

## Sabbath Interview // Diane & Brian Riemersma

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When I asked Diane and Brian about their experience with the Sabbath, I noticed an overarching theme: the conversation always came back to Sunday supper at Grandma's. Something I have been thinking about a lot this past month is the significance of *meals*. I want to suggest that we as a church consider the ways participating in routine meals may be an important part of our Sabbath rhythms and practices.

The story goes that when Diane and Brian were dating as a young couple, they began to make a weekly visit to Diane's parents' house for Sunday supper. Other members in their family caught on to the routine and started joining as well. Eventually, as the families grew, the nieces, nephews and grandkids were bringing along their friends. When some of the older kids went to college, they would make the trip back home from school just to partake in this family ritual. Sunday supper became a lighthearted, sacred space of invitation. Brian told me, "Grandma would always say, 'the more the merrier.'"

You can imagine the beautiful chaos of a large family meal. The chatter of children, little ones pulling on their parents' sleeves, glasses of water spilling, dishes being passed around, kitchen timers going off, the fragrance of food wafting about, laughter, catching up, and storytelling – ultimately, an atmosphere of fullness. Diane can recall watching Grandpa sit back and just watch as the Sunday suppers unfolded, thoroughly entertained and peaceful while taking in the scene. Everyone plays a role and is involved in a meal setting. Eugene Peterson writes, a meal is "an event that employs all the senses and can occur only in specific places with named

people, requiring a language that is personal and conversational... it is virtually impossible to be detached and uninvolved when we are sharing a meal with someone” (Peterson 217). A meal requires thinking of ahead for someone, anticipating someone’s arrival. A meal requires participation and presence. Elbow to elbow, eye to eye – a meal is *personal*.

Diane and Brian explained that the routine of a meal on Sundays kept their family connected and involved in each other’s lives throughout the weeks and years. Intentional time with family blessed their children, even in ways they may not have known at the time. “Bonds form when we spend regular time with people over meals,” Diane explained. The children were able to grow up with other Christians playing an active part in their life. Cousins became more like siblings. Aunts and Uncles became like mentors. When a child in the family was going through a hard time, they had their cousins and family members to receive community and support from. When one of the cousins was going through a difficult season in life, he spent time road tripping the country with one of the other cousins he grew up alongside. Connections like this forge over time and repetition of connection. Diane pointed out to me how many people it takes to raise a child – each child needs a number of significant mentors / influencers in their life. Routine gatherings with people naturally form new opportunities for intimacy.

I recognize that not all of us have great relationships with our families. Perhaps our families live far away or are even incredibly difficult to be around. I don’t think this kind of meal has to, or even should, be strictly for family. What would it look like to build familial community in our own neighborhoods and workplaces and especially in church by establishing new rhythms of time spent together around a table?

Diane and Brian expressed that Sabbath is a day in the week that is meant to be *different* than the others; Sabbath is meant to be “set apart.” Sabbath is meant to be a day where we interrupt the regular rhythm of work and play, where we pause and take things slowly. Peterson writes, “Meals take time, meals are inefficient, meals are not ‘productive.’ And so meals are streamlined, made efficient, individualized – the personal and relational and communal are abbreviated as much as possible.” One way we can set our Sabbath days apart and remind our bodies and spirits that we were made for *rest* is by taking the time to craft a meal, taking the time to do something that is not “productive,” taking the time to simply enjoy fellowship.