

# Chapter 9

## Sabbath-Rest, A Time to Remember

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

(Deuteronomy 5:15)

But God is the God of our yesterdays, and He allows the memory of them in order to turn the past into a ministry of spiritual culture for the future. God reminds us of the past lest we get into a shallow security in the present.<sup>64</sup>

(Oswald Chambers)

As I write this chapter a month has passed since Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi, the worst natural disaster in United States history. The dead are still being counted and parents are still searching for their children. Over a thousand lives have been lost, and property damage totals billions of dollars. Charitable organizations are receiving large donations and collecting truckloads of tangible goods from around the country. Some foreign countries have also sent shiploads of goods to devastated locations. Human and material resources are headed down to New Orleans and other gulf cities like white blood cells attacking an infected laceration. Eventually the land will be healed and cities rebuilt. Most material possessions can be replaced, but many are lost forever.

Destroyed photo albums are possessions that cannot be replaced after the flood waters have receded. Those albums contained pictures of loved ones

and friends who are no longer with those who now grieve. As one victim of Katrina said, “I do not even have one picture of my deceased mother.”

Photo albums help families remember the good old days of being together with loved ones. Pictures of births, birthdays, graduations, weddings, family reunions, and little league teams help refresh the memories of those who view the pages.

Photo albums renew the joy of years gone by. Cheer percolates in the hearts of parents who gaze at pictures of their children when they were tiny. Children view pictures of the days when grandpa took them fishing and grandma baked cookies for them. With twinkling eyes grandparents gaze at snapshots of their teenage grandchildren courting prom dates.

There exists another photo album that cheers hearts generation after generation. The Bible serves as a photo album reminding God’s family of their spiritual heritage. Like children surrounding the table where the photo album lies open, so one generation passes on memories of joy to the next. Psalm one hundred forty-five reminds all generations to pass on the joy of God’s greatness and goodness:

One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. <sup>5</sup> They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. <sup>6</sup> They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.<sup>7</sup> They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

The photo album begins with creation, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Creation provides a basis for a life of joy. It is good to be alive and enjoy all that surrounds me as a created being. Earth, water, and air flourish with life in harmony with their Maker.

Scripture abounds with celebration, but never apart from the Creator. As I stand in awe of my Creator's majesty reflected in his artistry, Psalm nineteen comes to mind and expresses the joy in my heart:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. <sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. <sup>3</sup> There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup> Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, <sup>5</sup> which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. <sup>6</sup> It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.

Enjoying the many assets of creation without the Creator would deprive me of the full celebration of creation. As a painting reflects the artist, so creation reflects our Creator (Romans 1:18-24). An artist can exist without a painting, but no painting exists without an artist. So it is with creation. No Creator, no creation! Random chance does not stand a chance of making anything, much less organizing it. Knowing the Creator as I enjoy his creation augments the joy of life. Solomon settled his perplexing search for meaning by remembering his Creator in all facets of life. He urged the young in particular to remember their Creator early and often: "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them'"(Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Jonah tried to forget about God because He did not like the assignment God gave him. When he got literally *over his head* in circumstances, memories of God returned to his conscience.

The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank

down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

(Jonah 2:5-7)

## **THE MAKING OF MEMORIES**

Like Jonah I find that adversity not only stirs up memories, it also makes memories! Arguably the brain is the most amazing of all organs in the human body. Memory is perhaps the most fascinating function of all brain activity.

I must admit that I have become more forgetful with the passing of time. I first noticed it several years ago when our youngest son announced, “Dad remembers the things that happened long ago, but can’t remember what just happened.” Unfortunately I can relate to the humorous moments experienced by the following individual:

A Harvard alumnus reports that he finds one of the most disturbing aspects of the passing years is his growing inability to recall vitally important information such as the Greek alphabet, the gross national product of Liberia, and where he put his slippers. This affliction becomes particularly pronounced whenever he goes upstairs to get something; half-way up he realizes he has no inkling as to what he was going upstairs to fetch, then he has to decide whether he should go back down stairs and try to remember what he needed, or to continue up and look around for something that wants bringing down. Unable to decide he resorts to sitting on the landing and sulking, only to discover that he has completely forgotten whether he was upstairs going down or downstairs going up.<sup>65</sup>

I have often wondered why it is so easy to remember some details and forget others. Psychologist and author Gary Collins provides an explanation in his book, *The Magnificent Mind*:

Whenever the sense organs are stimulated they send electrical charges into the brain and on down the neuron pathways. If we don't pay attention to these stimulations, they fizzle out, usually within a few seconds....

Some memories, however, do not fade. When short-term memories are mulled over, little growths appear at the synapses—those bridges between neurons. These growths remain as “long-term memories,” even after the initial stimulation is gone.

Someone has likened this to the influence of little streams of water running down a hillside. When the water stops, the little streams disappear. But if the water runs long enough, a small channel is cut out of the hillside and becomes a permanent memory of the water's original presence. In a similar way, long-term memories are created out of short-term memories if these keep flowing long enough.<sup>66</sup>

Repetition definitely enhances memory. Naturally I find it easier to remember the names of people I see on a regular basis versus people I see on occasion. As a pastor I found it difficult to remember the names of parishioners' relatives who visited only once or twice a year. If I want to remember a name, phone number, or formula, I must either use it often or intentionally repeat it until recall is a matter of reflex.

Another factor figures into recall. Memories stick when accompanied by emotions. For instance, I stand a better chance of remembering how to spell a word if I misspell it in public, like on a white board or overhead projector. While I do my best to avoid embarrassment, it has some redeeming value. I

much prefer creating memories linked to positive emotions. Right now the fall colors in Minnesota are at their peak. Yellow birch trees, deep burgundy oaks leaves, and flaming red-orange maples make for an unforgettable walk with family, friends and certainly the Creator Redeemer. I am apt to remember conversations and thoughts in such a setting. Collins explains why:

Whenever we are emotionally aroused, there are chemical changes in the body, including the brain. Sometimes these chemical reactions stimulate long-term memory...

It has been known for many years that people and animals learn and form long-term memories better when they are in stimulating and enriched environments. The stimulated brain has more of the chemicals that are needed to change the neurons and help us form new memories.<sup>67</sup>

## **REMEMBERING GOD AS CREATOR**

God engaged a means of grooving memories into minds which utilized both repetition and emotion. God in his foresight implemented repetition by establishing a day of the week for remembering his acts of creation and redemption. Week after week God's children gathered together turning short-term memories into long-term memories. It was so important the Father be remembered as the Mighty Creator that he established a day of the week for his children to open the photo album and view the many photos of his Creation. The Exodus reading of the Sabbath commandment reminded God's children that he was the Creator; and he established a healthy rhythm of work and rest:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.  
(Exodus 20:8-11)

The Sabbath was not mundane but a pleasant relief from productive work which otherwise became laborious. It was a memory maker enriched with affirming emotions. Week after week this day was a celebration established as a lasting covenant: “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant” (Exodus 31:16).

Sabbath celebrations were not as festive as the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles, which were celebrated annually (Deuteronomy 16:1,16). Weekly Sabbaths were quiet celebrations which reminded participants that they had permission and power to cease both business and busyness. Sabbaths celebrated internal and external rest, something that separated them from the unbelieving ranks.

The weekly celebration was a reminder that God was their Creator. It was a day God’s children could lay aside their own work and recognize the awesome work of the One who created all. It was to be a day for gathering around the photo album and remembering their Creator. As God had originally paused to rest and recognize the goodness of what he had created, his children were to follow his example. They were to celebrate the joy of being created by him and for him. They were to rest from their own work and recognize God’s handiwork.

God is not the only one seen working in this photo album. We see ourselves working with the abilities God has given us. We are to not only remember the works of God but to remember that it was God who created us with

skills and the ability to make a living. “But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today” (Deuteronomy 8:18).

With every stroke of a brush the painter is to remember that it is God who has given the ability to paint. With the close of every deal the salesperson is to remember that it is God who has given the ability to sell. With the review of every account the accountant is to remember that it is God who has given the ability to keep a ledger. With every opportunity to stand in front of a class the teacher is to remember that it is God who has given the ability to teach. With every swing of a hammer the carpenter is to remember that it is God who has given the ability to build homes.

### **SELF-FORGETFULNESS**

The great personal benefit of remembering God is self-forgetfulness. To remember God is to be released from consuming self-thoughts. When I remember God for a full moment I lose myself in him. Thinking *God* is such a big thought that it leaves little room for ruminating about me. To remember God is to be consumed with his majesty. It doesn't matter if my self-thoughts are positive or negative; it is a relief to be enamored with God and not myself.

I had the privilege of hearing John Piper make one of his radically true statements about the Gospel, “God came in Jesus Christ in order to liberate you from your love affair with a carnival image that makes you look great.” He went on to unveil the value of self-forgetfulness:

The highest moments of joy are not the times I have liked myself or liked what I have done, but when I have forgotten myself in delight of God in the service of other.



Self-forgetfulness is the most wonderful gift in the world, not self-esteem. Self-forgetfulness is the most wonderful gift in the world. Nobody goes to the Grand Canyon to increase his self-esteem. We go to the Grand Canyon because we might be given the gift for a few minutes to forget that we are big and feel the bigness of something outside of ourselves, which is just a little tiny image of God.<sup>68</sup>

## **REMEMBERING GOD AS REDEEMER**

There is much more in this family photo album called the Bible. God our Father is seen not only as a Mighty Creator; he is also pictured as a Merciful Redeemer (Isaiah 44:24). That means that as a Father he does not turn his back on his children when they get into trouble or go astray. As Redeemer he rescues his children, even if the redemption cost is very high requiring immense sacrifice.

Pages and pages of this photo album remind us that he is a Merciful Redeemer. The most prominent picture of redemption in the Old Testament is that of the exodus from Egypt. “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment’” (Exodus 6:6).

It was so important that the Father be remembered as the Merciful Redeemer that he set aside a day for all of his children to open the photo album and view the act of redemption at least once a week. Once again the Sabbath was designed to turn short-term memories into long-term memories through repetition and emotion.

Both accounts of the fourth commandment begin with the command, *Remember!* The Sabbath was a day to remember that God is the Mighty

Creator and Merciful Redeemer. The Exodus view of the fourth commandment emphasizes God as Creator. The Deuteronomy perspective on the Sabbath commandment reminded God's children that he was the Merciful Redeemer who delivered them from Egypt: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:15). The Israelites were commanded to set aside a day each week to remember the mighty and merciful works of God while resting from their labor.

The Sabbath is associated with the act of remembering. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of the two major themes of this family photo album. First, God knows that I am prone to forget if time is not set aside to recall and consider again and again that he made the universe and everything in it. Second, he cared enough to rescue me when I went astray. The Sabbath was a celebration of God's mighty acts of creation and his merciful acts of redemption. The photos of God's redemption, the release of his children from the Egyptian captivity, picture just the beginning of his redeeming acts. The photos of the Redeemer would become clearer as the cost of redemption became higher. The Father's one-of-a-kind Son would be the sacrificial price of redeeming his wayward children. These photos would be terrifying to ponder. The Prophet Isaiah described the content of these photos before they were taken:

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. <sup>14</sup> Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—<sup>15</sup> so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.  
(Isaiah 52:13-15)

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.  
(Isaiah 53:3-6)

The prophet made it clear that the Redeemer would suffer a gruesome death for guilty sinners. His act of redemption would be unforgettable. Yet those he died for would need reminding (Psalm 106:2, Hosea 13:6).

What the prophets revealed would come true as the pages of the photo album were turned. Photos of the Redeemer himself are viewed. Every dreadful word of the prophets would be confirmed by the lips of the Redeemer himself: “Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.<sup>32</sup> He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. <sup>33</sup> On the third day he will rise again’” (Luke 18:31-33).

As pages are turned to the unjust trial, the mocking, and flogging, parents hold their breath thinking, *perhaps we shouldn't let the children see the next pages. Young minds shouldn't be scared by vivid pictures of the shredded body of the flogged and crucified.* Breathless they refrain from intruding, remembering that each must look at the bleeding Redeemer until he or she is pierced by the reality that he was scarred for the sins of each child and adult. They may weep, and sleepless nights may come until they say, “My Redeemer and God” (Zechariah 12:10).

I clearly remember the day that I was pierced through with the realization that it was for me he was tormented to death. At age twelve I received Christ, having a simple understanding that Christ died to save me from my sins. At age eighteen I absorbed with emotional impact the reality that he, the Righteous, was pierced through for me, the guilty. I had to look at Christ's contorted body until I realized my sins were so deadly that it took such an agonizing death to forgive them. Hide their young faces as we may, the whole family, young and old alike, must look at these dreadful pages until they all say, "My Redeemer and God."

Thankfully that is not the last page of the photo album. While the crucifixion is to be remembered, it is not the last scene to be remembered. Christ rose again victorious over death, the grave, and our sin. His death and resurrection conquered our worst enemies and fears. The pictures of the empty tomb with angels surrounding it tell the story:

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup> 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words.

(Luke 24:1-8)

Christ's numerous appearances to his surprised followers conclude the Redeemer's first coming to earth. Every remembrance of his victory over

death would bring joy to first century believers: “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.  
<sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:30-32).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ deserved a new page in the photo album and a new day for remembering the most powerful demonstration of life since God breathed into man. The resurrection made such an impact on those who witnessed the risen Lord that a new day of the week was assigned for remembering his victory. Since it was the first day of the week that Jesus, the Redeemer, rose from the dead, the first day would be set aside for public worship of the risen Redeemer.

While there is no New Testament command equivalent to the Old Testament, “Keep the Sabbath,” there is significant evidence that Sunday became the day when Christians gathered in memory of the resurrection. The early church shifted from meeting on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week. Sunday ultimately became known as The Lord’s Day.

I have already noted that the resurrection took place on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Furthermore the Gospels make a point of mentioning it was on the first day of the week that Jesus later appeared to the disciples: “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’” (John 20:19).

Likewise, the book of Acts and First Corinthians make the point that the early church met together on the first day of the week: “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and,

because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight” (Acts 20:7). “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made” (1 Corinthians 16:2).

It is apparent that by the end of the first century AD when John penned Revelation that the first day of the week had become known as The Lord’s Day. “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet” (Revelation 1:10).

While I am persuaded that Sunday is the intended day for Christians to gather for worship, I have concluded that I should not be judgmental toward those who choose another day for public worship. I say this for the following reasons:

- There is no commandment in the New Testament to worship on Sunday.
- The fourth commandment is the only one of the ten that is not repeated as a commandment in the New Testament.
- Holy days are a shadow of things to come and not reason to judge one another. Paul addresses those with condescending attitudes regarding holy days in the following manner: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17).
- Sabbath, Sunday, or any other religious observance is by no means a way of gaining salvation or sanctification. It is, however, a means of remembering one’s relationship with Christ.
- Observance of the Sabbath or Sunday must never be put above Christ. Christ is the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:17), indicating that we become better law keepers as he, the Law Giver, lives within us.

The Sabbath, in concept, is a gift more than a commandment. Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

“The Sabbath was made for man” communicates that the Sabbath was a gift for weary man. The Sabbath was designed to refresh man as modeled by God: “It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:17 NASB).

Finally Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, is to be the focus of the Christian life. No practice is to take precedence over him: “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28).

### **THE DAY ENHANCES THE WAY OF LIFE**

Having retreated from being emphatic about the day for public worship, I remain passionate about remembering our Lord in all of his grace towards us. Without designating a day the Apostle Paul commands believers to “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal” (II Timothy 2:8-9).

It is not the day of the week that matters, but the way of life that counts. The day enhances the way of life! The day makes the way more attainable, providing a means of remembering the risen Creator Redeemer. My observation and experience convince me that a person needs to be intentional about recalling what is worth remembering. The word *intentionality* mandates setting aside a time and place to open the photo album of remembrances.

By the end of the three-step process one is inclined to experience great freedom in speaking with God. Burdens have been cast upon the Lord and

direction has been determined. One feels free to express themselves in the way God has gifted them. A pianist may go to the piano and an artist may go to his or her canvas. If time permits, a round of golf or a fishing trip may top off your praise experience.

In his book, *Working the Angles*, Eugene H. Peterson comments regarding the combination of playing and praying in Psalm ninety-two: “It is good to give thanks to Yahweh, to play in honor of your name, Most High” (Psalm 92:1; Jerusalem Bible).

What is it like to pray? To play? Puritan Sabbaths that eliminated play were a disaster. Secular Sabbaths that eliminate prayer are worse. Sabbath-keeping involves both playing and praying. The activities are alike enough to share the same day and different enough to require the other for a complementary wholeness.<sup>69</sup>

A stroll through a park may be desirable. Observing creation is my favorite activity. Andrew Murray’s thoughts on Psalm 104:27-28 have helped me understand the connection between observing creatures of nature and waiting on God: “These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things” (Psalm 104:27-28).

As we read this psalm, and learn to look upon all life in Nature as continually maintained by God Himself, waiting on God will be seen to be the very necessity of our being. As we think of the young lions and the ravens crying to Him, of the birds and the fishes and every insect waiting on Him, till He gives them their meat in due season, we shall see that it is the very nature and glory of God that He is a God who is to be waited on. Every thought of what Nature is, and what God is, will give new force to the call: “Wait thou only upon God.” What the universe and the animal creation does unconsciously, God’s people are to do



intelligently and voluntarily. Man is to be the interpreter of Nature. He is to prove that there is nothing nobler or more blessed in the exercise of our free will than to use it in waiting upon God.<sup>70</sup>

In similar fashion Jonathan Edwards “had an extraordinary love for the glory of God in nature.”<sup>71</sup> John Piper has researched Edwards for years and notes that, “The good effects of this love on his capacity to delight in the greatness of God and on the imagery of his preaching were tremendous.”<sup>72</sup>

Once as I rode into the woods for my health in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love and meek, gentle condescension...which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud.”<sup>73</sup>

I am persuaded that the best of life is spent outdoors. Men were not made to sit in cubicles and work for hours without windows. My observation is that women do a bit better with enclosures, but both men and women need to experience the great outdoors on a regular basis. That is why it is so important to enjoy a weekly Sabbath away from the common enclosures of work and home.

I have gone for long walks usually once a week for years in rural and suburban settings. When Minnesota snowfall prohibits walking, I crosscountry ski. Other times I have found that gazing outdoors through a window in a safe, distraction-free building or stationary car satisfies. There is plenty to ponder if we open the shades to see that we are surrounded by the glory of God.

The biggest challenge to walking through parks or gawking through windows is the assault of guilt. For years I fought the whispers from my workaholic background, *this is such a waste of time, how unproductive*. Only after years of noting improved productivity, better perspective, and power from on high, did I learn to rebuke the whisper.

My discovery of the benefits of contemplative walks parallels that of David Hansen's prayer walks:

Initially I didn't know the long-term benefits of taking these prayer walks, but now I do. Lest this sound all that "spiritual" an exercise, often I just see in a new way the light playing on a tree trunk, the colorful lichen on a boulder helping to break it down into soil over the years, inviting the natural world to help me empty myself so that God can fill me with his presence, his agenda for me. Often these are times when I feel so loved by him.<sup>74</sup>

What I once considered to be a waste of time has become a great source of strength. The following poem recorded in Tim Hansel's book, *When I Relax I Feel Guilty*, expresses my experience:

I wasted an hour one morning beside a mountain stream,  
I seized a cloud from the sky above and fashioned myself a dream,  
In the hush of the early twilight, far from the haunts of men,  
I wasted a summer evening, and fashioned my dream again.  
Wasted? Perhaps. Folks say so who never have walked with God,  
When lanes are purple with lilacs or yellow with goldenrod.  
But I have found strength for my labors in that one short evening hour.  
I have found joy and contentment; I have found peace and power.  
My dreaming has left me a treasure, a hope that is strong and true.  
From wasted hours I have built my life and found my faith anew.<sup>75</sup>

## **THE PARABLE OF THE JEWELER**

Once upon a time there lived a jeweler who handled diamonds on a daily basis. Some of them were splendid selections from his personal collection which he had purchased over the years. Others belonged to customers who came into his store to have them cleaned, appraised, and placed in settings. Occasionally a customer came in with a fine diamond worth thousands of dollars; but most of these diamonds were more valuable as keepsakes than monetary possessions. These keepsakes brought to mind precious memories of those who had given them as wedding bands, anniversaries, and other momentous occasions.

Day after day the jeweler examined diamonds under special light and a magnifying glass. None of these diamonds possessed perfection, including those in his personal collection. Then one day he came across a diamond that was perfect. No matter how many times he turned it in the light he could not find a single shadow or imperfection. It was flawless. He immediately fell in love with this diamond. He sold his entire collection in order to purchase that one diamond.

Day after day he continued to view diamonds as customers and merchants visited the store. But none of them presented a diamond comparable to the one he kept in his safe. It was matchless.

At least once a week when the store was closed and he was all alone he opened his safe and viewed the perfect diamond. He discovered great pleasure in holding the diamond in his hand and gently turning it in the light. That one diamond reminded him that the perfect exists. That one diamond made the monotony of viewing flawed diamonds worth it. That one diamond made him a better jeweler because it provided a standard by which he could measure all diamonds. Because of that single diamond the

jeweler kept his jewelry store open for years; it gave the jeweler future hope.

I am not a jeweler. Nor am I in the diamond business. The few diamonds Lois and I possess are keepsakes. As a minister, I am in the people business. Like it or not, I have to evaluate people for character, giftedness, leadership, and passion. I have yet to meet face to face a perfect person and just by reading this book you already know that I am not perfect. People disappoint us. I know that I have personally disappointed others. Working with people can be very discouraging. At times working with my own imperfections is more than I can bear.

There is one exception to all these imperfect people. As I read the gospel accounts of Jesus, the Old Testament prophecies and the New Testament epistles, I must conclude that Jesus Christ is that one perfect person who has set foot on planet earth. He is my perfect diamond. As I get alone with him, I am encouraged to know that the perfect does exist and I can work with all the other diamonds in the rough which will disappoint me. I take heart regarding my own flaws knowing that he is alive within me and refining me from the inside out. There will come a day when I am perfected along with all others throughout all time who bow to receive him (Philippians 1:6). No diamond has the ability to perfect other diamonds. Jesus Christ is able to perfect you and me as we place our faith, hope, and love in him.

Sabbath-rest is like that weekly visit to the safe, when for a prolonged time in the quietness of our hearts we review the diamond. Sabbath-rest reminds us that the perfect does exist. A prolonged look brings Christ to the foreground of our minds so that we can live and work with all the other diamonds in the rough.

How long has it been since you opened the safe and viewed the perfect diamond, Jesus Christ?

### **Prayer**

Jesus, my Lord, you are worthy of my total focus and devotion every day of the week. As you cleared a segment of your eternal existence to come to earth and die for me in demonstration of your love toward me, so I clear a segment of my week to remember that you are my Creator and Redeemer forevermore. This I do as a demonstration of my love for you. In Jesus' name and for his sake I pray, Amen.

### **Questions to Ponder**

1. What passages of Scripture has God fused into my memory bank which daily keeps him before me?
2. What memories are in my photo album of times with God?
3. Am I engaged in making lasting memories by entering Sabbath-rest repeatedly and with emotion?
4. What activities best help me remember and enjoy God?
5. When and where is my first or next Sabbath-rest for remembering my God going to take place?

**See Appendix, Part III (p. 271) for the exercise on remembering God.**

## **Chapter 10**

# **Sabbath-Rest, A Time to Look Forward**

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from