

A
PAUSE
for
PEACE

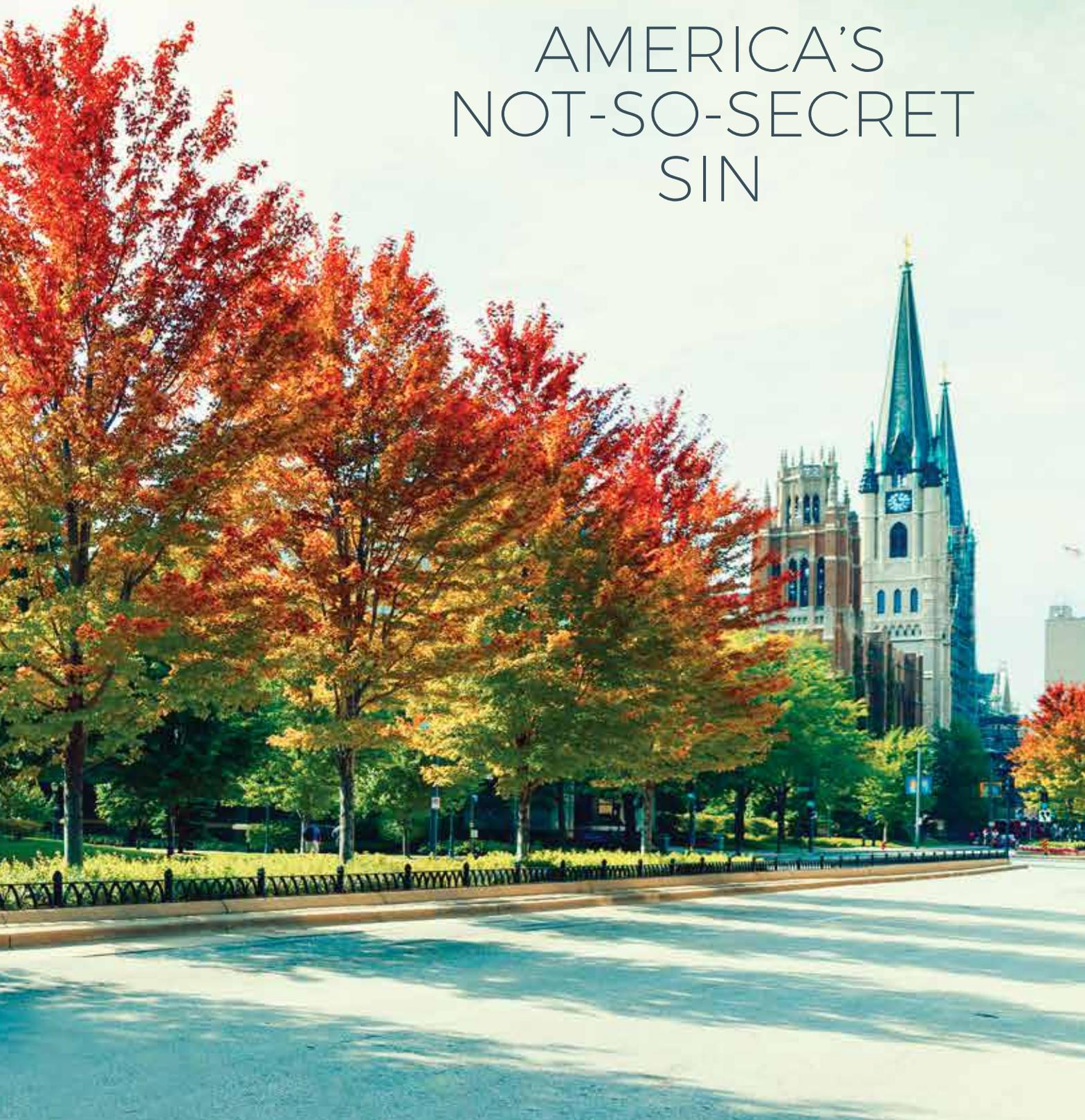
WHAT GOD'S GIFT OF THE SABBATH
CAN MEAN TO YOU

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—[PART ONE]—

AMERICA'S NOT-SO-SECRET SIN





THE SABBATH
IS A TOKEN BETWEEN GOD
AND HIS PEOPLE. IT IS
A HOLY DAY,
GIVEN BY THE CREATOR TO US
AS A DAY UPON WHICH
TO REST, AND REFLECT
UPON SACRED THINGS.

— *Christ Triumphant*, p. 110 —

Almost daily, our society faces new revelations of conduct that challenge our perceptions of fairness, morality, and social justice. The sins of the past seem entrenched among us with amazing staying power. Financial schemes, sexual harassment and abuse, bullying, racism, adultery, and drug addiction are not going away any time soon. These sins are blatant, many times public, and devastate communities, families—and even churches.

However, there may be another sin, more insidious and secretive. “It is,” wrote one pastor, “the American bargain-basement sin, on sale in virtually every American church.”¹

It is one reason, too, why divorce, alienation, abuse, stress, and loneliness have almost defaced the image of Christ in many Christian families. The damage surfaces, for instance, when parents ceaselessly work to provide material things for themselves and for their children, until they see less of their children than does the babysitter or teacher. Ironically, the children don’t want the teacher, the babysitter, or even what the parents buy; they want their parents instead.

Because of this sin, someone is always at work or at the store or doing something—until the average American father spends just thirty-seven seconds a day in one-to-one interaction with each of his kids. *Thirty-seven seconds!* Such neglect can produce only a legacy of angry, damaged children whose personalities will become gnarled into angry, damaged adults. Multiply this situation—and worse ones—by thousands, even millions, and we have a church, a faith, a nation in trouble.

Our lives, says Scripture, are to be “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3), but often they seem hidden only in ourselves, apart even from our spouses, much less Christ. The Lord used marriage to exemplify the intimate relationship that He seeks between Himself and His church, but this sin has left spouses without the necessary time to maintain the intimacy so crucial to marriage. Couples drift so far apart that the



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distance brings down home upon their heads.

Also, if spouses don’t have time to build an enduring relationship between each other, what about their connection to Christ? If Christian marriage reflects the church’s relationship to Jesus, then our marriages aren’t the only things in trouble. When Gallup polls show that saints have little less hesitancy to lie, cheat, or steal than sinners, our faith is as flawed as our families. “This is eternal life,” Jesus said, “that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). If we can’t take time to know our spouses, how can we know the Lord?

To protect against these problems, Jesus issued a commandment designed to give Christians time for both family and for Himself. Yet because it is so widely broken, most of us don’t have time for either.

Too bad, because all believers are aware of this commandment, the remedy for many heartaches, but they have neglected it anyway. And now, in a harvest of abundant bitterness, they are reaping what they’ve sown by this gross indulgence of Christianity’s not-so-secret sin.

Christians *have* the answer, have had it for almost two thousand years. If only they adhered to it!

More and more are.

A close-up photograph of a couple's hands clasped together. The couple is standing in a field with a body of water and hills in the background. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting a bright day. The couple is wearing light-colored, possibly white, clothing. The hands are the central focus, with fingers interlaced. The background is slightly blurred, emphasizing the connection between the hands.

THE CONNECTION

BETWEEN SABBATH & MARRIAGE

In the Garden of Eden, when the world was perfect and full of love, God gave humans two special gifts: marriage and the Sabbath. Each week, when Sabbath comes around, let the day remind you not only to focus on your relationship with God but also your relationship with your spouse. Create a Sabbath ritual that helps you and your spouse feel closer to each other and to God. For example, say a prayer together each Sabbath morning, or hold hands and take an evening stroll.

Some years ago, in an attempt to discern reader concerns, the influential evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* mailed a survey to 475 random subscribers, asking them to rate their interest in such questions about the Christian faith as, “Will a just God really condemn people to hell who have never heard of Jesus?” or “How can I be certain I will go to heaven?”

The results surprised the editors. The question rated of highest concern was, “Should Christians take their Sabbath/Sunday observances more seriously?”

Should Christians take their Sabbath/Sunday observances more seriously? Christians in America haven’t taken Sabbath/Sunday observance seriously since the days when citizens could be flogged and then locked in the stocks for desecrating the Lord’s Day. With the exception of a few hours in the morning for church, Sunday is usually consecrated to doing what we didn’t have time to do the rest of the week, except in the fall, when the day is “set apart” for football. Most Christians expend more effort for Halloween than for Sabbath.

What the *Christianity Today* survey shows, however, is that believers now realize that something is wrong with how they practice their religion. Something is wrong when their faith can’t keep their families together, their children off drugs, or the pews filled—and part of what’s wrong, they now see, is disregard of the Sabbath commandment.

“Whether or not people keep the Sabbath holy is not an incidental or insignificant matter,” writes Baptist preacher Walter Chantry in his book *Call the Sabbath a Delight*. “When God issued this fourth commandment he understood humanity much better than we do. Failure to practice this moral law is a root cause of moral

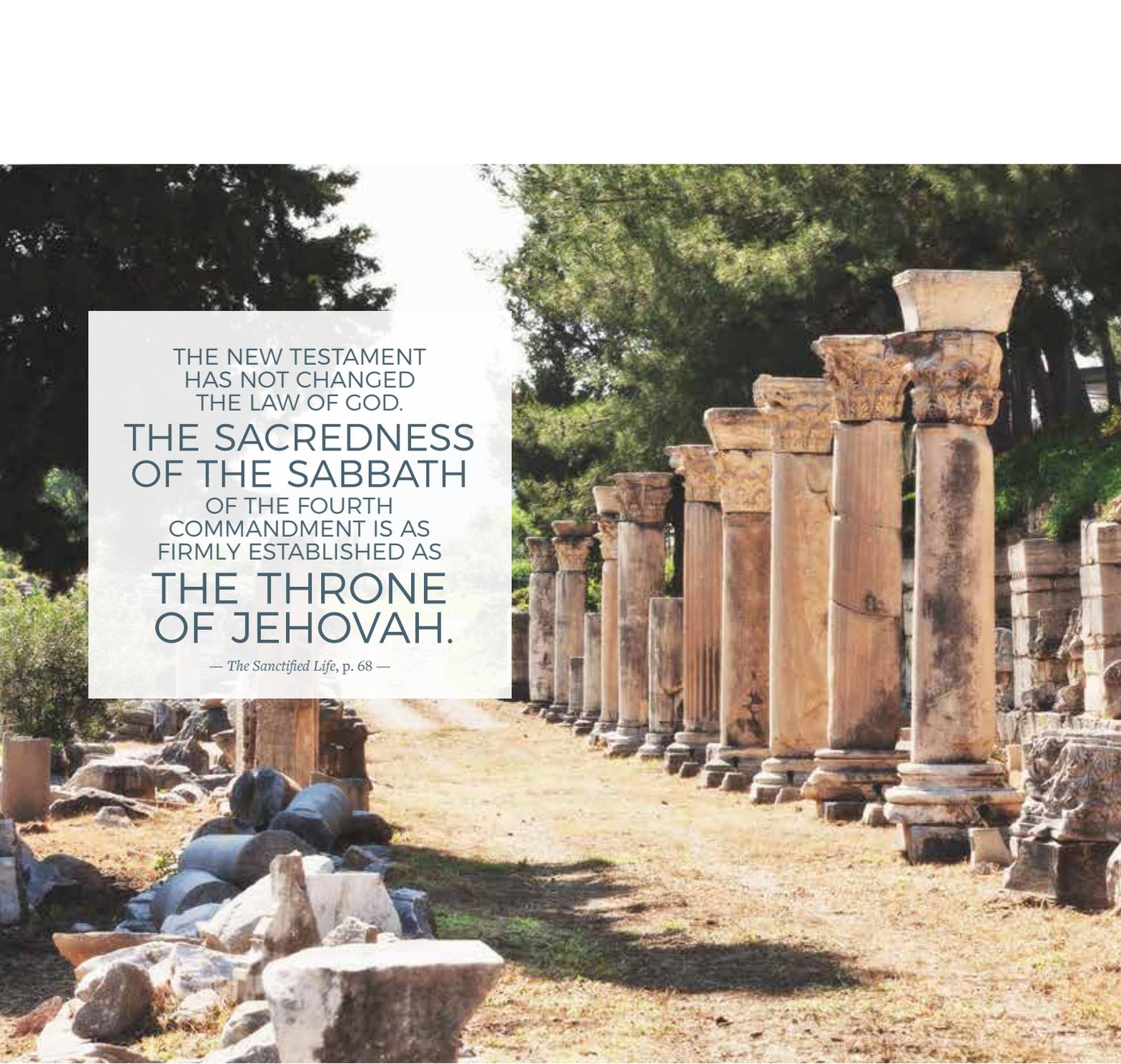
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Believers now realize that something is wrong with how they practice their religion.

decline, social disorder, and widespread human suffering. No successful recovery of mankind can be devised without the inclusion of the fourth commandment in the remedy.”²

Chantry’s book is one of many pumped off Christian presses in recent decades about the “forgotten commandment.” More and more evangelicals are aware that they hurt themselves, their families, their churches, and their communities by Sabbath breaking. As one preacher expressed it: “There’s a penalty for planting and hoeing corn on Sunday, but it doesn’t show in the corn; it shows in the person.”³

Besides Chantry, others are writing about the importance of the Sabbath. Marva J. Dawn has written the popular book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*. Tilden Edwards’s *Sabbath Time: Understanding and Practice for Contemporary Christians* came out in 1982. In 1987, Karen Mains published *Making Sunday Special*. The Lord’s Day Alliance, that lone voice crying in the wilderness of Protestant Sunday neglect, published *The Lord’s Day* in celebration of its hundredth anniversary. And Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, stressed the need to keep Sunday holy.



THE NEW TESTAMENT
HAS NOT CHANGED
THE LAW OF GOD.

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OF JEHOVAH.**

— *The Sanctified Life*, p. 68 —

Though these people differ in approach, style, and theology, Chantry summarized the basic message: “It is impossible to conceive of any measure more perfectly designed than Sabbath to bring everlasting blessing to individual families, churches and communities. Spiritual men bemoan the lack

of time to pray, read, worship, witness, teach children. God in His wisdom and grace has provided just such time for these very wishes of the godly by commanding that a day in each seven be set aside, devoted to the Lord.”⁴

That day is called Sabbath, and God commands Christians to keep it.

Of course, some Christians have been keeping the Sabbath for years, even decades.

“To all who receive the Sabbath as a sign of Christ’s creative and redeeming power,” says a Seventh-day Adventist book written in the 1880s, “it will be a delight. Seeing Christ in it, they delight themselves in Him. The Sabbath points them to the works of creation as an evidence of His mighty power in redemption. While it calls to mind the lost peace of Eden, it tells of peace restored through the Saviour. And every object in nature repeats His invitation, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ Matt. 11:28.”⁵

In the same century, speaking for the church that formalized Sunday keeping in Christianity, Cardinal James Gibbons wrote: “The institution of the Sabbath [Sunday] has contributed more to the peace and good order of nations than could be accomplished by standing armies and the best organized police force.”⁶

James P. Wesberry, executive director of the Lord’s Day Alliance, said: “The Lord’s Day is the axis upon which our nation turns. What would America do without the Sabbath Day? Our nation is great because of its great preachers and churches, but is great also because it has not forgotten to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.”⁷

Obviously, knowledge of the Sabbath blessing is not new, but the growing interest about it among Christians is. This surging consciousness about the day of rest raises questions. Why keep the Sabbath? What is the experience of Sabbath keeping? Which is the Sabbath day, Saturday or Sunday? Does it matter? Did Jesus or the apostles change the day to Sunday? Can we keep whatever day we want? How does one keep

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Jesus issued a commandment designed to give Christians time for both family and Himself.

the Sabbath? What are the benefits of setting aside one day a week?

Of course, whatever conclusions we draw, some will disagree. Which is fine. This book presents one perspective. If the Spirit impresses you that something you learn here is truth, then praise the Lord, who gives wisdom “to all liberally and without reproach” (James 1:5). If not, we are not to judge, but to love one another, “for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

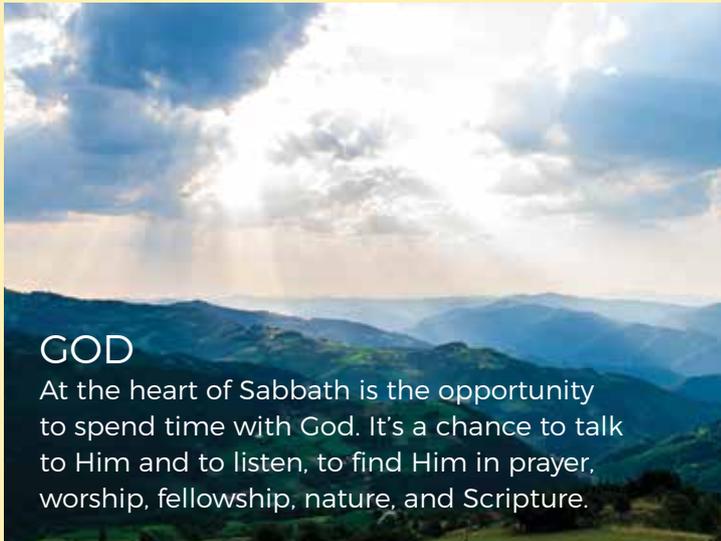
For the Sabbath, without love, is not holy, no matter what day one keeps.



Make More Time for the Things That Matter

In our fast-paced world, the months and years quickly pass by, and we're often left wondering, Where did the time go? Even the people and opportunities that are most important can get lost in the busyness.

Observing Sabbath each week is a great way to be intentional and ensure that the things that matter always have a place in our lives. Here are just a few of the important things that will be ensured a place in your schedule when you set aside time for Sabbath each week:



GOD

At the heart of Sabbath is the opportunity to spend time with God. It's a chance to talk to Him and to listen, to find Him in prayer, worship, fellowship, nature, and Scripture.

REST & RELAXATION

Your mind, body, and spirit need regular breaks. You'll be amazed how much better you can focus on your work after you've taken a break from it.

NATURE

Step into the great outdoors, and you'll see God's handiwork. The colors, the creatures, the plants—all reveal a glimpse of His beauty and glory!

FRIENDS & FAMILY

Turn off the screens, and take guilt-free time with the people you love. Laugh, tell stories, share memories, take a walk. You'll feel refreshed, and you'll build stronger bonds with each other.

