

Sabbath and Parenting

by *Becky Keife*

I grew up on "Little House on the Prairie" reruns and flannel board Sunday school lessons. *Good and wholesome*. But somewhere between Nellie Oleson's antics and the fabric loaves and fishes, I missed a few key points.

Like what I believed about the Sabbath.

I thought God finished all his making-the-world work in six days, so with nothing to do on the seventh day, he rested, and we ought to do the same.

As a freckled-nose third grader, I envisioned early believers busting their faithful behinds to tend the fields, thresh the wheat, and bake the bread, dawn till dusk, six days a week, so on the seventh day they could stop working and sit in holy righteousness.

Though I've grown in faith and stature, my understanding of God's command to rest has remained Half Pint size, like my favorite Ingalls family character.

I saw the Sabbath as a simple noun: A place for resting. A thing you do that means doing nothing at all.

As mama to three young children, I counted myself out.

Because the mom job never stops.

There is no end to making meals or changing diapers. Sure, I could let the dishes go undone and the laundry pile up for one more day. But the work of mothering can't be stored up and finished.

So if it's impossible to stop working, I reasoned, then it's impossible to keep the Sabbath.

I thought I was disqualified.

How could I make 24 hours calm and quiet with three wild boys? My sons won't sit all day and whittle toy trains out of blocks of wood. Their legs can't help but run; their lungs breathe to shout.

I was disqualified from the spiritual duty (would-be luxury) of a day of rest. Like I didn't even have a Sabbath chance.

But then I had to ask, *Would God really do that?*

Would God really give a command that mamas couldn't keep? And not just mothers, but fathers and farmers, doctors saving lives on Sundays and preachers who spend the Sabbath preaching.

Did God disqualify them all?

No, that can't be right.

I must have gotten something wrong.

I'm a word girl who learns from writing—I go back and read to find the wrong.

The Holy Spirit shines a light on my mistake.

Noun: PERSON, place, and thing.

I forgot the person.

Could Sabbath mean keeping company with the person of God?

Oh, yes! Breathes my soul.

I wrack my brain for anything else missed:

A word could be a noun and a verb. Like fly. The buzzing thing with six legs, two wings. But it's also an action! To take flight. Soar!

Defining Sabbath as a state of inaction could be completely upside down and backwards.

Rest is more than being sedentary or asleep. Rest is reflecting, remembering. Giving thanks for all the great things God has done. Rest is refocusing. Fixing our eyes on things above.

Maybe I *can* keep the Sabbath even in motherhood.

I Sabbath when I plop beside my boys, phone away, just sit and play.

I Sabbath when I prop my feet on the back porch stool, watch squirrels scurry and scribble down the morning's gifts.

I Sabbath when we hike the canyon. Snapping photos of boys with blue-bellied lizards and spiky-backed caterpillars. I Sabbath breathing in nature's perfume and marveling over sticks and snakes with my sons.

I Sabbath when we pull back the covers and kids climb in bed for snuggles warm and long.

Maybe as a mom I have this Sabbath thing down better than I thought.

Maybe I'm not disqualified at all.

Prayer:

Merciful God, who will always be the ultimate parent,

We pray that you give us the strength to fix our eyes on you when we become too focused on "to-do lists." Remind us to take to plop beside our children and enjoy their company without the distractions of work and technology. Help us to teach our children about the Sabbath through our own actions and words. You know this is difficult for a parent, so we pray you give us courage.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Questions:

1. Have you ever felt like your responsibilities as a parent made it “impossible” for you to take a Sabbath?
2. How can you teach your children to *help* your whole family take a Sabbath instead of being a hindrance to the practice?
3. What parts of parenthood are life-giving to you? How can you incorporate those things into your Sabbath?
4. Sabbath is about spending time with God. What ways can you spend time with God together as a family?