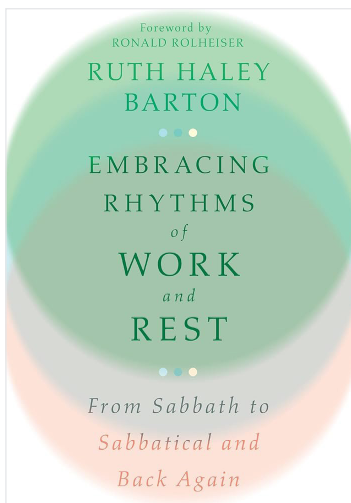


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Ruth Haley Barton is a seasoned spiritual writer, inspirational speaker and preacher. She is also the visionary founder of the Transforming Center, dedicated to nurturing spiritual transformation in individuals and communities.

Embracing Rhythms of Work & Rest

THE SUMMARY

Ruth Haley Barton 2022

FOREWORD

There exists a type of hurry that harms time itself, and in doing so, it harms us, our families, our communities, and our connection with God. At times, the demands of our relationships, family, work, and daily responsibilities can overwhelm the available time. It's a part of life, but we must not justify it. God didn't err in creating time; there's enough of it.

The solution is to follow the Fourth Commandment: to remember and keep holy the Sabbath day. Without regular moments of rest, worship, and forgiveness, people risk becoming compulsive, ambitious, and resentful, unable to enjoy life's more profound joys.

Ruth Haley Barton emphasizes the significance of Sabbath time. It is an opportunity for rest, worship, forgiveness, and a taste of something heavenly. It allows us to connect with the essence of life and, most importantly, our own lives.

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PART ONE: SABBATH

Chapter 1: A Wake-Up Call

Sabbath-keeping is a profound way of structuring our lives, aligning with the natural rhythms of work and rest, giving and receiving, and being and doing. This day of rest, worship, and appreciation of God's gifts stands at the heart of our existence, urging us to make significant choices in how we live.

Rooted in Christian and Jewish traditions, the Sabbath offers a sanctuary in time, regardless of the presence of a physical place of worship. It's a day to prepare, light candles, and cease from the week's toil. It brings joy, hope, and peace, refreshing us to see the world anew.

Falling in love with the Sabbath isn't easy, but it is essential. It's about recognizing our need for rest and responding to God's invitation. Sabbath-keeping is a life choice, from daily rest pauses to a weekly day of deep rejuvenation and even longer sabbatical seasons.

Embracing the Sabbath isn't just a personal endeavor; it requires communal support. Leaders in churches and ministries play a pivotal role in fostering Sabbath communities.

Our souls have much to say to God, and God has much to reveal to our souls through the Sabbath. It all begins with the desire to live a more balanced, sustainable life, honoring the God who grants us the precious gift of Sabbath.

Desire is the soul's language; each spiritual practice aligns with deep human desires. Sabbath practice aligns with our yearning for rest, freedom, delight, and a functional life. To truly embrace a sabbath life, one must connect with their soul's desires and respond to them.

Reflect on your history with sabbath-keeping, recalling how you first encountered it and who influenced you. If you have no prior sabbath experience, acknowledge it. Reflecting on your history offers insights from your current perspective, and it helps discern God's invitation to you now.

Chapter 2: Beginning With God

The concept of Sabbath may seem distant or irrelevant to many, even dismissed as a Jewish tradition. However, it's crucial to recognize that the Sabbath originates from God's own rhythm of creation. This divine pattern involves working for six days and ceasing on the seventh, establishing a unique form of rest and tranquility.

Sabbath is not merely about taking a break; it's about ceasing our usual labors and embracing tranquility and harmony, aligning us with God's own nature. While it might initially challenge us, practicing the Sabbath promises profound peace and an essential rhythm for our lives.

The beauty of life lies in its rhythm—a dance between work and rest. Neither is superior; both are vital. Work lets us partner with God in creation, while rest allows us to savor and appreciate our work. When we pause as God intends, we feel cherished for who we are, not just what we achieve. This rhythm replenishes us, making us energized partners in God's goodness. It's like an inhale and exhale; one cannot exist without the other.

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This weekly rhythm also points to a greater reality—eternal rest with God. Just as the Israelites found rest in the Promised Land, our Sabbath practice connects us to the promise of ultimate rest in heaven. Rest is not an optional escape but the ultimate goal of existence.

Contemplate the profound truth that sabbath originates with God and is inherent to His nature, which He extends to creation. Consider what this means for you personally and how it might transform your perspective.

Hebrews 4:1, 9-11 emphasizes the promise of rest for God's people, urging us to overcome resistance and hardness of heart. Reflect on any barriers you might have toward embracing the Sabbath, whether practical, psychological, or spiritual, and talk to God about it.

2 Peter 1:4 suggests that sabbath rest could be one of God's "precious and very great promises." Explore the idea that practicing the rhythm of work and rest allows us to partake in the divine nature.

Chapter 3: Finding Freedom Through Resistance

Sabbath, often seen as a time of rest, carries a profound message of resistance and liberation from oppression. Beyond mere rest, it symbolizes trust in God's provision, freeing us from self-reliance and cultural demands.

Sabbath is also inclusive, meant for all creatures, regardless of status, emphasizing its role as an equalizer. In a culture where sabbath may seem like a privilege, it's vital to recognize that it stems from God's intentions and represents the freedom God desires for all. Some propose the concept of a sabbath economy, emphasizing equitable resource distribution as a fundamental principle. While implementing this ideal may be challenging in today's culture, sabbath remains a powerful force for promoting equality.

Sabbath emphasizes our true identity as free individuals, allowing us to break free from the bondage of daily life. Cole Arthur Riley suggests that rest is an act of defiance against a world that demands ceaseless activity.

To practice sabbath effectively, one must identify the aspects of life that hold them captive and cease those activities. Sabbath fosters a sense of identity rooted in being rather than doing. It allows individuals to find themselves in God and experience the freedom to be who they indeed are.

Consider the concept of Sabbath as a means of resisting cultural bondage and our own relentless pursuit of productivity. How do you respond to this idea? Can Sabbath provide a structure that allows you to break free from the grip of addictions, be it to success, approval, wealth, or knowledge?

Try to recognize any areas in your life where you are addicted, whether to performance, achievement, or the need for validation. Explore how observing the Sabbath could offer the necessary framework for cessation, leading you towards the freedom God offers.

Imagine what it would mean to practice the Sabbath as a form of resistance against these bonds, ultimately embracing a deeper and more profound freedom.

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Chapter 4: Discovering Sabbath in Community

Sabbath isn't just an individual pursuit but a communal discipline. Many individuals and families navigate Sabbath independently because churches and ministries often neglect its importance.

This raises a crucial question for Christian leaders: What are we inviting people into when they join our Christian community? Is it a life of Christian busyness or one that truly works? Today, joining a church often means adding Christian busyness to already overwhelming lives. It's no wonder that younger Christians mostly decline the invitation.

We lack a clear call to communal Sabbath-keeping, which is vital for whole communities to embrace it effectively. Perhaps a subtle misconception needs clarification—Sabbath isn't the same as solitude and silence, which are practices with God alone. Sabbath is a communal practice meant to be embraced together, not a solo endeavor.

Without intentional community adoption of the Sabbath, community decisions and patterns can hinder individual intentions, even despite preaching from the pulpit. This can lead people to question whether to stay or seek a community that supports balanced work and rest rhythms.

Sabbath and self-care are not self-indulgences but vital for sustainable leadership. Leaders who champion Sabbath do so from their own experience, understanding its challenges and blessings. Their inner authority comes from having tasted the benefits of Sabbath in their lives.

Reflect on the truths presented in this chapter about sabbath as a communal practice and leadership's role in fostering it. Are you resonating with this notion, or do you feel resistant? For now, refrain from dwelling on implementation; simply acknowledge your genuine reaction.

Now, shift your focus to your personal journey with the Sabbath. Do you currently practice it? If so, how do you engage with it nowadays? Consider whether you have an older, wiser mentor with whom you can candidly discuss your way of life.

If you were to lead your community in embracing a sabbath way of life, consider whether your patterns and practices empower you with the inner authority needed for authentic leadership. In forthcoming chapters, we will discuss establishing, reviewing, or refining our individual sabbath practices.

Chapter 5: The Power of Unplugging

In the past two decades, the challenge of disconnecting from work and technology has grown exponentially. Mobile phones have become our lifelines, serving multiple purposes, from telling time to social media engagement.

This constant connectivity has led to a new kind of bondage. Every moment, whether significant or mundane, is susceptible to interruptions. The dilemma is that we want to be present with those around us, but we also fear missing out on something elsewhere.

The implications of this technological shift are profound. It affects our mental well-being, focus, relationships, and spiritual connection. While many discuss technology's impact on our humanity, my primary concern is the exhaustion and over-stimulation it brings.

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In the sacred tradition of the Sabbath, many Jewish families maintain a “Sabbath box”, a box to hold items unrelated to rest and reflection. This box, symbolic in nature, can contain representations of work, such as tools or even our ever-present cell phones. Over the years, I’ve pondered deeply on this concept, yearning for us all to place our smartphones within, to truly disconnect for a day.

Yet, there’s a silver lining. When I manage to detach entirely, whether during a serene walk, a quiet evening, or even an entire vacation, I feel an unparalleled sense of freedom. This realization has motivated me to advocate for a complete disconnection, especially on the Sabbath.

However, the challenge lies in the leadership. For a community to genuinely embrace the Sabbath’s rhythms, its leaders must pave the way. In my own community, our commitment to the Sabbath is unwavering. But I’ve learned, through trials and errors, that mere words aren’t enough. Our actions, especially mine as a senior leader, cement our dedication. Leadership, after all, sets the pace for the entire community.

So, are you ready to embrace the challenge of disconnecting from technology on the sabbath? If you haven’t yet, start experimenting. Observe the subtle differences: walking with or without your phone, sharing a meal with a friend with your phone by your side or leaving it behind, or even simply dressing up with the TV on or off.

Observe the changes in your energy, focus, and connection to God and others. Speak to God about what you observe. How does the idea of a tech Shabbat resonate with you? Don’t make hasty decisions; just ponder the possibility and discern any underlying desires or needs.

Chapter 6: Sabbath as Delight

In our fast-paced world, we often find ourselves tethered to technology, always moving, rarely stopping to breathe. The sabbath offers a respite. It’s a day to slow down, to connect with neighbors without the rush, to simply be.

But sometimes, the week’s weight leaves me too drained to enjoy the sabbath. Yet, if I surrender to this fatigue, profound gratitude emerges, turning into delight and leading to worship. Sabbath isn’t just about rest; it’s about remembering God’s goodness.

The sabbath often brings forth feelings of loss and emptiness. It’s a day when the lack of busyness and productivity makes us more aware of our painful realities, the unresolved issues in our lives that we can usually keep at bay during the busy weekdays. It’s a day when we are more in touch with our emotions, both the ones we want to feel and those we don’t.

It’s not always easy, but the sabbath creates space for God to be with us, to comfort us, and to help us make meaning of those things that seem so complicated. It’s tempting to run back to our usual distractions on the sabbath, but if we can resist, we can experience another kind of rest—the rest that comes through acceptance rather than denial. It takes courage to go there, but God promises to be with us even in our lowest moments.

While on this earth, we will always be moving in and out of feelings of loneliness, incompleteness, and being cut off from the union and communion we seek. Due to the lack of so many distractions, the sabbath may make our awareness of this reality of the human condition more pronounced. It’s a day to remember that *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”* (Matthew 5:4).

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Ask yourself what truly brings joy to your heart and imagine a day filled with such delights. Reflect upon those moments when, after sheer exhaustion, you transitioned to a state of gratitude and, eventually, worship. How transformative would it be to experience this weekly?

Life presents challenges so daunting that we might resort to distractions or emotional detachment. Yet, the sabbath offers a sanctuary, a space for rest rooted in trust and acceptance. Can you embrace this? The sabbath can be a compass, guiding you through the depths of loneliness and leading you to a profound intimacy with God.

Chapter 7: Sabbath and the Seasons of Life

Throughout my journey, I've often been asked about the difficulties of observing the sabbath, especially within the dynamics of a family with young children. I understand the weariness that family life can bring, and the daunting thought of integrating an entire family into the sabbath practice. Yet, it's essential to remember that the sabbath is a communal experience meant to be shared with our loved ones.

The sabbath is a divine gift, meant for all seasons of life, whether we are caring for aging parents, experiencing singleness, or navigating the challenges of young adulthood. It's a time to connect with God and others, a different opportunity from solitude, silence, and retreat.

In seasons of caregiving, I found myself balancing between attending to my aging parents while also seeking the restorative embrace of the Sabbath. It wasn't about rigidly adhering to a day of rest but discerning, week by week, how to integrate sabbath moments into the demands of caregiving. Sometimes, it meant sharing the sabbath's serenity with my parents; other times, it was about seeking solace in solitude or my husband's company.

In the seasons of singleness, the sabbath serves as a reminder of one's completeness, affirming the individual as a complete human being, irrespective of marital or familial status. It's about recognizing our inherent worth and seeking rest in ways that resonate with our unique life circumstances.

In the journey of life, each season brings its unique challenges and opportunities, especially when it comes to embracing the sabbath. It's crucial to reflect on how the sabbath can be a gift in your current season, whether you are a student, a parent, or someone caring for aging parents.

Each season, the sabbath is an invitation to pause, reflect, and embrace the divine rhythm of rest and renewal. It's about finding balance and beauty in life, embracing the sabbath with intentionality and grace, and discovering the divine rest amid life's varied seasons.

Chapter 8: Shaping Sabbath

Sabbath helps me find my true self, a more patient, loving, and grateful self. It's a day where the essence of my humanity feels more at home, less driven by the relentless pursuits of life, and more attuned to the deeper wells of my being. It's a day where I can just be, allowing the day to unfold, exploring the deeper layers of my soul and connecting with God on a profound and refreshing level.

The sabbath is transformative, a spiritual discipline that opens us to God's grace, allowing us to be the people we aspire to be. Sabbath teaches us to embrace our limits as gifts, to see them as integral parts of our human existence that God

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intended and called good. It's about accepting our limitations, about living within the confines of our humanity, and about embracing the freedom that comes with resting in God.

Work with its blurred boundaries is consciously excluded from Sabbath, as it drains the spirit. The sabbath is also a break from the consumerism of the commercial world, a time to appreciate the divine gifts that money can't buy, fostering contentment and resistance to consumer culture. It also provides refuge from emotional and mental labor, a time to rejuvenate mind, body, and soul.

So, what do we welcome into our sabbath sanctuary? We welcome the elements that bring delight and replenishment to our bodies, minds, and souls. We indulge in the pleasures of life, in the simple joys of existence, savoring the divine gifts of life.

In my journey, I've often pondered the concept of a 'floating sabbath.' While some professions demand flexibility in sabbath observance, it's essential to remember Jesus' words: *"The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath"* (Mark 2:27). The human spirit thrives on regular rhythms, and a consistent sabbath brings a sense of predictability and peace. Floating sabbaths can disrupt this rhythm, potentially leading to exhaustion and spiritual disconnect.

If you're hesitant about embracing the sabbath fully, start small. Choose one day in the next six months to observe it. Trust that God, in His faithfulness, will guide you in this endeavor.

In seeking the sabbath, listen to your deepest desires for the peace and rhythms it offers. Let these desires guide you, and if sabbath is already part of your life, reflect on its essence and whether any changes are needed.

Resistance may surface, especially for leaders. Which practices are you drawn to, and what conflicts do they bring up? In moments of silence, face these longings and questions. Seek divine guidance to choose the path of life and prosperity.

Chapter 9: Leading a Sabbath Community

Dan, a pastor with two decades of service, was exhausted from years of surpassing limits and masking the inherent pains of his ministry. His vacations and breaks were mere pauses, not the rejuvenating escapes he longed for.

He was concerned, not just for himself but for his staff. He was pushing them too hard, and some were leaving, unable to keep up with the pace. Realizing the need for change, Dan sought a spiritual leader, revealing his profound exhaustion and close encounters with quitting. He realized he lacked an effective sabbath practice, his supposed day of rest was filled with errands and tasks. He began to work on a more intentional approach to sabbath-keeping, slowly recovering from the brink of dangerous exhaustion.

Dan shared his experiences and learnings with his leadership community. The community began to explore and discuss the practice of sabbath, each finding their own way to incorporate it into their lives. They chose to rest together on Mondays, following Sunday services, to ensure a full day of rejuvenation. This decision, however, posed challenges, especially when considering adding a Saturday service.

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The potential disruption to their newfound sabbath rhythm sparked deep reflection on their actual values. Leading with vulnerability, Dan shared his journey with the sabbath, emphasizing its life-giving essence. The congregation's overwhelming support revealed a shared longing for rest and unity. This commitment to sabbath revitalized Dan's pastoral spirit and unified the church, emphasizing the importance of resting in God's presence.

In leading a sabbath community, I've identified some crucial steps.

- First, cultivate your personal sabbath practice, grounding yourself in its significance.
- Share your sabbath journey with fellow leaders, fostering a shared vision. After deep reflection, seek collective agreement on embedding sabbath into your communal life.
- Cast this vision to the broader community, emphasizing its biblical roots and practical applications.
- Plan a communal sabbath day, facilitating discussions about different life stages.
- Post-sabbath, debrief and chart the path ahead. Ensure all scheduling respects sabbath commitments. While challenges arise, remain patient and rooted in the belief that God guides this transformative journey.

Transitioning from viewing the sabbath as a personal discipline to nurturing a sabbath community is a profound shift. Is this your divine calling? Engage deeply with God on this matter. If you resonate with this calling, ponder the chapter's critical movements in fostering such a community. Recognize your current position in this spiritual journey and determine the next steps God might guide you towards.

PART TWO: SABBATICAL

Chapter 10: When Sabbath Is Not Enough

The term "sabbatical" traditionally meant a time for rest and renewal. However, in today's world, it often implies a period for academic or professional growth. For me, it was a time to disconnect, rejuvenate, and heal. With the support of my community, I took a much-needed break during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the organization was in good hands during my absence. Everyone, especially leaders, should recognize and honor their need for genuine rest.

The term "sabbatical" is deeply rooted in biblical traditions, emphasizing rhythms of rest and renewal. Yet, modern interpretations often blur its true essence with academic pursuits. I felt compelled to reclaim the term, drawing from its rich biblical origins and the natural rhythms God instilled in our world.

Understanding sabbatical as an extension of the sabbath, I realized that the best preparation is a disciplined practice of sabbath-keeping. Trusting in God's providence, we practice working for six years and resting in the seventh. Long-term pastorates benefit churches, and sabbaticals can improve a pastor's commitment and longevity. If congregations can financially support sabbaticals, it empowers leaders to rejuvenate holistically, ensuring their long-term well-being and contribution to the ministry.

While the idea of stepping away for months might seem daunting, it's essential to confront our emotions and uncertainties about this radical discipline. Engage in a heartfelt conversation with God, pouring out your feelings and aspirations.

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For those in leadership roles within religious communities, it's crucial to prioritize sabbatical leaves for senior figures. Reflect on the divine patterns of rest and renewal and assess your current practices. Don't wait for burnout to strike. By granting regular renewal leaves, we ensure passionate clergy leadership for our communities.

Chapter 11: More Than a Vacation

A sabbatical is not merely an extended vacation. It's a distinct period of intentional rest, addressing personal needs, hopes, and desires. While vacations are short and filled with activities, a sabbatical is tailored to individual needs, focusing on rest and rejuvenation.

Detailed planning is very important for a sabbatical, which could span months and involves considering travel, covering responsibilities, and funding. The planning phase is deeply personal. It forces us to confront our vulnerabilities, fears, and aspirations. A well-thought-out plan, grounded in reality, provides a roadmap for the sabbatical and ensures we make choices aligned with our goals.

Sabbatical is a time to rediscover the passions and interests that make us unique. It's about embracing the essence of who God created us to be, and in doing so, finding unparalleled energy and joy.

While understanding sabbatical, I've realized that travel doesn't necessarily mean venturing to distant lands. It's about breaking away from the familiar, even if it's just a short distance. Yet, everyone's ideal sabbatical differs. Some might find solace in staying in one place, while others might benefit from continuous exploration. The key is to recognize our personal needs. However, it's crucial not to overstimulate ourselves, missing the essence of soul care.

Recognizing our inherent personality types in preparing for a sabbatical is essential. I believe my 'P' (perceiving) personality craves spontaneity, starkly contrasting my structured daily life. Those with a 'J' (judging) trait might find solace in a well-structured schedule, while 'T' (thinkers) could thrive by diving into intellectually stimulating activities. Introverts might yearn for solitude and deeper connections with a selected few, whereas extroverts could benefit from engaging in group activities outside their usual circles. Ultimately, a sabbatical should be a time to rejuvenate our God-given personalities, while also challenging ourselves to embrace unfamiliar terrains.

Physical well-being is another cornerstone. It's a reminder that our bodies, often neglected in our service to others, deserve care and attention. A sabbatical offers the perfect opportunity to restore this balance.

Allocate a few hours or an entire day to connect with your inner self. Ponder on God's message, your aspirations, and desires for this period. Consider questions like: What does God want for me during this time? How do I envision rest and rejuvenation? And importantly, what does my body require for true healing? It's okay if answers don't emerge immediately.

Chapter 12: A Season of Spiritual Opportunity

A sabbatical is a unique period of spiritual possibility, distinct from other times of rest. In his sabbatical journal, Henri Nouwen conveys excitement and apprehension about taking a year off from his usual commitments. This tension, termed the "push-pull phenomenon", signifies a genuine divine invitation marked by attraction and resistance. Sabbaticals offer a spaciousness that allows suppressed desires and intentions to surface.

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The sabbatical provides the space to confront the painful realities, leading to deep-seated rest and healing. Though emotionally taxing, this transformative journey is more rewarding than any exotic trip. The essence of a sabbatical lies in addressing one's deepest needs and desires rather than merely indulging in superficial distractions.

Sabbatical can be a time to nurture relationships often sidelined by work demands. Whether reconnecting with old friends or spending quality time with family, these interactions rejuvenate our spirits. However, it's crucial to discern which relationships nourish our souls and which might drain us. The purpose of sabbatical is to reconnect with oneself, God, and loved ones, ensuring we return more grounded and refreshed.

During my sabbatical, I found a unique space to ponder life's deeper questions, especially concerning the future of the Transforming Center and my role within it. Amidst the constant demands of others, I yearned for clarity on my direction. I recognized the need to observe and receive God's guidance, trusting that the answers would unfold in time.

Sabbatical is not about seeking immediate answers but resting with our questions, allowing them to shape our spiritual journey. What questions might you be holding? I encourage you to rest with them, letting God shape their answers in His time.

The end of a sabbatical brings the challenge of reentry. Many overlook this phase, risking the loss of the sabbatical's gains upon returning to their routines. It's crucial to ease back, avoiding the trap of immediately reverting to old, draining patterns.

Still, feeling disoriented or even a bit down after a sabbatical is common. To counter this, I recommend easing back into your schedule and perhaps planning a retreat with spiritual direction. Reflect on your sabbatical experiences, capture God-given insights, and consider any changes you're prompted to make.

Chapter 13: Setting Boundaries

In the days following my departure for sabbatical, the world seemed to erupt. Just three days after I began my rest, George Floyd's tragic death at the hands of a White police officer sent shockwaves globally. Cities were ablaze with protests, both peaceful and violent. My heart ached, and I turned to writing to process my emotions and the world's turmoil.

This wasn't writing work in the traditional sense; it was a deep, spiritual engagement with the world's pain. But then, a dilemma arose: should I share my reflections publicly, even though I was on sabbatical? Doing so would inevitably pull me and my organization, the Transforming Center, back into the fray.

Sabbaticals are sacred. They're a time to step back, to rest, to rejuvenate. They require boundaries to protect their sanctity. As I pondered my next steps, I was reminded of the importance of setting clear expectations and boundaries for such times of rest. The challenge is to cease from our regular work, resist the pull of the familiar, and fully embrace the gift of sabbatical. It's a delicate balance that requires discernment, community support, and a deep commitment to the purpose of the sabbatical.

Sabbatical is a gift, a time to deeply reflect and rejuvenate. It's a period where boundaries are essential, especially in relationships and technology. While some relationships nourish the soul, others can be draining. I chose to invest

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in familial ties, while cautiously distancing from more taxing connections. Technology, a double-edged sword, can either aid or impede our sabbatical journey. I struggled with the urge to stay connected, but the need for genuine rest prevailed.

Sabbatical is a time of introspection, a period to embrace our vulnerabilities and humanity. It's a humbling experience, stripping away the facade of indispensability. As Rilke's poem suggests, it's a time to become more real, grounded, and ready for when God reaches out. In this stillness, we find our true selves, unburdened by the world's expectations.

It's essential to introspect and discern which aspects of setting boundaries resonate with you and which you might resist. As you plan a sabbatical, it's crucial to determine where you wish to focus your attention. To truly benefit from this period, clear boundaries must be established. The objective is to ensure you can focus wholeheartedly on what truly matters during this time.