

Sabbath-keeping: Work is not finished until it is enjoyed in rest

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [July 18, 2001](#) issue

My instructor in Sabbath-keeping was not a professor or a spiritual director, but a foreman at the East Chicago Inland Steel plant named Mike Paddock. His wife was the treasurer of the tiny congregation I served as a student pastor, and she wrote my salary check twice a month. Mike would deliver it along with two dozen eggs and a shopping bag full of tomatoes, cucumbers and honey dew melons.

Mike's seminar on Sabbath-keeping occurred on a summer Saturday morning when he saw my car at the church. "What the hell are you doing here on Saturday morning?" he asked me. "Well," I stammered, "I'm here being available to the congregation. I'm pretty much gone all week, at school, so Saturday I'm here in case anybody needs me."

"Let me tell you something," Mike said. "Nobody needs you today. If they do they'll call you. Nobody wants to see you today. They're busy. They'll see you plenty tomorrow. So go home. Cut your grass, wash your car, sit in your yard, play with your kids. Get outa here." I did what he said and have tried to abide by it ever since.

In *Practicing Our Faith*, Dorothy Bass writes: "Americans need rest, and they need to be reminded that they do not cause the grain to grow and that their greatest fulfillment does not come through the acquisition of material things. Moreover, the planet needs a rest from human plucking and burning and buying and selling."

In Genesis, God is busy creating for six days and then takes a day off. This is a different kind of God, a God who rests, a God who, in Walter Brueggemann's delightful words, says, "I'm not going in to the office tomorrow. I've put in long hours every day all week and tomorrow I'm putting my feet up and enjoying what I've accomplished." This is a life-changing way of thinking: work is not finished until it is enjoyed in rest. There is a lesson in grace here—the world does not depend on our activity; we do not have sole responsibility for the grain growing, or any responsibility for the sun rising.

Poet Wendell Berry takes a walk every Sunday morning and then goes home and writes a Sabbath poem. In one poem he describes how we ache and sweat in our daily labors, "and yet no leaf or grain is filled/ By work of ours; the field is tilled/ And left to grace. That we may reap,/ Great work is done while we're asleep." So make a Sabbath.