

Sabbath and Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood

by J. D. Walt

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, a neighborly day in this beauty wood. Would you be mine? Could you be mine?

He was a treasured guest in our childhood homes. First he went to the closet, where he exchanged his coat and shoes for a more comfortable sweater (knitted by his mother) and sneakers. Then he sang to us in a way that made us want to sing along. We boarded the trolley and went on a journey, awakening our imagination to the land of make believe. We were treated to story time and games like show and tell. He encouraged us to get in touch with our childhood feelings and gave us the freedom to play. All this happened under the carefree clock named Daniel, who had no hands. Not that we cared much about time then; it could be whatever time we wanted it to be. It is an overworked genre of literature, but a fitting book cries out to be written, *All I Really Needed to Know about Sabbath Keeping, I learned in Mr. Rogers Neighborhood.*

Sabbath invites us into a different kind of space. . . . a different dimension of time . . . a place of seeing God. . . an imaginative spirit of "make-believe." Done consistently, over a period of time, Sabbath keeping will make us believe in God in a much deeper way. Sabbath, in this vein, is a place of faith-making.

Eugene Peterson, in an article entitled "Confessions of a Former Sabbath Breaker," defines good Sabbath keeping as a creative combination of praying and playing. He invites us to find a place (a sanctuary) and craft a routine (a ritual). Those involved in church leadership have the additional need of finding a time beyond the working Sunday. Whatever the case, be it Monday or Saturday, it should be kept as consistently as possible. If Sabbath is to do its gracious work in us it must become a life rhythm.

Praying. Find a place for worship and prayer, a sanctuary. From a sacred space in your home to a quiet walk through the park, locate some holy ground and "take off your shoes." (i.e. prepare to meet God.) Take off your watch. (Eternity is timeless.) Enter in with praise and thanksgiving. Sing, but resist the temptation to write songs. Chant the Psalms. (Don't worry about how to do it—make it up!) Take a prayer like our Lord's Prayer and pray it slowly and deliberately, as a guide. Spend time reflecting on your calling and the way it is unfolding. Get in touch with the creation and remember the works of God in your life. Thank God for your gifts and reconsecrate them to Him. Break free from the idolatry of worshipping worship. Always be reminded: worship is a revolutionary reorientation around the radical idea of a God-centered existence.

Playing. Put the dreaded "to-do" list aside and go have some fun. Read some good fiction. Go to a movie, but try to avoid television. Take a long drive in the country. Visit a park and swing and slide. Learn to play games like cards or chess that stimulate thought and give attention deficit

addictions like GameCube a rest. Make a call or write a letter to an old friend. Be inventive; just resist the temptation to work.

Can you hear the Lord of the Sabbath singing? It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood. . . . would you be mine. . . could you be mine? That's what it's all about.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus,

We want to hear you, the Lord of Sabbath singing, calling out for us to join you in Sabbath. We give thanks for Mr. Rogers, who taught so many adults and children about loving our neighbors. Help us to show love to our neighbors and our love for you by taking time to pray and play. May we truly celebrate you and live a God-centered life by pushing our lists aside, turning off the TV, and spending time in creation with our family and friends.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions:

1. How has your concept of time changed from when you were a child?
2. What ritual can you create to be part of your Sabbath?
3. What are some activities you enjoy that help you remember to have fun? Is there a craft or hobby that you would like to learn on your Sabbaths?
4. How can you reconnect with your neighbors on the Sabbath and throughout the week?