

How Mini Sabbaths Will Save Your Brain

Have humans become an indoor species? Given that Americans spend, on average, [93 percent of their time indoors](#), it would seem that we are indeed suffering from what some call [“nature deficit disorder.”](#)

We don’t need a fancy term to realize we might benefit from spending more time outdoors. Getting out for a gentle walk or a vigorous hike is likely to reduce stress, improve health, and increase emotional well-being.

If you spend much time on a computer, you probably reach a time in the day when you have so many browser tabs and programs open that your computer slows considerably. It’s time for a reset.

For me, that time usually corresponds with times my mental bandwidth is clogged. I’ve opened so many “files” of worry, frustration, and expectation for what life should be that my productivity, like my computer’s, has slowed to a crawl.

I need a new lens. I need a mini Sabbath from my tedious thinking.

Taking a walk around my rural neighborhood, I’m fortunate that my circuit involves a significant elevation gain. The physical exertion of climbing slows my mind’s chatter. I’m working my body, but my mind rests.

In his foreword to the book [Living the Sabbath](#), the American novelist, poet, and philosopher Wendell Berry shares this wisdom:

Sabbath observance invites us to stop. Invites us to rest. It asks us to take notice that while we rest, the world

continues without our help. It invites us to delight in the world's beauty and abundance.

As the velocity of our thinking slows, we see the truth in Berry's simple observation. You won't see this truth, you won't be taking a mini Sabbath, if you're checking your phone while you walk. Now is the time to disconnect and free your mind from digital distractions.

In his 1862 essay [*Walking*](#), Henry David Thoreau calls the practice a "noble art." Over 150 years ago, Thoreau, too, observed people were spending too much time indoors:

I confess that I am astonished at the power of endurance, to say nothing of the moral insensibility, of my neighbours who confine themselves to shops and offices the whole day for weeks and months, ay, and years almost together.

Thoreau admitted that he could not "stay in [his] chamber for a single day without acquiring some rust."

Walking is more than exercise and the burning of calories. Thoreau put it this way: "The walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise... but is itself the enterprise and adventure of the day."

Looking far towards the mountains and into the forest, my thinking slows. Noticing beauty helps empty my mind of petty concerns. Fresh ideas can get a word in edgewise. As I drop my judgments and resistance, some problems simply disappear. Creative ideas arise without effort.

When my walk is over, I have new choices for using my energy. Berry reminds us that the world God made is imbued with a wholeness that "could adapt and change." God's creation is a "living work" in which "we humans, by *our* particular nature, must participate for better or worse."

Berry asks us to consider this powerful question about how we participate in the world:

Will we choose to participate by working in accordance with the world's originating principles, in recognition of its inherent goodness and its maker's approval of it, in gratitude for our membership in it, or will we participate by destroying it in accordance with our always tottering, never resting self-justifications and selfish desires?

I have not conquered my own “self-justifications and selfish desires.” Honesty demands that I see how much of my thinking is not guided by gratitude. But in taking a walk, I experience a mini Sabbath and regain some much needed perspective.

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