

J. Mathew Sleeth, “24/6”

A Prescription for A Healthier, Happier Life. Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois, 2012, 204 pages.

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Mathew Sleeth M.D. (born in Maryland in 1956) gave up his medical practice in St. Andrews Hospitals in Booth Bay, Maine, where he served from 1998 to 2002. He received his MD degree from George Washington University in 1988. In 2002, Dr. Sleeth founded with his wife Nancy Sleeth the “Blessed Earth” in Lexington, Kentucky. His latest book 24/6 is reviewed in the following pages.



Dr. Sleeth, Emergency Room Doctor Sleeth Preaching ‘Sabbath Care’

This book begins with a “FOREWORD” by Eugene H. Peterson, Professor Emeritus of Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. Peterson affirms: “Mathew Sleeth has crafted a compelling invitation to consider and participate in Sabbath-keeping, an invitation that is in my experience without peer.” Sleeth appeals in his book to remember Sabbath and keep it holy. He is cognizant of the fact that we now live in a 24/7 world.

And we have become slaves to technology. He emphasizes about restraint and clearly defines 'Sunday' for connecting with our Creator and to find the peace of God.

This book has four parts, first part dealing with "Our 24/7 World", the second part addressing the question "Why We Need 24/6", third part posing another query "How we do 24/6" and finally fourth part dealing with "Your 24/6 Life." In the first Chapter Sleeth convinces us that unfortunately, in our society, it is not Monday that got mislaid, it is our Sabbath, our day of rest. In the second chapter, he refers to the transition from Julius Caesar's Roman calendar established to Pope Gregory's calendar after 1500 years, founded in 46 BC with 445 days in a year. Our modern calendar thus became a year with 365.5 days. Sleeth posed the question whether Moses observed Sabbath? There is always humor in the writing style of Sleeth. In p. 23, Sleeth narrates the creation story from Bible with candor. "On Monday God cooks up a universe with a few simple ingredients. He mixes nuclear weak and strong forces with a dash of gravity and pinch of electromagnetism. He seasons the mix with covalent and ionic bonds." On Friday God after coffee, stocks the lakes and fills the sky with birds. On Day 6 God forms Adam and then –because she is more complicated –God makes Eve. Sleeth's narration of creation in six days is the simplest and funniest creation story ever told! In Chapter 3, Sleeth talks about how God stopped on the seventh day and God rested not because the Creator was tired but because seventh day is truly holy.

In the days of Moses, Hebrews observed 10 days in a week. Today it is possible to go by car from Egypt (Cairo) to Israel (Jerusalem) in eight hours and less than an hour by flight. But the liberated Hebrew slaves took 14,600 days (40 years) under the command of Moses and then Joshua. On pages 35-36, Sleeth narrates the Ten Commandments, identifying the fourth commandment that says "Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy." He identifies 4th commandment as a transition from first three dealing with God, the Father and the last six (5 to 10) dealing with human life with ethics and laws.

Part II addressing the question "Why we need 24/6" contains three chapters, namely Jesus and Sabbath, More than yet another brick in the wall and Resting in rest. In Chapter 4, Sleeth brings in memories of his emergency room experiences when he helps to harvest vein from the leg of a patient who needs it to bypass the clogged arteries in the heart. He talks about his colleague Dr. Simpson's comment that God is a thoracic surgeon since he removed Adam's rib to create Eve in the "Garden of Eden." Dr. Sleeth's depth of scriptural knowledge is seen in page 52 to testify Jesus in action. Jesus is a Sabbath healer as evident from casting out demons (Mathew 1: 21-), healing scoliosis (Luke 13: 10-), curing the blind (John 9: 1034) and feeding the hungry (Mark 2: 23 -). He asks effectively the question whether God's grace will nullify the intent of 4th commandment. Can you steal \$ 1 million and still get seated next to Jesus in heaven?

Chapter 5 begins with Dr. Sleeth's patient encounter in Vermont that, he admits, has a miserable long winter lasting for 10 months a year. He examines a girl who has low

blood sugar problem and her mother on welfare fusses about Sleeth's lousy hand-writing (as most doctors scribble their prescriptions that only pharmacists in drug stores can decipher). From the narration, we see the plights of an emergency room doctor with his patients. Then Sleeth goes on with the story of Nehemiah and the city wall in Jerusalem. He brings up the life of 12-year old Jesus who disappeared for 3 days when his parents brought Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover. In page 60, Sleeth admits that when he was a doctor, he did good work but he was not a believer in God. His God was the American Dream. He concludes, "The key to good meaningful work is not just to see more patients or to build more walls (as Nehemiah did), but to remember why and for whom we are working."

In Chapter 6 Sleeth brings back memories of his childhood days of 4th grade and recollects Mary Sue Leaden and his teacher holding him at arm's length using his ear as a handle and told young Matthew, while torquiting his ear a few inches more from the anchoring skull "The School is questioning whether you should be advanced to the next year." This story tells us that he was a mischievous kid in elementary school. Then, we see Sleeth, talking about Jesus saying with love: "Come all of you weary and heavy-burdened and I will give you rest" (Mathew 11; 28).

We read about the Americans spending 3 billion dollars a year in 1972 and in 2012 our bill for fast food in USA is 110 billion dollars. We lead a fast-life, and most folks getting obese. Sleeth brings up his definition of rest in several paragraphs. He tells succinctly that "Rest is God-ordained nap." God told Moses that He is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last of all. We need punctuation marks (coma, full-stop, question, exclamation mark etc), not a page-long contiguous sentence.

Part III, "How we do 24/6", starts with chapter 6 talking about time. If you turn left to page 88 there is the full song "Abide with me" by Henry F. Lyte. Sleeth poses the question: How can God lavish unfailingly love a thousand generations on those who love God and obey God's commandment (Exodus 20:6). Implicitly we get the message loud and clear that God is not bound by time as we are!

History tells us that French Revolution occurred in 1789 and the rebels threw away God and king. Russians revolted in 1929 and they threw away God and Czar. Sleeth tells his story in an autobiographical style that he fell in love with a teenage Jewish girl Nancy and he eventually married her against the wish his parents. He also remembers Dante's saying: "In the middle of the journey of our life I came to sense in a dark forest, for I had lost the straight path."

I found the most fascinating part of Sleeth's tale of his life when I came to the pages where he talked about reading the pantheistic Hindu epics such as Bhagavad-Gita from 'MahaBharathum' and also from Ramayana, revealing the life of Hindu god Raman. Amazingly, Sleeth found a bible in his hospital one day and simply stole it on a Friday afternoon. He went home and read the New Testament on a Sunday afternoon and

became a Christian. What a miracle it is. Now we all know why God gave the fourth commandment.

In Chapter 8, Sleeth talks about Adam created from adama (mud) and also remembers Jesus healing a blind by putting clay (mud) on the blind man's eye. The blind man regained his sight (John 9: 6-7). Nomadic people move from place to place and we Americans also move from place to place every seven years. Sleeths moved to Maryland, Vermont, Maine and Kentucky.

God in the creation event placed trees on earth and God said that these trees are pleasing to the human eyes (Gen 2:9). He dressed the lilies of the valleys and fields more lavishly than the king (Mathew 6: 28-29).

Chapter 9 is about manna to the Hebrews liberated from Egypt. God says: "Obey the commands of the Lord your God by walking his ways and not your ways by fearing Him. For the Lord your God is bringing you to a good land of flowing streams and pools of water, with fountains and springs that gush out in the valleys and hills. It is land of wheat and honey, of grape wines and fig trees and pomegranates, of olive oil and honey. Isreal is a land where food is plentiful and nothing is lacking!

Finally Part IV of Sleeth's book advises the readers about "Your 24/6 Life." In chapter 10, on page 133, we see the advice of Roman philosopher Seneca, who was a child when Jesus was born and lived a few decades after the crucifixion of Jesus (4 BC to 65 AD). Seneca reported that the customs of the Jews "have gained such influence that they are received throughout all the world. Did Seneca know about Paul's Mission around Mediterranean? Did he know about the "Great Commission" and John's mission in Asia Minor (now Turkey)? Did Seneca know of doubting Thomas taking the gospel all the way east to India? We are not certain but the truth is that Jews went all over the world.

Chapter 11 has the fascination title "Let the Celebration begin." It talks about the church. Apostle Paul referred to the church as a "body" in his first letter to the Corinthians. The part of our body that we curl, we make up, and blow-dry are really not as important to us as the parts that cover with underwear, he admonishes the twelfth chapter. The foot can't say, "I am not part of the body" because it is not a hand. Every part is important and benefits the body as a whole." Let me boldly interpret what Sleeth is trying to convey in his statements. Does Sleeth mean that every church, no matter what denomination it is and no matter where it is located on the globe, is important as long as it is Christ-centered.

Final chapter "Shabbat Shaslom" is really the benediction: "May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace" (Numbers 6: 24 -26). This book ends with two long appendices, one dealing with quotable passages from Scripture (pages 173 to 190), and 24/6 quotes (pages 191-202).

In summary, I fully agree with another reviewer of the same book Dr. Jonathan Merritt who wrote: “ By masterfully blending personal narrative with profound scriptural reflections, Matthew Sleeth breathes new life in the fourth commandment.”

ADDENDUM

Matthew Sleeth's excerpt from *Thoreau's Legacy* (Sleeth, 2009)

I used to be a physician—the chief of staff and head of the emergency department—at one of the nicest hospitals in America. But I felt as if I were straightening the deck chairs on the Titanic, saving one patient at a time while the whole ship—the earth—was going down. Today I am one of a growing number of evangelical Christians whom the Lord is using to witness to people about his love for them and for the natural world.

The Golden Rule allows us to see the moral side of many issues, including environmental ones like global warming. Love thy neighbor as thyself: one cannot ignore the Golden Rule and claim to be a Christian. It isn't a suggestion or a guideline; it is a commandment from God. What is the connection between the Golden Rule and the environment? Aren't our choices of homes, cars, and appliances just a matter of lifestyle, not a moral or spiritual matter? Does God care whether I drive an SUV, leave the TV on all night, or fly around the world to go skiing? The Bible doesn't mention any of these things; they didn't exist in Jesus's time. Yet Jesus taught us to follow the spirit of the law, not the letter. From the spirit of the law and the example of his love, we can determine the morality of our actions.