

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

his.

(Hebrews 4:9-10)

This last Sabbath Liturgy is to help train your restless heart heavenward, and it borrows from the logic of “how much more.” If this meal with friends and family is rich, how much more the banquet of the great King? If resting in this patch of sunlight is refreshing, how much more in the place where God and the Lamb shine brighter than any sun? If love making with my spouse is blissful, how much more what no eye has seen and no ear heard but which God prepares for those he loves?⁷⁶

(Mark Buchanan)

I have a glorious homesickness for heaven, a penetrating and piercing ache.

(Joni Eareckson Tada)

Like a fine diamond, Sabbath-rest deserves another look. Another turn under the light unleashes a new world of beauty. Thus far we have discovered that Sabbath-rest provides a time to release our concerns, review our lives, and remember our God. As we turn the diamond again another facet is unveiled. Sabbath-rest opens a window to the future. It has eschatological significance projecting our thoughts into the future. While our bodies rest from work, our minds review the hope of final rest from toil, when all consequences of the curse are removed from the believer. Hope is a priceless commodity.

HOPE VERSUS PROVISIONAL EXISTENCE

Ever since visiting the Holocaust Museum in Israel I have paid particular attention to the perspective of those who have endured horrific suffering. I would not go so far as to say that suffering is a complete test for truth.

Suffering, however, is a reliable refiner of truth, siphoning off the deceptions of pleasure.

Several years ago I became familiar with Viktor Frankl through his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who lived to tell about his experiences during World War II at Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp. He witnessed a marked difference between prisoners who maintained hope beyond a *provisional existence* within the camp and those who had abandoned hope:

A man who could not see the end of his “provisional existence” was not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life. He ceased living for the future, in contrast to a man in normal life. Therefore the whole structure on his inner life changed: signs of decay set in which we know from other areas of life. The unemployed worker, for example, is in a similar position. His existence has become provisional and in a certain sense he cannot live for the future or aim at a goal.⁷⁷

Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was lost.”⁷⁸

One does not have to face a holocaust to lose hope. I have a friend who serves as a chaplain in a nursing home. Every day he observes a distinct difference in the attitudes of residents. There are those who with the passing of years focus on their eternal home with God in heaven. They also have a growing interest in future generations and jump at every opportunity to encourage those who may follow them in their hope. In contrast there are those who live from one doctor appointment to the next. Their conversations center on their medications and who is going to pay for their prescription drugs. With the passing of time their focus becomes increasingly short-sighted. These residents no longer live from day to day, but meal to meal, even pill to pill. This is a provisional existence.

Provisional existence reminds me of a baseball player who hopes to get on base with a bunt. Not a bad idea if he is a good bunter, fast, and the infield is playing back. But this ballplayer is bunting because he has lost confidence in getting on base any other way. He no longer looks out over the fence to hit a homerun. Nor does he notice how the outfielders are playing that he might hit one in the gap for a double or possibly a triple. His focus is so short-sighted that he only notices the first fifty feet of infield grass. He has choked up on the bat so far that there is more wood behind his hands than in front of them. Provisional existence tends to choke up on life until there is nothing left for which to live.

In the comfort of my own home and country I can slither into a provisional existence. All I have to do is abandon a future perspective. All I have to do is start living from one vacation to the next, or one home improvement project to the next, or one oil change to the next. A life of prosperity and pleasure can become as void of future hope as a life of poverty. All I have to do is work or play focusing on temporal pleasures or pains. All I have to do is revert to former ways of thinking, or go with the flow of current trends of hopelessness. All I have to do is devalue the source of hope and set him aside. That is what the early Hebrew Christians did, making it necessary for God to set forth the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews is a book of hope written to a people who were losing confidence in their hope and did not know it. They underestimated the value of Christ and failed to cling to him as their hope. For this reason the author repeatedly confronted them with the supremacy of Christ as the ultimate source of hope.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he

made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.
(Hebrews 1:1-4)

But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.
(Hebrews 3:6)

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.
(Hebrews 6:11)

God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.
(Hebrews 6:18-19)

The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.
(Hebrews 7:18, 19)

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
(Hebrews 10:23)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

(Hebrews 13:8)

Hope was not a new concept to the Hebrew Christians. God has always given his people hope. God provided the nation of Israel with two assurances which allowed them to survive and thrive throughout history. By faith they were to enter the Promised Land and in faithfulness they were to enter the Sabbath. The Promised Land and the Sabbath provided rest on earth while reflecting eternal rest.

ETERNAL REST REFLECTED THROUGH THE PROMISED LAND

God portrays his offer of eternal hope through the Promised Land. The creation narrative in Genesis one clearly depicts God as the Creator of all. As Creator, God is also the Owner. The Psalmist David declares this very thought, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1). John Sailhamer states that the writer’s intention is to declare that the one who made the land is its rightful owner and that as owner he is justified in giving the land to Israel to possess:

What, then, does Genesis 1:1-2:4a tell us about the land? It tells us that God is its owner. He created and prepared the land, and He can give it to whomever He chooses (Jeremiah 27:5). In the ancient world, and in our own, the right to own land and grant it to others formed the basis of an ordered society. The author of the Pentateuch, then, is quick to point out that the promise of the land to Israel, made effective in the Sinai covenant, was in every way a right justly belonging to God.⁷⁹

In the fifth book of the Pentateuch, Moses makes clear what he has suggested in Genesis. Namely, that it is the Lord who has given the Promised Land to Israel. “The LORD your God has given you this land to take possession of it” (Deuteronomy 3:18).

OWNERSHIP AND REST

Owning property assures one of some degree of rest. Lois and I have been fortunate to own a home in most places throughout our journey together. As newlyweds we rented a one bedroom basement apartment from an elderly woman who had grown up in the home. The house was full of memories, especially of her parents who were deceased. For obvious reasons she was quite protective of the property. If our old car left oil spots on the driveway, we were sure to hear about it. She was sensitive to the volume dial on our stereo and scrutinized who visited the apartment. As soon as possible we found a way to own our own home.

During seminary we rented an apartment. There we quickly found ourselves to be noise sensitive. We could not control the noises of those in apartments on each side and above us. It was not so much the loud music that annoyed us as the fighting that alarmed us. We found it necessary to guard our two-year-old son from older children on the playground. When our rent was increased by twenty percent, owning a home began to look really attractive.

For three years our family of four lived in a church parsonage. It was a beautiful setting surrounded by tall pines and a golden meadow, located just a few miles away from several clear blue lakes. The parsonage was a nice enough home. The only problem was that it shared a driveway with the church facility. We were witnesses to everything that went on at church. Like it or not we couldn't get away from the hustle and bustle of church life. Furthermore, the key to the church door hung on a nail near the front doorbell of the parsonage. If church members didn't have a key, they came to our door to get one; and if the key was missing, they were likely to ring our doorbell asking for our keys. The church playground equipment was on the parsonage lawn, making it convenient for children to come to our home to use the bathroom. Adults also showed up on our

step wanting impromptu advice or counseling at their convenience. Try as we did to graciously establish boundaries, it was hard to relax at home. While we cherish many memories of that congregation, parsonage living is not one of them.

All of these rental homes were adequate. They just lacked one thing, a sense of rest. Ownership has its problems as well; if you own it, you fix it! However, owning gives one a sense of boundaries and greater control over what takes place on the premises. Rest to a greater degree comes with ownership. Ownership of land and the rest that accompanies it compels a nomadic people all the more to enter the Promised Land. The Promised Land signified a place where God and man were united in rest.

From the day God called Abraham from his homeland until Joshua crossed the Jordan River, Israel wandered from place to place and experienced frequent wars with those who did not like squatting nations. While Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob spent time in the Promised Land, the land was occupied by the Canaanites during their lifetimes. Famine drove the patriarchs out of the land, causing each to spend lengthy periods of time in Egypt. Egypt was anything but a resting place for the generations of Hebrews who endured four hundred years of slavery. Occupation of the Promised Land would have promptly followed the Exodus from Egypt had it not been for a failure to believe the God who promised the land. Thus an entire generation wandered outside of the land without the rest God intended for them to enjoy.

THE LAND OF REST

Jacob's request is the first time the Promised Land is associated with rest, "But when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried" (Genesis 47:30). Later the land offered rest from war and enemies: "But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD

your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety” (Deuteronomy 12:10; 25:19).

As Joshua begins the conquest, the Promised Land is clearly associated with the rest given Israel by the hand of God:

“Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: ‘The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.’ Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise.”

(Joshua 1:13-15)

So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

(Joshua 11:23)

The Promised Land was not only a resting place for man; it was a place of rest for God, not that God ever gets weary and needs rest like man (Isaiah 40:28). The Promised Land signified a place where God and man were united in rest. A.T. Lincoln explains:

In Deuteronomy, since Israel was to find rest from all its enemies in the land of its inheritance (12:10; 25:19 cf. also 3:20), the land itself can be called their resting place (12:9). In addition we find that God Himself

has His resting place in the land, and especially in His sanctuary at Zion. This is particularly clear in Ps. 132:7-8, 13-14; Is. 66:1. In other places these two motifs are combined so that the resting place of the people is also the resting place of God.

(Deuteronomy 12:9,11; I Chronicles 23:25; II Chronicles 6:41)⁸⁰

THE LAND OF REST ENTERED BY FAITH

Inasmuch as the Promised Land represents a place of rest, the land portrays God's invitation for man to enter into his rest. In Psalm ninety-five the Psalmist refers to the generation of Israel that wandered in the desert outside the Promised Land for forty years as those who will not enter God's rest. The root cause of the lockout was failure to believe in God's goodness and greatness after witnessing both divine characteristics throughout the exodus from Egypt.

The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?"

(Numbers 14:11)

Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, ⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. ¹⁰ For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." ¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

(Psalm 95:7-11)

Like heaven, the eternal resting place, the Promised Land was a resting place for those who believed in the One True God. James M. Boice speaks of the land as a symbol of heaven: "When God led Israel out of Egypt into

the wilderness in their days of wandering He had a goal to bring them into the Promised Land. It was to be a place where they would find rest from their wanderings. It was a symbol of heaven.”⁸¹

Consistent with Psalm ninety-five the writer to the Hebrews states that the heavenly Promised Land is entered by faith. He is quick to point out that the absence of belief was the reason the Israelites were forbidden to enter the earthly Promised Land: “And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief”(Hebrews 3:18-19).

He goes on to emphatically state that the faith which was needed to enter the Promised Land is also necessary to enter his rest: “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Hebrew 4:1-2).

Lincoln observes that the phrase, *enter that rest* (Hebrews 4:3) is to be taken as a true present and not simply viewed as having future force: “The Greek text means neither that they are certain to enter, nor that they will enter, but that they are already in the process of entering.”⁸²

Faith in the Provider brings the benefits of heavenly rest to believers before they reach heaven. This same writer assures his readers that the land was not the final intended rest, since Joshua, who led the people into the land, spoke “about another day” (Hebrews 4:8, Joshua 22:4).

The author skillfully weaves together the provision of rest through the Promised Land with the concept of Sabbath-rest:

ETERNAL REST REFLECTED THROUGH THE SABBATH

Ownership of land provides a partial solution to the problem of restlessness. As a property owner I may actually rest less than if I am a visitor, renter, or squatter on someone else's land. Without designated times for rest, caring, repairing, storing, and cleaning what I own becomes a restless proposition.

Owning land without knowing how to rest in the land is a recipe for fatigue. For that reason I believe God presented time as a provision for rest before presenting space as a provision for rest. God demonstrated the practice of rest before making any reference to a land of rest (Genesis 2:1-3).

Rest as time has provided greater hope of rest for the multitudes who never become land owners. Rest as time proved to be more durable and versatile than rest as space throughout Hebrew history. Abraham Heschel makes this very point regarding the Sabbath in Jewish history: "The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals; and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn."⁸³

Time has been a constant companion in the lives of nomadic peoples for centuries and modern man for decades. The businessman who has learned the value of rest can enjoy an hour while waiting for his next flight at an airport. A housewife can close the door on napping children and absorb moments of rest. Sabbath-rest reminds us to rest in God's finished work of salvation.

In an attempt to rekindle future hope, the author of Hebrews now reaches back in history to the creation narrative and pulls out the oldest concept of rest, the Sabbath. At the completion of creation God modeled rest on the seventh day.

For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.” ⁵ And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.” ⁶ It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. ⁷ Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.
(Hebrews 4:4-10)

Sabbath-rest, as used in verses nine and ten, addresses the most significant aspect of rest—salvation. Sabbath-rest delivers us from the notion that we can work off the penalty of sin or work for the rewards of eternal life. Sabbath-rest reminds us to rest in God’s finished work of salvation. While the greatest benefits of salvation will be enjoyed in heaven for eternity, resting in the gift of God’s finished work of salvation is enjoyed by believers while they are living on earth.

The weekly practice of Sabbath-rest signifies the believer has ceased striving for salvation and has entered into God’s rest. It is a reminder to the believer and a witness to the unbeliever of God’s offer of salvation. The entire context of Hebrews begs us to conclude that the rest is salvation through Christ, “the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrew 12:2). Heaven is, therefore, the intended place of rest suggested through the Sabbath and portrayed through the land. Lincoln observes correctly that the rest which the writer of Hebrews refers to is associated with the heavenly Promised Land:

It seems very likely that being acquainted with such a tradition the writer of Hebrews views “rest” as an eschatological resting place with associations with the heavenly promised land, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the heavenly sanctuary. This view is confirmed by the frequency of these items in Hebrews (cf. the heavenly sanctuary 6:19-20; 8:2; 9:11, 23-24; 10:19, the city that is to come, the heavenly Jerusalem 11:10,16; 12:22; 13:14, and the heavenly promised land 11:14ff.)⁸⁴

“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (verse nine) indicates the Sabbath is not merely a thing of the past but has future significance for those who believe. Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer suggests the writer of the Pentateuch has included the initial statement of God’s rest to indicate there is a future rest for the believer:

If, as we have earlier suggested, the author’s intention was to point to the past as a picture of the future, then the emphasis on God’s “rest” forms an important part of the author’s understanding of what lies in the future. At important points along the way, the author will return to the theme of God’s “rest” as a reminder of what yet lies ahead (Hebrews 2:15; 5:29; 8:4; Exodus 20:11; Deuteronomy 5:14; 12:10; 25; 29). Later biblical writers continued to see a parallel between God’s “rest” in creation and the future “rest” that awaits the faithful.
(Psalm 95:11; Hebrews 3:11)⁸⁵

Sailhamer is not alone in stating the past is a picture of the future. Commentators Keil and Delitzsch likewise note that the Sabbath has a future aspect:

To this rest the resting of God points forward; and to this rest, this divine Sabbath (Hebrews 4:9), shall the whole world, especially man, the head of the earthly creation, eventually come...In connection with Hebrews 4, some of the fathers have called attention to the fact, that the account of

the seventh day is not summed up, like the others, with the formula “evening was and morning was.”⁸⁶

The Sabbath in time and the land in space were like pieces of heaven. They were samples to keep the people of God looking forward and seeking for the Sabbath-rest of heaven. God served a portion of the week and a portion of land as appetizers to arouse a craving for the rest that does not end. His intent reaches beyond mere satisfaction of human temporal needs to communicate that there is more to be found where rest in time and rest in space came from. Ben Patterson illustrates the focus which the Sabbath specifically provides: “The Sabbath is therefore a window to the future. It points to the time when God will make sense of this mess. It tells us that there is more than just the inexorable march of time. It reminds us that there is meaning to our lives beyond the rat race.”⁸⁷

SABBATH-REST BOLSTERS LONG RANGE HOPE

Sabbath-rest provides a weekly opportunity to refresh my long-range hopes. Short-range hopes pertain to my earthly existence such as: *I hope I don't ever have cancer, a stroke, or a heart attack, at least not until I am very old. I also hope that I never have a serious car accident, or have to file for bankruptcy, nor do I want any of these hardships to happen to my children, grandchildren or friends.* Long-range hopes pertain to eternity and my relationship to God. Long-range hope makes any short-term disappointments tolerable.

I have met believers who in my mind were *so heavenly minded they are no earthly good*. However, I have met more believers who are *so earthly minded they are no heavenly good*. The former specialize in spiritual clichés, but rarely engage in projects requiring tenacity. The latter devote themselves to tasks tenaciously until they work themselves into a tizzy. They typically become agitated with those who refuse to join them in the

tasks at hand. They are also prone to bury themselves in responsibilities until depressed. Yet other earthly minded people are so preoccupied with this world's goods and pleasures that heaven has no place in their leisure driven minds.

Obviously balance is needed. God wants me and you to be responsible on earth while headed for heaven (I Thessalonians 4:11; II Thessalonians 3:6-8). He wants us to be heavenly minded so that we radiate with hope despite earthly troubles. He wants us to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks us about our hope (I Peter 3:15).

While the Christian life benefits the believer in numerous ways, the eternal benefits far outweigh the earthly benefits. The Apostle Paul made this clear on a number of occasions: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (I Corinthians 15:19).

I feel that an emphasis on eternity is greatly needed in this age of immediate gratification. My hope is to be a long-range hope, so that I do not despair when materialism disappoints or life in this body diminishes.

Growing old is an American obsession. While impoverished countries despair over food shortages, contaminated water, and civil wars, Americans dread the aging process. This phobia starts somewhere around age thirty. Most athletes recognize that they have physically passed their prime and must resort to experience, intelligence, and hard work if they are going to compete with emerging young athletes.

Graying hair, hair loss, wrinkles, muscle loss, slowing of body and mind begin by age forty. Unless extra measures that tone up or cover up are applied, aging is obvious by age fifty. Slowing the aging process through diets, workout routines, various applications to hair and skin employ many

people. Retarding the aging process is big business. Try as we may to overcome aging, it is a losing battle. Eventually time wins over the best of efforts and products. The best that friends and physicians can tell us is that we are well preserved for our age. For the next thirty years a no-win battle is fought and lost. Premature death is the alternative.

When I finally admitted that it was a losing battle, I could laugh about the aging process. Some of the funniest jokes are about growing old. For instance I just received the following in an email:

GREAT TRUTHS ABOUT GROWING OLD

- Forget the health food; I need all the preservatives I can get.
- When you fall down, you wonder what else you can do while you're down there.
- You're getting old when you get the same sensation from a rocking chair that you once got from a roller coaster.
- Time may be a great healer, but it's a lousy beautician.
- Wisdom comes with age, but sometimes age comes alone.

Better to laugh than cry. Laughter about old age can be an attempt to deny old age. It can also be a response of hope. People of hope don't need to deny anything. They can age with honor! The Psalmist declares the righteous as fruitful in old age:

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

(Psalm 92:12-15)

The Apostle Paul spoke of the changing of the garb, “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (I Corinthians 15:54). Believers have a much greater hope than the reversal of the aging process or returning to youth. The bodies of those who are in Christ will be changed into imperishable immortal bodies, ageless bodies, never to age again. That is what I ought to think about as I face new limitation with the passing of time. As I think about the immortal man I am able to laugh and even mock my fading flesh. Paul goes on to actually mock death:

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. Then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
(I Corinthians 15:53-55)

I believe God plants some believers in our midst who have a profound hunger for heaven. Every day they entertain thoughts of heaven and crave the fruition of their faith. Most of these people have experienced losses that generate their passion for heaven. Some have lost loved ones. My perception is the death of children creates the most acute awareness of heaven. Pastor Erwin Lutzer of Moody Church in Chicago cites an illustration from James Vernon McGee that has helped me understand God’s purpose in permitting the death of small children:

...when a shepherd seeks to lead his sheep to better grass up the winding, thorny mountain paths, he often finds that the sheep will not follow him. They fear the unknown ridges and the steep rocks. The shepherd will then reach into the flock and take a little lamb on one arm and another on his other arm. Then he starts up the precipitous pathway. Soon the two

mother sheep begin to follow, and afterward the entire flock. Thus they ascend the tortuous path to greener pastures.

So it is with the Good Shepherd. Sometimes He reaches into the flock and takes a lamb to Himself. He uses the experience to lead His people, to lift them to new heights of commitment as they follow the little lamb all the way home.⁸⁸

Faithful Christians who live with severe handicaps serve as God's instruments of future hope. While they may be physically challenged, they encourage us to look beyond earthly delights and develop an appetite for heaven. Since her diving accident in 1967, which left her paralyzed from the shoulders down, Joni Eareckson Tada, has challenged millions with her hunger for heaven:

I have a glorious homesickness for heaven, a penetrating and piercing ache. I'm a stranger in a strange land. A displaced person with a fervent and passionate pain that is, oh, so satisfying. The groans are a blessing. What a sweetness to feel homesick for heaven for, "a longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul" (Proverbs 13:19).

Father, I miss you. I miss a closeness to you that is tangible. I long for the righteousness of heaven. Focus my eyes of faith. Bring heaven forward into a vivid reality in my heart and mind that will spur me on to righteous living now.⁸⁹

I have found that a weekly Sabbath-rest is one of the best remedies for a provisional existence. Before I started the practice I despaired in the midst of what I perceived to be one hopeless situation after another. I found myself living from one Sunday sermon to the next, one board meeting to the next, and one pastoral visit to the next. As my eternal perspective diminished, I felt like life was being drained from me.

Today Sabbath-rest provides a means to go to God with my situations. Sabbath-rest opens the windows of future hope. This rest allows me to live light and laugh much. Resting in God's completed salvation and continual care feeds a robust hope! "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5).

Prayer

Dear Lord, I enter a weekly Sabbath-rest as a reminder of the eternal rest you have purchased for me and all who rest in your work of eternal salvation. In Jesus' name and for his sake I pray, Amen.

Questions to Ponder

1. Have I been living a provisional existence? If so, how?
2. Has owning property been a hassle or a restful experience?
3. What is my favorite Scripture verse pertaining to heaven?
4. When was the last time I seriously thought about heaven?
5. When will I contemplate heaven next?

See Appendix, Part IV (page 272), has been provided as an exercise for looking forward.

Sabbath-Rest, A Time to Look Forward

Part 3

Pleasing God at Rest, at Work and Life

HOW CAN I REST WHILE ENGAGED IN WORK AND LIFE?

When I speak of rest at work, by no means do I suggest that we sackout, slough-off, or catch-up on much needed sleep while on the job. By rest at work I mean being at ease on the job because we have discovered the combination which unlocks rest for our lives.

Sabbath keeping is a means of establishing a restful center around which all of the demands of life revolve. If I cannot be a restful person apart from the stresses of the job, it is highly unlikely that I will be at rest on the job. These final five chapters address topics related to life and work. They suggest answers to the basic question, how can I be at rest while engaged in work and the responsibilities of life?

Chapter eleven recommends that we all live and work lighter by coming to Jesus and learning from him. Chapter twelve encourages us to be as intentional about our private times with God as we are with our public times on the job and life in general. Chapter thirteen provides a guide to satisfaction, security, and success beyond what any job can provide. Chapter fourteen addresses our need to forgive as forgiven. Unforgiveness creates restlessness in the workplace and beyond. Chapter fifteen, the finale, identifies the essential role rest plays in spiritual revival, something needed at every workplace and in every community.

May God be pleased as we learn the art of being at rest at work and life.

Appendix B

Chapter 11

Taking a Load Off

As God Intends