

Priorities of Faith

SUPPLEMENTAL READING — THE BLESSING OF DIGITAL SABBATH DETOX

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exod. 20:8–11, ESV)

The Sabbath Rightly Understood

Seventh-day Adventists are good at explaining the historical change of the Lord’s Day from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week. We are sometimes less successful in demonstrating the beauty and blessing of keeping the Sabbath holy. For many, the Sabbath has deteriorated into a dreaded legalistic routine where they abstain from certain work. It is no longer a delight that delivers us joy in our walk with God. Unless we rediscover the delightful aspects of joyful Sabbath celebration, nobody will be attracted to experiencing the Sabbath as God’s blessing. The Sabbath, rightly understood, offers wonderfully practical blessings to a generation that is shaped relationally by using new technology in an age of digital connectedness. The Sabbath offers a perfect opportunity to clarify our choices about how we are going to live in the present. In a time when few people put any limits on texting, social media, or other uses of digital technology, the Sabbath offers an experience that will enrich the rest of our work week as well.

Digital Detox

Skimming media-rich web pages exposes us to endless information, but we become less able to engage in deep, undistracted thinking. When people get used to quick browsing, scanning, and one-time reading, the ability to do in-depth and focused reading diminishes. It becomes physiologically more difficult to follow an extended line of thinking and more challenging to reflect deeply on the words and ways of God. This has drastic implications for our relationship with God because Jesus tells us that our brain is essential in expressing our love of God (Mark 12:30). Digital technology does not develop the brain circuits needed for contemplation, undistracted prayer, and other dimensions of spiritual life. But this is precisely the type of thinking that is fostered by a digital detox, by slowing down, and by embracing and practicing God’s Sabbath. Imagine the blessings from one full day every week when we turn off our cell phones, when we keep our computers and tablets turned off, when we deliberately refrain from browsing the web and do not check e-mails. Instead, we purposefully engage in activities and relationships that invite us to be physically and mentally present. Imagine a Sabbath where you extend grace by offering undistracted conversation and keep your focus on the family and friends around you. Imagine a day of rest where you make time to reflect on God’s Word creatively and deeply. Imagine quality time where you share your insights and experience with others and also listen attentively and without interruption to their stories. Such a Sabbath practice will reconnect us to God, renew our relationships, and grace our spiritual journey in ways both beautiful and profound.