

CHAPTER TWO

Rest, the Pleasure of His Trust

I Please God by Trusting Him

Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days.

(Exodus 16:29)

How are we going to get the life that has no lust, no self interest, no sensitiveness to pokes, the love that is not provoked, that thinketh no evil that is always kind? The only way is by allowing not a bit of the old life to be left; but only simple perfect trust in God, such trust that we no longer want God's blessings, but only want Himself.¹¹

(Oswald Chambers)

A St. Cloud businessman known for his integrity, energy, and generosity has died.¹²

So read the headlines the day after Dad died. He spent fifty years building a business and developing an honorable name in the community. He did it largely with trust. He trusted people and enhanced their trust in one another. Family, friends, employees, even competitors came to show their respect at his memorial visitation and funeral. Many who once worked for him came to honor him, including some whom he had fired.

I frequently meet people who knew Dad and share fond memories of times with him. I hear them say, "Your Dad gave me my start in business. Without him I don't know where I would be today." His trust won him many friends.

Trust also has its heartaches. Dad trusted to a fault at times. There were those who proved themselves untrustworthy by taking advantage of his trust for their own personal gains. I saw the pain in his eyes more than once after a trusted business partner had selfishly siphoned off money and walked away from a partnership. He often hired people who were hard-up for work; some of them became long-term loyal employees. Others had to be released because of dishonesty or theft. All things considered I don't think Dad would have changed a thing. His trust gave people opportunities to grow and reach their potential.

Dad received great pleasure when people made good on his trust and developed into trustworthy people in life and business. He also received many blows from those who abused it, but he never quit trusting.

I have come to realize that God takes great pleasure when I make good on his trust. All I have is entrusted to me by God, even the ability to earn a living is a gift from God (Deuteronomy 8:18). Trust is the big idea behind many Bible texts. Exodus sixteen is a prime example. The fledging nation of Israel is forced to trust God for their daily provision of food, which came in the form of bread known as manna:

Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. ²² On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. ²³ He said to them, “This is what the LORD commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’” ²⁴ So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. ²⁵ “Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. ²⁶ Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath there will not be any.” ²⁷ Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. ²⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? ²⁹ Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

(Exodus 16:21-30)

The whole wilderness excursion was an exercise in trust. Thus far in the journey they had made pretty good on the Lord's trust. They had walked right out of Egypt at his command. They had marched through the Red Sea at his command with walls of water on each side and Egyptian chariots in revengeful pursuit behind them. This nation of slaves was now free and homeward bound. They could enjoy parading to the Promised Land; unless they failed to trust God for routine provisions such as food.

Whenever I travel I don't get very far before I begin to think about food: *Where am I going to eat? What's next on the menu? I hope it's not more gas station food.* I find it easy to compare one meal to the next and allow food to occupy my thoughts and conversations. I also have plenty of company when it comes to such conversations. In fact I would have fit right in with the Israelites in the wilderness. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:2-3).

Food is not the first thing I think about when it comes to trusting God. Prayer at meals is such an easy ritual, hardly requiring any thought. So I say to myself, *I will save my trust for bigger things.* But when I don't get what I have in mind I find myself groaning inside. When the disappointment occurs for a series of meals, I easily voice my opinion. So it was with the Israelites who had trusted God when their backs were against the pyramids or rushing chariots; they showed their lack of trust by complaining about food. They would soon learn that the one who had freed them would also feed them as their provider: "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions."

From their response I don't think manna was the Israelites' first choice. I know it wouldn't have been mine. The lesson is the same for me as it was for the Israelites. I am to trust God not only for the provision of food, but the kind of food he provides. He purposely gave them manna to teach them that life is not about food, but trusting what God says. "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Making good on God's trust also pertains to following instructions. Like the Israelites I find it so natural to listen selectively to instructions and see how far I get without the details I left behind. The result is usually the same; I have to go back and follow the instructions step by step before I get the desired results.

For many years I heard it said, *experience is the best teacher*, and figured that experience must be the preferred method of learning. Then one day I heard someone add the phrase, *unless you can learn any other way*. If I don't follow instructions, I am destined to learn by experience, which is often painful and costly.

The Israelites were prone to figure out their own way of putting life together rather than trust the instruction manual God had provided. Each day they were to gather enough for that day and no more, because what they did not eat would spoil by the following day. They were literally to trust God for their daily bread; not too hard an assignment being that their God was God Almighty who defeated the undefeated Egyptians. The former slaves knew God was powerful, but was he really good? Will he really lead us through the wilderness? Or will he be like the father who forgot to pick up his child at school after a special event? As trustworthy as God was some did not trust him for the next day's bread and hoarded it for themselves to ensure they would not go hungry the following day. "Then Moses said to them, 'No one is to keep any of it until morning.' However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them" (Exodus 16:19-20).

By the next day maggots had spoiled the picnic, and the leftovers reeked. No doubt the smell seeped from tent to tent, identifying those who chose to hoard and not trust. Food was not the only thing that spoiled; their relationship with Moses was spoiled and their relationship with the Lord was in jeopardy. Learning by experience was costly.

Another issue of trust had to do with the Sabbath. Whatever religious routines were engrained in the descendents of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they were pretty well washed out during the four hundred year imposition of pagan Egyptian culture. As slaves it was unlikely that they had any regular day off, especially in the years of the recent pharaohs. Could they handle a break in their monotonous routine of gathering for themselves?

The Sabbath would come with a miracle of its own. On the sixth day the people could gather all they needed for the seventh day, and it would not

spoil. The *Shabbat* was more than a day off; it was separate or holy. Literally the Shabbat was a day to *cease* their gathering and labor in general.

Could they handle a day of rest? Would they devote themselves to the pleasure of their deliverer and provider? After all, the entire Sabbath was to be a holy Sabbath to the LORD. This loaded phrase communicated ownership and pleasure. The Sabbath was first and foremost an offering of trust to the Lord designed for his pleasure. Finally, could those who get weary accept a gift of rest from the one who does not get weary? That which pleased God was to be a relief and pressure release to all who trusted him. "Bear in mind that the LORD has *given* you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out. So the people rested on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:29-30).

Yes, the Lord was pleased with those who were able to break with the patterns of their previous existence and trust God to provide according to his word. But not every one trusted God's provision; not everyone accepted the gift of rest; not everyone gave God pleasure one day a week. "Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?'" (Exodus 16:27-28).

Obviously God was not pleased with their compulsive gathering as they failed to cease doing on the Sabbath what they were told to do every other day.

GATHERING

Gathering or making a living, as it is called today, is rewarded by free progressive societies. Traditionally, America is a privileged society which champions the resourcefulness of hard workers who apply themselves wholeheartedly to their endeavors. Their ingenuity and energy create opportunities, including employment for others. Such individuals are rewarded by communities for gathering much. God is not opposed to gathering; he is the one who told the Israelites to do so in the first place. God rewards gathering as long as it is accompanied by the will power to cease, demonstrating trust in God as the ultimate provider.

I have wondered at times, *where does gathering go wrong?* The drive to gather more than I need is typically driven by one of two dynamics. The most obvious is greed, a resolve to possess more than I need simply out of selfishness. Being the *best* gatherer can become an obsession fueled by

egoistical motives. Greed may lead to egotism if egotism isn't already the root cause of greed.

The other dynamic for gathering more than I need is driven by fear—fear that I may not have enough someday. Those who suffered through the Great Depression will never forget what it was like to *go without*. The plague of going to bed hungry etched itself into minds that were determined to never lack again. No matter what their earnings were throughout adulthood, they worked like they were dirt poor, because that *gut* feeling never left them. The 1930s they spoke of produced a large percentage of workaholics, people who were compulsive workers and put their work before health and loving relationships. Love was expressed as the gathering of a masterful provider. Children of the Great Depression generally became good providers but mediocre parents; many were materially rich and relationally poor.

It is interesting to listen to the comments that outsiders, particularly those from Third World countries, make on the religion they observe in North America. What they notice mostly is the greed, the silliness, the narcissism.

(Eugene Peterson)

Once again it must be emphasized that gathering is good and ambition admirable. But I must ask myself, *when is enough, enough? Where rests my power to cease gathering?* In a day of rocket fuel and turbo engines I need to be as interested in stopping power as starting power. What is around the wheels should grip my attention as much as what is under the hood. I am personally thankful that brake technology has improved along with engine technology. At least once every winter I find myself praising God for antilock brakes. A generation that values *high impact* must bear in mind that *impact* is not a positive word without brakes.

The Sabbath was a day to test brakes. Every seventh day was a test to see if gathering was in control mode or on *run away*. It was a day to evaluate whether greed had taken root in the past week. Likewise every seventh day was set aside to read the fear gauge. It was time to ask a familiar question, “*Do I rely solely on my abilities to gather, or do I solemnly trust the God who gave me the ability to gather?*” (Deuteronomy. 8:18). Trust is the ingredient that is commonly lacking when I cannot stop gathering. The Sabbath is about trust. Those who have a hard time ceasing their work and resting

sufficiently for even one day a week lack trust. Trust is what working brakes are made of.

Hebrews chapter eleven has been called God's Hall of Faith. The chapter opens with a definition of faith and goes on to list individuals who lived by it. All these people had one thing in common—faith. Nothing was more essential to their connection with God Almighty. Hebrews 11:6 states why faith is so valuable: “And without faith it is impossible to please God...” There is simply no substitute for pleasing God. Trust is simply another word for faith. Like faith, trust gives God pleasure.

THE SABBATH PRINCIPLE

The Sabbath principle asserts: *If I set aside (make holy) one day out of seven for God's pleasure, He will make six days of work as good as seven.* In fact I will be better off, healthier, stronger, and smarter having ceased my work and rested that one day. It is a win/win offer. The Sabbath principle awards God the pleasure he deserves while drenching me in his goodness. There is only one condition—trust.

Some may argue, “The Sabbath has little or nothing to do with pleasing God today. It was for the Hebrew sojourners and Jews today who choose to obey its complicated rules.” On the contrary both the Sabbath principle and the journeys of those who crossed the desert thirty-five hundred years ago have powerful implications for people today, especially Christians.

The Apostle Paul bridged the divide between the Old and New Testaments by urging the Corinthian church to learn from the errors of the very people spoken of in Exodus 16: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (I Corinthians 10:11). Furthermore Paul quoted Exodus 16:18 in II Corinthians 8:15, “As it is written: ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.’” In both texts the recipients of the inspired Word of God were urged to trust God to provide and not hoard, as if God could not be trusted to provide as he had promised. The issue of trust is central to the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord Jesus challenges us to trust our Heavenly Father like the simple creatures of his creation:

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to

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his life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

(Matthew 6:26-34)

If the Sabbath principle is truly a principle and not a temporary solution to desert wanderers, it should be transferable to other peoples, times, and cultures. I have often asked myself, *Does the Sabbath principle have any relevance for other times and places? Is the trust required of the Israelites who ate unspoiled manna on the seventh day to be emulated by other generations?* Marva Dawn in *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* emphasizes the life-related truth of the Sabbath principle with this true story:

The story is told of a wagon train on its way from St. Louis to Oregon. Its members were devout Christians, so the whole group observed the habit of stopping for the Sabbath day. Winter was approaching quickly, however, and some among the group began to panic in fear that they wouldn't reach their destination before the heavy snows. Consequently, several members proposed to the rest of the group that they should quit their practice of stopping for the Sabbath and continue driving onward seven days a week.

This proposal triggered a lot of contention in the community, so finally it was suggested that the wagon train should split into two groups—those who wanted to observe the Sabbath and those who preferred to travel on that day. The proposal was accepted, and both groups set out and traveled together until the next Sabbath day, when one group continued while the other remained at rest.

Guess which group got to Oregon first. You're right. The one who kept the Sabbath reached their destination first. Both the people and the horses were so rested by their Sabbath observance that they could travel much more vigorously and effectively the other six days of the week. God honors those who honor his commands.¹³

For God's Sake, Rest!

Kirk owns a marina in northern Minnesota, where summer comes late and winter comes early. It is alleged there are only two seasons where he lives—*winter and rough sledding*. His business is open April through November and that is stretching it. Weekend business trickles in between April and June as well as September through November. June through August sales soar as customers buy everything from boats to minnow buckets. If there is a business that cannot afford to close one day during the summer, it is Kirk's Land O Lakes Marine. Ill-advised as it may seem, Kirk closes his store on Sundays, even during those busy summer months. His store is closed on one of the two busiest days of the week because Kirk believes in the Sabbath principle: *Set aside one day out of seven for God's pleasure, and He will make six days of work as good as seven*. His trust pays off year after year as Kirk has a solid business and many loyal customers.

Howard Dayton in *Money Matters* makes the point that rest is largely a trust issue that is as applicable to our lives as it was to the first recipients of the fourth commandment:

I believe this Old Testament principle of resting one day out of seven has application for us today. This has been difficult for me, particularly in times of “plowing or harvesting” when a project deadline is approaching or I am under financial pressure.

Why? Rest is often an issue of faith. Is the Lord able to make our six days of work more productive than seven days? Yes! The Lord instituted this weekly rest for our physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Our example in this is Christ. Even through the time appointed for his public ministry was only a few years, He still took time to be alone with the Father. He made his relationship with the Father a priority, and so should we.¹⁴

GOD'S MATH

Ceasing to gather is a struggle I face every week. To stop working when there is so much to do appears to be foolish and the lazy way. Only after failing to trust God on numerous occasions have I learned God's math: when it comes to work, six is more than seven.

After years of resistance I came to trust God's math. At first it was out of fatigue that I learned to rest. Then I discovered that I actually got more done after times of rest. Rest became a productive thing. Time was actually saved when I ceased to work and rested.

On one occasion I was leading a group of church leaders through a Sabbath-rest experience, which I will introduce later in this book. After several hours of divorcing ourselves from our work, we came together for a debriefing. One very busy associate pastor, whose senior was on sabbatical, raised his voice in astonishment, “We just saved ourselves a lot of time.” He was referring to the clarity of thought and direction received as he rested from work and trusted in God. Not only renewed energy, but new insights for solving problems are granted to those who rest from their labors.

Trust in God expressed as rest allows me to ponder what is really important. A long-range, even eternal, perspective is a by-product of rest. Like climbing to the top of a tower, I get my bearings and redirect my erroneous energies. I am often reminded during times of restful solitude that relationships are more important than completing mundane tasks or arranging agendas for *the right outcome*. On occasion after a time of rest, I have walked away with an outline for a whole sermon series. It was like a reward for trusting and not worrying or working.

There is something mysterious about the Sabbath; something supernatural beyond the physical, mental, and emotional impact of rest. Does God show up when his people rest? Various attempts have been made to explain away the manna as a natural phenomenon—like “honeydew excretion of two types of insects or aphids that live on the numerous tamarisk trees in the region” or “lichen.”¹⁵ Besides being less than appetizing, these explanations are rather porous. Walter Kaiser identifies the numerous problems with explanations that rule out the supernatural occurrence of the manna and agrees that something miraculous has taken place:

Both of the above suggestions run into trouble: Bodenheimer could not account for the stinking decay or the melting (he promptly relegated these textual features to a misinterpretation or an interpolation in the text). Furthermore, the manna continued to provide food for the Israelites for almost forty years, not just for the three to six weeks in July and August as Bodenheimer’s suggestion would necessitate. It was also produced in quantities far exceeding what either of these methods could possibly deliver. Thus we agree with Rawlinson (2:40): Manna “must be regarded as a peculiar substance, miraculously created for a special purpose, but similar in certain respects to certain known substances which are still produced in the Sinai region.”¹⁶

No explanation that rules out supernatural involvement satisfies reader curiosity. Furthermore there is no natural explanation for manna not

rotting on the Sabbath, when it rotted every other day of the week that it was held over. The Sabbath was a divine gift saturated with the supernatural. *Yes, God shows up when I rest in honor on him!* Therefore, there should be no embarrassment concerning a supernatural boost for practicing the Sabbath principle today. We should not be surprised when God honors and empowers those who willingly express Sabbath principle trust in him today. A timeless principle is at work. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (Romans 10:11, Isaiah 28:16).

HOW FAR DO I HAVE TO GO TO PLEASE GOD?

We are surrounded by opportunities to please God like never before. For instance, the familiar Bible verse, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19) once required becoming a trained missionary and living in a distant land. Today thousands engage in short term cross cultural missions throughout the world that lead to hundreds of thousands coming to Christ each year. I have had the privilege of visiting Russia twelve times. I never dreamed of speaking in Russian churches, leading Russians to Christ, teaching Russian pastors, and leading short term teams to help plant Russian churches. Serving God cross culturally has been one of the biggest thrills of my life. But you don't have to board a jet destined for a far away land to serve God in far away places. You can stay at home and share Christ around the world by email; whereas letters took months emails take moments before there is a reply.

A world of disciple-making has also come to our doorsteps because most every community is now international. The church I most recently served opened a preschool. To our amazement over half of the children enrolled were from India. Word got out among their immigrant parents that this was a caring preschool and would accommodate their children. The fact that we already had a doctor from India serving as an elder made it easier for some of these families to visit church services and hear the gospel.

Obviously we please God by serving as we walk through doors of opportunity available to us today. However, there is another means of pleasing God that has always been far more accessible than the new easy-access, high-profile ways of serving available today. Every person regardless of ability can participate in this means of pleasing God. It is called trust. Are you *making good* on God's trust by trusting him to provide through lean times, through illness and tragedy, or through waves of work that threaten to tow you under? Is that trust expressed through an ability to cease

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gathering for yourself and others? Is your trust demonstrated in acts of rest on a weekly basis? It is time to *make good* on God's trust by experiencing the Sabbath principle for his sake and pleasure. God takes pleasure in our rest, for Sabbath-rest is the pleasure of his trust.

Prayer

Dear Lord, all of your words are trustworthy and all of your deeds are done in righteousness. Please forgive me for not trusting you to care and provide for me. I have worked through times of rest because I did not trust you. I have allowed both anxiety and greed to rule my life. I long to please you by trusting you and offering significant times of rest to you. In Jesus' name and for his sake I pray, Amen.

Questions to Ponder

1. Am I driven by anxiety because I have not trusted God's provisions and promises?
2. Am I driven by greed to get ahead of others for my ego's sake?
3. Am I consistently working through times of rest because I do not trust the Lord?
4. What progress have I made placing my trust in God's provision and promises?
5. How will I please God with rest in the future?