



# How to Use *Horizons Magazine*

## CELEBRATIONS AND SABBATH

### FOCUSING ON THE ISSUES

#### **“Praying in Public”** by Richard Mouw (Devotional)

Use this article to open conversations in groups about praying in public, Why do you or don't you?

When can you? You might take the practical approach of naming other ways to acknowledge God's good gifts that honor one's thankfulness and the faith practices of others.

#### **“The Sabbath Promise”** by Michaela Bruzzese

- Bruzzese helps us clearly see Matthew's intriguing placement of Jesus' "invitation to true rest" (*Matt. 11:28–29*) between the "radical, divisive nature of discipleship" (*Matt. 10*) and the kingdom parables (*Matt. 13*). The placement points out the well-nigh impossible task of understanding Jesus' vision and living it! It's like hearing the message, "This will be hard—but I can give you rest. . . . Wait—this is in fact impossible." And we despair, as we worry about what we don't do, can't do or should do. And then worry that the things we actually do won't make a big enough difference in the large scheme of things!
- Is it possible that the key to being a disciple of Jesus is centered on our ability to be renewed for the task that is bigger than we can fathom accomplishing, and our determination to try the task anyway? Where and when have you heard or expressed despair at finding time for being a disciple? What of Bruzzese's analysis makes sense to you?
- How might it free you, and/or the community of faith, to continue to "labor" at being a disciple? What kind of "rest" do you need to focus on discipleship?
- What do you understand the difference to be between "experiencing" and "knowing" the joy of the Sabbath?
- Michaela Bruzzese says "For Jews, observation of the Sabbath is both commandment . . . and gift" (p. 5). In what way is Sabbath observance a commandment for you? In what way is it gift for you? Which one might you need to emphasize over the other to bring them into balance?
- "Six days of the week are committed to co-creating, but the seventh enables Jews to rest in the dream of perfection, to stop the struggle and to live as if the dream has been realized. In this way, the Sabbath provides a critical pause in the often overwhelming quest for perfecting the world . . ." (p. 6). This quote suggests that the Sabbath is a reminder of "what we are working for" looks like—it's as if you did the impossible, or could see what the world would look like if you did. You encounter the perfect on the Sabbath—God—and you realize every week why it's not only up to you.

- What do you see on the Sabbath in worship, in resting, in family activity or in your other Sabbath activities that shows you a glimpse of the dream? How does Sabbath energize you for the work Christians are called to do?
- If Jews see the Sabbath as the day toward which they journey during the week, and therefore a day to renew the covenant, what difference does it make for Christians that the Sabbath is the first day of the week? What metaphor might you suggest for the relationship of the Sabbath to the days of the week that follow the Sabbath?
- Bruzese comments “Given the overwhelmingly consumerist cultures in which many of us live, trying to live kingdom ideals when it comes to money and things is not only difficult, but profoundly countercultural. It is not supported or condoned by the mainstream; on the contrary, it is considered suspicious, idealistic and naïve” (p. 7). Do you agree? Why do you think this is so? What have you or your church tried to do that has garnered this suspicion? What is the hardest thing you have encountered? What are you and the church called to do in response? Wonder aloud with a friend, discussion partner or whole PW group which of the “kingdom ideals” are worth such conflict and why.
- Where have you experienced the community of Christianity helping you with the practice of Sabbath? What more do you need from that community to establish Sabbath practice? How will you ask for it?
- On a continuum labeled at one end, “My call to work for God’s reign,” and at the other, “Rest and renewal,” where would you place a mark that represents your current “balance”? Are you satisfied with where it lies? If not, what do you find in this article to point you in the direction of a better balance? What changes do you plan to make in your life to work toward a better balance?

 **“Keeping Time”** by Anitra Kitts

- No matter what our life choices, there are times we look longingly at someone else’s life, or at previous times in our own, and wish that was us now. What do you truly wish could be different about your life? What do you see in your life now that you think you’ll wish for (or still hold sacred) in the future?
- Under the header “Cooking as Connecting,” Kitts reports yeast (*goddisgoode*) “. . . is both a blessing and a mystery.” Truly the fact that God is good is both blessing and mystery! Have you even wondered why (or how!) God stuck with Jonah, Abraham or David? Of the multitude of biblical characters, think of one about whom you have wondered, “Why in the world did God stick with him or her?”
- Do you ever wonder why God sticks with you? with the church? What would you name “*goddisgoode*” in your life? If it is a person or persons, tell them so. Is it something important to you like grace, forgiveness, companionship . . . or something else entirely? Tell someone or write about your thoughts on this topic.

- Pick up the phone and make a date with someone with whom you have lost touch, or need to see, or miss. Plan to cook (maybe one of these recipes) and eat together or just reconnect.
- In the last paragraph of the article, the author talks about “cooking with intentionality.” What does this phrase mean to you? What are the advantages of doing so?
- Many of us would avoid cooking altogether if we could! Even if you don’t enjoy cooking, imagine one scenario you could look forward to. Picture the food and the circumstances that would make this worthwhile for you. What would it take to turn your picture into reality? Try. And think of it as “Sabbath time.”
- Reread the first paragraph under the header “Cooking as celebration.” Does the idea of a future minister making beer bother you?
- Drinking alcohol, in fact behavioral standards for church leaders in general, can be a controversial issue in the church. Some might see this article about a candidate for ministry brewing beer as a modern picture of priorities in ministry—hospitality over convention, for example—or they may see it as a portrait of someone who is freed of unreasonable expectations. But others may be troubled by this illustration because of the prevalence of alcoholism and abuse of the use of alcohol. Take this opportunity to examine your own ideas about standards that churches—or individuals in churches—hold for leaders in the church. What do you expect? More importantly, why do you expect that? Where do you look for an ethic of expectation for church leaders? for church members? for Christians?

 **“Cultivating a Sabbath Heart”** by Amy Starr Redwine

- What would a moment contain to make it a “Sabbath moment” for you? What does it mean to live as “children of the living God and disciples of Jesus Christ”?
- Under the header “Restoration and Recovery,” the author talks about people’s need for breaks, usually after 90–120 minutes. What signals does your body give you that you need a break? How well do you listen to, and indeed respond to those signals? What are the consequences for you when you ignore those signals?

Remember this pattern when planning your next event!

- What makes you miss signals from your body or your soul? If someone were to tell you to “stop and *notice* the life that [you] have,” what would you notice and name? Take a moment to do just that. Write it down if that will help you be more mindful of it.
- Skim the article for:
  1. Definitions and descriptions of “mindfulness.” Make a list of what you find.
  2. Examples offered of “mindfulness.” Note them. Write down three or four examples that are true for you.
  3. What difference can “mindfulness” make in one’s relationship with God? with others? Note ideas in the article. Then note your own ideas and observations from your own experience.

- At the bottom of page 14, the author quotes Mark Buchanan’s *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*: “ ‘We have let ourselves be consumed by the things that feed the ego but starve the soul.’ ” Look for signs of this for you. How might mindfulness of the signs help you change this for you?
- Recall a moment that begged for a “Sabbath heart.” How might it have been different? What could that difference look like? What can you do with your recognition of that difference?
- Look up the everyday prayers <link to the Web extra> that are a Web exclusive. Print a few copies and, in addition to using them yourself, give a copy to a friend. Make a covenant to use them for a time, then talk together about how they were helpful to each of you.
- The *Ignatian* practice of *examen* is a wonderfully easy practice of mindfulness. Simply take a time at dinner or in the evening to notice what during the day fed your life and what drained life from you. Being mindful of those things can help you focus more on what feeds your life.
- See the book *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1995). It provides a very clear description of this practice that can be used with children, youth and adults, and many ways to ask the two key questions for variety and for appropriate application.

 **“Builders of a Legacy, Keepers of the Faith”** by Ellen Birkett Morris

Who are the builders of a legacy and keepers of the faith in your congregation? Celebrate their lives and ministry in a monthly article in your newsletter or on your Web site. Or have a party that celebrates them and provides opportunities to learn about their lives—interview them and thank them. Shine a spotlight on black Presbyterian women using these stories and some from your locale. Highlight the stories of racial-ethnic community members who have struggled against hard odds and made progress.

 **“It’s About Time”** by Rebecca Kneale Gould

- If being “time affluent” is really a better predictor of happiness than having material things, how do you rate? What do you have more of—time or material things? Does this ring true for you?
- What are some places you see haste making waste in your life?
- Gould suggests that being overworked is a cultural problem. What are the negative effects of your workplace? your government? your culture?
- When faced with the choice of productivity or awareness, what are the dichotomies for you? for your family? How does your church play a part either positively or negatively?
- “... [I]t is precisely in these open times that we come to know our place\_ personally, environmentally and spiritually” (p. 23). Think about each of these “places” for you—personal, environmental and spiritual. How would you describe each of them? For each, what do you long for? What is possible and how is it possible?

- When you look at the statistics in the side bar on page 24, what surprises you most? If vacations are so important to one's health, what are some ways to take a vacation that don't require a huge expenditure of money? What are some vacations one could take that would provide rest, relaxation and renewal without breaking the budget?
- On page 24, read the section under the header "The Toll on Families and Children." If you are a mom of children living at home, go down the list and think about your family in relation to each statement. Now go back and select the one that most concerns you. What can you do to effect a change in your family pattern for this one thing?

 **"Builders of a Legacy, Keepers of the Faith"** by Ellen Birkett Morris

There are countless stories of people inheriting lots of money and "going wrong" or turning to the "loose and lazy life." Rarely do you hear of a "considerable inheritance" being used "to help people in need. What is the first thing you would do with a "considerable inheritance"? The second? The third? How far down the list is helping people in need?

If you want a fascinating take on one person's opinion of what is required of those with great wealth, see the article, "What Should a Billionaire Give—and What Should You?" in *The New York Times Magazine*, December 17, 2006. Another take by the same author: "Why we all should give away 25% of our pay," *Brisbane Times*, June 11, 2007. Both can be found at [www.utilitarian.net/singer](http://www.utilitarian.net/singer), the Web site of the controversial ethicist Peter Singer. Singer is the Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and laureate professor at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, University of Melbourne, Australia.