

**Rest & Restoration: A Practical Theology of Rest**

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## Table of Contents

Author’s Note.....	5
Chapter 1: Introduction & Question.....	6
Introduction.....	6
Question.....	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Workaholism: Why Do We Need Rest?.....	9
Effects of Sabbath-Keeping: Does Rest Work?.....	11
Sabbath Observance: What Does it Mean to “Observe the Sabbath”?.....	12
<i>Jewish Literature</i> .....	13
<i>Protestant Literature</i> .....	14
Chapter 3: Scriptural survey.....	16
God.....	17
Ourselves.....	19
Others.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Creation.....	23
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	24
Theoretical Framework.....	24
Hypothesis.....	25

Instrumentation ..... 25

Participants..... 27

Chapter 5: Student Survey ..... 27

Chapter 6: Conclusions..... 36

Appendix..... 38

    Student Survey ..... 38

References..... 39

## Author's Note

I am not a natural rester. My life has often been categorized by a full schedule, and for years I viewed rest as a “necessary evil.” Sleep was an inconvenience to be dealt with; any time unfilled by an already overwhelming schedule was merely waiting to be consumed by whatever opportunity arose last minute. And although my body pleaded with me to slow down through recurring colds and continual exhaustion, I pressed on. The people around me, often not realizing the depth of my condition, reinforced these ideas through praise over my accomplishments and involvement. *Life is short*, I would think to myself, *I can sleep when I'm dead*.

I never stopped long enough to consider my idolatry; to reckon with the truth that almighty God rested after the work of creation, and that the voice of God commands us to rest again and again throughout scripture. Amidst a culture addicted to doing, I have wrestled with this truth hoping that it would somehow morph and align with my idolatrous lifestyle. This struggle has not been easy; like Jacob, I often found myself limping in my attempt to reconcile these opposing forces. I am convinced that true rest is commanded precisely because it is not natural; because without our Lord's insistence, we would again and again find ourselves enslaved to the idols of our age.

My hope is that through this thesis project, this struggle would begin to pervade our churches and communities. That the ravaging pull of our “doing” culture may be countered by the life-giving commandment to rest, and that our lives may be categorized not by their busyness, but by how the intentional space of rest has deepened our connections with God, humanity, creation, and ourselves.

## Chapter 1: Introduction & Question

### Introduction

*“Remember the Sabbath day to set it apart as holy. For six days you may 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... For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.”* (Exodus 20:8-11).

In America and the American church, this commandment is nearly forgotten. A modern study revealed more than 25% of Americans do not identify “Keep the Sabbath holy” as a part of the Ten Commandments (Cooperman, 2010). American culture reflects this common misconception: exhaustion, fatigue, and burnout—conditions often resulting from a lack of rest—commonly occur in nearly every facet of American society. A lack of remembrance has led to lack of rest.

This lack of true, meaningful rest is not merely a personal problem experienced by select individuals, but rather a cultural reality. This phenomenon, although displayed transnationally, is seemingly interwoven into the very fabric of modern American ways of living. Industrialist and American legend Henry Ford claimed that “Work is our sanity, our self-respect, our salvation. Through work and work alone may health, wealth, and happiness be secured” (Marshall, 1915, p. 14). This statement may sound extreme, but the lives of many Americans—not to mention, many *Christian* Americans—testify to its truthfulness in the present age. According to a recent study, workaholics comprise 10% of the United States adult population (Andreassen, 2014). This inordinate involvement with work directly affects rest: consequences of workaholism include tiredness, sleep

deprivation, and sleep insufficiency (Kubota et. al, 2010). It does not end with this ten percent, but extends beyond workaholism: two national surveys found that 31.6% of American adults and 72.7% of high school students get insufficient sleep (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2017). Furthermore, 4% of adults age 20 or over use prescription sleep aid (CDC, 2013). In 2013, the Center for Disease Control declared sleep deprivation a “public health epidemic” (Pinholster, 2014). While one might expect these numbers to be countered within the church, research shows that this burnout and exhaustion expand past secular realms. A recent study surveying over 8,000 American clergy found 54% overworked, 26% struggled with fatigue, and 9% experiencing burnout (Krejcir, 2016).

Due to this neglect of rest within current American culture, I began to ponder the impact of rest and if resting has a holistic impact on participants. Throughout scripture, rest is a prominent and recurring theme, the extent of which will be explored in later sections of this thesis. Rest carries an undeniably significant and active role throughout the scriptural narrative. It is brought to existence through the creation narrative; commanded in the law; its neglect is admonished within the prophets; its adherence redefined through the ministry of Christ. (including, but by no means limited to: Gen 2:1-3; Lev 23:3; Isa 58:13; Matt 12:6-8; Heb 4:8-13). The scriptural narrative entwines rest with the four primary human relationships: the relationship of an individual with God, humanity, creation, and themselves.

Through discovering the current impacts of rest, numerous people may be shaped and liberated. First, research may prove useful in reversing many of the conditions (exhaustion, burnout, etc) listed above. Many scholars of workaholism suspect that many

of the mental effects of workaholism could be combated by simply engaging in a sufficient amount of recovery time (Balducci, 2018). However, the purpose of this research will be to provide individuals with an increasingly comprehensive perspective on the intended role of rest, as well as illuminate the importance and significance of a personal and practical theology of rest. Establishing this theology has the potential to enrich all four designated facets of the human experience: an individuals' relationship with God, others, earth/creation, and self.

### Question

In this study, these four primary human relationships mentioned above are consolidated as the “four ubiquitous human relationships”, since they are experienced by all individuals at all times (albeit in very different and diverse ways). In considering the command to rest, I was compelled by the question: **among Sabbath observers, what is the perceived effect of Sabbath-keeping on the four ubiquitous human relationships?** Or, how do individuals who intentionally rest and cease from work one day each week experience impacts in their relationships with God, others, earth/creation, and themselves?

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The neglect of rest has prompted a variety of research from various Christian and secular perspectives, much of which has influenced and furthered the depth of this project. Specifically, this research draws from previous literature published on the prominence and effects of workaholism, the impact of rest on general health and well-



being, and both Jewish and Protestant perspectives on what it means to observe the Sabbath.

### **Workaholism: Why Do We Need Rest?**

Rest may be neglected—but is it needed? Various pieces of research advocate for the need of rest implementation from a secular perspective, which can be seen through the increasing research being done on workaholism. Since the term’s inception in the late twentieth century, workaholism has received increasing attention in literature and research. It was coined by psychologist Wayne E. Oates in his book *Confessions on a Workaholic: The Facts about Work Addiction*, and defined as “the compulsion or the uncontrollable need to work incessantly” (Oates, 1971, p. 11). Intriguingly, Oates’ work on this topic stemmed from a theological background. An obituary published in the *New York Times* encapsulates Oates’ study, saying “his concept was that work can become an addiction, akin to alcoholism. Mr. Oates said in an interview... that the work addict 'drops out of the human community' in a drive for peak performance” (Martin, 1999, p. 9). In another article expanding on this topic, Oates records different effects of workaholism including isolation, withdrawal from society, and obsession with work continuation (Oates, 1968). From its origin, workaholism has been intertwined with a negative effect on human relationships.

“The Individual ‘Costs’ of Workaholism,” conducted by Balducci et al (2018), expands on the effects workaholism. This study explores workaholism and job-related effects in a variety of ways: emotional, physical, and mental effects; work demands; and gender differentiation. Results showed that workaholism is positively related to systolic

blood pressure, increased mental distress, and also higher negative experience within work/job. Also notable in this research is that the impact of workaholism is heightened by lack of rest or recovery time, since energy resources cannot be recharged. Recreational activity is therefore suggested to improve the well-being of workaholics. In summary, this study proposes that workaholism and its negative effects can be combatted by engaging in sufficient rest/restful activities.

Another study on workaholism, “Differential Effect of Workaholism and Work Engagement on the Interference Between Life and Work Domains,” (2018), explores the variation between work engagement and workaholism--especially as it relates to perceived work-life interference. The main distinguishing factors between the two topics in question pertains to internal drive and perception. Work engagement is characterized by plentiful--even excessive--hours spent working, but with a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction. These individuals do not feel compelled to work, but choose it for enjoyment factors. Furthermore, work-engaged individuals do not perceive work to be hindering them from interacting in other facets of life, and vice versa. Conversely, workaholism is characterized by feelings of obligation and compulsion; work was perceived to hinder engagement with the rest of life, and non-work facets of life were perceived to impede work productivity and participation. Therefore, rest/removal from work has been suggested to counteract workaholism’s tendencies and effects.

Overall, this literature suggests that workaholism affects individuals negatively, in both personal and relational ways. While excess time at work can be categorized as work engagement, workaholism is different in that it is driven by internal factors of obligation and compulsion. Currently, research seems to indicate that these adverse effects would be

lessened or eradicated by substantial and effective rest. This study proposes that one incredibly effective and impactful means of participating in said rest is that of Sabbath observance, the impacts of which have also been discussed in recent scholarly literature.

### **Effects of Sabbath-Keeping: Does Rest Work?**

Scholars have begun publishing effects and implication of Sabbath observance. One such study, “Relationships between Sabbath Observance and Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Health in Clergy” by Hough et al (2019), records mental, physical, and spiritual effects of Sabbath observance among clergy within the United Methodist Church in North Carolina. Surveys were compiled from 1,788 UMC clergy members who reported over a period of four weeks. This research concluded that there was a strong relation between Sabbath observance and spiritual well-being and better quality of life; however, it was noted that this correlation may be due a variety of external factors beyond Sabbath keeping, such as social support and spiritual health. This study also found that increased Sabbath-keeping correlated directly with increases in other types of rest, such as hours of sleep and vacation days.

In “Delight or Distraction: An Exploratory Analysis of Sabbath-Keeping Internalization,” psychologists Bailey and Timoti (2015) provide an in-depth study on correlations between Sabbath-keeping and self-reported happiness. Participants adhered to varying degrees of Sabbath-keeping: those who viewed Sabbath as separation between the rest of the week and a sacred day (labeled as *life-segmentation*); those who view Sabbath-keeping as means to a greater end (labeled as *prescribed-meaning*); and those who adhere to an *integrated Sabbath*, holding that “the principles of Sabbath keeping are expressed throughout the entirety of the Sabbath keepers life--not just during the

Sabbath” (p. 194). This study traces the Sabbath back to its origins in scripture, briefly covering both the scriptural command and intention of the Sabbath. Then, Sabbath observers were surveyed on self-reported happiness levels. Uniquely, this research recorded its participants mindsets concerning their Sabbath observance. This provided new information concerning how Sabbath-keeping impacts individuals who are internally motivated as opposed to those motivated by external pressure. Results from this study show that more integrated and internally-motivated Sabbath observance has significant correlation with subjective well-being.

Similarly, research has also been done on the correlation between Sabbath-keeping and health, both physical and mental. In “Sabbath Keeping and Its Relationships to Health and Well-Being: A Mediation Analysis,” Superville et al (2014) conducted research on a sample of Seventh-day Adventists correlating respondents’ levels of Sabbath observance with levels of physical and mental health. In exploring these relationships between Sabbath-keeping and health, the study examined four primary factors: exercise, diet, religious support, and religious coping. While the impact of specific factors varied, the overall results showed that Sabbath-keeping is positively related to both physical and mental health.

According to these studies, Sabbath observance is shown to have a positive impact among adherents. This was seen through increased rest, improved spiritual well-being, self-reported happiness, and enhanced physical and mental health.

## **Sabbath Observance: What Does it Mean to “Observe the Sabbath”?**

Having seen the benefits of Sabbath observance, it's important to elaborate on what Sabbath-observance consists of for adherents. Thus far, Sabbath-keeping literature has been examined through the lens of its necessity. However, there is also a great deal of academic work that delves into logistics of Sabbath observation. This research mainly falls into either Jewish literature or Christian literature. While Sabbath-observance is by no means limited to or inherently Protestant, research here that stems from a Christian perspective will focus on Protestant perspectives.

### ***Jewish Literature***

Adherents of Judaism have been observing the Sabbath for millennia. A critical piece of modern literature essential to understanding the motives behind this Jewish practice is *The Sabbath*, written by Rabbi and Jewish scholar Abraham J. Heschel (1951). Heschel conducts a thorough reflection on the nature of the Sabbath. His reasons rest on the dimensions of time and space, and the differences of human relationship with these two elements. Heschel writes: “[Humans] are all infatuated with the splendor of space, with the grandeur of things of space... Reality to us is thinghood, consisting of substances that occupy space...” (Heschel, 1951, p. 5). While the majority of our existence is focused on and bound by the constraints of space, the Sabbath is unique in that it is rooted in time. Elaborating on this point, Heschel writes that “Man transcends space, and time transcends man” (Heschel, 1951, p. 98). Therefore, the observance of Sabbath serves as a connection to eternity. Heschel defends this standpoint through an in-depth look at the relationship between time, humanity and God. The Sabbath is found to

be unique in its mastery of time, and critical in our relation to God and eternity which exist outside of time.

One of the unique aspects of the Jewish experience with the Sabbath is the communal observance in which it is experienced. In *To Life!*, Rabbi Harold Kushner (1993) seeks to enlighten his audience on modern Jewish faith and its practices, including observance of the Sabbath. While the entire mindset presented by Rabbi Kushner is helpful in understanding a modern-day Jewish Sabbath, chapter 4, “Sanctuaries in Time: The Calendar” was especially helpful in appreciating this fervent observance. Kushner elaborates on the importance of Sabbath keeping and why it should be practiced, especially by a religious (Jewish) audience. His perceptions revolve around the concept that Sabbath-keeping is worthwhile due to the inherent nature of the Sabbath, as opposed to other by-products and results (i.e. increased productivity, etc.). Kushner further illuminates this practice by detailing the Sabbath’s role in Jewish community. This day calls to remembrance freedom from slavery. This practice repeats the decisions of YHWH during creation. It is a distinguishing factor that looks back on where the Jewish people have been, and prepares them for the week ahead. Kushner ties in scriptural origins, centuries of tradition, and progressions of Sabbath keeping practices in defending his arguments on the need and impact of Sabbath observance.

### *Protestant Literature*

Practice of rest and Sabbath-observance can certainly be found in the Christian tradition outside of Protestantism; however, as mentioned before, this study will focus its research within the Protestant lens for audience relevance as nearly half of the American

population self-identifies as Protestant (“Religion in America,” 2014). Presbyterian Pastor Kara Root records and reflects upon the design of her Sabbath in her article “Sabbath: The gift of rest,” (2016). In this article, Root reflects on the practice of Sabbath that she and her entire congregation observe in the midst of a productivity-driven, anxious society. Their practice is grounded in the biblical commands found in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Root gives two main premises for her Sabbath: to remind us of *who* we are and *whose* we are. In addressing the first question, Root describes how Sabbath observation reminds humankind of their endowment with *imago dei*; that they are created in the image of God, who also took a day of rest. Root writes that resting “restores us to our humanity and God’s sovereignty”, and that individuals should rest “because God rests, and you are made in God’s image. A beloved child of God, that is who you are. Observe the Sabbath and you will recognize this reality once again” (Root, 2016, p. 272). The Sabbath also provides an opportunity for remembrance; reminding observers that freedom can only be known because as Christ has bought the church with himself. Owned by Him, adherents are no longer owned by the “gods” of “endless busyness, anxious production, and fierce dehumanizing competition” (Root, 2016, 273). Rather in Christ, one is owned by a Father who grants “abundance, freedom, justice, and rest” to his beloved children (Root, 2016, 273). The practice of Sabbath then invites us to share this blessing with the surrounding world. Root ends her article with suggested guidelines for practicing the Sabbath. These are not constrained by a list of what can and cannot be done; but rather they are driven by an urge to examine oneself honestly and to reconnect with the spirit of this command.

An additional account of Christian Sabbath-keeping can also be found in *Mudhouse Sabbath*, a book written by Jewish-convert Lauren Winner (2003). Although Winner touches on a variety of topics in her work--from eating kosher to candle-lighting--the introduction and first chapter, "Shabbat," prove especially helpful in understanding how rest can be of impact. Winner ties Jewish Sabbath observance to spiritual disciplines in the Christian faith, and advocates for their role in the process of transforming Christianity from a set of beliefs to a lifestyle interwoven with meaningful and intentional practices. Through sharing her journey in restructuring her former Jewish practice, Winner shows how Sabbath observance incorporates specific meaning into her relationship with Christ.

In *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann discusses the countercultural nature of Sabbath rest. In this writing, Brueggemann describes Sabbath rest as a distinctive gift from YHWH and that redirects "loving God" and "loving neighbor" in a systemic way. Sabbath directly opposes systems of anxiety, which define value in production and busyness. This liberation is not unique to Israel or to the church; rather it is designed to be the basis of a "new social reality" (Brueggemann, 2014, p. 43) defined by inclusivism and contentment.

In conclusion, both secular and religious based research points to the need and benefit of Sabbath observance. It shows that consistent rest counters effects of workaholism, which in turn promotes individual well-being on mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical levels. Furthermore, Sabbath observance better connects individuals with their community and relationships. From a Christian perspective, Sabbath liberates one from unhealthy social and personal relationships, instead promoting



an identity rooted in Christ's deliverance and the truths of *imago dei* and redeemed social communities. Previous research thus indicates that Sabbath observance intends to and succeeds in positively impacting individuals and their relationships.

## Chapter 3: Scriptural survey

Previous academic research may advocate and elaborate on the role of rest within the human experience, but an important question remains: if Sabbath truly matters to the Christian faith, what does the Bible say concerning this practice? Scripture repeatedly calls its followers to live and act in patterns of faithful rest. It is woven throughout the entirety of the narrative, from YHWH's example at creation to the church's anticipation of the coming Sabbath rest awaiting in eternity. The Old Testament Law prescribes rest; the prophets admonish its neglect; and the New Testament proclaims the very heart of Sabbath rest through Jesus Christ. These Sabbath-oriented passages of Scripture weave together a Sabbath narrative that emphasizes not blind obedience, but loving faithfulness in relation to God, the human community, creation, and even ourselves.

### God

*"And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day... So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done" Genesis 2:2-3 (ESV)*

In the beginning, God rested.

The Hebrew word used in these initial verses is *sabbath* (שבת), which translates most literally to “cease/desist.” There is no insinuation that God is tired; rather, YHWH makes a deliberate choice to cease from all creative activity. This cessation flows from an intentional investment in relationship. In regards to the first Sabbath, biblical scholar Bob Utley writes, “very early God established a special, regular day for Himself and humanity to commune... regular fellowship between God and mankind is the unstated, but contextually central, purpose of creation” (Utley, 2012, p. 33). YHWH’s rest is not done for the benefit of YHWH, but for the benefit of the beloved creation. It sets the precedent of pause, exemplifying for these new-formed humans the importance of relationship and establishing a rhythmic lifestyle that promotes human flourishing (Wenham, 2003). The entirety of history after Genesis 3 is a story of relationship; a righteous, loving God pursuing restoration with a wayward and fallen creation. Sabbath does not pause this pursuit, but instead bestows reconnection and a glimpse of future restoration. Walter Brueggemann writes that “at the taproot of [the] divine commitment to relationship... is the capacity and willingness of God to rest” (Brueggemann, 2014, p. 6).

This theme of fellowship between God and humanity finds deeper expression in the Ten Commandments. Having just been rescued from slavery in Egypt, the liberated Israelites must now determine a structure for the functioning of society. At the beginning of this search YHWH presents the law; instructions for how to live and engage in community. In giving the Israelites the command to rest, it is written that the “seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; on it you shall not do any work...for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as

holy” (Ex 20:10-11). The command to rest explicitly relates to YHWH, in whose image humanity was created and in whose likeness this community shall strive to live.

Observing the Sabbath is Israel’s “duty to God,” a distinct and defining element of their covenant (Wenham, 2003). In a culture dependent on agricultural labor, a day of cessation would have been completely countercultural. Surely this seventh day would fall in the midst of preparation; throughout the planting season; in the fullness of the harvest. But by observing this command, the people are reoriented in their relationship with YHWH. They become reattuned to “the awareness and practice of the claim that [they] are situated on the receiving end of the gifts of God” (Brueggemann, 2014, xiv). They are not sustained by the work of their own hands, but by the goodness and provision of YHWH. Sabbath is designed to draw the people back to their God, back to richness and fullness of community with the Creator as designed in the garden.

## **Ourselves**

*“Be careful to observe the Sabbath day just as the LORD your God has commanded you... Recall that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there by strength and power. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.” Deuteronomy 5:12, 15*

*“The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27*

Sabbath not only reminds the people of who God is; it also reminds the people of their own identity. Created in the image of YHWH, humanity is instructed to rest and set apart the seventh day just as YHWH exemplified in creation. This commandment comes at a pivotal time; the Israelites—no longer slaves—must define their identity within the

world they live in. As YHWH lays out commands and guidelines for living in loving-faithfulness, the Israelites must decide: *what does it look like to live in loving-faithfulness to the self?*

Brueggemann ties this identity crisis directly with the Israelite's existence under Pharaoh (Brueggemann, 2014, p. xiv). They have just emerged from a system of anxious and endless production, where value was determined quite literally by the amount accomplished at the end of the day. In giving the Sabbath, YHWH reminds the people that they are no longer defined by how much they get done. Instead, they are defined by their Creator. They have been chosen and reside under YHWH's loving ownership. The recollection commanded in Deuteronomy tears the people from worldly identity; it instills a recognition of finiteness and limitedness. Rabbi Abraham Heschel writes that in observing the Sabbath, one "must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world...will survive without the help of man" (Heschel, 1951, p. 13). In ceasing from work, individuals experience the freedom of just *being*; they create space for the beautiful opportunity to "partake in the blessedness in which we are what we are" (Heschel, 1951, p. 30).

Through the Sabbath, YHWH invites humanity to drop enticing facades and tiring projections, and instead to enter the presence of God as they have been created. It is a call to embrace the beauty of limitedness. In a way, Sabbath frees humanity from slavery again—liberating its observants from the internal prisons which demand that *everything* is *always* done. The anxiety instilled by the Pharaohs of the age are cast off. R. J. Snell writes, "Sabbath promotes internal freedom by moderating our passions, teaching

fundamental goodness... and fostering ‘truly human politics’ of dignity and equality” (Snell, 2015, p. 103).

Sabbath uproots humanity’s pride and reminds them that God accomplishes and sustains. By obedience and alignment with this truth, humanity enters into the opportunity of turning rest’s blessings outward. But this can only be done through practicing rest and cessation; through fully embracing the limits of time-bound, earthly existence.

### **Human Community**

*“You are to work and do all your tasks in six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. On that day you must not do any work, you, your son, your daughter, your male slave, your female slave, your ox, your donkey, any other animal, or the resident foreigner who lives with you, so that your male and female slaves, like yourself, may have rest. Recall that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there by strength and power. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.” Deuteronomy 5:13-15*

Sabbath not only strengthens an individual’s relationship with God and reestablishes them in their identity; it also deepens connections within the human community. Sabbath overflows from the relational heart of YHWH, and turns this love forward into relationship with neighbor. In the Deuteronomic remembrance of Sabbath, the Israelites are instructed to “recall that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there by strength and power” (Duet 5:15). The rationale for Sabbath observance here differs from the Exodus narrative. Instead of focusing on the rest precedent set by YHWH in the creation narrative, this passage

chooses to remind Israel of their journey from slavery to freedom. Their liberation was not from their own hands, but from the power of YHWH intervening on their behalf. Thus Israel is instructed to reproduce YHWH's goodwill: to intervene on behalf of those who can't orchestrate these things for themselves, providing refreshment and rest. The design of their freedom inherently turns outward—not just to sons and daughters, but to slaves and foreigners. The covenantal elements of rest may be unique to the Israelites, but the human need for cessation is pervasive.

Sabbath calls for structures of rest not just on an individual level, but on a societal level. The entirety of the law curates Israel's establishment of a community built upon *shalom*—the realization of completeness, prosperity, and contentment-filled peace with all. Sabbath serves as a glimpse of redeemed community, “prophetic of the wonderful flourishing life when justice of God is spread throughout the earth. Working together with God, humans have a responsibility to make right the injustices which have oppressed the whole created order of all living things” (Cafferky, 2015, p. 39). Observance of the Sabbath demands acknowledgement of societal injustice and enables the people to rectify the brokenness surrounding them.

The prophets bring the outward focus of this command to light in their reprimands of Israel. In Isaiah, Israel is rebuked for hypocrisy; while their actions may meet the requirements, their hearts neglect God's will. Social injustice and inconsideration rage, and although the Israelites fasted, “they did not demonstrate the attitudes and activities that fasting represented... it consisted only in people bowing their heads, not their hearts” (Constable, 2020, p. 401). In correcting this misrepresentation of community life, YHWH redirects the people to the Sabbath. The Israelites are called to respect and delight in this

day, refraining from “normal activities”, “business deals” and “selfish pursuits” (Isa. 58:13). Amos addresses a similar issue with his audience; the people’s resistance to Sabbath shows “a mark of unscrupulous greed” (McConville, 2002, p. 171) that directly impacts those around them. In a covenantal community, resting—as well as the intentional allowance of others to rest—forms sets a foundation of genuinely loving neighbor. As YHWH has poured out blessings of cessation, allowance, and pause, the people are to share this blessing with all those around them. They are to reorient themselves to community, with God and neighbor. The Sabbath serves as a bedrock where respect for the other manifests, social injustice is rectified, and perspective shifts from the individual to the whole.

## Creation

*“Speak to the Israelites and tell them, ‘When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land must observe a Sabbath to the LORD. Six years you may sow your field, and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather the produce, but in the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath of complete rest—a Sabbath to the LORD.’” Leviticus 25:2-4*

As an overflow of goodness, YHWH bestows a rhythm of rest to humanity as the crown of creation. Yet this blessing is not for them alone; nor does it extend only to neighbor. Sabbath offers rest even to the land and the animals. The land is given time to recover and heal; animals are given a day to cease from their labor. Michael Fishbane writes on the environmental system of Sabbath rest as it “enforces the value that the earth is a gift of divine creativity, given to humankind in sacred trust” (Fishbane, 2008, p. 126). The perspective-shifting of Sabbath is not restricted to how humanity sees neighbor, but includes how they care for the earth. In the beginning, God declared creation good;

Sabbath reminds the people that YHWH still deems it so. The mandate to guard the earth was not given lightly, but instead demonstrates YHWH's passion for the earth. And in a holistic Sabbath, humanity further reflects God's heart by living out this passion and allowing the earth they have dominion over to rest.

The theme of Sabbath pervades throughout scripture and—when observed—human existence. This practice clearly and distinctly impacts all four ubiquitous human relationships: that is, an individual's relationships with God, others, themselves, and creation. Distorted relationships with YHWH and communities begin to heal. Identities reground in truth. Social injustice is exposed. Creation receives dignity and respect. By adhering to this one command, humanity engages in powerful and transformative “work” that begins restoring reality to what it could be—all through a commitment to rest.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

Having seen scripture's advocacy for Sabbath, I chose to engineer a study in which students agreed to observe the Sabbath for three consecutive weeks. This study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative data to explore Sabbath's perceived personal impact on human relationships with God, others, self, and creation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on both quantitative and qualitative data, with a response analysis focused on participant's self-reported perception of impact. In analyzing the qualitative data gathered, selected responses were chosen to highlight specific participant stories and experiences. This practice draws from Walter Fisher's theory of Narrative Paradigm, which states that humans are primarily convinced and impacted by stories



(Fisher, 1985). Fisher refers to the human race as “meaning-making animals” who use coherence (i.e. *does this story make sense?*) and fidelity (i.e. *does this story resonate with my preexisting experiences and perceptions of reality?*) to make sense of information. While these stories may contain facts and evidence—such as data and results from this study, as it is gathered from real-life experience—Fisher argues that the inherent nature of story-telling is both the most natural and compelling form of information-relaying for human beings (Fisher, 1985). Therefore, the anecdotal evidence gathered through the following study will strongly bolster previous research done on the impact of Sabbath-keeping as well as provide meaningful and applicable results.

## **Hypothesis**

Based on the previous scriptural analysis, Sabbath-keeping design and implementation positively effects the four ubiquitous human relationships with God, self, the human community (others), and creation. Therefore, it stands that *participating in Sabbath-keeping will positively impact an individual's relationship with God, others, creation, and self.*

## **Instrumentation**

To gather evidence in support of this hypothesis, 22 Malone students participated in a study administered over the course of three weeks. For three consecutive Sundays, participants were asked to observe the Sabbath by not partaking in homework/academic obligations. Furthermore, participants were asked to complete a pre-survey at the

beginning of their Sabbath, which consisted of two questions intended to frame the individual's mindset concerning Sabbath observance. These questions included:

1. What will you say *no* to during your Sabbath observance, in order to remember **who** you are--a finite, beloved child of God? (*This may include but is not limited to: social media, worry, anxiety, chores, etc.*)
2. What will you say *yes* to during your Sabbath observance, in order to remember **whose** you are; that you belong to a sovereign, loving God and to a human community? (*This may include but is not limited to: time with friends, taking a nap, engaging with creation, etc.*)

At the end of each Sabbath, participants were asked to complete a post-survey consisting of five reflective questions regarding the four ubiquitous human relationships (God, others, creation, and self). These questions included:

1. Were you successful in observing the Sabbath today? Please explain.
2. Did your Sabbath observance impact your relationship with God? If so, how?
3. Did your Sabbath observance impact your relationship with others? If so, how?
4. Did your Sabbath observance impact your relationship with creation? If so, how?
5. Did your Sabbath observance impact your relationship with yourself? If so, how?

Survey results provided both qualitative and quantitative data. After study completion, the results were analyzed both for the amount of participant/relationships impacted (quantitative), as well as the way in which relationships are impacted (qualitative). Success was measured in two primary ways. Quantitatively, by 50% or more of the sample perceiving an effect on two or more relationships by their third Sabbath observance. Qualitatively, through recurring themes of rest, restoration/refreshment, and connection in participant answers.

## **Participants**

The participants of this study include 22 traditional undergraduate students at Malone University, a liberal arts university located in Northeastern Ohio. Participants were recruited on a volunteer basis through word of mouth and a campus wide email.

## **Chapter 5: Student Survey**

Data analysis began immediately following survey collection. Quantitatively, data was analyzed according to perceived impact. This impact was categorized by type of relationship (as identified and discussed above), as each participant specifically responded to whether they perceived an impact on their relationship with God, others, creation, and themselves. Participants were also asked to identify if they perceived themselves as successful in their Sabbath observance overall. Qualitatively, the data was analyzed thematically. While over fifty themes were identified, only the most frequently occurring themes are discussed here. These included struggle, reflection, awareness, rest/relaxation, conversation, and improvement/growth.,

## Quantitative Analysis

Quantitatively, the majority of students (over 50%) perceived an impact in all four ubiquitous relationships each week, with the exception of relationship with creation in week one. There were several trends within this data. Perceived success of Sabbath observance went down each week; however, participant perception of impact on each relationship was recorded as increasing overall throughout the course of the study, with the exception of “relationship with self.” Relationship with others was perceived to be impacted the most by Sabbath observance, and received the highest perceived observances in both week one and three. During week two, participants perceived their relationship with God to be the most impacted relationship. Participants’ relationship with creation had the lowest perceived impact throughout the study.

Table 1: Perceived Impact, as recorded by Question

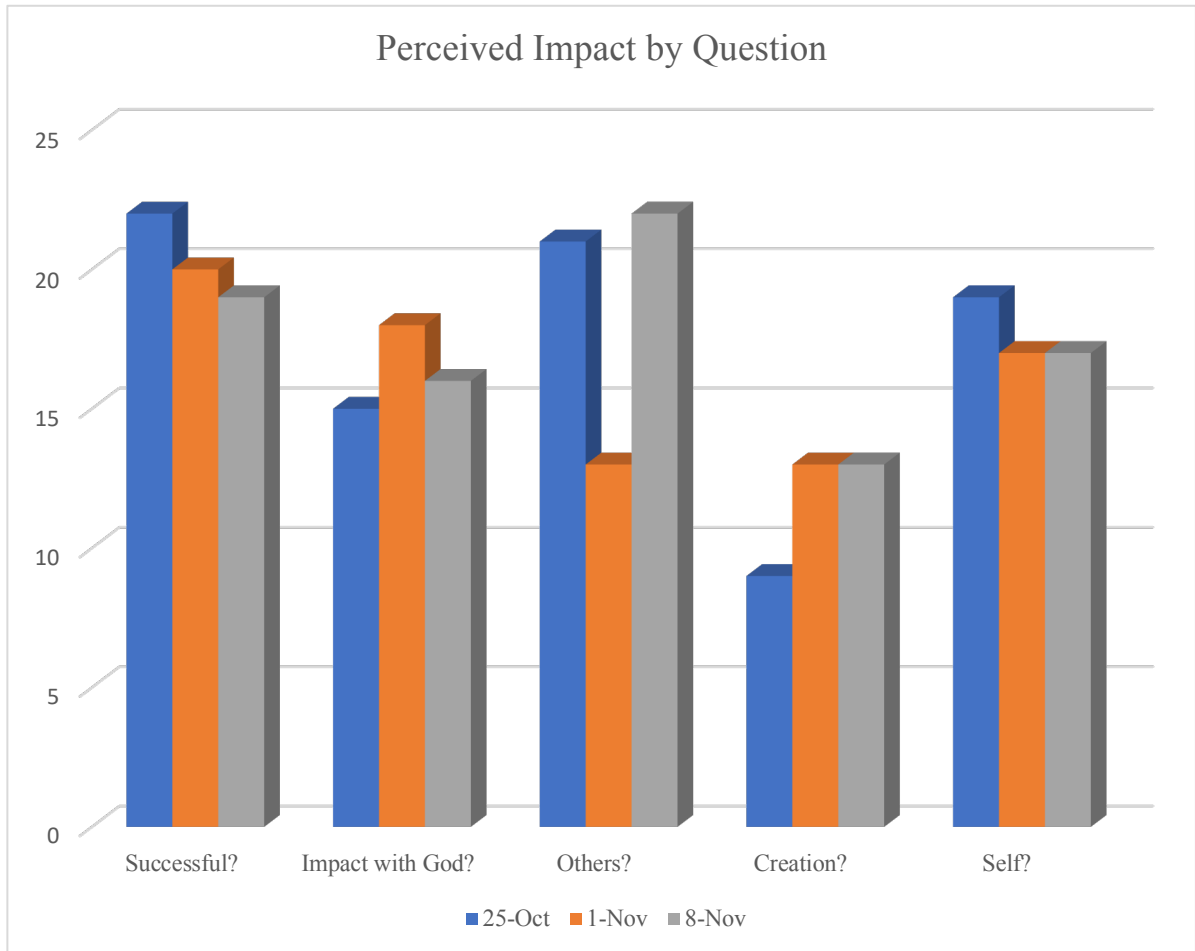
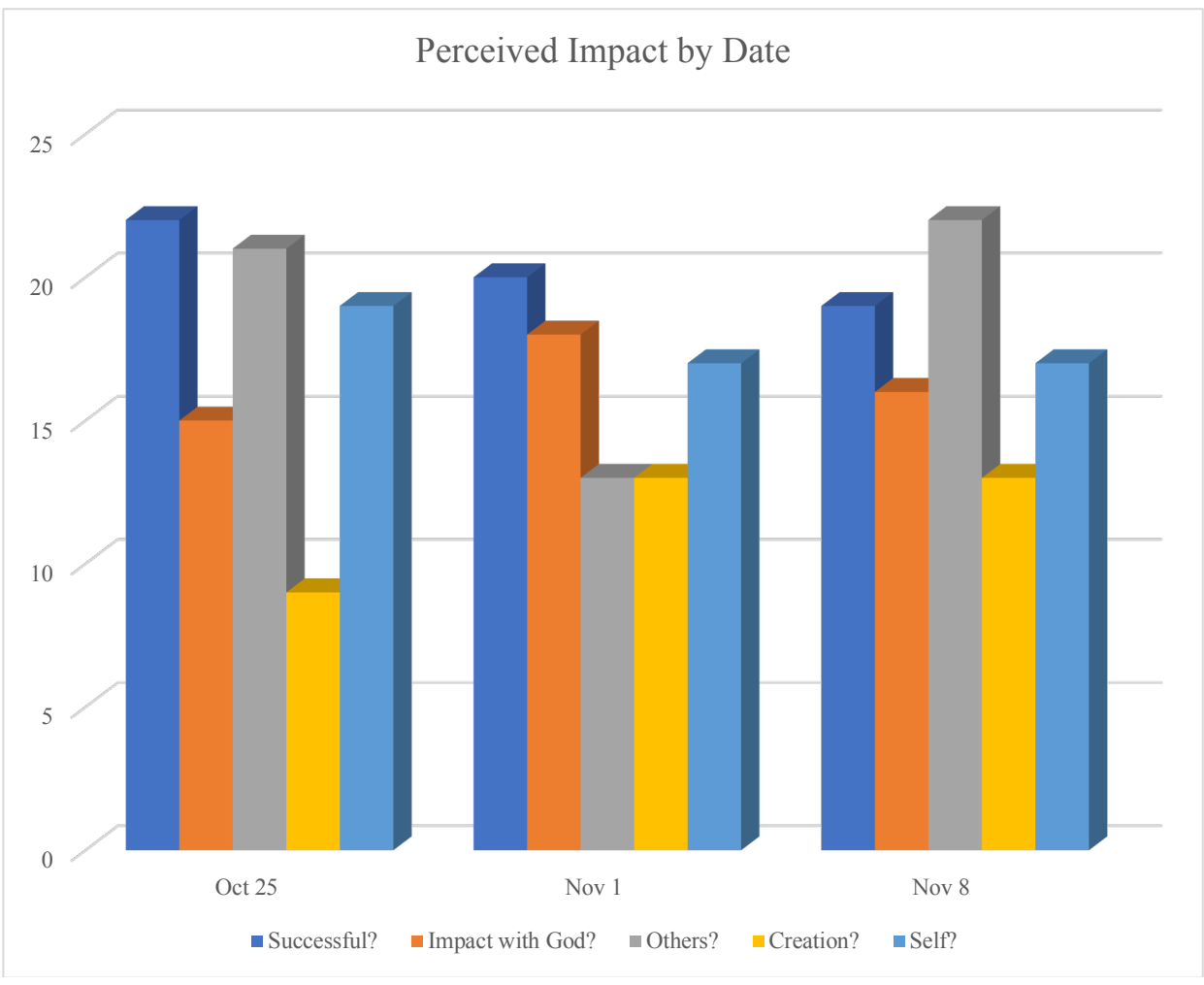


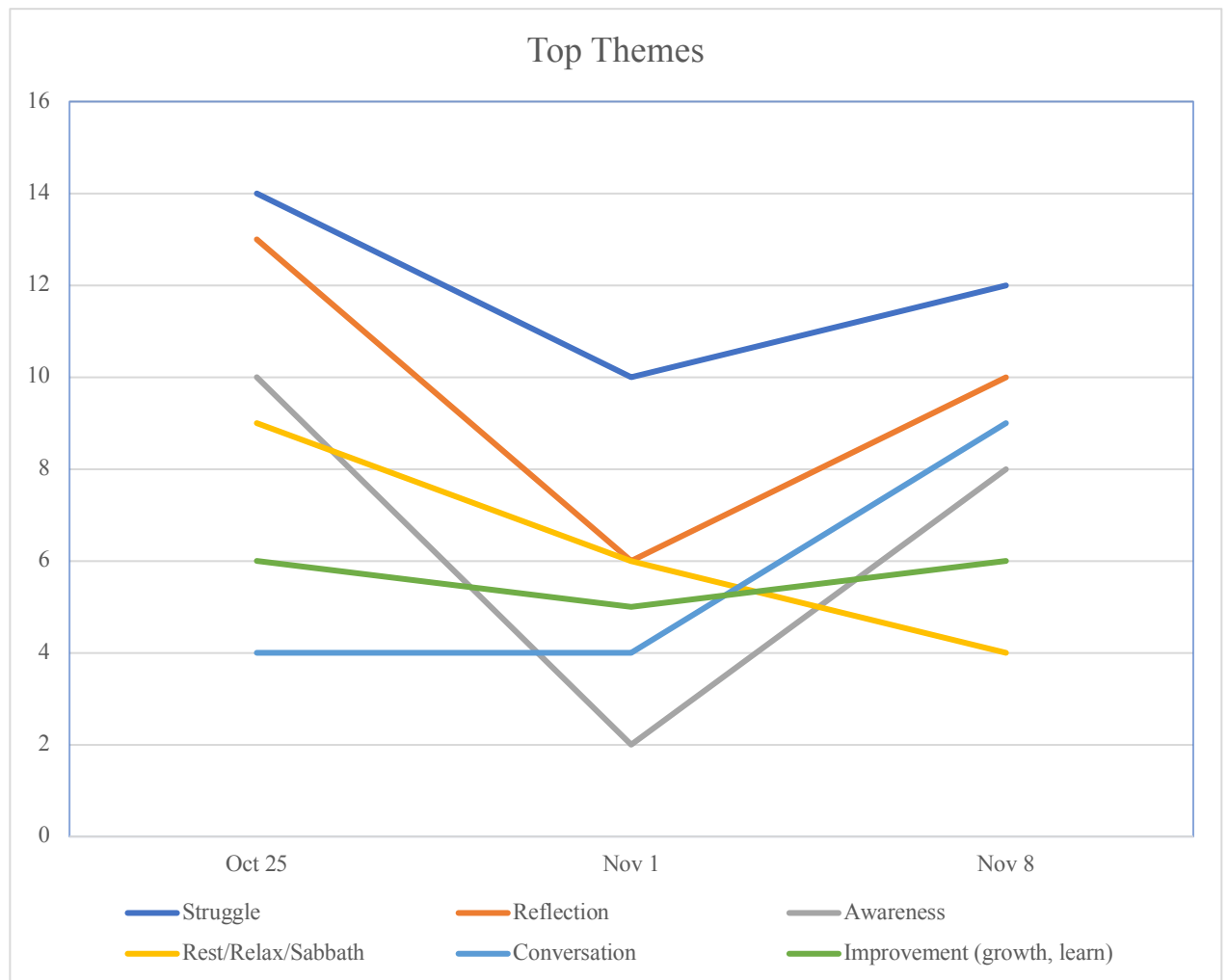
Table 2: Perceived Impact, as recorded by Date



### Qualitative Analysis

Qualitatively, there were several repeated concepts--identified as “themes”--threading throughout participant responses. The highest recorded theme was *struggle*, occurring in 36 different responses throughout the course of the study. The next highest recorded theme was *awareness*, which occurred a total of 29 times throughout the study. Themes of *conversation*, *reflection*, *rest/relaxation*, and *improvement* were also commonly recorded within participant responses. Overall, these themes occurred in a

decreasing “U” pattern, with week 2 receiving the lowest instances of each theme. The only exceptions to this pattern were the themes of *rest* and *conversation*. Conversation maintained consistent between weeks one and two, with a recorded increase in week three. The theme of rest decreased in instances of occurrence each week.



## Discussion

The hypothesis of this study, that *participating in Sabbath-keeping will positively impact an individual's relationship with God, others, creation, and self*, was expected to be supported by both qualitative and quantitative measures. Quantitatively, the hypothesis of

the study proved true. While each participant needed to only experience a positive impact and growth in two relationships over the course of the study for the hypothesis to be supported, in actuality over half of participants recorded a positive impact in all four ubiquitous relationships throughout the course of the study. The only exception was perceived impact within participant's relationship with creation in week one.

Furthermore, in comparing weeks one and three each theme increased in perceived impact, with the only exception of "relationship with self."

Qualitatively, however, the data differed from the initial hypothesis. While projected themes for impactful Sabbath-keeping were expected to be seen through themes of *rest, restoration/refreshment, and connection*, impact of Sabbath-keeping was primarily recorded through themes of *struggle, reflection, and awareness*, which were closely followed by themes of *rest/relaxation, conversation, and improvement/growth*. While *conversation* could be classified as a form of connection, the data still has stronger occurrences of *struggle, reflection, and awareness* as opposed to the three initially proposed themes. The prominence of *struggle* could be due to lack of previous Sabbath observance, or the pervasiveness of humanity's struggle with sinful nature. Also important to note is that although *struggle* often brings negative connotations, participants still recorded a majority of positively perceived impact. Themes of *awareness* and *reflection* may have been commonly observed due to the nature of the study (see survey in Appendix), and due to the nature of Sabbath which calls individuals to take personal responsibility for their work and cessation of work. Thus, an individual may be more reflective and aware of their role within reality when observing the Sabbath. Furthermore, through cessation of work many participants experienced days that were



less busy, creating space and time for reflective thoughts. While the overall theme of rest decreased throughout the course of the study, this may be due to the occurrence of other positive themes that appeared only in weeks two and three, such as *time*, *encouragement*, and *health*.

Another important and impactful result of this survey includes the specific responses recorded by participants concerning their Sabbath experience. Participants were affected in a variety of different and unique ways, including: self-acceptance/appreciation, peace, lack of guilt, holistic health, improved relationships, and renewal. A small sample of specific responses is included below:

*“Today I focused on doing things that I love. I smiled and laughed a lot for no reason other than being happy and enjoying myself. I think that I love myself a little more now than I did this morning.”*

*“I felt a huge sense of peace throughout the day”*

*“Even though I couldn’t completely refrain [from doing homework], I didn’t feel guilty which is so new for me”*

*“Allowing myself to rest in the ways that I find helpful is so good for mental, emotional, and even my physical health. I’m noticing a huge difference and I think I’ll continue this study even after the three Sundays for the study.”*

*“I was mentally free of distraction and I was able to use my energy on my relationship with my family and God, which gave me satisfaction.”*

*“It surprised me how much I enjoyed recognizing how vast His creation is! I wish I went outside sooner.”*

*“Today I felt more like me—which is such a big blessing because it feels like I haven’t been myself in so long. I extended grace, comfort, and care to myself today & truly saw how that translated to me being able to pour into others well.”*

Perhaps most impactful in recorded responses was that of one participant who elaborated on their experience with Sabbath observance in a personal anecdote. Writing a bit more extensively on this practice, the participant disclosed that:

“Eight months ago... I had not taken any real extended time off in over six, seven, eight months.... I wondered if anyone would truly miss me. In reality, I was thinking about killing myself. // The next meeting I had with my advisor... [he] challenged me to take every Sunday off. I thank God for this as I may have ended up in a different place [otherwise].

Now, almost 2/3 of a year onward, I see real benefits of taking Sundays off. It is the one day I look forward to, knowing that I have it off. I can make plans, spend time with friends, have fun. It is God’s gift to us to recharge before the toil of the upcoming week. To be honest... I do not know what I would do if I had to work 24/7 again. I praise Him for leading me to see that a day of rest is needed.”

Several outside factors may have impacted the results of this study. Most notable is that of participant quarantine due to COVID-19; throughout the course of the study, 11 of the 22 participants were in quarantine for at least one Sabbath observance (if not two), with the majority of shared quarantine experience occurring during week two. During this quarantine, students were unable to leave a specific dorm room and most were in isolation or quarantined with one other individual, severely limiting interactions with others and creation. This could explain why the data occurred in a “U” pattern, with lowest perceived impacts primarily occurring in week two. Also important to note is participant lack of familiarity with intended Sabbath keeping as portrayed in scripture (and as described in chapter three of this paper).

## Conclusion

Through this study, an individual's relationship with God, others, creation, and themselves was shown to be positively impacted by Sabbath observance. The biggest perceived impact was in a participant's relationship with God and others. It was hypothesized that this positive impact would be displayed through themes of rest, renewal, and connection; however in actuality this impact was recorded through themes of struggle, reflection, and awareness. These themes are neither inherently positive or negative; rather they merely portray the reality that resting in Twenty-first century college-culture is difficult, and that by engaging in Sabbath-observance individuals often find themselves more reflective and aware of what they are experiencing throughout the day.

In furthering research on this topic, one could run separate test groups to compare Sabbath-observance experience with a control group. Research could also be done pertaining to different types of rest. For example, one could study rest throughout the week as opposed to only Sabbath observance. Lastly, research on this topic could be furthered by expanding the study's reach and engaging a range of individuals beyond a college campus. Another means of expanding reach could be through extending the duration of the study, so themes and perceived impact can be better traced over a longer period of time. And, of course, a study similar to this conducted without the presence of a mass COVID-19 quarantine would be helpful in determining how drastically this study's patterns were affected by participants in isolation.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

The past three Sabbaths have been the hardest, most stress-inducing Sabbaths that I have observed. The irony of being stressed, and pulling late nights, to complete a project on resting has been brought to my attention far too many times. Yet this study has also brought so much deepening in perspective, as the heart of Sabbath and its potential for impact was revealed time and time again through scripture, sources, and recorded experiences. In Sabbath, I am able to recognize my identity as free, reflect the good design of the Creator, engage in sanctifying the creation, and restore my relationships with those around me. As I accept this limitation, I am finding freedom.

This study has also brought me a strong sense of validation. The choice to rest brings struggle; it is not natural, and it's certainly not normal in our Western, American, Twenty-first century culture. Yet through this process, I have found myself repeating the mantra that "we Sabbath not because it feels good, but because it *is* good." Sabbath has become another facet of my life where my faith is put into practice. Some days, it is refreshing and restorative; filling my cup and materializing a bit of promised restoration right in front of me. But on others, I am weary. Obligations and responsibilities stress my hours; relationships are frustrated, and I find myself craving the routine of the coming weekday. But each week, I try again.

I will continue to fail, and I will continue to succeed. Either way, I am convinced that my struggle with this observance shapes me and the world around me, accentuating God's intended goodness. When I fail, it is a reminder that I am limited; that to fail and struggle is part of what it means to be engaged in this earthly existence. When I succeed, it is a reminder of God's bountiful grace; which is continually working in and around me

despite my brokenness. Ultimately, my Sabbath observance each week is a reminder of reality; that what I do no longer defines who I am.

## Appendix

### Student Survey

Date of Sabbath observance: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer at the beginning of your Sabbath.**

1. What will you say *no* to during your Sabbath observance, in order to remember **who** you are--a finite, beloved child of God? (*This may include but is not limited to: social media, worry, anxiety, chores, etc.*)
2. What will you say *yes* to during your Sabbath observance, in order to remember **whose** you are; that you belong to a sovereign, loving God and to a human community? (*This may include but is not limited to: time with friends, taking a nap, engaging with creation, etc.*)

**Please answer after completing your Sabbath.**

1. Were you successful in observing the Sabbath today? Please explain.
2. Did your Sabbath observance impact your relationship with God? If so, how?
3. Did your Sabbath observance impact your relationship with others? If so, how?
4. Did your Sabbath observance impact your relationship with creation? If so, how?
5. Did your Sabbath observance impact your relationship with yourself? If so, how?

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