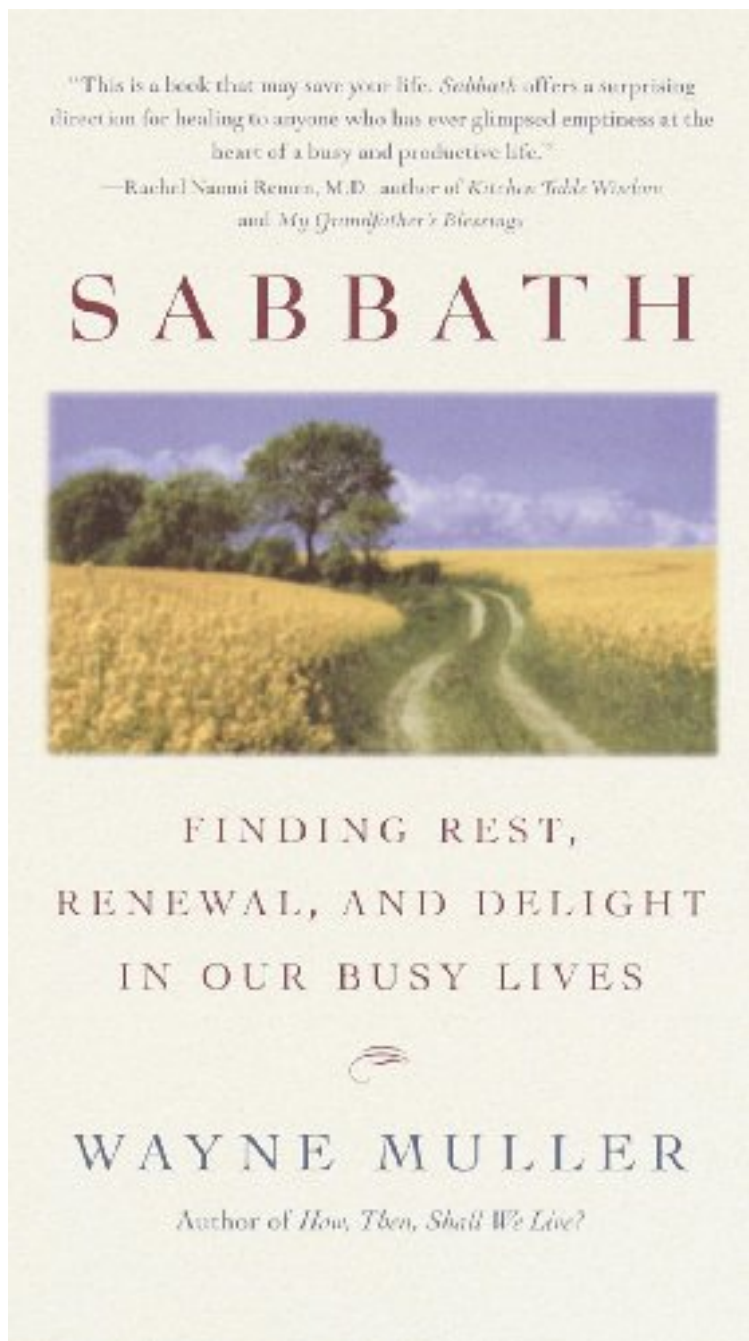


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Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn today's world, with its relentless emphasis on success and productivity, we have lost

the necessary rhythm of life, the balance between work and rest. Constantly striving, we feel exhausted and deprived in the midst of great abundance. We long for time with friends and family, we long for a moment to ourselves. Millennia ago, the tradition of Sabbath created an oasis of sacred time within a life of unceasing labor. Now, in a book that can heal our harried lives, Wayne Muller, author of the spiritual classic *How, Then, Shall We Live?*, shows us how to create a special time of rest, delight, and renewal--a refuge for our souls. We need not even schedule an entire day each week. Sabbath time can be a Sabbath afternoon, a Sabbath hour, a Sabbath walk. With wonderful stories, poems, and suggestions for practice, Muller teaches us how we can use this time of sacred rest to refresh our bodies and minds, restore our creativity, and regain our birthright of inner happiness.

Remember the Sabbath

In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between work and rest. All life requires a rhythm of rest. There is a rhythm in our waking activity and the body's need for sleep. There is a rhythm in the way day dissolves into night, and night into morning. There is a rhythm as the active growth of spring and summer is quieted by the necessary dormancy of fall and winter. There is a tidal rhythm, a deep, eternal conversation between the land and the great sea. In our bodies, the heart perceptibly rests after each life-giving beat; the lungs rest between the exhale and the inhale. We have lost this essential rhythm. Our culture invariably supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something--anything--is better than doing nothing. Because of our desire to succeed, to meet these ever-growing expectations, we do not rest. Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points that would show us where to go, we bypass the nourishment that would give us succor. We miss the quiet that would give us wisdom. We miss the joy and love born of effortless delight. Poisoned by this hypnotic belief that good things come only through unceasing determination and tireless effort, we can never truly rest. And for want of rest, our lives are in danger. In our drive for success we are seduced by the promises of more: more money, more recognition, more satisfaction, more love, more information, more influence, more possessions, more security. Even when our intentions are noble and our efforts sincere--even when we dedicate our lives to the service of others--the corrosive pressure of frantic overactivity can nonetheless cause suffering in ourselves and others.

Thomas Merton: "There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence . . . [and that is] activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence." The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful. A "successful" life has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company; war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities, because we are fearfully protecting what we have, and do not feel safe enough to be kind and generous; war on the earth, because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feed us, to taste its blessings and give thanks. How have we allowed this to happen? This was not our intention, this is not the world we dreamed when we were young and our whole life was full of possibility and promise. How did we get so terribly lost in a world saturated with striving and grasping, yet somehow bereft of joy and delight? I suggest that it is this: We have forgotten the Sabbath. Before you dismiss this statement as simplistic, even naive, we must explore more fully the nature and definition of Sabbath. While Sabbath can refer to a single day of the week, Sabbath can also be a far-reaching, revolutionary tool for cultivating those precious human qualities that grow only in time. If busyness can become a kind of violence, we do not have to stretch our perception very far to see that Sabbath time--effortless, nourishing rest--can invite a healing of this violence. When we consecrate a time to listen to the still, small voices, we remember the root of inner wisdom that makes work fruitful. We remember from where we are most deeply nourished, and see more clearly the shape and texture of the people and things before us. Without rest, we respond from a survival mode, where everything we meet assumes a terrifying prominence. When we are driving a motorcycle at high speed, even a small stone in the road can be a deadly threat. So, when we are moving faster and faster, every encounter, every detail inflates in importance, everything seems more urgent than it really is, and we react with sloppy desperation.

Charles is a gifted, thoughtful physician. One day we were discussing the effects of exhaustion on the quality of our work. Physicians are trained to work when they are exhausted, required from the moment they begin medical school to perform when they are sleep-deprived, hurried, and overloaded. "I

discovered in medical school," Charles told me, "that if I saw a patient when I was tired or overworked, I would order a lot of tests. I was so exhausted, I couldn't tell exactly what was going on. I could see the symptoms, I could recognize the possible diagnoses, but I couldn't really hear how it all fit together. So I got in the habit of ordering a battery of tests, hoping they would tell me what I was missing." But when I was rested--if I had an opportunity to get some sleep, or go for a quiet walk--when I saw the next patient, I could rely on my intuition and experience to give me a pretty accurate reading of what was happening. If there was any uncertainty about my diagnosis, I would order a single, specific test to confirm or deny it. But when I could take the time to listen and be present with them and their illness, I was almost always

right." Throughout this book I use the word Sabbath both as a specific practice and a larger metaphor, a starting point to invoke a conversation about the forgotten necessity of rest. Sabbath is time for sacred rest; it may be a holy day, the seventh day of the week, as in the Jewish tradition, or the first day of the week, as for

Christians. But Sabbath time may also be a Sabbath afternoon, a Sabbath hour, a Sabbath walk--indeed, anything that preserves a visceral experience of life-giving nourishment and rest. I have included dozens of Sabbath exercises, simple practices that can take a few hours or a few moments. Sabbath time is time off the wheel, time when we take our hand from the plow and let God and the earth care for things, while we drink, if only for a few moments, from the fountain of rest and delight. REST FOR THE WEARY "There is more to

life than merely increasing its speed." --Gandhi September. I am surrounded by flowers. Every day more flowers, until I beg the nurses to share them with other patients who could be cheered by them. A colleague from the AIDS clinic drops by to sing "The Lord's Prayer" in a rich alto at my feet. One visitor, a former client, brings me a tiny Buddha. An old friend brings me my favorite chicken enchiladas with green chili. Another sits beside me and, using a Tibetan practice, breathes in my suffering while he breathes out healing and strength for me. A neighbor brings me a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe. My son brings me Gizmo, his favorite stuffed animal, to watch over me in the night. Many come, I find out later, and depart without waking me. I have no idea who came and who did not. I am exhausted. I cannot lift my head or open my eyes. I am close to death, infected with streptococcal pneumonia, a rare and often fatal bacterial infection.

Jim Henson, the inventive puppeteer, died from this illness. I breathe only with great difficulty. I am on an emergency schedule: Every four hours, someone comes and gives me albuterol to inhale. Then I am tilted upside down by a respiratory therapist, who pummels me on my back and sides while I lie with my head below my feet. They are trying to make me cough up the phlegm that is choking me to death. A month earlier, I had been living a typical life, at least for me. I was seeing patients in psychotherapy, running Bread for the Journey, and traveling around the country, lecturing and teaching. When I was at home I served as the chaplain in the AIDS clinic in Santa Fe, and I was also finishing a book while trying my best to be a good husband and father. A month earlier, I had put a quote from Brother David Steindl-Rast on my bulletin board. Life, he said, was like the breath: We must be able to live in an easy rhythm between give and take. If

we cannot learn to live and breathe in this rhythm, he counseled, we will place ourselves in grave danger. Here I am, exhausted, barely able to breathe at all. I am attached and entwined; long plastic tubes feed me nourishing fluids, antibiotics, oxygen. Visitors, each bringing their particular gift of kindness, both comfort and tire me. Even with dear friends I feel the energy go out of me, the energy of attention, of listening to words, of being even marginally present. At the end of each visit, I fall immediately back to sleep before my visitors are out the door. I had always assumed that people I loved gave energy to me, and people I disliked took it away from me. Now I see that every act, no matter how pleasant or nourishing, requires effort, consumes oxygen. Every gesture, every thought or touch, uses some life. I am reminded of the story of Jesus walking through a crowd of people. A woman, seeking to be healed, reached out to touch the hem of his garment. Jesus asked, Who touched me? His disciples said, People are touching you all the time, what are you talking about? But Jesus said, I could feel power go out of me. Deeply mindful of the

flow of his life force, Jesus could feel the expenditure of energy in every encounter. This is a useful discovery for how our days go. We meet dozens of people, have so many conversations. We do not feel how much energy we spend on each activity, because we imagine we will always have more energy at our disposal. This one little conversation, this one extra phone call, this one quick meeting, what can it cost? But it does cost, it drains yet another drop of our life. Then, at the end of days, weeks, months, years, we collapse, we burn out, and cannot see where it happened. It happened in a thousand unconscious events, tasks, and responsibilities that seemed easy and harmless on the surface but that each, one after the other, used a small portion of our precious life. And so we are given a commandment: Remember the Sabbath. Rest is an essential enzyme of life, as necessary as air. Without rest, we cannot sustain the energy needed to have

life. We refuse to rest at our peril--and yet in a world where overwork is seen as a professional virtue, many of us feel we can legitimately be stopped only by physical illness or collapse. My friend Will is a gifted physician who was always busy. When Will barely survived a massive heart attack, he used his illness as an opportunity to reevaluate his life, and began to slow down, taking particular care to take time with his grandchildren. Helena is a passionate and driven massage therapist who found a lump in her breast and, upon discovering it was cancer, began to paint, do yoga, and nap in her hammock in the afternoons. Pamela, an overworked social worker, was nearly killed in a hit-and-run collision, and during her long rehabilitation she began to listen carefully for those things that brought her nourishment and joy. She remembered times of prayer and worship as a child, and felt comforted by the fragrance of her early spirituality. When she recovered sufficiently, she entered the seminary and became a pastoral counselor. She now serves those in need with gentle enthusiasm. Dolores was a devoted psychotherapist with a thriving private practice with far more clients than she could realistically serve. She was felled by a mysterious illness that left her weak and physically exhausted for almost three years. Later, with fewer clients, and the fragrance of rest in her body, her ears and eyes have become like crystal; she hears and sees deeply into the hearts of those who come to her. If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath--our pneumonia, our cancer, our heart attack, our accidents create Sabbath for us. In my relationships with people suffering with cancer, AIDS, and other life-threatening illness, I am always struck by the mixture of sadness and relief they experience when illness interrupts their overly busy lives. While each shares their particular fears and sorrows, almost every one confesses some secret gratefulness. "Finally," they say, "at last. I can rest." Through a good friend and doctor who literally threw me into his pickup truck and raced me to the hospital, through the wise and swift administration of good medicine, through numberless prayers and great kindnesses, I was granted the blessing of being healed of my infection. Now, I take more walks. I play with my children, I work mostly with the poor, and have stopped seeing patients. I write when I am able, and I pray more. I try to be kind. And without fail, at the close of the day, I stop, say a prayer, and give thanks. The greatest lesson I have learned is about surrender. There are larger forces, strong and wise, at work here. I am willing to be stopped. I owe my life to the simple act of rest.

PRACTICE: Lighting Sabbath Candles

The traditional Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown, the Christian Sabbath with morning worship. In both, Sabbath time begins with the lighting of candles. Those who celebrate Sabbath find that in this moment, the stopping truly begins. They take a few breaths, allow the mind to quiet, and the quality of the day begins to shift. Irene says she can feel the tension leave her body as the wick takes the flame. Kathy says she often weeps, so great is her relief that the time for rest has come. This is the beginning of sacred time. Even Sara, who does not celebrate Sabbath at all, tells me that when she has prepared dinner for her family and is ready to eat, she is especially fond of the moment she lights the candles. It is, she says, a kind of silent grace, a ritual beginning of family time.

WILL Three generations back my family had only to light a candle and the world parted. Today, Friday afternoon, I disconnect clocks and phones. When night fills my house with passages, I begin saving my life.--

MARCIA FALK Find a candle that holds some beauty or meaning for you. When you have set aside some time--before a meal, or during prayer, meditation, or simply quiet reading--set the candle before you, say a simple prayer or blessing for yourself or someone you love, and light the candle. Take a few mindful breaths. For just this moment, let the hurry of the world fall away.

Revue de presse "Muller's insights are applicable within a broad spectrum of faiths and will appeal to a wide range of readers."-- Publishers Weekly "One of the best spiritual books of the year."-- Spirituality and Health "Wayne Muller's call to remember the Sabbath is not only rich, wise and poetic, it may well be the only salvation for body and soul in a world gone crazy with busyness and stress."-- Joan Borysenko, author of *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* and *A Woman's Book of Life* "This is a book that may save your life. Sabbath offers a surprising direction for healing to anyone who has ever glimpsed emptiness at the heart of a busy and productive life."-- Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom* Visit Bantam's website at www.bantamdell.com