

How Sabbath Rest Can Bless Your Life Today

Editor's note: This is part 1 of a two-part series. Watch for part 2, coming soon!

The Chinese saint and scholar Watchman Nee's exposition on the epistle of Ephesians is encapsulated in his book titled *Sit, Walk, Stand*. Using the King James Version, which was popular in his time, Nee expands three key verses to cull out a simple outline of the book: being *seated* in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:4-7); *walking* worthy of the calling (Eph. 4:1); and taking a *stand* against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:11-13).

His thesis is that, without knowing how to be seated in Christ, you can neither walk worthy of Him nor take a stand against the forces of darkness and evil. Sitting down causes a rest as it removes the strain that the weight of the body places on the legs. His take is that if you do not know how to be seated in the heavenlies, you cannot know how to live a life of victory in this world as disciples nor be able to war against the spiritual powers of darkness and wickedness of this age and in the heavenly places. Only if you know how to be in rest and resting in Christ will you truly become an overcomer on earth and an intercessory warrior on earth and in the heavenly realms!

Some may consider his teaching erroneous or lacking in accurate interpretation since it is based on a particular version of the Bible. Yet Nee's study does throw up a real and key factor that is today lacking in our Christian existence and our life on this earth as His people: the factor of rest.

In this age of constant activity, change and movement, the

idea and concept of rest is foreign and alien, and rest is often confused with vacation or holiday. An accurate understanding and apprehension of rest would be essential to be able to live in the complex and ever-evolving world of this age.

Rest Redefined

The English dictionary defines rest as “Cease work or movement in order to relax, sleep, or recover strength; allow to be inactive in order to regain strength or health.” *Strong’s Concordance* defines rest as *shabath* (שבת), which means to cease, to celebrate, to repose, to desist (from exertion), leave, put away and so on. The word *shabath* or Sabbath appears 71 times in the Old Testament and is a sacred observance connected to a day and a year. Sabbatical leave, different from vacation, has come to mean a time period in which a person does not report to regular work but is given a chance to step back to focus on personal enrichment and professional development.

Shabath is, therefore, more of a time to sit back to contemplate and meditate, pause to think and thank for the past, rest and regain perspective of the present, assess and take stock to align priorities needed for the future. Rest is neither just simply sitting down with a vacant gaze on the horizon nor the taking of time to catch up on different activities you couldn’t otherwise do due to various duties and chores clogging your time. Sabbath is so vastly different and more fulfilling and empowering than all of these.

Rest Is Rejoicing

Rest is pulling back from a hectic schedule to take time to enjoy the calm at the end of a work well done and recharging your batteries for the next task just ahead of you. It is significant that the Bible notes in Genesis 2:1-3 (NIV), “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast

array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." It is as though God, like a builder, stood with His hands on His hips, turned slowly 360 degrees around to view what He had done and sighed with great contentment at His handiwork. In the glory of that deep satisfaction, He blesses (hallows, sets apart) the seventh day, bestowing on it special favor to make it holy and sacred. It is the day He delighted in all that He had accomplished and chose to make it a mandate for His people.

Have you ever wondered why the Sabbath was part of the Ten Commandments, a seeming insignificant order in the midst of some heavy demands? The Ten Commandments form the preamble of the Constitution that was delivered to the people of Israel in order to be the nation of His choosing and the people of His covenant. It comes almost at the center of the preamble, following five commands relating to honoring God and parents who stand in His place in the family and followed by four commands to honor relationship with others, neighbors and those around us. God valued the *shabath* and honored it, giving it a place in the first basic standard operating procedures of His people.

In the instructions relating to feasts ordained for Israel (Lev. 23), the Sabbath is topmost on the list and forms the beginning and end of every other major feast: the Feast of Passover, Feast of Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles.

Rest Is Reasonable

Have you ever wondered why God designated such a place to the *shabath* and gave such prominence to it?

Rest was not only part of and the crowning glory of God's creative acts; it is part and parcel of the creative makeup of

both man and woman. God made Adam on the penultimate day of creation and rested on the seventh day, which became the ultimate day of creation, making God's last day of creation man's first day of existence. Thus, man began his life and the act of living from rest; or God did everything and rested, while man rested before he began his doing!

I also believe that rest is a core value because of the curse that was laid on mankind, both man and woman, committing them to hard labor as punishment for their sin—for the man to eat by the sweat of his brow and for the woman to bear a child again by the sweat of her labor. It is the mercy of God exhibited constantly and even in the midst of serving the penalty He laid on us. It is also the precursor of the true rest kept in store for His people, as evidenced in Hebrews 4:9-11: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience."

We note the same motif displayed in the salvation process as in the creation one, with Jesus Christ rising from the dead on the third day, which was the first day of the week, setting a pattern for the church to designate it as the day of the church meeting together as the body of Christ in a particular place or locality. In Hebrews 1:3, we see, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." Jesus completed the work of salvation and has sat down at the right hand of His Father, waiting in rest for His enemies to be made His footstool (see Heb. 1:13).

Again, when God made a woman, a suitable companion and helper for man, He put him to sleep or rest and then created the woman out of his rib. One can therefore declare confidently

that rest has been planned, programmed and paid for to be part and parcel of man and woman's DNA, both in creation and salvation as well as their future hope and reward. {eo}

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