

Souls at Rest – Study & Discussion Guide

By Charlotte Ostermann

Part I – Foundations

If you are keeping a personal journal, take time as the study begins to jot down your preliminary thoughts about the Sabbath. Does it seem impossible, legalistic, wonderful, archaic, attractive, scary? What experiences of Sabbath have you already had – what joys, frustrations, images, memories do you bring with you into the present exploration of the idea. What in your life seems to make Sabbath an unworkable idea? What constraints, what realities impinge upon your Sabbath days?

Chapter 1 – Wholly, Holy, Whole

In this chapter we learn to diagnose symptoms of sloth – spiritual indifference and impotence, and turn to true leisure as the cure.

1. What is acedia? How is it related to laziness? How is it different?
2. Where do you see symptoms of acedia expressed in today's culture?
3. What does sloth have to do with the Third Commandment?
4. What are some of the ways we can avoid spiritual goods?
5. How is it that a busy, productive, responsible person can be said to suffer from sloth?
6. Contrast the Christian sense of the human person with the common understanding in the world around you.
7. What does wholeness have to do with holiness?
8. How is Sabbath rest, holy leisure, for a person different from periodic downtime for a machine?
9. How is the culture around you having an impact on your soul?
10. Why is the soul at rest more receptive to God?

Chapter 2 – Taking the Cure

In this chapter, we think about why we must consciously design our Sabbath practice, and about some of the obstacles and pitfalls we may face in doing so.

1. What things do you already do, or refrain from doing, on Sundays?
2. What happens if the Sabbath idea doesn't turn into actual gestures or practice?
3. What is the central focus of the Sabbath day?
4. Why should you choose your Sabbath practices thoughtfully?
5. How is the notion of a Sabbath day different from the idea of the weekend?
6. Should the Mass be the only 'Sabbath practice'? Why take a whole day for rest? Must Sabbath occur on Sunday?
7. What happens if we keep Sunday open for leftover work?
8. How is leisure connected to human freedom?
9. Why will your Sabbath be different from other Christians'?
10. Why is it hard for us to down-shift to the pace of Sabbath?

Part II - Experience the Sabbath

Get your journal ready! You will reflect on your unique ways of approaching and avoiding life, and put together a 'prescription' for your very personal and particular 'cure'. You'll notice characteristics of your family's 'style of being' that will give you ideas for shaping Sabbath to bless everyone in your home.

Chapter 3 - Be a Place

In this chapter we explore the difference between *being* and *doing*, and discover how the soul at rest becomes a hospitable place.

1. Think of someone who can do nothing, produce nothing, contribute nothing. Why does he have value and dignity?
2. What is the difference between encountering someone as a 'You' or an 'It'; as a 'person' or a 'thing'?
3. How is it that the rested soul seems to expand - become spacious - and the unrested soul to constrict, collapse, or flatten?
4. How can a person be said to be 'displaced' by my rejection of him, or my impatience with him?
5. How do busyness and laziness compromise our capacity to enjoy leisure?
6. Why is the restful soul more 'present' or unhidden?
7. How can Sabbath practices be like a 'health tonic' for seemingly opposite 'symptoms'?
8. Why do we say the rosary 'makes a place' within which we encounter Mary and Christ?
9. How can we know whether our Sabbath practices are 'working'?
10. How is the Blessed Sacrament a model for the soul at rest?

Chapter 4 - Be Quiet

In this chapter we see how critical quietude is for the rest of the soul, and how it attunes us to meaning.

1. What kinds of physical noise are common in your environment? Jot down as many examples as you can.
2. Why is it hard for us to endure silence? How is noise comforting sometimes?
3. Who is not being heard in your life? Who is unable to hear you?
4. How could being 'of no mind', or mentally emptied of all thought, be deafening?
5. Do you have any physical symptoms of disequilibrium or neediness? What is your body trying to tell you?
6. How is it that stimulating the senses can help quiet the soul?
7. Is any of your interior 'noise' fear? Of what?
8. How can your imagination or your emotions disrupt your interior quietude?
9. How long does it take for you to return to the still, quiet chapel - to recollect yourself in equanimity? How can Sabbath help shorten this time?
10. How is it that the Lord both speaks and is silent in the Blessed Sacrament?

Chapter 5 - Be Slow

In this chapter, we learn how speed contributes to the restlessness of our souls, and does violence to our capacity for wonder.

1. What are some of the forms of speed that are part of the context of our lives?
2. How is speed like noise in its affect on our souls?
3. How can speed be said to be a form of violence?
4. What is devalued as we value higher speed - in relationships, in cooking, in healing, in travel, for instance?
5. How do we run from choosing between many things that all have a claim on our attention? Why?
6. How does rest affect the rhythm of life?
7. Why is the soul at rest more content to be 'between'?
8. How does wonder contribute to the fullness of being human?
9. How can technology and efficiency be dehumanizing?
10. How can speed and stagnation both be forms of bondage?

Chapter 6 - Be Still

In this chapter we see how the body and mind can operate together to still and reintegrate the soul.

1. What characterizes truly restful mental or physical activity?
2. What is the difference between amusement and engagement?
3. How can slow movements help us be more 'present' to ourselves?
4. How might physical tone, balance, energy and relaxation contribute to the restedness of the soul?
5. How might the quality of what we ingest – orally, visually, aurally – affect the quality of our mind, our soul?
6. What is the difference between hearing and listening?
7. How do visual media manipulate the eye and by-pass, to some extent, the faculty of reason? Is this helpful or hurtful?
8. How does the dulling of our senses and sensitivities relate to the restlessness of our souls?
9. How do we defend ourselves against media, noise, speed, manipulation, hostility?
10. How do our self-defense mechanisms help and how do they hurt us?

Chapter 7 – Be in Community

In this chapter we see the impact of Sabbath rest on the soul's capacity to dwell in community, and in union with Christ.

1. In what sense are the homeless, orphans, gang members, anorexic girls, migrant workers and refugees all displaced persons?
2. What does being alone have to do with community life?
3. How does speed affect your relationships with family and friends?
4. How does the vibration of sound relate to the need of persons for 'place'?
5. In what places has your being been formed? What are the qualities of those places? How have these qualities affected your formation?
6. Why do you suppose God made for Himself a people, a tabernacle, a pure Woman, a Church?
7. How can the Sabbath day be said to be a place? What are its qualities? What is formed there?
8. How do we learn to harmonize our voice with others'?
9. How does independence, or disunity, make us weary?
10. How does feasting prepare us for the Lord's Table? How does the Eucharist prepare us for life in community?

Chapter 8 – Be Not Afraid

In this chapter we see that the courage to *be* a soul at rest is born of hope and leads to genuine human freedom.

1. How does being tough, surviving, keep us from being fully alive?
2. Does the idea of the individual person as a powerful change agent contradict your sense of what it takes to change the world?
3. Why shouldn't we aim to create an earthly utopia? Why should we bother at all with this passing world?
4. How does illusion lead us to the debasements of despair and impotence? How does Sabbath rest help restore hope and human potency?
5. What is the difference between having a deep, interior locus of self-control and being self-centered? How is the *locus* of will related to its effectiveness and freedom?
6. Who controls the person who is not fully human, fully free?
7. Why is philosophy a bold venture and a proof of human vitality?
8. How is the ability to reproduce a sign of human vitality?
9. How could a feast, a long walk, a thank-you note, a day of rest be said to be a revolution?
10. How does Sabbath-thinking help us deal with fear of the powers set against humanity?

Conclusion to Part II

Here, we recap the ways in which the Sabbath helps bring our souls to a point of rest - a poise, or equanimity, that can be seen as a *via media* between opposing, ultimately dehumanizing, extremes. Take time to discuss the chart below in your own words, exploring some of the connections between concepts that interest you most. Some of these concepts will be further developed as we move forward to Parts III and IV. I present the facets of the human person as the point of clarity, not compromise, between opposing extremes. It is this capacity of the fully integrated human person to *be* the resolution of paradox that I find most fascinating. Ultimately, the extremes meet 'around back' in the exact negation of each attribute of the person on the narrow way where only Christ can keep him.

Extreme	Via Media	Extreme
Focus divided from locus	Integration of »place and gaze«	Focus divided from locus
Double-Minded	Single-Mindedness	Double-Minded
Restless Movement	Poise, Equanimity	Restless Immobility
Distraction from spiritual goods Leads to impotence in valuing these goods	Ability to value and to move to obtain spiritual	Indifference toward spiritual goods Leads to impotence in possessing these goods
Willfulness	Balance in self-possession	Passivity
Doing - unable to hold open interior space for self, others	Place / Presence present to self, others	Non-being - unable to be at home to self
Noise	Quietude / Listening	Negation
Speed	Slow / Wonder	Stagnation
Distraction - counterfeit recreation: senses dulled, unable to attend	Still / Attention senses numbed, unable to reason	Amusement: non-thinking:
Loneliness hidden in crowds -	Solitude / Communion	Loneliness hidden in isolation -
Illusion of independence, but people are valued as means	Interdependence: persons encountered:love	Illusion of dependence, but encounter with persons avoided
«Pragmatism	Self Donation	Pragmatism»
«Fear	Courage / Hope	Fear»
Surviving	Thriving	Succumbing
Controlling Time Person as Product -	Waiting Person as Poem -	Decaying over time Person as Plant -
Determined by environment	A work of art created in cooperation	Determined by nature

Part III – Established by Understanding

This is a good time to think about all the things you have learned in your life. Which of them were known by trusting someone else's fuller comprehension? Which did you learn by experience? What have you learned by application of your intellectual faculties? Are there any areas in which you have layered one type of knowing upon another? If Sabbath is all about making you more fully *you*, it will help to be aware of some of these elements of your being and how they came to be part of you.

Chapter 9 – Roots of the Tree of Life

In this chapter we explore the development of the Idea of Sabbath from its roots in Judaism to its Christian meaning as a Sacrament of Easter.

1. How does understanding of Jewish Sabbath symbolism and practice enrich our Christian Sabbath-keeping?
2. How did God set apart his creation of the Sabbath from all else He had created?
3. How does 'remembrance' of the Sabbath differ from 'observance'?
4. How is the Sabbath related to the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery?
5. By what reasoning did rabbis prohibit or prescribe Sabbath activities?
6. How does Sabbath evoke images of womanhood? How is Mary's role in salvation history prefigured by these images?
7. In what sense can we say that the Sabbath-keeper is open-wounded, or is a spring in the desert, or is a vessel of grace?
8. How does the Seventh Day Sabbath differ from the Eighth Day Sabbath, regardless of which day we celebrate as Sabbath?
9. Why is Sabbath-keeping the identifying characteristic of God's people?
10. How might our Sabbath reflect the three days of Christ's Passion?
11. How did Sabbath-keeping prepare Jews for the Messiah's coming?
12. What does the Catholic Catechism teach about the Sabbath?
13. Why is delight an important aspect of Sabbath practice?
14. How does the Mass echo the Jewish Sabbath practices?
15. How does Sabbath-keeping help us grow more attached to spiritual goods – more in love with God – and more detached from this world's values?

Chapter 10 – The Sabbath Person

In this chapter we explore the many ways Sabbath corresponds to the human person, and cultivates both his own humanity and the fullness of Christ within him.

1. In what sense does Sabbath *have* power, and in what sense *is* it a power?
2. How does Sabbath correspond to the three planes of man's being, to his threefold purpose?
3. How does it affect our understanding of Sabbath to look at it through the lens of personhood (as opposed to the lens of history, or the lens of physical health, for instance)?
4. Why is the Cross of Christ the focal point of the lens of personhood – why is the human person seen in his fullness only in the Crucified One?
5. How are *knowing* and *not-knowing* related to worship? To wonder? To Sabbath? To the human person?
6. How is our joy linked to our capacity for wonder? For contemplation?
7. How is love for a person a form of suffering?
8. How is it that a double-minded man can be said to be at odds with himself, restless, displaced, unstable?
9. Why is giving ourselves rest a form of love, and how does it help us to love others?
10. How does being more fully human make possible the gift of self?
11. How does our humanity make others more human?
12. What is the 'power to be human'?
13. How does what people know, or love, or serve affect their humanity? What are some of the objects of your knowing, your love, your service?
14. Why would intimacy with evil incapacitate us for knowledge of truth? Why does love of idols displace love of God and other persons? Why can we not serve both God and mammon?
15. Why is fruitfulness a key to what it means to be human? How does the capacity to multiply function for good, or for ill? What is Sabbath's affect on our ability to be 'multipliers'?

Part IV – Treasure-Filled Knowledge

This would be a good time to stop and recapitulate, restate what you understand about, the human person, using one or more of the 'trajectories' we have been exploring: Start with a child and move toward full maturity; with a pagan and move toward Christlikeness; with one 'dimension' and move toward three; with bondage and move toward freedom; with stark apprehension and move toward full comprehension; with a seed and move toward fruit; with imbalance and move toward the *via media*.

Chapter 11 – A Sabbath Sense of Time

In this chapter we see how Sabbath-keeping revolutionizes our sense of time, helping us learn to wait, to wait upon others, and to wait on the Lord.

1. Where do you see clutter in your environment, in the world?
2. How would a person in full possession of all his faculties be better able to respond to the needs he perceives?
3. Why is wasting time a way of thanking God for the gift of time? A way of showing trust in Him?
4. What are two paradoxical senses of time, which we hold in tension, or in balance as we grow?
5. What happens if we move out of balance (toward complacency, or toward progress) in our relationship to time? How does Sabbath-keeping help us remain balanced with respect to time?
6. How does our Sabbath encounter with *kairos* affect our ordinary life in *chronos*? How does ordinary time impact our Sabbath-keeping?
7. How can travel contribute to the restfulness of the Sabbath? How does Sabbath prepare us to enjoy travel?
8. How can we say that doing nothing is a creative act?
9. How are patience, Sabbath, waiting, contentment and hope related to one another?
10. How has God tempered the force of His glory by mediating grace to the world through us? How is it that a veil both hides and invites discovery?

Chapter 12 – Formed by Encounter

In this chapter, we learn that the *being* of the human person is formed through encounter with Reality and that Sabbath is the ideal context for such encounter.

1. Where, when, how do you encounter reality – real people in real community, real nature (animals, plants, weather, mountains, ...), real music, real needs, real problems, Truth, Beauty, Goodness, real virtue, real passion, real limitations, etc...?
2. How is it that Reality calls us into being – that our identity begins to form where the 'I' encounters reality? How would denying a person contact with reality rob him of being, constrict his soul's formation, damage his humanity?
3. How are 'positive image' and 'negative space' related in a work of art? In a human life? In the Eucharistic Sabbath?
4. How does clutter affect the soul? What kind of emptiness is cultivated by Sabbath?
5. What qualities of playfulness are also qualities of contemplation?

6. How can it be said that our heart is hospitable, or inhospitable?
7. What is the unique shape of your emptiness? How do prayer, singing, Sabbath-keeping shape and clarify its contours?
8. In what ways are you a student, disciple, learner? Describe how you learn best – what qualities in the teacher, the subject, yourself, or the environment affect your learning positively? Negatively?
9. In what ways are you a teacher, advisor, mentor, persuader? Describe what you teach most passionately – what things are so fully formed in you that they are freely and fully given to others almost effortlessly?
10. In what ways can education correspond to the needs of the soul for Sabbath rest – for wonder, for quietude, for a humane pace, for safety?

Chapter 13 – Something Beautiful for God

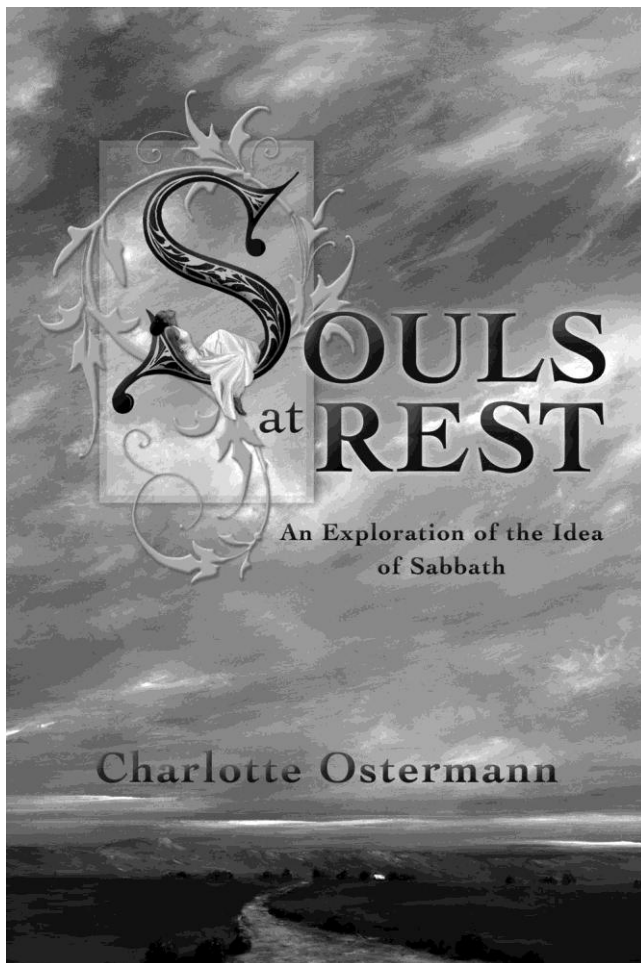
In this chapter we see how the unique and unrepeatable Reality of his being is the key to a person's most fully human capacity to be creative – to create opportunities for encounter with Christ through beauty, and thus to evangelize the world around him.

1. What is the difference between being more *generally* human and being more *effectively* human?
2. What does it mean to become more *specifically* human?
3. How is your ability to respond to reality affected by the fullness of your being, or humanity? By the fullness of Christ's being within you?
4. Can you think of some destructive ways people deal with the tension of paradox? How is comfort with paradox akin to contentment with being 'between'?
5. What are the two different ways in which evangelization and beauty both attract people to Christ?
6. How does beauty destabilize us? Why does that help us stand in a different relation to the world?
7. Why must truth be restated over and over in new ways? Why must love condescend to do this?
8. How can a person be said to be a poem?
9. How can beauty 'infiltrate' every corner of the world? Why might the way of beauty be particularly effective in our times?
10. How does Sabbath-keeping attune us to the beauty in other persons, and help us win them to Christ?

Epilogue – A Fugue on Poetry

In this ‘fugue’ we see the paradoxical ideas of man as a live being, and man as a place resolved creatively in the idea of man as a poem.

1. Why might a fully alive, fully free human being seem like a breath of fresh air and a threatening gale at the same time?
2. Why does the idea of Sabbath seem crazy to people?
3. How can it be said that a man in full possession of his humanity is a simpleton, or is a revolutionary?
4. How can merely intellectual apprehension of a great thing dull our sense of wonder at it?
5. Why must we possess the full dimensionality of our own *being* in order to know Reality as a connected, multi-dimensional whole?
6. Why must the soul dwell in the embrace of wonder in order to receive the fullness of Reality?
7. How does a poem allow us to see the connectedness of things?
8. Why does a poem temper the force of an encounter with reality by mediating it to us through the veil of symbolism and the limitations of structure?
9. How is a person’s true creativity freed by constraints?
10. How is it that God has condescended to encounter human beings in the form of a person?



I hope these questions whet your appetite for the book! If you decide to purchase a copy, you can find it at

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*Thank you for your attention to this work of mine,
Charlotte*