, There never seems to be enough time, I don't know where all

the time goes, This weeks just flown by, I haven't got a moment to spare, Wow but time

flies… If only I had the time… I'll try to find the time… I'm short of time… Run out of time…

Got to rush… Back to the treadmill… No rest for the wicked… And the revealing invitation

"We must get together sometime"

In fact I could list a whole lot of similar sayings but I don't have the time!

But we can't stop. And if we aren't busy, we feel guilty that we waste time and are not productive.

We go through the motions of doing so many things as if there is no alternative way of spending our days. It is like being addicted—only it is not to drugs or alcohol but to tasks, to work, to doing. Any sense of rhythm in our daily, weekly, and yearly lives has been swallowed up in the currents of our lives.

Add to this the storms and trials of life that blow into our lives unexpectedly and catch us off guard, and we wonder why so many of us are disoriented and confused. Like scuba diving in bad conditions at Aliwol.

Scuba Diving – Rope attached to a buoy – Aliwol Shoel diving in Cathedral with Ragged Tooth Sharks.
We need a rope to lead us home.

God *is* offering us a rope to keep us from getting lost. This rope consistently leads us back home to him, to a place that is centered and rooted. This rope can be found in two ancient disciplines going back thousands of years—the Daily Devotions and Sabbath.

`When placed inside present-day Christianity, the Daily Devotions and Sabbath are groundbreaking, countercultural acts against Western culture. They are powerful declarations about God, ourselves, our relationships, our beliefs, and our values.

Stopping for the Daily Devotion and Sabbath is not meant to add another to-do to our already-busy schedules. This is not a ritual or a law, it is the resetting of our entire lives toward a new destination—God. It is an entirely new way of being in the world.

The Daily Devotion and Sabbath are ropes that lead us back to God in the currents and storms of life. When done as a "want to" rather than a "have to," they offer us a rhythm for our lives that binds us to the living God.

They are nothing short of revolutionary disciplines for Christians today.

When I listen carefully to most people describe their devotional life, the emphasis tends to be on "getting filled up for the day" or "interceding for the needs around me." The root of the **Daily Devotions and the Sabbath are** not so much a turning to God to get something but to be *with* Someone.

Devotions and the Sabbath provides for us now an additional rhythm for an entire reorientation of our lives around the living God. We imitate God by stopping our work and resting.

Make no mistake about it: keeping our devotions and the sabbath are both radical and extremely difficult in our everyday lives. It cuts to the core of our spirituality, the core of our convictions, the core of our faith, the core of our lifestyles.

Our culture knows nothing of setting aside time to rest and delight in God. Like most, I always considered it an optional extra, not something absolutely essential to discipleship.

Our modern lifestyles are ruthless… It's a proven fact through statistics and research that

we work harder and earn more, but we have less time or energy to enjoy the money we've

made… Our working hours have increased, so have our stress levels… 60% of successful professionals say that they are suffering from chronic stress or depression… 48% of the top corporate executives say that their lives are 'Empty and Meaningless'…

We can't stop because that would mean we are surplus to requirements… But oddly enough it is not our bosses that push us but we push ourselves… We are bombarded by over 8000 messages a day trying to persuade us that we need something we don't have… I can believe it… I think way too much time is spent working to pay off things we couldn't afford and really didn't need anyway…

But as we've seen, living in a fallen world is much like being in the current of the ocean. Without the devotions and taking Sabbath time, we easily find ourselves lost and unsure of the larger picture of God and our lives. I am convinced that nothing less than an understanding of these times as a *command* from God, as well as an incredible invitation, will enable us to grab hold of this rope God offers us.

One of the great dangers of faithfully observing daily devotion and the Sabbath is legalism. What about pastors, nurses, doctors, police officers, and others who must work on Sundays? Jesus observed Sabbath but he also healed the sick and preached sermons on that day. What might be work for you may be different for someone else. Some people will have to choose another day besides a Sunday if it is to be a day without work.

The key is to set a regular rhythm for your devotions and Sabbath time twenty-four-hours in every seven days. What is important is to select a time period and protect it!

God has built us each differently. What works for one person will not for another. There are some elements, that need to be found in any Devotion and Sabbath keeping, regardless of what approach you ultimately choose.

The principal is to rest, replenish, and delight yourself in God.

Remember these times both your devotional time and your Sabbath…

Don't skip it these times… Imagine if I said well I'll just skip adultery this week!!! Well I've had

an offer! But next week I'll keep it… We say well I'll skip it this week, implying; oh well it's not so important…

As we know men and women have come up with 32 million laws… our Lord has 10… He must have thought it important to include it in the top 10… There is only 10!!

The Central Elements of the Daily Devotions and the Sabbath

1. Stopping

This is the essence of a Daily Devotion and the Sabbath is stopping. What is important is that our time with God be unhurried so that what we read or pray has time to sink deeply into our spirits. We stop our activity and pause to be with the living God. Central to the challenge of stopping at midday, for example, is to trust that God is on the throne. He rules. I don't. At each Devotion I give up control and trust God to run his world without me.

These are of stopping, BUT most of us can't stop until we are finished with whatever it is we think we need to do. We need to complete our projects and marking MAML students papers, answer e-mails, return all phone messages, complete the balancing of our accounts to pay our bills, finish cleaning the house. There's always one more goal to be reached before stopping.

In these times I embrace my limits. God is God. He is indispensable. The world continues working fine when I stop.

We stop in these times because God is on the throne, assuring us the world will not fall apart if we stop our activities. Life on this side of heaven is an unfinished symphony. We accomplish one goal and then immediately are confronted with new opportunities and challenges.

Ultimately we will die with countless unfinished projects and goals. That's okay. God is at work taking care of the universe. He manages quite well without us having to run things. When we are sleeping, he is working. So he commands us to relax, to enjoy the fact that we are not in charge of his world, that even when we die, the world will continue on nicely without us.

The core spiritual issue in stopping revolves around trust. Will God take care of us and our concerns if we obey him by stopping to keep our devotions and Sabbath time?

2. Centering

Scripture commands us: "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him" (Psalm 37:7) and "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

We move into God's presence and rest there. That alone is no small feat.

When you find your mind wandering, let your breathing bring you back. As you breathe in, ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. As you breathe out, exhale all that is sinful, false, and not of him.

If nothing else happens during a Daily Devotion, it is a call to mindfulness, an invitation to pay attention to what our short, earthly lives are all about.

3. Silence

Solitude is the practice of being absent from people and things to attend to God. Silence is the practice of quieting every inner and outer voice to attend to God.

These are probably the most challenging and least practiced disciplines among Christians today. We live in a world of noise and distractions. Studies say that the average group can only bear fifteen seconds of silence. Most of our church services confirm this.

When God appeared to Elijah after his suicidal depression and flight from Jezebel, he told him to stand and wait for the presence of the Lord to pass by. God did not appear in ways he had in the past. God was not in the wind, an earthquake, or fire. God finally revealed himself to Elijah in "a sound of sheer whisper" (1 Kings 19:12). The translation of God coming in "a still small voice"(KJV). The silence after the chaos, for Elijah and for

us, is full of the presence of God. God did speak to Elijah out of the silence, and he speaks also to us. While it is not the objective of the Devotion, it is a natural result.

4. Scripture

For you have exalted above all things your name and your word Psalm 138:2

The psalms are the foundation of almost any Daily Devotion book you will find available today. They have served as the prayer book of the church through the centuries. Jesus quoted psalms more than any other book except Isaiah. The prayers of the Psalms cover the entire range of our life experience—from anger to rage to trust to praise.

5. Rest

Once we stop, for our devotion and our Sabbath, God calls us to rest. God rested after his work. We are to do the same—every seventh day

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. Genesis 2:2-3

What do we do to replace all we are now stopping during our Sabbath time? The answer is simple: whatever delights and replenishes you.

For me to enjoy Sabbath and devotional rest, requires I have another day of the week to do the tasks of life that consume my energy or fill me with worry. For example, planning my week, paying bills, balancing our accounts, cleaning the house, fighting traffic and crowds to shop, doing loads of laundry are all work I need to do a different day of the week.

A “day off” produces positive results but is, in **Eugene Peterson’s** words, “a bastard Sabbath.” I hope they help you develop a biblical framework for Sabbath that fits your particular life situation, temperament, calling, and personality.

When we stop and rest, we respect our humanity and the image of God in us. We are not nonstop human beings. Sadly, it often takes a physical illness such as cancer, a heart attack, the flu, or a severe depression to get us to rest.

6. Delight

Devotional life and our Sabbath revolve around delighting in what we have been given. God, after finishing his work of creation, proclaimed that “**it was very good**” (Genesis 1:31).

God delighted over his creation. The Hebrew phrase communicates a sense of joy, completion, wonder, and play.

- We are invited to enjoy and delight in creation and its gifts.
- We are invited us to slow down to pay attention and delight in people our families and friends.
- We are invited to healthy play.

Creation and life are, in a sense, God’s gift of a playground to us. Whether it be through sports, dance, games, looking at old family photographs, or visiting museums, nurturing our sense of pure fun in God also is part of Sabbath.

7. Contemplate

The final quality is the contemplation of God. Pondering the love of God remains the central focus of our devotions and sabbaths. Throughout history these elements have included worship with God’s people where we feast on his presence, the reading and study of Scripture, and silence.

As with stopping, resting, and delighting, we will need to prepare in advance how to do this. There was food to buy, clothes to wash for the children, and final preparations to be made.

What will it mean to prepare yourself for worship, to receive the Word of God? What time do you need to go to bed the night before, to be at church on time? What invitation do you need to decline to get to church?

When might you have times of silence and solitude or prayer during the day? What final items do you need to resolve so you can have an uncluttered time with God?

This is like receiving the gift of a public holiday every week. Suddenly you have the gift of a day to do whatever you want. You don't have any obligations, pressures, or responsibilities. You have permission to play, be with friends, take a nap, read a good book. Few of us would give ourselves a "no obligation day" very often. **God gives you one—every seventh day**.

Think about it. He gives you over seven weeks (fifty-two days in all) of public holidays every year! And if you begin to practice stopping, resting, delighting, and contemplating for twenty-four-hours each week, you will soon find your other time will becoming infused with those same qualities. I suspect that has always been God's plan.

God invites us to grab on to his rope in the currents of life.

Daily Devotion and weekly Sabbath: Stop, Center, Silence, Scripture, Rest, Delight, Contemplate

He seeks to lead us back home to him. Sabbath keeping and a Daily Devotion summon us to slow down to God's rhythm. For when we are busier than what God requires. As **Thomas Merton has written**, we do violence to ourselves: