

Resting in Grace

by Curtis Rittenour

The most peaceful experience of my childhood was visiting my grandmother. When I was a young boy, my mother would drive to Grandma's lake home in Minnesota on the week end and drop me or one of my brothers off.

Grandma loved having us visit and cared about even the littlest of our problems. She pulled slivers from our feet, helped us catch fireflies, and put pink lotion on our poison ivy. Many evenings she would hold us in her lap while we ate applesauce and watched the Minnesota Twins play baseball on her old black-and-white TV.

However, the memories that stick the deepest were the Sabbath walks we took down a sandy dirt road to a nearby graveyard, where many of my Scandinavian relatives are buried. While Minnesota summers can be hot and humid, the ten-minute stroll led us to an old cemetery that was like an oasis. The cool, green grass, tall trees, and flowers provided a relaxing site, like a beautiful garden. It was a quiet and safe setting.

God has provided all of us a safe place to know His love. It is called Sabbath, and it comes to us on the wings of time every week. We begin learning this gift by walking into the first book of the Bible and into a garden.

In the beginning was grace

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Before you yawn and settle back to hear the rest of the story, stop and think about who created our world. When you walk through Creation week day by day, the focal point is the work of the Creator. "God made . . . God saw . . . God said . . ." While the creation of Adam and Eve was the crowning act of God's work, His *final* act was to make the Sabbath.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work He was doing; so on the

seventh day He rested from all His work" (Genesis 2:1,2).

The basic sequence was simple: God worked, and then God stopped working. The Bible uses words like "completed" and "finished." Then came holy time, Sabbath, which was a sign of this completed work of creation. The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:8-10 reiterate this idea of keeping the Sabbath holy by "stopping work."

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work."

Why do we not work on Sabbath? Because we need to stop and remember the work that God did at Creation. The Hebrew word for Sabbath (Shabbat) literally means "rest." God created the heavens and the earth, and then He *rested* from His work.

The work of another

But how could Adam and Eve "rest" on that first Sabbath in their new garden home if they hadn't worked all week? God did all the work. They could only rest in the work of God. Have you ever "rested in the work of another" ?

Let's pretend you're having company over for dinner. You're a young mother with three kids under five years old. Picture yourself running around town, frantically trying to do last-minute shopping. After loading the minivan and starting for home, traffic suddenly backs up. And as if that isn't enough, it's 98 degrees outside, and your van starts to overheat. So you shut off the air conditioner and open all the windows. In the midst of all this, your three children start crying loudly.

All the while you are thinking to yourself, *The house is a mess! My dishes in the oven must be burnt to a crisp! And I have five minutes before company shows up!* You feel like jumping off a bridge. But as you walk up to the front door, it swings open. There stands your husband smiling. He gives you a warm peck on the cheek and says, "Welcome home, honey! I

look off from work early because I thought you might need a little help. Everything is ready. Our company called, and they won't be here for 30 minutes. Let me take the kids. Go relax."

As you walk into the house, the place is immaculate. The table is set. Everything is ready. Your husband takes the children while you walk over and plop into a chair and let out a sigh of relief. At this moment you are "resting in the work of another."

This young mother certainly had been working. But when she arrived home unprepared and discovered everything had been made ready by her husband, she could rest in the work he had done.

When God finished creating the world, Adam and Eve rested in the work God had completed.

A finished work

If you look carefully at the words in Genesis 1 and 2 that describe what happened on Friday to introduce the Sabbath, you'll see verbs like *finished*, *completed* and *rested*. Now ask yourself, "Was there another Friday in history when these same words were used?"

Fast-forward to another weekend. It's Friday afternoon, and Jesus Christ, the Creator of the world is hanging on a cross. He's dying for your sins and mine. He's carrying out the great work of redemption. And as He breathes His last breath, He cries out, "It is *finished*." Then He bows His head and dies. The Savior has *finished* the *work* of salvation, and as Sabbath steals over Jerusalem, the Savior is laid to *rest* in a garden tomb.

God marked the ceasing of Creation's work by making holy time. So the Lord Jesus ceased from the work of salvation by also stopping and resting. God's work of creation *and* redemption are like sisters holding hands.

Sabbath is God's way of reminding us every week that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works (Ephesians 2: 8, 9). True Sabbath keeping is resting in God's grace. If we would receive God's free gift of salvation, if

we would truly experience Sabbath rest, we must learn to reach out and take God's hand.

A time to remember

A few years ago I had a strange yet warm experience. It happened near my grandmother's home. She died when I was a boy, and I moved with my family to the Pacific Northwest, only occasionally visiting relatives back in my home state.

One week end I traveled to Minnesota to visit relatives, and along the way, I passed near the place where my grandmother used to live. I hadn't driven by it for many years, so I turned toward the old farm. As I went slowly past, I remembered the little sandy road that continued on to the cemetery, the place where we used to take Sabbath walks when I was a child.

When I neared the graveyard, I pulled off the road, turned off the engine, and opened the door. What flooded my senses took me by surprise. The warm September evening was filled with the love of my grandmother. The odors of late summer powerfully reminded me of that long-ago time in my life when this special lady would take my little hand and walk with me to a place of peace.

God longs to reach out and take our hand every week and walk beside us into a garden of grace. The Lord wants us to remember on the Sabbath that salvation is a gift we may receive if we would only stop and rest in the work He has done for us.

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