DISORDERED LIFE

Randy Popl

O HOW I LOVE YOUR LAW! IT IS MY MEDITATION ALL THE DAY.

PSALM 119:97

A Remedy for a Disordered Life

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Dedicated to my children, Matt, Rachael, Dena, and David, and to their children, Eden, Elle, Ford, Payton, Drew, Eason, Saige, Gemma, Luke, Ryann, Rhett, Will, Wyatt, Barrett, and Greyson. May you discover the joy of an unhurried heart as you embrace God's design for a Sabbath rest.

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FOREWORD

How many of us today would say we love God's Law? David, the King of Israel in the Old Testament said, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Psalm 119:97). That is just one of many references of David's love for God's laws, commandments and statutes. How often have you heard someone sincerely say that they love the commandments of God, or that they are the delight of their soul? This response is not common among Christians today. For many, God's commandments are viewed as a relic of the past, and they may believe that, as our society has progressed, we have "graduated" to a more progressive moral code. Even those who would reluctantly embrace the commandments say, "We'll bear with them, but isn't it a shame that God's commandments are so restrictive? If they were less restrictive, maybe others would be willing to embrace them."

Contrary to popular belief, the truth is, when you understand the law, it becomes a "lovable law." The counterintuitive truth concerning God's law is that there is freedom in the law. In this book, I would like to direct your attention and consideration to one of God's commandments that has been treated as though it may have been relevant in an agrarian society, but in our fast-paced and complex world it is no longer relevant. I am

speaking of the Fourth Commandment:

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

(Exodus 20:8-11; NASB).

As you read that passage from Exodus, which is a part of a larger section which contains what is often referred to as the Decalogue, you may have been amused by the references to servants, animals and foreign travelers. I suggest that as you read this book, you will find that this commandment from God was given to us for our benefit, and it is as relevant today as it was on the day the Lord gave it to Moses and the people of Israel.

Now, before we begin this study entitled 'A Remedy for a Disordered Life,' which is a subset of a larger teaching from "The Lovable Law," let me assure you this book is **not** about clarifying what activities you **can** do, **should** do, or are **allowed** to do on the Sabbath. Nor is it about listing all the things you **cannot** do or are **forbidden** to do on the Sabbath. God's law regarding the Sabbath day, outlined in the Fourth Commandment, is so much more, and far better than, just a list of dos and don'ts!

As a brief introduction, the Fourth Commandment is about rest and cultivating and maintaining the right perspective. It's about reflecting and recharging our spirit. It's about an ordered heart and an ordered life. Unfortunately, for many in the church today, the Sabbath provokes thoughts of petty rules and regulations that make no sense and that nobody understands. Those who want to be compliant may say, "Please! Just tell me what I can and cannot do, and I'll obey it to the best of my ability!" There is so much confusion about what it means to keep the Sabbath day holy.

However, when we begin to understand the Fourth Commandment, we see that God's commandments are truly lovable. We see both the beauty and wisdom of His law, and how beautiful and wise God is as the Law Giver. He has given us a gift—a pathway to a healthy life called the Sabbath. As we understand that God's law and His commandments are 'lovable' one cannot help but realize that, the One who stands behind the law must also love. The purpose of this book is to help us grasp and embrace the Fourth Commandment and the One who has given it to us so, at our last breath, we may be able to say, "I lived for the Lord's Day because His love drew me to live for Him."

CHAPTER 1

SEVEN DAYS OF WORK MAKES ONE WEAK

In talking to people from all walks of life, I have found that most people work hard at making themselves stronger—emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. If I were to say to them that they have unwittingly put themselves on a path that will likely result in them compromising all of their efforts to be stronger, they would disagree.

Yet most Christians disregard the Fourth Commandment. They are generally aware of it, but it has no impact in their lives. They dismiss it by saying, "I don't think this commandment applies today." In doing this, they are setting themselves up for a lifetime of weakness. Amazingly, missing a proper understanding of this commandment may cause them to forfeit the very best that God has in store for them.

Listen as people speak today, and you will hear comments like these: I am experiencing depression; I'm exhausted; I can barely keep going; I'm starting to have physical problems, anxiety and stress; I'm struggling with temptation; I'm on the brink of committing some serious transgressions that could easily have long term consequences. Others of us might already be experiencing similar issues. Of course, there are seasons where

exhaustion and stress are inevitable, like when parenting young children. However, these seasons will pass in due time.

Some of these struggles may be the result of pushing the Fourth Commandment aside while thinking, "This whole idea of keeping the Sabbath holy is not a big deal today. I don't know if it's even relevant for today's culture." Misunderstanding this commandment contributes to so many of our modern-day problems at an individual and cultural level.

Let me illustrate by looking at the idea of competition. Competition has made us all crazy. Previously it was confined to the sports arena. Now it is pervasive in all areas of life—in the marketplace, in relationships and even among Christian Pastors. We see it in regard to our children. Kids today have to compete, compete, compete. Parents seem to believe they need to invest every minute in making their children master skills and content so they can compete against their peers. Parents observe what other parents are willing to do—provide extra training in sports, more music lessons, personal tutors—and believe that if their children are to succeed in life, they have got to have the best of everything. We are running as fast as we can to keep up with everybody else. The real danger is that we are expecting our children to run alongside us.

Now please understand this: observing the Lord's Day and keeping it holy will not cause life to suddenly become easy and perfect—not at all. However, I will assure you this: taking the Sabbath day out of your life and treating it like every other day

will cause your life to get worse. It may be almost imperceptible, but the decline will begin and, eventually, you will find your life has spun out of control.

Alternatively, treat the Sabbath like the special day it's intended to be and watch your life—not your lifestyle—improve. Choose any aspect of life and see how, when this relationship is ignored, life becomes seriously unhealthy and unbalanced, even detrimental. Everyone—particularly youth—needs to grasp this truth: There are many pitfalls in life that can be avoided simply by 'keeping the Sabbath day holy.' Developing a rhythm of life that includes a day set aside for emotional, spiritual, mental and physical health will serve you well for a lifetime.

TWO INDISPENSABLE NEEDS

Our Creator imprinted us with His image and designed us with indispensable needs, two of which are vitally important: **rest** and **perspective**. Without these two practices, life will quickly become burdensome and unmanageable. It may manifest differently for each person, but life will certainly deteriorate. Mental hospitals and prisons are filled with individuals who have reached the end of their rope only to find themselves in a freefall. While it is obvious that there are many extenuating circumstances that may account for this, I cannot help but wonder if our society—the modern culture we find ourselves living within—had a better understanding of the benefits of rest and

perspective, these institutions might contain fewer patients.¹

While most of us may never be admitted to a mental hospital or imprisoned for a crime, we are physically and mentally exhausted. We wonder how we are going to keep up with the pace of life. There are those of us who are so emotionally spent, so discouraged, that we wonder, "Is the struggle supposed to be this challenging? Shouldn't I have more victory in the battles I'm fighting than I'm experiencing right now?" If the practices of rest and perspective were brought into our lives in an appropriate and consistent manner and given their proper place, it would be life altering.

In 2016, Time magazine published a sobering article entitled "Anxiety, Depression, and the Modern Adolescent." It presented a harsh reality: teenagers today are cutting themselves as a means to gain relief from the stress they encounter in their schoolwork, home-lives and relationships. Approximately 30% of girls and 20% of boys have an anxiety disorder. Depression among adolescents is at an all-time high; nearly 30% of teenagers surveyed said they felt sad or depressed every day for more than two weeks in a row. While this number is alarmingly high, researchers believe this number is significantly lower than the reality among today's teenagers, as it doesn't take into consid-

¹ This by no means intends to suggest that criminal activity, for the most part, can be attributed to mental health, a lack of personal discipline, or a misunderstanding of biblical principles. Nor does it intend to deny that legitimate medical conditions and mental health diagnoses exist and may require extensive and long-term treatment beyond and in addition to rest and perspective.

² Anxiety, Depression, and the Modern Adolescent, Susanna Schrobsdorff, Time Magazine, November 7, 2016

eration the number of teenagers who consider their sadness or depression to be normal.

One quote in particular stood out, "It's that they are in a cauldron of stimulus they can't get away from, don't want to get away from, or don't know how to get away from." They're continually plugged into something. There's no **rest**. It goes on to say, "... being a teenager today is a draining, full-time job that includes doing schoolwork, managing a social-media identity, and fretting about career, climate change, sexism, racism—you name it ... It's exhausting." It continues, "At no point do they get to remove themselves from it and get **perspective**."

Unquestionably, there's an underlying problem far greater than our harried circumstances. One author put it best this way, "A fast-paced life is not so much a result of a disordered schedule as that of a disordered heart." To repair a disordered heart, we need to understand that rest and perspective come from embracing the Sabbath day and to recognize the only One that can change the state of our hearts is God himself. God has given us instruction regarding how He's going to change our hearts so we can obtain the rest and perspective we need for an ordered life. He has an incredible plan and explains the means by which we can receive it. Unfortunately, most people—including many Christians—say, "I'm not sure I want to use that plan, at least not fully. I'll use it partially, because I'm not convinced it even matters, or makes any difference." Hence, we prefer 'jump

³ John Ortberg Jr., The Life You Have Always Wanted, Zondervan, March 2004

starts' over 'trickle charges.' We tend to think the best way to recharge our life battery is to just give it a quick jump-start, a burst of energy to keep it going so we can do extra work and busy ourselves for a few more days or weeks. However, when we do that, we aren't getting the perspective we need to think about God, His kingdom or our lives, and we barely get any rest. Let's look again at what the Lord has to say about this in the book of Exodus:

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

(Exodus 20:8-11; NASB).

The word 'For' in that verse introduces a cause and effect scenario. It means 'this is the reason' we need rest and perspective, and then He illustrates why. By way of explanation, let me give you a picture that may aid in understanding the importance of this law.

For a season, in the early life of our church, I used to do most of the pastoral counseling. I am not a gifted counselor; it is not my calling in ministry. However, at that time I had to listen to many problems that people were experiencing. Eventually, after hearing of a strained life or an out of control life and all the problems, sicknesses and immoralities that would ensue, I

would simply ask two questions: "Do you keep the Sabbath, and do you tithe of your income?" Most were puzzled at the connection between their problems and those two questions. I would encourage them to conduct an experiment to determine how many of their problems could be eliminated by adhering to these two disciplines as God commands.

God gave two creation ordinances that pre-date Moses and the Mosaic laws.⁴ The two ordinances have to do with what is called the fourth and the tenth (referring to the commandments). The fourth was one day a week—addressing our time. The tenth refers to one tenth of all of our other resources—our offerings—or the tithe. It is not that the other nine tenths are not His. Certainly, they are. However, He says, "I'm going to have you give one tenth of your resources in a unique way, and you are going to watch how I bring balance and sanity to your life. It's a plan based on the way I have designed and created you."

Isn't it interesting that of all the laws of God in scripture, the two that have been most ignored are the creation ordinances: keeping the Sabbath day holy and the giving of the tithe? It's as though there's a general consensus that these two ordinances aren't applicable today but rather belong to earlier times. They're deemed irrelevant to a modern world. Then we look at what's happening in the world, and within the Christian community within that world, and we ask, "Are we missing something that

⁴ The Law of Moses, often called the Mosaic Law, refers primarily to the Torah – the first five books of the Hebrew bible. These ordinances were originally given to Abraham and later incorporated into the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai.

is so critically important that it could make all the difference in our lives and in the world?" If that's the case, why is it so difficult to keep the Sabbath day holy and to give of the tithe? To obey and follow the Lord in these two areas requires faith, and faith is the piece of the puzzle that pleases God so much—He says so in Hebrews 11:6 "Without faith it is impossible to please God." It is as though God is saying, "Because I, your loving God, have said so, go ahead and embrace the Sabbath day and keep it holy, even though it counters everything you intuitively feel." When we instinctively respond, "No, I can't do that—it's too risky. That won't work." He counters our response, "Have faith."

THE REASON WHY

Why do we observe the Sabbath? Why would the commandment tell us to set aside this day as special? We could simply do it because God told us to—without asking questions—but is there a reason why He has given this commandment? You haven't fully understood the beauty of the Sabbath if your first response is to ask, "What if I have small children? What about job responsibilities? What about all the distractions that come up?" We have to keep growing and maturing in our faith to ensure that we understand both the requirement and the blessing of the Sabbath. The following chapters will focus on four reasons why the Lord would have us keep this day holy. The first reason deals with rest; the remaining three deal with perspective.

God designed us to spend one day a week **resting** from our labor;

God designed us to spend one day a week **remembering** the past;

God designed us to spend one day a week **reevaluating** the present; and

God designed us to spend one day a week **reflecting** on the future.

CHAPTER 2

DESIGNED TO REST FROM OUR LABOR

Fatigue is notorious for devastating our health, priorities, commitments and relationships. We have sleepless nights, or we fool ourselves by thinking that we can function fully on just a few hours of sleep. When lack of sleep is coupled with a neglect of spending one day a week resting from our labors, we invite the onset of fatigue into our life.

Fatigue comes in three forms:

1. Physical fatigue

As soon as anyone mentions fatigue, we generally think of this category. When our physical exhaustion increases, we are more susceptible to illness, depression and disease.

2. Emotional fatigue

Many of us don't even realize we are under acute emotional fatigue. A loved one passes away; coping with a spouse is just too difficult; wondering where our children are and what they may be doing; finances are stretched to a breaking point. All this collides, and we suddenly realize we are under incredible emotional strain.

3. Spiritual fatigue

When we are not nurtured spiritually, we become discouraged.

We begin to experience significant challenges that may cause us to doubt our faith, God's plan or even God Himself. We stop maturing in our faith, become spiritually susceptible to temptation, start listening to the lies of the evil one, and find ourselves in immoral situations. Idolatries emerge, and we struggle as never before.

How do we become so fatigued? Consider this: If I were to attempt a marathon with no training or preparation and begin by sprinting, my pace would quickly decrease. Soon my legs would begin to tire. At some point dehydration would set in, and I would probably start to experience cramping. Finally, I would burnout, collapse, and maybe even die. We can only go so far before fatigue destroys us. However, we have to understand that it's not just physical—fatigue has emotional and spiritual components as well. God in His wisdom and graciousness says, "I have a maintenance plan to keep you from fatigue. The plan is that one day out of seven you shall rest. Work for six days and rest for one." This plan is God's design for our renewal.

Substantial scientific evidence exists that supports the benefits of regular rest. In the last couple of years, bestsellers have been written and talk show hosts have discussed the near miraculous benefits of rest as though it is a newly discovered secret to life. In 2017 Rhett Powers, a columnist for Inc.com, published an article called *A Day of Rest: Twelve Scientific Reasons It Works.*⁵ He says that 'most major religions call for a day of rest ... and science agrees.' Six of those reasons include: a day of 5 A Day of Rest: Twelve Scientific Reasons it Works, Inc.com, Jan 1, 2017. See Ap-

pendix 1 for full list.

rest reduces the risk of heart disease, boosts our immune systems, restores mental energy, enables better sleep, adds to our life span, and improves short term memory. If a pharmaceutical company were to develop a pill that provided these benefits with irrefutable evidence of their success without negative side effects, we would be willing to spend thousands of dollars to acquire it. If we didn't have the money, we might say, "I've got to get that pill! I'll do whatever it takes!"

Do you know why we as parents are spending so much time and effort to make sure our kids become the best at their sport or activity? Do you know why people are paying enormous amounts of money for their children to go to the very best schools? We often believe being the best is vitally important, if not crucial, for our child to have a successful life. We sacrifice so much because we want our kids to succeed. Conversely, to the Christian community God says, "Oh, I can do more than give you a good education. I can improve your memory, lower your risk of heart failure (risk of heart attack or something similar), encourage you and ease your concerns regarding your child. All this comes from a day of rest." It is surprising that most Christians respond to this plan by saying, "Hmm ... I don't think I want to adopt that plan. No, I don't think so. It's not for me." The real irony is we don't even have to pay for it, we simply need faith to believe that God has a better plan for our life than we do. He even tells us just how good it is in the book of Jeremiah:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to

prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you" (Jeremiah 29: 11-12; NIV).

There are many effective solutions to relieve fatigue and exhaustion, whether it is better time management, longer and more frequent vacations or seminars to help us manage our stress more effectively. However, if we turn to the world first, we are missing the obvious solution of setting aside a day for rest. The solutions offered by popular talk show hosts and books are typically what I refer to as 'jump starts.'

Recently, my car wouldn't start, and I had to jump the battery. Two days later, it needed to be jumped again. While it kept me going in the short term, the battery was not truly repaired so the problem persisted. God's remedy is a trickle charge; it is a long-term solution. It takes a twenty-four-hour period, and the charge is good for a week. God's plan is best.

THE LAW: "REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, TO KEEP IT HOLY"

In our text, Exodus 20:8-11, twice the Lord mentions: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Of five sentences, two say the same thing. God is repeating himself for emphasis. He is saying, "This is REALLY important! Have you got it? Hold on to it! It's going to make all the difference in the world to your life!" He wants us to understand that He loves to bless us. That is why it's a lovable law. We get restored, stay healthy and start

to see things in a different way. It is paramount we understand these two words—*holy and Sabbath*—in the text.

The word 'holy' can be translated as 'to set apart' or 'to make special.' Consequently, if we are to uphold this law, our initial question needs to be, "in our week-to-week life, do we make the Lord's day a special day?" Of course, we are going to have all kinds of different views on what keeping the Lord's Day entails. Each of us will develop different convictions regarding what we can and cannot do—and that is fine. However, the overarching question remains, "Do I really think of this as God's special day set aside for what He would have me do, irrespective of what I feel like doing or think I should be doing?" It is an interesting question for the Christian to ponder.

The word 'Sabbath' means 'to cease', 'to rest,' and 'to interpret.' To interpret is to contemplate and gain perspective on something. Many people associate the term Sabbath with Saturday, and that would be correct. To this day, those in the Jewish community observe the Sabbath from nightfall on Friday to nightfall on Saturday. We can trace the origins of the words sabbatical (which we associate with a rest or vacation from work) and Sabbath, back to the Greek word sabbaton which is derived from the Hebrew word shabbāth meaning "rest." The idea, therefore, is that there was the day in creation that God set aside for rest; the Bible says, "on the seventh day He rested." The Christian community sets aside the first day (Sunday) rather than the seventh (Saturday) as has been the practice throughout the history of the church. There is nothing written in scrip-

ture that says, "By the way, the Sabbath is being changed from the seventh day to the first day." The early church acknowledged the significance of the resurrection in their day-to-day lives by keeping Sunday as the Sabbath day, and we choose to follow their example. Ignatius, the disciple of John the apostle, explained it best in his letter to the Magnesians dated AD 110. He says, "Hold to the newness of the hope that we have obtained. No longer sabbatizing," that is reverting to the seventh day Sabbath (Saturday), "but living for the Lord's Day," the day of the resurrection (Sunday).

TWO REQUIREMENTS, THREE EXCEPTIONS

What we have learned in this chapter regarding the Sabbath can be summarized as the two requirements of and the three exceptions to the Law.

The Two Requirements:

- 1. We are required to do six days of labor.
- 2. We are required to take one day of rest.

⁶ Note: There are many fine Christians that are Seventh Day Adventists or others that have a different view regarding the Sabbath. The goal here is not to make large the distinction between these differing viewpoints, but rather to simply mention it so as to better understand why Sunday is now most often referred to as the Sabbath. To clarify, when the early church made this transition, it was understood at that time, in that era, the day began in the evening and it went through to the next day at that same time. That is why the Christian Community have always felt it appropriate to have worship on Saturday night and then again on Sunday morning.

Six Days of Labor

We get confused when we think about what six days of labor means. Does it mean six days a week of paid employment? Is it okay to work five days a week and one day of volunteering? What about retiring after a certain age? Do those six days include leisure time? Do vacations count? When we focus on definitions, we miss the point of the message. There is nothing wrong with vacations, leisure and retirement. However, we should certainly not be against the concept of work. God designed us to work. Work is good! So, we should take this commandment to mean, "I am going to keep applying myself with the strength I have, to the degree I can, to keep giving as much as I can to a broken and lost world, to a need, to whatever I can to enhance society. I have six days each week to do the work to which I believe I have been called by God."

One Day of Rest

God also gives us a prescription to take one day of rest and provides us with an example. Look at this passage in Genesis:

"Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed and all their hosts. By the seventh day, God completed his work which he had done, and he rested. He rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. Then, God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it"—set it apart—"because in it he rested from his work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:1-3; NASB).

This raises the question, does God get tired? No, He doesn't

weary at all, and yet He still rested. This is where the word 'interpret' comes into play. There is a 'ceasing' or a time to look back on the work that was done that week and 'interpret' or reflect upon it. Think about it this way—if the infinite one, God himself, rested on the seventh day, should we, the finite, not do the same, knowing that He says to, He designed us that way, and He knows what is best for us? Absolutely!

There are, however, times when you can work on Sunday that are exceptions to the teaching regarding rest that is given to us in scripture.

The Three Exceptions:

- 1. Works of Piety
- 2. Works of Mercy
- 3. Works of Necessity

Works of Piety

The first exception to the Law of the Sabbath is what we call works of piety. In Matthew 12:5, this is what we read, "Or have you not read the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet they are innocent?" Pastors that teach or preach and minister to the community etc. are essentially working on the Sabbath. They work hard on Sundays, and that is appropriate because they are fulfilling their faith-based obligations in obedience to and accordance with what the Lord has called them to do.

Works of Mercy

In the New Testament, because Jesus performed miracles of healing on the Sabbath, some Pharisees accused Him of breaking the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10; Mark 3:2, John 9:14-16). They would rebuke him and say, "Hey! You can't do that; you're breaking the Sabbath!" He said, "Oh no, no; you don't understand—this is a work of mercy." Jesus had no problem with healing on the Sabbath. People that engage in works of mercy include doctors, nurses, technicians and other hospital staff. Those who work in homeless shelters, assisted living facilities, or other health professions are also considered to be performing works of mercy and are appropriate activities for the Sabbath.

Works of Necessity

The third exception regarding working on the Sabbath is works of necessity. In Luke 14: 3-5, the Pharisees continue to attempt to catch Jesus breaking the law, and He simply says to them:

"If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out? And they had nothing to say."

When I was studying at my graduate school of theology, my roommate and I had totally different approaches to handling the curriculum workload. 'Dump truck day' was what the students metaphorically called the first day of any given quarter where every professor—in all five classes—would just back up the truck, raise up the flat-bed, and dump all the requirements on us for that quarter. In your first class, you might have a final exam, six papers to write and four books to read. Similarly, in

the next class, you might have three papers, two books and a final exam. By the end of that day, you could have 11 books to read, 17 papers to write and 5 final exams to complete by the end of the quarter. I would feel overwhelmed! So, in order to make it manageable, I would divide the work into six days a week so I could have my seventh day free—work six days, take one day off. I also planned to finish all the work a week prior to the end of the semester so I had time to prepare for exams.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, other than attending class, my roommate did nothing but socialize and play during the first six weeks. He would not write any of the papers, read any of the books, nor study. Then, in the last four weeks, he would work non-stop, sometimes eighteen hours a day, trying to get all the work done. One Sunday, while he was working away I said, "What are you doing?" He replied, "I've got to get this paper done. I'm three papers behind." I said, "Wow. Well, I'm going to church, and then I'll be out for the rest of the day, so I'll see you later." He looked at me and said, "I know what you're thinking; quit judging me!" I said, "What am I thinking?" He replied, "You're thinking that I should be keeping the Lord's Day holy today rather than working on my paper," and he quoted Luke 14:3-5. He then went on to say, "My ox is in the well." As I walked out of the room, I said, "I agree. Your ox is in the well. It's been there six weeks, and you're just now getting it out."

Do you see the difference? Jesus is saying, Let's not be legalistic here. If something comes up on the Sabbath that abso-

lutely cannot be avoided and needs your immediate attention, then deal with it. That's okay. However, don't fool yourself and justify not keeping the Lord's day holy simply because of poor preparation. Plan your week around the Sabbath, knowing there is an exception to the Law when you must do work on the Sabbath out of necessity due to unexpected circumstances.

BLESSED BY THE LAW: THE BEAUTY OF THE LAW

If you challenge yourself to abide by God's Law and keep the Sabbath holy, it won't be long before you'll begin to see what a privilege it is to do so and how rich a blessing it truly becomes in your life. You'll start to say, "Thank God it's Sunday. This is a special day, and I get to enjoy it because I don't have to work!" It will become the best day of your week. However, there is a warning I'd like to impart to you as well. We sometimes resist the Law because it shows us how far we fall short from keeping God's Law. It leaves us feeling guilty, doesn't it? It is important we understand, though, that guilt is an act of God's grace. Without guilt, we won't ever turn and see that we're in a sad and desperate place in life—and that's where the beauty of God's Law is truly revealed. You see, the beauty of the Law is not only its ability to show us just how far off the mark we are, it's also the tutor that leads us to grace—to the cross and the resurrection—to Christ himself. That's where we see the love of our God. That's where we get the faith that enables us to hear what

God says and to want to do that which He tells us.

Think about a young high school boy that hasn't begun to concern himself with personal grooming. He doesn't brush his teeth, comb his hair, or use deodorant. Then all of a sudden, everything changes. He brushes his teeth three times a day, carries a comb in his back pocket, and uses deodorant and body spray. What happened? He met a girl with whom he wants to spend time. All of a sudden, he wants to look and smell nice! A similar experience occurs when we come to the cross; we meet Christ and want to experience His grace and love. All of a sudden, we want to keep His Law and spend time with Him on the Sabbath. As David said, "I love your law! It is my meditation day and night!" It is how we groom and present ourselves to God. We give Him our lives that we would follow Him, our lips that we would praise Him, our hands that He would use them, and our feet that we would choose to go where He leads. Therefore, don't look at the Law negatively for it is the Law that breaks our heart and makes us fall in love with him. Then the Law becomes the delight of our heart.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGNED TO REMEMBER THE PAST

The second reason the Lord commands us to keep the Sabbath is because we were designed to spend *one day a week remembering the past.* The Sabbath is a day set aside to:

- a) Remember God's work as Creator.
- b) Remember God's work as Redeemer.

THE PAST: REMEMBERING GOD'S WORK AS CREATOR

The issue of creation is on the front lines of warfare for the souls of our children. Teachers in many of our public schools are encouraged to teach evolution but are prohibited from teaching creation. Many children do not even question how our world began because evolution is just accepted as the 'scientific' answer. When the topic of creation is introduced, however, you can expect controversy. Why is that? It points to the Creator and Designer of all things. If you want your kids to have a stable spiritual foundation, keep underscoring the beauty of God's design—the why and the how of creation.

When I talk to nonbelievers, we inevitably talk about the Bi-

ble being God's Word. Many express disbelief that the Bible is truly God's Word, and the most frequent argument is that they don't believe some parts of the Bible to be true and therefore don't believe any of it. When pressed for more concrete explanations, most bring up the validity of the world being created in seven days. Many unbelievers will even claim that 'science has proven otherwise.' When pressed for proof, they will recite information they learned in school.

You see, explanations about where the earth came from and how life came into being are, in reality, theories. There may be scientific research behind those theories and elements that point to certain possibilities. But nobody knows for sure, and while science has some excellent ideas on this topic, there are still too many unanswerable questions and other evidence that can contradict a theory as being fact.

As a follow up question, I ask if they have ever read a book written by a creationist who is also a very respected scientist. Now, I know there are many people in the world that have investigated creationist theory and have chosen not to believe. However, I've yet to talk to anyone that has read a book such as I described. I challenge them to read one or two books detailing scientific evidence that supports creation and the notion of a designer. They may not become a creationist, but they are going to question their certainty that this world came about without a creator.

It is so important to remember God as Creator! Unfortunately, so much of our society has been blinded from even con-

sidering creation and the idea of a Divine Creator as a possibility! That's why God says, "I want you to spend one day a week remembering who I am and what I have done. So, let me give you one approach that may help you to do that."⁷

Taking walks with God can be a wonderful activity for a Sabbath day. Short walks around your neighborhood are good, but long walks in nature are often better. When I walk, I often pray, "God would you just show off to me just a little bit today? Would you reveal yourself to me through your creation, so I can see you and be reminded of you as the Ultimate Creator of all things? You can do that through the trees, you can do it through animals, you can do it through whatever means, Lord, but just show off to me."

It's a great time to really see the world around us and remember that God is the designer of it all. Wow! That exercise will serve as a looking glass into the past at what He has done, who you are in His creation, how best you can serve Him by spending the Lord's day remembering, and how that in turn will ultimately bless, restore and refocus your efforts for the week ahead. It gives you a new **perspective**.

⁷ It is interesting that 65% of the winners of the Nobel Prize are self-identified Christians. Also, each year there are new resources challenging the long-held view of evolution. The most recent is, "Darwin Devolves" by Michael J. Behe, 2019. A Christian defense of creation has never stood on stronger legs than it does today. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/list_of_christian_nobel_laureates

THE LAW: TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE VERSUS ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to get a picture of what it means to treat the Lord's Day as holy and set apart, imagine you live in a huge room with four evenly spaced walls; the room is called Time—it's the temporal, finite life on earth. The only thing in that room, sitting right in the middle, is a treadmill. The treadmill is called Work. Our Designer and Creator tells us to get on that treadmill and run at a good pace for six days. Just lean into it and do the best we can, given our ability and circumstance. In one wall of this room called Time, there is a window. Our Designer commands that one day a week-'the Sabbath'-we are to get off that treadmill, walk to the window and just gaze. Outside of that room, on the other side of the window, is Eternity—it's timeless, infinite life in heaven. When we gaze into eternity, we gain eternal perspective. One author says, "Sunday is a window in this world that gives us a peek into the next." That's why we get off the treadmill and have a day of rest.

Many people think if they stay on the treadmill all seven days, running faster and longer than others, they will be better off because more work will be accomplished, they'll make more money, be more productive and successful. Leonardo Da Vinci once said, "The greatest geniuses sometimes accomplish more when they work less." Our performance based society encourages us to stay on the treadmill and promotes the false belief

that if you work hard enough long enough, you will achieve success and be better off in life. Perhaps we have a fear of appearing lazy if we take a day off, but studies have shown that Americans are not necessarily lazy. Historian J. R. Seeley remarked, "The supreme quality of great men is the power of resting." Seeley is stating what God has said since the beginning of time, "You need to get off the treadmill so you can get rest and perspective."

Many in the Christian community think the Sabbath is merely about resting. They get off the treadmill and seek physical rest—which is good for the mind and body. Unfortunately, when we focus only on part of God's plan, we miss the full blessing. When we only rest, it's easy to get consumed with the rules: What can I do on the Sabbath? What shouldn't I do? What really counts as 'resting'? Then the Law becomes a regrettable Law. Oh, we agree it's important, but we don't understand it. We start to begrudgingly obey rather than eagerly anticipating the day of rest. He gave us this command, saying, "I designed you in such a way that you need a trickle charge, every week. You need to rest for one day and **remember** who I am and what I have done! You must get off that treadmill in order to do one thing—gaze out of the window."

Ideally, we get a glimpse into time past and reflect on what He did through creation. It reminds us of who we are in Christ—part of His creation and plan. Gaining perspective on that one day provides what we need for the other six days so we can get on the treadmill and keep going. The time away from the

treadmill reminds us we were created to love and glorify Him. That's God's plan. You see, we need those sustained moments where we are peering into the beauty of eternity past, bringing His truth to bear upon us and our lives by recognizing and remembering God's work as Creator.

THE PAST: REMEMBERING GOD'S WORK AS REDEEMER

Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15; NASB).

This text, referencing the Fourth Commandment, is identical to the first recording we studied in Exodus 20 with one important exception. While it gives the same instruction to keep the Lord's Day holy, when it clarifies the 'for'—meaning the reason why—instead of creation, it references the Old Testament when the Israelites lived in captivity in Egypt. Moses is recalling the past, saying "Remember Pharaoh and the plagues? Remember placing the blood of the Lamb over the lintel of the

door for protection from the angel of death?" Most of us know that story of redemption—being bought out of slavery. The Old Testament points toward the New Testament. That lamb represents Jesus—the Lamb of God that would one day save us from the slavery of sin and, ultimately, from death—never to be condemned but to have eternal life. Redemption is where we find our purchase of God. He says, "I want you to take this day because you need a day to reflect and remember that I am not only your Creator, I am your Redeemer." Let's look at this passage in Ephesians and read it in light of God being our Redeemer:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:1-7; ESV).

Does that change your perspective? If we don't go to the window in order to get perspective on Him as Redeemer, we are literally going to **lose** perspective. This will become most evident in two ways. First, we will lose perspective on life in general as our focus becomes consumed by our earthly and per-

sonal kingdoms—our jobs, income, success, accomplishments, recreation, family, and home. The kingdom of God was designed to be the center of our lives, but when we lose perspective, it shifts to the periphery. Second, we will lose perspective on the Christian life simply from a lack of rest and perspective. We may believe with all our heart that Jesus saved us, but our perspective begins to shift, and we fall into false thinking like:

Jesus saved us so that He can be our Savior. No, he didn't! He saved us so that we might be His disciples.

Jesus saved us so that we can enjoy life. No, he didn't! He saved us so that we could enjoy **Him**.

Jesus saved us so that we could be happy. No, he didn't! He saved us so that we could be holy people.

I have met with many married couples that are members of the church or Christians that love the Lord. Often when we meet they express frustration with their relationship and explain how they 'just can't get along'. They admit to knowing there is no biblical reason for divorce, but declare they don't love each other anymore or even really like each other. I often respond by addressing the husband and ask, "You're a Christian, correct?" When he responds affirmatively, I might ask, "What do you want out of life? If you could just say one thing, what would it be?" Usually the essence of the answer is 'to be happy'. When

the same question is asked of the wife, she generally responds in kind. Neither believes they can attain happiness while married to the other.

When our happiness, comfort or pleasure becomes our focus we have lost perspective! As Christians, our desire should be to glorify God. That kind of thinking prompts the question, "What should I do in my present circumstances if my focus is glorifying God?" Maybe it means modelling obedience to Him in a tough marriage when there are no biblical grounds for divorce. Alternatively, if there are biblical grounds, maybe divorce is the best way to accomplish that which God has designed for us. We'll know what to do when we have taken time to gain perspective which shifts our thinking away from us and places it rightfully on Him and what He has done for us as our Redeemer. Perspective comes from going to that window to look outward: "Oh! It's not really about me, is it? It's about Him. It's not about what's in it for me, it's about what's in it for Him. It's not about gaining glory for me, it's about giving glory to Him. It's not about what's mine, it's about what's His."

When we don't get regular rest and perspective our understanding of our purpose in life very quickly gets clouded; we become confused and angry. How many Christians are so put out with God that they raise their fist at Him saying, "I've had enough with you, God; I am done! I just don't care about you anymore, because you don't care about me! You can do whatever you choose and look at what you, in your divine providence, have allowed to prevail in my life!" If that is what you are ex-

periencing, it will continue until you remember He is your Redeemer. He purchased you when you didn't deserve it, and He shed His blood so that you could have life eternal. He promises, "I work all things together for good in your life even though you can't see it."

Imagine your disappointment in an employer who makes a decision that negatively affects you, and by extension your family, in every way possible. Then your disappointment turns into anger. Without the ability to change your employer's decision, the only way to experience the situation differently is by developing a different perspective. Let's now think of this same situation in a different light.

Assume that you were hired by this employer when you were truly unemployable. You didn't have many job skills; your education was limited, and you knew that you were going to have a lifetime of struggle because no one would want to hire you. In fact, you were just not capable of doing much at all. All of a sudden, this employer chose you from among all other applicants. You think, "How would I have ever gotten this job without the graciousness of my employer?" Then, a few months later your employer makes the exact same decision I mentioned previously that negatively affects you and your family. Do you think you would be still angry at your employer for making the decision when you fully understand that you didn't truly deserve that job in the first place, and it was only because of his grace that

⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

you had that job at all? Of course not! You may be disappointed in the circumstances, but you would be thankful that he even took a chance on you at all. Christian, the Lord didn't just take a chance on you, He chose you according to His good purpose—and the only way to grasp that perspective is to dedicate time to remember our redemption, and the One who redeems, by keeping the Sabbath.

CHAPTER 4

DESIGNED TO REFLECT UPON THE FUTURE

The third reason for observing the Sabbath is *God designed us* to spend one day a week reevaluating the present. When talking about the Sabbath, Christian author and speaker Gordon MacDonald writes, "Sunday is a time to interpret our work, to press meaning into it, and to make sure we know to whom it is dedicated." To interpret—I love that idea! Four very practical, simple ways to use our time on the Sabbath to reevaluate and interpret our present life are:

1. Self-Evaluation

The Sabbath is a time to evaluate our own personal spiritual progress and discipline. One method I promote is called P, P, and P: Pencil, Paper, and Prayer. Take ten to fifteen minutes and give yourself a kind of a spiritual assessment by asking questions like: What kind of spiritual progress did I make this week? How are my spiritual disciplines this week? Did I spend time talking with and listening to God? Did I acknowledge His work in my everyday life? Choose questions that have mean-

⁹ Gordon MacDonald, Ordering Your Private World (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984). Gordon MacDonald served for over forty years as a pastor and was President of World Relief, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and now serves as Chancellor at Denver Seminary, Colorado, USA.

ing to you and do an evaluation. Then contemplate something small you could do during the coming week to improve your spiritual progress and discipline.

2. Family Evaluation

The Sabbath can be a time to evaluate how we are doing in terms of advancing our family's spiritual progress. Ask, "If I am totally honest, am I spending adequate time in the role that God has called me to in this family? Have I set my priorities in such a way that I am making room to lead them spiritually? Not perfectly, but fairly well? Could I lean into my role just a little bit more this week so as to impact them in a more significant way?" Consider how you could push yourself a little further in your maturity as a spiritual leader in your family.

3. Vocational Evaluation

The Sabbath may be a time to evaluate our effectiveness at work and our motivation for working as we do. Consider, "Why am I doing this? Am I working hard enough? Or am I working so hard just to get what I want, so people think of me the way I want them to think of me? How could I make my work a little more God honoring and less self-serving this week?" These questions help us assess how we are doing in the areas and roles the Lord has given us.

4. Health Evaluation

The Sabbath can be a time to evaluate our physical and emo-

tional condition as well. We can ask the questions, "How am I treating my body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit? How's my diet been?" More revealing might include, "If it's been good, why has it been good? Am I exercising so hard just so people will think better of me? Have I let the boundaries slip? Do I need to make an adjustment?" There are all kinds of things we do that affect our bodies and emotions. Evaluate what you are doing and talk to God about it. It's a great time to ask how well we are setting boundaries in our lives so that we can have positive emotional health.

Consider utilizing P, P, and P on the Sabbath to evaluate your emotional health weekly. "How well am I thinking on the Truth? Am I letting my emotions and feelings become the loudest voice, or maybe even the only voice, I'm listening to? When we allow our feelings to dictate our actions it is a sign we need to reevaluate. We can ask for God's help to recognize where we need to think on the Truth and discern one slight improvement we could make in that area.

What would happen if, every week, we got off the treadmill, walked to the window and peered out into eternity to remember He's our Creator and Redeemer? What if we intentionally evaluated our lives after obtaining eternal perspective? Who knows what might happen? God designed us to spend one day a week with Him. Watch what happens when we honor and obey Him in this regard! Keeping the Sabbath will become a blessing in our life and to our life.

THE LAW — A REGRETTABLE LAW OR A LOVABLE LAW

Have you ever driven past a jail and begun to imagine the lives of those incarcerated? They're rarely outdoors, have the freedom to walk where they desire, experience the joy of eating whatever they want whenever they want, or see people and places important to them. Oh man! What misery! When you begin to see the Law as something to restrict you, that's when the Law becomes unattractive.

What if you intentionally put yourself in jail? You purposely break a law so you end up in jail because your son is in jail. He's the love of your life, and more than anything, you just want to be with your son. You're not trying to get out; you tried to get in! Now you love the boundaries because they've taken you to what you love. It has become a lovable Law. When you fall in love with God, your mindset changes: "God, I want in! I want to be wherever you are, and I am willing to live within the bounds you set because you are the love of my life! I want to do whatever it takes to be with you, and if that means living within your Law, then that's what I want to do! It's not simply about enjoying life. It's about enjoying you."

God gave us the Law because He loves us that much. Remember the boy who had no interest in girls and, therefore, had no interest in grooming? When he meets an attractive girl, he wants to use deodorant, a comb, and a toothbrush! He even

wants to shop for nice, color coordinated clothing to enhance his eyes. You see, the Law is important because it shows us how dirty and smelly we are, yet it gives us no hope of getting clean or escaping the decay of death. It does, however, show us where hope can be found. The Law becomes essential to teach us we are condemned outside of the work of Christ, and in doing so, it drives us straight to the cross of Jesus where we see His great love for us. We see what He has done for us, how He paid our penalty and saved us from death, giving us life everlasting through eternity. We fall in love with Him by His grace and begin to love His Law. We desire to keep the Law and, like David, we see how good the Law is for us and how we benefit from it. It restores us and gives us rest and perspective; we are blessed because of it. The Law keeps our focus on our Creator and Redeemer—where it rightfully belongs.

A NOTE ON SELECTIVE OBEDIENCE

Let's not pick and choose which laws we are going to keep and which laws we are going to ignore. Declare war on selective obedience! Most of us find it easy to agree with the Commandments to honor God and not commit murder but might feel that keeping others is not really that big of a deal—like sex outside of marriage, observing the Sabbath, and tithing. Let's not select the laws we like and understand and obey them because they make sense to us and disregard those that don't. Don't despise the Law! Don't see it as a bunch of unattractive rules that

hang over us. Run to the Law! Let it be your tutor that takes you to the cross and enables you to fall in love with your God. Christian, it's a lovable law. It blesses your life immeasurably when you keep it, so let's keep the Lord's Day!

CHAPTER 5

DESIGNED TO REFLECT UPON THE FUTURE

So far, we have learned that we are to keep the Sabbath holy and set it aside as a special day so we can rest from our labor (and be restored to health), remember the past and who He is as Creator and Redeemer, and re-evaluate the present in light of who God is. The last reason for keeping the Sabbath is *God designed us to spend one day a week reflecting upon the future*.

When we stop work on the Sabbath, we are not simply resting and reevaluating our lives to bring perspective to our life here on earth, although that is certainly a big part of it, we are pausing to think about our future when we die. It sounds morbid but really it is a time to remember the best is yet to come! Most of us, however, don't have a positive perspective on the future at all. We frequently hear comments that make us look unfavorably upon the future, such as, "the runway is getting short", "aging is no fun", or "there's not much time left." The reality is those statements are true. Consequently, our perspective on living is not excellent, and for most people our perspective on death? Focus on glory! Romans 8:18 says, "For the suffering of this present world is not worthy to be compared to the glory yet to be revealed to us."

Interestingly, it seems that Christians today tend only to think about the glory yet to be revealed when a loved one dies, and even then it's for their own comfort—and rightly so, for it brings great relief and reassurance. We are so grieved and in so much emotional pain when someone dies that we need to believe and know the truth of glory—that our loved one is experiencing splendor right now. It brings peace to our mind and spirit. However, as the pain of the loss softens and subsides, we don't think much about glory anymore, and it fades into the background again. The truth is, we should be thinking, "When is that glory to be revealed? When Christ comes back, I'm going to be with the Lord in full glory!" It is actually something I often think about when I am taking one of my walks. As I consider my work week and contemplate the finite nature of time, I remind myself of the bigger picture and shift my perspective to spending Eternity with God.

When my children were young, I would occasionally go on a date with them so we could have some one on one time together. Often, they asked me where we were going, and I'd reply with a smile, "Oh, you're going to like this; it's going to be fun." When we arrived, they would ask, "What is this, Dad? A cemetery? Are we going to a cemetery on our date?" I would reassure them that we were going to see some fun stuff. We would wander through the cemetery and read some of the headstones. The dash between the birth and death dates represented that person's life, and we would imagine what their lives were like, what they may have seen or experienced. Death is not something to

fear because as those that are a part of God's covenant family, we've are promised something good. It's called glory.

Thinking about the future is a way of bringing eternal perspective to your life. When we set aside the Sabbath as holy, get off the treadmill, go to the window and gaze out, we bring a little perspective to our daily life as it relates to our future. Not just our past, not just our present, but our future also. Gordon McDonald writes, "It is a time to affirm our intentions to pursue a Christ centered tomorrow." The Bible doesn't give us a lot of detail about it; we are left to our imagination for most of it, but isn't it wonderful to be able to think about our future and know it's going to be amazing? Our whole outlook on life and death becomes a much more positive and exciting experience. It's the perspective that comes from looking out the window as opposed to the perspective that comes from just being on the treadmill.

FIVE TRUTHS REGARDING THE LORD'S DAY

To fully appreciate what we have learned in these last few chapters regarding the reasons why we keep the Sabbath holy and set apart, we shall now briefly touch upon five truths that will help solidify our understanding of the Lord's Day and God's intention behind it. These truths will serve as reminders of how to think about the Lord's day as we begin to apply them in our Christian walk.

1. The Lord's Day was not given to be temporary but permanent.

There are three basic views that Christians hold regarding the Lord's Day. One is that it was relevant prior to the coming of Christ, as a part of the old covenant. The second view is that there is a future consummation and the third is a blended view of the two preceding views. We do know that the scriptures emphasize the Sabbath's fulfillment in Jesus. In fact, Colossians 2:16-17 reads this way: "Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard for food or drink or in respect to a festival or new moon or a Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ," meaning that when Christ comes, everything is fulfilled. It has happened. The Sabbath was just a foreshadowing, and now that Christ has come, we don't need it anymore. This is where we have to be careful. When we begin to think that way, I do not believe our thinking is entirely biblical.

I'll use this as an opportunity to say to the Christian community—and you that will become Christians—please don't choose your opinion or belief about the Bible based on what you like best. That is **not** how we choose what we believe. We choose based on what we think the scriptures most clearly teach. This does not necessarily mean I am 100% accurate, but I am going to suggest a view that is a blended perspective.

The New Testament does reflect a fundamental tension between these two views: present fulfillment and future consummation. Yes, there is a change. That's why we went from Saturday to Sunday, the day of the resurrection. It is important to

show that there is a change; something has happened. But we cannot say now "the window" is right in our face all the time, or that it's all done. We're still in a broken body, broken world, broken mind. We have to go to that window to gain perspective, but we understand it's now a little different than it used to be.

Ultimately, I don't want you to think, "Oh, that's one of the Ten Commandments that has been done away with; there are only nine now." That is not true. Very few Christians would say there are only nine commandments today. However, many may very well live their lives as if there are only nine commandments. Let me encourage you to think this through carefully.

2. The Lord's Day was not meant to restrict but to liberate.

Mark 2:27 says, "Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath was given as a gift to restore us and refocus our hearts; it was never designed to restrict us. It is a loyable Law!

Young people generally tend to see the law as somewhat limiting. It's acceptable and understandable that in our immaturity we don't quite grasp the need for healthy limits and boundaries. As a result, we think that all these restrictions mean God is against us. We begin to think not all of God's laws need to be taken literally. We begin to evaluate whether we feel if it is necessary to comply with God's laws based upon the nature of the activity under consideration. Is it fun? Do I want to do it? The only response when this is our method of evaluation is to conclude that if God says not to do it, God is restrictive. He's

not good. He's not fun. He doesn't understand my life. He must not want me to be happy.

When we begin to think that way it is as if we are a child saying, "Oh, wow! Look at this cliff. That is a long way down there! Look at the birds—they seem to be having fun. I want to fly because I think that would be fun. I think I'm going to jump off this cliff! It will be exciting, and I just know it will make me happy." Sure enough, we jump and boy! There's a rush, a thrill, until ... Splat! It's no longer fun. We injure ourselves. Then we cry out, "Oh, I didn't quite understand. I didn't know it would hurt. It looked so good."

Do you see how that could correspond to the commandments? Some of us read the Fourth Commandment, to keep the Sabbath holy, and say, "Well, I don't understand why we need to rest. I want to do my own thing on the Sabbath, so I think I want to jump from the cliff." We believe that because God has asked it of us, the commandment must be depriving us of something good, when in reality it is preserving us for something so much better.

Sadly, we look at the Sabbath—getting off the treadmill—and we think, "On this day we are not allowed to do what we want to do. If I could just get back on the treadmill, I'd be happy and life would be better." However, God says, "You know what? I don't want you in a hospital, a mental institution, or a prison. I don't want you to be discouraged or depressed, to have anxiety or feel hopeless—so I am asking you to trust me for your own good and get off the treadmill." Those who say,

"Okay, God, you designed me. Let me get off the treadmill each Sabbath day. Let me go to the window. Let me stare," begin the week with a different outlook on life. They feel refreshed and have joy, even in difficult circumstances because they have received rest and a new perspective. What a difference it makes! The Lord says, "I'm doing this because I love you, not to restrict you. I've got your very best interest in mind." Those that are more mature in their faith have had enough experience to know that when you follow God's ways, you find out that there's liberation in His law.

To really appreciate the benefits of setting the Sabbath aside, we need to stop being resistant to obeying God and start enjoying it as a day of fun and pleasure, time to be with our God, reflect upon the past, present, and future and reassess our priorities based on what we see and hear. It can also be a day to spend time with friends and family and to set aside all the pressures, concerns and worries of the week by placing our lives in the context of eternity.

Parents, don't make Sunday a negative experience for your kids. One of the great fears I have is that children will regard Sunday as one of the worst days of the week. So, what do you do when there are ball games and other activities that are scheduled on a Sunday? There isn't one 'right' answer. Carol and I decided we had to draw a line somewhere, so we established an arbitrary line. We explained to the kids that on one side of the line was what we agreed was okay to do on Sundays and on the other side were those things we would leave for the other six

days of the week. Now the key here is the word arbitrary. The line could move, but in general, we decided that if an activity or outing was going to detract from what we do on the Lord's Day with regard to the gathering of God's people, the church, or our family then we wouldn't do that activity. So, for our family, we didn't go to a ballgame on Sunday. That was just our conviction—it doesn't mean it is the answer for everyone. For some, it may be right to say, "Well, we'll attend the game if it is in the afternoon, but if it interrupts our worship of God and spending time at the window to stare in a significant way, then no, we won't go to the ballgame."

Make the Sabbath day attractive. Do what you have to do to make your kids look forward to Sunday with the anticipation of it being the best day of the week. While many will disagree on this, I admit we were not above bribing our children. We would tell them we love the beauty of the Lord's Day and wanted them to experience it as well. We would offer them an amount that would be persuasive to their age if they were willing to skip the sporting event that day. Most of the time they would happily accept the money and we could spend the Sabbath day together. While they are young, build the perspective that the Sabbath is an attractive day.

3. The Lord's Day should include corporate worship with the broader Christian church family.

It's been said, "To kill Christianity, kill Sunday. To kill the

Christian, teach him isolation." I know it may sound like I am trying to get us back to the "good old days" of the 50's, but in reality, I am trying to get us back to the truth of God's original design for us. Christian, I can't tell you how important it is for you to have strong conviction in this area and to live out your conviction on a weekly basis. Parents, when your children leave your home as adults, they will create their own convictions, but you can model yours while they still live with you.

I cannot tell you how many people have expressed disappointment in their children for neglecting to attend church after they go to college. What went wrong? Well, it's a lack of conviction. If you have a second home, at the lake for example, and go there most weekends when the weather is nice and every weekend in the summer but you don't attend church while you are there, what message does that send to your children about prioritizing corporate worship? Your price for not going to church was escaping to the lake house, their price is sleeping late on Sunday morning. If you pick and choose, they will too. We have to take that way of thinking captive. Instead, rejoice that it is the Lord's Day, and we have the privilege of going to the window! Nothing gets you to the window like corporate worship. It brings you into the presence of the

Lord Almighty, and we can stare at the heavenlies alongside our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

When my wife, Carol, was a young girl, her family had a lake house about an hour from where they lived. On Friday the

¹⁰ This has been attributed to Voltaire but may not have originated with him.

car would be packed, and when her father would come home from work, he would step from one car to the next to drive to the lake house. Early every Sunday morning, the family was to be in that car so they could come back to attend church in their own town and be with God's people. Corporate worship was so important to us that Carol and I spent the first night of our married life together in a town so we could attend worship together the following morning before continuing on to our honeymoon. We felt there was no better way to spend our first full day of life together than staring out the window. What a beautiful thing!

I read about a Jewish lady who kept the Jewish traditions and later became a Christian. She told of her own experience of keeping the Sabbath holy, and said "I urge you to prepare yourself for the coming Sunday with prayer and rest so as to be punctual and alert at church the next morning." Having kept the laws, she goes on to tell of her own relatively new experience and of how she now sees the beauty of the Lord's Day. She says, "As for me, I'm starting small. I've joined a Bible study that meets Sundays at 5:00 p.m. to bookend my days so as to help me into Shabbat (the Sabbath). There's not enough time between church and Bible study to pull out my laptop and to start working, so instead, I try to have a leisurely lunch with friends from church, I have foresworn Sunday shopping—a bigger sacrifice than you could ever imagine—and I sometimes join my friend Ginger on her afternoon visits to church shutins." What a great way to take the day and give it to the Lord.

Do you want rest? Do you want perspective? Do it corporately, with your church family, and watch how blessed you are because of it. Don't let anything stand in between you and setting aside the Sabbath for a time of worshipping with God's people. It will take sacrifice.

Once, I took one of my children on a trip to Japan where I had been asked to speak. At first, I turned down the opportunity, saying 'I just can't come right now for family reasons.' They said, "Well, what if we paid for one of your children to come?" I asked, "Will he have a good time? Will he enjoy it?" "Oh, yes! We'll make it a great time for him," they assured me. Do you know, they worked me from morning until night and we just dragged this child around; it was no fun whatsoever. It was well into the middle of the week, when I finally said, "Where's' the fun you promised my child? We wanted him to be able to see and experience Japan and some of your traditions and culture? I'm just working and he's just sitting there listening to translations, it's boring."

They reassured me, 'Oh, it's coming on Sunday! We have packed Sunday full of all the sights you can see in this area of Japan. It's going to be great!' I said, 'Well, can we go to church on Sunday?' 'No, there's no church anywhere near those sights. You've got to stay way over there for church, and most of it's not in your language anyway, and so there is no point.' By now, I'm just looking at my child thinking, 'Oh, no, please tell me you're not going to do this to us.' I said, 'So you're telling me we've got to choose one or the other?' 'Yes,' they said, 'you have

to choose.' I said, 'Well then, we'll go to church.' I don't know what that child thought then; I don't know what they think about it now. I don't know if they remember it. But I tell you this, I think my child would know that, 'Hey, my parents have a conviction.' We have twelve family values—one of them is that daily personal worship and weekly corporate worship are vital for healthy living. Why? We've got to get off the treadmill and go to the window. Have I done that perfectly and well, all my life? No, but I am so thankful for what I have learned about doing it. It is so very important.

4. The Lord's day should not be exhausting—unless due to deeds of mercy, piety or necessity.

I work on Sunday, and as you may recall, the three acceptable exceptions to working on the Lord's day are deeds of mercy, piety and necessity. It can be very draining for me to work on the Lord's Day. However, it's worth it. Utilize the Lord's day, enjoy it, make the most of it. But don't allow it to become exhausting. Otherwise you negate the rest you need to receive in order to get perspective. You negate the time you need to go to the window, recharge, re-evaluate, do some P, P and P time—or whatever works for you—to reflect on the things of God. Our fast-paced lives make it easy to want to do a lot on our Sundays. We have been conditioned to be productive and accomplish a great deal every day—and on the other six days we should! But on Sunday, resist that urge. Block Sundays and make that day a time to get that trickle charge we spoke of earlier. Protect it

and preserve it.

Parents, especially single parents, of young children may need help getting to the window. Help each other by offering to trade off—even if it's only for a couple of hours. Find a way. The benefits to your life, health, work and relationships will be immeasurable.

5. One must follow his or her conscience regarding the use of the Lord's Day and must not impose his or her conscience on others.

In our observance of the Lord's Day, God is going to call some of us to certain activities and others to something completely different. We will each be convicted differently because the Holy Spirit knows what we each need to take up or set aside so we can truly gain rest and perspective.

In a debate at the 1834 General Assembly in England, the following quote from Charles Simeon speaks to the importance of allowing the Holy Spirit to guide one's convictions concerning the Sabbath. Simeon said, "In my own personal habit, I am as strict as most. But in my judgment as before God, I think that many religious characters, ministers as well as others, are in error. I think that many Judaize, (which means they are law bound) too much, and they would have joined the Pharisees in condemning our Lord on many occasions. I do not think they err in acting up to their own principles; there they are right. But they err in their own standard as a standard for all others. Again, I say, they may be right, but the others who think and act

differently are not therefore wrong. Those who ate and those who refused to eat meat offered to idols were both right, if they acted to the Lord, as were those also who observed, and those who did not observe, certain days, which under the Jewish dispensation were actually prescribed. I'll tell you what I consider the perfect rule—let all judge for themselves in relation to the ritual observance of such matters; the strong not despising the weak, and the weak forbearing to sit in judgment on the strong. This will be the safest and best discharge of the duty of all parties, whether to God or man. To God, who has said, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," and to man, "who should be left to stand or fall to his own master."

Each person is responsible before God as to how they observe this law and are not answerable to others.

CHAPTER 6

THE LOVABLE LAW

I hope you share David's conviction that the law is lovable, though it may not appear as such at first. This particular law, the Fourth Commandment, reveals not only the heart of God but also highlights the vital importance of keeping the Sabbath for our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. We have 'disordered hearts' and to resolve this issue, God has given us a divine plan to rest on one day out of seven. It's called the Sabbath—because it means 'to cease or to rest.' Another definition is 'to interpret' which means we take time to reflect and reevaluate our overall condition to view our lives in the context of creation, the cross (our redemption) and eternity. The word 'holy' means 'to set apart'. It literally means 'to make special.' And so, we keep the Sabbath holy.

We discussed the exceptions—of piety, mercy and necessity. Then we were reminded that, the design of a single day's rest is not so much to cause cessation of personal activity as it is to stimulate the right type of activity. We can do things like take walks, devote time to P,P and P¹¹, and worship corporately. These activities help us assess our lives. They allow us to peer out that window to get the rest and perspective we need to live

¹¹ You will recall that this refers to Pencil, Paper and Prayer.

the life we were designed to live in communion with Christ. It is not easy, however many of God's laws, particularly the laws that challenge us, require faith to follow—especially when we don't understand them. The key is to wage war on selective obedience. Don't simply obey those commands that make sense, feel good, or easily fit into our schedules. We willingly embrace things that conform to our desires. But, when something cuts across the design of our desires, such as sex before marriage, it challenges our beliefs. It creates suspicion about whether God really intends all things for our good. That's where we've got to have faith. Faith is trusting God. So when God says 'keep the Sabbath holy' and we obey, we are operating within our design. It really is in our best interest, but we have to have faith and believe.

When we don't keep God's Law, we suffer because of it. The only way we can overcome that kind of suffering is to understand that it's a lovable law, not a regrettable law. While the Law makes us feel the guilt of our sin because it reveals how short we fall of God's good standards, it doesn't stop there. Though our guilt hurts and causes us pain, it is the passageway to grace. Guilt convicts us, then shows us the love of God as we see the cross of our Savior and the redemption we have in Him. It is the pathway to health in our lives.

If you are reading this teaching on the Sabbath for the first time, it is my desire that you see the law, and this particular law, as lovable. A loving God gave us His law so that we could be the best of who He's created us to be. Christian, take the

commandment to keep the Sabbath holy and drive it so deeply into your heart that you would see the beauty of what God has prescribed for you. May you also have the peace and freedom when necessity comes, and the opportunity for piety and mercy, to work hard on the Lord's Day. May we eagerly anticipate the Sabbath as a reminder of how desperately we need a Savior and allow that need to lead us to Jesus. May we all embrace the beauty of the law, and may it become the delight of our heart.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, would You give us the insight to correctly see Your truth. May we embrace it regardless of feelings. Would You give us faith? Would You meet us in our physical, emotional and spiritual fatigue right now? May we begin to see that there could be something we have been missing out on that could make a real difference in our life forever—the Sabbath. God, we pray that we would fall in love with You, that we might see Your great love at the cross and what You did in giving us Your Son, and that we would fall in love with You and Him, Your Spirit that indwells us. We pray for those that are seeking to understand the faith of Christianity. May they see the Law as a conduit to revealing the condition of the heart that then takes them to You. We pray, Father, that You would grant it in the great name of Christ our Savior, Amen.

APPENDIX

A Day of Rest: 12 Scientific Reasons It Works

By Rhett Power, Head coach,

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PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION

1. Time out reduces stress.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reports in a CDC publication that stress levels at work at higher than ever and that "health care expenditures are nearly 50% greater for workers who report high levels of stress." Stress creates havoc with our physical and emotional health. "A growing body of evidence shows that "... skipping breaks can lead to stress and exhaustion."

2. Time out gives you a chance to move.

We've all seen the studies on the impact of a lot of sitting time on many aspects of health: "Research has linked sitting for long periods of time with a number of health concerns, including obesity and metabolic syndrome—a cluster of conditions that includes increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around the waist and abnormal cholesterol levels.

Too much sitting also seems to increase the risk of death from cardiovascular disease and cancer." Sitting extends beyond TV time to include all time at a screen, time at work, in the car, visiting with friends ... in short, the kinds of things that fill the day for most of us.

3. Completely divesting from your work on a regular basis reduces inflammation and the risk of heart disease.

Most occupations these days are sedentary. Modifiable risk factors for heart disease and general inflammation are uncontrolled diabetes, physical inactivity, overweight or obesity and uncontrolled stress or anger. We already know that work is stressful. In addition, studies show that time sitting, as most of us do at work, influences inflammatory markers even absent elevated blood glucose, obesity or heart disease. Each one hour increase in sitting time associates with an 18% increased cardiovascular disease mortality risk.

4. Getting away from work boosts your immune system.

Chronic stress also depresses your immune system. Conversely adequate sleep and exercise are two of four essentials of boosting your immune system. Take advantage of your weekends for extended R&R.

5. Speaking of sleep, you'll do it better during time out of work.

Time off helps sleep-disrupting habits like checking your cell phone before bed.

6. Your active time off adds years to your life.

Results of studies suggest that a higher amount of daily total sitting time associates with all-cause mortality, particularly among inactive adults.

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

7. Taking regular time away from work restores mental energy.

You probably know that just from your own experience. Science supports your intuition! Studies show "that people who do not know how to detach from work during their off time experience increased exhaustion over the course of one year and are less resilient in the face of stressful work conditions."

8. When you take out time for yourself, you're more creative.

Are you the creative type? You need time out! "Thinking is one of the crucial benefits of stepping back. Just as quality time off fuels energetic resources on the job, reflective time is critical to producing solutions and creative breakthroughs."

9. You're also more productive when you take time out from work.

Data from the OECD shows that working more hours means less productivity. The most productive countries are Germany and France—each mandating more than 30 days of vacation.

Workers in the U.S., with no law requiring paid time off, are the third most productive (and only about 25% of Americans take their full allotment of vacation time).

10. You'll focus better at work if you take your weekly rejuvenation time.

A 2008 University of Illinois study shows that all work and no play dramatically reduces focus as well as productivity. Conversely, regular time off work improves it. Be sure you opt for "restorative" breaks.

11. Your day off improves short-term memory.

Do you laugh knowingly at all those jokes about seniors forgetting what they were going to do or where they put their keys? Did you think it was just a sign of aging? Could be that you're just not managing your time out during the week properly. Separate from work, enjoy life, and as many studies show, you will probably remember where those keys are.

12. With regular time away from work, you might even love your job again!

Consultants all tell us that "Finding time to chill and unwind will help you enjoy both work and play more." In a recent Harvard Business Review article, the first recommendation for restoring passion about work is to "call a time-out." It works, according to many testimonies.

So there we have it! 12 scientifically based reasons to respect the wisdom of those ancient customs and take regular time away from work every week. When you care for your physical, mental and emotional health, you more likely to be successful in you professional and personal pursuits.