

GOOD SUNDAYS CAN CHANGE YOUR MONDAYS

Some of the greatest accidents\disasters in the past 50 years – The Exxon Valdez, Costa Concordia, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, the fatal navigational error of Korean Air Lines 007 - all occurred in the middle of the night and all were the result of human error caused by fatigue. In the Challenger space shuttle disaster, key NASA officials made the ill-fated decision to go ahead with the launch after working twenty hours straight and getting only two to three hours of sleep the night before. Their error in judgment cost the lives of seven astronauts and nearly killed the U.S. space program. We ignore our need for rest and renewal at the peril of ourselves and others.

Today we are continuing in our series I Love Sundays. We are looking at the fact rest and worship are important. Last week we talked about the fact that, part of what makes Sundays great is going to church. We need corporate worship. Today we want to talk about the other reason that Sundays are important, and that is because we need to rest.

God made the Sabbath to be the best day of your week. Over time, the nation of Israel had tried to over manage the Sabbath so that by the time of Jesus it had become a burden instead of a blessing. One Sabbath day, Jesus was hanging out with His disciples, and they were debating which Sabbath laws applied to them and which didn't. Jesus clarified God's purpose for the Sabbath by saying;

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

What Jesus was saying was, of all the days of the week, God knew we would need a day to break from everything else we were doing and refuel, refresh, and refocus. So, when God was arranging the rhythm of the world, He designated one day for refueling. The Sabbath was built into creation for us.

Since the dawn of time, you can see that whenever people have taken the time to set aside a day for rest and refocusing with God, their lives have gone better. They have felt better about themselves, enjoyed their families more, and been more productive.

Today, the idea of a day of rest is has been lost. Our lives are more hurried and busier then ever before. We never seem to have enough time. People work longer hours and then still worry about having enough money to make ends meet. We fill our non working hours with activities that only wear us out even more. Day in and day out we live with pressure. Pressure, pressure, pressure.

Do this with me for a minute. Fill your lungs up with air and then let it all out. It is like letting air out of a beach ball. Doesn't that feel good? I don't want you to relax so much this morning that you go to sleep, but I do want you to relax. I want to leave here feeling a little lighter, like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders.

Years ago, nobody worked on Sundays. Businesses were closed. People used Sunday for a rest day. People got a lot less done on Sundays, but as a result, they got a lot more done on Mondays. After a day of rest, they attacked the week eagerly.

Do you want to be prosperous and successful? The bible tells us how;

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

God says here to Joshua that the secret to getting ahead in life is to spend time in the Bible. Why? Because the more you get into this Book, the more this Book will get into you. And when this Book gets into you, you will follow its principles like rest and worship and you will become the kind of person who is prosperous and successful.

This has been proven true time and again. In eighteenth century in England, Jonathan and Charles Wesley started a movement that resulted in 100,000 weekly Bible studies. For the next one hundred years, England was the most prosperous nation on earth.

Back in 1857 Jeremiah Lanphier started a noontime prayer meeting in New York that sparked a movement of Bible reading throughout North America. As a result, the history of America's westward expansion was marked by households huddled around their kitchen tables at night. Mom or dad would read the Bible to the family, out loud for an hour. The result was that over the next one hundred years, the United States became the most prosperous nation on earth.

More recently we have seen this in different nations all around the world. Years ago, there was a video that came out called Transformations. It told stories from Columbia to Kenya of how whole communities and nations were radically transformed through revival. Spiritual strongholds were broken and the result was lives transformed and economies raised. In some cases, it showed that even the land started to produce more fruit and vegetables as a result of God's blessing.

What I am trying to say this morning is that the way to make better Mondays is to start with better Sundays. Good Sundays make better Mondays. If you will learn the principles of rest and worship you will be blessed and your life will be better. That is the concept of the Sabbath.

I feel as if God had, by giving the Sabbath, given fifty-two springs in every year – ST Coleridge

In the Bible, God prescribes fifty-two Sabbaths a year as part of our health-maintenance plan. That's seven and a half weeks of spiritual vacation every year! He made Sundays for us to help us and to bless us. Sundays should be a day of rest. I want to talk about that today. No guilt, no pressure today, just hopefully release.

Isaiah 58:13-14 If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, 14 then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Do you call Sundays a DELIGHT? Do you look forward to Sundays? Is it the best day of your week? Here are three steps to help you;

1. Accept God's Rhythm in the Sabbath

Years ago, I visited Israel. Sabbath celebration is so sacred to the Jewish people that the entire nation of Israel puts their elevators on automatic during the Sabbath. To avoid even the slightest amount of work, like pushing an elevator button, Israeli elevators are programmed to stop and open on every floor from the beginning of the Sabbath to its end. That might seem weird and extreme to you, but I remember thinking "what a great reminder."

Jewish people celebrate the Sabbath on Saturdays, but we celebrate it on Sunday. Christians adopted the first day of the week as our Sabbath to celebrate the day Jesus rose from the dead. But the principle is the same: take a day to rest. Build it around God and family.

In Exodus 20, Moses gave the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment reads,

Exodus 20:8-11 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 11 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. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Why did God rest on the seventh day? Was He tired? Had the task of creation worn Him out? Of course not. He did it to model for us the principle of rest. The idea of the Sabbath is built right into creation. You and I were created with the need to take one day in seven to rest.

You can either accept that fact or reject it, but it is true.

It would be as difficult to take an inventory of the benefits the world receives from sunshine as to calculate the blessings we derive from the Christian Sabbath – HD Ganse

Three men are hiking and they come upon a large raging river. They need to get to the other side, but they don't know how. The first man says, "God, give me the STRENGTH to cross this river." Poof! God gives him big arms and strong legs, and he swims across the raging river. It takes him two hours, but he makes it. Seeing this, the second man prays, "God, give me the strength . . . and the TOOLS . . . to cross this river." Poof! God gives him a rowboat, and he rows across the raging river. It takes him 60 minutes, but eventually he makes it. Seeing this, the third man says, "God, give me the strength and the tools and the INTELLIGENCE . . . to cross this river." And poof, suddenly his wife appears beside him. She reaches into his backpack and pulls out a map, then walks with him downstream 50 yards and points to the bridge that was there all the time. We believe as Christians that God will give us the strength and the tools necessary to overcome obstacles. Sometimes what we really need is the wisdom to see what is already before us. Wisdom is accepting God's rhythm of work and rest.

2. Acknowledge your Need of the Sabbath

It is one thing to believe that rest is important for most people. It is another thing to believe that rest is important FOR YOU! You only believe the parts of the bible you put into practice. It is one thing to believe that the Sabbath is important. It is another thing to KEEP IT.

It is easy to rationalize why we do not rest. It is easy to come up with reasons why it may be good for others but it is not really important for us as individuals.

A pastor rode by a farm one Sunday morning to see a farmer and church member at work harvesting. The pastor said "Brother. Don't you know that God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh?" "Yes," said the farmer, "I know all about that, but God finished His work in six days and I didn't!"

We do not rest because our work is done; we rest because God commanded it and created us to have a need for it.

As one pastor wrote: Sabbath is taking a day a week to remind myself that I did not make the world and that it will continue to exist without my efforts. Sabbath is a day when my work is done, even if it isn't. Sabbath is a day when my job is to enjoy. Period. Sabbath is a day when I am fully available to myself and those I love most. Sabbath is a day when I remember that when God made the world, he saw that it was good. Sabbath is a day when I produce nothing. Sabbath is a day when I remind myself that I am not a machine. Sabbath is a day when at the end I say, 'I didn't do anything today,' and I don't add, 'And I feel guilty.' Sabbath is a day when my phone is turned off, I don't check my email, and you can't get a hold of me

I learned this principle the hard way. When we lived in Kuwait the first time it was exciting to see the church growing. I was leading 4 services and was preparing 2 sermons a week. I was young and had lots of energy, so I figured I could handle the workload. I found that the only way I could manage the hectic pace was to work on my days off. I was preparing my sermons the day before I spoke, which caused a huge amount of stress. Eventually I burned out. I learned from that I need to rest just like everybody else.

3. Anticipate and Prepare for the Sabbath

Tragically, precious little in this hurried and hassled age promotes intimacy with God. We have become a body of people who look more like a herd of cattle in a stampede than a flock of God beside green pastures and still waters -- Charles Swindoll

Sabbaths are important. Like everything else in life that is of great worth and value, the Sabbath is something that we need to plan for. It requires thought and preparation.

Guys, when you were in high school, if you asked a girl out on a date, usually you'd take a shower ahead of time, hopefully brush your hair, and make sure you had clean clothes on, right?

That is what you do when you ask someone out on a date. However, what did you do when you asked a girl to the prom? For the prom, you would buy her flowers. You might rent a tuxedo. You probably washed your car. You made reservations for dinner at a great restaurant. Your regular date and your prom date might even have been with the same girl. What made one good and the other great was the preparation.

Likewise, think about this. On a normal weekend, the Smith family goes out and stays up really late on Saturday night. They sleep in until the last-minute Sunday morning and then rush around to get ready for church. Often this leads to them arguing all the way to the church parking lot. Then they walk into church pretending everything is great. How hard is it to have a great experience *at* church if you've had a miserable experience getting *to* church? Hard.

One author once wrote "Anyone who has ever put on a plastic smile knows how difficult it is to concentrate on something wonderful when they're feeling something awful. One of the greatest things about church is that people regularly walk in a mess and walk out at peace. Imagine how much better off we would be if we walked into church already at peace?"

Now, rewind the Smith family's weekend for a minute. What if, instead of whooping it up on Saturday night, they changed their plans. What if they decided to developed a plan for preparing for Sunday like Sunday morning was the prom?

Imagine this: It's Saturday morning and Mrs. Smith is asking each member of the family what they want to wear to church tomorrow. Armed with this information, she does laundry to make sure the chosen clothes are ready by morning. On Saturday evening, Mr. Smith helps the kids to an early or normal bedtime. What kind of difference would it make in your church experience if every member of your family woke up early and rested on Sunday morning and everything they wanted to wear was already ready for them?

The U.S. Marines have a saying, "Proper prior planning prevents poor performance." Plan for church like you'd plan for the prom.

Now, think about this. I know this is crazy talk, but just imagine. Say it takes 15 minutes to get to church. What if you were all in the car 30 minutes before church? No breaking the speed limit. No honking. No bickering. Maybe you sing a verse of "Kumbaya" together on the way? (Well, maybe not that, but you get the idea.) When you get out of the car, you could actually walk across the parking lot leisurely. You could stop and have a conversation in the lobby and still arrive in your seats with a few minutes to spare.

As a pastor I have to prepare for Sundays. I have to make sure that I get enough rest, so I go to bed early on Saturday nights. I am up early and at the church at least a few hours before just to make sure everything is OK. Preparation makes a huge difference.

Like prom versus date, the difference in a good Sunday and a great Sunday just might be the advanced preparation. So how will you prepare for next Sunday? Let me suggest a few things;

A. Make church a priority. Plan to attend.

I am not expecting that this one sermon will change your life, but I want to ask you to plan to come the next 2 weeks for the remainder of this sermon series. Schedule it. Mark it in your calendar now.

B. Figure out your advanced plan.

Sometime today before the idea wears off, sit down with your family or those you come to church with and talk about the kind of preparation you want to put into arriving here with smiles next Sunday. Do you want to put your clothes out the night before? Or set the table and eat breakfast together? What time do you all want to get to bed the night before? And what time do you want to leave for church next Sunday morning?

C. Talk about it in your Small Group.

D. Be here on time next week.

I have found, by long and sound experience, that the due observance of the Sabbath day, and of the duties of it, have been of singular comfort and advantage to me. The observance of that day has always had joined to it a blessing on the rest of my time; and the week so begun has always been blessed and prosperous because of it – Sir Matthew Hale

Back in 1842 the first Sunday train from Glasgow to Edinburgh ran. Pastors in Glasgow denounced the running of Sunday trains as quote "a flagrant violation of the law of God as expressed in the fourth commandment. A grievous outrage on the religious feelings of the people of Scotland. A powerful temptation to the careless and indifferent to abandon the public ordinances of grace, and most importantly a disruption to the quiet of the rural parishes along the railway line."

In the Edinburgh paper it described a threatening battery of ministers, (quite an image there, a 'threatening battery of ministers') lined the platforms and informed the passengers getting ready to board the train that they have just bought tickets to hell.

OK, maybe that was a little extreme. I certainly don't want to threaten anyone this morning. I do however want to remind you that the Sabbath is important. Going to church and having a time of rest is important. Accept God's plan and acknowledge your need of the Sabbath and make sure you prepare for it.