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Sabbath As Resistance: Saying No To The Culture Of Now



Synopsis

Discussions about the Sabbath often center around moralistic laws and arguments over whether a person should be able to play cards or purchase liquor on Sundays. In this volume, popular author Walter Brueggemann writes that the Sabbath is not simply about keeping rules but rather about becoming a whole person and restoring a whole society. Importantly, Brueggemann speaks to a 24/7 society of consumption, a society in which we live to achieve, accomplish, perform, and possess. We want more, own more, use more, eat more, and drink more. Keeping the Sabbath allows us to break this restless cycle and focus on what is truly important: God, other people, all life. Brueggemann offers a transformative vision of the wholeness God intends, giving world-weary Christians a glimpse of a more fulfilling and simpler life through Sabbath observance.

Book Information

Paperback: 89 pages

Publisher: Westminster John Knox Press; 1 edition (January 31, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0664239285

ISBN-13: 978-0664239282

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.2 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 141 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #41,065 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Holidays](#) #82 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Social Issues](#) #86 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Commentaries](#)

Customer Reviews

Walter Brueggemann is William Marcellus McPheeters Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary. An ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, he is the author of dozens of books and hundreds of articles.

You have probably heard about impatient societies or situations in which people simply cannot wait. With many symbols all around us that promote speed and efficiency, our fast-paced culture supported by fast-food industry is helping all of us race one another constantly in the search for meaning and accomplishments. Even Christians are not immune to this state of busyness and rush.

Thankfully, there are perceptive people such as Walter Brueggemann who offers their acute awareness of contemporary culture that is combined with their grasp of biblical truth. Old Testament Professor and renowned author of books like "The Prophetic Imagination," and "Truth Speaks to Power," contributes yet another counter-cultural take on resisting the ways of the world. Expanding upon the topic first published as a series of Bible studies at "The Thoughtful Christian" website, Brueggemann has expanded the teaching into a book that aims to resist the worldliness by saying "NO to the culture of now." Riding on a provocative title, this book is deeply necessary to bringing back sanity back in an increasingly restless world. Brueggemann joins a chorus of prophetic voices in speaking against the restlessness, the frantic busyness, and the aimlessness of the world. He shares with theologian Marva Dawn and Michael Fishbane on the Jewish wisdom practices about keeping the Sabbath. He acknowledges the classic book on Sabbath by Abraham Heschel, calling it a "magisterial book." He then mines the Old Testament passages, focusing particularly on the Ten Commandments, to draw out elements of what it means to practise the Sabbath as resistance and provides an alternative lifestyle to a world that is quickly becoming breathless due to over-exertion, over-activity, and overwhelming anxiety. Reading this book reminds me once again how relevant Sabbath keeping is for our world. On and on, we hear of an always-on, 24x7, and constant availability of anything to keep us running, working, and coveting. In Sabbath keeping, we have this ancient practice to discipline ourselves, to help us acknowledge that we are not super-people. We are not robots who can work non-stop. We need to rest regularly. We need to take a break frequently. We need to keep the Sabbath religiously, simply because we do not create ourselves. God has created us and it is best to follow the "manufacturer's manual." Brueggemann has written a concise book about keeping Sabbath, and this is clearly written for laypeople. More could have been written about how technology and the digital addiction can be addressed. Our current era has a problem of a new kind of idolatry. The Internet, the smartphone, the digital waves around us, all threaten to overwhelm us more and more. How do we resist such temptations? What are the ways in which we can practise Sabbath keeping in an Internet era? Is there anything the Christian community can practise together to resist these wireless intrusions? Maybe, Brueggemann is already aware of the many resources and literature out there that have spoken on such topics. That said, at least, he could have pointed readers to resources that he know about. If I have any critique, I would say that this book is way too brief for a topic that can be expanded upon more. I highly recommend this book for two reasons. First, it is staunchly biblical and sees Sabbath keeping with a big picture perspective. Instead of letting just a few verses lock the author in, the author is able to allow biblical theology to guide the reading and understanding of the Sabbath. Second, we all need

it. We are in a modern quicksand of anxiety, restlessness, and impatience. By keeping a regular Sabbath, we will learn to be more sane, and more importantly, to guide our next generation to do the same. The modern ideology of busyness and non-stop work only leads us toward idolatry of activities, achievements, and acquisitions. Sabbath keeping helps us resist that. Rating: 5 stars of 5. conrade This book is provided to me courtesy of Westminster John Knox Press and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

I can remember a time not too long ago that I took varying perspectives on the Sabbath and the 4th commandment in general. I recall transitioning in thought from "this doesn't apply to us today" to "well maybe it is incremental" in other words maybe the accumulation of our down time during the week equated to a 24-hour work stoppage. I am a very "driven" person who likes to achieve goals and get things done. I knew that God modeled this for us in the Creation account by creating for six days then resting on the seventh. Over time God has challenged my perspective on the Sabbath. This book along with a couple others such as Emotionally Healthy Leadership and Henri Nouwen's work have changed how I view this to be more of a set 24-hour work stoppage. Even with this knowledge it is tough to follow consistently. If you are like me and struggle to find how the 4th commandment fits in to our culture today then this is a book I would recommend to you as well! IT IS RESISTANCE BECAUSE IT IS A VISIBLE INSISTENCE THAT OUR LIVES ARE NOT DEFINED BY THE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF COMMODITY GOODS. IT IS ALTERNATIVE.

Walter Brueggemann is unarguably one of the greatest Old Testament scholars of our day, so what he says about sabbath should be taken seriously by any Christian who strives for faithfulness. But more than that, he is a natural-born teacher and a great preacher. I have read a good bit of his writing, and listened to and watched many of his lectures and lecture series and conference presentations and sermons online. The man is engaging! I think the most important thing Walter Brueggemann does, in his informative and entertaining style, is to do in our day what the prophets he knows so well in Old Testament days did: he calls us to faithfulness. Just like the people in those days, we don't want to hear that message, and we don't have time for it anyway. The prophets like Amos and Micah were rejected and ignored because they were not professionals. Nowadays, people who don't want to hear the message make the opposite charge. He's an academic, so what

does he know? And the guy quotes Karl Marx and Abraham Heschel! That's enough right there to show he's some kind of subversive. Ignore him, and here's a cable deal with hundreds more channels to occupy your time. Including, of course, lots of shopping channels....Brueggemann has written this book not for other academics or even for college or seminary students but for faithful Christians who need to be reminded, or maybe learn for the first time, why the day of rest is so important to us as individuals and as communities and as church. Many of us grew up with a very legalistic approach to the Sabbath in our hearts as well as on our law books, although the days of blue laws are now long gone even in the deepest parts of the Bible Belt. He calls us to look at Sabbath as a *positive practice of faith* and teaches us that *restfulness and not restlessness is at the center of life*. In addition, he teaches us that one of the important things about the Ten Commandments is that it stresses neighborliness along with worship of the one true God. And what links those two things? Quite literally, the Sabbath. According to Brueggemann, God called the Hebrews in Egypt, and calls us today, to question the system's constant stress on production and consumption, and to do things differently. And as the work stoppage permits a wanting of anxiety, so energy is redeployed to the neighborhood. The odd insistence of the God of Sinai is to counter the *anxious productivity* with *committed neighborliness*. The latter practice does not produce so much, but it creates an environment of security and dignity that redefines the human project. Walter Brueggemann may be an Old Testament scholar, but he is an ordained Christian minister as well. While there is lots of great material here from throughout the Old Testament, in chapter six he brings in the New Testament as well, and to great effect. Ever wonder just what Jesus meant when he said that his burden was easy, and his yoke light? Read this book, and you'll have perhaps a new way of thinking about that passage! If you've read much of Walter Brueggemann's work before, you will see some familiar themes here. One of those is about the relationship between God and God's people, i.e., covenant. Another is the concern shown in the Old Testament for what he calls the *triad of vulnerability* that is, widows, orphans, and strangers (immigrants.) Yes, he does question a lot about the way our society and economy work in the United States, and he is openly critical of some of it. And again, some people need to be reminded, and others may never have heard this, but it's nonetheless true: ...the God of Sinai who gives the Ten Commandments is never simply a *religious figure* but is always preoccupied with and attentive to socioeconomic policy. Walter Brueggemann does not in this book tell us what we should do or not do on the Sabbath. But he does help us to understand what the Bible says about that issue, in both testaments. This is a short

book, and as always with him, a good read. This is a book every Christian could benefit from reading. And even better, they should read it with others and discuss it.

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