

to the Laundromat in town. The last time I did this was in 1978, which means that I took about a dozen quarters with me this time. After I had loaded up the biggest washer with bedsheets and added the detergent, I stared at the lit red number 18 by the coin slot. What could it mean? Was this the eighteenth washer in the Laundromat? Did the wash cycle require eighteen minutes? After a brief period of meditation I realized that I was meant to put eighteen quarters in the slot. *Eighteen quarters.* As it turned out, I got a whole afternoon of playing children, new neighbors, honest work, and sweet-smelling sheets for just a little over \$4.50.

I no longer call such tasks housework. I call them *the domestic arts*, paying attention to all the ways they return me to my senses. When the refrigerator has nothing in it but green onions that have turned to slime and plastic containers full of historic leftovers, I know my art is languishing. When I cannot tell whether that is a sleeping cat or an engorged dust ball under my bed, I know that I have been spending too much time thinking. It is time to get down on my knees. After I have spent a whole morning ironing shirts, folding linens, rubbing orange-scented wax into wood, and cleaning dead bugs out of the light fixtures, I can hear the whole house purring for the rest of the afternoon. I can often hear myself singing as well, satisfied with such simple, domestic purpose.

This is my practice, not yours, so please feel free to continue calling such work utter drudgery. The point is to find something that feeds your sense of purpose, and to be willing to look low for that purpose as well as high. It may be chopping wood and it may be running a corporation. Whatever it is, perhaps you will hold open the possibility that doing it is one way to learn what it means to become more fully human, as you press beyond being good to being good for something, in a world with the perfect job for someone like you.

What is one thing you do that helps
you become more fully human?

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Geography of Faith, Barbara
Brown Taylor, 2009, HarperCollins

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The Practice of Saying No

S A B B A T H

God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by subtracting.

—Meister Eckhart

A few years ago the bestseller list included a book on leadership called *Getting to Yes*. I think it was about moving from win-lose situations to win-win situations in which everyone involved had an easier time “getting to yes.” The title appealed to me enough to buy the book, although I never read it. *Getting to Yes* was such a positive concept that even seeing it on my bookshelf cheered me up. *Yes* is one of those words capable of changing a life through the utterance of a single syllable.

“Yes, I want the job.”

“Yes, I will marry you.”

“Yes, it is my desire to be baptized.”

At least part of the pleasure of saying yes is knowing that someone wants you—wants to be with you, wants you to do

something that you do well, wants to do it with you. Saying yes is how you enter into relationship. It is how you walk through the door into a new room. It is how you create the future.

This may account for the seductiveness of the word, especially in a "can do" culture where the ability to do many things at high speed is not only an adaptive trait but also the mark of a successful human being. As much as most of us complain about having too much to do, we harbor some pride that we are in such demand. We admire people who are able to keep more balls in the air than we are, and when they drop one we instinctively avert our eyes. We feel their pain.

Meanwhile, technology opens up more opportunities than ever to say yes. Messages from high school friends you have not seen in thirty years show up in your inbox. They found you through Google and are eager to be back in touch. Political action groups want you to sign and circulate petitions for very good causes. People at work send you links to their blogs or invite you to join their circle of friends on MySpace. You cannot even sign on to Amazon.com without being shown the covers of some books that you may like based on your previous purchases.

For these reasons and more, it is difficult to find many advocates for the spiritual practice of saying no.

"No, I want to stay home tonight."

"No, I have enough work for now."

"No, I have all the possessions I can take care of."

Depending on your temperament, your cultural conditioning, and your circle of friends, negations like these can sound like death wishes. If there is nothing more you want to do or have, then why go on living? If you are going to say no to perfectly good opportunities for adding more to your life, then what is the point?

Maybe you have to be really, really tired before you can answer questions like those. Maybe you have to be deeply discouraged by never having time for all the things that need doing in this world—not just the important things, like spending time with the people you love, taking care of your health, and engaging in purposeful work (paid or unpaid) that gives you a chance to participate in the repairing of the world, but also the minor but non-negotiable things, like keeping up with the laundry, getting your oil changed, stocking the refrigerator with something other than fat-free yogurt and frozen pizza, remembering to send in your quarterly estimated tax payments, getting your teeth cleaned, taking the cat to the vet for her annual shots, and changing the sheets on your bed before they develop brown images of your sleeping body on them like those pictures of people caught in the lava of Vesuvius.

Since you are reading a book right now, it is possible that you are not this busy, or perhaps you have found time to read by pushing something else aside, so that you will be even busier tomorrow. Or maybe you are one of those people who has to hide the fact that you are not all that busy, since being busy is how our culture measures worth.

Someone just told me that in China, the polite answer to "How are you?" is "I am very busy, thank you." If you are very busy, then you must be fine. If you have more to do than you can do, and the list never gets done but only longer, then you must be very fine, because not only in China but also right here at home, successful people are busy people. Effective people are busy people. Religious people are busy people. For millions and millions of people, busy-ness is The Way of Life.

"How are you?"

"Busy like crazy, but what else is new? And you?"

Some busy people cannot even tell the difference between relaxation and narcolepsy, because the minute they sit down in a quiet place alone, they nod off. If it happens while you are reading this book, please, do not think a thing about it. I know you do not sleep well. It does not make any sense, since you are exhausted, but the fact is that it is very hard for your body to go from fifth gear to off just because you say so—at least not without a little pharmaceutical help. It is hard to watch the eleven o'clock news with your heart wide open, letting in the misery of neighbors near and far, and then sleep soundly through the night. It is hard to dream rejuvenating dreams or sink into those deep-sea delta brain waves when you keep waking up at three o'clock—what is it about that hour?—to think about how many unanswered e-mails you have in your inbox, how much money you owe on your credit cards, or how odd your heartbeat sounds all of a sudden. Did it always give that little flip at the end, like a small, beached fish in the middle of your chest? Never mind. What kind of stove would you buy if you could have any kind of stove you wanted? An Aga? A Thermador? A Viking?

And there was evening and there was morning, the seventh day.

WHEN YOU LIVE in the desert, where the sand is so hot it can melt your flip-flops, your day begins when the sun goes down. Your day begins when the air cools, and the breeze stirs, and the little bit of water in the air turns into a fine mist that you can feel on your upper lip, as if the evening had been poured into a goblet for you to drink. When you live in the desert, working twice as hard as people who do not, to lead your flock to food, and water, and shade, your day begins when they all lie down, no longer

interested in following you but only in murmuring to one another until they can fall asleep and graze fields of clover in their dreams. Your day begins when you too can lie down by the fire, with nothing to do but trade tales with the others, or play a tune on your reed flute while the children watch for shooting stars over all your heads.

And there was evening and there was morning, the seventh day.

THE GREAT SWISS theologian Karl Barth once wrote, "A being is free only when it can determine and limit its activity." By that definition, I have a hard time counting many free beings among my acquaintance. I know people who can do five things at once who are incapable of doing nothing. I know people who are able to decide what to do without being able to do less of it. Since I have been one of those people, I know that saying no is a more difficult spiritual practice than tithing, praying on a cold stone floor, or visiting a prisoner on death row—because while all of those worthy activities may involve saying no to something else so that I can do them instead, they still amount to doing more instead of less. Limiting my activity does not help me feel holy. Doing more feels holy, which is why I stay so intrigued by the fourth commandment.

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and

sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hal-
lowed it.

Exodus 20:8-11, JPS Tanakh

The first time I really tried this was the Sunday after my last Sunday as a parish minister. After more than twenty years of being in church most Sunday mornings, I found myself suddenly faced with a whole day at home alone. I could not go to the church I had just resigned from. I did not want to go to church anywhere else. I thought about going to the grocery store, but I live in a small town where someone was bound to report that I had been seen buying cold cuts on my first Sunday morning away from church. So I stayed home instead, where I confronted grave questions about my professional identity, my human worth, and my status before God.

But that only lasted about an hour. After that, I went out on the front porch and said morning prayer with the birds. Then I read until lunchtime. Then I made an egg sandwich. Then I took a nap. By the time the sun went down, I realized that I had just observed my first true Sabbath in more than twenty years. In the years since then, I have made a practice of saying no for one whole day a week: to work, to commerce, to the Internet, to the car, to the voice in my head that is forever whispering, "More." One day each week, More God is the only thing on my list.

While reading up on a practice is no substitute for practicing it, I have also read enough to remember that the Sabbath has always been Saturday, not Sunday. By the lunar reckoning of the Bible, it starts on Friday evening and it ends on Saturday evening. Look the word up in the book of Exodus and you discover that Jews were observing Sabbath *before* Moses brought the stone

tablets of God's holy law down from Mount Sinai. The first holy thing in all creation, Abraham Heschel says, was not a people or a place but a day. God made everything in creation and called it good, but when God rested on the seventh day, God called it holy. That makes the seventh day a "palace in time," Heschel says, into which human beings are invited every single week of our lives.¹

Why are we so reluctant to go?

I can think of several reasons, beginning with how some of us were raised. If you are of a certain age and were raised in the South, then for all practical purposes the commandment might as well have read, "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it boring." The Sabbath was the day you could not wear blue jeans, could not play ball, could not ride bikes, could not go to the movies, could not do anything but go to church in the morning and *again* at night, with a wasteland in between during which old people with little hair left on their heads but a great deal growing out of their ears sat around in rocking chairs talking about incredibly dull things and you could not creep away for more than twelve minutes without your mother yelling, "What are you *doing* in there? Come back out here and visit with your Uncle Lynch and Aunt Alma, who came all the way from East Point to see you."

Sabbath was the day you *could not*, because the Bible said so. If I knew then what I know now, I would have argued more, since the Bible does not say one thing about resting on *Sunday*. Biblically speaking, the Sabbath has always been Saturday, and the Lord's Day has always been Sunday, the day when Christian tradition holds that Jesus was raised from the dead. There is evidence that for a very little while, early Christians tried to observe both the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. They rested on Saturday and gathered to remember the resurrection on Sunday. Then the

church and the synagogue got a nasty divorce and part of the separation agreement was the division of holy days.

This explains how most Christians grow up thinking of Sunday as the Sabbath, but it does not make them any better at saying no on that day or any other. Until about fifty years ago, Southern culture made Sabbath practice easier by not offering any alternatives. Movie theaters and municipal swimming pools were closed on Sundays. If you needed a cup of flour for the baking-soda biscuits you were making for Sunday dinner, then you were flat out of luck unless your neighbor had one to spare. When you got through eating lunch you threw a big white sheet over the dining room table to keep the flies off until supper, because no restaurants were open on Sundays. You did not even hear the whistle of freight trains in Georgia on Sundays, because it was illegal to haul goods on the Sabbath.

When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in 1840, he wrote of the Christian Sabbath, "Not only have all ceased to work, but they appear to have ceased to exist."²

If he had come back in the 1960s, he would not have recognized the place. More than 90 percent of homes had television sets by then, and almost 40 percent of them were tuned to Sunday football. The gross domestic product had become the foremost indicator of the nation's health and well-being. Entertainments and shops of every kind were open on Sundays, as the culture reneged on its "no compete" clause with the church. Merchants were no longer willing to stay closed to help churches stay open. People of faith were free to keep the Sabbath if they wanted to, but not because there was nothing else to do. They would have to make their own choices from now on. They would have to find the strength to say no for their own reasons, from their own spiritual resources, to things that would from now on be easily within their reach.

While this seismic change spelled loss for some people, it spelled liberation for others. In Karl Barth's language, these Sunday captives were tired of other people determining how they would spend their Sabbaths. They welcomed the freedom to determine their own activities, and they set about making full use of their newfound sovereignty to work, shop, play, eat out, and haul freight to their hearts' content.

I guess I do not have to tell you how well that went. Once merchants began opening on Sundays, they needed people to work on Sundays as well. While higher-wage earners could say, "Thanks, I think I'll play golf instead," lower-wage earners had to choose between keeping the Sabbath and keeping their jobs. Either way, if people were going to work on Sundays, then it did not make much sense to say the kids could not play competitive sports on Sundays. And if the kids were going to play sports on Sundays, then someone was going to have to drive them, which was going to make pulling a meal together harder to do, but no harder than pulling the family together to sit down and eat together even once a week.

What happened to the American weekend also happened to the week. By the 1990s, the average worker was putting in 164 extra hours of paid labor each year—the equivalent of an extra month of work. Around this same time, the two-income household was becoming the middle-class norm, which meant that the new pressure at work was matched by new pressure at home. The incline in work time was matched by a steep decline in the unpaid activities on which most societies depend: the care of the very old and the very young, civic duties, volunteer work, church work, and support of the arts. While those who still bowled, bowled alone, Hallmark developed a new line of cards for absent parents. "Sorry I can't be here to tuck you in," one said. "Sorry I can't say good morning," read another.

According to Craig Harline, who has written a cultural history called *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl*, "Sundays changed when the world changed."³ And according to his reviewer in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Stopping farming in the Middle Ages was easy. But to close restaurants, shut up amusement parks or clear the airwaves when Americans with money were trying to spend it that day was impossible."⁴

There is no talking about the loss of the Sabbath, then, without also talking about the rise of consumerism. There is no talking about Sabbath rest without also talking about Sabbath resistance. Since I am technically a Lord's Day Christian, I have no authority to speak of the Jewish Sabbath, but I freely indulge in what I call "holy envy." When I find something in another religious tradition that sets my heart on fire, I do not admonish myself for wishing it were mine. One thing I wish were mine is a proper Friday evening Shabbat service, beginning with the lighting of two candles when three stars can be counted in the darkening sky. According to those who know, there is one candle for each of the Sabbath commandments in Torah, both of which call God's people to be more like God.

The first commandment is based on the creation account in Genesis. You can tell that by the way it ends: "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." God worked hard for six days and then God rested, performing the consummate act of divine freedom by doing nothing at all. Furthermore, the rest was so delicious that God did not call it good, or even very good. Instead, God blessed the seventh day and called it holy, making Sabbath the first sacred thing in all creation. Resting every seventh day, God's people remember their divine creation.

That is what the first Sabbath candle announces: *made in God's image, you too shall rest*.

The second candle stands for the second formulation of the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5. There the basis of the command shifts from the creation of the world to the exodus from Egypt, ending this way: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." God's people cried out to God and God heard them, sending Moses to free them from bondage in a land that was not home. Resting every seventh day, God's people remember their divine liberation. That is what the second Sabbath candle announces: *made in God's image, you too are free*.

When observant Jews light two candles on Shabbat, they light one for each of these "therefores"—a rest candle and a freedom candle—which have more to do with each other than may be apparent at first. By interrupting our economically sanctioned social order every week, Sabbath practice suspends our subtle and not so subtle ways of dominating one another on a regular basis. Because our work is so often how we both rank and rule over one another, resting from it gives us a rest from our own pecking orders as well. When the Wal-Mart cashier and the bank president are both lying on picnic blankets at the park, it is hard to tell them apart. When two sets of grandparents are at the lake with their grandchildren feeding ducks, it is hard to tell the rich ones from the poor ones.

If Bible lovers paid as much attention to Leviticus 25 as to Leviticus 18, then we might discover that God is at least as interested in economics as in sex. According to that astounding chapter of Torah, Sabbath is not only about getting a little rest but

also about freeing slaves, forgiving debts, restoring property, and giving the land every seventh year off.

Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce—you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

Leviticus 25:3-7, JPS Tanakh.

Sabbath is not only God's gift to those who have voices to say how tired they are; Sabbath is also God's gift to the tired fields, the tired vines, the tired vineyard, the tired land. Leviticus 25 shows divine concern for *grapes*, for God's sake. It promises both the tame and wild animals in the land enough to eat, along with the hired hands who presumably have time to take up wood-working and water aerobics during the year that the tractors stay parked in the barn.

SABBATH IS THE GREAT EQUALIZER, the great reminder that we do not live on this earth but in it, and that everything we do under the warming tent of this planet's atmosphere affects all who are woven into this web with us. Just because the land and the livestock cannot hire lawyers does not mean they have not

been violated. Their biblical rights are written down right there in the Bible, but other gods go on getting in the way.

Where there is money to be made, there is no rest for the land, nor for those who live on it. In the rural county where I live, developers bulldoze the laurels by the river where the raccoons taught their babies how to fish. An entire pine forest comes down to produce the paper for one mail-order catalog. People who have already run out of closet space work overtime to pay the interest on their average \$9,000 credit card debts, while economic predators send teenagers applications for their own preapproved cards in the mail. No resistance to such ravenousness will come from those who are heavily invested in its revenue. The resistance will have to come from elsewhere, from those who live by a different rhythm because they worship a different God.

In the eyes of the world, there is no payoff for sitting on the porch. A field full of weeds will not earn anyone's respect. If you want to succeed in this life (whatever your "field" of endeavor), you must spray, you must plow, you must fertilize, you must plant. You must never turn your back. Each year's harvest must be bigger than the last. That is what the earth and her people are for, right? *Wrong god.*

In the eyes of the true God, the porch is imperative—not every now and then but on a regular basis. When the fields are at rest—when shy deer step from the woods to graze the purple clover grown up between last year's tomato plants, and Carolina chickadees hang upside down to pry seeds from the sunflowers that have taken over the vineyard—when the people who belong to this land walk through it with straw hats in their hands instead of hoes to discover that wild blackberries water their mouths as surely as the imported grapes they worked so hard to protect from last year's frost—this is not called "letting things go"; this

is called "practicing Sabbath." You have to wonder what makes human beings so resistant to it.

"Look at the birds of the air," Jesus once said, "they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these."⁵

Sabbath is the true God's gift to those who wish to rest and to be free—and who are willing to guard those same gifts: for every living thing in their vicinity as well. Remember the commandment? It is not just for you. It is for your children, your employees, your volunteer helpers, your hunting dogs, your plow horses, your fields, and your migrant workers. It does not matter in the least whether they believe in your God. You do, so they get the day off. Anyone who engages this practice discovers saving habits of work and rest that promise life not only for each of us individually but also for our families, our communities, our far-flung neighbors, our systems of justice, our human economies, and our planet.

According to the rabbis, those who observe Sabbath observe all the other commandments. Practicing it over and over again they become accomplished at saying no, which is how they gradually become able to resist the culture's killing rhythms of drivenness and depletion, compulsion and collapse. Worshipping a different kind of God, they are shaped in that God's image, stopping every seven days to celebrate their divine creation and liberation. And yet those who practice Sabbath, a little or a lot, know that there is another kind of resistance at work.

One of my favorite prayers in *Gates of Prayer*, the New Union Prayer Book, is called "Welcoming Sabbath" and it goes like this:

Our noisy day has now descended with the sun beyond our sight.

In the silence of our praying place we close the door upon the hectic joys and fears, the accomplishments and anguish of the week we have left behind.

What was but moments ago the substance of our life has become memory; what we did must now be woven into what we are.

On this day we shall not do, but be.

We are to walk the path of our humanity, no longer ride unseeing through a world we do not touch and only vaguely sense.

No longer can we tear the world apart to make our fire.

On this day heat and warmth and light must come from deep within ourselves.⁶

If you can hear the welcome in that prayer, then perhaps you can hear the dis-ease in it as well. How is your own deep fire doing, by the way? Are you pretty confident that you have enough heat and warmth and light within yourself to get you through the night? Once you have turned off the computer and hung up the car keys, once you have decided to take one whole day off from earning your own salvation, are you ready to wrestle with the brawny angels who show up?

A couple of years ago, the *New York Times* magazine ran an article called "Bring Back the Sabbath" by Judith Shulevitz.⁷ She opened her piece by citing the work of Sandor Ferenczi, a disciple of Freud's who worked in Budapest in the early 1900s. What

Ferenczi noticed how many people came to see him complaining about the sudden onset of headaches, stomachaches, and attacks of depression they experienced every Sunday—or, in the case of his Jewish clients, every Saturday. After he had ruled out purely physical causes, including the rich Hungarian food served on these days, Ferenczi concluded that his patients were suffering from the Sabbath.

He called it "Sunday neurosis," attributing it to the loss of control people experienced on the Sabbath. When the shops shut down, so did "the machinery of self-censorship," he said. As the routines of the workweek gave way to family get-togethers, worship, and rest, Sunday neurotics feared that their wilder impulses might get away from them. With the "eternal inner murmur of self-reproach" temporarily silenced within them, they worried that they might run amok. So they produced bellyaches and the blues to protect them from the full freedom of the Sabbath.

ANYONE WHO PRACTICES SABBATH for even an afternoon usually suffers a little spell of Sabbath sickness. Try it and you too may be amazed by how quickly your welcome rest begins to feel like something closer to a bad cold. Okay, that was nice. Okay, you are ready to get back to work now. Yes, you know you said you wanted this, but now you have had just the right amount of rest—maybe even a touch too much—so that you are beginning to feel sluggish. What if your energy level drops and never comes back up again? What if you get used to this and want never to go back to work? Plus, how will you ever catch up after taking a whole day off? Just thinking about it makes you tired.

Is weeding the garden really work if you enjoy it? Is looking through a Garnet Hill catalog really shopping? This, I think, is

how the rabbis were finally forced to spell out all the kinds of work that are forbidden on the Sabbath—because people kept trying to find ways to get to yes instead of no. If I am a doctor and someone calls for help, am I allowed to help? If my dog gets sick, can I take her to the vet? Is striking a match really making a fire?

Yes, it is. If you decide to live on the fire God has made inside of you instead, then it will not be long before some other things flare up as well. Most of us move fast enough during the week to outrun them, but if you slow down for a day, then all kinds of alarming things can happen. You can start crying without having the slightest idea why. You can start remembering what you loved about people who died before you were ten, along with things you did when you were eighteen that still send involuntary shivers up your back. You can make a list of the times you almost died in your life, along with the reasons you are most glad to be alive.

Released from bondage to the clock, you eat when you are hungry instead of when you have to. Nine times out of ten you discover that you are far less hungry than you thought you were, or at least less for groceries than for the bread no one can buy. As you slow down, your heart does too. The girdle of your diaphragm loosens, causing great sighs too deep for words to pour from your body. In their wake, you discover more room around your heart, a greater capacity for fresh air. Sabbath sickness turns out to be a lot like other sicknesses, which until now have been the only way you could grant yourself more than one day off from work. If you flee from the pain and failure, then you run into them everywhere you go. If you can find some way to open to them instead, then they may bring their hands from behind their backs and lay flowers on your bed.

Most people I know want to talk about why it is impossible for them to practice Sabbath, which is an interesting spiritual exercise

in itself. If you want to try it, then make two lists on one piece of paper. On one side of the paper, list all of the things you *know* give you life that you never take time to do. Then, on the other side, make a list of all the reasons why you think it is impossible for you to do those things. That is all there is to it. Just make the two lists, and keep the piece of paper where you can see it. Also promise not to shush your heart when it howls for the list it wants.

If a whole day of life-giving freedom is too much for you to imagine, then start however you can. Decide that you will get up an hour before everyone else in the house and dedicate that time to doing nothing but being in the divine presence. Decide that you will turn off the television an hour before you go to bed and spend that time outside looking at the sky. You could resolve not to add anything more to your calendar without subtracting something from it. You could practice praising yourself for saying no as lavishly as you do when you say yes.

If you do any of these things, you will likely discover that they are very difficult to sustain all by yourself. It is hard to be a lone revolutionary, yet that is what you become when you start saying no. You rise up against your history, your ego, your culture and its ravenous economy. You may also have to rise up against your church or synagogue, if you belong to one, since such institutions can demand as much of you as any pharaoh. My advice is to find yourself a partner revolutionary. Find a whole community of revolutionaries if you can. They will help you hang on to your vision, the one that helps you remember who you were created to be. They may even supply you with some missing details, along with the support to realize them.

In the meantime, I think it is good to have a Sabbath vision even if it seems impossible to you right now. Here is mine, which you are free to borrow while you are envisioning your own.

At least one day in every seven, pull off the road and park the car in the garage. Close the door to the toolshed and turn off the computer. Stay home not because you are sick but because you are well. Talk someone you love into being well with you. Take a nap, a walk, an hour for lunch. Test the premise that you are worth more than what you can produce—that even if you spent one whole day being good for nothing you would still be precious in God's sight—and when you get anxious because you are convinced that this is not so, remember that your own conviction is not required. This is a *commandment*. Your worth has already been established, even when you are not working. The purpose of the commandment is to woo you to the same truth.

It is hard to understand why so many people put "Thou shalt not do any work" in a different category from "Thou shalt not kill" or "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," especially since those teachings are all on the same list. The ancient wisdom of the Sabbath commandment—and of the Christian gospel as well—is that there is no saying yes to God without saying no to God's rivals. No, I will not earn my way today. No, I will not make anyone else work either. No, I will not worry about my life, what I will eat or what I will drink, or about my body, what I will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? And there was evening and there was morning, the seventh day.

WHEN YOU LIVE IN GOD, your day begins when you open your eyes, though you have done nothing yourself to open them, and you take your first breath, though there is no reason why this life-giving breeze should be given to you and not to some other. In the dark or in the light, with a stone slab under your back or

a feather topper, your day begins when you let God hold you because you do not have the slightest idea how to hold yourself—when you let God raise you up, when you consent to rest to show you get the point, since that is the last thing you would do if you were running the show yourself. When you live in God, your day begins when you lose yourself long enough for God to find you, and when God finds you, to lose yourself again in praise.

9

The Practice of Carrying Water

PHYSICAL LABOR

He who is aching in every limb, worn out by the effort of a day of work, that is to say a day when he has been subject to matter, bears the reality of the universe in his flesh like a thorn. The difficulty for him is to look and to love. If he succeeds, he loves the Real.

—*Simone Weil*

When I lived in the city, a power outage meant eating sandwiches by candlelight for supper and going to bed early under a few extra quilts. When I moved to the country, a power outage meant hard labor for however many days it took the repair trucks to reach the end of my dirt road.

The first time this happened, the storm began with a beautiful, heavy snow. My husband, Ed, and I wasted no time getting out in it, charmed by the transformation of our dappled land