

# Life: Give work a rest

March 22, 2014

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for April 6 focuses on Exodus 31:12-17.*

Americans are a tired and harried people. We work more hours than Europeans, take less vacation time even though we have earned it, work when we do take vacation and sleep less than is healthy for our bodies.

What are the reasons we give for this kind of living? • In tight economic times, we're afraid of losing our jobs. • There is pressure to be a team player. We don't see our boss or coworkers taking time off, so how can we? • There are spoken and unspoken expectations in the workplace. For example, take your vacation, but check email and respond to phone calls. • Our families can have more if we work more. • We build our self-image on how much we work. Culturally, Americans are a strong "doing" culture.

Are we in the church any different from the culture around us? We hear about Sabbath but may think it is totally unrealistic to find time for a day of rest and worship in overscheduled calendars.

Our commitment to Sabbath in some ways reveals what we believe about God and our desire to obey him. As a holy people set apart for God's purposes, there is a different way of living.

## **A holy God**

The first two chapters of Genesis tell the creation story. We need only to spend time looking at creation to see natural rhythms established by our Creator. Night and day. Fall, winter, spring and summer. Sowing and harvesting. Hormonal, sleep and digestive cycles. These are but a few.

The designer and creator of this amazing world in which we live models for

us a rhythm of work and rest. Genesis 2:2 reveals two important things about God. His creation was the result of six days of his work. On the seventh day, he rested from his work.

Genesis 2:3 says, "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." On the seventh day, work ceased. The day was blessed and set apart by a holy God. He leads the way.

While the term "Sabbath" is not used in the Genesis verses, the Hebrew verb used for "rested" is the origin of the noun for "Sabbath." During Sabbath work ceases.

### **A holy people**

With the creation of the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 19:5-16, God says: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Just as the rainbow was a sign of the covenant God made with Noah, Sabbath was the sign of this new covenant. Exodus 31:13-17 speaks of the purpose, importance and longevity of Sabbath.

Resting from work was a reminder of their holy God who worked and then rested. He can be trusted to take care of his people by giving them a day without work. He will sustain them. In the wilderness, he provided enough food on the sixth day so they did not have to work on the seventh day. The people rested from their work and did not go hungry.

As Christ-followers, we are set apart in this world. As we rest from our work, we show others God will take care of us. He can be trusted to provide what we need.

## **'Obey me fully'**

God said keeping the Sabbath was so important that if someone chose to work instead of rest, he would be put to death. Does this seem rather harsh to you? Consider again the covenant requirements in Exodus 19: "If you obey me fully." God desires complete devotion from us. We are to obey him fully. This obedience is not to gain his favor but an expression of love because we belong to him.

For generations to come, Sabbath was to be a sign of this lasting covenant. Jesus clearly turned the legalism of the Sabbath upside-down when he healed the sick and fed his disciples on the Sabbath. But we also see him stopping work to spend time with his Father. He knew the need for and lived the rhythm of work and rest.

So what is the message for us? As God's holy people, we serve a holy God who worked and rested. We are to be his holy people who do the same. In doing so, we declare our love and gratitude for God's work in our lives as Savior, Redeemer, Provider, Healer and so much more.

Ceasing work one day a week also is a declaration of trust in God to meet our needs. The nations around Israel didn't observe Sabbath. As my grandfather would say, "They stood out like a sore thumb."

Do we as God's chosen nation, his royal priesthood, his holy nation stand out from those around us? Resting from our work is one way we declare our praises to this God who called us "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 1:9). Give work a rest. Celebrate Sabbath.