

Reclaim the Sabbath

By Whitney Stager, M.S.

As I was driving to work I saw a billboard that said, "Hallelujah!" But it was not about God, rather about a bank being open on a Sunday. I was actually quite shocked - is there anything left that is sacred on a Sunday? I would like to propose an alternative to a busy Sunday. It could be called "Project Sabbath" - how to reclaim the Sabbath for yourself and your family!

Most of us know how to fill our schedules to the max. Many of us find ourselves running from event to event, rarely having time to really connect with our spouse, our children, our self, or God. In fact, some of us may have even forgotten what free time - unscheduled time - really is.

There are many studies showing the detrimental impact of lack of free time on both children and adults. Children may not know how to tell parents that they are over-scheduled. Parents can look for signs such as decrease in interest of a specific activity, lowered grades, or other signs of stress. Adults also experience stress and other symptoms from being over-scheduled. Feeling disconnected from family members and lack of "real" communication on a regular basis can be negative side-effects of being too busy.

When given the opportunity for free time, many people don't even know what to do with themselves because they feel as if they are "wasting time". Imagine spending time without working on a task or completing a project. Imagine your children doing what they want with their time. Instead of rushing from event to event, the family is actually having relaxing time together!

Although this seems next to impossible, you can reclaim some free time for yourself and your family. And what better day to reclaim some down-time than the Sabbath! "Therefore, you must keep the Sabbath as something sacred. Six days there are for doing work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of complete rest, sacred to the Lord." (Ex 31:14-15).

Ideas for reclaiming your down-time on Sunday:

- Schedule any big events on Fridays or Saturdays
- Build more chores into the week so Sunday isn't "catch-up day"
- Schedule in unscheduled family time on the calendar
- Be selective about social "obligations" - remember, if you turn down activities on a Sunday, you are giving a great witness to keeping the Sabbath!
- Cut down the kids' weekend activities - work with coaches and teachers as well as other parents to keep Sunday an activity-free day.
- Avoid day-long projects - keep them short or break them down over several weekends
- This avoids being too tired and busy to enjoy each other.

Ideas for increasing family time and down-time:

- Go to church together - add a special meal before or after
- Family movie time
- Reading and prayer time - everyone pick a book and read! Even the smallest family members can do this.
- Get out the family- friendly games!
- Quiet time – I know of one family six who has 15 minutes of silence in their house every day!
- Idea box - have each family member write a family- friendly activity on a piece of paper and pick one every Sunday.
- Enjoy a special treat together (i.e. popcorn, ice-cream, etc.)
- Have a Sunday picnic - even if it's on the living room floor!

Families love traditions, and keeping the Sabbath holy and keeping Sunday a family day gives everyone something to look forward to during the hectic week. Having specific down-time set aside allows families to reconnect and can even open doors for better communication with your spouse or children. Adding some positive family time can decrease stress and increase the “fun” factor. Try some of these ideas for a week or two and see what happens. Once you get the Sabbath back, you won't want to give it up again!

(Many ideas for this article were drawn from the October 2006 and Nov/Dec 2006 issues of “Parenting” magazine. In addition, please see Mary Lambrecht's article entitled “A Christmas Sabbath”).

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