



What Do You Do

# When God Stops Working?

*Psalm 121*

A Biblical Reflection on Sabbath Rest

Keith Ruckhaus

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WHEN GOD STOPS

WORKING?

A BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON SABBATH REST

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# FOREWARD

The issue of Sabbath rest is one that has both theological and practical dimensions for both Jews and Christians. *Theologically*, it is part of a much larger question concerned with the relationship between Law and Gospel, between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant sealed in the blood of Jesus, between Church and synagogue, and between type and fulfillment. *Practically*, it has to do with how Christians relate to the Old Testament in our concrete daily lives. Do we ignore it? Do we pick and choose from it what we like? Do we embrace it as belonging to the Christian community and yet dismiss some of its clearest injunctions? How do we who celebrate Sunday, the Lord's day, the Day of Resurrection, deal with Shabbat? This is the question raised by Keith Ruckhaus. Does the Sabbath rest, which God gave to His people in the "old" covenant, still somehow speak meaningfully to us who have been grafted onto the People of God through Jesus Christ and who are justified in His blood?

We live in a culture that increasingly finds itself torn between the desire for leisure and the perceived necessity of constant work. How do rest and work relate to the ultimate questions of life? How do they relate to God? Is God completely indifferent to what we do with our time or does He have something to say to us in this regard? He certainly seems to have said something quite clearly to the people of Israel. What does that have to do with us today? Can Sabbath rest still somehow be received as a gift from God, a grace, even by those who live in the "new" covenant and who live in the modern age? If so, how? These are tough questions, but ones that we need to ponder.

To understand Christianity, it is necessary to see how deeply it is rooted in the Jewish tradition. The primary symbols that have created Christian identity – baptismal and eucharistic worship, structures and charisms of ministry, moral life, eschatological vision, and even Christ Himself – are incomprehensible except in relation to the Jewish inheritance of the Church. In other words, we cannot understand *who we are* except in relation to the People of Israel. While being constantly aware of the *novelty* of the work of God in Jesus Christ, the Christian tradition has also

recognized its permanent indebtedness to the religious experience of the Jewish people and the revelation of God given through that experience.

Keith Ruckhaus's study of Sabbath rest stands within a long tradition of Christian thinkers trying to make sense of life today by relating it to the Jewish experience, as this is understood through the prism of Jesus Christ. It is an attempt to grasp and to reclaim what is permanent and universal in the Jewish experience of Shabbat, while simultaneously seeing its fulfillment in the very person of Jesus. The basic theological and historical presupposition behind this position is that there is a living continuity between the synagogue, the temple and the Church, and that there is a genetic link between Christian worship and the liturgical tradition of Judaism. The new Christian "cult" does not replace or abolish the old Jewish "cult." It becomes the place where the permanent revelation of the Old Testament lives on in all its fullness. The new has meaning only on condition that the old is preserved.

Christians have long understood and defined the mystery of Christ in relation to Shabbat. Perhaps one of the clearest and most magnificent expressions of this is found in the Byzantine liturgical tradition at the celebration of the Matins of Holy Saturday:

*The great Moses mystically foreshadowed this day, when he said: God blessed the seventh day. This is the Blessed Sabbath; this is the day of rest, on which the Only-Begotten Son of God rested from all His works. By suffering death to fulfill the plan of salvation, He kept the Sabbath in the flesh; by returning again to what He was, He has granted us eternal life through His resurrection, for He alone is good and the Lover of man.*

The value of Ruckhaus's work is that it calls on Christians to keep on exploring more and more deeply this relationship between the mystery of Christ and the work of God among His people of the Old Covenant. The full meaning, the mystical depth, of the Seventh Day as the day of rest and the day of fulfillment is located precisely in the mystery of Holy Saturday. Yet, without a sense of Shabbat, Holy Saturday would itself remain incomprehensible to us. The "old" Covenant conditions and shapes the "new", while the new reveals the depth and profundity of the old. Even when Christian theology had at times forgotten this, Christian worship maintained a lively sense of the connection.



Ruckhaus's reflection on the biblical *meaning* of the Sabbath rest draws us into this symbiotic relationship between old and new Covenants. It roots us in the history of primitive Christianity and its relationship with Judaism. In its own way, it reminds us once again that in its inner identity and reality, the Church of Jesus Christ is the People of God and the House of Israel abroad throughout the world.

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## INTRODUCTION

Some time ago, a good friend asked me if I could write something on rest. I, as well as a small group of others, had just come out of a church debacle that left most of us torn, exhausted, confused, and worn through with a painful experience. This was the impetus behind this writing. At the time, we all sensed a deep need for a season in which we could be renewed, refreshed, revived or restored in God. The church that we were a part of was geared towards always going, going, going. Stopping our work, was almost considered a sin. It was viewed as a kind of laziness or spiritual lethargy. Having lived that way for many years, it seemed necessary for many of us to change our thinking as well as our lifestyle to experience God's rest.

Originally, this was just going to be for the little group of leftovers, but I offered it out to a broader audience. Also originally, I had planned on writing a brief essay. I haven't been very good at being brief, and now look what I got myself into. The more I go along the more I wonder how much rest my friend will experience from any of what I'm writing. Somehow rest or peace seems to get bogged down in complexity and then it doesn't seem quite so restful anymore. As with any theological treatise, it is a part of the big soup, and cannot be partaken of in isolation without losing its flavor. I do wonder, as I continue, whether any rest will be had in all of this?

It does seem funny to me how in our society, the notion of rest alludes us. It is something we have to know conceptually, because we don't actually experience it. So, immediately, there is something that is ineffectual about any treatise of rest. My friend, as well as many others, are looking for a real, physical, and abiding rest. To get some idea of rest may not seem very helpful. Many of us feel overworked. There is too much going on in our lives. At home, the pace doesn't let up. An acquaintance of my wife informed her that she and her family practically live out of their car. They eat, clothe, have family meetings, and do business and homework in it. With the added introduction of the Internet, the market now never closes. Somebody must be working at all times. To interject some conceptual notion of a slow-down constituted by God in all of that, doesn't seem to fit.

We, of course, take our leisure very seriously, and there are plenty

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of profiteers of pleasure to choose from. So too, our days off can often be more anxious and exhausting than work. The pursuit of tickets, reservations, and parking for entertainment can deplete our patience as well as our wallets. Feeling worn-out and sore from recreational sport provides a physical sense of rest for many. God's Sabbath rest, however, has nothing to do with the search for self-fulfilling leisure; indeed, it is counter to it.

I do believe that there is simplicity in God's rest, in Sabbath rest; but it is in the midst of our world as we know it, not in a negation of it or escape from it. Neither is it found in working ourselves silly in an attempt to control the elements outside ourselves, to hold chaos back. This is precisely what idolatry is about. We end up in never ending contractual negotiations with the powers. Like the sports contracts of our day, so it is with contractual agreements with powers; they can change or be nullified willy-nilly.

In the middle of a formless, worthless, chaotic universe God places the earth (Gen.1:2). The Lord intentionally took a people for Himself out of the land of perpetual work and strategically placed them in the middle of the nations. The Shabbat command is in the middle of the Ten Words, weeding through the false notions of relationship to gods on the one hand and destructive human relations on the other. Even more so, it bridges the seemingly impossible chasm between God and man.

So, I it shouldn't be a surprise to us -although it always is- that Jesus speaks of rest most profoundly under the shadow of assassination, in the heat of controversy, in the middle of opposition, and in the treacherous mine field of revolutionary fervor. It is here where Jesus promises us that we will have many troubles. Matter of fact, Jesus tells us to expect that, but he doesn't stop there, for he announces again and again that there is a monumental turning point of history that was happening in him. Jesus is confident that, if that is revealed to anyone, it would bring rest. It is in that one thing that God places in the middle that is the center- piece for life's blessing. Out of the one, the many are blessed.

Understanding that Sabbath rest is at the center of things and at the heart of life is carried one step further by the early church. Because of the on-going and very real life of the ascended Jesus, they understood there to be another Sabbath rest that is yet to be experienced, a destination to be journeyed to. Finally, the Sabbath rest found in Jesus stands right in the middle of temporal and eternal time.

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Perhaps there is some idea of rest that many of us need to be reintroduced to or reminded of in a new way. I have found this study of Sabbath rest to have slowly seeped into my being. There is something profound and fundamental to be understood about God and our relationship with him in Sabbath rest. I still find it quite the struggle to experience a rest in God on a regular basis, but I am also finding that I am clearer than before on what to look for and what is important about God's rest. For some, it may be helpful to affirm that there is a resting place in God. God wants it for you, and you need not feel ashamed or guilty that He wants you to take a break. Ultimately, Shabbat is about taking a break from a world that now says, "Don't stop till you get enough," and entering God's world that says, "Enough! It is finished, and it is good."

May God bless you, and may you find His Sabbath rest.



## GOD'S GRACIOUS TURNING

### Shabbat Grounded in Creation – Genesis 1

Recently, I came across a couple of ads that appeal to what is an important value and need in our contemporary culture. A local phone company has taken on a slogan to push a new communications device: "We never stop working for you." The product for sale would provide an always-available stream of endless distraction: games, entertainment updates, and trivial information pursuits. A well-known burger business was pushing their new late night service. On a billboard, there is a large picture of French fries with a slogan above it: "Because desire keeps no time tables" How true of our world.

With these two examples I am confronted with what is perhaps a dominant idea inherent in our social psyche. We are most happy when our lives and our things are going all the time. The world works best when it keeps on working.

Perhaps it is not like this in some cultures today, but I know of one culture that sees things differently. That is God's culture. From the first chapter of the Bible, we are informed that a work stoppage is in fact at the center of life. This account in no way renounces the necessity and the pleasure of work, but it simply doesn't give work the exclusive and center stage to meaningful human existence. In fact, Shabbat is God's announcement that it is just the opposite: it is in the ceasing that fulfillment resides.

Let me just come straightaway with the answer to the question proposed in the title of this book. One should find a double message in it. For many who struggle with believing in God, it is quite common to put God to the pragmatic test, "God, if you do this one thing for me, I'll believe and trust in you." It is pretty harmless to see if God works or not. It is not, on the other hand, a very effective test. God may, in fact, intensely desire to prove Himself to an inquiring soul, yet he could do this not so much in doing something for a person but in His refusal to do so. It is often the case at my household that I finally sit down after a whirlwind of activity. "Ahh! Time to take a break," I affirm to myself. Predictably,

one of the children will come at that instant and request my energies to be applied somewhere, "Dad could you do this for me?" "No," I reply, "I just sat down. I'm not doing anything right now." God, in fact, can have a similar posture.

There is a notion that perhaps has become completely foreign to us: God stops working. He ceases. He rests, reposes, reclines. Even more so, he has woven that part of Himself into the very fabric of creation and our human existence. Life will not make sense without ceasing times.

I had a sixth grade student who had his difficulties getting on task in my class. Once he finally got started, however, he would have an almost trance-like focus on his work. Unless I could catch it early, he would be glued to his seat while everyone else had moved on to the next class. Perhaps our sophisticated society reveals the same embarrassment as my student. We can get so wound up in activity that we haven't noticed that everyone else has finished. It is time for us to learn anew that God ceases from his labors. What do you do when God stops working? You stop working also. In that hallowed break, something of God, our world and us are to be discovered and revisited.

## When Rest Began

One of the clearest biblical notions of rest is under the rubric of Shabbat<sup>1</sup>. It is encountered immediately in the first chapter of the Bible. Indeed, it could be argued that the main purpose of the creation account isn't so much to explain how creation came about, but rather, what is so important about Shabbat.

*God looked over all that he had made. Wow! It was really good!  
It was morning and evening the sixth day.  
And God completed the heavens and the earth and every  
assembly piece that went with it to set it on its way. On the  
seventh day, since God had masterfully completed everything he*

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<sup>1</sup> There is no significance implied by employing the Hebrew transliteration – Shabbat – instead of the standard English pronunciation - Sabbath. In cases where the word is being used as an adjective instead of a noun, it works better to use Sabbath i.e. Sabbath rest instead of Shabbat rest.

*was working on, he stopped working. On the seventh day God stopped working. God blessed the seventh day and set it apart, when on that day he stopped doing the work of creating.*<sup>2</sup>

God stopped working; this is Shabbat. Unlike us, however, God stopped because there was nothing left to do. God had completely, masterfully, intricately created everything. Already, we have a big reason why, we do not often feel restful; we never have a sense that our work is done. But God didn't stop doing on the seventh day; he just stopped doing work. Said another way, on the seventh day God stopped working on creation and started doing something else. So, to understand rest, we need to go on to see what God did on Shabbat.

### **Holy and Bless - The Language of Rest**

There is a certain language around Shabbat that can guide our understanding and perhaps lead us to some rest. Here, I want to interject something that is important. It has to do with how to understand the Bible - hermeneutics, but also with how one views God – theology. Simply put, it is important to pay attention to the language of the text. Essentially, listen to the words God has spoken.

Our God is not a telephone-talking or talk-show-jabbering kind of communicator. He is a God who speaks with deliberation and force. He is a master communicator. His choice of words is not haphazard or casual. I really believe this. His vocabulary is deliberate and rich with nuance. In the study of hermeneutics, there is a notion called “dynamic equivalence”. It is the idea of transferring biblical words and concepts into contemporary language. This has its value, but it has its dangers. One danger is that we can stray away from God's language, his vocabulary. We can lose the kind of connection with God that is like when you are told a joke but then the punch line is said in another language. When someone translates it for you – dynamic equivalence – it doesn't seem all that funny. The translator then informs you that your language really can't say it quite the same way.

What is to follow is an exploration into the language of Shabbat.

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<sup>2</sup> Gen.1:31-2:4 ; my translation



The hope is that if we listen to the words of Shabbat, of rest, we might experience rest. I advocate that we ought to let God's language seep into ours rather than our language seeping into God's.

The language of rest is creation language. This is appropriately so because Shabbat is not something imposed on the created order, but is its most critical element. The passage quoted above – Genesis 1:31-2:4 – is cumulative. It closes off and finishes the tightly constructed creation account that starts out the book of Genesis, the Torah, and indeed our entire Bible. “In the beginning” (v1:1) ends when God stops (v2:2). God started creating and then he finished, Shabbat.

The Sabbath declaration not only closes chapter one. It also plays a critical role in introducing chapter two as well as the rest of Genesis. It is critically intermediary. Indeed it is conciliatory and packed with theological daring. It takes on the task of harmonizing two theological perspectives that may appear in conflict with each other. Genesis one presents God, Elohim, as the master of the universe. Elohim controls the cosmos as well as all the natural elements. Chapter two presents the Lord, Yahweh who is an intense relational God actively involved in the affairs of the human race. The first four verses of chapter two are meant to subordinate chapter two to one. Genesis one and two are not parallel accounts of creation. In fact, chapter two is not a creation account; rather, it is the “unfolding of the history of mankind as the intended offspring of the creation of the heavens and the earth.”<sup>3</sup> It is the seventh day that is the christening of God's covenant activity. The seventh day ushers in God's creative activity into man's history. As Von Rad states, “To talk of an ‘institution of the Sabbath’ would be a complete misappropriation of the passage. It is God who rests. It tells something about Yahweh and his relation to creation. It is in fact a particularly mysterious and gracious turning towards his creation.”<sup>4</sup> Again, the language of rest is the language of creation and covenant. It masterfully weaves two notions that had not fit together very well in Israel's early history, that their God is both Creator and Saviour. The language of creation found in Genesis one is this: separate (holy), fill, day, complete, and image. All these lead to and are

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<sup>3</sup> Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, pg 149, Fortress Press

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Vol.I*, pg 147-148, Harper and Row Publishers

encompassed in the word *baruch* – blessing. These are the words to be explored.

The first key word to look at in the language of rest is found in Gen. 2:3. The word is *qadesh* - holy. The word is a verb; it is something God did. God was still doing things on Shabbat. He *holisized* the seventh day. Essentially, what God did was separate the seventh day from the other six. He set it apart. Although the scripture places *qadesh* after blessing, it is actually its precursor. For this biblical writer, God has to first separate before he can bless. For the writer of Genesis one, this is an important theological point; that is, out of the one, many are blessed.

This notion is expounded in the liturgical style of Genesis 1. The first three days of creation are days of separation. God first separates light from darkness, then the expanse, and finally the waters. The end result of this series of separations is *eretz* – land. The author wants to show that the way God brought forth the earth is the same way that God brought forth a people. Out of all the vast array of the creation elements, the earth is the one place that God has extracted or extruded out of the rest to be the place of his intentional and intensified creative activity.

Likewise, the intention of Genesis is to demonstrate how out of all the families of the world God pulled one out, to be the object of His activity. The emphasis on the earth comes out as immediately as the second verse of the Bible. Verse one gives a sweeping statement about God's creative activity. It simply states: God created it all. By putting the subject –earth- in front of the verb –was- in the second verse, the author deliberately draws attention to the earth as the intensified concern of God. The first three days is a reductionist activity of God. Like when one extrudes strawberries until it becomes the essence of the fruit – jelly, so God did with all the elements of creation to make the earth. This is the deliberate set up of Genesis chapter one. The first three days of creation were meant to demonstrate that God separates before he blesses. God sets apart a special place for his intentional and intensified activity – His love.

As the first three days provide the place for God's covenant activity, the earth, the next three days provide the object of this activity. The end result is *adam* – man. Here the notion of blessing is introduced. In the second set of three days God commands that the thing that had been separated now be filled. So, the arena of light is now to be filled with lights. Then, the expanses are to teem with swarming things. Finally, the earth is to multiply with living things. What God reduced to essence in the

first three days, *qadesh* (holy), he expands – fills out and multiplies – in the next three days, *baruch* (blessing). We are to take note of what in particular is blessed. It is living creatures, those who are able to be fruitful, multiply, and fill. Here, we have our definition of bless. It is an empowerment or endowment to bring living to fullness or completion. Blessing is endowed with purpose; it is driven and compelled toward expressing that biblical affirmation, “On the seventh day, God completed everything.”

Inherent in the definition of bless is its purpose. Blessing is not a self-acquiring activity. To be blessed means to be empowered to bless. Out of the one, many are blessed. God pulls one out of the many, and that one becomes the object of God's special activity. God blesses that one, not for the purpose of having it over everyone else, but for being the source of blessing for many others. Blessing begets blessing. To bless means not only to declare something good, but also to destine it for goodness and fullness. Blessing means to empower blessing.

Out of the one, many are blessed. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. Holiness and blessing, separation and fullness, set apart and fruitfulness, one and many, extrude and expand, this is the language of creation. Both of these words, holy and bless (keep in mind that they are both verbs), are synthesized into one word, Shabbat – cease. When God stops, being picked out for blessing starts. The grammatical emphasis in 2:3 stresses the point that the seventh day was made holy and blessed in that God stopped working on that day. There is a beautiful twist in all of this. As I have tried to show, setting apart (holy) and filling out (blessing) were indeed the creative activities of the first six days. The difference is that in the first six days, separating and filling was done via God's word. God spoke separation and blessing. On the seventh day, the essential acts of creating continue; only now, it is not in word but in rest, not in speaking but in ceasing. Holiness and blessing occurred on the seventh day because God stopped working. It does sound odd, but it is true that things can be accomplished even if one is ‘not doing’ anything. Things can happen even when one is not trying to ‘make it happen’.

Genesis 2:2-4 brings a powerful closure to the creation account. At the beginning, chaos ruled the earth. Unlike us modern scientific types, the ancients were not obsessed with the question of how did all this come into being and how did we get here? What dominated their thinking was a more pressing question; is the cosmos and our existence in it essentially

one of chaos, randomness, and disarray? Does chaos rule? Does existence have any purpose or meaning?

The creation account attempts to bring home a powerful theological point summed up in the statement on Shabbat. The answer is a resounding and emphatic NO! The earth is not moving towards chaos, but towards completeness, order, and rest. It is moving towards God because God has graciously turned toward it. There is a profound proclamation in God's ceasing on the seventh day. **God has intentionally and graciously turned toward his creation.** Regardless of what the world has become, Shabbat is God's resounding affirmation of his creation. God's face shines toward us. Here, I will explore some more language of creation to understand how holiness and blessing come together in Shabbat.

### **Day, Image, and Rule.**

Are the heavens and earth essentially random? Is there no form, shape or order? No! Because the very first act of creation is that God made day. It is easy to figure out that the creation of the first day was to set the framework for the rest of creation. God needed day to do his work. We should understand the Hebrew word for day –*yom*– as a framework of time, which is one of its primary uses in Hebrew. The very first thing God did was bring order to the seemingly random elements of the cosmos. The creation of day immediately reverses the formless nature of primal creation. It sets apart, makes things distinguishable. Holiness answers shapelessness. Light subdues darkness by making distinctions. Light separates darkness into day and night and takes away its formidable power. The scary nature of randomness is now given order. On the first day, God set purpose into creation.

Are the heavens and earth essentially empty and in disarray? Again the answer is no! God fills out what has been empty and worthless. God fills the expanse above with lights. This filling out of sky serves first to be a sign. The word sign means to mark, pledge, token, or memorialize. Its purpose is to fill out day with appointed times and seasons. The second function of lights is to govern, rule. The word here is *mashal*. It basically means alongside, to be next to. Its prominent use in the Hebrew is not rule, but it is a wisdom word. It is translated into Greek as *parabolos* – parable. It carries a notion of balance. The lights are to rule by representation; they parallel or reflect the light of day.

God continues to fill the expanses with living moving creatures. Here the emphasis is on teeming, moving, living creatures. The creatures are *nephesh*, often translated soul. It means “open throated”; creatures are those with the capacity to take in life. Only creatures can be blessed because only they have the capacity to confer abundant and effective life. The governing aspect of day four is carried forth into the next day in that the creatures are divided into their kinds. They are given distinction and boundaries.

The filling out of creation reaches its culmination in the creation of God's image bearers – *adam*. This is not the pinnacle of creation, but its lowest point. For Adam is the last creature and the most dependant; nevertheless, God blesses them. Here again the empowerment to fill out creation includes a governing function. The blessed one is an image bearer. It is that one who not only is blessed but also has the capacity to bless, to make blessing happen. We can take note of this in Genesis chapter 5. Seth is the image of Adam. This is a statement to indicate his special status as the blessed one of Adam. He bears the image because he is blessed and endowed with the power to bless.

Here again, this is where filling, multiplying, and rulership come together. It is interesting to note that image here does not serve to give form to creation, but to fill it. This may not seem like much, but it may in fact critically address the idols of pagans. The emphasis is on their shape and form. Godly image doesn't bring order or purpose as much as it brings worth and meaning. True image is life giving, and it can't be equated with form. The blessed one is image-bearer because that one has the endowment to be life giving. Out of the one, the many are blessed; this is true image. This is what should rule creation.

There is one final creation word to complete our consideration; it is *qalah* - complete. In verse 2:1, the verbs *complete* and *cease* are paralleled. There is a difference of opinion on this, but I go with the idea that creation wasn't finished **until** the seventh day. If this is so, it means that what closed off creation was when God stopped working. Shabbat – to stop working – was the finishing touch to creation. The catch twenty-two is that the work of creation on the seventh day is when God stopped working. (If this is true, it is no wonder why we moderns don't understand rest. We have no notion of work going on without us doing work). The activity of creation continues on the seventh day. The idea is repeated for emphasis; it

is because God stopped working that the seventh day was set apart, blessed, and complete. When God stopped working, all that is left is God. A satisfied, marveling God in the midst of his creation is ultimately what makes Shabbat.

Is it helpful to have an image of a reclining and simply satisfied God? I lived in a neighborhood that was heavily populated by Mexicans. There is one thing I always admired about them. On any given Sunday, you can see them out on their front or back porch, in chairs or lying in the grass with plenty of food and drink. They were there all day, satisfied, content, resting. The hard work of the week is gone for one day. I can imagine our God sometimes in the midst of that.

On the seventh day, God rests in this; now there is a place, earth, and an object, man, for his intensified covenant activity, that is his love. God has made all, is satisfied with all, and has turned towards all. Certainly, the earth and mankind especially have caused God a whole lot of unrest; nevertheless, the passage is God's emphatic affirmation. God's face is turned towards us. Rest is found when we understand that we are in the right arena of God's gracious activity and that we are the special objects of His love. God has turned towards his creation and has never stopped turning towards it (even when he regretted it). In God, purpose and meaning are in every aspect of our existence. This is rest – out of the one many are blessed.

### **On Your Marks, Get Set, Stop!**

Shabbat means to cease or stop, and in particular in means to stop working. There is something marvelous that happened when God stopped working. When God stopped doing the work of creation, he started His gracious and redemptive work towards us. When I am teaching, I sometimes find it necessary to stop and give a hard and intensified glance at a particular student who is not being attentive. For the student, it is not a particularly welcome or comfortable turning in their direction. There is, however, a similar kind of glance that has quite the opposite affect, like when a lover first turns his attention to one he is interested in. That glance, equal in intensity as mine towards a student, excites wonderment, adrenalin, and thrill as the receiver gloats in a marvelous realization. He looked at me! He favors me! On the seventh day, God interrupted creation to let his face shine upon it.

There is another way to say all of this. On the first six days, the heavens and the earth began and came into being. On the seventh day, God's relentless grace began and entered the history of mankind.

We must learn or be reminded of a simple truth. We too must stop working to find grace. It must be a daily thing, and not just something reserved for the seventh day or special seasons. We must also learn, however, that Shabbat is not counter to creation; it is an intragal part of it. It is a mistake to struggle too hard to find rest because it is woven into the very nature of things. Shabbat is not about picking a fight with the world, but affirming what God has affirmed about it. Essentially and ultimately, God says and is still saying, "It is good".

The world I live in seems to press in harder and harder with the message, "Don't stop till you get enough." It seems to keep making a longer and longer list of necessary items. I'm not just talking about material things. The pressure increases that we must be on a ceaseless vigil to be informed, educated, and aware. We must be tireless watchman, or we'll die out.

If we want to enter into God's Sabbath rest, then we must learn to shut down and shut up the busy-ness. We need times and seasons when we ignore what our little world says is so bloody important or necessary. We need to make time for saying to ourselves, to God, and to our neighbor what is fundamentally important to any and all thriving on this planet; it is to bask in the warm and radiant light of His unending love.

*The Many Gifts of God*

*When woman and man were made,  
God left one good thing for last: the day to give thanks for the  
world and its wonders.*

*Now the seventh day has come. Now Shabbat begins:*

*To bring us rest, to bring us joy;  
to bring us song, to bring us peace.*

*How good it is, how filled with beauty!  
On this day we remember the goodness of all creation.*

*On this day we remember the goodness of earth,*

## God's Gracious Turning

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*water and sun, and all that grows.*

*On this day we remember the many gifts of God.  
Let us remember, and let us give thanks.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> *Gates of Prayer* pg 262 Central Conference of American Rabbis





