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Briefing 54: Tuesday 9th March, 2021.

Dear friends,

New City Catechism Question 10: What does God require in the 4th and 5th Commandments?

Fourth, that on the Sabbath day we spend time in worship of God.

Fifth, that we love and honour our father and a mother.

Since it will be almost entirely adults who read this newsletter, I'm going to concentrate on the 4th commandment.

When I was a child, my mother used to take me along to church. I'd sit in the choir stalls with my grandmother, who would feed me polo mints, and then head out for my Sunday School group. It was a small church, so there weren't many of us, just 2 or 3 if I recall. But it was there that I heard the good news of Jesus and there, at the age of 7 or 8, my Sunday school teacher, an American woman called Joy, asked me and my friend if we were ready to put our trust in Jesus. After a moment's pause, we both knelt down and asked Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour.

But if I'm honest, the hour or so in church on a Sunday morning were about the only Christian things that took place on a Sunday. My dad wasn't a Christian when I was little, so he often didn't come with us to church. I recall eating lunch together and often going for a walk with the dogs. In those days, there were very few other places to go. The only thing I remember being open on Sundays were garden centres, which are not the most exciting places for children! But whatever we did, I'm not sure God got another mention after the Sunday morning service was over.

For a good chunk of my adult life that was also the pattern. I'd go to church, and then do other things. Eat, potter around the house, watch TV, hang out with friends. Even if I went back to church in the evening, the rest of the day was unremarkable. You'd have been hard pushed to look at how I spent my time and guess I was a Christian.

I suspect that is the case for many Christians when it comes to how we spend our Sundays. We go to church, perhaps after a morning quiet time, and that's it. The rest of the day is no different to any other day away from work. The question is, is that ok? Or does God's word demand more from us and have more for us when it comes to keeping the fourth commandment? I think it does. As I said on Sunday, I believe that the keeping of the commandment requires that our Sabbath Day (whether Sunday or another day if we need to work on Sundays) looks very different to other days. And I also believe that the rewards of obedience are many.

So what might that look like for us. There's little point being overly prescriptive here, our lives and family situations are too different for that. So I want to suggest 3 principles to help shape our day of Sabbath rest. I offer them as helpful things to discuss together with those you live with, and with the assurance that God's commands are good.

1: Put God right at the centre. Our true rest is only found in God, so if a Sabbath is going to refresh us, body, mind and soul, God needs to be at the heart of all we do. So church (*and remember I'm talking about post-covid normality here*) should never be an optional extra. It's too important for that. So do your best not to let your paid work stretch into your Sabbath. Don't let the demands of your family or friends or sport keep you from gathering with God's people. Make time with God's people a priority. There can be time for friends and family later (see below!)

And whatever you do for the rest of the day, make sure that God is right at the centre of it. As you eat, give thanks to God. If you go for a walk, consciously thank God for the beauty and wonder of his creation. If you spend time with friends, find ways to discuss the things of God and his kingdom. Put God right at the centre of all you do. I'd suggest that should also have implications for what we read and watch on our Sabbath. We live in an age when there is no shortage of Christian books, magazines, blogs, podcasts and things to watch. What would putting God right at the centre of everything you do on a Sabbath mean for you and your family?

2: Allow time for rest. As someone with a large garden and who knows from many years as a teacher (and Vicar) how our work is never done, it's very easy to let our paid work crowd out time for rest and relaxation. Sometimes that can't be helped. Sometimes we have to work on Sundays. Sometimes there are jobs around the house that simply need to be done then and there, but very often we do on a Sunday what could be put off to a later date. Now

I find this one hard. I am a do-er. I don't like leaving things undone, and sometimes I find it difficult to settle down until loose ends are all tied up. But as I said on Sunday, taking God's command for a day of rest seriously is a way of showing that we trust him; that there will be enough time later to do what needs to be done. A Sabbath is a day to be more Mary than Martha, because on a Sabbath, God has given us, as a gift, a day to enjoy his company and to rest from our labours. What might allowing time for rest from work on a Sabbath mean for you and your family?

3: Make time for joy. Remember: God is good, and his commands are good. What's more, Jesus said that he came to give us life in all its fullness, so taking God's commands for a Sabbath seriously should **never** mean a day of dull, dreary, boredom. During Lent, often a time of fasting, Sundays are exempt. They are not in the 40 days! So Sundays are for feasting, for celebration, dare I say it; for fun! So, our Sabbaths should also be a day of joy. What might that mean or include? Perhaps a special lunch, with nicer puddings than normal! Perhaps invitations to friends or family to eat and celebrate with you. Perhaps some games, real conversations, going for a walk together, time to enjoy each other's company, with God your ever-present companion, without having to hurry. Perhaps some music, singing together, or starting a family story time. Sabbath days are meant to be days of rest from our work, of putting God in the centre, and days where joy abounds. That's a far cry from the dull and dreary days being dragged round garden centres I remember as a child! What might making time for joy on a Sunday mean for you and your family?

Time for God. Time for rest. Time for joy. A taste of the eternal rest to come. That's God's plan for a Sabbath!

Yours in Christ,

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

**COME
and
PRAY**

COME AND PRAY TOGETHER! THIS WEEK we will be meeting on ZOOM to pray for the church, for the world and for one another from 7:45pm on Wednesday evening. This is the same link as the early morning prayer group. If you don't have the link, please contact Dave.

If you want to pray in church, St Nicholas will be open for private prayer for 3 sessions a week: Tuesdays from 2 – 4pm, Wednesdays 12 noon – 2pm, and Thursdays 10am – 12 noon. Why not go along and pray there? (*Perhaps that could be part of your road map for coming back to church?*)

EASTER EGGS: www.meaningfulchocolate.co.uk/ The Easter Egg that tells the Easter story (fair trade to boot) was available in supermarkets last year, but this year they are only available on line. We need to order 10 for our Easter treasure hunt if you'd like a number to give away please contact Dave by Sunday 14th. They will be £4:50 each.

THINKING OF BAPTISM OR CONFIRMATION? If you are considering having your **children baptised**, please do get in touch with me. Our next 3-session baptism preparation course will take place after Easter, but it would be good to get dates booked in the diary. If you are looking to be **confirmed** into the Church of England, St Nicholas will be hosting a confirmation service on the evening of Monday 7th June, with the Bishop of St Albans presiding. Do speak to Dave if you'd like to pursue confirmation or would like more details.

SOME ITEMS FOR YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT:

Following on from the YouTube film of the great Welsh revival I shared last week, I thought you might enjoy this. [Christ Church Sidcup Lent Course 2021 Week 2 THE HEBRIDEAN REVIVAL with Dr Paul Blackham - YouTube](#) As the title suggests, the talk comes from Christ Church Sidcup where their Lent series is on Revivals. The recording starts with some introductory remarks on Nehemiah 1, and then moves on with a description of the amazing work of God on the Isle of Lewis in late 1950s. I found it challenging and stirring. May God move like this here. If you'd like to spend some time praying for God to move here, do get in touch with me. Judy and I will be in church on Friday evening from 8pm. Join us there or pray at home.

A great song to complement our Lent studies: [Wonderful Love \(Live at Prom Praise, Royal Albert Hall\) - YouTube](#)

A great song to meditate on: [Fernando Ortega - Give me Jesus - YouTube](#)

CHILDREN'S WORK ON SUNDAYS: Under tier 4, we are unable to hold separate children's work in church. However, activity packs will be available to tie in with the talk and the question from the New City Catechism, so do bring your children along. They are a treasured part of our family and we love to see them. Unless things change, our children's work will not be able to recommence until after Easter.