

The Sabbath: God's Anti-Stress Program

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Stress is a serious matter. Although some stress may be healthy, too much is dangerous and, in some cases, even fatal. Stress is caused by an overdose of stimulation, a hectic life, traffic in large cities, noise, overload at home, at work, in school or in the personal sphere, etc. It includes the anxiety to fail and the fear not to be able to cope with what confronts us. Consequences include nervous mental blockages, aggression, depression, a weakened immune system, cardiac, circulatory, liver, and gall problems, etc. We need to protect ourselves against too much stress. Therefore physicians recommend that we relax and rest, exercise, and avoid the intake of alcohol, tobacco, and coffee.

However, long before the medical profession talked about the benefits of rest and relaxation, God recommended it. He has not only told us *that* we should rest but also *how* we should rest. Our Creator has given us tips that can help us—when we observe them—to function at our best. In addition to daily devotional time when we focus on God, He has given us one entire day per week for reflection, regeneration, and communion with Him. In Scripture this day is called “Sabbath.” God’s special blessing rests on this day.

The Sabbath in the Old Testament

- Gen 2:1-3 The Sabbath was installed when God created this world including plants, animals, and humans. Creation was completed with the Sabbath, and the Sabbath existed before sin came into our world. Adam and Eve, the representatives of humankind, celebrated the Sabbath.
- Exod 20:8-11 The Sabbath (modern Saturday) is part of the unique law called the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments, complete in their comprehensiveness, constitute God’s unchangeable law. The term “remember” in the Sabbath commandment points back to the creation account.
- Exod 16:4, 19-29 The Sabbath was known even before the law was written on tables of stone (see also Gen 26:5).
- Isa 56:2 God wants all human beings to keep the Sabbath.
- Isa 66:22-23 The Sabbath is associated with the new earth.

The Sabbath in the Time of Jesus

- Luke 4:16 Christians follow Jesus, their example. It was Jesus’ custom to keep the Sabbath.
- Luke 23:56 Jesus’ followers observed the Sabbath.
- Matt 12:8-12 Jesus corrected a false understanding of the Sabbath and rejected human traditions.
- Matt 5:17-19 Jesus did not abolish the Ten Commandments.
- Matt 24:20 In the context of Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in AD 70, Christians were urged to pray that their flight might not be on a Sabbath. Jesus wanted his disciples to keep the Sabbath even after his death on the cross.

The Sabbath in the Time of the Apostles

- Acts 13:42, 44; Paul’s practice was to preach to Jews and Gentiles on Sabbath.
- 17:2; 18:4, 11 Nowhere in Scripture is the Sabbath done away with. Nowhere is another day recommended which was to replace the Sabbath.

The Meaning of the Sabbath

- **The Sabbath reminds us of creation and the Creator (Exod 31:17).**

- **The Sabbath reminds us of salvation and the Savior (Deut 5:12-15).**
- **The Sabbath is a sign of our sanctification and relationship with God (Exod 31:13, 17).**
- **The Sabbath is a sign of the covenant between God and His people (Exod 31:16).**
- **The Sabbath has a future dimension (Exod 31:16-17; Isa 66:22-23).**

The Sabbath is a wonderful gift of God through which we can experience rest, time for reflection, fellowship with others and especially with God, as well as joy and regeneration. This day cannot be replaced by another day because God's special blessing rests on it. We can make the decision to accept God's anti-stress program and enjoy intimate communion with the Lord.

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