

Madison Heights Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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Open doors-----Open hearts

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Sabbath is the Alternative to Coveting

Virtually every time I read the Bible I learn something new. I once led a study group on the 10 Commandments and thought that I knew about all there is to know about them. That is until recently when I read something that revealed to me to a way of understanding one of the commandments that I had never considered before. I was reading the book *Money and Possessions: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church* by Walter Brueggemann when I came across this sentence. "Sabbath is the alternative to coveting." When I read that sentence I had to stop and think about it, and reflect on what it was that the author was actually revealing.

The book addresses the vast amount of biblical texts that deal with economics, money and possessions. There are a lot more biblical lessons on financial stewardship as the author puts it "economics is a core preoccupation of the biblical tradition." The book is laid out in fifteen chapters from Genesis to Revelation with each chapter addressing details regarding how the various segments of Scriptures deal with economics, money, and possessions. I didn't realize there was so much attention to the issues of financial stewardship until I began to do a little research on the subject matter and read this book.

The tenth commandment located in Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21 "You shall not covet" is a prohibition that concerns acquiring what belongs to another. It is also the desire to have more for the self at the expense of the well being of others is a sin. It is prohibited. It is contrary to the will of God. As Brueggemann states "The God of the gospel does not intend that social life should consist in the unrestrained, addictive pursuit of commodities." It is a "do not" commandment from God.

There are five unnamed Pharaohs in the Bible. The Egyptian pharaohs are thought of as kings but in the day they were considered a god among the people. So, the Pharaoh was a monarch with a priestly role to rule over and to look after the welfare of the Egyptians. The Pharaoh of Joseph's time had enough food to supply refugees that were suffering from famine. However, he was overcome with anxiety and frightened by the prospect of scarcity. His actions resulted in reducing peasant farmers to slavery while he took ownership of all the land. Pharaoh coveted his neighbor's field with an insatiable desire for more. The slaves were treated ruthlessly and were kept busy producing more for the Pharaoh. The life of a slave was one of hopeless despair. There was no vacation, no days off, no rest. Their future was one of endless chores with difficult, dangerous, and exhausting work. There was no Sabbath rest for anyone because the desire for more made the Sabbath rest impossible. Therefore, the Sabbath is the alternative to coveting.

Sabbath is a refusal of the rat race of commodity acquisition. The insatiable quest for more only leaves one with wanting more. Coveting leaves one with desire that is never satisfied. Coveting is propelled by anxiety and fear of scarcity, and it does not realize that work stops even in the wilderness where God provides abundance. Honoring the Sabbath is a refusal to join in the rat race, the chase for more for the self at the expense of others.

Honoring the Sabbath because it is a commandment is an obligation. But honoring the Sabbath because you realize that God provides enough, more than enough, for all is a matter of expressing the joy of giving thanks to God out of appreciation for what God has done for us. Honoring the Sabbath is an affirmation that God provides an abundance that is more than adequate. When you appreciate, truly appreciate, what God has done for you then it's not a matter of coming to church out of discipline. It is a matter of devotion. When your love for God reaches a point to where worship is something you cannot do without. Likewise, when you truly appreciate God then it's not a matter of giving out of discipline. It is a matter of devotion. When your love God so much that you cannot help but give your very best to God.

In Christian Love,
George