



Café ([boldcafe.org](http://boldcafe.org)) is a monthly on-line magazine for and with young adult women made possible from support from women’s groups active in Women of the ELCA ([welca.org](http://welca.org)), the women’s organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

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## Slowing down, for Sabbath’s Sake


by J. Dana Trent

I am a migraineur, a fancy term for people who sometimes feel as though ice picks are being driven into their brains. Nearly 38 million Americans suffer from migraines, creating a multibillion-dollar industry to treat them. My migraines can be caused by anything: light, food, smells, weather changes, hormone fluctuations, too much sleep, too little sleep, too much screen time, and intense conversations. Most recently, the status of my illness has progressed to chronic migraine, which means I spend half my life feeling like I have an ax in my head.

“Lighten up,” people suggested, chalking up my condition to perfectionism and spreading myself too thin. For them, the solution seemed easy, but I’d tried everything: relaxing, praying, meditating, over-the-counter medications, prescription medications, acupuncture, acupressure, yoga, herbal steam baths, ice therapy, heat therapy, and a meager diet of leaves and air. Cinnamon paste often covered my forehead, and I swallowed tablespoons of sriracha hot sauce with lemon water and pink Himalayan salt chaser. The peppermint oil roller tube was acceptable in public; a strange brown substance smeared on my face not so much.

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In the midst of my almost daily migraines, I continued to teach, to care for my mother who has dementia, and to provide volunteer pastoral care because I felt I had to. My chronic migraine diagnosis urged me to take on more. I didn't want to be viewed by my students or colleagues as weak or compromised by my health. I put on a strong face, but all I wanted to do was hide in a cold lavender-infused basement.

Medicine works best in tandem with balancing the human essentials: enough sleep, nutritious foods, and stable homelife. I needed to get my condition under control while seeking meaningful relationships with God and others. The symptoms—migraines, depression, busyness—were indications of something larger. The chronic condition that dictated my days became an invitation to find peace and purpose beyond deadlines and success.

My migraines had always been less severe during seasons of my life when I was on the correct medication, calm, and connected—more attuned to my soul, God, and community. I remembered times when I wasn't so stressed—when weekly replenishment hadn't seemed so out of reach. Two decades ago, when the world was much different, time had felt slow and limitless. I was a teenager with no migraines; I spent many guilt-free Sundays with no worldly goal in sight, filling my hours with daydreaming, reading, resting, praising, praying, gathering, and moving toward the Divine. Time had been my most abundant resource. Back then, I seemed to understand the medicinal value of free time. My sabbath practice came easily—from singing Jesus hymns in worship to gushing over youth-group boys. I was told to keep the sabbath and I obliged, but I never knew why I did it.

There is often an inciting incident that slows us down and calls us to sabbath, whether we recognize it or not. It's something that knocks us off our track, a signal to stress less—or else—and to depend upon something that transcends us. But we don't need a crisis to get into this club.

It's the why of a thing that keeps it relevant, which is the reason I dropped the sabbath-as-joy habit as soon as I hit college. Though I had left an authentic sabbath practice behind, the need to ask why arrived nearly twenty years later, thanks to a chronic disease that requires significant medical interventions.

But there's no need to wait until the string quartet accompanies our sinking Titanic. Getting to the crux of sabbath will rescue us before we drown.

Resting means confronting the itchiness of wanting to keep our bodies (and minds) moving. Worship means finding a place in which we can really concentrate on devotion—and it's amazing how much we (myself included) are unwilling to sacrifice an hour to spend in God's house. Community means stepping out of comfort zones to risk rejection and navigate complex relationship dynamics in order to spend quality time together—whether it's over dinner or in service to a greater good.

My fledgling sabbaths are still not where I want them to be, but I remind myself not to keep score. Instead, I have realized how my new sabbaths resemble those of my youth, minus the braces and teenage angst. My intention and awareness have shifted toward noticing God's presence in

stillness, devotion, and community. I may not hole up in a dark room for twenty-four hours and meditate on scriptures—I wouldn't even recommend that—but I know that I can't tend to the sacred garden within and around me without stepping out of everyday life.

I'm a big fan of "sabbath moments," which are sacred glimpses in regular time—like a rainbow on a Thursday afternoon or a conversation with a close friend. Sabbath moments were a good place to start. Once I felt ready to stretch those moments into an hour, an afternoon, or a day, I did. I put my phone away. I napped. I attended worship. I walked slowly in nature. I read. I meditated. I prayed. Most of all, I practiced humility: I am not the Creator; this world will not fall apart without me.

I learned to learn into wonder and awe. My life depended on it, for sabbath's sake.

—This is an adapted excerpt used with permission from *For Sabbath's Sake: Embracing Your Need for Rest, Worship, and Community*, © Upper Room Books 2017. Learn more and purchase here.

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# Running from rest

by *Elyssa Salinas Lazarski*

When I was in college, my parents got divorced. I remember running away from everything that could remind me that my world was breaking apart. Overcommitting myself with school and social life was just another way to stay too busy to think about the brokenness of my family and my new life as a child of divorced parents. One summer, I traveled more than 2,000 miles to California to work as a camp counselor. What better way to escape than going full speed halfway across the continent?

## The rules about rest

I was so busy and I just couldn't give up. But then I fell ill – and I was forced to stop. To feel. To rest. And it felt like the world was crashing down around me.

This is the collapsing rest of Moses upon reaching Midian (Exodus 2:15), or of Hagar when the water skin was empty (Genesis 21:16).

Rest at this point is not negotiable. It's not a luxury. This kind of rest can be painful, even as it is regenerative. This is the rest I experience at the end of a run when I fear that my lungs will explode if I don't stop.

It is the rest forced after weeping when the tears can no longer come. It is rest housed in a weary soul that cannot run away anymore. It is rest weighed down with worry that I can no longer carry.

I do not wish this type of rest on anyone.

## What I look for now

The rest I search for now is creative rest. This is the kind of rest that validates the work I've already done and prepares me for the future. This is the kind of rest that I try to schedule into my day to find time away from my work, my spouse and even my infant daughter.

Forcing myself to stop is how I can be present for the world around me. Rest is now about a closed door, a journal, a walk and music that gives me space to feel. This is my holy time, my sabbath.

After the God of all things created for six days, God rested. God rested and called it holy. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that God had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all the work that God had done" (Genesis 2:1-2). The multitude was finished, and then God rested. Yet let us not forget before God rested, God reflected on a wondrous creation. "God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31a). God created. God reflected. God rested.

Rest is a holy endeavor for me because it is then that I stop to recognize what I have done. I sit back and consider what I have made. We are part of God's creation, but we are also tasked with creating now.

As Adam and Eve were put in the garden to tend it, we inherit the responsibility to take care of the world around us. Yet alongside that responsibility is the tradition of a holy day of rest. Now I admit I do not take a whole day to rest, but I am learning to sit back and admire the creation I am tending around me.

When I was running away from the broken world around me, I forgot to stop and recognize what I was creating from the brokenness. Not every piece could be salvaged, and not everything was "good," but I was still able to create.

Maybe creation is breaking apart in order to make something new. When God created the world as we know it, maybe stars needed to be crushed in order to form the rock of the earth. Maybe we all come from those broken stars, bits of shattered fire that reside within our bodies. Maybe in order to create, we need to stop, to take a moment to feel our brokenness, feel our beauty, feel our reality. When we stop to rest, we ready ourselves for creation, for putting the pieces back together, or for taking the next steps on our journey. Rest is sacred. We were given the model to stop, look around, and reflect on the creation at our feet.

Take your rest, dear friend. Take the time given to you on the weekend, after the kids go to bed, or in that summer stretched between too-busy semesters. Take a moment, look around and acknowledge what you've created. Rest to see how truly wondrous you are as a creation of God. Rest to feel whatever you need to feel. Rest to stop and breathe in the sacred breath of the Holy Spirit.



## Discussion questions:

1. How do you practice rest?
2. What would it look like to make rest a holy time?
3. *How does rest relate to creation?*

## Closing prayer:

Creator God, Thank you for showing us the blessing that is rest and making it holy. Let us take time to stop and reflect on what we are creating. Be with us as we feel the regeneration and reflection that rest provides. Amen.

*Elyssa lives in Chicago with her husband, two cats, and infant daughter. She spends copious time at the local Starbucks and library working on her PhD in theology from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary where she is focusing on sexual shame.*



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