



## CHAPTER ONE

# Rest, the Pleasure of His Image

## I Please God by Reflecting His Image

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

(Genesis 2:1-3)

Made in the image and likeness of God, I am likely to rest.

(Jim Anderson)

**F**or years my wife, Lois, and I had heard others talk about their trips to Lake Louise in Banff National Park. “It is so beautiful, you have to go there and see it for yourself.” Nestled in the Canadian Rockies, in the province of Alberta, Lake Louise has captured the hearts of admirers for centuries.

Not until Lois and I were given an all-expense paid vacation for our thirtieth wedding anniversary did we schedule a trip to Lake Louise. I had no idea the trip would teach me so much about God and about myself. I didn’t know that Lake Louise was going to give me a deeper understanding of spiritual rest.

For years we had vacationed in Colorado and experienced the grandeur of the American Rockies, but this sight stimulated our senses like none other. Towering snow-capped mountains stand vertically on both sides of

the lake. As we looked down the long narrow waterway, our eyes fixated on the huge, sparkling glaciated mountain known as Mount Victoria.

Tom Wilson was the first white man to discover the lake in 1882 and named it Emerald Lake. No wonder—its water resembles the turquoise color of the precious stone. Two years later the name was changed to Lake Louise in honor of Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, wife of the Governor General of Canada from 1878 to 1883 and the fourth daughter of Queen Victoria. No matter what it is called, the total visual experience is a heart stopper.

I marveled, *what a work of art!* But before the day was over the scene would teach me more about God's rest than God's handiwork; this panoramic view increased my pulse rate and put me at ease simultaneously.

The moment Lois and I thought we had seen the lake in all her glory, the sun came out, and Lake Louise reflected the image of Mount Victoria. The lake augmented her beauty by absorbing the image of the mountain.

Just as water contains the intrinsic ability to bear the image of objects far more impressive than itself, I realized *so do I!* A reflection on water serves as a reminder of the uniqueness of man. Like water, I was created with the ability to bear an image. I bear nothing less than the image of God, the Creator of all. Distinct from all other created things, man was created *in the image and likeness of God*: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

As I read these verses my soul begged for an answer to the question, *how is the image and likeness of God reflected in man?* Knowing we would ask, the Author answers such questions within the context of the text. As God is the ultimate ruler, so he lets man rule in the caring image of God: "...and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." The image of God is evident in man as man rules the creatures of God's creation. Since God empowered man to rule, seeing man rule must give God pleasure.

When our two sons were still boys living at home, the three of us often went fishing together. For years it was toilsome work, untangling and tying line, baiting hooks and taking fish off. Eventually these lads became

good fishermen. What was once as painful as a hook in the finger became a pleasure to watch because they were doing something in my likeness. To this day I will phone and ask our grown sons, Scott and Nate, “Have you been fishing lately?” Likewise they are prone to call me with the news, “Dad, I caught a big one!”

If we are made in the image and likeness of God, we are also apt to work. Much of our work may pertain to our privileged role as rulers of God’s provision. However, work embraces much more than ruling as we expand our creative energies in the likeness of our creator. It is not that we become gods or even become more like God by ruling or creating; rather we reflect what God has already instilled within us. The acts of creating and making in Genesis chapter one are referred to as work in Genesis chapter two: “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Genesis 2:1-3).

Holy God worked the works of creation and continues to work as master of all. Work and all its related tasks of creating, making, ruling, planting, gathering, and managing preceded the fall of man. Bearing the image and likeness of God, man worked apart from any penalty or consequence of sin. It is safe to say that since God empowered man to work, God takes pleasure in seeing mankind at work. The person who refuses to work within his or her God-given capacity or realm of responsibility lives in contempt of the image and likeness of God within him or her. However, we are not to *overwork* as if it were the only way in which the image of God is evident in our lives. Many of us live as if work were the only way by which we can please God. We are constantly on the go and feel guilty when we are not.

## REST AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

I will never forget the day I visited a counselor. A few months after leaving one congregation for another I began to experience severe anxiety. I felt like I was being squeezed in a vice between the expectations of all the new faces that stared at me every Sunday and my self-imposed ideals. After telling the therapist my story, I left myself wide open with the question, “Well, what do you think?”

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She simply said, “The person in front of me is one of the most restless, driven people I have ever met.” How humbling! I wanted to please God so much that I was neglecting one of the primary means of doing so—rest!

Contrary to my driven lifestyle, I realized that rest is actually a means of God showcasing his image in me. Made in the image and likeness of God, I am likely to rest as he shows me by example how to rest.

*If my life is going to clearly reflect the image of God,  
I am going to have to learn how to rest.*

In contrast to the first six days of creation, on the seventh day God does not speak or work. Twice it is stated that God *rested*. Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer cites an important link between the rest theme and the unique creation of man:

It is likely, as well, that the author intended the reader to understand the account of the seventh day in light of the “Image of God” theme of the sixth day. If the purpose of pointing to the “likeness” between man and his Creator was to call upon the reader to be more like God (e.g. Leviticus 11:45), then it is significant that the account of the seventh day stresses that very thing which the writer elsewhere so ardently calls upon the reader to do: “rest” on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8-11).<sup>1</sup>

I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

(Leviticus 11:45)

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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

(Exodus 20:9-11)

If my life is going to clearly reflect the image of God, I am going to have to learn how to rest. Rest is of value to both God and man. The author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, points out that the life of God

and man intersect during periods of rest. Rest is so important to the God-man relationship that God called one day of the week—the Sabbath—a day of rest! The Hebrew word for rest is *Shabbat*, from which comes the word Sabbath. However, God’s definition of rest may differ somewhat from our contemporary understanding of rest. From God’s perspective rest is more than sleep or leisure. After all, God doesn’t get tired: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom” (Isaiah 40:28).

When I read that God rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done, I wondered, “What is it that God did that was rest? He must have done something other than sleep.”

### DIVINE REST IS CLOSURE

Divine rest is closure. Before there can be closure, some activity or segment of time must begin. Genesis 1:1 tells us that God had indeed begun an era of creative activity, and that creative activity had been brought to a close. An act of closure is significant according to the value of that which precedes it. Genesis 2:1-3 tells us that something had been finished and this act of completion is the basis of divine rest, as commentator James G. Murphy explains, “The resting of God arises not from weariness, but from the completion of His task. He is refreshed, not by the recruiting of His strength, but by the satisfaction of having before Him a finished good.”<sup>2</sup>

The first book about the Sabbath that impacted me was *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald. His insights remain helpful to me as I seek to understand and apply the Sabbath concept to my own life:

High-tech systems planners like to use the phrase “closing the loop” to describe the completion of a phase in an electrical circuit. They also use the phrase when they want to say that a task has been completed or that every person in a project has been informed or consulted.

So you could say that on the seventh day, God closed the loop on His primary creation activity. He closed it by resting and looking back upon it to survey what had been accomplished.

A Sabbath rest is, first of all, a time of looking backward, of loop-closing. We gaze upon our work and ask questions like: “What does my work mean?” “For whom did I do this work?” “How well was the work

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done?” “Why did I do this?” and “What results did I expect, and what did I receive?”

To put it another way, the rest God instituted was meant first and foremost to cause us to interpret our work, to press meaning into it, to make sure we know to whom it is properly dedicated.<sup>3</sup>

Closure requires that we have the power to stop working. Genesis 2:2 declares twice that God rested, and three times it states that he ceased making. C.F. Keil states, “God completed the creation of the world with all its inhabitants by ceasing to produce anything new...”<sup>4</sup> It is conceivable that God could have continued to create yet another universe or simply added another strain of insects to the present existing earth, but did not before resting. He had the power to cease his work. He controlled his work; his work did not control him.

It therefore can be said that in light of the likeness of God in man I demonstrate God's likeness by bringing closure to my work. This ability makes me unique compared to the rest of the created order, which does not voluntarily cease its endless cycle of activity. Closure has powerful implications for workaholics, those of us who are obsessed with work and even work at our play. The Sabbath becomes a test to determine if a person is in control of his work or his work is in control of him.

As a means of curtailing my own workaholic tendencies, I have found it helpful to set aside a time each week to record what I did during the past six days. I simply finish the sentence: *This week I \_\_\_\_\_*. I then list the tasks completed over the past seven days. The list embraces all aspects of life: doctor appointments, household chores, key conversations with family members, and of course loads of work-related endeavors. Nothing that comes to mind is too small for the list. Recording seemingly insignificant tasks or conversations has a role in registering a sense of closure and accomplishment. This means of charting progress contributes to a light-hearted mood, putting a smile on an otherwise stress-filled face. Perhaps it was more than a smile on my face. Perhaps it is the image of God within me and the pleasure of God inducing the smile.

I believe God modeled daily closure for us as well as weekly closure in Genesis one and two. He brought closure to his work each day with the words, “It is good,” even though the total project of creation remained unfinished. Then at the end of the sixth day he said, “It is very good.”

## DIVINE REST IS BLESSING

Divine rest is blessing: “And God blessed the seventh day....” (Genesis 2:3). Blessing is the act of bestowing some good on an object or person. God had *seen* that all he had made was good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31). Now he includes the seventh day in that goodness. However, this declaration regarding the seventh day is distinct compared to statements following the days of creation for three reasons. First, before the seventh day it was the contents of creation that were seen as good and not specifically the days themselves. The seventh day is the first day that is recognized as good or *blessed*. Second, God does not simply see that it is good but specifically gives it his blessing. Third, the word *blessed* is distinguished from good because it is associated with life. The notion of blessing does not appear until the creation of living creatures of the sea and sky (Genesis 1:22). An identical blessing is given to man with the addition of *dominion*. Once again John Sailhamer’s commentary clarifies the point: “As soon as ‘living beings’ are created, the notion of ‘blessing’ is appropriated because the blessing relates to the giving of life.”<sup>5</sup>

In his work, *The Sabbath Belongs to Israel*, W. Zimmerli goes as far as to say, “God takes this day and impresses upon it some special importance. He puts into this day the powers of life....”<sup>6</sup> This statement about the Sabbath is supported by Exodus 31:17: “It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:17, NASB).

The root meaning of the Hebrew word translated *refresh* in Exodus 31:17 is life or soul (*nefesh*). The form of the Hebrew verb is reflexive, meaning the subject *refreshes himself*. While it may be difficult to understand why God would need to refresh himself, each person has experienced the self-refreshing powers of the human body. When a person ceases to do and starts to rest, the body begins to refresh, restore, and repair itself.

The craving for rest is instinctive; fatigue draws a weary athlete to the bench, bed rest is the remedy for the common cold, and a business executive under stress seeks retreat. The concept of Sabbath-rest orders what human experience verifies—namely that the refreshing powers of life are received through declared periods of rest. This is the blessing of the Sabbath. It was given to refresh our lives.

The Jewish writer Abraham Joshua Heschel likewise understands the Sabbath to be a day full of life:

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Every seventh day a miracle comes to pass, the resurrection of the soul, of the soul of man and of the soul of things. A medieval sage declares: The world which was created in six days was a world without a soul. It was on the seventh day that the world was given a soul. This is why it is said: "and on the seventh day He rested *vayinnafash*" (Exodus 31:17); *nefesh* means a soul.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately the act of blessing a day of rest grinds against many western practices. Our work ethic continues to make people who need rest feel guilty. Voices of the past challenge us to work harder and longer days. Voices of the present whisper, "*Supermarkets and shopping centers are now open seven days a week. One day is just like all the rest.*" A competitive spirit nags, "*You must use down time to get ahead.*" A day of rest is scoffed at; the concept of rest is cursed. In contrast God blesses rest, relieving troubled consciences of unnecessary guilt.

Men and women demonstrate their likeness to God by following God's example and personally blessing their labor. Verbal blessing is a rare gift belonging only to God, angels, and man. Sabbath-rest gives man an opportunity to practice the art of blessing. As God blessed the day, so should man. As God looked upon his week's work and declared it good, so should man. This is rest and refreshment to both man and his surroundings.

The image and likeness of God is reflected in each of us as we see that our work is good and we bless rest, specifically our own rest. *Am I distinguishing myself from plant and animal life by exercising my ability to bless? Do I have a day or at least a weekly block of time to practice the divine knack of blessing as God intended? Is rest at the top of my list of recipients of my blessing?* As a person made in the image and likeness of God, I am moved to please him right now by pausing to bless this moment of rest. I find it essential and delightful to set aside a day or block of time each week to pump life (*nefesh*) into my surroundings by saying: *It is good! I bless you!*

### DIVINE REST IS HOLY

And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy

(Genesis 2:3)

You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy

(Leviticus 20:26)

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For it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy”

(I Peter 1:16)

On occasion I ask people, “Is rest a four-letter word?” Literal minds immediately go to work counting letters asserting “Of course it is!” In contrast more figurative thinkers immediately connote four letter words with coarse speech unfit for polite use. They react with a resounding “No way!”

Regardless of thought patterns, busy people treat rest like it is an unmentionable. It is perpetually on our minds but suppressed among our passions. We dream of it but dare not yield to it. We avoid the urge to rest for fear of looking lazy, being unproductive, losing out to the competition, or failing to meet self-imposed goals. In contrast God calls rest *holy*.

The word “holy” appears in Scripture approximately six hundred times. By far the most common declaration is *God is holy!* Closely connected to the declaration that God is holy is the command that we are to *be holy*. As an aid to the process of becoming holy, God has given us holy things or places. What surprised me was the fact that the first thing God called holy was neither a thing nor a place.

God’s work week, as described in Genesis one, was spent creating many *things*; yet none of those things was specifically called *holy*. The word *holy* does not come into play until the seventh day. It was not a *thing* that was first called holy but *time*—specifically a time of *rest* (Shabbat). Rest is the word from which comes the word *Sabbath*. Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel points out the significance of God calling the Sabbath *holy*:

How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: “And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness. This is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that, after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness of time, the Sabbath, which comes first.<sup>8</sup>

To my astonishment I saw that it was a segment of time that was first called holy resembling the character of God. The root idea of holiness is one of separateness or the act of setting apart. Thus when the text says that God sanctified the seventh day, it is to be distinguished from the other days. It is special, not ordinary! God’s ability to rest was a demonstration

of his own holiness. I am beginning to understand that my passion to meet him in periods of rest is an indication of my desire to be holy. James Montgomery Boice explains the connection between rest and holiness: “God sets the Sabbath day apart to teach that we are to enter not only into His rest but also into His holiness. The two go together, because holiness is the opposite of sin, and sin is what makes us restless.”<sup>9</sup>

Unlike any object that has to be purchased, made, or carried, time is with each person and possessed by all. Heschel has profoundly identified the significance of the Sabbath in Jewish history: “The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals; and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn.”<sup>10</sup>

I had to think about that: *Do I have a cathedral of time that no one else can burn or destroy? What sacrifices will I have to make to meet God weekly? Have I identified a time and place for my weekly meeting with God?* I know that I need to identify a cathedral of time that I can enter and where I can meet God.

*As parents and grandparents take pleasure in their sleeping children,  
so God takes pleasure in our rest.*

When our children were small, Lois and I would often lie down with our sons to get them to nap in the afternoon or to go to sleep at night. There were plenty of times when we would have loved to take naps ourselves, but our agenda was to help them settle down and go to sleep for their own good. We would lie down, read books, tell stories, and pray until they finally closed their eyes and went to sleep. As Lois and I now cherish the privilege of doing the same with our grandchildren, we now realize that such times are some of the most precious in a parent-child relationship. This intimacy provided the foundation for our lifelong relationships with our sons.

Throughout Scripture God is referred to as Father. Jesus consistently urged his followers to think of God as their Father. For example The Lord's Prayer begins, “Our Father in Heaven” (Matthew 6:9). I find it helpful to think of God as a parent who lies down beside his child to quiet him and help him go to sleep. God uses rest to merge my temporal life into his eternal being. Through rest, I find closure, blessing, and holiness.

As grandparents Lois and I not only enjoy playing with our grandchildren, we like to peek in their rooms while they are asleep. Those active

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little bodies and inquisitive minds have momentarily ceased running, climbing, and asking questions. A child at rest is a precious picture of health, satisfaction, and peace. As parents and grandparents take pleasure in their sleeping children, so God takes pleasure in our rest.

It can be said that man demonstrates his likeness to God during periods of rest. It is my privilege to demonstrate the likeness of God within me by following the pattern of the first Sabbath. God takes pleasure in seeing us rest, since rest that is set apart for meeting with our Holy God is itself holy. Is rest a four letter word? Yes, it is a *holy* one.

Some time ago I saw a photo of a beautiful autumn scene. The trees in the picture had turned into flaming shades of yellow, orange, and red. The picture had obviously been taken on a calm day since the lake beneath the forest was casting a perfect reflection of the trees. I studied the photo for some time before noticing something peculiar. The photo hanging on the wall was actually upside down. The reflection on the water was so good that I assumed it was the real thing and not a reflection at all.

I have often thought about that picture and asked myself, *How well do I reflect the likeness of God in whose image I was created?* I have to honestly say my reflection has been a broken image at best. Hardly did I fool anyone about my reflection of God during the years I produced whitewater with my anxious thoughts and hasty lifestyle. Today I can say that I have at last come to the realization that the reflection of God's image in my life is impossible without rest.

### Prayer

Lord God, your majesty is expressed in all that you have made and done both great and small. I am honored to be made in your image and privileged to have the opportunity to reflect your image and likeness during my time on earth. Forgive me for clouding your image with selfishness and fear. I long to reflect your image in all I do and say at work, play, or rest. In Jesus' name and for his sake I pray, Amen.

### Questions to Ponder

1. How does my work reflect God's character?
2. How do I bring closure to periods of work?
3. When do I pause to bless my work?
4. When do I rest without guilt?