

Burned Out?

Trusting God with Your “To Do” List

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Married with three children, Bob played all of the roles typical of loving husbands and fathers. For his wife he was confidant, friend, and handyman. For his children, he was homework helper, chauffeur and cheerleader for sporting events, and a sympathetic ear to his daughters' occasional "boy troubles." His job was demanding. He was a mid-level manager for a company with tight resources and high expectations. Bob frequently felt the need to work overtime, doing things left undone by his employees. Involvement at church seemed like another endless "to do" list as he taught regularly, participated in various programs, and led a small-group Bible study.

A Very Tired Man

Over several months, Bob's stress levels had soared. As he accepted more and more responsibilities, he had less energy to bring to projects. Assignments were forgotten or neglected, people were disappointed, and Bob's anxiety and frustration grew. As it turns out, Bob's life was killing him—literally. One afternoon after a long day

at work, Bob came home and had what seemed to be a heart attack. He was rushed to the hospital where he was diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat created by stress. The doctors recommended counseling. Bob had to find a way to slow down and learn to rest.

If Bob needed a reason to slow down, you would think he had one that no one could argue with. But someone did: Bob! Bob was in counseling because he didn't know how to stop. When asked to lay aside some responsibilities for his own good, Bob couldn't do it. In every area of his life, Bob would raise the same concerns: “But this is so important!” “But it's for the church!” “But it's for the kids!” “If *I* don't do it, who will?” “I would just feel too guilty.” Bob was stuck on a treadmill of his own making.

Do you see yourself in Bob? Does your life feel like one long “to do” list? Do you find yourself saying yes to activities you don't have time for? Here's a tougher question: Are you, like Bob, driven as much by your own demands to perform as the requests of others? How many requests feel like demands only because of the way

you perceive them? Short of having a heart attack, are you willing to slow down and rest?

A Command to Rest

There is one very important reason to slow down and rest. God commands it. In fact, resting is so important that it is one of the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment reads, “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” (Exodus 20:8–10). The word *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word for “ceasing” or “stopping.” You may already be familiar with the idea of “Sabbath” from Sunday school or from hearing your parents or grandparents mention it, but have you ever wondered why God thinks that having a day of “stopping” is important enough to be one of the Ten Commandments?

The first instance of Sabbath in the Bible features God himself resting. In the opening chapter of Genesis, God creates everything that exists in six days: light and darkness, moon, sun, stars, land and sea, plants,

animals, and humankind. Chapter 2 begins, “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).

In some ways this seems natural enough; after all, God had just created everything! Can you think of a task more deserving of rest? But notice *how* God created everything. Every act of creation required nothing more of God than a spoken word: “And God said. . . .” God isn’t toiling in sweat and anguish—just the opposite. He created an ordered, obedient cosmos with nothing more than a few words from his lips. Not only was his labor effortless, it was also perfect. Every creative act began with a word and ended with the pronouncement, “And God saw that it was good.”¹

You may be so familiar with the story of creation that it no longer astounds you, but you can be sure that