

# Keeping the Sabbath

*So God's rest is there for people to enter.*

**–Hebrews 4:6, NLT**

Let's explore a biblical principle God set in motion at the close of creation week—the principle of Sabbath. It's so important that the violation of it in Old Testament times meant certain death.

I'm not going to suggest that we change the day of our religious activities to Saturday. Nor do I propose that we ban all Sunday activities. I simply want to introduce a concept that is valid, relevant and necessary in our contemporary society—the Sabbath rest.

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## Seeking Wisdom in Proverbs

*The purpose of these proverbs is to teach people wisdom and discipline, and to help them understand wise sayings.*

**–Prov. 1:2, NLT**

Are you looking for “ancient wisdom” with a modern application? Look no further; the book of Proverbs contains your answer! Proverbs is a unique collection of short, pithy sayings designed to impart wisdom, understanding and knowledge.

Proverbs is undoubtedly one of the most practical books in the entire Bible. Why? Because it deals with the practical, everyday issues of life. Oddly enough, little if any mention is made in the book about heaven or the afterlife. Rather, it is packed with information about living in the here and now.

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## What to Wear Today?

In the conclusion of his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul wrote: "A final word: Be strong in the Lord. ... Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11, NLT). How often do you feel "strong in the Lord"? Many Christians more frequently feel "small and puny" or "frail and afraid."

The good thing is, Paul wasn't telling the Ephesian believers (or us) that through self-effort we could just be strong—he wasn't saying, "Just do it!" as the Nike commercial says. He goes on in verses 13-18 to explain that being strong in the Lord requires getting suited up for battle. Spiritually speaking, he compares it to dressing like the professional soldiers in his day.

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# The Secret Blessing

✘ In Genesis 13, Lot chose selfishly and moved his family to the choicest land-near the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose inhabitants sinned greatly. Abram, Lot's uncle, generously let him go; and for his generosity, God blessed Abram and allowed him to settle his family in a safe area.

Later, God used Abram to rescue Lot from the evil cities before He destroyed them. Abram learned the blessings of being generous and following God's plan.

We often think of giving as being limited to money or things. We need to give our time or talents to the Lord as well. The abilities the Lord has given you can be offered as a special gift.

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## To the Jew First

The book of Romans would be incomplete without a masterful treatise on the plight of God's people, the Jews. Paul provides this treatise in chapters 9-11 of the book. The setting for the story is this: The Jews, God's chosen people, are about to be temporarily displaced from their active role in God's kingdom. Their continued disobedience finally had run its course, and the result was an awful price to pay:

"Did God's people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves. Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God's offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will

share when they finally accept it” (Rom. 11: 11-12, NLT).

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## Learn to Move On

✘ Many of God’s people are not schooled in the art of moving on. We spend a lot of our time stuck, not able to move beyond what happened yesterday.

*Now the Lord said to Samuel, ‘You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem.’ ”*

–1 Samuel 16:1, NLT

This passage from the Bible indicates that Samuel had reached a place in his life from which he needed to *move on*. Ever been there? Like it or not, we all hit this type of place periodically in our journey of faith.

Unfortunately, many of God’s people are not schooled in the art of moving on. We spend a lot of our time stuck, living in the past, never able to move beyond what happened yesterday. We’re unskilled at navigating new beginnings.

The Bible shows us that life is a succession of closures and new beginnings. God said to Abraham, “‘Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you’ ” (Gen. 12:1, NLT). We see this pattern demonstrated time and again in the lives of God’s choice are required to let go of the old and step out in faith toward the new.

Closure is one of the great keys to moving forward in life. When we don’t understand its importance, we often get stuck in our yesterdays or simply grow comfortable with the way things

are.

It is foolish on our part to believe that nothing in life will ever change. Everything changes! Our characters develop, our personalities blossom, our attitudes change, and unfortunately, our bodies grow older.

The definition of the word “closure” is “to bring something to a close; to bring to an end, to resolve and finalize it in your thinking, to move beyond.” It’s the act of resolving to let something go. Most often, closure is a decision; it’s an act of the human will. Sometimes it is easy, at other times grueling. More often than not, it is purely an act of faith; feelings catch up with you later.

Many who are struggling with a decision to move on in life will battle incessantly with ambivalence. Ambivalence is the emotional turmoil one feels when weighing the pros and cons of life’s decisions. As uncomfortable as it is, ambivalence is actually a part of the process and forces us to fully examine our decisions in light of good judgment. Ambivalence must be endured as we process life.

Is it possible the Lord is saying to *you*, “You have mourned long enough”? Could it be that you need closure in an area of *your* life? Undoubtedly, God wants to take you into something new. Are you ready for it?

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## **Take Charge of Your Fleshly**

# Desires



What's up with Paul and the struggle with his flesh? Shouldn't this spiritual giant have been beyond such a struggle? Why would he need to take drastic measures to control his body?

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*by John Chasteen*

At a Glance

So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified."

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**Corinthians 9:26-27, NLT**

What's up with Paul and the struggle with his flesh? Shouldn't this spiritual giant have been beyond such a struggle? Why would he need to take drastic measures to control his body?

As Christians we are called to discipline our bodies. By "discipline" I mean to take charge of urges motivated by the flesh. Whether we like it or not, the Word is clear that we are to control our fleshly desires.

So why does Paul make such an extreme statement? Mainly because he knows our

bodies are not yet redeemed and that they have the potential to impede our spiritual progress.

In verse 27, when referring to the discipline of his own body, Paul uses a strong Greek word to get his point across. The word *hupopeadzo* conveys the idea of handling roughly or forcing into submission. This was Paul's attitude toward his flesh.

Romans 8:9-10 tells us that because of sin our bodies are dead. The verses are not referring to physical death but rather to the fact that our bodies are not alive to God, that they do not want to participate in spiritual matters.

For instance, the physical body has no desire to pray or worship. It is dead, so to speak, to the things of God and must be made to cooperate.

As a matter of fact, Paul goes on to explain that our bodies are somewhat unspiritual. Not in the sense that the human body is unprofitable or bad, but rather in the sense that the principle of sin operates through the unredeemed physical body, thus making it not spiritual.

Sin working through the body also can easily sidetrack our spiritual progress. Romans 6:12-13 says: "Do not let sin control the way you live. ... Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to

serve sin.”

If left undisciplined, the body will become an instrument through which sin can dominate.

Paul clearly understood the need to discipline his body, and he took drastic measures to ensure that he kept it in check.

If this great man of God needed to discipline his body, we certainly need to bring ours into subjection—especially since failure to do so can lead to disqualification.

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## Need Wisdom?

Need wisdom for daily living? Most of us do!



Wisdom is the predominant theme of the book of Proverbs. That’s why it has been referred to as the “wisdom manual” for daily living. It’s designed to provide common sense and skill in dealing with everyday problems.

Wisdom brings balance to our lives as we endeavor to live in this high-tech “information age.” Acquiring it is top priority, our text says—“the most important thing you can do!”

Solomon begins the book by saying, "The purpose of these proverbs is to teach people wisdom" (1:2). In essence, he is saying: "I am writing so you can have a personal encounter with wisdom." He emphasizes the importance of wisdom by mentioning it more than 123 times in this one book.

The Hebrew word for "wisdom" is *hokmah*. It's a multifaceted noun that means "to have skill, intelligence, and sensibility, judicious prudence, to be endowed with reason." Wisdom is simply the ability to live skillfully in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

King Solomon uses the feminine gender and first person to characterize wisdom. Why does he present wisdom as a woman? Some scholars lay the blame on his heightened preoccupation with women. However, since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God (see 2 Tim. 3:16), there must be a deeper purpose.

I believe the Holy Spirit is giving us a physical picture of spiritual truth. Think about it: From the natural standpoint woman is appealing. So is wisdom. She is desirable and unique among the species. Wisdom also holds these qualities. In the creation account, woman is represented as the crowning of all God's creation—the completion of humankind. Wisdom too brings fullness and completion. It is principal, first and necessary.

Solomon refers to wisdom in first person to set forth the truth that wisdom is speaking directly to each of us. For example, in Proverbs 8:6-7, he writes: "Listen to me! For I have excellent things to tell you. Everything I say is right, for I speak the truth and hate every kind of deception."

By using first person, the Holy Spirit is making wisdom personal rather than presenting it as mere information or knowledge. Therefore, wisdom becomes intimate, real and animate. Wisdom takes on the nature of a close, personal friend.

Do you need wisdom? The book of Proverbs focuses on this topic more than any other book in your Bible. Why not avail yourself of it? Grab your Bible—and wise up!

Read John's Blog

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# Living a Holy Life

by John Chasteen

*Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for*

*those who are not holy will not see the Lord."*

*—Hebrews 12:14, NLT*

What comes to mind when you hear the word "holiness"? For most of us, it

conjures up all kinds of negative associations related to legalistic rules and

behavior.

In this day of public scandal, many are asking important questions such as,

"What is biblical holiness?" "Is it important anymore?" In light of these and

other pressing concerns it might do us good to revisit the concept.

Let's start by saying that God has called every believer to holiness (see 1

Thess. 4:7). The commonly used Greek word for holiness is *hagios*, and it

literally means "to be set apart or separated unto God."

Similarly, the Hebrew

word for holiness is *kodesh*, and it carries the idea of setting something apart as different or uncommon, not for everyday use.

The word "holy" or one of its derivatives is used more than 425 times in the Old Testament and at least 165 times in the New Testament. It seems God is trying to make a point!

A lifestyle of holiness is a life that is lived as separated unto God, one that is *not* common or like everyone else's. It is one that's different from the lives of worldly people.

It is important to remember that though the word "holiness" is defined as being uncommon and set apart from the world, it does not have the connotation of being weird or irrelevant. Being holy simply means that one does not march to the same beat the world does.

Holiness always begins on the inside of the believer. It is not merely a list of dos and don'ts that Christians must comply with; rather, it is a byproduct of our relationship with Christ and stems from our position in Him (see Col. 1:22).

Provisional holiness-what Jesus won for us on the cross-is a wonderful reality, but it must be accompanied by a life of practical holiness lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Practical holiness means we regularly crucify the

flesh, deny ourselves and understand the meaning of sacrifice. This makes us different and in the biblical sense, holy.

Our text says we should *work* at living a holy life, that we should pursue it. A lifestyle of holiness can elude us if we are not careful. So work hard in your pursuit of it-great dividends await you.

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