

A MONTH OF  
**SUNDAYS**



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31 Meditations on Resting in God

Glenda Mathes



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*A Month of Sundays*  
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## INTRODUCTION

*Rest in the LORD...*

—PSALM 37:7a

The concept of rest permeates the Bible from creation to consummation. After God created and named the different aspects of our universe in six days, He rested. When Christ returns to complete His kingdom, all believers will enjoy perfect rest. Between these two great bookends of history, God calls us to rest in Him every day.

In today's hectic and distressing world, we need to recapture the concept of daily rest. Demands and distractions agitate our spirits. Disasters trigger anxiety. Diseases generate pain. Despair creeps into our hearts. These influences displace our peace and pull us from resting in God and His Word. The reflections in *A Month of Sundays: 31 Meditations on Resting in God* pause our spinning thoughts and calm our fluctuating feelings.

Real rest is impossible apart from belief in the triune God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine of Hippo famously wrote, "Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." God created people to praise Him. We are inherently restless apart from saving faith in this Creator God. God instituted the Sabbath as a creation ordinance.

We must set aside one day each week for worship and rest. But true Sabbath keeping includes an attitude of worship and rest that He calls us to develop daily.

Psalm 37:7 commands us: “Rest in the LORD.” In Jeremiah 6:16, God says, “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” These verses refer to more than mere Sunday worship. Our souls find rest when we truly trust a sovereign God, who is also our loving Father, and walk in His ways every day of our lives. True rest begins with faith in His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. It continues when we reject sin and embrace sanctification through the Holy Spirit.

The Heidelberg Catechism beautifully expounds on the complementary concepts of Sabbath rest. As question 103 explores God’s will for us in the fourth commandment, its comprehensive answer embraces support for the gospel ministry and an all-encompassing participation in worship on Sunday, which it calls “the festive day of rest.” But the answer additionally notes “that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin already in this life the eternal Sabbath.”

While we worship and rest on Sunday, we must also rest daily by trusting our triune God and obeying His timeless Word. Each of these devotions helps readers do that through a recommended Scripture reading reference, a focus verse (or verses), a meditation, and questions aimed at stimulating personal reflection. May God bless your study of His Word as you pause to enjoy His gift of daily rest while you anticipate His guarantee of eternal rest.

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## GOD RESTED

Read: Genesis 2

*And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.*

—GENESIS 2:2–3

During each of the six days of creation, God called some thing into being by the power of His spoken word, and then He named it. Time began and order was established. Each thing did exactly what it was created to do. Light passed into night. Puffy clouds floated in blue sky above a rippling sea. Fruit ripened on supple tree branches. Plump heads of grain undulated in gentle breezes. The sun's golden globe daily bathed the earth with its warm rays. The moon's silver disc nightly shimmered among millions of sparkling stars. Squawking gulls skimmed past spurting whales. Deer grazed fearlessly beside calm lakes. In this perfect creation, Adam and Eve reigned as God's regents.

On the seventh day, God rested. Since God's strength never ebbs, He didn't need to rest. But He chose to cease work for an entire day and, in fellowship within the triune Godhead and with His creatures, enjoy His very good creation.

God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, making it holy. He established a Sabbath pattern for us by setting one day apart from the others as a special day for rejuvenating worship and joyful rest. Even though Christ's resurrection generated the Christian observance on the first day of the week, Sabbath remains a creation ordinance. God confirmed this decree in the fourth commandment, which is the longest of the Ten Commandments:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex. 20:8–11).

Exodus 20 clearly connects God's rest on the seventh day of creation week with our Sabbath rest each week. On Sunday, we rest from our regular work and gather with other believers to worship God corporately. But remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy encompasses much more than merely making time for formal worship.

Notice with what event God links the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy 5: "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day (Deut. 5:15). Here God ties Sabbath observance with His amazing deliverance of the Israelite nation from Egyptian oppression. Just as

God brought Israel out of bondage to Pharaoh, He delivers believers from slavery to sin. Sabbath rest includes not only an appropriate view of the Lord's Day but also a daily turning from sin and submission to the Spirit.

The Heidelberg Catechism elaborates on the comprehensive character of Sabbath keeping while tying together the complementary concepts of Sunday rest and daily rest. Exploring God's will for us in the fourth commandment, the answer to question 103 states:

First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I regularly attend the assembly of God's people to learn what God's Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin already in this life the eternal Sabbath.

What lovely language the catechism uses in this inclusive answer!

Note first that the catechism calls Sunday the "festive day of rest." This phrase seems to incorporate two opposing attitudes. We tend to think of "festive" as describing something lively and noisy, like a party or parade. And we tend to think of "rest" as something quiet and sedate, like a nap or coffee break. Considering Sunday as a "festive day of rest" changes how we view and observe it.

Perhaps you grew up with a negative view of Sunday. Legalistic parents can make Sunday observance into a long list of forbidden activities. How much better to focus positively on the unique privileges of a day for corporate

worship and personal rest! Thinking of Sunday as a festive day of rest conveys both celebration and peace.

Before question and answer 103 describes Sunday in this colorful way, or even discusses worship, it addresses the gospel ministry in general. Keeping the Sabbath covers a wide variety of things involved in assuring continued corporate worship. We need to encourage, pray for, and financially support our pastors. Those who proclaim the gospel should make their living by the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). We should also pray for and support those seminaries that train godly ministers.

Appropriate corporate worship encompasses more than simply showing up for every service. Meaningful attendance goes beyond a pew-parked body to include an open mind and a teachable spirit. Worship in Spirit and truth incorporates recognizing and repenting from personal sin. Appropriate worship overflows with gratitude for Christ's sacrifice while joyfully celebrating and jointly praying with other believers. It embraces cheerful giving for others' benefit, not for the tax break.

The second part of question 103's answer shares this book's focus. God calls us to rest daily from sin by obeying the Lord's commands and the Spirit's leading. As the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, we enjoy the beginning of the eternal Sabbath rest God has prepared for us.

God set the Sabbath rest pattern when He rested from His creation work on the seventh day. He calls us to follow that pattern every Sunday, and He calls us to rest in Him every day. We'll explore biblical guidelines for daily rest in this *Month of Sundays*. Sabbath is a day *and* an attitude.

**Questions for Reflection**

How does God's resting on the seventh day affect the way I view Sunday?

How does viewing Sunday as a "festive day of rest" color my Sabbath observance?

In what specific ways can I demonstrate an attitude of Sabbath rest today?

## COVENANTAL CONSOLATION

Read: Genesis 15; 26:1–5, 12–33

*After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*

—GENESIS 15:1

*And the LORD appeared unto [Isaac] the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.*

—GENESIS 26:24

God deals with His people within the context of His covenant. After Adam, as our covenantal representative, fell into sin, God provided redemption for His children through the promise of a Redeemer. God's initial promise, known as the "mother promise," appears in His words to the serpent after the fall in Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

This marked the beginning of a cosmic conflict that still rages, the antithesis between believers and unbelievers. In the course of that great conflict, Satan would be permitted to bruise the heel of the woman's seed. But the seed of the woman, the promised Redeemer, would bruise Satan's head.

When Adam fell, we all became God's enemies. In His covenantal mercy, however, God provided a way for us to become reconciled to Him. That way is Christ.

In Genesis 15, we see how God chose Abram (who would later be called Abraham) to become the father of a particular people, the line of promise through which Christ would come into the world. Genesis 26 depicts the continuation of God's covenantal promise to Abraham's son Isaac and succeeding generations. This promise is not limited to physical descendants of Abraham, but includes all his spiritual children. Galatians 3:29 says, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." True Christians continue today as part of God's covenant family.

It is crucial to read Scripture as a unified whole, structured around the overarching theme of God's covenant with His people, coming to expression in the person and work of Christ. Within the context of God's covenantal promises, believers are able to trust God and rest daily in His Spirit. Today's verses focus on God's consolation.

God says to Abram in Genesis 15:1, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." God echoes that promise to Abraham's son Isaac in Genesis 26:24 when He says, "Fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake."

What would you guess is the most common command in the Bible? Perhaps you grew up thinking it was the command to obey authority. Or perhaps you believe it is the command to love. These are important and frequent commands, but God most often tells believers, "Fear not."

In today's verses, God connects the command to fear not with assurances that He is with His covenant people. He was

with Adam and Eve in the garden. After they ruptured the sweetness and intimacy of their original communion with God, He mercifully came to them, covered their nakedness, and provided a plan of redemption.

God was with Abraham. He promised to be his shield and his exceeding great reward. God not only protects His people, but He also abundantly blesses them.

God was with Isaac. He reminded him of His covenantal relationship with his father, Abraham. He promised to bless Isaac and multiply his descendants for the sake of Abraham, whom He called “my servant.”

Was Abraham God’s servant because he lived a perfect life? Hardly! Read Genesis 12:10–20, 16, and 20 to get a glimpse of the ways Abraham failed to trust and rest in God’s promises. But Galatians 3, the same chapter stating that today’s believers belong to God’s covenant as Abraham’s spiritual children, says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (v. 6). When Hebrews 11 lists believers in what is sometimes called “the hall of faith,” Abraham is discussed more than any others. That chapter describes faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (v. 1). It concisely overviews covenant history by showing how believers are counted faithful despite their doubts and transgressions. By working faith in believers’ hearts, the Spirit enables ordinary people to do extraordinary things. We are God’s servants when we serve Him through faith in Christ and the equipping of the Spirit.

God blesses His people and deals with them and their families within the context of covenant community. Because God is always with us, dealing with us in His covenantal love, because He has provided a way of salvation through

the finished work of Jesus Christ, and because the Spirit equips us, we are able to fear not. We rest in God.

In what may well be the most beautiful expression of confessional comfort, Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism exemplifies why believers can face life without fear:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me whole-heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

How amazing that this confession conveys God's comfort in such lovely and biblical language! No wonder so many people memorize and treasure these words. May God's covenantal promises in Christ become real to you as you rest in His Spirit.

### **Questions for Reflection**

How do God's covenantal promises console me?

How have I seen God fulfill the biblical promises of Lord's Day 1 in my life?

In what specific ways can I rest today in the joy of God's consolation?

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## TEN COMFORTS

Read: Exodus 20

*And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.*

—EXODUS 20:20

When you read Exodus 20, are you surprised at seeing the command to fear not in the same chapter as the Ten Commandments? Is Moses' command in verse 20 to "fear not" contradictory when in the same sentence he encourages fear? Although the placement or use of the word "fear" may initially seem illogical, it was not illogical for the Israelites then, and it is not for us now.

The Israelites had good reason to be afraid. Smoke billowed from the mountain. Lightning blazed across the sky. Thunderclaps and trumpet blasts assaulted their ears. They knew what God could do. They had seen Him change water into blood as well as other amazing miracles during the ten plagues in Egypt. They had seen God lead them with pillars of cloud and fire. They had walked through towering walls of water—walls that crashed down on Pharaoh's host, drowning and sweeping them away. Bread rained from heaven, water gushed from a rock, and the sun stood still. Small wonder they trembled when Moses

warned they would die if they came too close to the smoking mountain!

God could, indeed, strike dead any who disobeyed. But Moses assured the people that they didn't need to be afraid. God had come to prove or test them. He wanted the Israelites to realize His power and perfection because keeping that awareness in the forefront of their minds would help them resist sin.

While the biblical command to fear God includes recognizing His might and holiness, it does not mean trembling before Him in abject terror. Fearing God is a comprehensive concept that includes a healthy awe and reverence as well as a heartfelt love and desire to obey Him. Like little children, we believe our Father can do anything and is always right. We know He is capable of administering painful discipline; however, we want to obey Him—not from fear of punishment—but because we love Him so much.

Obedience as gratitude colors the way we view the Ten Commandments. We don't obey them simply to avoid destruction. We obey them because we love our heavenly Father and want to please Him. When we see the Ten Commandments as guidelines for gratitude, we begin to see how fearing God complements the comfort of fearing not. Our grateful comfort grows when we realize that we cannot keep God's law and when we consider how Christ willingly obeyed God's law in our place.

The Ten Commandments guide our relationships with God and our neighbors. Jesus summed up the law:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the

second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30–31).

Christ's summary is convicting. No one can love God and neighbor fully at any given moment, let alone all the time. We all fall far short.

This realization of our failure is another way the Ten Commandments guide us. They bring us to repentance by awakening an awareness of our sin. Paul wrote, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

The law shows us our sin, but obeying the law does not save us. Paul wrote that "no flesh" shall be justified by doing the deeds of the law. If we are not justified by obeying the law, is there no hope? On the contrary—we have great hope! And our hope is not in ourselves, but in Christ. What a comfort!

We take comfort in knowing that Christ's perfect obedience throughout His life and in His death fulfilled the demands of God's law. Christ Himself declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17).

Christ came, not to banish God's law or ignore it, but to complete it. We can't obey God's law perfectly, but Christ could, and He did. Truly God and truly man, He came to earth as our mediator. He reconciled us to God and restored us to fellowship with Him. Our Lord Jesus Christ lived an obedient life and died an atoning death. He did all the things we should have done, and He died for all the things we should not have done.

If you trust Christ for your salvation, you do not need to fear your heavenly Father. Your only fear of Him can be an

awe-filled reverence and wholehearted love. You no longer need to feel anxious that your failures to perfectly obey God's Ten Commandments will incur His eternal wrath. Instead, you can thank God for His great gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Finding your comfort in Christ's completed work, you can now obey the Ten Commandments through the Spirit's power in gratitude for your salvation.

Obedience doesn't earn salvation, but it evidences gratitude. Disobedience impairs Sabbath rest and daily rest. Belief in Christ and trust in God the Father generate rest through the Spirit's work in our hearts. The triune God comforts us with the knowledge that Christ has perfectly fulfilled every word of the law. We rest in the Lord.

Knowing God's holiness and power, we fear Him with awe and reverence. Loving Him as our dear heavenly Father, we obey Him out of gratitude. God's commandments guide our relationships with God and our neighbors. Through Christ's atoning work and the equipping of the Spirit, the Ten Commandments become our ten comforts.

### **Questions for Reflection**

How does the biblical concept of fearing God change the way I'll pray and live today?

In what ways do I live as if obedience contributes to my salvation?

In what ways can I rest in the Ten Commandments as ten comforts?

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## GOOD COURAGE

Read: Deuteronomy 31 and Joshua 1

*Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*

—DEUTERONOMY 31:6

*Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*

—JOSHUA 1:9

The book of Deuteronomy dawns with the Israelites on the threshold of the Promised Land. Moses reminded them that their disobedience had led to an extra forty years of wandering in the wilderness. He reviewed the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, renewing God's covenant with His people. He recited additional history and listed more detailed rules for living as God's people in their own land. Since Moses failed to trust God and disobeyed Him by striking a rock for water when he was commanded only to speak to it, he was not permitted to enter the land. Deuteronomy concludes as he prepares to hand the reins of leadership to Joshua.

Moses bookended his instructions to Israel with similar exhortations about trusting in God. In Deuteronomy 1:21,

he said, “Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.” And in Deuteronomy 31:8 he said, “And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.”

As one of the only two fighting men that God had allowed to live through the entire wilderness journey, Joshua had many opportunities to learn from Moses’ example and teaching. An apt pupil, Joshua learned his lessons well. When he prepared the Israelites to take the land, he encouraged them by reiterating Moses’ final command to “be strong and of a good courage” (Josh. 1:9). Later, he would tell his military leaders, “Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage” (Josh. 10:25).

All this might suggest, at first glance, that if believers are strong or courageous enough they will never be afraid, dismayed, or discouraged. But don’t miss the emphasis on the Lord’s continued presence. He goes with us, never fails us, and never forsakes us. It is only in the Lord that weak believers can be strong. We don’t draw courage from ourselves and our abilities. Only God gives us good courage.

The people of Israel saw God’s power demonstrated in an amazing way as they obeyed God’s strange commands for Jericho’s conquest. What military strategist would advocate marching around a city for days? But that is what the Israelite army did. Soldiers solemnly marched before seven trumpet-blowing priests and the ark of the covenant, which was followed by the rear guard. The entire procession walked around the city once on each of six successive days. Can you imagine how strange this tactic looked? Even if the

people in the city were frightened on the first day, they were surely hooting in derision by the sixth day.

The plan changed, however, on the seventh day. Instead of walking around Jericho only once, the procession circled the city seven times. Perhaps Jericho's inhabitants began to wonder what was happening during the second or third circuit. The tension must have mounted by the seventh time. An eerie stillness may have filled the city as its people looked over the walls or listened apprehensively within. Breaking the suspenseful silence, the priests blew a loud trumpet blast and the Israelites shouted. The impressive ramparts of Jericho immediately collapsed. The city literally fell into the Israelites' hands with almost no effort on their part. It's difficult to imagine a more effective demonstration of God's power.

We don't have to trust in our own physical strength or mental acumen. We don't have to trust in a capable president or a powerful military. We must simply trust our mighty God. When we need it, He gives us good courage.

Later, the Israelites were disheartened by a painful defeat at the hands of men from the city of Ai and were understandably reluctant to attack Ai again. God Himself appeared to Joshua and told him, "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed" (Josh. 8:1).

In these verses from Deuteronomy and Joshua, we read God's command to be strong and courageous combined with the common exhortation to fear not. But we also see God promising never to leave us or forsake us. That refrain of God's constant care resounds again and again throughout Scripture.

David echoes today's texts when he presents his son Solomon with plans and materials for building the temple of God in Jerusalem:

Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD (1 Chron. 28:20).

David wrote this long before advertisers promoted the Nike brand with its “Just do it!” slogan. But he says basically the same thing. Because God will be with Solomon, he shouldn’t hesitate to begin. He doesn’t need to be dismayed by the immensity of the mammoth project he faces. God will guide his every step and will carry the work through to completion. In God’s strength, he can be strong. God will grant him good courage.

God’s promise never to leave or forsake us is also found in the New Testament. After Christ’s resurrection and prior to His ascension, Christ confirms this promise to the church in the words of what has become known as the Great Commission:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18–20).

Because Christ reigns at the right hand of God and has complete authority over the entire cosmos, believers can spread the gospel throughout the world. New believers are to be baptized in the name of the triune God, but they are also to be taught. We must teach them to obey everything God has commanded in His Word. This daunting task is

possible because our Lord is with us always, even unto the very end of time.

Christ is always with us. For that reason, we can spread the gospel far and wide, teaching the whole truth of God's Word. We can face the Jerichos in our lives, even that last enemy death, because we can be sure that God will give His people good courage.

### **Questions for Reflection**

How does the Great Commission impact the way I live my life daily?

How is my obedience connected to courage?

In what ways do I need to depend more on the Lord and rest in Him for my good courage today?