

A background image of Jesus with a beard and long hair, wearing a white robe and a white head covering. He is looking towards the right. In the background, there is a sunset over a field with sheep grazing. The sky is filled with warm, golden light.

The True Sabbath

**The true Sabbath
is not a day.
It is a person.**

**“Come to me that you might
find rest for your souls.” *Jesus***

Dr. Steven L. Highlander

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Significance of the Message

The issue of keeping Sabbath is a controversial subject for the church today. Some claim keeping the Seventh-Day Sabbath is an eternal command from God. Others change Saturday to Sunday. Some say it is unnecessary. What if there were another principle of the Sabbath that they all missed?

The principle of the Sabbath in the Bible is much larger than the argument over which day of the week to observe. There are a number of Sabbath days in addition to the weekly Seventh-Day Sabbath. Every seventh year was to be a Sabbath year and every fiftieth year was a Sabbath year of Jubilee.

In *The Truth Sabbath*, the author presents a third view of the Sabbath that has nothing to do with the day of the week. He presents Sabbath as a spiritual principle that finds its true fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ.

The first spiritual Sabbath a person can experience is salvation from dead works. We no longer have to work to earn salvation but can come to God through faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Additionally, a Christian can enter Sabbath rest—not weekly—but daily, as we bring our problems and needs to Jesus to work out for us. “Cast all your cares on me, for I care for you,” is the essence of true Sabbath.

We are told in the book of Hebrews, “There therefore remains a rest to the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9).

In this book, you will discover that spiritual rest you have been looking for.

About the Author

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He is the author of three books. Test the Spirits, a book about discerning demonic deceptions in the end times. Four Anoinings Every Church Should Have is an in-depth look at the Body of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the local church. The Supervisor's Handbook examines the fruitful life of spiritual stewardship. Additionally, he has authored numerous ministry booklets and Bible college courses,

Highlander created several ministry websites, including www.EmmausRoadInstitute.org, a free resources and training site for third-world leaders and workers. www.TalkToAPastor.com takes questions from anyone around the world and provides scriptural answers. His website, www.stevehighlander.com includes information on the mission work in Papua New Guinea and many free resources.

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The True Sabbath

Understanding Spiritual Rest

There are a few Biblical subjects that cause quite a stir among serious Christians. The issue of the Sabbath is one of them.

In this study, you will be surprised and challenged with a view of the Sabbath that you probably have never considered before. I wrote this book for both my Seventh-Day friends and those Christians who do not keep a Seventh Day Sabbath. I think there is something here both sides could benefit from. Therefore, I ask you to open your heart, mind, and spirit to hear what the Spirit of God might be saying to you.¹

I am convinced that the principle² of Sabbath rest is one of the most misunderstood, misapplied, and least appropriated spiritual principles² in the whole Bible. While we argue about the physical principle, we totally miss the spiritual principle.

When I say of the “spiritual principle” of the Sabbath, I am talking about a lot more than taking a day to honor God.

The principle of Sabbath is much broader and more significant than arguing over which day Christians should honor—or if they should keep a “Sabbath day” at all. To understand and experience true spiritual Sabbath rest, we will need to broaden our thinking.

¹ The phrase, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” is used seven times in the Book of the Revelation, chapter 3. A similar phrase is used nine other times in the New Testament, and multiple times in the Old Testament.

² A principle is the foundational motivation behind a believe or a behavior. It is the reason we believe or do something.

Think about this. Before Jesus Christ launched His ministry on earth, God sent another man—John the Baptist—to “prepare the way of the Lord.”

We must ask, “Why did Jesus need His way prepared?”

Wasn’t the man Christ Jesus the Son of God? Wasn’t Jesus’ ministry greater than John’s? Didn’t John say, “I must decrease, but He must increase?”³

So why did God have to send someone before Jesus to prepare the way for Him?

The answer is as significant as it simple.

John’s message was, “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”⁴ and, when Jesus started His ministry, the message was the same “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”⁵

The problem is that what we preach as repentance today is not what John and Jesus had in mind when they told people to repent.

The Greek word for *repent*⁶ means “to change your mind.” Or “to think again.” It is a change in the way we think about things. True repentance, then, is the change in the way people think about something. Changing the way we think will certainly change the way we believe, speak and act.

John made both points clear when he told the people, “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance....”⁷ In other words, John was telling them, if you are truly thinking differently, you will start acting differently. Prove your

³ John 3:30

⁴ Matthew 3:1-3

⁵ Matthew 4:17

⁶ Greek: Strong’s Greek Lexicon #3340: Metanoeo – to think differently or afterwards, i.e. reconsider. Noeo means: to perceive with the mind, to understand, to have understanding to think upon, heed, ponder, consider

⁷ Matthew 3:8

repentance by changing your actions.

Repentance—a change in the way we think—requires corresponding actions. However, repentance is not just about sin but about the way we approach God (or anything else) in our understanding and thinking. Changing the way we think about any Biblical subject will cause us to respond to God differently in our lives.

Our doctrinal beliefs are the programming we base our lives on. Jesus confirmed this principle when He told the people, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.”⁸ Believing a lie will not bring freedom but rather bondage. Rejecting lies and accepting truth (true repentance) will bring freedom.

Let me share one more passage to show this is a biblical principle.

Paul said, “Don’t to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”⁹ Paul tells us transformation—a radical change of nature and action—requires renewing our minds—or thinking differently. That is repentance.

There are two important words to understand here. The first is transformation. This word is the same word used when a worm builds a cocoon and transforms into a butterfly. It is “*metamorphosis*.” It is not like a small puppy growing into a big dog. That only requires growth and maturity—not transformation.

Transformation is a radical change of form and function. Notice the word “meta” in *metamorphosis* and its relation to the word of repentance (*metanoeo*). If you want to transform your life (or someone else’s), you must change how you think, what you believe, and how you understand

⁸ John 8:32

⁹ Romans 12:2

God.

Therefore, the apostle Paul prayed that God would grant (give) the Ephesians a “Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.”¹⁰

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”¹¹

The second word to understand is “renewing.” It means a complete renovation like remodeling a house or restoring a vehicle that has been damaged.

The idea we must understand is that to be different, we must think differently. That was the message with which both John and Jesus started the New Testament age.

The people of their day heard them say, *‘You need to change the way you are thinking about the Kingdom of God because the Kingdom is here now, and if you don’t start thinking differently, you will miss it.’*

¹⁰ Ephesians 1:17

¹¹ Ephesians 1:15-21

Today, when we tell people to repent, we mean that people should stop sinning. Of course, there is that part of it, but that is not the meaning of the word.

Why is it important to understand repentance in the context of our study of the Sabbath? Simple! If we do not change the way we think about the Sabbath, we will miss the true message and blessing God intended for us. Many of the Jews and leaders of Jesus' day did not repent (change their thinking), and it caused them to reject their Messiah and crucify Jesus. Right?

First, we need to understand that the Jewish people "*kept the law of the Sabbath*" for more than 1500 years and yet failed to enter Sabbath rest.¹² They had made so many rules and regulations about how to keep the Sabbath, they never actually entered into the spiritual principle of it.

When Jesus came, they accused Him of breaking the Sabbath.¹³ Did He? Of course not, He was without sin, so they were wrong in doctrine and practice. Their thinking about Sabbath was so wrong they rejected Jesus in favor of their doctrine. Keep in mind that these were the very people to whom the Sabbath was given. They needed to change the way they thought about Sabbath—and many other things as well.

We Need to Change the way We Think About the Sabbath

The Sabbath never was—and never will be—Sunday. Some Christians want to try to keep the principle of the Sabbath but change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. To these brothers and sisters, we must say; The Sabbath, as

¹² See Paul's explanation of this in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4

¹³ See John Chapter 9:16 (Also see: Matthew chapter 12, Mark chapter 2, Luke Chapter 6, John Chapter 5, John chapter 7)

established by God, was from sundown on Friday evening until sundown on Saturday evening. That was the Seventh day.

This is important because God built spiritual pictures into all His Old Testament patterns. Not only did He do something in the natural when He gave them the tabernacle, feasts, rituals, and ceremonies, but He coded spiritual messages into them as well.

God told Moses to make everything ***“after the pattern.”***¹⁴ When we change the pattern, we change the truth it was meant to picture and explain. Therefore, Jesus told the Jews, ***“You have made the Word of God of none effect by your traditions.”***¹⁵

The message of the Sabbath was that there was a rest *after* you labored. By moving the Sabbath to Sunday—the first day of the week—we break the spiritual truth conveyed. Should Christians keep a Sabbath? We have a couple of denominations that center on this question. Paul also dealt with this tricky question. Some demanded the keeping of the Old Testament Law, including the Sabbath. Paul rigidly fought against this requirement, though.

“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord.”¹⁶

If a man believes God has told him to keep a physical Sabbath, then he should be convinced in his mind, but he should not demand that others follow that conviction. The brother then feels free not to observe the Sabbath has that

¹⁴ Exodus 25:30

¹⁵ Mark 7:13

¹⁶ Romans 14:5

liberty—according to Paul. Let us remember, though, that honoring a day as special, for whatever reason, does not constitute entering spiritual Sabbath rest.

Besides the seventh-day Sabbath, God instituted several other Sabbaths. In Leviticus chapter 23, God tells His people to keep seven yearly feasts. Several of the feast days were also Sabbath days. It is interesting that He starts out by saying, “Here are my feasts...remember the Sabbath; keep it holy; do no work.”

Why is that?

It is because we will never understand the spiritual truths conveyed in the feasts unless we first understand the spiritual principle of Sabbath rest.

In addition to special Sabbath days throughout the year, God gave the Israelites a Sabbath year every seven years. The land was to lay fallow or untilled. Furthermore, every 50 years, He commanded a “Year of Jubilee,” when all slaves were set free. Land that had been mortgaged or sold was returned to the original owners, and debts were forgiven. Every 49th and 50th year, there were two Sabbath Years in a row.

I am quite positive that those who insist on keeping a seventh-day Sabbath do not insist on keeping a seventh-year or Year of Jubilee Sabbath. All were commanded in the law, so why not keep them also? (I encourage my Seventh-day brothers and sisters to seriously consider why you do not keep these additional Sabbath commands.)

Perhaps now you can see how the spiritual principle of Sabbath is an unfolding revelation of something that goes way beyond trying to figure out how or why to set aside a day as special?

Some Christians are still arguing over which day is the Sabbath or if we must keep it or not. That was not what God intended at all. As in all of God’s Old Testament pictures, the

physical Sabbath was meant to convey a spiritual truth or principle.

What was that principle?

Sabbath rest can be easily defined this way: *Obedience to God, in faith, that produces rest.*

Sabbath is much more involved than taking a day off to rest physically and to honor God. It was never intended simply as the day we went to church. Underlying the whole idea was the fact that we need to come to total trust in God's provision.

We are told in scripture, "**God rested on the seventh day.**"¹⁷ Here is the institution of the *Sabbath principle*. Christians have some strange ideas about the scriptures because we never bother to think through our doctrines.

Ask yourself a question. Exactly how did God rest? Did speaking the world into existence wear Him out? Did He get to Wednesday and think, 'I can't wait for Saturday to get here so I can relax and take a day off from all this work?'

Did God need to rest *physically*?

Obviously not! God is a Spirit; physical weariness and the need for physical rest were unknown to Him (until He becomes the God-man Jesus¹⁸).

But He did rest, so there must be more to it than simply taking a day off to worship Himself.

How did God rest?

He rested spiritually. He rested in the knowledge that He had set something in motion that was destined to come to pass in its time. He no longer had to strive to create something. Once done, it would work out exactly like He had determined it to be, regardless of what happened between

¹⁷ Genesis 2:3

¹⁸ John 4:6 "Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus, therefore, *being wearied* from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour."

the beginning and the end.

Here is the first principle of spiritual rest. The point at which we stop striving to create for ourselves an answer or solution to our problems and—with full faith and confidence in God and His Word—we enter His rest,¹⁹

God said we were to enter into *His* rest. That means we cannot truly rest apart from Him.

God has also invited us to sit on His throne with Him. What does this mean? Does it mean that when God isn't sitting there, we can try it out for ourselves? No! It means that We are invited to sit where God sits. To enter His power and authority, not apart from Him, but in cooperation with Him.

The same holds true for entering His *rest*. It is not a rest we have to conjure up; it is a rest that started nearly 6000 years ago on the seventh day.

True Sabbath rest (true Sabbath) is something that takes place in our minds, souls, and spirits in cooperation with God through faith.

Jesus said,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”²⁰

Seven times Jesus uses the words, I, Me, and My. Interestingly, seven is the number of God's perfection and completion. We can only find salvation in Jesus. Likewise, we can only find perfection and fulfillment

19 Hebrews 4:5

20 Matthew 11:28-30

in Jesus. That is true Sabbath.

Another principle of Sabbath rest was *no labor*. Or, in other words—no work. This one is easy to accomplish in the natural. The Jews had many laws and rules regarding what could not be done on the Sabbath; however, the spiritual principle is a little tougher to apply. We want to work out our problems and issues ourselves. We want to have control over our lives.

The truth is salvation by faith is entering into the beginnings of Sabbath rest. That is why Jesus said He was “*Lord of the Sabbath*”²¹ and invited people to come to Him to find rest.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”²²

The spiritual message contained in the feasts was clear. By wrapping the Sabbath principle into each feast, He was declaring to all, ‘You aren’t going to be able to work this out on your own. You will have to rest in me for the spiritual work to be started and finished in your life.’

The feast of Unleavened Bread started and ended with a Sabbath. The natural picture presented a spiritual truth: There is nothing you can do to work for your salvation. And there is nothing you can do to finish it. You need to rest from beginning to end that God is doing work in your life. Let us see this principle in the light of New Testament scriptures.

“Looking unto Jesus, the author, and finisher of our

²¹ Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5

²² Matthew 11:29

faith.”²³

Does this passage correspond to the message of the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread? Indeed, it does. Jesus is the *Author and Finisher of our faith*. He started it, and He will complete it. That is good news. That should bring rest to your soul, peace to your mind, and joy to your spirit. Isn't this the idea pictured in the physical feasts the Lord gave Israel— peace, joy, rest, and provision?

We no longer have to worry that we won't be good enough or do enough religious things to be accepted. Paul tells us, “[God] made us accepted in the Beloved.”²⁴ God accepts you because of what Jesus did—not what you have done or not done. Jesus has undertaken the task. He said He would get the job done. He did not save us and leave us to work out the rest of the details in our self-effort.

“I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”²⁵

God will never stop working in our lives through His Spirit.

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ.”²⁶

From beginning to end, God is at work to finish the job He started. My friend, rest in that. Stop striving. Stop

²³ Hebrews 12:2

²⁴ Ephesians 1:6

²⁵ Galatians 3:2

²⁶ Philippians 1:6

worrying that somehow, you will fail to lay hold of God and miss eternal life. Place your faith in Jesus. Stop trying to labor to please God, so He will accept you. You will never be acceptable to God in your own efforts. The good news is that you can take a Sabbath. You can stop working for God's approval and rest in what God has already provided for you. This is the real and true spiritual Sabbath rest—and it has nothing to do with a day of the week.

Salvation by faith—apart from your works or religious observances—is the beginning of the total Sabbath rest God has for you. God desires for you to come to rest in every area of your life.

Salvation by faith is the first real Sabbath a person can enter. However, Sabbath was also associated with God's provision in every area of your life. You can experience genuine Sabbath rest every day—not just once a week.

Everything that Jesus did was a sign of spiritual truth. Consider some of the things He did on the Sabbath. These were the very things that caused much alarm to the religious Jews who accused Him of breaking the Sabbath. Think about what He did.

- Jesus's disciples picked corn and ate on the Sabbath. Indicating that there was rest in God's provision.
- Jesus healed on the Sabbath day, thus demonstrating rest in healing the healing power of God.
- He cast out demons on the Sabbath, declaring to heaven and hell that we can rest in peace, knowing that the devil is not our master any longer.
- To the blind, He gave sight, and to the lame, He gave strength—all on the Sabbath.

What need do you have today? What possible circumstance could you have that Jesus could not calm the storm and bring peace to your troubled heart, mind, and spirit?

Learn to rest in God. Learn that you can never work it out yourself. Learn to respond to God in faith and obedience and leave the rest to Him. Learn that God is indeed faithful.

Do you need to be saved today? You will never get there by all the religious works and righteous acts you could do. Likewise, you cannot earn it through your morality. You need to come to Jesus and let Him be the author of your salvation.

Have you gotten tired and weary on the Christian journey? Jesus said, “Come to me all you that are weary and heavy laden, and you shall find rest (Sabbath) for your souls.”²⁷ Let Jesus be the “finisher” of your faith.”²⁸

Do you need freedom from the devil’s power? Provision? Healing? Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.²⁹ Before you find your answer, you will need to have found a place of rest—a place of confidence in God’s Word to you. This is true Sabbath rest. You can observe a weekly Sabbath Day and never enter into spiritual rest.

True faith is evidenced by peace and rest, no matter what the circumstances. This is the fulfillment of the principle of Sabbath rest. Enjoy!

Sabbath means “rest.” So we are really talking about spiritual rest. The rest God offers is not just a temporary rest, so we can go back and start working again—repeating the cycle of working, carrying burdens—and then briefly resting before starting it all over again.

²⁷ Matthew 11:28

²⁸ Hebrews 12:2

²⁹ Mathew 8:12; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5

When God rested on the seventh day, we are not told He went back to work on the eighth day. The rest God gives is a rest from our efforts to please God and earn our salvation. This is once and for all! We enter into His rest.³⁰ We no longer have to work for our salvation. Our righteousness is not our own; it is the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.³¹

Paul said he did not want to promote his own righteousness but wanted the righteousness which was from God by faith.³²

In Romans chapter four, Paul tells us of Abraham, the Father of faith, who was given righteousness by faith, apart from keeping the law—including the Sabbath Day.³³

So far, we have learned several things.

1. First, the weekly Sabbath day was only a small part of a bigger principle in the Old Testament.
2. Second, we learned that God is not as interested in us observing a day as He is in our coming into a relationship with Him. Jesus said He was *Lord of the Sabbath* and invited people to come to Him to find *rest for their souls*.³⁴
3. God was not after *physical rest*, but *soul rest*. Rest is not found in religious observation; it is found in a relationship with God through Jesus.
4. Jesus said He would give rest to those who were **“weary and heavy laden.”** Are you tired of carrying

³⁰ Hebrews 4:9-10

³¹ II Corinthians 5:21

³² Philippians 3:9 “...and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;”

³³ Romans 4:1-8

³⁴ Matthew 11:29

that load, whatever it might be? Are you worn out from trying to live for God—only to fail again and again? Good news! Jesus said there was rest available for you and me.

That brings us to our point. Everything God did in the Old Testament was a physical picture of New Testament spiritual truth. Sabbath was no different. He showed us a natural picture to illustrate a spiritual principle. By emphasizing the Old Testament type and shadow, some have failed to enter into the New Testament reality.

“So, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”³⁵

Notice again; the Old Testament religious rituals were shadows—reflections without substance. Vague. Dark. Incomplete. However, Christ is the substance—the Body. The Reality.

With those thoughts in mind, let us discover how we can enter this rest.

Salvation is Sabbath rest

(What did you say, brother Steve?) I said, “Salvation is a Sabbath rest.” That is the very first Sabbath we can experience.

The principle of the Sabbath was not that they took a day and worshipped. (We should worship God every day—not once a week.) It was that they *did no work*. There are times when God said, ‘*I will not accept any effort on your part.*’ That was the whole issue of salvation. You cannot work for

³⁵ Colossians 2:16-17

it, and you cannot work to keep it. The Word says it is a ***“free gift, not reckoned of debt, but of grace.”***³⁶

“For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God not of works, lest any man should boast.”³⁷

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost...”³⁸

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law (including the Sabbath) but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”³⁹

God said salvation was **not of works**. So, man must **rest** in the issue of salvation by faith. This is the spiritual Sabbath. We must stop working to earn our own salvation.

Jesus is ***“the author and finisher of our faith.”***⁴⁰ It is His job to get it started and his job to bring it to completion. Somehow that gives me confidence that, with Jesus on the scene, things are going to work out okay after all.

However, resting in God is harder than it sounds. We still have the tendency to want to earn our way. The flesh still likes to brag about our moral and religious accomplishments.

36 Ephesians 2:8-9

37 Ephesians 2:8-9

38 Titus 3:5

39 Galatians 2:16

40 Hebrews 2 12

And we still want to work things out in our own power and wisdom. There is something about really trusting God with the big stuff that's tough to do. Oh, we give Him the small stuff, and we try to give Him the big things too, but how often we take the steering wheel back when it appears God (at least in our eyes) is drifting off course?

Salvation is Sabbath rest. Rest in God's grace to become a child of God in the first place. And rest in God's ability to finish the job He started and bring you to completion in His eyes.

But Sabbath rest is even more than that. Sabbath rest is something we can experience every day of our lives. In fact, we should be laboring to enter that rest in every area of our lives. The Old Testament Jews had to "*keep the Sabbath*" at prescribed times. They had to "*enter into it.*" Likewise, we must learn to *keep the spiritual Sabbath* and *enter it*. Knowing the principle means nothing if you do not learn to apply it to your life.

Are you having difficulties? It might be financial problems or family problems. Maybe you are trapped in some situation. Or possibly some sin or habit that you do not seem to have the power to break free from. Perhaps God has placed some call or vision on your life, and you cannot figure out how it will ever happen.

These and other areas of your life are places where you must learn to enter into rest. You must stop striving and trust God to work in and through you to accomplish His will and purpose in your life.

We need to point out that rest does not mean that you stop doing what's right and push all the responsibility off on God. It does mean that we find the rest for our souls Jesus offered. A rest from emotional turmoil. A rest from the fleshly striving to accomplish what we never could accomplish. It is a rest that says, 'I trust God to work this out in a way that is

pleasing to Him and best for me.’

I have often said that God wants to *change us* before He *changes our circumstances*. Coming to a place of Sabbath rest will do more to change you than anything else I can think of.

Two Dynamics of This Rest

(For the sake of space, I am going to ask that you stop and read Hebrews 3:6 - 4:11. I’ll be using this passage extensively.)

First, notice that this passage is about entering into rest. And second, that it had nothing to do with a *Sabbath day*. God illustrated spiritual rest with the story of the Israelites going into the promised land. The story's whole point is that some are promised rest but never make it into that promised rest. We are admonished not to fall after the *same* example of unbelief (4:11).

You will notice several words and thoughts are repeated in this passage. They make up the dynamics of spiritual rest.

The first thought, of course, is rest. Verses 3:18 - 4:6 make an interesting point. The rest we are to enter is not our rest but God's rest. God is at rest. He has set some things in motion that He knows will end up just as He has planned. We can come to a place of rest only as we learn to rest in God.

The second thought is that not everyone who was promised rest will enter into it. God did not keep them out; they refused to enter into it. The picture is that some, hanging onto the Old Testament shadow of Sabbath rest, will refuse to enter into the New Testament fulfillment and reality of that rest.

There is some effort on our part. That was one principle of Sabbath—it came at the end of a workweek.

It seems strange that Paul tells us to “**labor to enter into rest** (verse 11 KJV).” We just learned that God wanted us to stop working and trust Him. What does this mean, then?

It means that we have never gotten past the Old Testament example and arrived at the New Testament truth.

What are the “works” God requires of the believer today?

Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you

believe in Him whom He sent.”⁴¹

The Jews asked a direct question and got a direct answer. The only work God requires from us is faith. So, when the writer of Hebrews says we are to labor to enter into rest, he tells us that we must work through the issues of doubt and unbelief to come to the place of faith in God and His Word.

The second word that is repeated in this passage is “heart.” People die physically from heart problems, and people die spiritually from heart problems.

Over and over, Paul admonishes the people not to harden their hearts like the Israelites. Paul made it plain that God’s rest had a lot to do with the condition of one’s heart. It was a hard heart that ultimately kept them out of God’s blessing.

The people would not trust God. In this passage, he talks about a time of testing in the wilderness. The interesting thing is that it was not a time of God testing the people, but a time for the people to test God and prove Him faithful.⁴²

Yes, God brought them into some hard places, but the purpose was to prove Himself to them. Each trial was to build and produce faith in God’s power and provision. Ultimately God wanted to take them into the Promised Land, and he knew they would need absolute confidence in Him to possess it. Yet, at each difficulty, they hardened their hearts toward God and complained rather than trusting Him.

When they finally came to the Promised Land, they could not enter in because of unbelief. They had never learned to trust the Lord along the way.

⁴¹ John 6:28-29

⁴² Psalms 95:9

Here is the key, regarding the spiritual Sabbath, we are admonished not to fall after the same example of unbelief.

Christian, will you continue to struggle over what day of the week to honor and fail to enter into the true spiritual rest God has promised for you?

God operates the same today as He leads us towards spiritual rest. All along the way, He leads us into some tough spots, but each is carefully calculated to prove Himself to us. We often get discouraged and quit because we do not understand the *principle* of Sabbath Rest.

Rick Warren, a well-known American pastor, said, “The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart.” How true! If our hearts are not soft toward God, each trial will make us harder, not more pliable. God can mold a soft heart, but the only thing He can do with a hard heart is break it.

Looking once again to the passage in Hebrews chapters three and four, we find the third repeated principle. That is the principle of faith or—on the negative side—unbelief.

In Hebrews 3:12, we are warned against having an evil heart of unbelief. In verses 18-19, we see that unbelief is why they couldn’t enter into the promised land, which is the picture of God’s promised rest. Again, in verse 4:2, we are told that they had the gospel (good news of rest) preached to them, but it didn’t profit them, not being mixed with faith.

And again, in verses 4:6 & 11, we are told quite plainly that they did not make it because of unbelief.

We are admonished in this passage not to ***“fall after the same example of unbelief*** (verse 11).”

Many are the times when circumstances overwhelm us. Our minds become a whirling mass of conflicting thoughts. Our emotions are rocking like a boat in rough water. We worry and doubt, wondering how we will ever get out of this situation. Faith brings peace to our hearts, souls, and minds.

The Jews had a big problem. The land God had promised them was inhabited by very unfriendly giants who had no intention of handing over their homes and fields to the Jews. God knew this from the start. Likewise, God knows what circumstantial giants you will have to face when His promises come to pass in *your* life.

The Jews looked at the obstacles and said, ‘No way! We can’t do it.’ Had they placed their faith in God, He would have brought them into the land forty years earlier. They settled for forty years of “life as usual” instead of experiencing the blessings of God. Is that what you want?

We are faced with the same situation. When faced with impossible circumstances, we can either quit and run—hardening our hearts—or place our faith in God.

Spiritual rest had to come first. The Israelites had to settle the issue in their heart—through faith. Then they had to act on that faith in obedience to God’s Word. Remember, Jesus said the works of God were to believe in God.

Either God had spoken, or He had not.

Either He could give them the land, or He could not.

It was not whether they could fight and take the land. The issue was, *could God give it to them?*

Our battles are the same. Can God do it? Will He do it? Faith comes first. There can be no real spiritual rest unless we first develop a confident trust in God and his Word.

Here then is the essence of the true spiritual Sabbath. It has nothing to do with a day. The day was simply God’s way of illustrating a spiritual truth.

We enter into Sabbath when we stop trying to work and earn our salvation and accept God’s free gift.

We can also experience Sabbath regularly in our lives when we trust God with our whole heart and place our faith in Him. Great peace and rest come from the knowledge that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. He will get the

job done. Finally, when we are done with this world, we will enter the perfection of Sabbath Rest for all eternity. Do not miss it!

“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

Heb. 4:11