

# FINDING SABBATH REST

---

Lessons on silence and solitude in the midst of ministry



Photo courtesy of Sabine Creek Ranch (2019)

We've all heard the advice about putting on our own oxygen masks before trying to help others with theirs. We've all been warned that we can't pour from an empty cup. But, how can we find time to recharge our batteries while ministering to others during a busy summer or retreat season at camp? I spoke with Bob Tissot, whose own experiences have taught him the importance of Sabbath rest and spending quiet time with God. ▶



Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon (2020)

“In Christian camping, there’s always something to do. No matter what job you have, it’s never actually done. It can be easy to fall into the trap of doing Christian things, rather than being in Christ.” —Bob Tissot

For 29 years, Tissot worked as the director of Bair Lake Bible Camp (Jones Lake, Michigan) before retiring in 2018. He is a certified counselor, and he wrote a program for CCCA called “The Sanity of Silence and Solitude.” He has taught this program to staff at dozens of camps over the years.

When Tissot was in his first few years at Bair Lake, three of his mentors separately expressed concern about his work habits. “It was eye-opening,” Tissot said. “One of them told me that I wasn’t trusting God with Bair Lake Bible Camp, and I was trying to do everything myself.”

His mentors were worried that he was working too much and was heading for burnout. Although Tissot wasn’t sure he agreed, he went on a three-day retreat away from the camp. “I spent quiet time alone with God,” he said. “I came back completely changed. That’s when I realized that if we wait to rest until we feel burned out, we have waited too long. I learned that I needed to make a plan to rest, even when I thought I was doing well, and I needed to encourage my staff to do the same.”

Tissot believes that being overly busy is a big problem in our society. “We are caught up in doing and not just being,” he said. “We have lost the ability to be alone and quiet before God, but the Bible says that this is an essential practice.”

Tissot understands that finding time to rest is not easy. “In Christian camping, there’s always something to do,” he said. “No matter what job you have, it’s never actually done. It can be easy to fall into the trap of doing Christian things, rather than being in Christ.”

Tissot tried to build a culture at Bair Lake that put people ahead of the organization. “As a camp director, I found myself sometimes applauding staff members who got a lot done, but I needed to step back and ask how they were doing as a person,” he said. “I thanked them for what they do but also encouraged them to take time to rest. After all, the best workers are the ones who find Sabbath rest because they are more productive in the long-term.”

To encourage staff members to rest, Tissot included an annual two-day silence and solitude retreat as part of the permanent staff’s benefits package. “It was in addition to their sick leave and vacation time,” he said. “No one was forced to take it because then it can be viewed as an obligation. I wanted to teach them the benefits and blessings of rest and allow them to choose for themselves.”

Tissot modeled this in his own life. Every summer, the previous director of Bair Lake returned to camp for two or three days to give Tissot and his wife, Nanci, some rest. “He took over at camp, including caring for our children, while Nanci and I spent a few days away resting,” he said.

Permanent staff at Bair Lake had one day off each week during the summer, and it wasn’t the turnaround day in between camps. “They were encouraged to find someone else to take over their duties and leave the camp’s grounds for the day,” Tissot said. “I wanted the staff to be able to leave camp and not feel guilty or worried about it.” ▶

Tissot stressed that a good leader brings in others to help the staff get rest. At Bair Lake, a couple volunteered to check in with the summer staff and give the counselors a break by staying in the cabins during rest time so the counselors could get away and have some time to themselves.

The training week for the college-aged summer staff included the topic of rest. “We taught them about the importance and benefits of Sabbath rest, and then we practiced by having a day of silence and solitude during training week,” Tissot said.

Tissot teaches about different types of rest. All are necessary for maximum benefit. He humorously calls these the blip, the bloop and the ba-dumpp. “The blip should happen daily,” he said. “Blips are those small, quiet moments we find during the day to rest and be quiet with God. The bloop is our day off each week that we can use to rest and recharge. The ba-dumpp is that two- or three-day retreat we take each year.”

At the end of each staff meeting, Tissot encouraged the staff to take 15 to 30 minutes to be quiet and alone with God before starting their work. “During busy times, we need to look for little moments where we can practice rest,” he said. “Don’t ignore small opportunities to recharge.”

We can find moments with God while performing mindless tasks. “We can pray while working on something that doesn’t require much thought,” Tissot said. “Even while our hands are working, our minds can be spending time with God.”

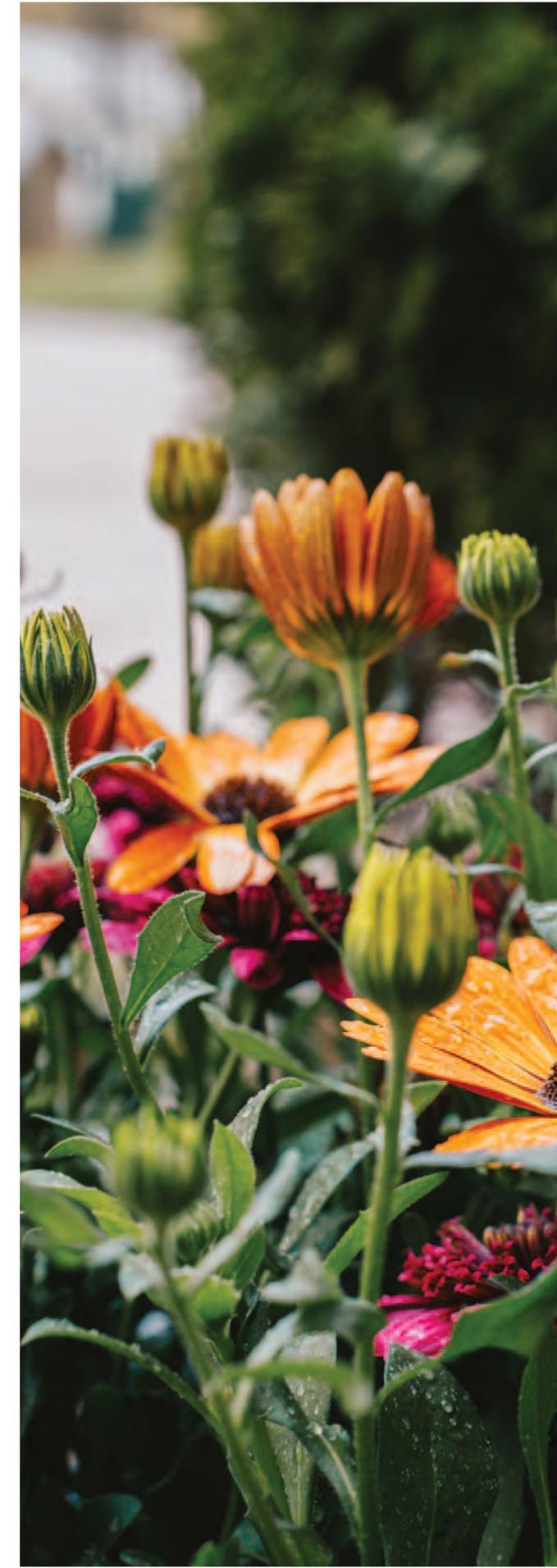
Despite Tissot’s efforts to encourage staff to rest, he did have a few staff members over the years who struggled to find time for it. “I had a young man on my staff who was recently married, and one day, his wife came to my office to talk about her husband’s work schedule,” Tissot explained. “She said that he had worked 12 days in a row, but when I pulled up his schedule, I showed him having three days off during that time. It turned out that on his days off, he would go for a walk around the camp and see something that needed to be done, so he’d take care of it. When he finally went back home and explained to his wife what he’d been doing, she got upset. They eventually left camping ministry.”

This experience taught Tissot the importance of leaving the camp property on days off. “There’s always work to do, so sometimes, we need to remove ourselves so we can actually rest,” he said.

Tissot also began emailing the minutes of staff meetings to the staff’s spouses. “I got their permission first, and they all thought it was a good idea,” he said. “Since we sometimes forget to tell our spouses about things that were going on around camp, this practice helped with communication and accountability.”

Making time for rest and quiet with God improves our relationship with Him and improves our relationships with other people, too. Camp ministry is a team effort, and allowing one another time to rest is the best way to build the strongest, most Christ-centered team. ■

“As a camp director, I found myself sometimes applauding staff members who got a lot done, but I needed to step back and ask how they were doing as a person. I thanked them for what they do but also encouraged them to take time to rest. After all, the best workers are the ones who find Sabbath rest because they are more productive in the long-term.” —Bob Tissot



## How to Find Sabbath Rest Even if You Work on Sundays

### *Ideas to customize your rhythms of rest*

We all know that having a day of rest isn't always realistic at camp, especially during busy summers. But there are ways you can incorporate Sabbath rest into your week. Here are a few ideas:

- Plan ahead with your team. Many ministry leaders work on Sundays, so moving your Sabbath to a different day of the week takes planning. Mark it off on your calendar and let team members know of your intentions. Decide ahead of time who will cover your responsibilities that day so you can rest worry-free.
- Determine what the Sabbath looks like for you. Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*, once said that there are only two rules when it comes to the Sabbath: pray and play. This means spending time with God and doing things you enjoy with people you enjoy. This looks different for each of us. For some people, gardening is relaxing and fun, so it's a perfect activity for the Sabbath. Other people think of gardening as work, so it needs to be done on the other days of the week.
- Tie up loose ends before your Sabbath begins. Run errands, reply to emails and finish any outstanding chores the day before, so you aren't tempted to perform these tasks when you're supposed to be praying and playing.
- Find an accountability partner. The temptation to become overly busy can be so strong that having someone hold us accountable in this area can be helpful. Plan to check in with one another regularly and pray for each other daily.
- Trust God to help you complete the tasks He has called you to do in the other six days of the week. If you are struggling to honor a Sabbath day, ask God to help you examine your priorities and pare them down. It is not His design that we work so hard that we can't find time for Him. If you're too busy, you may be doing things that God has not asked of you.