

Feeling stressed, anxious or overworked?

# Rest

The Benefits of Having the Sabbath

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# CONTENTS

Chapter 1	
QUESTIONS	3
Chapter 2	
ORIGINS OF THE REST DAY	6
Chapter 3	
THE EARLY CHURCH CHANGED THE SABBATH DAY	12
Seven Benefits from the practice of Sabbath Rest.	16
How to Stop	19
Chapter 4	
THE SABBATH REST EXPERIENCE IS FOR YOU TODAY	21
A Rest for the People of God	24
A Final Challenge	31

## Chapter 1

# QUESTIONS

Many people who live in the Western world, or in the increasing number of countries that have been influenced by the culture of the West, have found themselves materially wealthy but time poor.

In the past fifty years we have developed machines to take over many of the time-consuming tasks that once took us hours to complete every week.

Today we have machines that can wash our clothes, dry them and iron them, thus saving us hours of our time every week. Other machines will scrub, vacuum or polish our floors, instead of getting down on our hands and knees to clean them – saving many more hours. Instead of taking a few hours to prepare a meal, we can cook one using the microwave in a few minutes. And what happened to the time spent cleaning the pots, pans and plates? It is reduced to a minimum because everything goes into the dishwasher! We don't have to wait until the water has boiled because it comes out of the tap boiling hot – or cold if that is our preference! No time is wasted roasting or grinding the coffee – it is now instant!

Outside of the home we have machines to cut the grass – even without our pushing them! There are machines that saw and machines that prune. Other machines automatically water the garden following computer instructions. Some of the work gets done without our even being at home! We are saving time everywhere!

Then there is the car or cars! For many people having a car means no more time wasted waiting for public transport or having to walk to the train. We can move faster and more efficiently saving minutes here and hours there! Children are transported to school and to their extracurricular activities such as sport or dancing classes.

If we have truly saved so much time, what have we done with it?

Well, the experts tell us that we work longer hours – something about “the work expanding to fill the time available.” Many households now need two incomes in order to pay the mortgage and the payments on the new cars and the boat.

In the early 1980s the Australian Government commissioned a group of experts to discover what life would be like by the year 2000. One of the major findings of this group of experts was that due to the advances in technology and labour-saving devices, by the year 2000 Australians would only need to work a four-day week. So, the Government began to plan for resources and recreational facilities so we could spend our spare leisure

time easily.

Here is another question that I have asked myself, "What happened to the proposed extra leisure day each week and why is it that people are working longer and harder for very little increase in income?"

Australians are not only time-poor. They are also increasingly anxious, feeling highly stressed and burnt out from overwork. Doctors are reporting record numbers of their patients needing help for depression. The numbers of suicides, even among the youth, are increasing annually. This week, a psychiatrist who was not a person of faith, stated on National Television that we were experiencing an epidemic of hopelessness. She told everyone of her listeners that Australians needed to find hope!

Of course, some of these symptoms appear to have been magnified during the Covid Pandemic that has had devastating impacts on many countries around the world in 2020 and 2021. Australia has not been immune from the suffering and it is difficult to see a way out of this period of pandemic in the near future. But the pandemic has only served to magnify these symptoms. It has not created them. They have been creeping up on us for decades. They have acted like a silent thief in the night who comes into our houses unseen and unobserved, stealing things that are really precious to us without our being alerted to what is missing! Then only when it is too late, we miss the stolen treasure and are unable to replace the loss.

My third question is, "What can I do to relieve some of this pressure that I live with every day? Is there a way to restore my life to a liveable balance where I have time for my priorities and time to let my mind and emotions be set free from worry and stress?"

I have no doubt that many medical people will have helpful answers to my third question. Counsellors will no doubt have a contribution to make too. Business leaders and politicians will present their own solutions - mostly self-serving answers designed to quieten the concerns of the customers and voters.

Now, I am a pastor so I have to ask myself, "Does God have an answer to my questions?" Maybe you have asked the same question yourself. No doubt you have found your own answers. I cannot claim to have all the answers. I am sure that the medical people and counsellors can be a great help to us as we try to cope with the pressures. But I have been thinking a great deal about how my little world has changed in the last fifty years in relation to the practice of having Sunday as being a rest day when the shops were all closed and hardly anyone went to work. Many people attended Church services on Sunday, but not everyone! No sport was played and the neighbourhood was a quiet place.

Where did the idea of having one day in seven as a rest day come from?  
What are the benefits of us taking a day off each week just to rest and re-balance our lives?

## Chapter 2

# ORIGINS OF THE REST DAY

Many older people in the Western world have grown up with the idea of Sunday being a non-work day for most people. So, it may come as a surprise to learn that in many countries there is no rest day.

On one of our first visits to Thailand, Irene and I were introduced to a young mum of three children. The lady belonged to a strong Buddhist family and because of her circumstances her income was desperately needed to support her family. To protect this lady, I will not mention her name here. We were privileged to have a role in training another young Mum from Thailand at The Pines Training Centre. Her name was Peung. When Peung returned to her home in Thailand, one of the first people that she led to Jesus was her friend. This lady friend worked seven days each week selling small locally made craft goods in a market. Most nights she would also work at home to create more goods to sell in her stall. In her culture there was no day of rest! On a later visit we were able to meet with Peung's friend again who was now a part of a new home group of brand-new Christians. The lady told us that she knew that Peung was able to worship God in her Church on a Sunday and she wanted desperately to be able to worship God too. Her plan involved some risk. She planned to ask the owner of her market stall if she could take Sunday off work without pay so she could go to worship. There was a very real danger that she would lose her job completely.

God is good and He is faithful! A Sunday worker replacement was found for the lady and she was able to worship God with other Christians. A few years later, she told us that the owner wanted to sell his stall and she was able to buy the small business from him and gain more freedoms!

Over the border in Myanmar, most of the population of the capital city of Yangon were day labourers. Every morning the men reported to the work line. If work was available for that day, they earned the equivalent of one dollar - enough to buy enough rice for the family's evening meal; no work - no food! Again, the population worked every day because there was no designated day for rest. Whenever someone became a believer in Jesus and desired to set a day aside for worship, then they missed a day's wages and possibly also a day's food.

All of this is not meant to promote Sunday as a day of worship but simply to educate people to the fact that in many cultures there is no tradition of one day in seven as a day of rest.

## **What are the origins of the tradition of keeping one day in seven as a rest day?**

To find the answers to our question we need to turn to the Bible, particularly to the first two books that outline the early history of the origins of humankind and of the first nation of Israel.

Now someone is remembering an old lesson from Sunday School or Religious Instruction at school. "Wasn't there something in the Ten Commandments about keeping the Sabbath day holy?" Yes, one of the commandments given to Israel by God and communicated by the first leader, Moses, said in Exodus 20:8-11:

*"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

So, we read, "the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God." Because Israel always measured a day as "the morning and the evening," the regular Sabbath day began on Friday night and finished early Saturday night. During these 24 hours the people were commanded not to do any labour or to work. The Jewish word, "Sabbath" actually means "to cease or to desist from." No one was to work - not even the son or daughter, or the servants, or any animals or even any foreign visitor living in the town. The rest day was not only to be labour free. It was also designed to be a "holy" day. Holy means a day separate from the others to be used for God's purposes.

We will see later how revolutionary this law was and how widespread the intended benefits of the sabbath rest were.

Is it true then, that the concept of having one day in seven as a day of rest originated from the Ten Commandments and the nation of Israel? No! We have to go further back in history to find the answer. In verse 11 of Exodus 20 we read *"For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."* The idea of having one day in seven as a day of rest originated in something that God did Not do! After creating everything in six days, God ceased from His work and rested! We read about this rest in Genesis 2:2,3.

*And by the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so, on that day He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creation He had done.*

The seventh day of creation was the first day of humankind! God had just completed all the work involved in making the entire creation. Everything satisfied Him! From this time on, His work would be very different so He took a break. Why? Because He was tired or exhausted? No, because He wanted to set an example for all humankind that after creative work there needs to be a pause for contemplation and for refreshment in preparation for the work of the next six days. God declared the day to be "holy." It was to be a different day.

### **In so doing God Himself established a pattern for creative, satisfying and successful living.**

So, when God gave the commandment about keeping the Sabbath day holy, He was simply describing a practice that He Himself had followed after He completed His work of creation and prepared to move forward to His work of Redemption.

*For six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you must cease, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the son of your maidservant may be refreshed, as well as the foreign resident. Exodus 23:12.*

The sabbath day (one day in every seven), was to be a day when all work would cease. Every man and woman, every servant and slave, every animal and even the land and vineyards would have a chance to rest. Everything came to a standstill except that sacrifices were offered to God four times on this day instead of twice.

This complete rest was one of God's greatest temporal blessings to humanity. Blaikie said, "The Sabbath is one of God's special presents to working people and one of its chief goals is to prolong their lives and to help them to work at their best for their own personal satisfaction."

### **The Sabbath rest was also meant to be a "sign."**

Exodus 31:13 says,

*"Tell the Israelites, you must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so that you may know that I am the LORD who makes you holy."*

A sign! Of what? Sabbath day observance was a sign that Israel was in a precious covenant relationship with God. From this time up until the days of the Roman era, Israel was known as the only nation that observed the



Sabbath Day. In fact, Jews were known as “Sabbath keepers.” By this unique witness, the Jews declared that God had called them out of Egypt through mighty miracles and set them apart to be His people. They were to be true God-worshippers. This unique sign was not a temporary arrangement, but it was intended to speak to the hearts and minds of all of the following generations of Israelites. Because the Sabbath was such a strong and permanent message to the following generations and to the world, anyone found desecrating the day was severely punished!

### **The Sabbath rest was also meant to be a “Joy!”**

Isaiah 58:13,14 says,

*“If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,  
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,  
and call the Sabbath a delight  
and the holy day of the LORD honourable;  
if you honour it, not going your own ways,  
or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;  
then you shall take delight in the LORD,  
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;  
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*

In his Bible commentary on this passage Tatford wrote:

“ The Sabbath in Scripture is not synonymous with the quintessence of morbidity (sorrow and a long face), but rather with the fullest of joy. It was intended to be a day of happiness and rejoicing. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest but the Pharisees had overlaid so many of their own regulations and interpretations on it that Sabbath keeping had become a burden to many. When Jesus healed people on the Sabbath day, the Pharisees criticised Him but in reality, Jesus was fulfilling the Law in his actions by bringing great joy to people. The day provided the opportunity for public and private worship of God. On that day the morning and evening sacrifices were doubled (Numbers 28:9). Fresh shew-bread replaced the old (Lev. 24:8.) It was a day when people could give to the Lord. In return, God promised that if His sabbaths were kept, blessing would accrue to His people. ((Lev.26:2-12 and Isaiah 58:13-14.)”

The idea of a Sabbath rest originated with the Creator Himself who stipulated that the entire nation of Israel would copy His example of resting one day in seven. The purpose of this rest was threefold:

1. It was to create a pattern for creative, satisfying and successful living.
2. It was to be a sign to the world through all succeeding generations of the relationship that existed between God and His people.

3. It was meant to be an experience of joy and delight in the Lord, appreciating His provision.

This Sabbath idea is an expression of the pure genius of God indicating His concern for far more than a worshipping community.

Dennis Prager is a popular neo-conservative radio commentator based in Los Angeles. His parents were both non-practicing orthodox Jews and he has a special interest in the history of the Jewish people in history. I do not know him personally and therefore cannot comment on other matters that he has published. Nor can I endorse them. But I found a brief article of his online about the Sabbath rest that gave me a greater appreciation of the genius of God. Here are his main points together with some necessary explanations from me.

According to Prager there are six reasons why the Sabbath rest is important.

**First, it uniquely elevated the human being.** For all of human history people had to work hard in order to survive. For centuries that work involved incredibly endless toil and labour. Even after the Industrial Revolution when machines took over some of the most arduous and repetitive work, still people worked long hours in often dark and dangerous locations. In this modern age, it is essential that we “work to live.” But in instituting the sabbath rest God said to humans, “your life is more than work! You are more significant than the labour you contribute to society! You are much greater than the work you do, so one day in seven, cease from your work and refresh yourself!”

**Secondly, no matter how materially poor we may be, at least on the Sabbath Day, we are not just material beings.** Even the animals were to cease from their work on the sabbath day. But humans were told to make the day a holy day! Our life does not consist only of labour and its rewards. Humans are spiritual beings who have been designed by the Creator for a greater, Eternal destiny. Our lives should not be totally absorbed with gathering material things. We need to care for the spiritual part of ourselves which will last into Eternity while the material things will be left far behind!

**Thirdly, more than any other commandment, the Fourth commandment reminds people that they are meant to be free.** In a later re-statement of this commandment in Deuteronomy, we read, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt.” There was no Sabbath day to be celebrated in Egypt! Why? Because slaves cannot take a day of rest, only free people can do that. Prager wrote, “In the light of this, in the Biblical view, unless it is necessary for survival, people who choose to work seven days a week are essentially slaves – slaves to work or perhaps to money, but slaves nonetheless. The millionaire who works seven days a week is simply a rich slave.”

**Fourthly, while the Bible could not universally abolish slavery, the Sabbath commandment greatly humanised that terrible institution and ultimately helped make slavery impossible.** Until this commandment, a slave owner was in total control of the slave. There was no obligation on the owner to ever allow the slave to rest let alone take one day off work in seven. This commandment said that even a slave has fundamental human rights, one of them being one day in seven to rest. Both slave and owner were the same, human beings bestowed with dignity and spirituality by God the Creator.

**Fifthly, the Sabbath almost singlehandedly strengthens family ties and friendships.** The day when we “cease from work” each week allows us to re-orientate our lives to the things that really matter. We are free to give quality time to our relationships in marriage, family and friendships. Wherever there is a “workaholic” in a family, there will almost certainly be evidence of strained relationships and problems between people who should be enjoying an environment of love.

**Sixthly, the Sabbath commandment granted animals dignity.** All the animals belonging to the family were to enjoy a day of rest when the family celebrated the Sabbath Day, possibly the first national law in history designed to benefit animals. People who felt obligated by the Sabbath to give their animals one day’s rest in seven were much less likely to mistreat them on the remaining days of the week.

I will give Prager the last word here.

“The God factor plays another role in the Sabbath. Just as faith in God brings people to the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath brings people to faith in God. In our secularised modern societies, very few activities bring people to a relationship with God as effectively as does devoting a day each week to the spiritual, not just the material. Not bad for one day a week!

That’s why the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. No wonder that those who have it in their lives are often happier, with richer family lives, more serenity, a community of friends, and, yes, even better health.”

Throughout the world, the nickname for the Jews became “the Sabbath Keepers!” Today, only among orthodox Jews, does the Sabbath day remain as a religious practice. The Seventh Day Adventists and a few smaller Denominations also follow the Jewish example.

But most Christians have not followed the practice of setting apart the Friday evening to Saturday evening as a rest day. Our failure to do so raises some questions. Are we disobeying God by ignoring one of the Ten Commandments? Why did we as Christians move from keeping the seventh day to keeping the first day of the week? And if the effects of keeping the Sabbath Day were so wide ranging for the Jews, have we lost far more than simply keeping one day in each week as a rest day?

## Chapter 3

# THE EARLY CHURCH CHANGED THE SABBATH DAY

We have discovered that God meant the Sabbath Day to be celebrated with joy and lightness of spirit. (Isaiah 58:13,14) But unfortunately the legal people (the Pharisees) got to work on it and made it a burden for the people. How did they turn something that was meant for personal refreshment and joy into an intolerable burden?

I can just imagine one of the leaders of the Pharisees intimidating a crowd of young Jews who were under his instruction. Perhaps he quoted the fourth commandment and emphasised that on the seventh day God ceased from His work. Then with a stern look at his followers he asks them, "How do you define work?"

Work became defined as preparing some kinds of food in certain ways, but not in other ways. Lifting a certain weight was not work, but if something was heavier, that was work! You were allowed to walk a small number of steps on the Sabbath day but if you exceeded that number, you were a law breaker! And so, they went on with many rules and regulations.

By the time Jesus came to earth, the Sabbath rest had changed its meaning and had become a great burden because of all of the rules surrounding it. This change explains why Jesus was considered to be quite revolutionary by the Pharisees of His day. No doubt, the early Apostles were challenged and changed by the experience and explanation of the Sabbath Day that they received from Jesus Himself. And this knowledge would have helped them to frame up the practice of Sabbath Day keeping within the early Church.

### The Sabbath Day and Jesus

Matthew tells us about two incidents that took place when Jesus clashed with the Pharisees about their rules for keeping the Sabbath Day.

*Matthew 12:1-12 (ESV):*

*At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were*

*with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."*

The Pharisees often followed Jesus around seeking to find a way to criticise Him and undermine His popularity with the crowds. In this instance the critical issue was does the Law allow you to pick a head of corn and eat it on the Sabbath Day? The Pharisees rules stipulated that this was work and was forbidden. But they were wrong! Jesus quoted two examples from the Old Testament. The first was about King David who was hungry and he led his followers into the house of God and ate the Bread of the Presence to satisfy their hunger. The Law said that only the priests were allowed to do this. Then Jesus gave the example of how the priests in doing their work every Sabbath Day were actually breaking the Commandment and remained guiltless. Then Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6, *"I desire Mercy and not sacrifice."* Then Jesus made an important pronouncement, *"For the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath."*

In Hosea 6 verse 7: God says, *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice."* In other words, the whole law exists for the sake of mercy. Jesus said that all the law is summed up in this one word: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. The Pharisees couldn't see the true meaning of the sabbath because they didn't have hearts of love. *"The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath,"* Jesus says in Mark 2:27. So if your heart isn't a heart for man—if it is not a heart of love—you cannot see the meaning of the sabbath. For the sabbath is a gift of love to meet man's need, not an oppressive burden to make him miserable or proud.

Then there was a second incident when Jesus was challenged about the Sabbath.

*Matthew 12:9-12 He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

Jesus explained to the Pharisees and the crowd that the Sabbath is a time to do good. If your animal needs your care, then it is good to care for it. Because a person is of more value even than a sheep, then it is lawful to heal the wounded on the Sabbath.

Love not only overcomes the Law, it also fulfils the Law of God!

## Jesus Didn't Abolish the Sabbath

So, Jesus didn't come to abolish the Sabbath but to dig it out from under the mountain of legalistic sediment, and give it to us again as a blessing rather than a burden. It is a day for showing mercy and a day for doing good (Matt.12 verse 12). It should not be governed rigidly by narrow definitions of what is work and what is not. It is a day to focus on the Lord. And now Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (according to verse 8), so it is a day to focus on Jesus. It is impossible that a day focused on Jesus should be a burden to the believing heart—*"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"*

## The Early Church moved the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week

The Bible does not record any instruction of Jesus to celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday. Nevertheless, those followers and leaders who knew Him best decided that the Church would mark Sunday as their Sabbath Day.

Whilst the early Church was confined to the Jews, the early believers continued to observe the Sabbath rest. But there is evidence that quite early, the Christians moved their day of worship to coincide with the joyous day that their Master Jesus rose from the dead. The Book of Acts records that the early Church actually met daily for teaching, fellowship and worship. (Acts 2:42-47) It was only when many Gentile people began to be followers of Jesus that the subject of which Jewish customs and Laws should the Gentiles keep. The Church elders' decision, recorded in Acts 15, related to their desire that the Gentiles should live in freedom except for keeping certain dietary requirements that would allow for fellowship between Gentiles and Jews, and abstinence from sexual immorality. No mention was made of keeping the Sabbath Day.

By the time the Church had been established in Troas in the ancient province of Asia (bordering the Mediterranean Sea,) the Book of Acts records the Church meeting *"on the first day of the week."* (Chapter 20 v7)

When Paul gave his instructions to the Church meeting in Corinth about the need for a special offering he wrote, *"On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come."* (1 Cor.16:2)

These two Bible references indicate clearly that as the early Church moved to include all the nations, the practice of keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day moved to an observance of the first day of the week as a holy day. Why did the Apostles change the practice of celebrating on the seventh day of the week? We could say that the change was due to the fact that the Church was no longer composed of people from a Jewish background - a true fact.

But the real reason for the Church coming to count the first day of the week instead of the seventh day of the week as the day of rest and worship is that Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath rose from the dead on the first day of the week. (John 20:1) After God completed His original work of creation, He rested on the seventh day of the week. The creative work of redemption performed by Christ involved the passion of the cross and His triumphant resurrection on the first day of the week. In the great words of Paul in Ephesians 2:10, *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

So, from the commencement of the Church Age, the first day of the week was set aside as a day of worship. Some people maintain that the creation of Sunday as a day of worship was the work of the emperor Constantine the Great in 321 AD. But we have seen from the Scriptures in Acts and 1 Corinthians that the change took place long before Constantine ruled the Roman Empire.

### **The writings of some of the early Church Fathers confirm this fact.**

Barnabas writes about 70 AD, "We keep the Lord's Day with joyfulness. The Day that Jesus rose from the dead." The Didache of the Apostles, one of the earliest Christian documents originating in the first Century, states: "On the Lord's own day gather yourselves together to break bread and give thanks."

Ignatius of Antioch in 110 AD says, "Those who walked in the ancient practices attain unto newness of hope, no longer observing sabbaths, but fashioning their lives after the Lord's day, on which our life also rose with Him, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ."

And Justin Martyr in 135 AD said, "Sunday is the day on which we all hold common assembly, because it is the first day on which God having wrought a change in the darkness and matter made the world, and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. "

### **In moving from the idea of Sabbath rest to Sunday as a day of worship have we lost something important?**

It may well be that the early Christians gained a great deal by setting aside the first day of the week as a day to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, especially if they were able to incorporate the concept of rest into their day.

But whilst the Church in Africa, Latin America and Asia continues to grow in astonishing numbers today, the Church in the West is in serious decline in most places, causing some politicians and academics to describe our time as a post-Christian era, and our countries as Secular States. Our Sundays, once days for worship, families and relaxation, have become no different in many ways from the remaining days of the week.

We should not wonder why people who feel over-worked, anxious and

stressed about the future, doubt their ability to cope. There is a great need for us to re-discover how to disconnect from work pressure, to re-focus on relationships and to re-connect with the big picture meaning of life.

We need to return to the concept of having one day in seven as our Sabbath Day. There are enormous benefits to be gained. Let us consider what we might gain emotionally, practically and relationally from paying attention to God's demand for humans to enjoy a Sabbath Rest day every week. Later, we will consider our spiritual practices in relation to entering into God's rest.

Natasha Moore is a research fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity in Australia. She has a Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Cambridge. Natasha has written an article called, "Recovering the Sabbath: Rest and the Culture of Work."

In her article, Natasha describes the difficulty that modern workers face with coping with all the demands that are upon them. She says that while good business demands that we be good "time managers" it does not allow us the time for our own re-creation and relaxation. It is almost impossible for people today to contemplate how they might return to the concept of celebrating a Sabbath (rest) day each week. She writes, "The concept of Sabbath became merely another burden for people already struggling with time. Yet the question of formal work hours disregards the ways in which the paradigm of paid work characterises our engagement with the rest of life, and how little of what happens on our days off could be accurately described as rest."

So here is her challenge to us. She refers to a "subversive Sabbath" and says, "Sabbath is more than a decision not to undertake salaried employment (if possible) on a Sunday. It is a robustly counter-cultural practice; an exercise in resistance and subversion. Its effects run deep and can be unexpected. I suggest that there are at least seven significant benefits to the practice of Sabbath rest."

## **Seven Benefits from the practice of Sabbath Rest.**

**1. Freedom from Work.** In an ideal world, the personal safeguard of having a Sabbath rest would allow us to be free from the demands of the work place for at least one day each week. This one day's break provides a buffer against all the emotional, mental and physical pressures that rob us of creativity and energy. We need to guard against "work creep" where work intrudes on our family life and our times of re-creation. This practice is difficult, because we have moved away from "the phone in the office" to "the phone on the person." Emails come to our computers at home that demand instant replies. Someone in our family has a responsible position in a large electrical company. He receives calls for help twenty-four hours a day, seven



days a week – even when he is on holiday. It is difficult for us to feel that we are free from the demands of our work, precisely why we need to observe a Sabbath day of rest. If we can develop a lifestyle where we can set aside one day a week free from the demands and intrusions of work, then we will be more able to accomplish all that we have to do in the remaining six days of the week.

**2. Freedom from the Tyranny of Productivity.** In 1928, Keynes predicted that through advances in technology, the average working week would be no more than fifteen hours within one hundred years. Another expert panel in the USA predicted in the 1960s that the average working week would be fourteen hours per week by the year 2000. But instead of the increases in productivity giving us fewer working hours, it has led to greater consumerism and a preoccupation with productivity as the greatest goal in our work. It is common for men in the Western culture to introduce themselves with a description of their occupation – “I am an accountant,” or “I am a builder.” These descriptions that we give ourselves emphasise our importance according to what we can “produce.” Our sense of self-worth may then depend on how “productive” we are in our daily work lives. If our level of productivity has declined for some reason, then we can feel restless and dissatisfied. The temptation comes to forget the Sabbath rest idea and “get something done!”

Moore quotes Walter Brueggemann, the American Theologian who says, “People who remember and keep the Sabbath find they are less driven, less coerced, less frantic to meet deadlines, and free to be, rather than to do.” Sabbath keeping can increase productivity and not reduce it!

**3. Freedom from Anxiety.** Submitting to the physical and psychological need to shut down for one day is our acknowledgement that the world will get by without us for one day. It is an act of humility. Resting compels us to admit that we are not indispensable and that the world (and God) does not need us to solve every problem. Ceasing and resting allows us to see the world as a gift and a blessing, instead of something we have to dominate and control. The Bible tells us “to be anxious for nothing,” yet we have become anxious for many things. When we choose to cease work for a day, we change our relationship with the world, we choose to refrain from acting on it and instead, we stand back and celebrate the greatness of creation and the Creator! We learn to relax a little in the knowledge of His love and care for us and all that He has made. When we let go of all the tasks that are part of our work life for one day, we cease to be a “multi-tasker”, a practice that often results in a divided self and our full attention given to nothing.

**4. Freedom from Commodity Culture.** Some of us grew up in a culture where Sunday was a non-trading day for business. This practice allowed for all workers to be free of their responsibilities to be part of the buying and

trading system. Those days are long gone and Sunday trading is now a common practice. Unfortunately, instead of giving us a respite from the demands of a commodity culture, we are now assailed by multiple sales points that are designed to increase our desire to have. Because we can never accumulate enough, we become involved in endless productivity and endless restlessness. This is where the Sabbath Rest is counter-cultural. Observing a day of rest will confront the pressures to accumulate commodities. Instead, observance will present faith in the provision of a loving Father-God as a more peaceful and satisfying lifestyle.

**5. Neighbourliness and Social Justice.** The Sabbath Day injunction involves the people thinking of the needs of others. Everyone was to rest, even the animals. The wealthy were not allowed to use their workers in serving them while they rested. So the Sabbath rest was not simply a day where all work ceased. It was statement that all needed to work for a fairer life together. In our modern world, those who have been “productive and successful” in business and trading can take advantage of their wealth and status at the expense of the workers who may be forced to work because of their contracts or their circumstances. This practice runs counter to the concept of the Sabbath rest for everyone. The Sabbath creates a generous, inclusive community where the needs of all are considered and met. The habit of ceasing to work each week breaks the production cycle and the anxiety cycle, redeploying our energy toward our neighbourhoods.

**6. A Point of Transformation.** Marva Dawn insists that the Sabbath is “not only a festival day but also a new social reality that is carried back into days one through six. People who keep the Sabbath live all seven days differently.” The act of setting one day apart from the others restores shape, rhythm, and deliberateness to what remains of our time.” Abraham Heschel wrote about the Sabbath from a Jewish worldview. He said that while other religions have their sacred places and holy images, the Jews think of the Sabbath as “our great cathedrals.” By ignoring the weekly rest day, we risk spoiling the other six days because we are unprepared for their challenges.

**7. Reorientation within the Big Picture.** God’s intention is that by having one day in seven as a day when we “cease”, we “cease” from the relentless activities that demand our attention and wear us down. In the quietness, and in fellowship with loved ones, we can take a step back to reflect on the big picture. We then are able to re-align ourselves to our vision and to God’s purposes for us. Natasha Moore wrote these beautiful words about the practice of re-orientation.

“If it’s about reordering our relationship to time in a way that makes us at once more conscious of it and less subject to it, Sabbath is a means of keeping the urgent from consistently trumping what we actually count as most important: to keep work from trumping relationships, or admin from

trumping enjoyment, or (for the Christian) my personal kingdom from trumping the one to which I've professed allegiance.

Sabbath is meant to reflect that strange, monstrous thing - eternity. It looks backwards, to God's rescue of his people from slavery (not only at the Exodus but at the cross of Jesus); and forwards, to the future reality the Bible describes as God's "rest." It asks believers to reorient themselves and their lives to the larger reality in which they believe. It helps us to not forget God - or whatever we consider the defining reality of our lives to be."

## How to Stop

While Sabbath keeping is a practice that is still honoured by Jewish communities around the world to this present time, for most of us who are practicing Christians it is a lost art. Apart from not undertaking paid work (if possible) on a Sunday, we know little about how to practise the concept of having a Sabbath rest on a weekly basis.

If there are so many clear benefits from observing a Sabbath where we cease from our work and re-focus and refresh our lives, how can we re-imagine the Sabbath rest for our modern world? Let me be clear at this point that I am not advocating a return to holding the Sabbath from Friday night to Saturday night each week. Clearly, the early Church, with good reasons, relocated the "one day in seven" to a Sunday, the first day of the week. This choice was to celebrate the finished work of Christ in His new creation - a complimentary work to God's first creation of all of the natural world. Here are some ideas that you might consider:

- **Plan to have a weekly day of rest.** One of the Australian competitors who really impressed me in the Tokyo Olympics was Jessica Fox. She competed in two events in which she had to paddle down a stream of raging white water in a small canoe. The winner would be the person who successfully guided the canoe in and out of various "gates," often against the waves, without touching any of them with her body. In the last two Olympics Jessica has proven herself to be among the best in the world. I heard Jessica tell a reporter that before every race, she imagined going through each gate with its difficulty. She planned how to overcome the raging waves and the strong currents. In other words, Jessica ran her race many times in her mind before she climbed into the small canoe and paddled into the stream. Imagine what would have happened if she had not planned out how she would attempt to become a winner at all. Her race would have been over before she passed through the first two or three gates! There is a saying that says, "If you fail to plan, then you plan

to fail.” So, the necessary first step to success is to plan and organise your weekly program so that you can “cease” your work on Sunday.

- **Discuss with your family how you can spend Sunday in a way that allows for personal recreation, realignment, and quality family time.**

It is essential that everyone knows why you value this time and how each person can contribute to the quality of family relationships of the day. Discuss the part that worship of God will play in your day and why it is important that the Sabbath is not an exercise in “self” but in “other.”

- **Close the door on unnecessary interruptions.** When I was a Church leader, our family devotions and my personal devotions were constantly interrupted by phone calls from other pastors which began at 6 am in the morning and continued in our home until almost midnight most days. My solution then was to install an answering machine where people could leave messages and to have an office secretary to deal with the calls during the day. We can still use our phones to screen out calls that interrupt our “God time”, as long as we are faithful in calling people back later. But we need to educate people, especially at work, that we are not available to handle work calls and emails on Sunday. Even better – shut the phone and the computer down for the day!

- **Avoid any private desires to make the Sabbath rest a day “just for me.”** Your focus should be outward looking – towards family and other important relationships; and upward looking – towards God and His purposes for your life. It may also help to think of how you might connect with or serve others in your community.

- **Ensure that the day is both “creative” and “delightful” to you and those in your house.** There is something wrong if your day becomes a burden. The Old Testament prophets constantly challenged Israel whenever keeping the Sabbath became a burden to them so that they complained against God. Remember that your day of rest is to allow for recovery from the labour of the past week and for refreshment so that your labour in the next week is a “Gold medal performance.” It’s okay to do things that you enjoy such as communicating with friends, gardening and walking, if these things enrich your life and relax your mind.

**Regularly re-evaluate your progress in implementing and enjoying God’s plan for your day of rest.**

## Chapter 4

# THE SABBATH REST EXPERIENCE IS FOR YOU TODAY

So far, we have been focused on our need to safeguard one day in seven for our own re-creation, recovery from the stress of work, re-focusing on the Eternal and preparation for the following week of service. Incredible benefits will flow out into our families and into society in general if we follow the practice outlined in God's Fourth Commandment given to Israel.

But, in the midst of all the demands upon us, how can we maintain this sense of peace and rest as we move through the week? The answer to our question provides us with one of the greatest lessons in Christian character and effective service that I have discovered.

Where can we find the greatest and most perfect example of someone who lives "at rest" yet works constantly with many complex problems and issues? The answer is - "in Heaven." Remember where we started? "God created everything in six days and on the seventh day God rested." (Genesis 2:2,3) God lives "at rest" but He also continues to do His amazing work throughout all of His creation.

In one sense God is the real "Sabbath rest" in Heaven. Whenever people commit themselves to the weekly process of ceasing from their work and deliberately evaluating their progress in Godliness and effectiveness through worship and reflection, in this respect those people are like God's shadow on earth.

In Hebrews chapter 8 we learn that many practices and objects that became a part of the Jewish system of worship were actually copies of the real ones in Heaven. Because they were copies, and often imperfect copies, Hebrews 8:5 describes them as "shadows of the real ones." *"They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in Heaven. That is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle, 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'"* There are Heavenly realities and there are earthly shadows. Today our practice of the Sabbath rest is a shadow of God's present experience and of what we will enjoy in Heaven one day.

### **Now for the big Revelation!**

God's plan is not for us to keep one day in seven for our rest! God's intention is for us as believers in Jesus to be "at rest" every day of the week whether we are working or not!

Please pay close attention to God's story in Hebrews chapters four and five. Here is the climax of the argument in the Scriptures.

*There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us therefore, make every effort to, enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (Heb.4:9-11)*

There is a life of rest that we can enjoy now even while we are working or serving the Lord!

What is this rest and how can we have it for ourselves?

### **God's promise of rest to Israel**

These chapters in Hebrews lead us backwards in Israel's history to the days of wandering in the wilderness. God had brought the entire Nation out of their lives of slavery in Egypt by His strong hand. When the Red Sea parted, the nation walked through on dry ground leaving Egypt's chariots to drown in the depths of the Sea. The Bible tells us that God brought them out so that He could bring them in to their own land – the Land of Promise.

Sadly, the Israelis refused to enter God's land and remained in the wilderness, grumbling and complaining against God. They hardened their hearts and they tested and tried the patience of God! (Heb. 3:8-10) *"So I declared on oath in my anger, 'they shall never enter my rest.'"* (verse 11) The land of Canaan was to be the exact opposite to the land of Egypt. Life in Egypt was a life of slavery. It was a life of thankless toil under the direction of cruel masters. The people had no rights. Life and work lacked any reward whatsoever!

On the other hand, Canaan was to be God's gift to a free people! The land flowed with milk and honey according to the report of the spies who were sent out to investigate. Every person's work brought a reward and a sense of self-satisfaction. Their sense of human dignity was to be restored. Most of all, God would care for them. He would meet their needs. He would fight for them and give them amazing victories! Strong walls would collapse and giants would be defeated by God's miraculous power working with them.

But Israel could not enter into their land of rest. They failed and condemned themselves and their children to forty years of wilderness living. Why did they fail to enter their rest?

*So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief! (Heb.3:19)*

For forty plus years God had proven His power and His faithfulness to Israel. He had brought a mighty deliverance. He led them by day and night by His

Presence. He fed them Manna every day. And when they were thirsty, He twice caused water to flow from a rock! God Himself established a way for the people to worship Him at His Tabernacle. His Presence was visible and tangible to them always.

But God tells us in Hebrews Chapter Three that the people hardened their hearts. They tested and tried God. Their hearts were always going astray and they never learned the ways of God. God became angry with them and swore that they would never enter into the rest that He had planned to give to them. So it should not surprise us that when God brought them to the Jordan river to cross over it, they lacked the faith to say, "Yes Lord, we will trust you!"

It saddens me to say that there are many Christians today who act as these rebels did. Yet they think that the Rest of God is for them. It is not! To enter into God's rest requires faith! Hebrews 4:1 contains both a true statement and a warning for us. *Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest remains...* And we are warned not to follow the behaviours of the Israelites. *Let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.* God has not withdrawn His promise of rest for us.

What does it mean to "*fall short of entering into rest*?" Imagine the people coming to the very banks of the Jordan river. At that point they probably could have thrown a stone across to the Canaan side! Almost there! Literally just a few more steps! But no, they fell short by so little and turned back into the wilderness to die! People today can be like them too. The Israelites heard the good news but they lacked a faith response. They failed to own God's promise and claim it for themselves. *But we also have had the Gospel preached to us just as they did; but the message was no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed have entered into that rest, just as God has said. (Heb. 4:2,3)*

### **The Promise repeated in David's day**

Did God give up after Israel's failure to enter into rest? No. God is relentless. Hebrews 4:6,7 continues the story.

*It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later He spoke through David ...*

Even though a sinful generation refused God's offer of rest God did not withdraw His offer. He repeated His offer through His servant King David hundreds of years later. So, the writer's logic is that if Israel had received God's rest, then God would not offer rest to anyone else. However, God did offer His rest in David's day. So, the conclusion is that "*There remains a*

*Sabbath Rest for the people of God.” (Heb. 4:9)*

There is a life of rest that we can enjoy now even while we are working or serving the Lord!

What is this rest and how can we have it for ourselves?

## **A Rest for the People of God**

We can do all the things that I have suggested in regard to ceasing from our work for one day in seven to make a “holy” day, but still not find rest for our minds and our hearts which will last right through the week.

What is this rest that Jesus promised us in Matthew 11:28 – 30 when He said, *“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

This promised rest is fulfilled in us and for us in three or four stages.

### **Entering Rest - the first stage.**

In order to enter into God’s rest, we need to first hear the Gospel and then respond to the message with our first step of faith.

It is like the experience of the children of Israel who came a second time to the Jordan River after all the previous generation had died in the wilderness. Joshua told them (Joshua Ch 3) that God was about to do amazing things among them. The most sacred and precious object in Israel’s possession was the Ark of the Covenant. Twelve chosen priests would carry the Ark into the waters of the Jordan River. At the moment that their feet touched the river water, the river would stop flowing and the people would follow the Ark of the Covenant across on dry land, just as their forefathers had through the Red Sea. In this miraculous way, the nation would begin to enter into the promised rest land.

God’s presence was with them. God’s miracles were about to be theirs. God had done His part; now Israel was to do theirs no matter how small and simple it might appear to be. They were to demonstrate their faith in God by taking that first step into the river.

That is what it is like for us. We hear the story of Jesus and His sacrifice in our place on the cross. We are told that He died and rose again to take away all our sins and failures and to re-unite us with Father God. But knowing the story is not enough. Even believing that it is true is not enough. We must take that first step of faith that involves asking Jesus to forgive us and to help us to become His servants.

There are two things for us to understand – our own good works and God’s



promised rest. In order to enter in to God's rest we must recognise that our own good works will never be enough to satisfy the standards of a holy God. Our faith can then take hold of the finished work of Jesus on the cross as we realise that this alone satisfies God and saves us.

### **Entering in to God's promised rest then involves the first step of faith.**

There are still many people, even Christians, who think that God grades us on a curve like the educators do. We think that as long as we are "good enough" then we will somehow get to Heaven. How much is good enough? Often in my school exams, I was glad just to get 50 percent. Others students argued with their teachers if their grade was not an expected "A." The Bible tells us what we look like to our holy God in Romans 3:10 *"As it is written, there is no one righteous, not even one."* Earlier, in Romans 3:5 Paul refers to *"God's righteousness."* God is always right and His actions are always right. By way of contrast, there is not one human being who has ever lived who can compare with God - except for Jesus His dear Son. That is why we all need a Saviour and we all need to hear the Gospel and respond with that first step of faith. We step into a life of "rest."

### **Deepening our rest - the second stage.**

The entry point into this life of rest is our response to the great invitation of Jesus when He says to us, *"Come unto me...and I will give you rest!"* The beginning of the deepening experience of that rest is *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* The word picture contained in this verse is one that was commonly seen and experienced by the people of Jesus' day. It was a picture of the common way of training a youthful, exuberant, excitable young oxen to walk patiently, faithfully and correctly while pulling a simple plough. The training involved placing a wooden yoke across the shoulders of the experienced oxen and the younger oxen in training. In this way the younger oxen learned how to be useful and also how not to harm itself by pulling in the wrong way.

In this picture of "rest", we are the learners and Jesus is the strong, experienced teacher. Every time we kick and buck and pull the wrong way, it will harm Jesus! But if we submit to His love and teaching, we will soon learn how to work and rest at the same time! Jesus will not be harsh with us or cruel for He has said, *"learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

What does this promised rest look like? Hebrews 4:10 describes it as *"Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work!"* Resting then is living a life where the characteristics of our life "before" we met Jesus are gradually replaced by the evident characteristics of Jesus. Resting is also

learning that many of our actions and works that we did before we met Jesus need to be re-learned and empowered by the Holy Spirit before we can serve God effectively. A story might help bring understanding here.

When I was a young pastor there was a man whose wife loved to sing and play the piano in our Church. He would occasionally come to worship with his wife, but his life never changed. He was the Union organiser in a steel fabrication plant in the town. Once, when I challenged him to accept Christ as his Lord and Saviour, this man said, "I think of God like He is a bus driver. One day He will come and run me down. Then I will trust Him." While I served that Church he never became a Christian. I eventually moved on to another town and another Church. About ten years later, I was surprised to receive a telephone call from this man's pastor. In the call the pastor asked me if I would visit the man who was now in hospital near to where I lived. He was in a serious condition. While he was supervising the unloading of a whole truck load of steel rods, something went wrong and the whole load fell on top of him, severely damaging his legs. Of course, I was delighted to meet up with this man again in hospital. During our first conversation together, I reminded the man that he had told me that he would take the first step of trusting God when God ran him over with the bus. I asked him did he think that God's bus had hit him and was he now ready to give his life to Christ. He was not ready to trust Christ yet! But I heard that two years later he became a Christian and he had been appointed to be a deacon in the Church. All this is background. Now here is the lesson in my story.

A short time later I was again called to the Church to help the pastor deal with some disagreements among the members. One issue arose when this deacon, who was sincerely serving the Church as an enthusiastic leader, tried to manipulate the other leaders to make a decision. When it was pointed out to him that his methods were those of a Union organiser and not a man of God, the deacon was so embarrassed at his mistake that he resigned from office and refused to come back to the Church. He felt that he was a terrible failure and an ignorant leader. What he failed to recognise was that he was really no different from the rest of us!

During our lives we are all taught many lessons – some good and some may simply be the behaviour of a selfish person, or a wounded soul. When we first become a Christian our actions and behaviours remain the same. We still need to work and to eat. We are still living in relationships of all kinds with others. We still sing and speak to encourage others. We still prepare meals for our family and others – much remains the same, on the surface. The Christian difference lies at a deeper level. Jesus said that our words flow out from the fulness of what we have in our hearts. (Matt.12:34) We need to be changed deeply so that not only our words, but also all our acts of service flow out from the deepest source – God Himself. This is why we need to take

Christ's yoke upon us to learn from Him. There is such a wealth of goodness in God who has come to reside within us that Jesus wants to bring out to the surface.

**Leadership theory calls this progressing from "ministry out of doing," to "ministry out of being."** I have found this to be true. I can worship. I can preach. I can pray. I can encourage others. But unless the source of all my words and thoughts is God Himself, and unless the Holy Spirit blesses that ministry, than it will all be for nothing.

So, even though we are now believers in Christ, we have only entered into the beginning of God's promised rest. We have it in part, but not totally, because we are still learning from Jesus what it is all about.

### **Learning from Jesus**

One of the biggest lessons that we have to learn over and over is how to deal with the "old self" that remains in us and struggles to control us every day. I love the way the Apostle Paul gives such an honest testimony in Romans chapter 7. There Paul is talking about how greatly he is convicted by the high standard described by God in the Ten Commandments. Then he writes,

*"For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I no longer want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." (verses 18-20)*

Are these the words of a Christian leader who is at rest? No, they cannot be! Then it gets worse in verse 24. *"What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* This verse expresses a horrible picture. In Paul's day, right across the Roman Empire, the punishment for a person convicted of murder was to be bound hand to hand, foot to foot, face to face to the corpse of their victim until the murderer became infected from the corpse and died a miserable death. Paul feels like a murderer who has been bound to his old self and he cries out for deliverance. Jesus teaches us deep lessons sometimes. Only by learning them can we enter more fully into God's rest.

In the next verse Paul moves dramatically from pity to praise, *"Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* Here is rest! Paul has moved from realising that he does not have the power within himself to be free from the entanglement of self and sin but Jesus gives him the victory! And so, Paul continues into Chapter 8 expressing his praise for the release and victory that he has found through Christ's work and Christ's life in him.

Paul has found a deeper experience of God's promised rest. His testimony

has changed!

- *The Spirit helps us in our weakness (v26)*
- *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him (v28)*
- *If God is for us, who can be against us? (v31)*
- *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (v35)*
- *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (v37)*
- *Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (v39)*

When I was still a young, inexperienced pastor, I struggled with these same issues, and especially my feelings that God was not able to use me in His power as He had used others throughout history. I continually read stories about the great saints of the past. The stories of men like F B Meyer, C J Tinsley, Praying Hyde, C T Studd and George Muller made me thirsty for more.

I clearly recall reading the life story of Hudson Taylor, who was the leader in China of the China Inland Mission. In those early and formative days of world mission, the concept of reaching the world with the Gospel was foreign to many Churches. Some Church leaders even opposed it. There were no great mission offices with support structures to ensure that missionaries were cared for and financially supported. Communication was by slow ships and snail mail. As a result, when someone went out to be a missionary, they were really on their own! Where they were fortunate enough to be a part of a team, then the full burden of leadership, provision and care fell on the shoulders of the leaders. Hudson Taylor was one such leader. Every day he had to handle problems relating to personnel, illness, finances and housing. The burden was great upon him. And for that reason, Hudson Taylor always kept a small pedal powered organ in his house. Whenever the burden grew too great for him to bear and he felt himself being crushed by it, Taylor would often stop his activity and sit at the organ, playing and singing these words. (Modernised to make them understandable.)

*Jesus I am resting, resting, in the joy of what you are!  
I am finding out the greatness of your loving heart!  
You have asked me to gaze upon you, and your beauty fills my soul  
For by your transforming power, you have made me whole!*

*Oh, how great your loving kindness - greater, broader than the sea!  
Oh, how wonderful your goodness, all poured out on me!  
Simply trusting you, Lord Jesus, I behold you as you are;  
And your love so great, so changeless, satisfies my heart.*

*Always lift your face upon me, As I work and wait for you!  
Resting in your love, Lord Jesus, all my troubles flee!  
Brightness of your Father's glory, Sunshine of your Father's face,  
Keep me ever trusting, resting - fill me with your grace.*

*Jesus I am resting, resting, in the joy of what you are!  
I am finding out the greatness of your loving heart!*

Deepening Rest is discovering more and more of Jesus in our lives.

Saphir wrote:

We can take nothing out of this world, but Christ formed in us. And whatever may have been our calling and occupation, the question is: Has it been subservient to the formation of the Christ-man? ... The sum and substance of all our experiences, actions and trials in time must needs be the character, the attitude of the heart, the strength of the soul. If Christians are in business, if they have many and complicated transactions, many difficult and important duties in which the welfare of others is concerned, large and complicated responsibilities, the question is: Have they learnt faithfulness, justice, kindness, self-restraint, generosity? Have they been a steward of God's gifts? Have they been heavenly-minded, fervent in spirit while not slothful in business? Then all this earthly work has been spiritual work, and their labour in time has produced eternal results."

### **Completing our Rest - the final stage**

Everything we have thought about until now, at least from the human side, has been implemented imperfectly. But when we come to the final stage of our rest, it will be perfect. Why is this? It is because it is totally the work of God.

Our eternal destiny as believers in Jesus is to be with Him in Heaven. He has gone on before us to prepare a place for each of us.

The early Christians who lived in the Province of Thessalonica were concerned about the future destiny of their loved ones who had died. The Christians firmly believed that Jesus was coming back for them soon and they did not want their believing loved ones to miss out! So, the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4 some words to encourage them. He said:

- Jesus died and rose again. In the same way, (v14)
- Believers who have "fallen asleep" will return with Jesus (v14)
- When Jesus returns from Heaven accompanied with a loud command, the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, the bodies of believers will be reunited with their true spirits in a resurrection form (Vs 15,16)

- After that, believers who are alive at that time will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. (v17)
- And so we will be with the Lord forever. (v17)

We who have been so imperfect, so troubled, so stressed and tired, will be free at last from sin and Satan. There will be no more persecution, no more sickness and death, no more tears and crying – only peace!

After the One Thousand years, Satan will be finally doomed and God will judge all those who have ever lived. All those whose names are missing from the book of life will be excommunicated from the Divine Presence of God forever. (Revelation Chapter 20)

Then what has been written by the finger of God in revelation Chapter 21 will become our eternal reality as we fully share in the Divine Rest!

*“Then I saw a new Heaven and a new earth, for the first Heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’*

*He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then He said, ‘Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.’”*

God’s rest which He entered into on the seventh day as an example to us all will finally become our experience when He takes us to be with Him. Then the “shadow” of the Sabbath will become the greatest reality of all of us. And the “rest” that Jesus promised to all who would come to Him will be complete in us!

## A Final Challenge

When we carefully examine the context of Hebrews Chapter 4 v 9, we see that there is a strong challenge to action and then a statement of truth.

The Apostle's challenge comes to us today, *"Let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."* (v11) Are you someone who feels over-worked, stressed out, constantly tired and worried? You may need to re-arrange some of your life priorities in order to regain a sense of balance and freedom. But this will not be enough! Jesus is calling you to come to Him with your burdens and heavy load. He will give you rest! Are you willing to be yoked together in life with Him so He can teach you and relieve you of your burdens? Submit to Him. He loves you. He knows what is best for you and your family. He is waiting for you to come to Him today. Please don't delay!

Or it may be that you are someone who appears to others to have your life mostly in order. You may have a name as a successful person. You may already attend Church and do some generous deeds. It is to you that the challenge comes to be truthful. *"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account."* (v13) *"The Word of God is living and active, like a sharp sword and it penetrates dividing soul and spirit; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* (v12) So I must ask you, "Has the Word of God done its true work in your life? Do you now know truly that in all your activities you have come to Jesus to receive rest for your troubled and burdened heart? Have you really begun to walk through life as one who is "yoked" with Jesus so that you have learned from Him? Remember, all your assets and accumulations of goods will be left behind when you leave this life. Only what has been formed of Christ in you will last.

***"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***

