

# God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

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## RESTFUL OR STRESSFUL?

Q: How many of you traveled yesterday?

My Christmas consisted of getting up early, driving to Kent, opening gifts and having lunch with Marilyn's family, then rushing back to MV to have dinner with my family.

- It's not that I didn't have fun - it just wasn't very restful.

Q: What do you associate with the holidays, *rest* or *stress*?

- "God rest ye merry gentleman!?" I'll rest after the holidays!

The pressure begins the last Wednesday of November as my family prepares for Thanksgiving. It builds as we do our Christmas shopping, negotiate Christmas parties.

The pressure doesn't let up until we make it safely past the gifts-return lines and the New Year's Eve party. I'm having fun most of the time. It's just so stressful. Between the holidays and no-sleep thing, I would love nothing more than a chance to rest.

- All I wanted for Christmas was a good night's sleep - and I didn't get it!

Sound familiar? Would you like a break, an eye in the middle of the storm? To be well rested, not just during the Christmas season, but all year long?

## SABBATH REST

God has a lot to say about rest. He invented the weekend. When God freed the Israelites from grueling slavery in Egypt and gave them the Ten Commandments, rule #4 instituted the weekend.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping 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.... *Exodus 20:8-10 NIV*

Every Saturday – Sabbath – everyone *had* to rest. Working through the weekend was a capital offence. The day was to be spent resting and worshiping God.

- The Sabbath was a day to for Israel to reflect on how God set them free from slavery and rest in Him.

## **SABBATH NOW**

But over the years, legalism corrupted Sabbath. Laws dictated every aspect of their rest. What was meant to be blessing had become another bondage that Jesus had to free His people from.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. *Mark 2:27 NIV*

- Jesus taught that the Sabbath should be a day of restoration, not legalistic bondage.

**Q:** If the Sabbath on Saturday is a clear OT command and Jesus embraced it while reforming it, why don't Christians do the same?

- Here is a short history lesson:

In Acts, the early church grew to include many Gentiles who didn't celebrated Sabbath. The Apostles debate whether Gentiles were obligated to observe Jewish laws, including Sabbath.

- They decide "no."

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. *Romans 14:5 NIV*

And so believers were not bound to obey the OT Sabbath laws, but that did not mean that they abandoned a day of worshiping God. The early church began meeting on Sunday instead of Saturday, in honor of the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

- Sunday was spent in worship, teaching, and fellowship.
- This was very important to the early church.

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.... *Hebrews 10:25 NIV*

This pattern of worship on Sunday is what we follow today, but over the years Sundays have lost the aspect of rest.

**Q:** How many parents would classify their Sunday mornings as “restful?”

## **MY PERSONAL SABBATH**

At many points in my life, I have tried to understand how to apply OT principles of Sabbath to my life in a 24/7 culture. As an adult, I don’t think I’ve ever consistently had Sundays off.

- I still work on Sundays!

When I was in college I really struggled with this. As a full-time student putting myself through college, I was always in class, working, or studying.

Sunday was a prime homework day and I didn’t feel guilty about it. I knew my theology and church history, that I’m not bound to OT laws. But that was the wrong way of looking at it.

- When God gives a command, it’s for our benefit and well-being.
- The principles of a Sabbath rest are still valid.

I took a look at my routine: I never really took time off for rest. Instead, I wasted time here and there, felt guilty but never was refreshed. So I tried an experiment:

I made myself take a set amount of time off each week, guilt-free. It wasn’t on Sunday and it wasn’t a full day, but it was consistent. No work, no studying, just enjoyable activities.

- The result: I felt better and got more done.

## **PRINCIPLE OF REST**

Since then, I have made a point of learning what it means to rest and how to take my own “Sabbath,” even if I can’t take a full day off.

Here’s five principles I’ve learned. They’re not exhaustive, but I hope you’ll find them helpful. The goal is to find rest, even in the daily grind, Christmas season, or life with a newborn.

## 1. REST SHOULD EXPRESS DEPENDENCY ON GOD

By requiring Israel to take a day off, God demonstrated that she was dependant upon Him for everything. To make this clear, God also required Israel to take every seventh year off.

But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest... Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. ... You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. *Leviticus 25:4-5; 20-21 NIV*

Rest reminds us that we cannot do everything. It should be an expression of our complete dependency on God. He provides for all our needs, physical and spiritual.

"God *rest* ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay." Why? "Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day to save us all from Satan's power."

- Rest reminds us we are saved by grace, not our own striving.

## 2. REST SHOULD BE RESTFUL

Rest and inactivity are not synonymous. Rest is more than doing nothing; otherwise I would feel great after five hours of TV.

- Inactivity isn't always bad, but it isn't rest.

Inactivity can drain us and promotes more inactivity. Inactivity usually sneaks up on us, and may leave us feeling guilty for things left undone. Rest energizes us and promotes action. It mends us from the trials of the previous week and energizes us for the week ahead.

- So what is the difference between inactivity and rest?

The rest of these principles help answer that.

## 3. REST SHOULD BE SCHEDULED

Scheduling rest isn't restricting. Like a budget, it's freeing. By having a set time, we have permission to take a break without feeling guilty for the unfolded laundry or the unmowed lawn.

It also prevents a time of rest from becoming inactivity. An hour playing a video game may allow me to detach and gather my thoughts, but a whole day gives me a headache and a numb hinnie.

#### **4. REST SHOULD BE ENJOYABLE**

Enjoyable rest requires knowing how you tick. It means intentionally engaging in activities that refresh you. It's different for everyone. What drains and refreshes you?

- An introvert is refreshed by being alone.
- An extrovert is refreshed by being with other people.

Study yourself and find those activities that are enjoyable to you and restore you.

#### **5. REST SHOULD BE REFLECTIVE**

The single most rewarding component of my times of rest is personal reflection. More than anything, this is what mends me from the previous week and energizes me for the week ahead.

Every Monday, I take an hour to drink coffee and write out my thoughts. During the last week, what did I do right? What did I do wrong? What lessons did I learn?

- My mistakes are turned into an opportunity to grow.

Next, I think about the week ahead. What am I excited about? What am I nervous about? As I examine my thoughts, I find that my concerns are usually over-rated.

- More often than not, I find myself looking forward to my week.

#### **SELF-REST TEST**

Here's a simple "self-rest test" to see if you need to work on your rest skills: How do you usually feel at the beginning of your work week?

- "Dear Lord, it's Monday." or "Dear Lord! It's Monday!?"

We aren't always going to be happy about going to work or facing the daily grind, but a truly restful break will leave you energized, not more drained.