

ANCIENT PRACTICES, MODERN INSIGHT

Fasting:

The Ancient Practices Series

Scot McKnight

Thomas Nelson

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Sabbath:

The Ancient Practices Series

Dan Allender

Thomas Nelson

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It is love for God that calls one to endure the physical discipline of fasting, and that same love which fills one's Sabbath rest with delight. Lacking that love, these spiritual disciplines would be devoid of meaning, mere physical responses to some overwhelming, body-shocking event (fasting), or a simple break from overwork and exhaustion (rest). Properly understood and

Properly understood and placed within the context of relationship with the Divine, fasting and the Sabbath are powerful, unifying practices that strengthen, enliven, and delight body, mind, soul, and spirit.

placed within the context of relationship with the Divine, each is a powerful, unifying practice that strengthens, enlivens, and delights body, mind, soul, and spirit. But the dualistic mindset of the twenty-first-century world places body and spirit at war with each other, fragmenting the *Eikon* (the image of God) that human beings were meant to reflect. Perhaps, these volumes suggest, this is why neither fasting nor the keeping of the Sabbath are much understood or appreciated today, even by those who consider themselves to be religious or spiritual. Scot McKnight's *Fasting* and Dan Allender's *Sabbath*, both part of Thomas Nelson's *Ancient Practices* series, couple historical perspective with modern insight, showing the practices to be as valid, helpful, and indeed, necessary today as they were in the ancient world.

Fasting

"Fasting is the natural, inevitable response of a person to a grievous sacred moment in life"; it is a "choice not to eat for a designated period because some moment is so sacred that partaking in food would deface or profane" its seriousness. With these statements, Dr. Scot McKnight, professor of Religious Studies at North Park University in Chicago and a widely-recognized authority on the New Testament, early Christianity, and the historical Jesus, places the ancient practice of fasting within reach of twenty-first-century Western understanding.

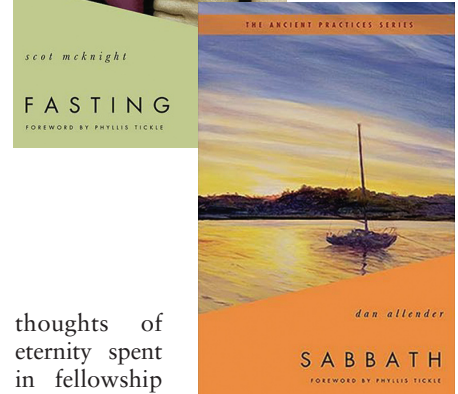
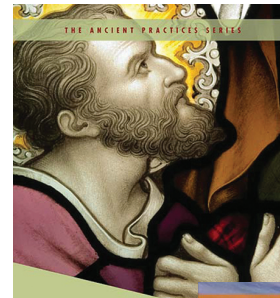
No one is spared moments of grief so overwhelmingly painful that the very thought of food creates nausea; here there is no choice—the body's natural response to such an event is to reject food for a time. However, some may choose to fast because of an intense desire to give the self fully to a moment or task, the sacredness of which is palpable. Fasting then "brings the body and spirit back together" in a way that is focused and without distraction.

Dr. McKnight suggests that re-joining

the material to the immaterial results in the "embodied" faith of one who is completely human, yet whose very countenance radiates Divine awareness. Fasting, for such a person, is not "instrumental," an attempt to "get something" from God, it is rather a participation in the mind of God in relation to a grievous sacred event, a yielding of the whole person—body, soul, spirit, heart, and mind—to a clear, focused encounter with Divine reality, and coming to know that such union is all that was desired.

Sabbath

The Sabbath is "an invitation to enter delight," asserts author Dan Allender, Ph.D., president and professor of counseling at Mars Hill Graduate School near Seattle. It is to be an intimation of eternity, with all the joy, peace, wonder, and delight that



thoughts of eternity spent in fellowship with the God

of creation suggest. Yet, as Allender states, "few people are willing to enter the Sabbath and sanctify it, to make it holy, because a full day of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone in a week."

The Sabbath is a "sanctuary in time"; it is time set apart, prepared for with intent, protected, and made sacred for the sharing of the delight of God, who looked about with satisfaction at all that was made, and declared it good. This same God made the keeping of the Sabbath not an option but a commandment, and throughout history its observation has been bound with rules and restrictions. Allender traces Sabbath-keeping through history and Scriptures, reflecting on a theology of time, play, and feasting from its ancient roots to current practice, coming to the same conclusion as Jesus, who said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

In a culture that has immunized itself from true joy, a new look at the Sabbath as a time to discover and do what one would truly enjoy is much needed. The resulting delight will bubble over into gratitude and love for God that can fill the rest of one's week, making the keeping of the fourth commandment not a burden, but a taste of the goodness of God. (February) *Kristine Morris*

Kristine Morris writes regularly for ForeWord. She is also a book review columnist for Spirituality and Health magazine and an ordained minister.