

# Sharpening Our Saws

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The Boy Scouts have as their motto "Be Prepared." This principle has physically saved many lives over the years and is a good principle for us to keep in mind during our spiritual development for the Kingdom. Yet, more specifically, how does it apply to the Sabbath? Are we preparing for this day—or do we suddenly find ourselves in it, as if we have suddenly fallen through a trap door into another world?

It seems that many times we rush frantically to complete our work or our projects past the proper time, even though we know better. We fall into this habit mostly because we fail to plan ahead. If we take the time to plan, we can head down the exit ramp of our high-speed workweek into a calm, peaceful, productive twenty-four hours devoted to God and His way. Our minds will be clear and ready to be focused in the right direction.

As one writer put it, the Sabbath "is a time to sharpen our saw," and he used an illustration to explain it:

One man asked another, "What are you doing?"

The man replied, "I'm sawing this tree down."

The first asked, "Isn't that hard work?"

"Oh, yes," replied the sawyer, wiping his brow.

"Then why don't you stop long enough to sharpen your saw?"

"Can't," retorted the sawyer. "Don't have the time!"

And so it would be for us without the Sabbath day.

## God's Rest

What does the Sabbath mean to us? Do we see it as a time of don'ts and can'ts or as a time of great opportunity unlike any other? Since God made the Sabbath for man (Mark 2:27), it brings Sabbath-keepers benefits unavailable to those who do not keep it. It is a blessing to us, not a curse.

The Lamsa translation of the Bible from the Aramaic renders Hebrews 4:9-10 as: "It is therefore the duty of the people of God to keep the sabbath. For he that has entered into his rest also has ceased from his own works, as God did from his." Along with the examples of Christ, His apostles and the early church, this scripture indeed shows us we have a responsibility in keeping the Sabbath. It is on the Sabbath day that we have the best opportunity each week to learn and grow toward entering God's rest, His Kingdom.

To observe this holy time properly, the Bible mentions a day of preparation in Exodus 16:23 in the context of God providing manna for the Israelites in the wilderness:

Then [Moses] said to them, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.'"

This day is also mentioned in the New Testament: "Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath. . ." (Mark 15:42). In fact, the name the Jews used for Friday, the sixth day of the week, was "Preparation Day." In the Greek language, this is true even today!

However, even in the first two chapters of the Bible, God alludes to this day.

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. (Genesis 1:31; 2:1-2)

The Creator Himself paints a beautifully detailed picture. The week of Creation is finished, and the sun is just about to set on the horizon. It takes very little imagination to picture God settling down in His favorite spot, perhaps holding a cool drink in one hand and wiping His brow with the other. A satisfied smile brightens His face as He scans the work He has just finished. As verse 31 says, "Indeed, it was very good."

We can relate to this wonderful illustration if we have ever planned, built and finished a project, like a garden. Seeing something completed just as planned is a great source of satisfaction. Even after all our labor, it is *refreshing* to finish a job.

Though He had just created the world and everything in it, God had no need for rest. Isaiah writes, "The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary" (Isaiah 40:28). But Exodus 31:17 shows us how God rested on the first Sabbath: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day, *He rested and was refreshed.*" God's Sabbath rest was a real rest—though He was not tired—because He was refreshed, at ease and satisfied with His work.

Are our Sabbath rests refreshing?

### **A Time for Reflection**

We can use God's example here to help us in our own lives. As the Sabbath begins is a perfect time to critique ourselves over the past week. Did we engage in our basic spiritual duties of prayer, study and meditation? What did we learn? How did we grow? What can we do to improve?

What about our other responsibilities? Did we do anything to improve our relationships with our parents, mate or children? Did we use godly principles in working out any difficulties we may have encountered? How about our neighbors, friends and acquaintances—did we help or hinder our association with them?

How about our workweek? Did we give our best to our employers or customers? Are we confident our clients got their money's worth? Did our exposure to them lighten their load and make their week as pleasant as possible?

Simply stated, twilight time as the Sabbath begins is a great time to reflect on our overall spiritual development for the entire week. Some of us may find it helpful to keep a notebook to chart our progress. As time goes on, such a record might prove useful in comparing where we are with where we have been. If we are honest with ourselves, it may pinpoint our strengths and weaknesses and help us to work on them more vigorously.

### **Other Preparations**

Yet even if we do this, our preparations for the Sabbath are incomplete. We can do a great deal physically to make our day of rest better and more productive. The more preparation we do, the less we will be disturbed on the Sabbath day.

When is the best time to prepare for the Sabbath? Ideally, it is an unending process; we are always preparing for it. After all, is not preparing for the Sabbath rest very closely related to preparing for the Kingdom of God, His ultimate rest?

In the Sabbath commandment God says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. *Six days you shall labor and do **all** your work*, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do **no** work" (Exodus 20:8-10). God gives us six days to prepare so that on the Sabbath we must do none of our routine tasks.

So when should we do such chores as pressing a shirt or dress and shining our shoes? For most working people, this means we need to have these preparations done no later than Thursday evening. Some who are not on a strict 9-5 schedule may have a little more flexibility. The point is that we should complete all our mundane work before the Sabbath begins. This includes the majority of our meal preparation and cooking, fueling the car, shopping and cleaning.

Notice how the Jews of Jesus' day prepared:

On Friday, which was in fact called "the day of preparation," the house had been carefully cleaned and the women had cooked all the dishes that were to be eaten on the Holy Day. . . . It was a particular mark of a good housewife that she never forgot to fill the Sabbath lamp with oil nor supply the house with those hard, flat rounds of bread, with fish, dates, and figs. People would take a bath, particularly if like the tanners and leather-dressers, theirs was a dirty trade. As soon as the lamp was lit, they would sit down to a meal. . . . In some cases Psalm 91 was sung to bring in the Sabbath, which many believed was mankind's first song, sung by Adam to his Creator. (*Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, p. 389.)

Church members have begun their own traditions in this vein. Herbert Armstrong left us a good example of being ready for the Sabbath. It was his custom, if possible, to shower, put on clean clothes and enter the Sabbath in prayer. Others enjoy sitting down to a special Sabbath meal, accompanied by hymns or soothing music playing in the background, as the sun sets on Friday evening. Whatever the case, we should begin God's day of rest relaxed and refreshed rather than harried and exhausted.

No matter how busy our lives are, we can enter the Sabbath prepared to devote it to God if we prioritize and plan properly. If we are so strung out with activities that we blow into the Sabbath like a hurricane, perhaps we need to begin simplifying our lives. If the Sabbath is just a bump in our careening lives, maybe we are not honoring it as we should.

### **Examining Our Saws**

When was the last time we looked to see what condition our saw is in? Have we been too busy trying to cut down huge trees to notice? Are we so overwhelmed with the complexities of life that we ignore the basics?

God has given us one day in seven to rest, reflect, refresh, rejuvenate. Are we taking advantage of His wonderful blessing? God made the Sabbath for man's good, not to bind us with a burden. We need to think of all the advantages the Sabbath affords and concentrate on them to get the most out of it.

- » It gives us physical rest and refreshment after a week of hard labor. It should be a joy not to have to work on it! Any monetary loss we incur by not working is doubly repaid in gains to our health and well-being.
- » It gives us time to meditate on the greater questions and answers of life. The Sabbath gives us time for quiet so we can ponder God's plan and our place in it. It allows us to reorient ourselves to what is truly important.
- » It is a day that affords us time to fellowship with people of like mind and purpose. We can sharpen each other in God's way of life and doctrine and encourage those who are down or going through trials. The Sabbath helps us grow in unity and love.
- » On the Sabbath, we can eat our fill of God's Word, both in our own private studies and from the ministry. As we grow in knowledge, we expand our understanding and wisdom in applying what we have learned.

There are many other good reasons for keeping the Sabbath, but all of them begin with being prepared to devote the Sabbath to proper pursuits. With a little thought and a little planning, we can use the Sabbath to keep our saws sharp. And with a sharp saw, we can cut a clear path to God's Kingdom.