

# Confident Parenting

The Lesson of the Sabbath:  
Finding Replenishment for Overcrowded Lives

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Dr. Ron Benson is a very wise pediatrician, who I am told is “old school.” He makes house calls, and he takes time to read stories to children who visit his office. There’s a peace and a presence about Ron that is incredibly refreshing in today’s high speed world.

Dr. Ron tells the story of a woman who came to him thinking her child had attention deficit syndrome, or ADD, for short. Ruth was a pastor’s wife with three active kids, ages fourteen, twelve, and eight. Her husband led the community’s largest church, of which Dr. Ron, the pediatrician, was a member.

One day Ruth came to Ron’s office to have him examine her 12 year-old son, whom she believed was displaying signs of ADD. The boy was very active, very distracted, and very rude to everyone around him. He had become nearly impossible to handle. Dr. Ron asked all the necessary medical questions and took some notes. After listening intently, he put his chart down and asked his nurse to take the boy out of the room. Then he turned to Ruth.

“Ruth, I don’t think there is anything clinically wrong with Ross. However, I do think there is something wrong with your family. Your family is overloaded with too much stress and hurry. You are so busy doing good things that you are missing the best things in life. Ross doesn’t have ADD, he is just too busy for such a young boy, and the pressures are making him distracted. He is acting out because your family is way too busy.”

## **SPEED KILLS!**

I’m fairly convinced that the same scenario could be played out in most pediatricians’ offices in this region of Ontario. The pace of life is killing the soul of families in our community and in our churches.

The speed of life today makes people crazy. Families are at risk because they are overstretched and overcommitted. And as a result most of them are disconnected.

Let’s face it: Everything is more dangerous at high speed. When we are over-tired, we settle for mediocrity in our primary relationships with God, friends, and family.

The saddest part is that many of us are just too busy to care. To compound the problem, busyness has become a virtue in our culture. But if we don't stop and make some courageous decisions to slow it all down, we put several aspects of our lives at risk.

### **1. Loss of Rhythm**

In the relentless busyness of modern life, we can lose the gentle rhythm between work and rest. God created healthy tempos for work, rest, play, and worship. We were not meant to behave like machines that run full tilt until they burn out.

When a family finds a healthy rhythm, everything seems to work better.

### **2. Loss of Spiritual Focus**

Jesus made a profound statement in the Sermon on the Mount when he said in Matthew 6:21 CEV *Your heart will always be where your treasure is.*

So, wherever you spend your time, wherever you focus your attention, wherever you spend the bulk of your money, that's where your heart is.

For most of us, the great danger is not that we will walk away from God overnight. The great danger is that we become so distracted and so rushed and so preoccupied that we settle for a second-rate relationship with God. We become lukewarm and begin to drift away from God.

Johnny and Susie are not involved in youth ministry or home groups or anything else, because that interferes with sports and homework. They are not connected to any authentic spiritual community in the church. They have lost spiritual focus. Mom and dad say nothing because their priorities as parents are all messed up, too.

In contrast to all of that, Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 NIV *But seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

We have to put God first, and seek His kingdom first in our lives.

Parents, may I challenge you? Be bold! Slow down. Make room for Sabbath rest. Lead your family into authentic spiritual community. Serve the Lord by serving the local church. Get involved!

### **3. Loss of Health**

Medical reports indicate that more kids are depressed, stressed, and showing signs of mental and physical breakdown than ever before.

I read an article about a boy named Jacob who is involved in every sport imaginable. His dad coaches most of the teams, and his mom wouldn't think of missing a game. I applaud his parents for their involvement, but....this kid experiences frequent stomachaches because he worries all the time. He has regular tension headaches from trying to juggle all his responsibilities with school and sports. He never has time for his friends. He is exhausted. It seems like he's always sick. And he's only fourteen!

We have families in our church who going against the prevailing culture by guiding their children to choose just one activity – *just one* – that they want to be involved in for that season. Not hockey *and* basketball *and* gymnastics *and* music lessons on top of homework and youth group. That's too much!

Dr. Alvin Rosenfeld, says,

"We're buying into an overscheduled lifestyle. It's burning kids out. The problem is that kids with little time to think, play, pray, and dream, are often kids who become robots who can't do relationships very well when they grow up, and move from one activity to the next looking for meaning."

*The Over-Scheduled Child*

They are not healthy people with healthy priorities. They have experienced loss of health.

#### **4. Loss of Spiritual Safeguards**

When we get dangerously tired and overcommitted, we become way more susceptible to our sinful nature. The Bible tells us to

Ephesians 6:10-11 NIV

*...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*

But when you're overtired, stressed to the max, and running on empty, you don't have the muscle, and sometimes you don't have the desire to put on the full armor and take your stand. And at that very moment you are vulnerable to sin. Remember,

1 Peter 5:8 NIV says,

*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

When fatigue becomes the normal way of life, defenses go down, and the risk goes up. Way up.

Proverbs 4:23 NIV says

*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

When you are tired and weary, you drop your guard, and your heart is up for grabs.

So what's the answer? How do we fix these issues? I believe part of the answer is found in the lesson of the Sabbath.

## **THE LESSON OF THE SABBATH**

Exodus 20:9-11 NIV

*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

A regular Sabbath honors the indispensable wisdom of dormancy, or taking refuge from the cares of this world.

One writer describes it this way: *Sabbath time can be a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities, and accomplishments.*

The practical response to Sabbath means we cease from our work. We stop working and we start living. "Sabbath breaks" rest the body, refresh the spirit, and restore the soul.

## **THINNING, OR JUST SAYING NO**

So how do you start implementing a Sabbath in your family? My advice is to take a lesson from gardening and start by "thinning."

When we built our house 7 years ago, I landscaped my front and back yards immediately. The first couple of years everything looked beautiful. But soon the plants were overcrowded and I needed to thin them out and create some space.

Most families need to take a look at their overcrowded schedules and do the same sort of thinning. I suggest making a list of all your family's activities and responsibilities. Then start slashing. Cut back on what is not necessary. Then review your schedule and look for places to insert Sabbath rest.

## **SHAPING SABBATH TIME**

What should Sabbath time look like for you and your family? Well, the simple answer is *whatever delights you and replenishes you*. I believe there are three components to shaping the Sabbath.

## **1. Resting the body**

The invitation of Sabbath is to replace the time you would normally spend working with activities that you find restful. Whatever brings rest for you and your family, do it.

I remember all the years that we had access to a cottage on Bob's Lake, between Ottawa and Kingston. Our family would make the trek from Niagara every summer for a week, and we would play together: Catching and releasing frogs, exploring an island or two, fishing off the dock... We'd build the best fires in the world and play games around the table at night, eating popcorn and drinking pop.

Sabbath rest for your body can be very simple. You don't need a cottage! Take a nap, take a walk, a bike ride, a long bubble bath. Eat some of your favorite foods, don't count the calories on the Sabbath, sit in the sun, turn off the TV and listen to beautiful music.

Do whatever helps you rest your body.

## **2. Replenishing the spirit**

Another invitation of the Sabbath is to pay attention to what replenishes the spirit and choose only those activities that renew you and bring you joy.

One of my favourite things to do is to find a quiet place and read a good book. I also enjoy taking Patty out for lunch to one of our favourite places...or a long visit with one of my adult children to process what God is doing in their lives. For me, those activities replenish my spirit.

## **3. Restoring the soul**

Perhaps the deepest refreshment is the invitation to renew the soul through worship and quiet reflection. This is the part of us that gets most lost during the work week, which is governed almost completely by the value of productivity. Sabbath is about restoration, not production or output or efficiency.

Spend some extra time in silence and prayer, take a slow meditative walk, or read a book that God has been prompting you to read. Perhaps you could make a list of all the things you are thankful for. You could share a special meal preceded by a Scripture reading. Light candles and go around the table and talk about where God seemed particularly present with you during the week.

What should Sabbath time look like? *Whatever delights you and whatever replenishes you.*

One of the great temptations of the spiritual life is to believe that if I were in another season of life, I could be more spiritual. *If only my kids were older and more independent, then I could have devotions every morning and grow my faith!*

The truth is that spiritual transformation takes place as we embrace the challenges and opportunities associated with each season of our lives. You don't have to wait until your kids have moved away from home before you become "more spiritual." In fact, I would argue fiercely that you need to be more spiritual right now – for the sake of your family. Don't wait for another season of life. Do it now.

Confident parenting promotes faith-based spiritual transformation in the midst of the chaos and confusion of daily family life. Right now – it can happen right now – not in another season of life – but right now.

With kids in diapers.

With the economy in the toilet.

With mortgage payments and a car that needs to be replaced.

With a roof that needs to be fixed and a garage that needs to be cleaned and a basement that has flooded.

The lesson of the Sabbath? Create some space in your life in this season so that spiritual transformation can take place now.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Comment on each statement:
  - a. "We are overcommitted and dangerously tired."
  - b. "Hurry is not of the devil, it is the devil."
  - c. "Everything is more dangerous at high speed. When we are over-tired, we settle for mediocrity in our primary relationships with God, friends, and family."
2. How could a regular Sabbath experience enhance your family life?
3. What could you immediately begin introducing rest and replenishment into your family's weekly schedule?