

BUILDING THE WALLS OF YOUR LIFE — PART 3

Ruth was married to Boaz, and they met first in a field. He was harvesting, she was gleaning—that is, following along behind the harvesters and picking up anything they dropped. It was an acknowledged practice, and the way some of the poorer people ate. And it was written in to God's Law.

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God. Lev 19:9,10

Modern practice is very different from this. We'd want to go over it a second time and even a third time if necessary, reaping right to the edges and maximising productivity any way we could. Why leave anything for the poor, the alien, or anybody else for that matter? That just lessens the yield!

The influence of this thinking is wider than merely farming. We used to have one whole day in the week when the shops were shut. It meant that most people were neither working nor shopping, and could do other things that day. However, that is not "reaping to the edges". To the retail trade it seemed wasteful. They could increase productivity by 17% by opening the extra day!

As in shopping, so in other areas—and in the UK we now live in a 24/7 culture. There are many consumer benefits to this. It's perfectly workable. However, if the principles were carried over to the lives of individuals, the result would be disastrous. Why work only five days? Would it not be more productive to work seven? Why stick to eight hours? There's more of the day available to use! And is all that time sleeping really necessary? Could sleep not at least be severely curtailed?

These questions may seem very silly, and no doubt they *would* be—if it were not that many of us had already volunteered to "live in the answers"!

The Wall of Rest and Renewal

We've been looking at *Building the Walls of Your Life*. As Nehemiah was motivated to remove the reproach by rebuilding the walls of the city, so we can bring renewed *internal* definition, demarcation and order as we build the walls of our lives. Having dealt previously with *personal purpose*, and last issue with *time and priority*, we now turn to *rest and renewal*.

Short-term thinking

The best sprinters can run 100 metres in less than ten seconds. But what if someone started a 10,000 metre race at 100 metre pace? At first he would lead the field, but it wouldn't last. He might soon be too tired to *continue* the race, far less complete it. Runners know they have to pace themselves.

In our enthusiasm for serving the Lord, we can drive ourselves at a pace we simply can't sustain over the long haul. But what's the alternative? Slow down and rest? It seems so wasteful, even sinful—but that's nothing other than short-term thinking. Better to burn *on* and be of lasting benefit than to burn *out* and be of but fleeting benefit.

A candle and a stick of dynamite have a lot in common: both can be lit, and both will then give off light. The candle will burn with an unspectacular but steady glow, while the dynamite fuse may look brighter, more vital and much more exciting. It's not long, however, before the dynamite's light is catastrophically extinguished, in the process damaging everything in its vicinity. The candle is less exciting (and less explosive), but more effective in the long term. If you're burning for the Lord, seek to burn like a candle—it's more useful in the end.

The Principle of Sabbath

It was God who instituted the Sabbath; and He told Moses: "*It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.*" [Ex 31:17 NKJV] We may imagine God as being so exhausted from His efforts in creation that He needed to sit down in His armchair for a whole day to rest and be refreshed—but that would be an error. Rather, He's modelling the Sabbath for us and giving it foundation. God subjected Creation to the rhythm of work and rest, and by precedent observed it Himself.

The principle of Sabbath is this: set aside for rest and refreshing one day in seven. This is not necessarily a day of *inactivity*—it could be a day of *different* activity. The important feature is that it creates a context, a cycle of weekly seasons of which our life consists. Rather than every day alike being yet more of the same, we work in manageable cycles punctuated with the opportunity to "catch our breath". The result can be regular spiritual, mental, emotional and physical renewal.

The story is often told of two men chopping logs. The first man chopped and chopped all day without a break. The second man chopped for fifty minutes of each hour and rested for ten. The first man smiled to himself at the slackness and inefficiency of his companion, confident that he would have a bigger pile of logs at the end of the day. Yet at the day's end, the second man had the bigger log pile. The first man's question exploded: "How did you do that? I worked flat out all day, you worked and rested and worked and rested, and you've got more to show for it than me!" "That's easy," the second man replied; "Every hour when I rested, I sharpened my axe."

That's what the principle of Sabbath does: it sharpens us, so that we accomplish more in the six days than we would have accomplished in the seven.

True rest

We say, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

If "all work" truly dulls us, then "play" is not only permitted, but actually *necessary*. And yet "play" itself is not the heart of the issue. True rest is more than leisure, more than relaxation, more than sleep—though all these may be involved without guilt. True rest includes reflecting on the wider and the higher issues, focusing on the eternal truths, seeing work and the daily activity in perspective. True rest looks again at purpose and mission, and reminds us *what it's all about* and *Who it's all for*. We climb up to a higher vantage point, see the bigger picture, and then go back down again with fresh motivation to "work it out".

Some struggle with this, feeling frustrated by temporarily-enforced inactivity. "I'm too busy. I haven't got time for this luxury!" But the truth is it's more *necessity* than *luxury*.

We can actually get so focused on our calling, our task and activity that we wonder how God and the world could cope if we took some time off! True rest reminds us that we're *not* indispensable—it's *not* all up to us! God is fully capable in Himself. As Jamie Buckingham said, "We take ourselves too seriously—because we don't take God seriously enough!"

Martin Luther died in 1546, yet his name and legacy are still well known today. He would be considered significant and important and productive in his day. But he apparently understood rest, for he said, "While I drink my little glass of Wittenberg beer, the gospel runs its course."

The Wall of Rest and Renewal contributes to our internal prosperity. It's a significant part of bringing definition, demarcation and order to our inner life.

All those years ago, Nehemiah motivated the building process and the walls of the city were successfully rebuilt. Today, you have the opportunity to be your own personal "Nehemiah", rising up and *building the walls of your life*.

George Alexander
January 2006

Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.