

Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now

By Walter Brueggemann

Reviewed by Robert Gailey
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Brief Recommendation

Brueggemann has written a solid book of biblical and theological reflections on the purpose and intent of keeping Sabbath in a globalized, 24/7 economy. The book is short, easy to read, and accessible to the average college student, making it a good supplementary book for upper-division courses or a class devotional for lower-division courses. Professors of business will find the content a balanced grounding of biblical practices for business.

Full Review

With each passing year, Sabbath-keeping becomes a more significant act of countercultural resistance. In our 4G-connected, 24/7, globalized economy, the world of business both responds to and helps nurture a notion that consumers demand and must have access to instant purchasing of all goods and services they so desire. When commercial banks and even the U.S. Post Office are open for business seven days a week, our society takes note of a fast-food chain like Chick-Fil-A choosing to be closed on Sundays and forgoing millions of dollars of potential revenue.

Walter Brueggemann offers a timely and convicting biblical and theological reflection on why Christians must resist the culture of wanting things now. Brueggemann outlines his case by appealing to several Scripture passages, primarily focused on the Ten Commandments of Exodus but including both old and New Testament references. Brueggemann uses the first commandment (no other gods) and tenth commandment (no coveting) to book-end the importance God places on the fourth commandment of keeping Sabbath.

The author considers how secular society — as far back as what the Israelites confronted in Egypt — seeks to direct our efforts, in the name of progress and growth, towards anxiety, coercion, exclusivism, and multitasking, by ignoring God's directive to rest. Followers of God's covenant are called first towards love and worship of God (first three commandments) and then towards a concern

for others (last six commandments deal with living in community). The pivotal fourth commandment calls God's people to rest and honor God and connects this worship on one day towards a reorientation of how life must be lived out in neighborly relations the other six days of the week. Christians today need Sabbath practices to counteract the constant siren call of business "principles" repeatedly demanding we operate in a hyper-individualistic and profit-maximizing way.

A primary shortcoming of the book is that Brueggemann gives scant attention or discussion to the several passages in the Gospels where Jesus' actions and words specifically address Sabbath-keeping. In a related vein, there is no mention of how service/ministry should be handled on the Sabbath. Too often, Christian leaders can be as ministry-obsessed and self-focused as those working in the business world, and our churches can be as consumer-driven in their ways of doing ministry as stores are in vying for our business. Nevertheless, there is great value in this book for the Christian business community wanting to serve God in a way that honors God's commands.