

December 11, 2017
By Jim Mathis

THE WORKPLACE – AND THE SABBATH

Many of us struggle with not having enough time to get things done at work. Some employers expect us to be on call 24 hours a day. Self-employed people have an even greater challenge in being able to get away from their work for a few days, or even a few hours. We must put in the time that is needed, we reason. But at what cost?

Studies have shown productivity drops dramatically if we do not take time to rest, to “sharpen our axe.” There is a very practical adage that the fastest way to cut wood is to first set aside time to make certain the axe is sharp. This principle holds true even if you are not in the wood-cutting business. Nearly every new idea I have gotten for my businesses has come while I am on a vacation or away from work, where I had time to gain a new perspective or discover fresh thinking from a totally random, even unrelated source.

This necessity to take time to step away from our work, our vocations, is so important it is even given as a divine directive in the Bible.

In the biblical creation account, God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh day. The idea of resting on the seventh day was codified when the Ten Commandments were handed down to Moses: *“Remember the*

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Sabbath day by keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work.... 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....” (Exodus 20:8-11).

Jesus later clarified this Sabbath commandment, teaching that honoring the Sabbath is not about following a set of rules, but that the day was established for man – a time of rest, reflection and recuperation, a time to slow down and enjoy the world God has created. *“Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27).*

Over the centuries, the idea of the Sabbath for Christians has shifted from the seventh day to the first day of the week. This has been a source of conflict and confusion for me. Should we rest on the seventh day, Saturday, or the first day, Sunday? I thought maybe our calendars are just labeled wrong. Recently, however, I have begun to realize both days are right. We need to honor the seventh day of the week as a day of rest. My wife calls it a REAL Saturday, meaning a day to rest, recuperate, spend time with friends, have a relaxing meal, and just enjoy being alive. Sunday then becomes the day to honor Christ and remember His resurrection. It becomes a time to start the week by giving the first few hours of the week to God, sort of the first fruits of our time – of our week.

Saturday, the seventh day of the week, becomes my day of rest. Sunday, the first day of the week, becomes a time to worship God and start the week right.

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This idea might sound radical for some, but it can serve as a test of our trust in the Lord and His provision. *As Psalm 127:2 assures us, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep."*

Practically speaking, I often start my work week on Sunday afternoon or evening, planning the week and getting a few things ready for Monday morning. That makes sense for me, realizing I have rested on Saturday and devoted the first few hours of the week to the Lord. Then it becomes time to work until the next Saturday, the true Sabbath in terms of getting rest, preparing mentally, physically, and spiritually for a new week.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. Do you normally manage to get enough rest despite the many workplace demands you encounter? What steps do you take to avoid having your work control your attention and schedule seven days a week?
2. How do you respond to the concept of observing and maintaining a true Sabbath within the context of your work week?
3. Do you agree with the idea that God instituted the Sabbath observance not as an arbitrary, rigid regulation, but rather as a practical way to ensure we receive the rest we need? Explain your answer.
4. What if you have a job – such as a medical practitioner, a law enforcement officer, or a restaurant worker – when you would be required to work on a Saturday or a Sunday, or both? How could you still ensure that you receive the Sabbath rest you require?

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NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Exodus 23:10-12, 31:14-16; Proverbs 3:24; Ecclesiastes 2:23, 5:12; Hebrews 4:4-11

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