



Death by Suburb

[How to keep the suburbs from killing your soul]

Study 8

of an 8 Week Study

The Environmental TOXIN:

I NEED TO GET MORE DONE IN LESS TIME

The Spiritual PRACTICE:

FALLING IN LOVE WITH A DAY

Introduction

A friend recently commented how soccer is not a sport anymore. It's a program, at least in the 'burbs.

In an email, he wrote, "It's like signing up for tumbling or a spin class. You pay your fee, you get your shirt, your instructor (coach), your class (practice) schedule—it's all very organized and tidy."

When he has suggested that his kids go outside and play soccer when they're lying around and bored, they reply, "But we don't have soccer today."

If it's not scheduled, it's not worth doing—at least that's the thinking.

Everything is managed, even play, and so play is not really play but something that you do only when it has a purpose, like furthering your chances to make the team or for a future scholarship.

My friend says, "Most suburban kids are so scheduled they might as well have a PDA. Mommy is their personal secretary making sure they make all of their appointments."

Play is a counter-cultural act in the suburbs. To play is to take a stand against efficiency, rampant scheduling, and a control-obsessed culture. To play is to create holiness in time, when, for a morning or afternoon, there is no reason or utility for the activity—only for the pure joy of it.

—Dave Goetz

Reading the Chapter

This study is based on Chapter 9 of *Death by Suburb: How to Keep the Suburbs from Killing the Soul*. Chapter 9 introduces the final toxin and practice.

Understanding Your 'Burb

I just picked up my 7-year-old from soccer tonight. As well as three of her teammates. I dropped each off at her home. And then headed home. The entire ordeal took about 45 minutes. Not a lot of time, but I grouched about it to myself the entire way. That's not how I envisioned spending my early evenings back in my early twenties.



Competition and opportunity create much of the busyness in our lives. Suburban culture values the packed, scheduled life. Do you know someone who doesn't have enough to do?

1. Reflect on some recent conversations with friends or acquaintances. What are some of the phrases they use to describe their busy life?

- a. "We just spent the weekend down state with our son at a tennis tournament. His coach thinks he may go to nationals this year."
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.
- i.

2. How do you feel about the level of activities in your life? In your family's life?

3. Do you feel trapped? Why or why not?

4. If you could redesign your life, what would you give up? What would you add in?



5. Does your family practice a Sabbath (no matter which day it ends up being)? If so, how is it different from the other six days?

Discovering Biblical Spirituality

Keeping one day holy seems quaint in a culture of opportunity. Perhaps it's the word holy that makes it so. For some reason, the word evokes for me a sense of exasperation. Sundays drove me nuts growing up. Perhaps it was the seemingly unending church, the two-a-days that I mention in Chapter 9.

The true understanding of a Sabbath is, truly, about entering the thicker life. About protecting, guarding, and savoring one day a week where soccer games, paying bills, climbing to the next rung are forgotten. Where one day a week we can experience a taste of eternity in time. Where for one day, we stop the hustle for the next achievement for our kids or for ourselves. Where for one day, we can just be.

1. Read through the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. In *The Sabbath*, Abraham Heschel writes that instead of coveting the things of space (our neighbor's husband, Colorado vacations, talented-and-gifted kids), we must learn to covet time.

What do you think he means by that? What would it mean for you for one day to value time more than the things/activities of space?

2. One key theological underpinning of a biblical Sabbath is that God is at work upholding creation and still at work in your life, even while you rest. The world keeps spinning on its axis. The sun still comes up the next day. In Genesis 1, God rested after six days of work. What might that mean for us?

What might be behind our stubborn refusal to rest for a day?



3. What might we gain by choosing to implement a 24-hour Sabbath in our lives? What would we lose?

Spiritual Exercises

Implementing a true Sabbath is excruciating, at least it was, and still is, for me. I still fight not to download email or complete some other business activity during our family Sabbath. I wonder if "family Sabbath" is an oxymoron. I've found, though, that listening to how others create space in time offers hope that I can do it and ideas for how to do it.

1. Have your leader initiate a time of reflection. Each person should write down the biggest issue that prevents him or her (and/or family) from keeping a weekly Sabbath.

One of the most thorny issues is travel team sports on Sundays. Sunday becomes just one more day for pursuing achievement. What is behind the drive of the incessant pursuit of athletics for kids? How could you implement a Sabbath on a different day other than Sunday, if sports are a high priority?

2. What are some of the best ideas you've heard for creating eternity in time once a week?

- a. "We often spontaneously invite friends over late Sunday afternoon for a meal. No planning. No anxiety. No stress. Just friends sharing a light meal and great discussion for a couple hours."
- b. "With our kids, we cut out TV before church and after about 5 o'clock Sunday afternoons."
- c. "For a time when our kids were teenagers, Saturday became our family's best shot at a Sabbath."
- d.



e.

f.

g.

Quote to Live by

"The Sabbath is no time for personal anxiety or care, for any activity that might dampen the spirit of joy. The Sabbath is no time to remember sins, to confess, to repent or even to pray for relief or anything we might need. It is a day for praise, not a day for petitions."

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, *THE SABBATH*

A Final Word from Paul

"But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity."

GALATIANS 5 (THE MESSAGE)