

What Is God Doing? #4

by: Ronald L. Dart

You're not under any stress, are you? The funny thing about that question is, that most people, when they are asked the question, would say, "Well, no, not really." When the truth is, they may be, even as they speak, suffering from various kinds of stress related illnesses and diseases. But at the moment, they don't feel stressed. They will say, "Well, no not really."

Are You Under Any Stress?

Now the reason I know that's true, is that I had two different doctors ask me the same question within a matter of a month and each of them said, "Are you suffering from any kind of stress in your life," and I said, "No not really." Then afterward, especially when I started looking at the things for this broadcast, I had to say, "Oh yes you are."

Low, persistent levels of stress are generally not recognized, but they are there, and they slowly eat away at a person's health, their mental health and their physical health.

Everybody suffers from stress. Some people know it, and some people don't. The truth is that when they did a survey about workers who were reporting a stress-related condition among teachers in public schools and other schools, 58% of them had an observable condition related to stress.

Hospital employees, 43%. Clerical workers, just the old office grunt, banging on a typewriter doing ordinary work, 35% of them are suffering from an overt form of stress. In other words it is already affecting their body in some significant way. Federal employees, well only 27% of them. I guess they have it easy.

Often these people contracted psychiatric problems, chemical dependency problems and this doesn't include a lot of us, sort of folks, who are on the way to that kind of a problem.

What sort of things does stress actually cause? I ask you, I say, "Are you suffering from any kind of stress? And you say, "No not really." Well, let's consider the number of things in a person's life that might crop up. High blood pressure, panic attacks, anxiety attacks, mid-life crisis, burnout, asthma, insomnia. Do you ever lie awake at night, worrying about things, full of anxiety over something. Then in the morning, in the broad daylight, it does not seem as bad as it might've seemed.

Mood swings, depression, chronic fatigue, encephalitis, addictions, allergies, skin rashes, memory and concentration difficulties, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, bowel problems, ulcers. My goodness, you could get the idea from something like this that the whole world is suffering from stress.

Well, they tell us, that stress now contributes to 90% of all diseases. How in the world did we ever get into a mess like this. Why are we being eaten up with stress-related diseases and stress-related illnesses. Well, the answer could be, because we think we have to work harder than God.

God Worked Six Days Then Rested on the Seventh Day

God, you know, worked six days and took a day off. Not only that, He commanded man to do the same thing. God actually gave us a tool to deal with stress and for the most part we ignore it.

What is it? Well, it's called the Sabbath. When did God give us this tool?

In Genesis 2 and in verse one, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them." God had finished everything that He had set out to do in terms of creation. {2} "And on the seventh day, God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had made." Now, I don't think God was tired. Nevertheless, when He got through with His work, He stopped working and He rested. Then He went further, {3} "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it, He had rested from all his work which God created and made." Another passage of Scripture tells us, "that God not only rested, He was refreshed" (Exodus 21:17).

Now this is a little foreign to the way most of us think about God. God is all-powerful, God can do anything, God can work 24 hours a day. God never sleeps, and yet here is the Scripture telling us that God, when He finished His work, rested and was refreshed.

Now the human mind, which after all was modeled after God's mind, can work continually at a task only so long, then it needs to rest and be refreshed, because it is in the rest process that our mind sorts out all the stuff that we have done, all the things we've learned, all the experiences we've had, and it attaches meaning to them, and relates them to one another and if you never rest, your mind never gets a chance to sort out the enormous amount of information that you put into it everyday. This is more obvious, in a way, with the body that you have to rest, but it is just as true of the mind.

When God had finished creating man on the sixth day, He took a look at Adam and said. "Let's take tomorrow off. Take a day off." Which they promptly did.

God Sanctified the Seventh Day

Now what do you suppose the Bible means, when it says, "that God sanctified the seventh day" as stated in Genesis 2 verse 3. That's one of those Bible words, 'sanctified' like 'holy' and 'sacred' and so forth. What does it mean? Let me give you a quick lesson in theological words. 'Sanctified' is one of a set of words which all deal with the same general idea. It means 'to set apart,' generally, in the Bible, it means 'to set apart for God.' Some other words are holy, sacred, saint, sanctify, all come from the same root in both the Old Testament and New Testament. They mean, either in verb or noun form, 'to set apart for that which is set apart.'

Seven Baseballs

Now imagine if you will, what shall we say, seven baseballs. There is something that can be done. For all practical purposes they are all identical, all brand-new from the box, and you set them out in a row in front of you. Then you take one of those baseballs and set it apart from the others. You have made that ball 'holy' in the simplest and secular meaning of the word. It is not different from the other baseballs in any way except that you have set one baseball apart. Now if you add the idea of setting that baseball apart as belonging to God, then you have a fairly complete idea what the Bible means when it says that 'God sanctified the seventh day,' for there was nothing different from one day than another. They were all the same.

The sun goes down and the sun comes up. Days are days, right? So the only thing that made this day different, was that God 'set it apart.' Now, how did He do that? It wasn't merely saying that it was set apart, although that's important enough. God actually set the day apart by working six days and then not working on the seventh. Do you follow me? If God had worked on the seventh day, then all seven days would have been identical. The way He set it apart was by not doing on that day, what he had done on all the other six days.

So God 'set the seventh day apart' simply by not working. When did He do it? He did it from creation and because it was a cessation, a pause, a rest day, and in Hebrew the word for that is 'shabath', so it is called the Sabbath.

Where did the Sabbath day go from there?

The Sabbath Had Been Forgotten

In the subsequent years, from creation, the Sabbath existed, but generally speaking, it was forgotten. Finally, when Moses went down and brought Israel out of Egypt, the Sabbath is brought into the Mosaic Covenant and is expressed as one of the Ten Commandments. It's found in Exodus 20 and in verse eight, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. {9} Six days shall you labor and do all your work, {10} But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor

your manservant, your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates. {11} For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and everything that in them is, and rested the seventh day, wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

To 'hallow' is to sanctify. To 'sanctify' is to set apart for God. That's easy, isn't it? We have already seen that. God worked six days, and rested the seventh day and by resting on the seventh day, He set the day apart or hallowed it. So He says, the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God, and He might as well have said, because it's what the Hebrew means, 'the seventh day is the rest of the Lord your God.'

Now the commandment was to, "Remember the Sabbath," and it was that way because the Sabbath had basically been forgotten. For generations the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. They had worked as slaves, seven days a week. Now, they were liberated, not only liberated from slavery, they were liberated from working seven days a week. They could work six days and now they were permitted to rest. They were actually commanded to rest on the Sabbath Day.

Our Nation Used to Keep a Kind of Sabbath

There was a time, when we in this nation kept a kind of Sabbath. Stores were closed on Sunday. Men didn't work their farms. Strenuous types of recreation were avoided and what's also interesting is that the churches called it the Sabbath. I can remember vividly as a boy hearing deacons in church on Sunday morning in the opening or closing prayer, saying, "Lord God, bless us on this your Sabbath day. This holy Sabbath day. This beautiful Sabbath day." They commonly called it the Sabbath day.

I once asked some friends about this who were older than I was and they said, "Oh yes, they remembered that people were that way, and that even on their farm their dad who really did not mind so much working on Sunday always made it a point to plow the field that was out of sight of the road, because he didn't want his neighbors who were on the way to church on Sunday, to think that he would actually work on that day."

Why Baptists Observed Sunday as the Sabbath Day

I have a little book in my library called, 'Baptist Distinctives' and it is dated 1946. In the back of the book, it has two confessions of faith. It has the 'Baptist Faith and Message' which is dated 1925. It also has a much earlier, 'New Hampshire Confession of Faith' and I thought the contrast between these two was interesting because some of what it says about why Baptists observed Sunday as the Sabbath day. The 'New Hampshire Confession of Faith', which is very old said, "We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath and is to be kept sacred to religious purposes by abstaining from all secular labor and sinful recreations by the devout observance of all the means of grace, both private and public, and by preparation for that rest that remaineth for the people of God."

It's interesting how language changes over the years and generations. I'm sure that this, when it was written, made perfect sense, but when you read it now in the 21st. century, it says "On the Sabbath day we are to abstain from all secular labor and sinful recreations." And presumably it's all right for us to engage in sinful recreations on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and so forth. I mean, that's the way one would look at it, but I think what they meant was, that there were certain types of recreations that would be sinful if done on the Sabbath Day.

In 1925, this confession was modified by the Southern Baptist Convention under the title, 'The Baptist Faith and Message'. Under the heading, 'The Lord's Day', now mind you, the 'New Hampshire Confession of Faith' had the heading 'Of the Christian Sabbath'. The 'Baptist's Faith and Message' of 1925. under the heading, 'The Lord's Day' says this: "The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should be employed in the exercise of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, and by refraining from worldly amusements and resting from secular employments, works of necessity and mercy only accepted." Now this is prewar WWII and it still had a strong statement in it about abstaining from secular employments, but what is interesting is that it has been moved from close to the front to right near the end of this statement. The emphasis is no longer really on the Sabbath day as cessation and rest, its emphasis is now on the Lord's day, which seems to be a different matter. The change is subtle but the change is important.

In later generations, it would diminish the idea of rest still further, until the Lord's Day obligation, today, if you were to consider what most people think is really a matter of church attendance and worship. The Sabbath instead of being a holy day has become a holy hour.

Now I don't know what these confessions of faith say today but I can see what people do. They go to church and then they head off to work, either at a job or in their yards, or maybe to go off to the golf course, or the lake for water skiing or fishing. There is no Sabbath Day anymore and it is killing us.

The Sabbath Commandment was Abandoned

I think the place we went astray was when we abandoned the fourth commandment. The fourth commandment is very precise. We are not to work on the seventh day Saturday Sabbath.

Israel was not given the option of keeping one day in seven. They had to keep the seventh day. In other words, there was no option for you to say, "Well I will keep Wednesday this week." Next week, on Wednesday you really have something you need to do, so you decide, "I'll keep Thursday," and then the following week Thursday is busy so you move it back to Tuesday. This is not the option that was given to Israel. They were taught, and in fact, disciplined to observe that one day in seven, the seventh day.

One Reason Why the Day of Worship Was Changed

Now toward the end of the first century, partly to distance themselves from the Jews, because the Jews were coming under a great deal of persecution from the Romans about that time and Christians were getting persecuted by people who thought they were Jews because a lot of them were keeping the Sabbath day. And so in order to distance themselves from the Jews, the largest body of Christian churches began to leave off Sabbath observance and observed Sunday as a day of worship.

Now all of this is documented in history. If you'd like to study the history of that change contact me and I will tell you where you can get a book that will go through the entire history of the change from Sabbath to Sunday and I think it will really open your eyes to one of the most significant events in the history of the Christian Church. Call me toll free at (888) BIBLE44. This book will explain all about the change of worship "From Sabbath to Sunday."

Did the Church Have the Right to Change the Day of Worship?

Now the question is, did those Christians who made the change from the Saturday Sabbath to Sunday have the right to make it? Or were they wrong? The more practical problem is, without divine sanction to set a day apart, the day has no authority and no reason why having been changed once, it can't be changed again, or even done away all together, which is essentially what most people have done. We are paying a terrible price for this, in our health, our peace of mind and in our relationship with God.

But isn't this an Old Testament thing? Did Jesus keep the Sabbath day? What did Jesus have to say on this subject and as Christians and followers of Christ how should we relate to this?

The Jewish Oral Law

The Pharisees of Jesus' day had really kind of lost touch, I think, with what the Sabbath was all about. They kept the Sabbath, but they had developed a set of rules, of do's and don'ts about the Sabbath, that to really understand them would be the equivalent of a university degree. They had built what they called a fence around the law. To give you an illustration, the Sabbath is supposed to run from sundown to sundown. They would start the Sabbath a half hour before sundown and they ended it a half hour after sundown because they did not want to take any chances on getting too close to the line. They had a lot more rules than that regarding the Sabbath.

Jesus and His disciples came afoul of one of those rules on one Sabbath day. The story is in Mark two and verse 23, "It came to pass, as Jesus went to the corn (grain) fields on the Sabbath day, and his disciples began as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. {24} And the

Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are your disciples doing on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful?'

Not lawful according to who? We have already read the commandment. There is nothing in the commandment that says, you can't, if you're wandering through a field on the Sabbath, to grab hold an ear of corn, and eat it as you go. Is there? I did not read anything like that.

The Pharisees said, "If you can pluck one ear of corn then can you do two? And if two then three? If three then four? If four then a bushel? If a bushel then why not reap the whole crop? There may be a certain logic in all that but that still wasn't God's law. It was not what God said! It was what they said.

David and the Showbread

Jesus said to the Pharisees, this is in Mark 2 verse 25, "Have you never read what David did, when he had need, when he was hungry, he and his men that were with him? {26} How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest and did eat the showbread which is not lawful to eat but for the priests and gave it to them that were with him?"

Now what Jesus is telling the Pharisees, and it's rather shocking, is that, "Oh I understand the law, but sometimes, because of human need, there can be made an exception to the law." The Pharisees didn't see it that way. They saw the law as controlling. The law was dominant. The law was over man. The law was a ruler. It was a set of rules and the rules had to be obeyed. An infraction of the rules had to be punished, severely in many cases.

Jesus saw the law differently. Jesus saw the law as a guide to life, as a revealer of the difference between right and wrong, of showing a man what the right path is. Of course, to violate the law is a sin, but there are times when sound judgment and common sense will interpret the law differently from one person to another person.

Jesus' interpretation of the law was, there's nothing in the world wrong with plucking a handful of grain on the Sabbath Day as you walk through the field and eat it. In fact, I'm certain Jesus would have eschewed the idea of engaging in a harvest on the Sabbath day, but having given them this illustration Jesus came back and made a profound statement.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

Jesus said to the Pharisees, and this is in Mark two and verse 27, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." Now that's a very full statement and it says in the first place, the Sabbath was made. Now we have already seen how it was made. God made it by working six days and resting the seventh day and thereby setting it apart. He then pronounced His blessing upon that day. Not just any day, but the seventh day, after six days of work, so the Sabbath was made.

The Sabbath was made for man, not just for the Jews, not just for some men, it was made for man. Why was it made? It was made because man needed a rest. His poor old flesh and blood body needed to rest. His mind needed to rest. He needed some time for quiet, reflection and for drawing near to God.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man made to keep the Sabbath, which seems to be the way the Pharisees interpreted the Sabbath day. Then Jesus said another thing that was surprising, He said, "Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." So Jesus establishes Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath.

The Lord's Day

Now the expression, 'the Lord's Day', which is in common vogue among Christian people, must be derived from Revelation 1 and verse 10, where John says "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." This is a curious thing that in the Bible, there is absolutely not one word anywhere in there to tie the expression the Lord's day to Sunday. I would assume, based upon Mark two verse 28, that if I were going to look around for the Lord's day, I would think that it is the seventh day Sabbath day.

Why Did God Give You The Sabbath?

Let me make a suggestion. Why don't you take the Sabbath off next week. The Sabbath begins at sundown Friday night and goes until sundown Saturday night. That's the seventh day. That is Saturday on our calendar.

You have been meaning to do some reading in the Bible and you have been wanting to do some Bible Study on some related subjects. That would be a good time to do it. You have been meaning to go by the municipal rose garden and see the different varieties that are there, and maybe consider them part of what you would like to add to your own garden. Go on down there. Take the day off. Take plenty of time. Stop and smell the roses. Scuff your feet through the mulch at the bottom of them. Look the place over. You have wanted to take the kids to the zoo. Go ahead. Take the day off. Show the kids God's handiwork in the animals and wonder why in the world did He made the zebras with those funny stripes.

You been meaning to talk with God about what's wrong with your life and why things are not working anymore, but you just haven't found the time. You see, that's what the Sabbath is for.

The Sabbath is a gift of time. It is a day when you can take time to talk with God. A time to talk to your wife. A time to talk to your children. It is the time to draw the family closer together.

Okay, so you go to church on the first day of the week, Sunday. Does that keep you from resting on the seventh day of the week? It might surprise you to learn that there were some

early Christian churches that rested on Saturday and worshiped on Sunday. Others rested and worshiped on the Sabbath day.

The truth is, though, that unless there is an authority outside of yourself that tells you to take the day off and dedicate it to God, you are just not very likely to do it. You will play games. You'll take it off this week and next week you will have something you have to do. And the next week after that you will have something else to do. And pretty soon, your life and your body and your spirit, and your health will be coming apart and you won't know why.

The truth is, there is an authority outside of yourself, that tells you to take the day off. It is contained in the basic code that God gave for His worship. It's the code that developed the two great laws, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12 30-31). That code is the 10 Commandments and the fourth commandment is "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God, in it you shall not do any work." Why? "Because in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day, wherefore the Lord God blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it".

I have a suggestion, next Saturday, why don't we take the day off. Why don't we spend a little time reading the Bible and spend a little time with our family.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart reminding you, you look like you need a day off to rest.

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