

“The Sabbath is a time when we are reminded of this; accepting the manna that cannot be hoarded, picking blackberries that provide delight without cultivation.”

## Finding Sabbath Rest

Have you ever tried to keep Sabbath? As people of faith, we understand the importance of God’s command to rest, but we often fall short in implementing this ideal.

The following is an excerpt from a new book [Wendell Berry and the Given Life](#) by Ragan Sutterfield (Franciscan Media, 2017). The subtitles have been added by Building Faith

### 1. Sabbath Calms our Interior Anxiety

If we are to recover what it means to be a creature, to live a given life in a given world, then Sabbath will be a central practice. It is in Sabbath that we learn to rest and wrest ourselves from the anxieties of achievement, of making and doing, that clamor inside and out.

“It invites us to rest,” writes Wendell Berry. “It asks us to notice that while we rest the world continues without our help. It invites us to find delight in the world’s beauty and abundance.” In our greed that rushes to consume the world to our own destruction, “it may be asking us also to consider that if we choose not to honor it and care well for it, the world will continue in our absence.”

### 2. Sabbath Reconnects Us to Nature

Sabbath has not only been a central idea and principle for Berry—it has been a regular and anchoring practice. For six days a week, Berry works and as anyone who has had the fortune to visit him knows, he is loath to break the pattern of those days. On Sundays, however, Berry rests from his labor, takes a walk in the woods, and sometimes goes to church, where his wife plays the piano. It is on Sunday afternoons that visitors are welcomed on occasion, hosted on the porch or his living room lit only by the sunlight pouring in. It is on these Sundays that Berry has been engaged for several decades in one of his central poetic projects—Sabbath poems.

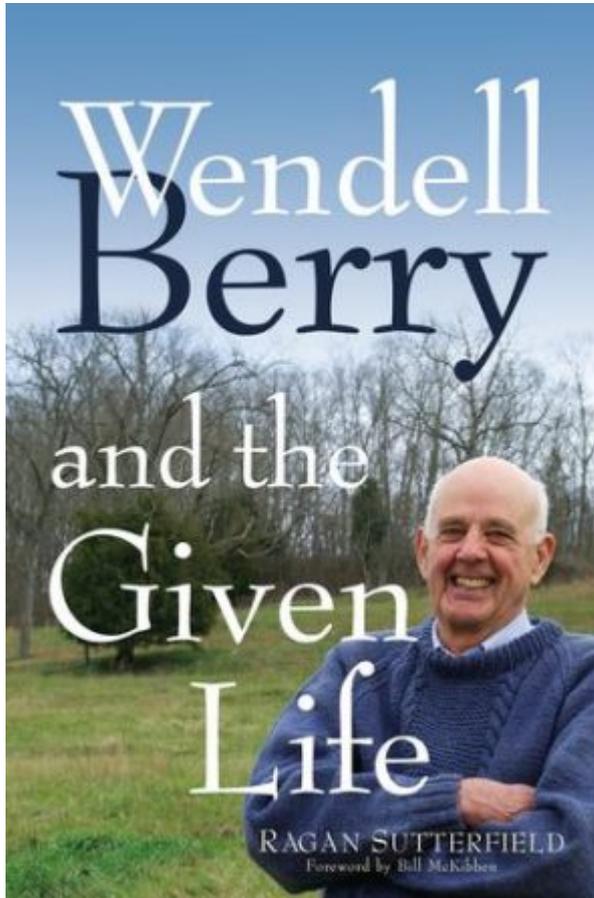
The subject matter of these poems ranges widely, from the delights of creation to sadness and lament. But in all of them, there is a quality of the rest from which they are born, the silence they have broken and to which they return. On his Sabbath walks in the woods, Berry writes: “I experience a lovely freedom from expectations—other people’s and also my own. I go free from the tasks and intentions of my workdays, and so my mind becomes hospitable to unintended thoughts: to what I am very willing to call inspiration.”

The poems that come are not, then, the work of a poet trying to force a line, but rather a gift received from the given world. “If the Muse leaves me alone,” writes Berry, “I leave her alone. To be quiet, even wordless, in a good place is a better gift than poetry.” It is in these poems that Berry is able to grasp what is ultimately at the base of all good work. It is all, though not without effort, rooted in gift—“Where we arrive by work, we stay by grace.” Though a garden should be cultivated, its soil tended and sowed toward flourishing, weeded and protected from pests, its ultimate produce is based in the gift of the abundant creation. The Sabbath is a time when we are reminded of this; accepting the manna that cannot be hoarded, picking blackberries that provide delight without cultivation.

### **3. Sabbath Re-oriens Our Work**

It is in the same way that we are reminded of the truth of the creation—that our work, though called and needed, is not necessary. The world will continue without us and came long before us. Our work is to live from and with these gifts so that we can use what time we have, what little time we have, to tend their flourishing rather than exploit them for the gains that will soon fade with the rot.

The practice of Sabbath also has the effect of elevating the value of labor and of the people engaged in it. It is not a break so that we might become renewed and refreshed for more work, but is rather a time when we live in the simple reality that we are creatures whose lives are given by God. On the Sabbath, we are able to be apart from our achievements.



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