

Living God's Way 5 'Get Refreshed'

Exodus 20:8-11 and Mark 2:23-28

Toki Miyamisha's version of Psalm 23.

The Lord is my pacesetter, I need not rush,

He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals.

He provides me with images of stillness, which restore my serenity.

He leads me in ways of efficiency through calmness of mind.

His guidance is peace.

Even though I have a great deal of things to accomplish each day, I will not fret.

For his presence is here, his timelessness, his importance will keep me in balance.

He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of activity

By anointing my head with oils of tranquillity.

My cup of joyous energy overflows.

Such harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours,

For I shall walk in the peace of the Lord

And dwell in his company for ever. Amen

This morning we're thinking about being refreshed, and I wonder what image that conjures for you in your mind ? Perhaps you're a computer sort of person and you automatically think about that icon that you click on to refresh the web page you're trying to look at. Or maybe getting refreshed involves a nice cup of tea. Or maybe a power shower with some luxurious smelling shower gel, or perhaps a walk in a beautiful place. But what ever it is for you, I'm prepared to hazard a guess that being refreshed doesn't make you instantly think of the ten commandments !!

But actually, here we are at commandment number four, and the theme is definitely one of being refreshed.

'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work.'

The word Sabbath in the Hebrew means to cease, to desist.

I said at the start of this series that I was going to try and find a way of remembering the order of the commandments. So here's my hot tip for number four. (And this one does require a fair amount of lateral thinking !) Picture the number four in your head, and then tilt it backwards a bit (the number four that is, not your head !) until it looks like a deckchair. Commandment number 4 is to do with being refreshed and relaxed like you would be sitting in a deckchair on holiday.

Old Time, in whose bank we deposit our notes,

Is a miser who always wants guineas for groats.

He helps all his customers still in arrears

By lending them minutes and charging them years.

O.W. Holmes Our Banker

How often do you find yourself saying, 'if I had more time I'd fill in the blank as appropriate.

I'm really tired,

I'm too busy,

Is that the time already ?

We exist in a society where 'time is money', where success is measured in how busy we are, where more and more people are suffering from illnesses related to over work and stress.

If your body could speak, what would it be saying to you ?

And God says to US, okay, work for six days, but on the seventh have a rest.

God set this model at the creation of the universe. He created for six days, six periods of time, but on the seventh day, the seventh period of time, he rested. Not because HE was tired, but to set a pattern for work and rest. Because God made us, he knows what we need, and one of the things is regular periods of rest where we can be refreshed.

When we look at the Ten Commandments and find all kinds of serious things in there, like not having idols and not murdering, it seems incredible that included should be one about having a proper amount of rest. And amazingly it's number four out of ten. We might have expected that if it was included it would be way down the list. But no, keeping a special day for relaxation is not an afterthought. It takes up four verses of explanation, the longest of all the commandments. It's obviously important in God's scheme of things.

It's holy, special, set apart, different. It reflects a covenant made between God and his people Israel. When the people of Israel were wandering in the desert, they gathered manna to eat every morning, but on the Sabbath day they didn't have to go out and gather their food. It was a day to rest. God had provided double portions the previous day.

So Remember the Sabbath day, says the commandment, but time people tried to make it complicated and full of rules of things they could and couldn't do.

Jesus had strong words for the Pharisees who tried to complicate this commandment. As we heard from Mark's gospel, He was clear that the Sabbath was made to benefit people, and not people to benefit the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a gift to us from our God who loves us and calls us His children. And children are good at receiving gifts. Have you noticed that ? They don't say, actually I'm alright thanks, I'll leave it this time because I have had rather a lot of presents recently !! They receive gifts with great delight and then often very embarrassingly ask for more. God calls us to be gracious receivers of his gifts. When we're tempted to pass up the opportunity for a rest, let's remember that the Sabbath is a gift to us.

The Sabbath is a day to rejuvenate our bodies.

As one time-management guru said, The time to relax is when we don't have time to relax !!

As the modern-day version of Psalm 23 says,

He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of activity.

Medical research has shown that getting the right amount of sleep, around eight hours a night on average for adults, and exercising three times a week can help to keep our bodies and minds healthy

The Sabbath day is a great opportunity to get a decent amount of sleep and to have some exercise, even if it's just a gentle stroll round the park.

Our bodies will be delighted with such good treatment.

The Sabbath is a day to recharge our emotions.

One of the best stress relievers ever invented is laughter and play. The Sabbath is a chance to get together with friends or family and play.

Or if your week has been cluttered with endless noise and conversation, then it's the perfect opportunity to go somewhere alone and be quiet.

He provides me with images of stillness, which restore my serenity says Psalm 23.

The Sabbath is a day to renew and recommit ourselves spiritually.

His importance will keep me in balance.

William Wilberforce put it like this,

Blessed be to God for the day of rest and religious occupation wherein all earthly things assume their true size. Ambition is stunted.

A day set aside for worshipping God allows us the opportunity to hear His voice and respond, when otherwise we might be too distracted to listen properly.

So how does the Sabbath day fit in to a society where working patterns are becoming more and more diverse ? Well your Sabbath doesn't have to be a Sunday. The people of Israel worked six days and rested on the seventh, the last day of the week, which was a Saturday. Early on in Christian circles it changed to a Sunday, the first day of the week, to reflect the importance of the resurrection of Jesus on that day.

There are some occupations that mean we *have* to work on a Sunday. Imagine the outcry if Accident and Emergency shut. And there are some occupations, especially in the retail sector, where there is real pressure to work on a Sunday.

Your Sabbath can be any day that you choose to set aside for physical, emotional and spiritual refreshment. But the bonus of having Sunday is that it is possible to gather as a community of believers and worship God together. And the danger of taking a different day is that actually you don't end up taking it at all, and you miss out on this precious gift that God has given you.

So what about the thorny issue of Sunday trading ? Well, if you're hoping this morning that I'm going to tell you whether it's okay or not to shop on a Sunday, then you're going to be disappointed ! That's something that each of us has to work out for ourselves.

There was an article in the Baptist Times a couple of weeks ago discussing the possible extension of shopping hours for large stores beyond the current six hours. In the article

Trade and Industry Secretary Alan Johnson is quoted as saying, 'We're open minded at the moment and will need to balance the views of business, consumers, religious groups and employees before we can take any decisions.'

The Keep Sunday Special Campaign, says the Baptist Times, is arguing for current regulations to stay in place, citing a poll which it commissioned showing that seventy five percent of the population would prefer a weekly day of rest.

The cynical voice inside me suggests that of those seventy five percent, most would think it okay to pop out for a pint of milk, or fill up the car with petrol, or have a pub lunch on a Sunday, which means that for someone else it definitely isn't a day of rest.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

So what challenges does keeping a Sabbath day present for you ?

Perhaps it's making sure you're disciplined enough to have one.

Perhaps it's balancing a work rota.

Perhaps it's deciding your personal policy on Sunday trading.

We'll all be different, and I can only tell you what mine are....

My challenges are being organised enough to keep a day free from stuff that grinds me down, like ironing. And ensuring that I really give Ian and the kids some proper attention, both quality and quantity, without other demands gobbling up the time.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

Society might try to say to us that the Bible is outdated and irrelevant for today.

But here is a commandment that deals with time management, good working practice, dealing with stress, and keeping a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

It doesn't get much more up to date and relevant than that.

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Housegroup notes

For the people of Israel, the Sabbath day reflected God's 'rest' following the six days of creation. It also reminded them of their covenantal relationship with God, when following the Exodus they ate manna in the desert, but did not have to gather any on the Sabbath day.

In the Hebrew the word Sabbath means to cease, to desist.

The Sabbath day is God's gift to us.

Jesus spoke harsh words to the Pharisees for complicating it unnecessarily.

It allows us to rejuvenate our bodies, recharge our emotions and renew and recommit ourselves spiritually.

For Discussion.

If you were writing ten commandments, would keeping the Sabbath day holy be included?

How do you spend your Sabbath day ?

Do you think the Sabbath must be a Sunday, and why ?

What is your opinion on working on Sundays ?

Is Sunday trading an issue for you ?