

PARENT  
STUDY GUIDE

NATHAN T. STUCKY

# WRESTLING WITH REST

INVITING YOUTH TO DISCOVER THE GIFT OF SABBATH

FOREWORD BY KENDA CREASY DEAN

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WRITTEN BY MEGAN DEWALD

# INTRODUCTION & CHAPTER 1

## - WEEK ONE -

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1. Stucky introduces readers to the topic of Sabbath with a personal story that had profound implications on how he understood himself and his community as a young person.

### DISCUSSION

What are the stories that are told and retold within and about your family? What do you think these stories say about your family? Are these the stories you want to be told? What stories are you living?

2. Stucky notes that a problem with the “work-reward-repeat” cycle in our broader culture is that it leaves no room for failure (p. 2). We know, however, that failure is a normal part of life, that it has valuable lessons to teach us, and that learning how to cope with failure is an important life skill.

### DISCUSSION

Think of an example of failure in the life of your family. How was that experience discussed among your family and what lessons did your family learn? Specifically, what do you think your children learned from the experience?

3. Stucky writes, “Sure, I want my children to grow up and know how to work hard. I also want them to know beyond the shadow of a doubt that grace is real” (p. 2).

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY

On a sheet of paper, write down the typical weekly schedule of one child in your family, accounting for all 24 hours in each day. Using another writing instrument in a different color, circle all of the times when you think your child is working hard. Next, in a different color, circle all of the times when you think your child is resting. Using this exercise as a reference, do you think that your child’s schedule is teaching them that “grace is real”? Why or why not?

4. Cliff's story in chapter 1 provides one example of how the pressures for constant connectivity through mobile technology can impact young people's well-being (p. 6-7).

**DISCUSSION**

In your experience as a parent, how do you see these pressures impacting your children and how have you helped your children navigate those pressures? Relatedly, what is the example you are setting for your children with your own engagement with mobile technology?

5. A recurring theme throughout chapter 1 is that young people—in our schools, churches, communities, and in our own homes—have learned how not to rest because of the adults in their lives.

**REFLECTION ACTIVITY:**

On a sheet of paper, write down what your typical weekly schedule looks like, accounting for all 24 hours in each day. Following the same instructions as above, circle in a different color all of the times when you are working. In another color, circle all of the times when you are resting. Compare your schedule with your child's schedule from the above exercise. Where are there parallels in work and rest? Where are there differences? What would it take for you to model a better balance of work and rest? Looking at the two schedules, reflect on Stucky's words: "We've been willing to work tirelessly on behalf of young people. But are we willing to rest on their behalf as well?" (p. 7)

6. **ENGAGING SCRIPTURE:** After reading chapter 1, read Exodus 16. Stucky suggests that "it seems plausible that God provides the manna-Sabbath combination as a way of slowly reforming the identity of the Israelite people" (p. 17). How does practicing the Sabbath reform their identity? How could practicing the Sabbath reform the identity of your family?

## CHAPTERS 2-3

- WEEK TWO -

1. Stucky introduces his readers to the work of Dr. Daniel J. Siegel and the emerging field of interpersonal neurobiology. In this work, Dr. Siegel offers seven practices that promote well-being and healthy development in young people, "Siegel's Simple Seven" (p. 35-37).

**DISCUSSION**

As you read through the descriptions of these seven practices, which one(s) do you feel certain that your child or children regularly practice? Which one(s) do you feel certain that your child or children hardly ever practice?



## REFLECTION ACTIVITY:

Using the 24-hour schedules that you created to explore ideas from the first chapter, give yourself a “Siegel’s Simple Seven” test. Next to each item on the calendar, write down which of the seven practices most prominently applies. Then reflect on how this exercise provides a framework for you to consider your time.

2. Throughout chapter two, Stucky explores the role of sleep—or the lack thereof—in the lives of young people, indicating how critical it is for parents to set boundaries and limits around their children’s sleep. However, he also notes that “many parents remain unaware of the actual sleep practices of their teens, with 90 percent of parents believing their children get adequate sleep ‘at least a few nights during the school week’” (footnote 40, p. 194).

### DISCUSSION

What are the boundaries and limits you set around your child or children’s sleep? How do you monitor how much they are sleeping? What is the language that is used in your home about sleep (i.e. does your family talk about the need for sleep as “a sign of weakness and inferiority” [p. 39]?) How does Stucky’s exploration of the conflict between a cultural disdain for sleep and the real need for sleep resonate with your experience?

3. The research of psychologist Suniya S. Luthar on busyness and adolescence demonstrated that “young people’s relationships to and perceptions of their parents had a much greater influence on their well-being than did over-scheduling per se” (p. 47).

### DISCUSSION

What—if anything—surprises you about this research? Think of a particularly stressful time in your relationship with your child or children. How did you witness the impact of that stressful period on your child and children’s well-being? How did it impact your well-being?

4. Stucky suggests a strange intimacy that has been cultivated between human beings and their mobile technology (p. 56-58), even exploring how this intimate relationship affects sleep and face-to-face interactions. Conjuring a familiar image, Stucky states “[i]magine the daily dinner scene at restaurants or homes in every corner of America... each person stares at a two dimensional rectangle of light” (p. 58).

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY:

Invite your family to help you conduct an experiment. Set aside one dinner each week for four weeks and conduct the following “experiments”:

- Week 1: Device Dinner—Every person is invited to bring their chosen mobile device to the dinner table. For the duration of the dinner, there is no expectation of conversation among the family members. Just eat and text or email or watch videos or listen to your own music. When dinner is over, have everyone return to the table without their devices and discuss likes, dislikes, and questions about Device Dinner.
- Week 2: Device Detective Dinner—Go to a public place for dinner, whether a restaurant, a picnic in the park, or a church potluck. Instruct your family members to be on detective duty, and their

objective is to observe other families or groups who are eating together while on mobile devices. When dinner is over, have everyone gather together to discuss their observations.

- Week 3: Deviceless Dinner—Every person has to turn off all of their mobile devices and leave them in another room. Have dinner together, and consider preparing a little for a conversation that can engage the whole family. When dinner is over, facilitate a conversation to discuss likes, dislikes, and questions about Deviceless Dinner.

- Week 4: Dinner, Devised—It's time to discuss the “results” of your experiments! At the end of the three weeks, what have you each learned about the presence or absence of devices at the dinner table? As a family, discuss what kind of dinners you'd like to have more or less of—and why.

5. In chapter 3, Stucky notes the huge influence that parents have on young people's understanding and experience of rest. Through conversations with the young people in his research, Stucky observes “the intersection of rest and family [which] serves as a starting point for the anxiety, stress, worry, and pressure” (p. 85).

#### DISCUSSION

How do you feel when you read Stucky's observation of how “parental pressure—real or perceived—induces the stress and pressure that insists [your child] must keep going” (p. 89)? Can you identify areas within your own parenting style or moments along your own parenting journey where you “associate rest with laziness and inefficiency” (p. 92)? Digging deeper, can you identify the influence of your family-of-origin in your own perspective on rest?

6. Stucky's summary of his conversations with the young people in chapter 3 describes how young people exist with a baseline level of anxiety and stress that they never question and have learned how to hide (p. 97).

#### DISCUSSION

How can you check in with your child or children about their levels of stress and anxiety? How can you help them identify and manage how stress and anxiety manifest in their lives?

## CHAPTER 4

### - WEEK THREE -

1. “Being unproductive undercuts our primary ways of evaluating ourselves and others,” Stucky writes. “Who are we if we're not producing something, if we're not achieving, if we're not doing?” (p. 99).

#### DISCUSSION

What are some of the ways that the fear of your child or children “being unproductive” shows up in your parenting? When you instruct your child or children to “do something productive” (or use another common parenting phrase that means the same thing), what are you trying to communicate to them? What are some things you consider “productive” for your child or children? What are some things you consider “unproductive”? Why? How do we maintain space for productive work without making productive work all-important?

2. In this chapter, Stucky introduces his readers to the theological work of Karl Barth, and he explores how Barth's interpretation of the seventh day of creation reveals God's freedom and God's love (p. 103). God's rest on the seventh day reveals that God is free from ceaseless activity. ("God puts the phone down, so to speak. God isn't held captive by God's work, but is free to be in relationship to it" [p. 104]). God's rest also reveals that God has freely chosen to love creation. ("God loves creation, has time for creation, and determined in advance to set limits around creative work for the sake of love and covenant relationship" [p. 104]).

#### DISCUSSION

What is your experience with the kind of freedom Stucky references in this chapter? How has your child or children experienced this kind of freedom? What are the limits you have decided to create around your time and your child or children's time in order to experience this kind of freedom and in order to nurture love among your family?

If these concepts feel utterly foreign or difficult to grasp, what specifically is the challenge for you?

3. **ENGAGING SCRIPTURE** After reading this chapter, read the entirety of the first creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Notice how often and where God sees that creation is "good." By finishing creation with a day of God's rest—"[h]umankind's first full day of existence" (p. 106)—"God pronounces humans to be good prior to any labor of striving on their part" (p. 107). Consider how you affirm the goodness of your child or children. On the whole, when do you think you affirm them? Is your affirmation frequently tied to their accomplishments or activities? Why or why not? How might this interpretive lens reorient the way you see the goodness of your child? Of yourself?

4. Throughout the book so far, Stucky has been building upon his initial observation that "[b]efore we existed, before we could do anything to earn it, we were loved. Sabbath tells this story" (p. 3). In chapter 4, we encounter a fuller exploration of the idea that God's gift of the Sabbath is "Sheer Grace" (p. 107), drawing from Barth's theological framework and a nuanced interpretation of Scripture.

#### DISCUSSION

How do you understand, cultivate, and model grace as a parent? Why do you think Stucky repeatedly describes grace as "disorienting"? How has reading this chapter changed—or disoriented—your understanding of grace?

5. Chapter 4 opens with a reference to Barbara Brown Taylor's comment that Sabbath is "a practice in death" (p. 99). Stucky continues to explore the intersections of Sabbath, death, and identity throughout this chapter, especially in his discussion of Barth's "renouncing faith"—"faith that renounces every identity other than the grace-rooted one we find in God" (p. 116).

#### DISCUSSION

The journey through adolescence into adulthood is often filled with questions of a future identity: What do you want to be when you grow up? Where do you want to go to college? What do you need to do to get there? As a parent, how prominent are these kinds of questions and concerns on your mind for your child or children? How would you describe your child or children if you were unable to name their accomplishments or activities? How would you describe yourself if you were unable to name your accomplishments or activities?

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY

Locate a digital copy of your résumé, and copy/paste into a new document. Keep the identifying information, but delete any objective or summary that highlights your professional accomplishments. Instead, insert the following Objective: “Child of God with [insert age] years of experience as God’s beloved creation.” Next, edit each section to correspond to that “Objective” statement. Instead of “Professional Experience,” write “Experiences of God’s Grace”—and list some. Instead of “Education,” write “How I Rest”—and list some ways. Instead of “Skills,” write “Who God Says I Am”—and provide some bullet points. Save this new résumé, and return to it when you need the reminder of your truest identity in God. For “extra credit” (p. 124—see below), have your family members repeat this exercise.

6. **ENGAGING SCRIPTURE:** Return to Exodus 16 and to your answers to question 6 in the first week of this study guide. After reading chapter 4 (particularly p. 121-124), what more could you say in response to the questions about how the practice of Sabbath could reform the identity of your family? How do you resonate with Stucky’s observation that “the Israelites intend no disobedience; they perceive their own efforts not as a failure of God’s test, but as extra credit” (p. 124)?

## CHAPTER 5 - WEEK FOUR -

1. In chapter 5, Stucky explores the passages in the Gospels that feature Jesus healing on the Sabbath. “[T]he Gospel picture of the Sabbath is a picture of miraculous, gracious, and often unexpected healing at the hands of Christ” (p. 132).

### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE: LECTIO DIVINA

The ancient spiritual practice of lectio divina (Latin for “divine reading”) is a deliberate, contemplative posture toward Scripture that approaches the reading of the text as an act of prayer.

Select one of the following Gospel passages to read closely: Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; or John 5:1-18. Following the practice of lectio divina, work your way through the passage using the guide below.

**LECTIO (READ)**—Slowly and carefully, read the text once through, paying close attention to nuances, language, characters, and plot. What details stand out to you as you read? What do you notice anew?

**MEDITATIO (MEDITATION)**—Read the text again, paying particular attention to what drew your attention the first time through. How is God present to you in this text? What is God saying specifically to you?

**ORATIO (PRAYER)**—Read the text a third time, and then offer your response to God. Try journaling or praying aloud, responding to what you sense God is revealing to you in this text.

**CONTEMPLATIO (CONTEMPLATION)**—Finish this exercise by spending time simply resting in God’s presence, receiving the gift of God’s disorienting grace through this often disorienting practice. Set aside at least ten minutes to sit and be still in this gift before returning to your day.



2. Stucky draws the reader's attention to the ways that the Pharisees' understanding and practice of the Sabbath fall short of God's radical grace in Christ. "Jesus insists that the error of the Pharisees is not that they take the Sabbath too seriously, but that they have missed the point and reduced it to a matter of mere human power and choice... As he miraculously heals on the Sabbath, he simultaneously proclaims both the superiority of his own power and lordship—making himself equal to God—and the insufficiency of merely human power and agency for attaining God's all-powerful Sabbath grace" (p. 134-135).

#### DISCUSSION

Think back to Sue Miller in chapter 1 and her experience with her grandmother's "legalistic" practice of the Sabbath (p. 8-11). What are the similarities between the Pharisee's and Sue's grandmother's approach to Sabbath? What is missing in these approaches, according to Stucky? Whether you currently practice Sabbath rest with your family or if you hope to start, how can you create a space for a practice that celebrates God's grace and avoids legalism? How might you engage your child or children in developing this practice?

3. Stucky notes that, with the notable exception of the one Sabbath that Jesus spends alone in the tomb, Jesus spent the other Sabbaths of his ministry in community. "Jesus refuses the reduction of the Sabbath to a matter of mere private devotion and insists instead on a Sabbath inclusive of a broad community" (p. 138).

#### DISCUSSION

What are some ways that your family can celebrate Sabbath rest together? What are some ways that your family can celebrate Sabbath rest with your broader family, community, neighbors, and friends?

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY

Return to the 24-hour schedules that you created for yourself and your child or children in week one and two of this study guide. What are the ways that your family experiences rest? If there are areas of overlap in what counts as rest for family members, how might these areas inform your imagination toward celebrating Sabbath rest together? If there are not areas of overlap, how might this insight prompt further conversation and reflection with your family?

4. Stucky demonstrates that, for Jesus (and for all of creation, including us) Sabbath is a matter of life and death. "[Jesus's] Sabbath ministry bears life-and-death significance. Jesus's own life is on the line" (p. 134). Stucky then follows this idea through chapter 5, tying together the manna-Sabbath narrative from Exodus 16, the Sabbath-healing passages from the Gospels, and Jesus's own death and resurrection.

#### DISCUSSION

As you've been reading this book and working through this study guide, what have you realized are your "lesser identities" that must die because of the abundant life of God's Sabbath grace? Answer this question in the forms of a modified "Matthean antithesis" below.

I have heard it said that I am \_\_\_\_\_; But God's Sabbath grace says that I am \_\_\_\_\_.

5. Stucky explores several key features of the Sabbath healing texts that distinguish them from other passages of Jesus's healing ministry in the Gospels.
- (1) The person who is healed in each of the Sabbath stories does not initiate the encounter with Jesus. Instead, "[o]n the Sabbath, it is Jesus who initiates healing of a radically gracious nature" (p. 142).
  - (2) The person who is healed is a character "at rest" in the encounter. "The Gospel writers seem to exhibit consistent intentionality in depicting the recipients of Jesus's Sabbath healing as passive" (p. 143).
  - (3) Unlike many healing narratives in the Gospels, the Sabbath healings do not mention the person's faith. "Jesus's action precedes any action on the part of the one who receives the healing" (p. 143).

#### DISCUSSION

Think of a time in your life when you experienced Jesus's healing presence. Where do you see overlap with that experience and the features of these Sabbath healing narratives? Where does your story depart from these narratives?

## CHAPTER 6

### - WEEK FIVE -

1. When rest—or even Sabbath rest—is discussed in our contemporary culture, it is often confused with practices of self-care. (See footnote 69 on pages 210-211 for Stucky's exploration of how the concept of Sabbath as God's all-powerful grace challenges this notion). Throughout the book and in chapter 6, Stucky observes how these practices may have their place, but that they also assume "substantial privilege" (p. 154) and may even lure us toward "the ideals of consumer capitalism and any other cultural narratives that turn people away from God's grace" (p. 155).

#### DISCUSSION

Why do you think Stucky is wary of the ways "consumer capitalism" tries to package and sell "rest and relaxation"? What are ways that "consumer capitalism" has seeped into your family's understanding of rest? How has reading this book helped shift your perspective on the concept and practice of Sabbath rest? How might you help reform the imagination of your child or children to facilitate a similar shift in their perspective?

2. A theme that Stucky weaves throughout this book is the idea that limits bring true freedom to human beings, as first demonstrated by God's self-imposed limit of rest on the seventh day of creation. Stucky argues that such a limit allows for the rightly ordered relationship to form between a person and anything that might otherwise "possess" them—work, school, sports, technology, achievements, effort, or anything else. "To give in to such temptation is to fail to realize that human freedom takes place not beyond limits, but within them. The limits are, in fact, a gift from God" (p. 156).

## DISCUSSION

What are the things that threaten to “possess” your child, children, self, or family? What (if any) limits have you put in place so that your family members and self can be in rightly ordered relationship with these things. If these limits do not currently exist, what would it require of you to be able to create these limits? What do you think is at risk if you do? What do you think is at risk if you don’t?

3. Consider Stucky’s illustration of Sesame Street Ernie’s rubber ducky (“You gotta put down the ducky if you want to play the saxophone!”). In a similar light, Stucky frames the stories of the Israelites in the wilderness and the Pharisees in the Gospels, and the stakes come into sharper focus. “If it’s true that God asks the Israelites and the Pharisees to put down something on which it appears their lives depend, and if it’s true that God does this so that they may know that their lives ultimately depend on God’s grace, provision, and care, then perhaps we can gain clarity on our Sabbath practice by asking the same questions: What is it that tempts us to believe our lives depend on it?” (p. 160).

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY:

Take a look back at the 24-hour schedules you created for yourself and your child. Following Stucky’s argument of “how important parental expectations are in shaping the busyness of their young people’s lives” (p. 165), reflect on how busy you are and how busy your child is. Do you see this correlation? If so, how do you feel about it? If not, why isn’t the correlation present?

On fresh sheets of paper for each schedule, re-write three new schedules for both you and your child(ren), according to the following limits:

Schedule 1—You and your child are each allowed only one structured activity each outside of sleep, school, and work.

Schedule 2—You and your child are only allowed to be engaged in structured activities other than sleep, school, and work from 7:30am-5:30pm each day.

Schedule 3—You and your child must set aside one full 24-hour day when the only activities permitted are sleeping, eating, and spending time with family.

After completing this exercise, what anxieties do you feel? More directly, Stucky asks, “What is it that tempts [you] to believe [your] lives depend on it?” (p. 160). What would “need to die” in order for these kinds of reimagined schedules to be real for you (p. 167)?

4. In chapter 6, Stucky introduces the reader to four ancient Sabbath practices, including:
- (1) worship and liturgy, which happens at God’s initiation (p. 163-164);
  - (2) story-telling, which reshapes and reforms misshapen or deformed identities (p. 164-165);
  - (3) breaking bread, which invites us “to partake of God’s provision” (p. 165-166); and
  - (4) loving neighbors, which reminds us to “consider the implications of all our choices and of the political and economic systems that surround us” (p. 166).

## DISCUSSION

How does your family enact these four practices? When? Where? How frequently? What gets in the way of these practices in your family? How does Stucky's observation that "parents will have to lay down expectations which communicate that achievement is a greater god than the God revealed in Jesus Christ" (p. 166) resonate with or challenge you?

5. Stucky closes his book echoing Dietrich Bonhoeffer's call (which itself echoes Jesus's call) to "come and die." Describing what that means, Stucky notes that "if the death that we and our young people experience is in service to achievement, productivity, and ceaselessness, or in avoidance of the disorientation of rest, then it isn't Jesus's call we heed... Our existence doesn't begin with what we can accomplish, and it won't end by what we can achieve" (p. 177).

## DISCUSSION

Consider Jesus's words in the Gospel of Matthew: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" (Mt. 16:24-26).

HAVE YOU BEEN HEEDING JESUS'S CALL?