



Return to Rest

It used to be that television stations would play the national anthem and sign off sometime after midnight. No more. These days the wee hours are filled with programming. Anyone up at those hours can be pummeled with unending news, weather, and/or infomercial pitches for gadgets you never knew you needed. Even in small cities, giant superstores are open round the clock. Increasingly, we live in a 24/7 world.

And business hours are busier than ever. Multitasking is the name of everyone's game. Even on the road, you can take or make phone calls, message your uncle in Spokane, check on stock prices, be updated on the news, learn the scores in yesterday's rugby match in New Zealand, and download music or video on your iPhone, Blackberry, or Netbook.

For many of us, eight-hour days at the office have become every-waking-hour days where the office, business, and the world invade our homes. But sooner or later we come to the realization that we need rest— not total inactivity, but a change of pace. A change from endless concerns about this hour's stock prices and next quarter's bottom line . . . to things both timeless and eternal. A change, yes, to love, and family, and our place in the universe. Socrates said "The unexamined life is not worth living," and increasingly we know this to be true. We work and plan, strive and acquire, but to what end? So long as we allow ourselves to be mesmerized by the streams of data that fill the air all around us like an invisible smog, we will not pause and contemplate the truly important issues.

It's come to the point where business publications like the Wall Street Journal are calling for—can you believe it?—a return to a Sabbath. A June 15, 2007 editorial, "The Decline of the Sabbath," by Mollie Ziegler Hemingway put it this way: "The flip side to the prosperity we enjoy is that we have lost our day

of rest for another day of consumption. The pace of commerce and technology provide unheard of options for ignoring family, religion and rest—not just on the Sabbath but every day of the week.”*

The Sabbath provides exactly the antidote we need to counter today’s information overload and anxiety disorders. The Sabbath provides a refuge, a rest, a respite from the constant activity and endless barrage of ‘news.’

The Bible tells us that God built our need for rest—and the remedy—into the very fabric of Creation. God “blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done.” By resting from all the work that He had done, God provided us with a model, and example. In the Ten Commandments, He makes this example explicit and binding: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.” Note that neither text says, “work six days out of seven, and rest on one.” Rather, it is explicit that the seventh day is the Sabbath. The seventh day, not a seventh day. And that day is Saturday.

Saturday? You may have been taught that Saturday Sabbath was given at Sinai just for the Jews. If that’s true, then ‘not killing’ and ‘not stealing’ would also be just for the Jews. Or you may have heard that the cross ended the claims of the Sabbath. Once again, that would mean we’re free to murder and steal—but no one believes that. You may have been taught that we worship on Sunday in honor of the Lord’s resurrection. Surely that’s an important thing to remember. But the Bible never tells us to remember his resurrection, however, we are told to remember his death (1 Cor. 11:26).

We are told to ‘remember’ his death, a striking parallel to the way the Ten Commandments told us to ‘remember’ the Sabbath. And we discover that the only full day Jesus rested in the tomb was—the Sabbath. Rather than abolishing the Sabbath, Jesus’ death reinforces it. As He had rested from the work of creation on the seventh day of Creation week, Jesus rested from His work of redemption on the seventh day of redemption week (commonly “passion week”).

Of course, most of us don’t like the ideas of “commandments” or “obedience.” But in this case especially, it’s foolish. Imagine if a doctor told you to take a vacation, and then revealed that he had a vacation designed to meet your deepest needs. That’s what the Sabbath is. Jesus himself said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” That means that the Sabbath is not some arbitrary hoop for us to jump through—we have enough of those the other six days— but rather it is a rest tailored to meet our needs.

But why not Sunday, or Tuesday? Why Saturday? Remember that the creation story in Genesis told us that “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy?”

What does it mean to “make something holy?” When Moses stood before the burning bush, he stood on holy ground. What made it holy? The presence of God. God makes the Sabbath holy by being present on that day in some special way.

“Wait a minute,” you may say. “Isn’t God present on every day?” And of course, that’s true. But it is also true that God is present everywhere—but Moses didn’t have to remove his shoes everywhere, only at the burning bush. Because, just like the Sabbath, God was present at the burning bush in some way that differs from the way He is present everywhere else. And those who set aside Saturday, the seventh day, to rest from their everyday pursuits and meet with their family and with God can attest that He truly can be experienced in a special way on that day.

If you would like to explore the possibilities of the Sabbath, there are those who live nearby and would be glad to share it with you. You can find out more about this and other interesting and useful information online at www.glowonline.org.

*<http://www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110010216>