

KEEPING HOLY TIME: EMBRACING SABBATH
AS A LIFE PRACTICE AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

KEEPING HOLY TIME: EMBRACING SABBATH AS A LIFE PRACTICE AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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This project seeks to explore if it is possible for undergraduate students at a highly selective Ivy League University to embrace Sabbath as a life practice amid the pervasive culture of academic, emotional, and social stress to achieve. Princeton University is an institution that espouses the highest standards of intellectual excellence. Chartered in 1746, Princeton University is the fourth oldest university in the United States of America. Princeton is a member of the exclusive Ivy League circle, and recognized as a world-renowned research University with a special emphasis on undergraduate education. Students that compete successfully to be admitted to this highly selective private institution of higher education are considered to be the best and brightest students from around the world. Admission into the number one ranking University in the nation according to U. S. News and World Reports since 2000 for eleven straight years and tied for the number one spot twice, Princeton University is both academically competitive as well as academically challenging as it regards the intellectual rigor and volume of the scholastic workload.

Academic excellence is a hallmark of a Princeton education, and coupled with the particularly high standard of excellence is the ever-present reality of an extreme culture

of stress and critical pressure to succeed. The purpose of this project thesis is to examine the significance of Sabbath in the lives of students, and if the practice of Sabbath (the call to unplug) allowed them to be rebooted for a greater good and purpose. Eighteen students representing both the Christian and Jewish traditions were interviewed for forty-five minutes to one hour to talk about the culture of stress, searching for the soul, and their identity as keepers of holy time. Each interview served as a unique Sabbath opportunity to exhale and allow each interviewee to catch a breath in the midst of the harried and hurried existence sometimes experienced as a college student striving to balance the inevitable and multi-taskable busyness of life.

DEDICATION

To my extraordinary grandparents, the late Samuel Blanks and Mamie Heyward Blanks who raised me and were two of the most resplendent lights in my life, my maternal grandmother, the late Emma Davis Blanks Williams whose example of enduring strength is ever with me, my mother, the late Fannie Mae Blanks Long, whose gentle spirit speaks to me in the quiet moments of life; my brothers, Samuel Preston “Tony” and Gregory Blanks, with whom I share an incredible life-giving bond of deep love and enduring kinship; and to my late sister-cousin, Trina Marie Gordon Jones Benjamin, whose tenacity of spirit reminds me always that all things are possible.

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There are so many on my life's journey that have deposited more in my life than I can ever fully or adequately give voice to the depth of its meaning. I have been blessed beyond words by family, friends, and people with whom I share a life-giving bond. To all, named and unnamed, know that I love you, and I am who I am because of who you are in my life.

CHAPTER ONE
IN SEARCH OF SABBATH

And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Genesis 2:3-4

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien your towns.

Exodus 20:8-10

Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

Princeton University is a world renowned research university and an extraordinarily unique ministerial context in which I exercise the ordained rites of ministry in the twenty-first century. Comparable to most of its peer institutions in the 1700's, the university's historical purpose was to educate men for ministry, there was never formal legal ties to any particular denomination. Princeton was and is a secular university! Chartered in 1746, Princeton University is the fourth oldest college in the United States of America located on an amazingly beautiful idyllic campus creating an intellectual oasis for learning. Author William Selden writes in *Chapels of Princeton University: Their Historical and Religious Significance* that the original charter authorized, “that the College erected in Our Said Provençe of New Jersey for the Education of Youth in the

Learned Languages and in the Liberal Arts and Sciences.”¹ It is clear that the founders of the University, who were called “New Siders,” possessed a far reaching vision of what the University would be as an institution of higher education for a diverse body of people from across the world. Selden writes, “During this period the New Siders, as the more evangelical and liberal clergymen were called, rebelled against the literal interpretation of the Bible as practiced by the Old Siders, and as taught at Harvard and Yale.”²

Moreover, “the charter included the significant provision that, “Petitioners have also expressed their earnest Desire that those of every Religious Denomination may have free and Equal Liberty and Advantage of Education in Said College notwithstanding any different Sentiments in Religion.”³ Further Selden recorded,

“Although the founders of the College were members of the Presbyterian denomination and they intended that the students would be taught the tenets of their religious beliefs, the charter made no provision for it to be legally controlled by denominational authorities, a fact that had significant import in the eventual transformation of the College of New Jersey into Princeton University one hundred and fifty years later.”³

Throughout its history this highly selective elite Ivy League university is known for admitting the best and brightest students from around the globe.⁴ “From 2001 to 2013, Princeton University was ranked either first or second among national universities by U. S. News & World Report holding the top spot (sole or tied) for 11 of those 13 years, and was ranked #1 again for 2014, as per U.S. News. “Princeton’s endowment is the

¹ William K. Selden, *Chapels of Princeton University: Their Historical and Religious Significance* (Princeton, New Jersey: A Princeton University Publication, 2005), 13-14.

² Ibid. 13.

³ Ibid. 14.

⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "Princeton University." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/marketing> (accessed October, 30, 2013).

fifth-largest in the country, with a value of \$17.9 billion as of March 31, 2013.”⁵ The University has an irrefutably impressive global reputation as a leading institution in higher education for those chosen to matriculate on its sprawling residential campus of 180 buildings situated on 500 acres of land. Princeton University undeniably has colossal academic and economic currency and with that portfolio comes enormous pressure as well as privilege for those who study within her gates. The Daily Beast, a news reporting website named Princeton University in 2011 number 12 in its ranking of the most stressful colleges in America.⁶

Stressed out! Addicted to busyness! Frazzled to the fray! These epigrammatic utterances provide a glimpse into the harried, hurried, and hectic Princeton University culture for undergraduate students matriculating at one of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the world. Diane Hale in her article “An Invitation to Health” stresses, “Current research indicates that the college years have been deemed as one of the most stressful periods of a person’s life.”⁷ The millennials are the first generation since 1945 to be held to more stringent academic standards.⁸ Moreover, students are urged to perform at the highest levels of academic excellence in high school

⁵ The Trustees of Princeton University, “The Endowment,” <http://www.princeton.edu/pub/profile/finances/#comptheendowment> (accessed October 31, 2013).

⁶ The Daily Beast, “The 50 Most Stressful Colleges.” <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/04/04/the-50-most-stressful-colleges.html> (Accessed October, 30, 2013).

⁷ Diane Hales, “An Invitation to Health,” 13th ed. Wadsworth Cengage Learning (2009).

⁸ The term millennial or the millennial generation, also known as Generation Y, are the demographic cohorts following Generation X. There are no precise dates when the generation starts and ends. Commentators use beginning birth years from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. Website: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials> (accessed December 13, 2013).

in order to have any chance of being admitted to a college or university. In the College Student Journal, the authors indicate that, “Today 64 % of women and 60 % of men go to college; 85% of college students attend full time. The two greatest concerns of this generation are grades and admission, which are extremely different from the concerns of generations that preceded them in pursuit of an education.”⁹

Since the beginning of my ministerial career as an ordained itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, I have been working in a non-traditional church setting exercising the rites of ministry in pluralistic milieus. The foray into the world of ministry began with serving as an active duty military chaplain for ten years. Upon an honorable discharge from military service, I have served as a university chaplain and a dean of religious life and the chapel in the academy at Brown University and currently at Princeton University since 1997. During my journey at Princeton I have exercised spiritual leadership within the Office of Religious Life, seeking to give voice to the sacred through pastoral, priestly and prophetic ministry in a secular context. Often I am asked to explain what I do as chaplain or a dean of religious life. My response is succinct; “I facilitate religious life on a university campus for students, faculty and staff as pastor, prophet, counselor, and religious/spiritual leader.” I am in essence a pastor in a space where people study and work – living life outside the hallowed walls of an organized religious assembly. Universities are essentially laboratories of learning and every institution has its own unique culture. Ivy League centers of learning demand

⁹ Helen W. Bland, Bridget F. Melton, Paul Welle, and Lauren Bigham, College Student Journal 46.2 (June 2012): 362-375.

much of all its university citizens; thus, the journey through an Ivy labyrinth can be a daunting and arduous experience for even the most adept student or university member.

My journey as a clergy member in an ivy-layered academy began in 1994 as an assistant university chaplain at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Brown and Princeton are peer institutions recognized for their competitive admission standards and the expectation that its graduates will have leadership roles on the world stage. The cost of an Ivy League education over four years is almost \$230,000 at Princeton. There is a need-blind admissions policy so that no one is discriminated against based on financial need. However, when one enters the orange bubble that is Princeton, one is entering into a world that gives rise to tensions that dominate life inside and outside the classroom.

The University brand is a macro-realism; thus, the website states, “As a world-renowned research university, Princeton seeks to achieve the highest levels of distinction in the discovery and transmission of knowledge and understanding.”¹⁰ All of the students who receive the personally designed electronic email with the bold word of “congratulations” informing them of their acceptance to this prestigious institution represent young scholars of every stripe. These new Princeton Tigers, with wide-ranging distinctiveness as valedictorians, salutatorians, merit scholars, playwrights, musicians, artists, athletes, community activists and others, enter this new universe with great expectations.¹¹ Admission into the Ivies is a major feat for any student able to make the academic cut. The high grade point averages, outstanding test scores, uniquely diverse

¹⁰ Princeton University, 2012, www.princeton.edu (accessed August 16, 2012).

¹¹ The Tiger is the Princeton University mascot that emerged around 1882.

extracurricular and community service activities distinguish these future leaders from others. Professor Miguel Centeno, Chairman of the Sociology Department at the University, in a talk to the Campus Life staff, described the typical Princeton student as someone on the proverbial professorial tenure track since pre-school.¹² Those who study within the hallowed walls layered with Ivy are driven to succeed at all costs by parents, teachers, and their own inner voice.

In my role, I have witnessed the impact of extremely performance driven lives and the mental, emotional and spiritual chaos that causes some undergraduates to spiral out of control. John Kolligian executive director of University Health Services at the University provided insight regarding the challenges faced by Princeton students in a 2009 interview,

“About 18 to 20 percent of Princeton students visit University Health Services each year for mental health or alcohol-related issues — an increasing percentage that is higher than the average for all colleges but on par with Ivy peers. Kolligian suspects that the increased use of services is related to greater student awareness, better outreach, reduced stigma attached to mental-health problems,

and the fact that more students come to college already taking psychotropic medications.”¹³

The importance of this project is rooted in the belief that “Sabbath” is a practical alternative for collegiate students and others desiring to live holistic lives. In this research, Sabbath is being defined as a prescribed period of physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual restoration, a necessity for the 21st century undergraduate student

¹² Professor Miguel Centeno gave a talk on the challenges of student life to the Princeton University Vice President of Campus Life cohort group comprising: Athletics, Career Services, Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students, University Health Services, and the Office of Religious Life.

¹³ Katherine Federici Greenwood, “A moment with ... John Kolligian,” Princeton Alumni Weekly, <http://paw.princeton.edu/issues/2009/03/18/a-moment-with> (accessed January 25, 2014).

at an elite university like Princeton University. An argument could be made that this kind of intentional Sabbath is a dire need of all people seeking to negotiate the constant pressure and stress of life, not only students. God's Sabbath invitation is a counter cultural response to the intensity of stress and busyness that chiefly dominates collegiate life. For many students, sleep deprivation is accepted as a badge of honor. Furthermore, not sleeping for days, as opposed to the once in a while "all-nighters" of another era, is considered by many students as perfectly "normal." The self-inflicted level of stress experienced by the average student is unimaginable and unconscionable. Many members of this millennial generation believe that if they are not continuously engaging in intellectual pursuits they may be regarded as an "academic slacker." Schedules are often booked with little to no flexibility, forcing too many students towards a profanely stress-producing cycle.

Kolligian states further in his interview that during his tenure as Director of Counseling, he often gathered colleagues to talk about the pressure points for students at Princeton. He shares,

...We wondered if the increasing sense of globalization and instant communication and the 24-hour news cycle — if all that is taking a toll on the overall stress levels on our young people. We don't know for sure exactly what that toll is, but that, combined with increasing uncertainty around the economy, is certainly something we worry about. ... Students will say stress is the major factor getting in the way of their own academic excellence. They tend to take on a lot in terms of academics and extracurriculars. One colleague wrote a book entitled *College of the Overwhelmed* — that's an apt title for what a good number of students struggle with.¹⁴

Those of the millennial generation are not the only busy people burdened by the weight of stressful living. As a minister of the gospel, I find that I too succumb to this

¹⁴ Ibid.

way of life far more often than I would like to admit to myself, let alone anyone else. The “life button” is always in fast-forward and, in spite of my best efforts, not always as balanced as I would like it to be. I too, find myself much more hurried and harried on the journey called life as I seek to serve the millennials who always appear to be rushing from one activity to another, addicted to busyness.

Kirk Byron Jones in *Addicted to Hurry* lists several reasons why we run. He contends that there are a variety of reasons and cites them in no order of importance or prevalence:

We run to get things done;
 We run because the clock is ticking;
 We run because there is so much to do;
 We run to catch up;
 We run because of our jobs;
 We run to maintain control;
 We run for success;
 We run to be first; and
 We run because we do not know how to stop.¹⁵

All of the reasons the author cites in the chapter aptly titled “See Why We Run” provides insight into the broader context of how the “busy addiction” manifests itself through stress and controls all of life on some level. Whether one is an undergraduate student attending an elite university or tasked to support those striving to succeed within the university, the challenge to living a healthy life is a continuing one. It is my job to model, as much as I am able, the benefits of living a life of freedom and one that does not succumb to the detrimental harm of undue stress. However, freedom to live above the fray is not easily achieved, but requires intentionality in incorporating behaviors that will

¹⁵ Kirk Byron Jones, *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 20-25.

enable the students I serve, and me, to live more healthily. All privileged to be in the Princeton bubble are unquestionably in search of Sabbath within the hallowed halls of this elite community of learners.

A Love Affair with Stress

In 2011, UCLA Higher Education Research Institute conducted a study that concluded that today's first year college students are experiencing more stress than students twenty-five years ago. This study elicited a range of public responses to the report's conclusions. Kelsey Zimmerman, a Princeton senior columnist for the *Daily Princetonian*, the student newspaper, added her voice to the national conversation by writing an editorial titled "Why Princeton Students Have a Love Affair with Stress." She asserted, "After thinking it over, I quickly came to the conclusion that Princeton students are more stressed than the majority of college students. Of course, we deal with a lot of the same stressors that most college students do — grades, relationships, financial concerns. But Princeton students also face a lot of unique stressors."¹⁶ The expensive \$200,000 plus cost of a Princeton education, the unique holiday schedule returning students back after the break to take final exams, and the all-important glaring realism that they may not be the smartest person in the room are several factors. To be at Princeton University is to innately be aware that you are one smart person among many. Zimmerman summarizes,

¹⁶ Kelsey Zimmerman, "Why Princeton Students Have a Love Affair with Stress," *The Daily Princetonian*, February 1, 2011.

“Add in the fact that grade deflation makes it more difficult to get good grades, and you have Princeton’s recipe for ensuring the maximum amount of academic stress.”¹⁷

Many of the factors cited in the student’s article, as well as what I experienced firsthand during my years at the University, are true. These brilliant but chronically stressed and fatigued members of the millennial generation face the continuing challenge of being fully human and alive. Theologian Marva J. Dawn issues a universal call to Sabbath for all of humanity in penning these words:

To all the people who need the Sabbath—
 the busiest, who need to work from a cohesive unfragmented self;
 social activists, who need a cycle of worship and action;
 those who chase after fulfillment and need to understand
 their deepest yearnings and to hear the silence;
 those who have lost their ability to play because of the materialism and
 technologization of our society, who need beauty and gaiety and delight;
 those who have lost their passion and need to get in touch with feelings;
 those who are alone and need emotional nourishment;
 those who live in community and need solitude;
 those who cannot find their life’s priorities and need a new perspective;
 those who think the future is dictated by the present, who need hope and
 visions of future to change the present order ...
 those who need a relationship with God;
 those who want to be God’s instruments, enabled and empowered by
 the Spirit to be world changers and Sabbath healers.¹⁸

The question that emerges through Dawn’s clarion call is: How do we live full lives that serve as models for the larger world as transformative and healing? The fullness of life is experienced in an awareness that there is a gravitational pull of the culture upon us, but it is in allowing “deep calling unto deep” as cited in the Scriptures that nourishes and nurtures the soul opening us to receive the healing gift of Sabbath.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. v, vi.

Matthew Sleeth, MD., offers thought-provoking prescriptions in his book *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life*. It is Eugene Petersen's quoting of Sleeth in the foreword of the book that spoke to the heart of what this project seeks to understand. The quote succinctly states, "Sabbath is a time of transition from human doings to human beings."¹⁹ One of the greatest challenges on any college campus and in the living out of busy lives is carving out time to stop and simply "be" without the pressure of feeling that there must be an end result, a bottom line. We are divinely created human beings, which means that life is more than a quantitative commodity. As I pondered the purpose of this doctoral project for my ministerial context, I discovered that *doing* and *being* were constantly engaged in an ongoing battle of what was most pertinent. However, the call from without and within as *deep calling unto deep* continued to cause me to contemplate the deeper implications of what it truly means concerning "Keeping Holy Time."

Sabbath-breaking, is often done without reservation, but Sabbath-keeping is critical for our survival as individuals and the human family. For those who have no innate understanding of Sabbath, there remains the sense of what it means to be fully present to self and to others. Sabbath keeping in its essence is being fully present to life. Abraham Joshua Heschel captures the essence of the unequivocal need for Sabbath when he writes, "What would be a world without Sabbath? It would be a world that knew only itself or God distorted as a thing or the abyss separating God from the world, a world without the vision of a window in eternity that opens into time."²⁰ Heschel's argument throughout

¹⁹ Matthew Sleeth, *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), xii.

²⁰ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 16.

his seminal work *The Sabbath* urges us to live radically, which means that Sabbath is not an option; it is inextricably linked with the restoration and survival of the human spirit.

College Culture Is a Culprit

The college culture in many respects is one of the culprits in the distressing prognosis for the postmodern millennial generation on the Princeton University campus and beyond.²¹ Stress, which covers the spectrum of unhealthy manifestations from sleep deprivation to detachment through technology, is inflicting violence upon the human spirit. Young people are suffering dire consequences to live out performance driven lives. Alternatively, Sabbath rest and “intentional time out” offers a worthwhile answer to living life in a decisively different manner.

The poignant words of the fourth commandment of Scripture, “Remember the Sabbath...” as well as “... and God rested on the seventh day” echoed loudly as I thought about the millennial generation and wider campus population that I serve. The intention of the Creator is that we rest, pause and delight in the wondrous gift of life. Sabbath as defined in the Scriptures encompasses a weekly twenty-four hour period of dedicated time to savor and relish life moments more purposely. However, limiting the Sabbath exclusively to the *chronos* (human quantitative time) on a calendar misses the opportunity to experience *kairos* (God’s qualitative time) and the transcendent touch of the Creator that transforms all of life. Donna Schaper in *Sabbath Keeping* cites theologian Heather Murray Elkins who speaks of “altaring time,” that is to see the sacred

²¹ In the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually, www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gengloss/postm-body.htm

at the core of the clock; hence, saying yes to the movement of time, and in doing so, saying yes to God who is the source of time's movement."²² But it is more than merely recognizing the movement of time. To altar time is to see time as sacred and holy movement that alters us in a way that brings to the fore and the core of life true transformation – and that is the sanctification of time.

Amy Seed in her blog “Learning to Observe Sabbath Moments” states that a quote she came across on Pinterest is most relevant in response to the performance driven culture that we live in, “Stop the glorification of busy.” The glorification of busy for college students whom she is addressing in *The Boundless Blog* names sleep deprivation, capitulating to the notion of having the most work to do, and being totally consumed by busyness to feel a sense of achievement that sets one above others. The madness of this cycle in college is for many the beginning of the end for those who do not periodically incorporate resting as a part of the human sojourn. For those who may feel that Sabbath is only another space to fill on the schedule Seed suggests that moments of Sabbath can center the heart and give solace to the soul. The author captures this idea in embracing Sabbath as moments of time when she writes,

“In the midst of my busyness, I’ve learned to seize small moments throughout the week to cease doing. Sometimes our Sabbath doesn’t fall on Saturday or Sunday, but the important thing is that we recognize and observe Sabbath moments. It helps us refocus on God, and it opens our eyes to what God is doing around us and in us.”²³

²² Donna Schaper, *Sabbath Keeping* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1999), 9.

²³ Amy Seed, “Learning to Observe Sabbath Moments,” *The Boundless Blog*, entry posted May 16, 2013, <http://community.focusonthefamily.com/> (accessed November 15, 2013).

Princeton University students hunger for programs that invite them to pause and reflect. From September to May during any given academic year, the campus is over programmed with numerous offerings of every kind. This is a world-class university and the world comes through the Fitz Randolph Gates inviting students to assume more than they can possibly imagine. The students who enter the gates take upon themselves the mantle of incredulous expectation to perform with perfection. While this is the truth of many lives, a significant number of students long for time in the midst of their busy and driven lives – to be still, to partake of Sabbath.

This doctoral project will explore relevant questions addressing the challenge and opportunity of “Keeping Holy Time” in order to be fully human and alive: (1) Is there a role that the ancient tradition of Sabbath can have in the life of a twenty-first century Ivy League university student? (2) Can a student’s life experience be deepened by a planned daily practice of nurturing the inner life? (3) Is it possible that a regular Sabbath experience might be the Balm in Gilead (a healing salve for the soul)?²⁴ (4) What is needed to counter the stress and busyness seeking to enslave the soul of students of modernity? Even as questions are posed for the millennial generation, these are questions for myself as well: Am I honestly keeping holy time and honoring the divine rhythm of life? Do I dare live counter culturally and intentionally as a profound act of faith by keeping holy time? Are the forces of stress, pressure, and the societal addiction of blatant busyness dominating my life in such an insidious way that there is an inadvertent glorification of being “busy?”

²⁴ Balm of Gilead was originally a healing compound (a balm) made from the resinous gum of a bush which grew plentifully in the area of Gilead. Its fruit was called Carpobalsamum, and the dried twigs Xylobalsamum. This compound was exported widely. The Balm of Gilead is mentioned several times in the Bible, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balm_of_Gilead (accessed March 8, 2014).

The next chapter provides two narratives that serve as the impetus for this project offering profoundly personal insights into the demands upon student life and lessons learned. Ethnographic interview schedules offer the parameters for the project and from its earliest days until now is critical to answering the pertinent questions of this doctoral thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IMPETUS FOR THE PROJECT: TWO NARRATIVES

The idea for this project was crystallized during the summer of 2012 while attending the Drew Doctor of Ministry (DMIN) three-week intensive course of study. I pondered how to connect the *learnings* in the classroom that were definitively church oriented to my context as a clergy member in the university setting. I love the church and know the church well. But I wanted to translate the new knowledge effectively to my particular specialized ministerial environment. What was the relevant question for the majority of the flock that I serve whose demographics look more like the United Nations than any homogenous church body? How would the thesis project support and serve the mission of the university for undergraduate students at a secular university? Princeton's religious heritage is undeniable, as the University Chapel is a towering icon of religious identity on campus. In this sacred cathedral, all undergraduate students begin and conclude the academic journey with Interfaith Opening Exercises and a Baccalaureate Service. It was vitally important that the project address a need of the community and the principal need was how to confront the stress of life in the Princeton bubble and establish a healthy life balance through pausing, resting and delighting in life. This cultural crisis of busyness is not unique to Princeton and is pervasive in the larger world as faster, bigger, and better dominate our every waking moment.

The *Preaching Life* required our class to take a field trip into New York City to visit the great cathedrals of faith in Brooklyn once pastored by three great preachers that we were studying: Harry Emerson Fosdick, Riverside Church; Henry Ward Beecher, Plymouth Church; and Gardner Calvin Taylor, Concord Baptist Church of Christ. As we traveled from one destination to the next we engaged in conversations about the urgent call upon all our lives. During this time someone shared a story about a young woman who was a recent graduate of Princeton University who encountered profound struggles during her time of matriculation. The young woman had been academically gifted from childhood and a highly sought after “academic 1,” which means that she could have written her ticket to attend any University in the country. Her stellar academic success guaranteed a coveted spot at Princeton. After almost three seemingly successful years at the University, the family was astounded to receive a call from the young woman during her junior year indicating she needed to take time off from the University. In the early conversations, her family discouraged her from doing so, and indicated that this was a challenging phase she was going through and things would improve. In subsequent conversations, the young woman was adamant with her family that if she did not withdraw from school immediately she believed she was headed for a psychotic episode; she felt like she was approaching a deep dark place of no return. It was only after this agonizingly jarring conversation that the family agreed to support her decision and welcomed her home for a break from her academic studies. She took the time off and embraced care of self and eventually returned to the University to graduate. When I heard this story, it stirred something within me about

the fragility of life and how essential it is to listen to the inner voice that serves as a compass.

The second story that surfaced as I thought about the challenges of collegiate life at Princeton is one that I often share with new Princetonians. This narrative remains with me for numerous reasons, but I think the primary reason is that it is so representative of the larger student population. One of my favorite and most active student leaders on the Hallelujah Worship Committee, a weekly Christian worship service on campus, completely surprised me by an unexpected action as we were preparing to depart for an overnight retreat. Quentin (granted permission to share his story) was in his junior year and actively engaged in the ministry on campus whenever the doors were open. He attended services every Sunday, served as a ready participant and principal contributor at the weekly Bible Study, was quite involved as an engaged voice at the bi-monthly leadership meetings, and a well-grounded intellectual, spiritually mature, and innately intuitive guy from the Mid-west. A religion major with an interest in pursuing doctoral studies, part of his future trajectory was to possibly teach at a university or seminary.

He was the spiritual life chair, the one designated to create opportunities for spiritual growth, exploration and formation. The worship committee planned its annual spring semester overnight retreat and he was a chief member of the planning team. It was the chance to escape if ever so briefly from the campus for a time of Sabbath, a prescribed period of spiritual restoration. No one would deny or question that most Princeton students are type “A,” and always in the busy mode trying to outdistance themselves academically from their peers and stay on top of their studies. All the retreat attendees were assembled to board the van for this short excursion from the rigors of academic

work. As we were loading up, it was noted that our dynamic student leader and chair had not arrived yet. Someone telephoned him and he assured us that he was on his way.

When he arrived, I was shocked to see that he was rolling an extremely large 28" to 32" suitcase. Usually a suitcase this large would be utilized for a trip exceeding a week. The retreat trip was to be a 24-hour getaway; everyone would return to the campus the very next day.

It seemed most appropriate to inquire about the very large piece of luggage that he was preparing to load onto the van. What he shared upon my inquiry completely surprised me. His response to my query proved most interesting in more ways than I could have ever imagined. The extremely large suitcase was not filled with clothing or other items that he would not be able to live without for one night, but rather books for the purpose of doing research and writing during any breaks while on retreat. In that brief exchange, I became extremely aware that our students needed to be introduced to God's command in Genesis and Deuteronomy to observe the Sabbath. Although we were an exclusively Protestant Sunday church-going body of believers, introducing the spiritual and theological resources from the Judeo-Christian faith tradition would enable students to begin to understand the intrinsic value of achieving life balance.

This particular student's story was more than a reminder that the gift of life is not in the doing but the being. In the New Testament Jesus speaks of humankind not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath made for humankind. Sabbath, as it relates to the students at Princeton University, is not a day of the week but a time in which to engage in being still and allowing their lives to listen to the God that yearns to speak words of peace and hope

to the soul. I am happy to report that the student participated fully in the retreat without opening up any of the books he brought with him.

He reported in a testimony in the Sunday worship service that the retreat had actually afforded him such renewal that he was able to accomplish much more than he had anticipated upon his return. But more than merely returning to do work and rushing back into the academic grind, he had discovered that in embracing Sabbath as resistance to the culture of “do it now,” he was changed for the better and a living witness to others. What was most interesting is that as others listened to his spoken word, they too echoed similar sentiments that the retreat had added value to their lives in more ways than they had ever imagined. Quentin’s heartfelt and honest testimony became a catalyst that helped the community think more deeply about their relationship with God, others and most importantly themselves.

The Apostle Paul, in the letter to the Romans, advises transformation by the renewing of the mind when he writes in chapter 12 and verse 2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” One student’s inner transformation served as a witness to others that making space for God in the busyness of life changed everything in such a positive way that it ingrained a difference in his life. This religion major that had plans to become a professor someday (and may still pursue that path) currently serves as a city councilman and mayor pro tem in his mid-size Midwestern city. I cannot help but think that the defining moment during his junior year in college continues to inform his busy life as he seeks to serve the common good of his community.

There are numerous stories of students damaged emotionally, psychologically and spiritually by the culture of stress that creates a harsh and unhealthy environment. The chapter on “Intellectual Rest” in *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* captures this idea succinctly, “Sabbath keeping gives us time to rest ... into this holy time the Spirit comes with renewing power and transforms our thinking from the inside into new patterns in line with the perfect wisdom of God.”¹ What does it mean to allow renewing rest to empower the body, mind and soul? It is being aware that we are not our own and the care of the mind is in actuality care for the total being. The care of our physical life is inextricably linked to the care of the totality of our existence and well-being. When we care for the body through allowing ourselves to be renewed through physical rest – this is an essential manner in which to care for the mind.

It matters not whether it is the student with the very large suitcase packed with books to study during a retreat, or the sophomore woman refusing to sleep for three days while studying for exams, or the student walking alone who never makes eye contact with people, or even the one who is always in another zone listening to music or talking on the cell phone; the call to holy rest and play is the call to fully engage the most precious gift of all – life. Sabbath transcends faith traditions in a place like Princeton University and affords students of every religious tradition a sacred opportunity to partake of the resplendent beauty of life found in relationship with God and in the countenance of our neighbor. Life is not lived in isolation and those on the journey are encountering in the faces of others a reflection of what it means to be truly human. Carl Savage’s insights

¹ Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 83.

on the power of stories and how they shape our identities emerged in these defining narratives, “We are in a real sense, our stories. Who we are, what we think, and how we act are all shaped by the many large and small stories that make up the discourse embedded in our multi-sensory social experience.”²

The Sabbath Project: Keeping Holy Time

While the two narratives were the definitive impetus for the project, the challenge was how to actualize this project in a community where time is often altered (controlled) and not altered (sanctified). In a highly competitive community of learners, time is a commodity highly guarded, and quite limited, including my own. Most of my DMIN cohort colleagues knew early in their studies what projects they would undertake in their church ministry contexts. Several intensives had given the theological fodder upon which to build their ideas. I felt like a DMIN candidate in a strange land, needing to find a song that would resonate in my ministry venue. Once the idea of exploring Sabbath became my focus of research, the first challenge was figuring out the best methodology and whether this prospective project would be feasible. Initially, I thought that there would be a relatively comprehensive threefold approach: 1). Conduct interviews or surveys targeting a small but representative demographic of the undergraduate population; 2). Establish a post- interviews six-week course on Sabbath practices as a result of findings from the interviews; 3). Invite participants to culminate the project experience by joining in a 24-hour silent retreat. The University schedule necessitated a more reasonable path of least

² Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 25.

resistance. Good ideas versus time constraints defined the actual execution of the most feasible objective of the Sabbath Project. Ethnographic interviews were the most attainable goal on the itinerary.

The next step in the process was soliciting the assistance of administrative colleagues and chaplains to recommend students who would agree to be interviewed for the Sabbath Project, as I named it in the subject line of my Macedonian email call outreach.³ With the help of professional colleagues, I was able to contact interested students whose names were submitted and conducted eighteen interviews in the spring semester. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the Office of Religious Life Library and lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour. The research participants were remarkably engaged in the topic and provided invaluable insights into the Princeton culture and psyche of the average Princeton student.

The ethnographic interviews involved undergraduate students who were actively engaged with the Office of Religious Life or chaplaincies under its auspices. Students interviewed represented various religious traditions: Baptist, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, Non-Denominational, Protestant (mainline), Roman Catholic, Jewish (representing diverse branches of Judaism), and one student who was an African American from an interfaith family in which the father was Jewish, and the mother a practicing Christian.

Prior to beginning the official interview, each participant was given a brief overview of the purpose of the project and asked to complete the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) consent form agreeing to voluntarily participate in the research project. All

³ The Macedonian call is a missionary call for help as expressed by the Apostle Paul in Acts 16:9 -10.

interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewee. The interviews were conducted from April 11th through May 23rd.

The questions posed were divided into four sections to acquire information to facilitate understanding the particular narrative of each student. Princeton students are not cookie cutter replicas of one another; thus, the intention of the questions were to hear where there were parallels and variations in the narratives. The biographical and demographic information secured enabled this interviewer to establish rapport with the interviewee by allowing the student to share their most prized possession – their life story, and offer some gleaning into the student’s personal world prior to Princeton.

Biographical and Demographic Profile

- a. Tell me a bit about yourself and life before Princeton University.
- b. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
- c. Do you have siblings? If an only child, what was that like growing up?
- d. What was your high school educational experience like? Did you attend a private or public high school?
- e. Were you involved in lots of extracurricular activities?
- f. Do you have particular hobbies and extracurricular interests?
- g. What color would describe your personality and why?

The greatest duty for an undergraduate of the Princeton academic community is being a student in the orange and black bubble that dominates life for at least four years and informs the Princetonian’s life for years to come. There are unwritten rules and great expectations placed upon members of this community; hence, life is not lived in the

shadows but very publicly via rankings, classifications, and the “internal expectations” that the student places upon himself or herself. These questions were posed to ascertain how students balance life in the impermeable bubble and gain clarity regarding how students negotiate the inevitable maze that can produce stressful outcomes during their academic careers.

Balancing Life in the Princeton University Bubble

- a. When you hear the word stress as a Princeton University student, does it evoke a positive or negative response?
- b. In a typical week, how often do you feel stressed at Princeton?
- c. How would you describe the relationship between Princeton and stress?
- d. What would you say are the primary sources of stress for a college student?
- e. What would you say are the primary sources of stress for students at this Ivy League university?
- f. How much of the stress experienced do you think is internal?
- g. How much of the stress experienced do you think is external?
- h. What would a stress free day look or feel like for you?

The purpose of the questions exploring meaning was to obtain an understanding of what gives students life beyond the classroom experience. Questions were framed to cause students to move from merely giving answers that would solely evoke and elicit intellectual assent to shifting to a level of intuitive witness. These questions were designed to hear what resonates in the heart of the students.

Searching For the Soul and Pondering the Big Questions

- a. What are the ways in which you find meaning and purpose in life?
- b. Where are the places you find the most meaning?
- c. Who are the people that inspire you the most?
- d. How often do you have deep conversations with your fellow Princetonians about the big questions of life?
- e. What are the large life questions that keep you awake at night?
- f. What are the grace-filled moments that cause your soul to ascend?

The objective of this final section was to learn from students if practicing Sabbath as a life project was a reasonable and achievable goal for members of the millenials generation. Additionally, the aim of this section was to gain innovative ideas and insights from the students of how to implement diverse and creative Sabbath practices in the everyday life of a university student.

Embracing Sabbath as a Life Practice

- a. When you hear the word “Sabbath,” what kinds of emotions or thoughts does it evoke in you?
- b. Do you employ particular spiritual practices that have great meaning for your life?
- c. Do you have a weekly or daily Sabbath opportunity that you employ?
- d. Is community important in your practice of Sabbath?
- e. What would Sabbath look like as a life practice at Princeton University?
- f. Name one Sabbath practice that has been most beneficial for you.

g. Has this interview opportunity afforded you a Sabbath-like retreat in any way?

When I began this doctoral project I was not aware that the methodology that would prove to be most expedient would be ethnographic interviews. Listening to people's lives is what encompasses the heart of my ministry. Trying to translate what I hear in order to respond pastorally and prophetically through the ministry of the word, sacrament and presence is the hoped for result. Mary Clark Moschella, in her book groundbreaking book *Ethnography*, passionately proclaims, "Listening can be a means of grace, as it brings forth stories through which people make sense of their lives and become aware of the larger reality."⁴ I found this claim consistent with what happened during the ethnographic interviews with the eighteen Princeton University students. They opened themselves up to the known and unknown truths of their lives as they verbally shared their narratives. Every interview began with the same set of questions, but the stories that unfolded were distinctive as the students openly talked about stress, but dared to think about Sabbath and its potential life-giving power.

Eighteen different stories evolved and offered insights into individual journeys that presented a corporate understanding of exactly how students dare live out their own narrative of concern. I agree wholeheartedly with Moschella's view that affirms, "Ethnography is a way of immersing yourself in the life of a people in order to learn something about and from them. Ethnography as a pastoral practice involves opening your eyes and ears to understand the ways in which people practice their faith."⁵

⁴ Moschella, Mary Clark, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 144.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

Sabbath involves slowing down long enough to be enveloped by a holy sense of being. The looming research question that guided this endeavor is, “Is there a role that the ancient practice of Sabbath can have in the life of a twenty-first century Ivy League university student?” I began the one-on-one interviews of eighteen with this central research question guiding my thinking as I listened to responses. The goal was to ascertain from this small sampling of the student body some broader understanding of the common themes in all of the students’ lives. No specific group or individual had a monopoly on the pressure of stress or addiction to busyness within an Ivy League University like Princeton. A majority of the student population who walk the hallowed grounds of Princeton University are there because they are high achievers who pushed themselves like Olympians to achieve the gold medal of a prospective sheepskin degree that grants them enviable currency in the larger world.

Students who consented to be interviewed for the project responded to the email with enthusiasm and appreciation for being invited to participate. Each one arrived on time and appeared delighted to take the time to talk about their Princeton University life as an undergraduate. I sensed throughout the interview process that the invitation was a welcome interruption of the busyness in the students’ hectic pace in the second semester of an inevitably demanding year just by being a Princetonian.

Interviews were conducted in my office with a panoramic view of the main plaza of the campus as well as Prospect House, the faculty/staff club on campus. The principal interview site was key in the project. A majority of the interviews were held in the newly created ORL Library located on the second floor of Murray-Dodge Hall where the Office of Religious Life is housed. The space seats eight people comfortably at the

medium sized table and is furnished with beautiful oak bookcases. It is a comfortable and safe space. The ORL Library faces the University's Art Museum, which is directly across from the back of the office building. There is always an amazing piece of art to view on the grounds. During the interview, I intentionally seated myself so that every interviewee was positioned facing the Art Museum. Princeton's campus is especially gorgeous in the spring and outside this window one could behold radiant beauty as spring opened its expanding seasonal arms to welcome us once again to its embrace.

Each interview began with thanking participants for allotting the time to conduct the interview amid a busy schedule. Many of the interviewees thanked me for asking them to participate and made it known through body language and verbal affirmation of their appreciation for the opportunity to speak aloud of their stress burdened lives. The demographic and biographical questions were included to establish rapport with the student and to learn a bit about their life and academic journey prior to Princeton. I was interested in discovering if the stressful life was as prevalent during their high school years in a public or private school. All but two of the students indicated that their high school academic curriculum seemed much more rigorous than the Princeton experience. One participant, a female freshman student expressed her feelings in this way: "Some people would be surprised to hear me say this, but I was actually more stressed in high school than I am here. High school caused me to have "panic attacks," a place that I never want to go back to."⁶ One of the questions that I posed in the interview was, "What color would describe your personality and why?" I wanted to get a sense of how the students saw themselves or perceived that others viewed them in light of the highly

⁶ Participant 9 interview.

intense Princeton culture. The breakdown was fascinating because most students chose blue or green. The freshman student who did not encounter the Princeton academic workload as stressful in the same way as others cited orange as the color to best describe her personality, which she denoted was bright, bubbly with a deep side. This particular student's sense of self-care seems to enable her to negotiate the academic terrain differently.

Thirteen of the eighteen respondents stated that when they hear the word *stress* as a Princeton University student it evoked either a “definitely negative” or “negative” response. Many of the students attributed the stressful nature of the environment to the *expectations* placed upon them by the institution, parents, and themselves. A senior who posited herself as “not one of the extraordinary Princetonians” shared that she believed that the problem of the stress-induced life was directly related to the obsession with accomplishment and excelling. David Brooks penned an important article about the “elite generation” of students for the *Atlantic Monthly* over a decade ago. In the thought-provoking article that gained national attention entitled “The Organization Kid,” he described the quintessential Princeton University student in this way:

In short, at the top of the meritocratic ladder we have in America a generation of students who are extraordinarily bright, morally earnest, and incredibly industrious. They like to study and socialize in groups. They create and join organizations with great enthusiasm. They are responsible, safety conscious, and mature. They feel no compelling need to rebel – not even a hint of one. They not only defer to authority; they admire it. “Alienation” is a word one almost never hears from them. They regard the universe as beneficent, orderly, and meaningful. At the schools and colleges where the next leadership class is being bred, one finds not angry revolutionaries, despondent slackers, or dark cynics but the Organization Kid.⁷

⁷ David Brooks, “The Organization Kid,” *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1, 2001).

A common theme for most of the interviewees was the pressure to live up to the Princeton name in terms of earning the best grades to be admitted to the best graduate schools or landing the coveted top jobs. The senior continued by asserting,

Our sense of identity is often really divorced from anything that is not considered accomplishment. This is the speech that is given every year to the freshman class. You guys are the brightest and the best and you worked really hard, learned a lot and accomplished so much to get here. We know ex facto that if you keep this up you are going on to do great things. So that's what the identity of the school is. It is not that we love New Jersey or something else — or a common theme challenging us to do good.⁸

The female senior's perspective reflects one noteworthy value of the institution: accomplishment. But it can also be argued that the administrative leadership of the university and the faculty desire students who achieve as well as live meaningful and purposeful lives. President Christopher Eisgruber, newly installed 20th President of the University shared in his first Opening Exercises address to the Freshman Class these words,

All of you have been blessed with exceptional talents, and your time on this campus is itself a great gift. When, four years from now, you graduate from Princeton, you will find it easier than most people to be successful at whatever career you pursue. But being successful is not the same thing as being fulfilled or living a life that matters.

So I hope that, as you pursue class work and research, as you compete on the playing fields, as you sing, dance and perform your way through Princeton, as you enjoy the camaraderie of the wonderful students around you — as, in other words, you experience all that this University has to offer — you will also find time to wrestle with and to delight in the question about what it means to live life well.⁹

That is the tension woven within the complex culture of the Princeton University ethos — to stop, halt, rest embrace Sabbath during the four year Princeton pilgrimage to “wrestle

⁸ Participant 7 interview.

⁹ Christopher Eisgruber, Opening Exercises: Princeton's Honor World speech delivered on September 8, 2013 at the University Chapel to the incoming Freshman Class 2017.

with and delight in the question about what it means to live life well.” Living well is synonymous with slowing down long enough to fully participate in the life that is before you.

Figures 1-3 provide an overview summary of the responses to the section on “Balancing Life in the Princeton University Bubble.” The charts provide a glimpse of the responses to the selected questions in that section. Data that repeatedly surfaced during the interviews related to how the relationship between stress, achievement and control of one’s life and destiny were interconnected. During the interviews I was indeed a story broker drawing out the unique journeys of eighteen diversely different women and men. The information discovered in the interviews speaks to the heart of *Narrative Research in Ministry* when Savage and Presnell write, “As one was kenotically listening at the outset, now one narrates not advertises; one announces not propagandizes. That does not mean none should be embolden to state where one has been made wise by research, inspired by the emergent outcome or surprised by grace.¹⁰ The surprise of grace was to hear again and again how each student in one way or another struggled in accepting their place at Princeton University. The real or imagined battle with stress was a direct result of their own uncertainty regarding their worthiness to be a Princetonian.

Each chart offers concise responses to questions in the designated section and present a visual of the students’ answers based upon gender and class year. One prevailing theme among most of the seniors was the consistent negative response regarding stress. This was quite interesting since all the seniors were at the end of their Princeton University academic career. Some of the responses evoked deep seated feelings about the sense of

¹⁰ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 126.

self, the burden and blessing of bearing the Princeton name in the world, and how busyness inextricably linked to a sense of significance.

Ellen Kent, a member of the LAC and a psychologist at Princeton reviewed the charts and offered the insight that many of the students revealed that much of their stress is internal. Some of the responses were surprising to her as it related to the one student's feeling of being "caged" and "stress being a notch on the belt." She concluded that it appeared that the students felt that they were in "control.

	Respondent 1 ♂ Sophomore	Respondent 2 ♀ Senior	Respondent 3 ♂ Senior	Respondent 4 ♂ Senior	Respondent 5 ♂ Sophomore	Respondent 6 ♀ Sophomore
When you hear the word “stress” as a Princeton University student, does it evoke a positive or negative response?	We hear a lot about stress at Princeton University. Stress is always here.	It evokes a negative response.	The word evokes a negative response.	Negative.	Definitely negative! It is a day-to-day reality of Princeton.	Definitely negative! It’s very familiar to people. It defines your experience.
How often do you feel stressed in a typical week?	I do not feel stressed anymore. Grown use to the workload.	I feel stressed every day or 20 times a week.	When I board a plane in Africa to come back to Princeton, I immediately feel a different vibe – it makes me feel like I am caged.	Stress is a symbol of status, another notch on the belt.	I experience stress daily.	There is never a typical week. I am more use to as a part of life – once a week.
How would you describe the relationship between Princeton University and stress?	Princeton University and stress are synonymous.	The environment creates stress.	Princeton and stress are one in the same.	There is a love/hate relationship with stress. People like to have all their time filled up.	I think the relationship between Princeton and stress is manifested through its students. Everyone is trying to excel at everything.	Princeton is a place where people put on a face where everything is fine.
What are the primary sources of stress for students at this Ivy League University?	Schoolwork, tests, papers – getting good grades. Meeting EXPECTATIONS of parents. Social drama!	Academic work, bickering, EXPECTATIONS.	A Princeton student is ALWAYS TRYING TO PROVE THEMSELVES TO OTHERS.	People are usually stressed out by classes.	Eating clubs and the bickering. If one does not get in – you are “hosed!”	Schoolwork, social stress, eating clubs.
How much of the stress experienced at Princeton University is internal versus external?	Most of the stress is internal.	It depends on the worldview and how much you take ownership.	Princeton has tons of work, but you make a life.		The external stress is more academic stress; internal is related more to the social aspect of life.	Most stress is internal, a sense of getting overwhelmed.
What color would describe your personality and why?	Blue or green = Calm person	Reddish orange like an autumn leaf = Excitable, passionate, dynamism, engaged	Blue = Steady guy, pretty chill	Blue = Calm and contained	Blue (Middle spectrum) = Laid back, not too emotional	Green = In control

Figure 1. Balancing Life in the Princeton University Bubble

	Respondent 7 ♀ Senior	Respondent 8 ♂ Junior	Respondent 9 ♀ Freshman	Respondent 10 ♂ Sophomore	Respondent 11 ♂ Senior	Respondent 12 ♀ Senior
When you hear the word “stress” as a Princeton University student, does it evoke a positive or negative response?	It definitely evokes a negative response.	In almost every sense – a negative response.	Definitely invokes a negative response.	It use to evoke a negative response, because it is so commonplace. But now it is pretty neutral.	Negative. In some ways I see stress as positive, because it motivates me.	Positive. No longer struggling with stress.
How often do you feel stressed in a typical week?	Rare to feel intense stress, but a couple times a week I feel stressed.	Regular intervals –peaks at beginning of the week.	Once or twice a week.	Definitely every day, multiple times a day for a plethora of reasons.	Two to three times a week.	No stress. Prioritizing my schedule with God made things fall into place more easily.
How would you describe the relationship between Princeton University and stress?	Most students don’t have institutions to lift stress off their backs. Obsession with ACCOMPLISHMENT.	Incredibly competitive environment.	Being a freshman, it’s not too bad.	One in the same.	Princeton causes stress! PRESSURE TO PERFORM well at Princeton.	There is a culture of stress; everything revolves around how much work you have to do.
What are the primary sources of stress for students at this Ivy League University?	Workload, future prospects, metaphysical questions, relationships.	The root cause of stress is grades.	Academics. The stress of feeling like you have to be the BEST AND SUCCEED.	Academic work, EXPECTATIONS for the best grades,	PRESSURE TO PERFORM at the Ivy League.	Academic workload and the future.
How much of the stress at Princeton University experienced is internal versus external?	It is hard to detangle the two. There is a culture of stress at Princeton in comparison to other colleges.	Most of the stress is internal.	A lot of the stress is internal.	Stress is internal! It is the stress we put on ourselves.	Most of the stress is internal.	Stress all internal.
What color would describe your personality and why?	Orange = Bright, unusual, not excessively cheery	Green = Active, movement, cheery, vibrancy, nature, engaging	Orange = Bright, bubbly, deep side	Green = Not very in your face; not boring like brown or gray	Red = Reserved, introverted, excitement, passion, fiery	Purple/blue = Cool, calm, tranquil

Figure 2. Balancing Life in the Princeton University Bubble

	Respondent 7 ♀ Senior	Respondent 8 ♂ Junior	Respondent 9 ♀ Freshman	Respondent 10 ♂ Sophomore	Respondent 11 ♂ Senior	Respondent 12 ♀ Senior
When you hear the word “stress” as a Princeton University student, does it evoke a positive or negative response?	It definitely evokes a negative response.	In almost every sense – a negative response.	Definitely invokes a negative response.	It use to evoke a negative response, because it is so commonplace. But now it is pretty neutral.	Negative. In some ways I see stress as positive, because it motivates me.	Positive. No longer struggling with stress.
How often do you feel stressed in a typical week?	Rare to feel intense stress, but a couple times a week I feel stressed.	Regular intervals –peaks at beginning of the week.	Once or twice a week.	Definitely every day, multiple times a day for a plethora of reasons.	Two to three times a week.	No stress. Prioritizing my schedule with God made things fall into place more easily.
How would you describe the relationship between Princeton University and stress?	Most students don’t have institutions to lift stress off their backs. Obsession with ACCOMPLISHMENT.	Incredibly competitive environment.	Being a freshman, it’s not too bad.	One in the same.	Princeton causes stress! PRESSURE TO PERFORM well at Princeton.	There is a culture of stress; everything revolves around how much work you have to do.
What are the primary sources of stress for students at this Ivy League University?	Workload, future prospects, metaphysical questions, relationships.	The root cause of stress is grades.	Academics. The stress of feeling like you have to be the BEST AND SUCCEED.	Academic work, EXPECTATIONS for the best grades,	PRESSURE TO PERFORM at the Ivy League.	Academic workload and the future.
How much of the stress at Princeton University experienced is internal versus external?	It is hard to detangle the two. There is a culture of stress at Princeton in comparison to other colleges.	Most of the stress is internal.	A lot of the stress is internal.	Stress is internal! It is the stress we put on ourselves.	Most of the stress is internal.	Stress all internal.
What color would describe your personality and why?	Orange = Bright, unusual, not excessively cheery	Green = Active, movement, cheery, vibrancy, nature, engaging	Orange = Bright, bubbly, deep side	Green = Not very in your face; not boring like brown or gray	Red = Reserved, introverted, excitement, passion, fiery	Purple/blue = Cool, calm, tranquil

Figure 3. Balancing Life in the Princeton University Bubble

The section of the interview on *Searching for the Soul and Pondering the Big Questions* was suggested by one of the members of the LAC. There was a sense that if the aim of the project was to discover how meaning interwoven with the practice of Sabbath could transform students' lives then it was necessary to hear where and how meaning was actualized in their lives. When the conversation shifted from stress to meaning, I was amazed to see how the narratives were thickening.

One participant spoke of an experience during her freshman year that informed her journey at Princeton:

I think I have been searching for meaning throughout my college days and academically as well. That is why I took the Hume's series. When I was a freshman, I remember I attended my first Manna small group meeting and we were asked, "What do you want your four years at Princeton to be like?" I wanted to graduate knowing what is most important to me and why. I wanted to know what I believe and what it means to live life to the full as much I can. My meaning and purpose come from my relationship with God. As I have grown in my faith, my greatest fullness comes from a relationship that is not about me. This relationship with God is not about me, but knowing that the best and fullest meaning in life comes from giving up control. People don't like this idea, they want agency, but I feel the best meaning comes from giving up control.¹¹

Another participant spoke of realizing that life is not limited to their realm alone but is much larger:

One of the ways I find meaning in life is looking at the bigger picture of life than these narrow things. The reason that many people do not find meaning is because their version of life is so small. It's about getting an "A" or getting this car or living in this house and town. Enjoying all of God's creation as he has created it gives meaning. Just walking outside on a day like this spring day, and finding all these flowers outside is so beautiful. There are things that God gave us to make us feel human, because these things are engineered into us to enjoy is a big part. Secondly, to live a life that's not about you. I didn't realize that has such a big difference in how you live your life and how meaningful you find your life.

¹¹ Participant 2. Interview.

As said before, the life here is all about achievement – it's about making your story great and as awesome as it possibly could be. But what if you came into a day thinking that this world was not about you? What if it was about making other people's story great? That was revolutionary for me. Radically living life for other people gives you such a different perspective on life, and it keeps you from this constant neurotic state of mind where you have to prove yourself and justify yourself.¹²

Another participant addressed what it means to ponder the big questions as well as what keeps her awake at night and shared the following:

On campus I have not found that we talk much about the big questions. I have gotten into the habit of thinking about the bigger questions, but it's not a normal thing. I think about suffering. The suffering of so many people that no one really notices. It's because we live in such a superficial society. People focus on what's on the outside and not how things actually are. We have mass shootings, bombings and other atrocities and they are often done by young people. The culture seems to be raising people who look fine on the outside, because people don't probe deeper to see what's happening. I'm concerned for the inner state of people – and that keeps me awake at night. When I say suffering, I don't only mean physical suffering, but psychological, mental, and spiritual suffering. That's what keeps me up at night.¹³

Moschella speaks of listening as an art form of allowing the speaker to share their truth, their story – without analysis or judgment. As I listened to the stories of the students, I realized that I had to exercise a kenotic position, which meant that there needed to be an emptying of self and an openness to hear the responses all the way through. Moschella comments, “Listening is difficult because it requires us to give up the role of expert, and become a learner again.”¹⁴ This revelation became glaringly apparent as I listened to one student speak in response to the “meaning” question. There

¹² Participant 2. Interview.

¹³ Participant 12. Interview

¹⁴ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 142.

was a pause and then the student mentioned struggling with depression. In that moment, I thought- I need to hear to this, but I am not certain I want to. As I allowed the student to continue, I learned a bit more about the “depth of being” resident in this young collegiate.

The student shared her truth in this way:

I guess religion is a big thing for me. (A long pause before continuing) Occasionally, I struggle with depression and so sometimes it's hard to find meaning or purpose in life. I find generally when I return to fellowship that being with other Christians definitely helps, because it reminds me of just how much God has done in my life and what God is calling me to do. I also derive a lot of purpose in life from family. My young sister is most important to me as well as making sure I'm there for her. I also realize the things I do now will affect my future and I'm reminded of how much God has done and what it means.

One of the things I want to be able to do is to adopt, to help children in the system. I think that will give me the greatest fulfillment to be able to directly impact someone's life and see the visible changes. I believe that's really what God has called us to do and that's where I derive a lot of my purpose.¹⁵

This student’s perspective on Sabbath and community fleshed out her understanding of meaning as she offered these thoughts:

You cannot truly experience Sabbath if you're on the clock. I attended a Catholic School once and everyday right after lunch and before the next class, Sister Jada, would position herself at the front of the cafeteria. She would say in a lyrically chanting voice, “M-E-D-I-T-A-T-I-O-N for fifteen minutes.” More often than not I would make myself go and it really did wonders for my day. Something like that at Princeton would be nice. It would make big difference to have the option to pause every day at our Residential Colleges right after a meal.

I believe community is important because it's important to be connected to other people. You can do a lot of great things in college, but the only things that really matter are the friendships, relationships and the memories that you create. Sabbath is about those things – it's about making memories and growing relationships, taking the time out to get to know someone. It would be nice for people to have more time to get to know people better.¹⁶

¹⁵ Participant16. Interview.

¹⁶ Participant16. Interview.

A female senior articulated these thoughts on Sabbath in relationship to obedience to God:

I am still growing in obedience to God. I am still not there yet. My Sabbath practices are taking the whole day off; it is easy for me to rest. When I do observe the Sabbath I try to spend time in prayer. I think of Sabbath as an act of obedience to God and to enjoy life. If I one day have a family, I would hope that I can pass this practice onto my family. Observing Sabbath is also way of saying that our work does not define who we are.¹⁷

The Orthodox Jewish students responded to the questions on meaning, Shabbat and community by providing perspectives deeply rooted in their religious tradition:

The way in which I find a lot of meaning is in this understanding of community. There is a certain element of responsibility but I can't put my finger on it. It's not something I necessarily signed up for, but it's something I inherently feel. There are different levels of community and concentric circles of community. I feel very close to my friends, family, the broader Jewish community in particular, Princeton University, and to humanity. There is an element in us that seems irrational, but is so ingrained; being connected to other people is very important to me.

Friday night dinner at the Center for Jewish Life when I am sitting around and seeing how many people are taking part in the shared experience is so important to me. This is what it's all about. The whole week you're running around busy, but on Friday night you taking a step back and are appreciating life.

Sabbath is the intentionality of rest or being mindful. There is this constant tension between obligation or that which is ritualistic rather than something that is genuine and spiritual that doesn't require formalized ritual.¹⁸

Another Jewish student offered this voice:

I think of rest. I think of good food. I think of a world that is somehow different. It's a different sense of life – something changes!

¹⁷ Participant 12. Interview.

¹⁸ Participant 4. Interview.

Friday night service is filled with music, which I connect with in a beautiful way. There is something missing when I am not with a community. Community is big in Judaism. I think there is a sense that Sabbath is so different from the rest of your life. My friends who do meditation may be experiencing more of a Sabbath than I do. I find that I need to understand that it is something bigger than myself, which is something I feel on Shabbat, but not on an everyday basis. It's important to build time into my day to allow myself to be renewed. For example, if I have to write a paper I have to be done by the time that Shabbat begins. But if this were at any other time of the week, I would continue until I was done. I think in order for Sabbath to become a life practice, I would have to learn more about the benefits and limitations. It would be important to understand, delineate the benefits of distinctions.

I read a Jewish commentator who said that if you look in Genesis that God looked at the world after six days and said "It is very good!" Not just good, but very good! After that he created the Sabbath, Shabbat. Essentially, God looks at the completion of everything and really appreciates it and then it was "very good." The commentator said that after that he created the Sabbath. Learning how to appreciate the world can be a personal Sabbath. An understanding of the world as complete, not as perfect, is something that is beautiful, and I need to appreciate more.¹⁹

The idea that something changes as a result of embracing Sabbath as a life practice is echoed in Abraham Joshua Heschel's words, "The meaning of Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things or space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to *holiness* in time."²⁰ Through the interviews with the 18 students it was repeatedly reaffirmed that although the culture of stress at Princeton University is a reality and will most likely always be so – students continue to hunger for community and meaning. There was openness to the idea that they could find a safe and sacred sanctuary in embracing Sabbath as a life practice. Each one expressed the daunting dilemma of pushing back against the culture, but affirmed that when they

¹⁹ Participant 6. Interview.

²⁰ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 10.

have done so their lives are greatly enriched. The Center for Jewish Life has become a destination place on campus on Friday evenings in which students who are not of the Jewish faith join in the celebration of the Shabbat meal. One of the Jewish students interviewed for this project spoke of how edifying it was to have friends of different faiths sharing in the weekly high and holy observance of Shabbat/Sabbath.

Two interviewees who represented the Roman Catholic voice spoke deeply to what this project was aiming to achieve.

One person said:

“The Sabbath is good for us in understanding ourselves not to be gods.”²¹

Another participant quoted the Roman Catholic priest on campus by saying:

“Sabbath is a substantial act of trust in God.”²²

Both students offer a representative view of what was heard from all the participants: Sabbath has an important place in the collegiate journey. Sabbath is definitively different from “meditation,” because the Sabbath is honoring a command from God and there is the realization that one’s life is not under one’s ultimate control.

The goal of this project was to solicit answers to the prevailing questions, “Is there a role that the ancient practice of Sabbath or Shabbat can have in the life of a 21st century Ivy League student at Princeton University? Is it possible that a regular Sabbath experience might be the Balm in Gilead (healing salve) to restore to health and liberate the enslaved soul of the postmodern millennial student? The eighteen students representing diverse religious traditions, class years, racial and socio-economic

²¹ Participant 7. Interview.

²² Participant 13. Interview.

backgrounds offered distinctive perspectives, but all with similar results and meaning. Savage and Presnell wrote about *intentional interviewing*, which they indicate allows people to speak, stating, “When people are encouraged to speak they not only report experience, they also reveal the meanings by which they have been formed as people and the relationships they have with each other.”²³ The narratives shared through the interviews revealed that many Princeton students are on the perpetual tenure track of an obsession with accomplishment, achievement and equating busyness with significance. However, throughout the interview process the recurring theme was the message that there is a larger reality in life that demands consideration: being able to find meaning in the practice and embrace of resting, delighting, and connecting with community. An interviewee said it this way:

*Am I following God's plans or am I subjected to my own desires? I'm trying to balance the feeling of ambition and desire to be up there at the top with everybody else with the realization that these four years are not the end of the road. There is life beyond Princeton and I need to have an eye toward that and God's call.*²⁴

The eighteen voices represented in this project open a door for further exploration of what it can mean to the Princeton University collegiate climate and cultural ethos to engage the community in a Sabbath Project that does not apologize for or minimize the need to celebrate through intentional renewal of the gracious gift of life. In the upcoming chapter I will provide a synopsis of Princeton's historical application of Sabbath and my

²³ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 83.

²⁴ Participant 13. Interview.

own practice of Sabbath and its meaning for my life and the ministry I provide to the Princeton community.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLACE OF SABBATH: INSTITUTIONAL AND PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

Princeton University is a venerable institution steeped in a rich intellectual and religious heritage that shapes its history to this present day. From its founding until the mid-1900's, a clergyman or the son of a clergyman served as the president of the University and was responsible for the chapel services. An official post of "Dean of the Chapel" was endowed when the current Chapel was completed in 1928. Chapel attendance was compulsory until the early 1960's. The requirement of chapel attendance incorporated into the life of the University was a weekly Sabbath opportunity. Chapel at Princeton University is its oldest tradition, and although not compulsory for the student body any longer, it is an integral part of the life of the campus. Every Sunday for 268 years an ecumenical service is held in the Gothic cathedral, which is a place of prayer for all people. "Historically the University has pursued three approaches with respect to religion in order to fulfill the provision of its charter: (1) experience of religion through worship, (2) applied religion through service to humankind, and (3) intellectual development through courses in the curriculum."¹ As the University has become more diverse, so have the religious and ethical offerings that are designed to meet the needs of

¹ William K Selden, *Chapels of Princeton University* (Princeton, New Jersey: Trustees of Princeton University, 2005), 63.

the millennial generation. The Princeton University Chapel, and the Office of Religious Life which is located in Murray-Dodge Hall, are situated on the main plaza of the campus. These two sites are epicenters of religious engagement and sacred hospitality for people of diverse faith traditions and practices as well as those exploring wide-ranging questions of meaning. Both sacred spaces are consecrated by work and witness on the secular campus and transcend the traditional definition of *ekklesia* “the called out,” in the familiar sense of what the church is called out to do and be in the world. The church in its mission is called to make disciples as mandated by Jesus Christ in the gospels. In the same way, the setting in which I exercise the rites of ordained ministry calls me to be a pastor-dean in the University Chapel and a facilitator of religious life in the Office of Religious Life through implementing programs that invite people to spiritual commitment, awareness, and engagement. Both the Chapel and ORL uniquely provide the portal through which students, staff and faculty are enabled to explore the most profound questions of life, and in doing so, more often than not, encounter the transcendent.

Princeton University is a specialized site to do ministry. It is not identified as a typical church, although the chapel building itself is in the shape of Latin cross (cruciform), the stained glass windows reveal the distinct Judeo-Christian heritage, and the iconography throughout the sacred space is predominantly Christian. Dean Ernest Gordon, a former dean of the chapel for twenty-five years wrote, “The University Chapel provides a place where people can come in reverence to face the ultimate mystery of creation and existence.”² That statement became incarnational during a prayer service following the

² Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, Princeton University Press (1978).

tragic aftermath of September 11, 2001. The university community packed the Gothic 2,000 seat Chapel beyond its capacity to grieve unabashedly, pray fervently, and to seek solace and solidarity with other members of the human family touched by the enormity of the tragedy. The Chapel became on that National Day of Prayer a place of prayer for all people and becomes that daily and weekly for all who enter the sacred space.

A place of prayer for all people is an apt description of the University Chapel, because it is an epicenter for those seeking to experience the transcendent as well as the ceremonial center for the University. Each year Alumni Day is celebrated the last Saturday in February and alumni return to the University to reaffirm their commitment to Princeton. There is an annual Service of Remembrance in which recently departed alumni, faculty, and staff are memorialized. A representative of every undergraduate class, graduate school alums, faculty and staff create a memorial procession and march down the long aisle to place a carnation in the memorial wreath to honor the life and legacy of the departed. This service is a living reminder that this sacred space is a place of prayer for all and the words spoken by the President of the University in the Service of Remembrance captures the beauty of this reality:

By the dedication of this wreath, we, the living members of the Princeton family, join together to honor those of our company who are now numbered with the great communion of the eternal. May this wreath be the symbol of our continuing unity so that we may uphold the work of this University in her dedication to the service of all people and in her devotion to our living God.³

The Princeton University Chapel and the Office of Religious Life are symbols of institutional commitment to provide a sacred space for religious, spiritual and ethical engagement. Religious life thrives in this pluralistic ecumenical and interfaith milieu,

³ The text dedicating the Memorial Wreath in the Service of Remembrance is cited in the annual worship bulletin.

because the ORL, unlike any other campus unit, is instrumental in individual and institutional formation and transformation. Princeton is a place where every person on every level can stake his or her claim in a university that values all its members. A quote by Max Warren informs the ministry that I strive to deliver in the diversely unique context, “Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on another’s dream, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.”⁴ Warren’s words speak to the heart of the essential nature of what it means to have a University Chapel centrally located on the main plaza of the campus towering as a beacon of hope and light and an Office of Religious Life housing 14 chaplaincies that represent mainline Christian denominations, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, a Center for Jewish Life, Chabad and 2 religious coordinators serving the Muslim and Hindu faith constituencies. The goal of religious life offerings on the university campus is to enable people of varied religious expressions, as well as those with none, to find a community in which faith and belief are embraced and celebrated and the humanity of all people affirmed. The mission of Princeton University’s Chapel and Office of Religious Life is to provide holistic care for the total person that is deeply rooted in the great Shema of loving God with the whole heart, soul and mind as recorded in Deuteronomy 6: 4-5.

The one common denominator among all religious leaders at Princeton is that we seek to support the needs of students through care for the total person. Having enough “time” to do it all is the elusive reality for all members of the university community.

⁴ Max Warren (1904-1977), General Secretary of the Anglican Church Missionary Council (from a Chorus of Faiths).

Thus, “Keeping Holy Time” became an important project to learn about the challenges as well as the opportunities for changing lives and University culture.

A Personal and Biblical Understanding of Sabbath

Dan McAdams, in *Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* connects the importance of the personal story with understanding the essence of one’s life and how our stories define and reveal more fully who we are as we come to know ourselves. He writes, “If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my life, then I too, must come to know my own story.”⁵ “Within the ivy-covered buildings of Princeton University, I seek to make my calling and election sure. As John Wesley, the venerable founder of Methodism, described the world as his parish, I, as an associate dean of religious life and the chapel, view the whole university as my parish, having been designated to facilitate religious life for the entire community. Carl Savage and William Presnell in *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* states, “The study of a ministry site is a ministry in and of itself. That is, to arrive at a sense of the current self-understanding of a religious community often has the attendant benefits of aiding in theological discernment within that body and also of providing direction for the generation of relevant and effective ministries.”⁶ The Princeton University ministry site is always evolving for me as an ordained person as I seek to proclaim and embody the

⁵ Dan P. McAdams. *The Stories that We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993), 11.

⁶ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 73.

meaning of the sacred in a secular context. Sabbath is the theological and biblical imperative that serves as a spiritual compass for a healthy relationship with the Creator and human community. As I practice Sabbath amid the challenges of modernity, I have become much more attuned to the rhythms of my own soul and aware of the cadences of creation that call me to fully participate in the human enterprise of living a life of liberation – not enslaved to things or structures. Walter Bruggeman, says, “Sabbath, in the first instance, is not about worship. It is about work stoppage. It is about withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one’s life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being.”⁷

The creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:3 explodes with divine activity in the ushering of the world into being. In the opening lines of the first chapter, the world is without form, void, and dark; there is a sense of emptiness yearning to be filled. The Creator speaks into existence a world and fills it with luminous light and burgeoning life. In six days of divine creating, the world and everything in it is completed. With a holy crescendo of calm, God ceases from labor and blesses the seventh day, declaring it holy, hallowed, and a day of rest. These opening chapters in the Pentateuch indicate that the Creator from the beginning was establishing order in the universe. Sabbath is introduced into the equation of life not for legalistic purposes, but to invite humankind to live life fully in the midst of being alive. There is a God ordained rhythm of life in which the Creator’s image of activity and rest is reflected in humanity’s image lived out in the world. Walter

⁷ Walter Brueggeman, *Journey to the Common Good* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 26.

Brueggeman says, “The celebration of a day of rest was, then, the announcement of trust in this God, who is confident enough to rest.”⁸

Sabbath is defined in the Hebrew Scriptures as a *menuha*, a time to embrace rest and rejoice from the day-to-day routine of labor. In addition, the word Sabbath is derived originally from the Hebrew verb *Shabbat*, which in its essence means, “to cease or desist.” All of creation is invited to pause and play so that life is experienced as pure delight. The season of rest is not limited to humankind, but in the changing of seasons and cycles for all of creation. Not only is the call to rest encountered in the Book of Genesis, but also in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20. The 10 commandments offer guidelines to govern human life and the nature of relationships. Why is the call for rest a commandment in Scripture? The commandment builds into the fabric of human existence a means to intentionally incorporate Sabbath time into the life calendar.

The invitation in the Hebrew Scriptures to embrace God’s Sabbath is a counter cultural response to the pressure of stress and brutality of busyness that can sometimes dominate human life. What makes the call of Sabbath fundamentally distinctive is the irrefutable commandment to rest. It is as if the Creator is aware from the very beginning that there is something inherently life-giving in the moments in which the creation stops long enough to luxuriate in the wondrous gift of life. Not only is Sabbath-keeping about offering a restorative reality for the creation, it also provides a unique identity in the world. Often in the church, we have been told to be “in the world, but not of it.”

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis. Interpretation* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1982), 35.

Embracing Sabbath as a life practice while a student sojourner is one way in which this dualism of our life existence can be realized. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman's latest book *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* provides this apt analysis:

“When taken seriously in faith by Jews – and derivatively by Christians – Sabbath-keeping is a way of making a statement of peculiar identity amid a larger public identity, of maintaining and enacting a counter-identity that refuses “mainstream” identity, which itself entails anti-human practice and the worship of anti-human gods. Understood in this way, Sabbath is a bodily act of testimony to alternative and resistance to pervading values and the assumptions behind those values.”⁹

From Eden to the 21st century, civilization has been engaged in an ongoing battle for the soul of humankind; thus, one day of designated rest and recreation is an opportunity to experience an Eden-like reality. Jesus issues a similar call for weary and worn pilgrims in the Gospel of Matthew 11:28 in the words, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” The recurring idea that life is not to be lived as a means to an end; humanity is not just to exist but also to experience the fullness and wonder of life. Sabbath rest is woven into the tapestry of the human journey to give a broader and deeper understanding of the reason for being. The moments in time taken to be in relationship with the Creator and with all that gives meaning and fulfillment to life is a chance to experience in the deepest sense what it means to be human. As stated by Jacque Ellul, “Sabbath keeping allows one to gain a larger perspective and to view our fragmented existence in light of a larger whole, to

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 21.

view our visible reality in light of the invisible, and larger, Truth.”¹⁰ God’s call to Sabbath offers humanity an indescribable gift that nourishes the soul beyond measure. Theologically, the idea of Sabbath has been seducing me into its embrace since I graduated from seminary in the early 1980’s. I recognized early in ministry that amid all of the information received in classrooms that trained me “to do” ministry, I had not witnessed the most essential formation instrumental in developing who I would “be” in ministry. The “doing” of ministry consumes life and the consumeristic culture of faith communities depletes spiritual reserves, which in many cases can position the inner needle on empty. Marva Dawn’s insightful inventory in chapter one captures this idea of running on empty while seeking the deepest meanings in life:

“those who have lost their ability to play because of the materialism and technologization of our society, who need beauty and gaiety and delight; those who have lost their passion and need to get in touch with feelings; those who are alone and need emotional nourishment; those who live in community and need solitude; those who need a relationship with God; those who want to be God’s instruments, enabled and empowered by the Spirit to be world changers and Sabbath healers.”¹¹

I discovered that I was not alone in this wake-up call to the life and reality of the ministry of Word and sacrament. A conversation with my pastor many years ago about the struggle “to do” versus “to be” in ministry affirmed my growing suspicions. I was scheduled to preach and in spite of my quiet time of preparation and prayerful

¹⁰ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 10-11.

¹¹ Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 83.

supplication – I felt detached from the divine in that moment. On this particular Sunday, I was in the church! Was it not reasonable to think that God should be in God’s holy temple? Is that not what the Scripture said? “God is in the temple; let all the earth keep silent before God.”¹² This Sunday wake-up call had all the trappings of worship in place. Clergy were praying passionately. Choirs were singing with holy fervor. Saints were giving testimony to the goodness of God in the midst. And yet, I was feeling strangely disconnected and disengaged. I had no words to give voice to the depth of my sense of detachment and disconnection in the moment. Yet, there was the experience of moving through the motions and not sensing an authentic connection with the God who I proclaimed had called me into this glorious work. In the midst of my own ministerial hitting of the wall, I began to realize that I needed to pause to revisit the place of renewed encounter with God. The title of the contemporary gospel song “Take Me Back Dear Lord” by Andrae’ Crouch summed up the yearning of my heart, and the lyrics gave voice to my earnest desire as I heard the rousing symphonic rhythm of the words with every beat of my heart as the chorus resounded:

“Take me back, take me back dear Lord
To the place where I first believed you.
Take me back, take me back dear Lord where I
first believed.

I feel that I'm so far from you Lord
But still I hear you calling me
Those simple things that I once knew,
The memories are drawing me.
I must confess, Lord I've been blessed
But yet my soul's not satisfied.

¹² Habakkuk 2:20

Renew my faith, restore my joy
And dry my weeping eyes.”¹³

More than anything, I needed to return to the place where I first encountered the holy and sensed the divine touch within and upon my frail human vessel of dust. I gave myself away to God as a child, and made that official covenant of faith through baptism on an Easter Sunday morning at my home church when I was thirteen years old. As I reflected on what this all meant at the time, I discovered that concentrated and consecrated time with God was vital for my life and ministry. I could not do the ministry or be the servant that I wanted to be except by being with God. Abraham Joshua Heschel’s wrote profoundly of the tension of life in this way, “It is one thing to race or be driven by the vicissitudes that menace life, and another thing to stand still and to embrace the presence of an eternal moment.”¹⁴ In order to reclaim the faith I proclaimed, I needed to embrace Sabbath and realize that more than a mere feeling – I needed devoted face time with God. To that end, I sought to learn more about Sabbath and the invaluable importance of a spiritual life of depth that provides sustenance for the soul. Heschel became a spiritual mentor through that slim but majestic publication, *The Sabbath*, and offered a soul quenching drink of life-giving water for my soul. In more recent years, Christian authors have been focusing on Sabbath, but it was from the Jewish tradition that I was able to gain a greater insight into the importance of this commandment.

Sabbath has become critically important in my exercise of ministry. There is always a challenge to incorporate Sabbath into my multi-task oriented life, but I have come to the

¹³ Take Me Back Dear Lord is a song I grew up singing in my youth choir at my home church, Saint James AME Church, Newark, New Jersey. The words are a part of my faith canon catalogued among the songs of Zion that give me life.

¹⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 29.

conclusion that I cannot survive or thrive without it. My postmodern ministerial context places tremendous demands on my time and energy to provide liturgical leadership in worship, implement creative programming, shepherd the lives of students, serve as pastor to chapel attendees, counsel students, staff and faculty, and coordinate leadership meetings for 14 chaplaincies. Additionally, as an African Methodist Episcopal minister, I serve as the Dean of the New Jersey Annual Conference Ministerial Institute preparing those in training to pursue the ordained ministry. All of these realities place upon me time-consuming and constraining responsibilities. My life is not my own or so it seems. In the midst of the inevitable busyness of life, Sabbath is the gift of the spirit feeding the hunger of my soul and quenching the thirst of my spirit.

Practicing Sabbath

The practice of Sabbath is not an easy endeavor. Each morning I make my way down to a designated spot in my home that I created to quiet myself before God so that I may listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. God speaks in the silence and in the reading and the singing. God's presence is felt in the simple knowing that God is with me in those moments. Putting the "to do" list out of my mind or battling with the next significant demand before me is the daily challenge. But when I kneel (kneeling is the posture that reminds me that I am submitting to One greater than myself) in stillness for a period of time, I experience a rebirth of the spirit that enables me to face the day with unabated strength. Often I ask myself how this is possible. Why does this happen repeatedly? Why do I leave the space more rejuvenated than when I arrived? I have come to the conclusion that in the quiet I can hear the conversations of creation; birds chirp

untranslatable messages to one another and other members of the universe connect in ways beyond my knowing. Reading the Scriptures or the writings of spiritual mentors enables me to be more attuned to the work of the Spirit within my being and outside of my being, in the large exterior expanse of creation. Over the years I have developed the habit of selecting books that offer daily meditations for short periods of time. Joan Chittister's *The Breath of the Soul: Reflections on Prayer* or *40 Days With Howard Thurman* are examples of books that give anchoring to my spiritual life. Seeking nourishment from the Bible daily is an essential part of my practice. This habit of keeping holy time has evolved over the years. I strive to build in holy flexibility so that I do not weary myself if I do not measure up to my own standards of expectation. In the end, it is living in this God consciousness that makes all the difference on my spiritual journey. Author Keri Wyatt Kent contends, "To practice Sabbath is to practice a stillness that brings clarity to our lives."¹⁵ Through the practice of Sabbath I reclaimed my life and ministry. I was able gain greater clarity and find the joy again that sometimes eluded me.

Jesus' call away from the necessary labor of life in the gospels (Mark 1:35; Luke 5: 16) is a welcome call that I strive to respond to faithfully. Is it a perfect response? Hardly. But it is a faithful response that allows for longer time, scheduled on my iPad, to be in the presence of the Sovereign One who I believe created me in His divine image and likeness and desires to have an audience with me. Often in the gospels, Jesus secretly slips away from the crowd and the disciples to find a sacred space for solitude and prayer. Never does Jesus apologize or make excuses for why he cannot consecrate this important time.

¹⁵ Keri Wyatt Kent, *Rest: Living in Sabbath Simplicity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 29.

Space for intimacy with God is as necessary as breathing air; it is the means by which I am able to live my human life to the fullest as represented by Jesus.

‘Theology by Heart’: The Living Human Document as explained in the book *Theological Reflection: Methods* is a particular theological method used to explore the dynamic presence of God in one’s life in a deeply personal way, usually through written personal accounts.¹⁶ Our stories are our lives. I am my own living human document seeking to analyze and discover if I am making time for the woman I desire to be in my relationship with God and others. Periodically, I write in my journal and it is the instrument by which I measure my spiritual evolution. If there are several entries over months, this is a clear indicator that I am actively engaged in a daily spiritual Sabbath that is opening up my soul to grace. However, if I note that the entries are sporadic and written in shorthand that is also a clue that the ship, which is my life, may be off course. I must ask myself John Wesley’s provocative question, “How is it with your soul?” My answer is determined by whether I believe the time spent is qualitative or quantitative. When I spend quality time, I meditate longer and write more in the journal, but when the rush of life is upon me, I hastily engage in what could be termed as a Sabbath drive-by. This is to say that the hurriedness has me so tightly in its grips that I miss the opportunity to be fulfilled and filled. The Wesleyan tradition conveys the doctrine of sanctification, living a life that honors God with the totality of one’s existence. The authors of *Theological Reflection: Methods* assert, “Writing brings a sense of separation between the interior life and an external text and this is an important step in this method of

¹⁶ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (Long Lane, London: SCM Press, 2010), 18.

theological reflection. Writing about one's inner life becomes a conscious self-reflexive activity."¹⁷ The experience of faith is not a one-time event, but a growing in the grace and knowledge of God to full maturity as a Christian.

Denominational Understanding of Sabbath

What does Sabbath mean for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, my denomination? Does the church practice Sabbath holistically? Are we truly Sabbath-keepers or potential Sabbath-breakers? I searched *The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* to determine what we believe about "Sabbath" as it relates to the faith proclaimed in our churches as a member of a connectional body. Moreover, I sought guidance from those within the ordained ranks to discover how we communicate the call to stop and rest for our well-being and the wholeness of the people in our corner of the Methodist kingdom. In the AME Church, "Sabbath essentially is a Sunday event!" Sabbath is synonymous with worship! Historically, the AME Church has been committed to preaching and teaching a gospel of liberation. The Sunday worship service and the weekly involvements challenge members to live out a faithful witness in world by serving the needs of humanity. The historical preamble affirms,

The African Methodist Episcopal Church, whose founder affirmed their humanity in the face of slavery and racism, stands in defense of disadvantaged and oppressed peoples in the 21st century. From the origins in the Free African Society through the involvement of the AME clergy and lay in the Civil War of the 1860's and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's, the AMEC has preached salvation from sin and deliverance from bondage. The mission expanded to others within the African Diasporas in the Americas, Africa, Caribbean, and

¹⁷ Ibid. 33.

Europe... This mandate still informs its ministry, vision and mission in the Church's third century of existence.¹⁸

The AME Church believes in Sabbath as an important principal of Scripture. We are radical Sabbath-keepers in our fervent worship of God and fostering of a communal spirit. Sunday is not an exclusive day of rest, because the work of the church summons us "to do" even in the midst of the divine call "to be." In an article titled, "Reclaiming Sabbath," Gwyneth J. Whilsmith writes,

The Jewish Sabbath fell on the last day of the week. Early Christians, perhaps wanting to distance themselves from Jewish legalism, adopted the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, and celebrated it as the Lord's Day. In time, the two names became synonymous. Perhaps in their zeal to keep the Sabbath holy, our ancestors with their long list of do-nots took the joy out of what should be the most festive day of the week, celebrating the risen Christ. Nevertheless, we must credit them for at least setting aside Sunday for worship and rest.¹⁹

The African Methodist Episcopal Church is the oldest African American denomination in the Western Hemisphere, founded in 1787 by a former slave, Richard Allen, who became the first elected and consecrated bishop of African descent in America. This denomination began as response to social injustice at the altar of Saint George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Throughout its history it has continued to be a beacon of light in proclaiming the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ, and a voice for those oppressed in the society by systemic "isms" of racism, classism, sexism and the like. Boasting more than three million members, this historic denomination, like so many others, offers to the world a perspective of Christianity through an African

¹⁸ *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: The AMEC Sunday School Union, 2012), 13.

¹⁹ Gwyneth J Whilsmith, "Reclaiming Sabbath," *The Presbyterian Record* 131.1 (January 2007): 31-33.

American lens. It is my firm belief that the salvation of individual members through the practice of “Sabbath” will sustain not only the individual but also the larger corporate body, the Church. A colleague of the Wesleyan tradition once described the meetings of the church as “The curse of the church!”²⁰ The African Methodist Episcopal Church is known for its “bureaucratic genius through assembly”, and it can be argued that the reformation and salvation of the church will come as a result of incorporating the spirit of Sabbath so that all might experience a spiritual revival that could save our very lives.

Sabbath-breaking, we do without question, but Sabbath-keeping is critical for our survival as a church, a people, and the human family. Abraham Joshua Heschel captures the essence of the unequivocal need for Sabbath when he writes, “What would be a world without Sabbath? It would be a world that knew only itself or God distorted as a thing or the abyss separating God from the world; a world without the vision of a window in eternity that opens into time.”²¹ Sabbath is not an option; it is inextricably linked with the restoration and survival of the human spirit.

Vocational Perspective of Sabbath

My arrival at Princeton University in 1997 was a radical transition from my tenure at Brown University from 1994-1997. At Brown, I had summers off, which afforded an opportunity to be renewed in body, mind, and spirit. The time away was always a chance to be replenished through reading, thinking, engaging in authentic human

²⁰ A colleague from another branch of Methodism described the meetings of the church as a curse that sometimes burdens the work of the kingdom of God.

²¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 16.

interaction, and simply being. Accepting the Princeton University offer meant that my full-time employment would be twelve months, and time away dictated by how many vacation days I elected to use. I adjusted well to the new work reality and learned from a colleague that a proposal had been implemented in the office that allowed one of the deans of religious life to be off for the summer every third year. The prospect of a sabbatical was indeed welcomed and made me aware that the leadership understood that in order to be effective in service to humanity one needs Sabbath time, modeling Jesus' example in the New Testament. Although this innovative idea was shared enthusiastically and did occur prior to my arrival, it has not materialized during my years at Princeton. My primary sabbatical is a weekly Friday/Saturday time out of the office, but is sometimes determined by University commitments that may require being present for an official university gathering. The work of ministry is especially demanding in a university because we are called upon to not only serve as pastor but also programmer, counselor, family member and friend as well. Our responsibility is to cultivate the life of the spirit and mind so that the community thrives. While shepherding the community so that it will grow is important, having the time to nurture one's own inner life has the potential to reap far more dividends. My student Quentin's lesson was one that I could claim too in my pursuit of Sabbath to sustain my inner life. Marva Dawn articulates what I believe is the true call of a leader when she writes, "God's kingdom renews us. Constantly, second by second, the Kingdom nourishes us afresh and equips us unceasingly for what God calls us to do."²² It is God's call upon my life that ignites a

²² Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 13.

fire within to embrace the holiness of time and to realize that it truly is a precious gift to pause long enough to experience the *kairos* reality of God with us.

The command of Sabbath in my personal life has influenced my practice of ministry within my context. I recently provided leadership of spiritual formation group that encouraged and challenged university members to incorporate Sabbath into their daily lives. A six week opportunity during the spring of 2013 allowed twenty to twenty-five people to gather on Mondays from 12:00 to 1:00 PM to participate in a series called “Catch Your Breath.” Each week the gathering grew in acceptance of entering the space in silence and embracing the moments of complete solitude. Often people gave testimony of how the CYB series was transforming not only their lives but the lives of their family. This group was so successful that the members asked if we could continue in the 2013 fall semester, which we have done monthly in an effort to enhance the spiritual formation of those wanting to continue to explore the value of Sabbath intentionally.

In the next chapter, I introduce the role and relationship of the Lay Advisory Committee and the significance the LAC to the overall project. The Sabbath Project stretched all of us in indescribable ways as it caused to examine the deeper truths of our lives and the care of our souls.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE: RECRUITING, ORIENTING AND EVALUATING

Seven members representative of the University community were actively recruited to serve on the Lay Advisory Committee. All the prospective members I approached to participate as LAC members were individuals that knew about my doctoral studies or who inquired often regarding the status of this new educational endeavor. They were intrigued and slightly impressed that I was in school while working full-time and seemingly successfully juggling life and my studies adeptly. The prevailing question that continued to be posed was: How is it possible to be a full-time student and simultaneously a full-time employee? Describing the all-day and sometimes well into the evening one-week intensive courses, required reading, and writing papers helped me develop a fuller understanding of this professional degree and its relevance in my particular work/ministerial context.

A formal personal email invitation was sent to prospective members of the LAC with detailed information about the Doctor of Ministry (DMIN) degree and the project thesis focusing on Sabbath. I inquired about their availability and willingness to partner with me in offering their expertise and support in bringing the project to fruition. The email gave a brief explanation of the narrative of concern, which was to explore the “culture of stress” that undergraduate students experience at Princeton University and to examine the benefits of Sabbath as a biblically mandated, spiritually sustaining and theologically

transformative life alternative. Upon accepting the invitation, their role would be to offer guidance, support and input in the development of the project.

During our first meeting, I introduced the LAC written guidelines and responsibilities of the committee and made the members aware that a LAC Chair would have to be selected from their membership. The very first meeting evoked a spirited exchange regarding whether there was a definite necessity for a LAC Chair. There was the contention that people's schedules were exceedingly busy and each one was already overcommitted. Moreover, the committee members assured me that they were committed to supporting me on this journey; thus, there was no reason to follow the guidelines to the letter of the law. A forty-five minute discussion ensued pertaining to the pros and cons of the requirement and I realized throughout the process that we all desperately needed a "Sabbath." I shared with the LAC that the guidelines were established and sanctioned by administrators of the DMIN Program and diplomatically directed us to select a Chair so we could move forward together. The reality of the difference between a congregational setting and the university context was amplified in this first meeting as we sought to name a chair of the committee. Members of the LAC group represented different independent units of the university; thus, a corporate consciousness was not as prevalent as it might likely be in a congregation. In churches, the pastor is the chief executive officer and directives are often followed without considerable resistance.

Marni Blitz was unanimously selected as our venerable LAC Chair, and her unwavering commitment to the process and the project made all the difference. It was evident in that first meeting that Sabbath is an essential life ingredient that we all need in

light of the extremely stressful lengthy conversation during the first official act of the LAC.

The following faculty, staff and students agreed to serve on the Lay Advisory Committee:

Marni Blitz, LAC Chair, Associate Director of the Center for Jewish Life

Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, Senior Lecturer, Sociology and Research Associate in the Office of Population Research

Ellen Kent, Psychologist, University Health Services

Sarah Jemison, '15, Princeton University (undergraduate)

Ogemdi Ude '16, Princeton University (undergraduate)

Paul Riley '15, Princeton University (undergraduate)

Torey Wilson, Associate Director of Princeton University Preparatory Program (PUPP); Lecturer and Program Associate, Teacher Certificate Program

All the LAC members brought unique and diverse perspectives that I hoped would enable me to proceed forward on the project successfully with their invaluable assistance. My primary purpose in selecting particular staff and faculty member was their specific scope of responsibility in the life of the University. Additionally, I believed it imperative to have someone from the Jewish community represented on the committee. **Marni Blitz**, Associate Director of the Center of Jewish Life is a one who has been an amazing colleague since her arrival to the University in 2007. Marni is a Conservative Jew who observes Shabbat, weekly, and is very intentional about preparing herself and home for this holy observance. Her faith is deeply grounded in Judaism, but she is also one of the most earnest people I know concerning her openness to people of other faiths. Marni's incisive intellect and wide-ranging commitment to educating student leaders in the

Jewish community and beyond was important in having her leadership participation in this project initiative. **Patricia Fernandez-Kelly**, serves as senior lecturer in Sociology and is an accomplished woman having earned two Ph. D's, and an Emmy for a documentary she co-produced. Professor Patricia is a committed Presbyterian (who grew up Roman Catholic) and serves as an elder in her local predominately African American congregation in Princeton. She works compassionately to help every Princeton University student who crosses her path achieve his or her ultimate goal: graduation. PFK, as she affectionately known across campus, is highly regarded as an authentic human being committed to making difference in people's lives for good. I felt she would provide valuable insight on human social behavior and offer an important perspective about the millennial cohort. **Ellen Kent** is a staff psychologist on campus who I have known and worked with since my arrival at Princeton in 1997. Ellen is genuinely interested in the developmental issues of college students and supporting them in balancing individuality and group membership. Her professional expertise as a psychologist assisted in looking through a different lens to recognize a deeper awareness of the psycho-social reality of the undergraduate population who utilize University Health Counseling Services. **Torey Wilson**, an associate director of the Princeton University Preparatory Program, works with academically gifted students from low economic backgrounds to help them achieve their dreams of succeeding at an elite or highly selective institution of higher education. Torey is a man of faith, an ordained Baptist minister, and is pursuing a doctorate in education. He is one of very few African American male leaders on campus and it seemed important to have someone of his character and caliber to share his knowledge of the millennial male experience.

The three students selected to serve on the LAC were invited because of their leadership as undergraduates in their first and second year at Princeton University. **Sarah Jemison**, an Episcopalian, was actively involved in the Presbyterian Chaplaincy her first two years on campus is highly engaged in religious life and witness. **Paul Riley**, a Baptist, serves as one of the student leaders of the Hallelujah Worship Committee, which is a committee that has governance over the 23-year-old Hallelujah Worship Service that is deeply rooted in the African American church tradition and is under my pastoral auspices through the ORL. Paul is a committed individual of faith who is active in the life of the university and serves as an elected student government council representative. **Ogedemi Ude** is a student intern in the Office of Religious Life and possessed the rare persona of seeming to be unstressed most of the time as a first year student. Two students who would have been seniors by the final year of the project were not able to commit because of other obligations outside of the university. I had hoped to have all class years represented on the LAC to compare and contrast the observations of upper and underclass students navigating the academic maze.

The second LAC meeting was a relatively easier gathering during lunch. Most of the members of the LAC were present and we were on the continuing journey to discover how this project could transform the undergraduate culture at Princeton University. During the meeting I presented a draft of research questions to be utilized for conducting the interviews. The LAC Chair had requested questions from the committee prior to the meeting in order to ensure there were diverse perspectives included for the larger conversation. One member of the LAC felt that the questions focused too much on the “stress factor,” and suggested it was imperative to find innovative ways to elicit

responses that would cause the respondents to explore the deeper questions of meaning in their lives. The questions were modified so that there was sacred space to listen for the underlying stories that might emerge during the interview. This recommendation by a LAC committee member proved most helpful as I interviewed the students and served me well in listening in a different way and looking eagerly for the nuances shared in the narratives.

The members of the LAC are outstanding people representing diverse units of the Princeton University community. In our initial meetings, committee members expressed and demonstrated a firm commitment to supporting and assisting in the development of this project in anticipation of a positive impact upon the University campus culture. However, the realities of the very campus culture that we were hoping to transform, incrementally but intentionally, dominated our efforts. The LAC Chair utilized the online doodle calendar to convene the group, but it was enormously difficult to have all the members of the LAC together at the same time, which made it more challenging to have the active involvement and input of every member of the team. The distinctive difference in a church and university context is the weekly or biweekly opportunity to gather as a body, the range of responsibilities on the university campus created greater challenges for meetings. Moreover, the inherent demands upon this unique body as administrators, professor, psychologist, and students placed us all at a disadvantage.

LAC members were positively and actively engaged via email suggesting reading resources as well as students to contact for the interviews. The committee was essentially “thought partners” whose insight and varied perspectives provided invaluable

incentive for the project. Professor Patricia Fernandez-Kelly referred me to the article “The Organization Kid.” Marni Blitz, LAC Chair, and I met numerous times to collaborate on the project. She was the anchor on this journey and made time in her busy and demanding schedule to check in often and to meet, to ask questions, offer suggestions and apprise me of the status of the LAC. It was disappointing that time and access constraints did not allow opportunities for LAC members to interview some of the students. Reflective theological dialogues regarding student responses would have contributed to a more comprehensive interpretation of the project and the potential for impacting the student population.

Self-Evaluation

When I realized that the topic of Sabbath was speaking deeply to my own soul, I was excited about the transformation that could emerge from this endeavor. This project seemed to have potential for transforming me as well as the larger Princeton University community. I facilitate religious life for a 5200+ undergraduate population and figuring out how to best introduce and ultimately execute this project was the ultimate challenge. The Methods course that I took with Dr. Carl Savage provided resources that I could utilize. I decided that an interview/survey approach would be the most beneficial technique in my ministry community.

I successfully interviewed eighteen undergraduate students with diverse academic, religious and ethnic backgrounds to ascertain their perspectives on the stresses of being a student in the highly competitive environment of an Ivy League university. I gained significant insight into what they experience and how they deal with their experiences.

The greatest gift of this journey was to engage with people on campus in new ways and to realize that the students I was meeting for the first time dared to entrust their personal narratives with me, and were eager to support an effort to design something that would benefit the Princeton University campus.

The “Keeping Holy Time” project is the genesis for a larger initiative on the campus that might include Counseling Services, Residential Colleges, the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students, and the Office of Religious Life. All of these constituent partners are interested in the well-being of the undergraduate population and discovering creative ways in which to enable students to thrive as scholars, but most importantly as university citizens who care for self and their neighbor. Every unit in the university is concerned with ensuring that all its members are healthy intellectually, spiritually and morally. Possible outcomes of the project could include the following for the campus as well as within my Annual Conference Ministerial Institute:

1. Establish monthly or weekly designated day to embrace a period of silence at the beginning or the end of a meal in a specified dining facility; students would be charged to enter in silence and partake of the meal for a period in silence as a means of being attentive to their lives and life in community;
2. Launch a campus-wide “Pause Campaign” that challenges every member of the university community to participate in a period of recess from the demands of work of study to experience renewal for a prescribed period of time;
3. The Office of Religious Life and constituent partners could inaugurate a three-day silent retreat for all interested students during the week before classes begin each year as a means of introducing new students and returning students to an

innovative way of being; currently there are opportunities for the incoming freshman class to participate in community service and outdoor action for one week prior to the beginning of the academic year;

4. Advocacy for sabbatical opportunities for staff so that the administrative arm of the university is afforded time away to for renewal and restoration to perform at their maximum potential;
5. Introduce a course to the New Jersey Ministerial Institute of the African Methodist Episcopal Church on Sabbath for all individuals pursuing the ordained ministry of the AME Church as an essential element of spiritual formation.

This ethnographic interview endeavor has been for me an opportunity to see and hear what God might be doing or desire to do on the Princeton University campus with post millennials who hunger and thirst for meaning – and that is a divine moment in time. Author Dan Allender writes, “Sabbath is not a diversion; it is a radical entry into shalom.”¹

The ultimate goal of this important project was to invite students to consider what it could mean to live counter culturally by responding intentionally to the ancient call and practice of Sabbath and Shabbat through embracing this invitation to “Keep Holy Time As a Life Practice,” and in doing so experience the shalom of God that transcends human understanding. Carl Savage and William Presnell essentially sum up my thoughts: “Discipleship is a partnership with the divine in which we discover what new thing from God is breaking through, and join with it.”²

¹ Dan B. Allender, *Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 106.

² Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 120

APPENDIXES

A. Confidentiality Form

Confidentiality:

Your answers will be confidential. The records collected during this study will be kept private. We will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file and only the researchers will have access to your records. If the interview is audio or video recorded, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed.

Risks or Discomforts/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts in participating in this **one-one one interview** aspect of the research project.

Benefits:

We expect the project to benefit you by gaining more knowledge regarding how practices of Sabbath can enhance and enrich a healthier life experience in handling the culture of stress at Princeton University.

I understand that:

- A. My participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time. My refusal to participate will not result in any penalty.
- B. By signing this agreement, I do not waive any legal rights or release Princeton University, its agents, or you from liability for negligence.

I hereby give my consent to be the subject of your research.

Signature

Date

Audio/Video Recordings:

With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview. Please sign below if you agree to be photographed, and/or audio videotaped.

I hereby give my consent for audio/video recording:

Signature

Date

Please keep this sheet in case you have any questions about this research project.

1. TITLE OF RESEARCH:

**KEEPING HOLY TIME: EMBRACING SABBATH
AS A LIFE PRACTICE AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**

2. PROTOCOL NUMBER: **IRB # 6180**

3. For answers to any questions you may have about this research, contact:

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
DEAN DEBORAH BLANKS, 609-258-3621**

4. For answers to any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject,
contact:

Princeton University Office of Research Integrity and Assurance
Compliance Administrator
Email: irb@princeton.edu
Phone: (609) 258-3077

B. Ethnographic Interview 16

Name: Sydney

Date of interview: May 3, 2013

Religious Affiliation: Hallelujah

Class Year: Sophomore

Biographical and Demographic Profile

- a. Tell me a bit about yourself and life before Princeton University.

My name is Sydney and I'm 19. I skipped kindergarten, which I find to be an important fact because it was important. It posed important social challenges and opportunities, growing up. I have always felt younger than everybody else which something that I am still grappling with even now. Both my parents were in the Navy. My mother did a four year contract and got out when she was pregnant with me. My dad retired in October of 2011 in the fall of my freshman year. He has deployed a number of times growing up so that was a little difficult. It was challenging because I didn't get along with my mom much when I was younger. She was very strict. My parents are divorced.

My mom was a hospital corpsman, and my dad was also a corpsman in the Navy (medical personnel). Later my dad was a career counselor and then worked with the wounded warriors in Kuwait. He was a core instructor in Chicago, and the last thing he did was work with the Wounded Warriors Program, or Olympics at the Navy Safe Harbor.

- b. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

My father was a hospital corpsman instructor and based in Chicago, Illinois, which we meant that we didn't move around as a result of his assignment. My parents thought it was important that I grew up in the same area, and that had it has its ups and downs.

- c. Do you have siblings? If an only child, what was that like growing up?

I have a sister eight years old with whom I am very close. My sister is my life and the one I seek to live for as I consider my life's goals.

- d. What was your high school educational experience like? Did you attend private or public high school?

I joined a lot of activities growing up, gymnastics, soccer, piano, flute, figure skating. I was a very active child. I started my own non-profit. I don't do it here but I do it at home. I teach underprivileged children learn how to figure skate for free, and I taught piano lessons from age 11 to age 18. I have always worked at least two jobs.

- f. Do you have particular hobbies and extracurricular interests?

Did I mention that I have been dancing since I was ten? Dance is a really big part of my life here. I'm not particularly in the dance companies that I would like to be in, but I am vice president of the High Steppers, costume, and gear, design for Tap Cats which is the tap dancing company here. I just got into "NACHO," the Indian dance company and I used to dance for the dance department. I was going to apply but I recently dropped it. I do a lot of cd thesis work for seniors in the dance department.

- g. What color would describe your personality and why?

Green, I think. I can be very like bubbly sometimes and very happy. I think I picked green because there are many different shades of every color. Green is a color where the shades are so much more pronounced. A light green is like a baby and it is childlike, young, and youthful. The medium or dark green is somewhat dull or it makes me think of money, which is something that is not very important to me but as someone who spends a lot of time working it is an important symbol in my life for sure. The very dark green makes me think there are lots of times when I can be like very guarded. I have a lot of emotions, but I don't always show them.

Searching for the Soul and Pondering the Big Questions

- a. What are the ways in which you find meaning and purpose in life?

I guess religion is a big thing for me. Occasionally I struggle with depression, and sometimes it is hard for me to find meaning or purpose in life. Generally, I find when I get like that when I return to fellowshiping with other Christians it definitely helps. I am reminded of how much God has done in my life and what it means and what he is calling me to do. I also draw a lot of purpose in life from my family. My sister is one of the most important things to me and making room for her is most important. I want to be able to adopt and take someone into my home and I want to be able to help children in the system like legally. Everything that I am doing is now is leading to that goal. I think that will give me the greatest fulfillment being able to directly impact someone else's life and see the

visible changes. I think that is really what God has called us to do. And so I guess that is where I derive a lot of my purpose.

- b. Where are the places you find the most meaning?

I find a lot of purpose and meaning in my job because I work with children that are not all troubled, but demanding and the things that I am doing are directly impacting their lives. I also find it spiritually through music. I listen to a lot of gospel music when I need a reminder of what God has done for me. Kirk Franklin is great. His lyrics really touch me and you know just really move me. They have the power to capture my feelings and what he does with his song, which is so great is that the song will start off and it will be like you know, I don't know if it is like love related but it is: "When I wake up in the morning and my heart is full of pain and the smile on my face is gone, can't see the sunshine, from the rain," I understand.

- c. Who are the people that inspire you the most?

I am generally inspired by my peers, especially, my older peers. A lot of this comes from the fact that I generally feel younger much younger than I should compared to my elder peers. Black upper classmen who are seniors inspire me. The way that they carry themselves, the way that they are always reaching down and reaching back towards us really inspires me to want to be like them.

Embracing Sabbath as a Life Practice

- a. When you hear the word "Sabbath," what kinds of emotions or thoughts does it evoke?

It just makes me think of the Sabbath day. You have given a different definition of Sabbath than I was used to. I guess it is very peaceful or I guess more like worship.

- b. Do you have a weekly Sabbath opportunity?

This is hard because I'm trying to separate my previous definition, with this new definition. I definitely like coming to Hallelujah on Sundays because it gives me a chance to step away a little bit and like focus in on God. I have scheduled my friends for weekly meals, because I found that if you don't do that you actually never see your friends. So I have Monday night dinners with family and it is a pause or a break because our dinners last for an hour-and-a-half or an hour. We never really cap it being in each other's presence, and catching up on our lives – those times where you are not on the clock. Because I feel like you can't actually Sabbath if you are on the clock. That is just kind of impossible to do. It is dinner at 6:15, or, 6:30 and then it is usually 8:00 when we leave. And it is just a time for us to really enjoy

- d. Is community important in your practice of Sabbath?

I think so. Because I think it is important for me to be connected to other people. I was just telling this to my friend this morning, you could do a lot of great stuff in college that sounds really good and you can put it on your resume, but the only things that are going to really matter in life are the friends and the relationships that you make and the memories that you make. I feel like Sabbath is about those things. It is about pausing to make those memories, and to make those connections, to grow in those relationships, and just take the time out to get to know someone. There were so many times freshman year I had this conversation with a lot of people: "You know, I've got a lot of acquaintances, but I don't really have a lot of friends." And I've got a lot of people where you are sharing: "Oh, my God, I love you, I miss you. Oh, my God, let's get a meal." And maybe we never do. Or even you get a meal and then you don't actually know each other's life. You don't really know some of these people that you call your friend at Princeton and it is because nobody has the time to really get to know somebody. I think if you are not really getting to know somebody you are not really paying attention and you are not in the moment.

- e. What would Sabbath look like as a life practice?

I don't know. I went to a Catholic school for one year, just one, Freshman year and they had this thing at the end of lunch period, because we had two lunches, and at the end of each lunch period for the last 15 minutes, Sister Jane, a super short Filipino, woman, would ring the bell: "Meditation!" Sometimes a lot of people went and sometimes there were a few people who attended the meeting. I went a lot and it was literally only 15 minutes. You are pretty much done with your lunch by then anyway because we had a 45-minute lunch period and you don't need that long to eat lunch and she had like this little guided scenario, like story thing and then you were just supposed to like meditate. And it was just really made me feel good for like the rest of the day. I usually always went, and there could have been one of those days, where you were like: "Oh, my gosh, nothing is going right" or like whatever and then you go to meditation, and "everything's okay now." What would that look like here? I don't know. I mean I think there is definitely something to be said for doing something like that at Princeton. We live in residential colleges and have all our meals together. It might be nice to have an option for you to have some mediation at the end of that lunch period or at the end of the dinner. . I don't know exactly like how that would work but it would be nice to have something everywhere. I think a lot of Princeton students would benefit from that.

- f. Name one Sabbath practice that has been most beneficial for you?

As much as I don't like walking, when I do walk I recently have tried to make my walks more purposeful. I use it as a time of reflection. When I was on the way here I was listening to Kirk Franklin trying to get in the right frame of mind. Sometimes I will call my grandparents. I try to use it as a moment for either reflection or active reaching out. You know, just trying to reach out to God, my parents that maybe I don't talk to, or maybe others that I really don't talk to because I realize a phone call doesn't take that long – but really means so much.

C. Ethnographic Interview 9

Name: Jayla

Date of interview: April 18, 2013

Religious Affiliation: Bible Study

Class Year: Freshman

Biographical and Demographic Profile

- a. Tell me a bit about yourself and life before you came to Princeton University.

I hail from Wilmington, Delaware and grew up in a household where it was just me and my mother. My parents divorced when I was two years old, and we lived with relatives for a while and went to church with those family members. We basically went to a Baptist church and tried not celebrate Halloween because of its pagan origins. On Halloween we attended a church where they had services for the children. As I grew older, we separated from the church and moved away from the family that we were living with for a period of time. The church wasn't such a big part of my life anymore. However, we would go back to church whenever we visited family for Easter and Christmas. But we really didn't have a church home or a church community that I identified with. Once I came to Princeton that is when I really started getting back into the Christian faith and I started developing my faith again.

- b. Do you have siblings? And if not what was it like growing up an only child?

I have no siblings. Growing up as an only child was kind of lonely but it was good at the same time. It was lonely because I didn't have anyone to play with, but at the same time I had a lot of attention and focus placed upon me. What was your high school educational experience like?

- c. Do you have particular hobbies and extracurricular interests?

In high school I was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. I was actually voted most involved in voting. I did chorus. Chorus was actually really interesting for me because in our concert choir, we sang a lot of like gospel pieces that always made me feel a longing, for church. Here on campus I am a part of the "High Steppers". So I am on the "Step Team," and also a part of the Student Volunteers Council, which is a tutoring group that goes to Trenton three times a week.

- d. What color would describe your personality and why?

Orange. I guess I would actually say orange because most of the time I'm really bright and bubbly. I find there is also like a deeper side to me and I feel like it is almost yellow, but then orange has that deeper tone to it.

Balancing Life in the Princeton University Bubble

- a. When you hear the word stress as a Princeton University student, does it evoke a positive or negative response?

It definitely invokes a negative response, but I actually feel like I was more stressed in high school than I am now, which might surprise some people. I know high school when I involved in do admissions applications in the 12th grade year, I used to have panic attacks. I am like terrified of going back to panic attack stuff like that and I try not to go back to that time of panic attacks and stuff. So while I am here, I always make sure I don't get back to that stress level because I am kind of terrified of going back to that type of stress level.

- b. In a typical week, how often do you feel stressed at Princeton?

Stressed? I would say maybe once or twice. Whenever I am about to have a test – anxiety, in a sense. But it is not too bad.

- c. How would you describe the relationship between Princeton and stress?

I feel like it's different for different people depending on what their major is. I know that for me being a freshman I don't really feel it. It also depends on class year. Being a freshman it is not so bad since I am an A and B student and not in the B and C grade category. But I know a lot of students feel a lot of stress and pressure to do well in those extremely hard science classes. I guess it is hard to generalize about the stress experienced by "Princetonians" in general, but I would say that a lot of people feel stress.

Searching for the Soul and Pondering the Big Questions

- a. What are the ways in which you find meaning and purpose in life?

I find meaning and purpose in life through interactions and conversations with people. Whenever I converse with others I see the bigger picture in life. I am able to compare my life goals and the things that are important in my life and it helps me reevaluate the way I view life.

- b. Where are the places you find the most meaning?

My home and Bible Study. These two places are where I really think deeply about life and ponder things questions of meaning.

- c. Who are the people that inspire you the most?

I have a friend in Stamford, Connecticut who inspires me academically, and spiritually, because she is a generally nice and benevolent person. I would also say my mother because she is always giving and caring. She is a really good role model.

- d. What are the big questions that keep you awake at night?

The questions that continue to live with me are: "What am I doing with my life? How am I going to make this world a better place or how am I going to impact the world and make a difference?" I have always seen myself pursuing degrees, but it really doesn't matter if you have the degrees – it is what do you with them. I always end up wondering what it is I am going to do that is going to be significant to change the world.

- e. What are the big questions that cause your soul to ascend?

Children. I really like seeing the potential that little kids have and seeing them dream, big. More often than not, they do not allow their situations or their home life to bring them down. I like see them overcome and make the world a better place at an early age.

Embracing Sabbath as a Life Practice

- a. When you hear the word "Sabbath," what kinds of emotions or thoughts does it evoke?

It invokes serenity and it also invokes, "oh, that is something that I should be doing that I never do." Serenity that I do not seek ever.

- b. Is community important in your practice of Sabbath?

I would say, yes. But it is a very particular community. Most of my Sabbath time is with my Bible Study group and I really bonded with the people that attend. So because of that I feel really relaxed. When I am around them I feel like I can just be myself and indulge in our Sabbath.

- c. What would Sabbath look like as a life practice?

I would say that a life full of Sabbath would be one in which you are in communion, with others. You pay attention to that communion, and you are bonding over human experiences. It is a time of reflection, and coming together.

- d. Name one Sabbath practice that has been most beneficial for you.

I actually thought when you were speaking about the celebration part of the Sabbath definition and I know we have "True Thursday." All of my life is in some way related to "True Thursday." "True Thursday" is a predominantly African American worship experience. We sing gospel songs and

share our faith fervently. All of us have our experiences of the week and talk there among ourselves and share from the heart. So that is a communion, and good Sabbath time.

D. Ethnographic Interview 3

Name: Daniel

Date of interview: April 16, 2013

Religious Affiliation: Korean American Church

Class Year: Senior

Biographical and Demographic Profile

- a. Tell me a bit about yourself and life before Princeton University.

I was born in San Diego. I grew up in San Diego, California and I attended church, with my parents. I went to a Korean American Church, which is sort of like a general gathering. There was an adult program there where they speak Korean, and they had an English ministry for college students and youth groups. I mean life was pretty chill. I was really into music and played lots of music in school in a youth orchestra. That is one of the things that I was really passionate, about. I liked taking walks on the beach. One of the things that I miss about San Diego is definitely the weather. Recently my parents moved out of San Diego and live in Korea now. So the city is a little different – life was pretty slow in San Diego. I don't remember too much else. Like it was only like five years ago but to think about it, right? Not much happened, relative to, you know, how many things happened over the last four years here at Princeton. So I think that is pretty much my life in a nutshell.

- b. What was your high school educational experience like? Did you attend a private or public high school?

I went to a public school and it was a good school in terms of a public school. We had really good AP scores and a lot of smart people went to this school. I think it was very wealthy and a lot of wealthy people attended. There was of a smart you had to take throughout high school if you wanted to get into a good college. We had a competition of who could get the highest test score and we would all compare and if I would get the highest score somebody else would get really jealous. It was like that sort of dynamic.

- e. What color would describe your personality and why?

I like blue as a very calming color. I'm not really disturbed generally by anything. I'm a pretty steady guy. I also say blue because of being in San Diego, you are by the ocean, all the time and life is so much more relaxed and you know the constant sort of crashing, the almost soporific, the crashing, of the ocean. I associate myself with that sort of setting. Here at Princeton people tell me I am like pretty chill. Even when there is a lot of things to do I am not generally stressed out. Like I said I don't express it that much. So I would say blue is, you know, definitely it attracts, me.

Balancing Life in the Princeton University Bubble

- a. When you hear the word stress as a Princeton University student, does it evoke a positive or negative response?

Definitely negative. I travel to Kenya every summer and life there is extremely different from the United States. You go there and life is so much slower. When you set up a meeting for a certain time – people arrive twenty minutes late just because life is slow and people don't stress about things as much. I actually feel this every time I come back from Kenya. When I am on board the plane, I can actually feel this vibe that is different. I feel like I'm being caged. There is a very tangible sense that the atmosphere has changed.

Searching for the Soul and Pondering the Big Questions

- a. What are the ways in which you find meaning and purpose in life?

I think maybe I will give like a two part answer. One of the ways I find meaning in life is by finding a bigger picture of life than these narrow things. The reason why a lot of people I feel don't find meaning in life is because their version of life is so small. It is about getting an A or doing this or that little thing. You know, achieving this little thing, getting this car, getting this house, living in this town. But seeing and enjoying all of God's creation as he has created it is so meaningful. There are so many things that he has given us for us to be able to enjoy. I think just walking outside on a day like this spring day, and finding all these flowers outside is so beautiful.

Living a life that is not about yourself that is one of our themes in "Manna" that this year it is not about you. It is not about you. But I didn't realize that that has such a big difference on how you live your life and how meaningful you find your life. I mean because before, you know, like I said, you know it is all about achievement, right. It is about making your story great. It is about making your story as awesome as it can possibly be. What if you actually came into a day thinking that this road was not about you, but it was about making other people's stories great? That was revolutionary for me.

- c. Who are the people that inspire you the most?

I think that the people that inspire, me the most are people that just don't care about themselves and have given up everything to other people. It is all about serving others.

E. Ethnographic Interview 13

Name: Garvin

Date of interview: April 16, 2013

Religious Affiliation: Orthodox Jew

Class Year: Senior

Biographical and Demographic Profile

- a. Tell me a bit about yourself and life before Princeton University.

My name is Garvin. I am a senior in the Near Eastern Studies Department and I just delivered my thesis. It is very exciting!

Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

I am from New York, originally. I grew up in Riverdale New York. I went to a Jewish Day School for my entire life. I would say my family is somewhat, traditional, but not strictly observant and not necessarily so Orthodox, in their practice. Growing up at home, in relation to the Jewish Sabbath, we would do certain rituals related to the Sabbath. We would sit down at Friday night dinner together and say certain blessings. But some of the prohibitions of the Sabbath, we didn't necessarily always follow. Being at an Orthodox, Jewish Day School, I actually spent a year after high school in Israel studying, in a Yeshiva, a Jewish Learning Seminary -- I became slightly more observant in my own practice and started, observing the Sabbath in a more Orthodox, way.

- c. Do you have siblings? If an only child, what was that like growing up?

I have three younger siblings who range from 20, 17 and 14.

- d. What was your high school educational experience like? Did you attend a private or public high school?

I loved my high school. I was in the second graduating class of my high school, so there was a lot of room for flexibility to kind of the experience you had. The school didn't offer Arabic at the beginning of my high school and then half way through my first semester, I and a couple of students, went to the administrator, since we wanted to learn Arabic, and they started offering Arabic. It was the kind of school that pushed the students, to challenge, and question, with both the secular as well as within kind of Judaic, studies. They were very open and really pushed students both formally and informally in conversations to really question our own practice, and how we viewed ourselves in relationship to Judaism as well as the practice of the Jewish faith.

- e. Do you have particular hobbies and extracurricular interests?

In high school, I was on a couple different sports teams. I played basketball, but I also was involved in like "Model UN" and also -- this was not so much in high school -- but during some of my summers, I participated in a program called: "Seeds of Peace", which is a program that brings Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians', and Americans to a summer camp and promote a dialogue.

We had a class that was called "Abraham's Vision" where you would have a Muslim, teacher and a Jewish teacher, who co-taught, a class at my high school and we had a sister school, a Muslim School in Manhattan that co-taught the same type of curriculum to their students, as well.

- f. What color would describe your personality and why?

I feel like my instinct is to say blue. I guess it's probably because blue to me is kind of like a very relaxed color. Maybe, I associate it with like the flow of water for some reason. In my mind it kind of typifies, me. I am someone who kind of goes with the flow, and is very calm and contained.

Searching For the Soul and Pondering the Big Questions

- b. Where are the places you find the most meaning?

Finding meaning and purpose in life is something that I am not always so clear on. I think in a large way I find a lot of meaning in a sense of community. There is a certain element of responsibility that I can't really put my finger on because it is not something that I necessarily signed, up for, but it is something that I just inherently feel. Truthfully, I guess there are different levels of community – different circles, of community. I feel very close to my friends and family in that sense of community. Additionally, I am tied to the broader Jewish community in particular and then the Princeton community, and even to humanity in general. There is a certain element of responsibility to me because it's almost irrational in some sense to me, It is just so ingrained, in us to feel so connected to other people. That to me is very important.

- c. Who are the people that inspire you the most?

I would say my parents definitely outrank, anybody in that category. I would say my parents first and foremost.

Embracing Sabbath as a Life Practice

- a. When you hear the word “Sabbath,” what kinds of emotions or thoughts does it evoke?

I would say it invokes, rest, peacefulness, and serenity. I think especially, at Princeton, it is that time where it is like, "ah, it is finally Shabbat, finally the Sabbath". There is a big sigh of relief.

- b. Is community important in your practice of Sabbath?

So I think for me it's huge. I spent my first summer in Egypt, and my second summer in Tanzania, and both of those places once had thriving, Jewish communities, but no longer do. It was during my first summer there when I was in Egypt -- the summer of 2010, I was very observant in my own practice of the Sabbath, and I didn't use any technology. I would make sure to buy food beforehand so I didn't need to use any money on the Sabbath, but it was this very bizarre feeling. It did not feel at all like the Sabbath because everyone else around me was going about their day and there was no one I could share the experience with. I felt a little weird and I didn't enjoy it at all. Because it basically felt like I was just prohibited from doing things. There was nothing that I was really gaining, out of the experience.

In the same way when I was in Tanzania, I actually at times wasn't as observant in my own practice because like it really didn't make sense to me. That being said, when I come back to a Jewish community whether it be in my home in New York or I step into a Jewish community, that I didn't know before and have that Sabbath experience and fully embrace it. I love it for what it is within a community even though if it didn't really totally make sense for me as an individual completely on my own.

- c. What would Sabbath look like as a life practice?

You know, this past week I went to two different mindfulness related talks and that is very much like what Sabbath is. It is the intentionality of being mindful, resting and delighting in life. There is this constant tension throughout the Jewish tradition of obligated or ritualistic spirituality and something that is more genuine and spiritual in that it is not formalized.

- d. Name one Sabbath practice that has been most beneficial for you.

I would say it is not exactly a practice it is the prohibition of using a computer or a phone. Because I think that you saw when I walked in here I was on my phone, and I think throughout the day, you are constantly connected or constantly looking at new things and there is very little time where you are just taking a deep breath, relaxing, on your own with your own thoughts. According to these mindfulness practices, being with your own thoughts and not being connected significantly reduces feelings of stress.

F. Princeton Perspective Project Mission Statement

The Princeton Perspective Project (PPP), a joint initiative of the Office of the Dean of the College and the Office of the Vice President for Campus Life, aims to empower Princeton students to:

- constructively navigate setbacks, disappointment, isolation, and rejection;
- build resilience and develop adaptive coping responses to stress;
- alleviate the burden of unrealistic expectations; and
- mitigate anxieties inherent in the Princeton student experience.

Intended to normalize the conversation around student struggle and combat the idealized notion of “effortless perfection” that pervades the Princeton campus, the project will facilitate Princeton students talking to their peers as a supplement to programming and advice from faculty members and advising staff. Featuring video and written narrative from students, faculty, staff, and alumni of all backgrounds as well as programming that encourages reflection (i.e. retreats, group discussions, and individual counseling, advising, and mentoring sessions), the project will gather and make more visible efforts already happening across campus to help Princeton students gain “perspective” when they encounter failure and rejection. A distinct, new feature of the project will be a password-protected website for use by students as well as academic and student affairs advisers to demystify how students can seek help and take full advantage of Princeton’s unique and resource-rich environment, realizing their full potential at Princeton and beyond.

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