

THE LORD'S DAY

Paula muted her phone. She had received eleven texts this Saturday, and it was only 9 a.m.! Seven of those texts were requests for help. Paula had gently declined and reminded her family and friends that she had started a new semester of courses, and she was swamped with readings, assignments, and deadlines.

Paula was close to completing the coursework for her Doctorate of Strategic Leadership with a concentration on Servant Leadership. She was hoping that she would be done with her courseload by the spring and could start writing her dissertation.

The Lord had given her a desire to be a servant leader by helping churches and Christian organizations excel in leadership and administration. Her work would be her for-profit business, and she already had a name for it.

But the progress had been slow. Paula had to juggle her doctorate, a full-time job, and being a single mother. Not to mention, her phone was always ringing with calls or beeping with texts.

When even when good things, requests, and ideas came along, Paula could not entangle herself with them. She kept to her priorities. The Lord was first. So she made a commitment to pursue what she felt the Lord had called her to do.

Paula looked at the clock. She would be working on coursework until about 5 p.m., then she would switch gears to preparing for a small group that she ran. Paula had to text new members to remind them about class the next day, and then she would go over her reading. There wasn't a lot of time in the day, but she was thankful for everything she could do with the time.

1 How can saying “no” to some things allow for something greater?

2 Why do you think that we tend to make ourselves so busy?

3 Why do you suppose God created us with the need for rest?

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰ But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Remember the Sabbath

The people of Israel heard from God at the foot of Mount Sinai. God had spoken with their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. But now, God was speaking directly to them. The commands of covenant are of absolute importance—summarizing what Israel must do as God’s chosen people. The first half of the Ten Commandments show how to honor God properly. The second half of the commands describe guardrails for treating other humans. But the command in the middle—Sabbath—bridges the two categories. The Israelites are to regularly stop their work *because of God and on behalf of others*.

The command is to “remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy” (Ex. 20:8). *Sabbath* is the Israelites’ word for Saturday, or the seventh day of the week. The first time the word “holy” is used in Scripture is in reference to Sabbath, in Genesis 2:3. God established the seventh day for rest; God is the keeper of all space and time. Since anything holy is set apart for God’s use, the Sabbath is set apart for God.

God explains that the Israelites are to work for six days, but no work is to be done on the seventh (vv. 9–10). It would be easy for the elders and patriarchal leaders not to work, but God wants rest for all—including children, servants, foreigners, and even animals.

Everyone created by God can honor the Lord and follow His example of rest.

A person who does not rest develops an unhealthy outlook on the meaning of life. One Christian definition says that people exist “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” When work becomes the most important aspect of life, people idolize possessions and productivity. The Egyptian slave-masters had ruthlessly worked the Israelites, tying human worth to the output of their hands. But God values His people for other reasons; a stoppage to work forces God’s people to be deliberately unproductive—free people—for a single day. This helps them to remember God’s good order of creation and rely on Him to provide the difference.

God does not *need* to rest; He never tires (Isa. 40:28). God could have made a six-day week, where every day is for work. But a day of rest reflects an important aspect of His character. God does not need our work. He is not desperate for us to fix everything. He is the Savior and Redeemer (Isa. 43:11). Since we are made in God’s image, we should mirror His character (Gen. 1:27). This includes taking time to rest. Resting helps people to develop a mindset of dependence upon God. Resting helps to reflect and refocus on what is important. Psalm 46:10 commands, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

1 What’s the hardest work to stop doing so that you can rest and reflect on God?

2 What special blessing has God done in your life during a time of rest?

3 Give examples of how your character changes when you are overworked.

⁴ Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

⁵ One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. ⁶ He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

...

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

...

¹⁰ On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.

The Lord's Day

Soon after Jesus' ascension, the church was growing and becoming more diverse, as communities of Christ-followers were planted across the region of Asia Minor. When Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, he reflects about unity among believers (Rom. 14:19; 15:2, 5–7). One of the most detrimental attitudes against unity is a judgmental spirit. It is all too easy to judge another's choices as being too rigid or too relaxed.

Paul points to a real-life example: choosing to honor special days, or not. Some believers—particularly those of a Jewish background—honor special days and keep the Sabbath (compare Col. 2:16). Others are trying to treat every day as the same (Rom. 14:5). Interestingly, Paul does not agree with one side or condemn the actions of the other. That's not the point. The point is to be dedicated to Christ instead of quarreling about personal convictions. Every believer should be thoughtfully living for the Lord. He allows differences of diet or calendar observances (v. 4).

Paul asks, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?” (Rom 14:4). Paul is putting the focus where it belongs, on the fact that Jesus is the one in charge, who holds all authority in the universe (see Matt. 28:18). No one else has the authority to judge, and here *judging* means deciding matters that require individual discernment, what he calls “disputable matters” in Romans 14:1. If we try to make ourselves the ultimate judge of another, we have subverted Christ’s authority to replace it with our own. Beware!

Yet every believer has the responsibility to submit to the Lord Jesus, to give thanks to Him for all things, and to seek wisdom in all of their convictions. If we remember that we live for God, we shall find condemning one another difficult indeed! Paul says that the community of Christian faith is big enough to include some differences, and he says “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

We find another example in the text of Revelation. John is on the island of Patmos when he receives a vision from God. But notice that he says the time is “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). What John means by this is not the seventh day of the week, but the first.

From the New Testament and other early Christian texts, we learn that the early believers used the first day of the week—Sunday—as a day to gather for worship (see also Acts 20:7). John does not explain why Sunday is called “the Lord’s Day.” He assumes that readers already know that Jesus rested in the tomb during the Sabbath, and on the *first day* of the week, Jesus rose from the grave (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Thus, when early Christians continue honoring the God of creation, they found Sunday a fitting day to celebrate God’s *new creation* and Christ’s authority over all things—even death itself.

1 What things divide churches today? How should believers react?

2 When have you ever seen someone unfairly condemned for a matter of individual discernment?

3 Is Paul saying that all kinds of judging are bad? Why or why not?

The Lord's Days

My son loves to use the word *actually*. He'll say things like, "Actually, bananas are not yellow. They absorb every color but yellow. Yellow is the only color they reject and reflect." When I read Revelation 1:10 and John mentions "the Lord's day," I couldn't help but hear his nine-year-old voice saying, "Actually, every day is the Lord's."

God invites us to special times of worship, but let us not forget that every moment belongs to Him. All of life is a gift from God (Isa. 42:5). But we naturally think of time as ours. A worker exclaims to his boss, "You can't tell me what to do on *my own time*." When the bell rings, students in school immediately grab their belongings and run to the door—often when the teacher is still talking. It is easy for us to think that we own our time. The Bible teaches that God rules over every day (see Luke 12:13–21).

It is convicting to ponder, *Do I honor God with all of the time He gives me?* And it could be easy to slip into a transactional mindset, thinking that we have to meet quotas to make God happy. God is not like our earthly bosses. He is not like the Egyptian taskmasters who treated the Israelites with cruelty. God is our loving Father who delights in His children (Ps. 149:4; 1 John 3:1). And believers should not honor God out of slavery, guilt, or coercion. It should flow from a heart of joyful delight (1 Sam. 12:24; Ps. 100:2).

We remember that God delights in giving rest. Psalm 23 is a beautiful picture of the Good Shepherd, giving to those in His care precisely what they need—including rest in green pastures. Following God's design allows time for everything: work, rest, weeping, laughing, and more (Eccl. 3:1–8).

1 How do you balance the different times in life, such as work and rest?

2 When is it hardest to honor God with your time?

3 If you had a day where you picked the entire schedule, what would you do? What do your choices reflect?

Deliberately Resting with God

Build a habit of having deliberate time with God by starting small, like making rest a priority this week.

Choose one particular day this week to set aside extra time for prayer or spending time with God. You might also begin every day of the week by praying these words:

Lord of all time and space, direct my day. Teach me to trust that I am valuable, even when I do nothing but spend time with You.

Key Text

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. —Exodus 20:11 KJV

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

—Exodus 20:11 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of February 16 through February 21

Mon. Malachi 3:7–12—Blessings to Those Who Give.

Tue. Exodus 36:2–7—Giving More than Enough.

Wed. Psalm 67—May God's Ways Be Known.

Thu. 2 Corinthians 9:1–6—Ready with Voluntary Gift.

Fri. 2 Corinthians 9:6–15—Bountiful Sowing and Reaping.

Sat. Matthew 28:16–20—Go and Make Disciples.

Next Week: Acts 1:6–8; 2 Corinthians 8:3–9

Since we have talked about God's control of our time, next we will discuss God's plan for our resources. This week, be asking whether God has a new door to open for you.