

God's Return Policy

Nordstrom's department store, started in 1901 has always had a very progressive return policy. If the customer brings in an item, whether it was purchased at Nordstrom's or not they would refund the customer's money. The return policy is just a part of Nordstrom's original pledge of unsurpassed customer service. However, this return policy has taken on a life of its own - beyond the store history. One story in particular has had many scratching their heads over the years asking, "Is this really true?"

In fact, many have tried to debunk it as urban myth that Nordstrom's once took back a set of four car tires – and returned the customers' money. However, as one of the original founders of Nordstrom's verified years ago, that is truly the case. It seems that on the very spot where the Nordstrom's store was standing in Seattle – a small tire store once stood. And when a customer came back with four tires that he'd bought on that spot, Mr. Elmer Nordstrom, son of the founder, John Nordstrom, said, "yes, we will take them. He bought them here before we came along and we should honor the return policy."

This act of kindness soon gave Nordstrom's the reputation of customer service beyond conventional understanding – all as a result of their return policy.

Have you ever received a gift that you really just wanted to return? Or perhaps you kept the gift and just left it in the box - put it up on the top closet shelf - or it ended up in the attic? I've heard stories of wedding gifts - even Christmas gifts – that ended up abandoned in some part of the house. That while you didn't want to return it, you may have just kept it and didn't use it. Ever. I mean, who is truly going to get long term use out of a salad shooter or a fondu pot, or what about those seven sets of wine glasses, each given by a favorite aunt or cousin? You get the point: gifts given that we don't use seem to just pile up somewhere - like the land of forgotten gifts. Are there any gifts from God we don't use or don't recognize and appreciate?

One gift in particular that I'd like to ask you about is God's gift of Sabbath. Sabbath? You may ask, "Why do we need to talk about Sabbath? We are in church, after all, hearing this."

Well, did you know that there is a reason we speak much about Sabbath? Did you know that the concept of Sabbath is found 113 times in The Message, 146 times in the King James Version and 173 times in the Bible most commonly used by the United Methodist Church the New Revised Standard Version! But why, why is Sabbath so important?

Would you agree with me that Sabbath is first a gift from God? We heard how after God created the Earth on the 7th day, he rested. We heard that part of the scripture from Genesis 1 and 2 this morning, God rested. God took time to look over all he had done and rested. Now I know that some will say, "Well, that is Saturday. Some will argue that Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and runs until sundown on Saturday - as is the Jewish tradition. But we are ALL all God's children in each Abrahamic faith received this gift of the Sabbath.

Are you leaving the gift in a box stored in your attic? You see the gift is not just coming to church on Sunday and spending an hour in worship or 2 hours, one for worship and one for Sunday school, it is a

gift of a time of renewal we are given. We are given a gift to observe Sabbath in our lives, no matter Friday, Saturday or Sunday! It is a gift. What do you do with your gift of Sabbath time? Do you enjoy it to the fullest or do you put it in a closet and, if you get to it, you will use some of it at some point? Or do you thumb your nose at the gift and say, oh, God had time to take a break I, we or our family doesn't? What pleasure does the gift give? I dare say that with a gift talked about more than any other thing in the Bible that maybe, just maybe, we should be more aware of what the gift of Sabbath offers. Don't you think? I doubt that God wants us to return it. Is it something like Aunt Edna's wedding gift of that beautiful family heirloom punch bowl we will never use but hey, we can't get rid of it, it is a family heirloom. Or is it a gift which we hold on to for dear life and use often?

Do we treat the gift of Sabbath like a 'have to'? Meaning do we come to church out of habit or duty and call that our Sabbath time? Then go on with the rest of the day or the rest of our week like it is nothing different than normal?

How many of you remember "Blue Laws" and what they were? I'm guessing that many of you won't know... Blue Laws were state laws written on the books of most states and then there became the question of separation of church and state, or unfair advantage of Christian business owners over Jewish or Muslim, however I have to tell you there were some things about "blue laws" I remember and liked. Blue laws were laws that restricted activities or sales of goods on Sunday. You see blue laws typically restricted sales of anything on Sunday's other than the occasional gas station open for emergencies or the required pharmacy open for the same reason and that was it. There was no shopping at WalMart or Target, no Macy's or Boscov's, no Weiss or Giant and there were certainly no school activities such as sporting events or concerts. No, blue laws were to set aside a day when people didn't have a choice, you spent time with family and friends, you spent time at rest and in that time you were given the opportunity to enjoy God's great gifts. Now granted, the first blue law in the American colonies was enacted in Virginia in 1617. It required church attendance and authorized the militia to force colonists to attend church services. I really don't believe that was God's intention to force us to be in church or to take time out, we have a choice take this gift or put it on the shelf and just return it to God.

I remember to this day, coming home from church on Sundays and my grandmother would have prepared dinner for Sunday on Saturday evening and we would eat a big Sunday lunch and anything that didn't have to be refrigerated was covered with a table cloth and left on the table and we would come back to the table for our evening meal, thus not creating any work on Sunday, leaving the maximum amount of down time, quiet time or Sabbath. We would sit on the porch, play croquet, talk long walks, visit the cemetery to pay our respects. In the summer, we would head over to Second Creek by my aunts home to play in the water with my cousins, niece or nephews. Those are great memories and great gifts from God.

But what do we do today? Chip thinks I am funny - and a little strange about this: I do not believe in mowing, running the weed trimmer or blower on Sunday. For me, not only would that not be an appropriate thing to do on the Sabbath, but the noise could disturb a neighbor who was trying to observe the Sabbath. Maybe I'm old fashioned, however some of my fondest life-long memories have come when observing Sabbath or rest, yes, maybe even vacation. You see, Sabbath is not just about taking time to come to church. Sabbath is about allowing God to be present in each and every moment of your day, recognizing God's gifts, taking time to observe God's gifts and appreciate them in our families, our sons, daughters, grandparents, mothers, fathers, friends, sisters, brothers, aunts and

uncles. The important things in life – the memories that we cherish – are made in the business of our life, in the Sabbath of our lives. Sabbath is not a duty, it is not meant to be put on the top shelf of the closet, stuffed in the attic, or returned to God.

In the good news of the Gospel we heard today, Rebecca read to us Jesus' instructions to the Disciples to go and teach the Gospel, to share the good news. How do we share the good news? How do we show others we are Christians? Do we observe the Sabbath and turn it in to a time to spend each week appreciating and enjoying God's gifts or do we brush it off and say yes to spending the day shopping, working in the yard, or doing something that takes us away from family.

Now I can hear the echoes of, "Well, I don't have any other time to take care of things," or, "I can't help that the school schedules something on Sunday," or, "it's the only day I have to get the laundry done or the grocery shopping out of the way." Yes, lives have changed over the years. We have, as a society, become busier and busier. We must, we have to, it's the only free time I have.

Miss Addie has something she says to the children at Busy Beaver if one child touches or hits another child. Miss Addie reminds them, "that is not your body." They can only have control over what their body does and should not be touching or poking someone else's body. I thought about that when I was thinking about our excuse of busy-ness.

It is OUR schedule, is it not? We make the determination of how busy we are or are not. Much like the children are responsible for their bodies, WE are responsible for our own schedules. "But my children have soccer matches," or "my children have events they MUST attend." To use one of Rebecca's lines, "who's in charge?"

WE are in charge of our schedules. We can guide our families' schedules. Won't you ensure that your schedule, if you need to schedule it or block it out, includes down time, a time for you, a time with family, each and every week? Sabbath time? I promise you, the benefits you receive from this great gift are far beyond what you may perceive as the cost of not going and doing. And yes, if you are not used to taking what we call Sabbath time. It will take some discipline – some getting used to - and if you are used to it then I ask you to renew your focus of Sabbath rest.

We today are no different than those that have gone before us. Yes, there were blue laws. Some of those around us may talk about how they weren't allowed to do anything other than go to church, rest and spend time with family on Sunday. For those of you who I would then ask the question did you concentrate on the wonderful blessings God had given you on that day. Or did you take Sabbath because you had to? And I realize that we all may not have Sunday as a day we can rest and not work. However, I urge you to take Sabbath time, Rebecca and I for example work on Sunday mornings, or at least some would call it work, however we have to take Sabbath time as well, so our day off, our day of rest may be Monday, or Wednesday or Friday. Or our time of Sabbath may be each early morning, when we take time to read our Bibles and spend time in prayer. My Sabbath when I am going to school, studying and working at the church is sometime when I am on a treadmill I spend time with God in prayer, however I also need to remember to spend total down time enjoying my family and friends, enjoying the nature that surrounds us and thanking God for the many wonderful blessings I have. Yes,

you may not be able to change your child's soccer match schedule, however then I urge you to find other Sabbath time.

We know stories of Jesus healing on the Sabbath, we have heard the parable of the oxen in the ditch and helping someone in need and we should be called as Christians to do these things, yes even on the Sabbath, however we are also reminded, remember more than any other topic in the Bible to observe Sabbath. Jesus taught it wasn't just to sit on our porches, hands folded in our laps and rock the day away, instead Jesus taught us to spend our Sabbath as special time, a time of renewal, Jesus spent down time, Sabbath if you will, with the Disciples, praying, eating, visiting and even sitting and reclining, much like was custom of the time and they all did in the upper room.

Sabbath time is a gift. How do you use it? Is your life too busy so you come to church and then rush home, check Sabbath observed off your list and put it on the proverbial closet shelf til next week and then you rush out the door to take care of chores you were too busy to get to earlier in the week? Or do you take every moment of Sabbath time you can stopping to observe and reflect on the amazing blessings God has given you. I will ask you again, if you aren't taking or observing Sabbath please make it a part of your daily life or at a minimum your weekly life and if you are observing it, take time to reflect on the blessings the gift of Sabbath brings to your life.

Life can be fast and exciting, we can be anxious about tomorrow or we can intentionally live for today, spending time in Sabbath. Amen.

The gift of Sabbath has many wonderful returns as the monetary gifts of God we receive, we give back so that God may use our gifts to help us provide for others be it a meal for the hungry, service to the less fortunate, or a place to gather for the community. Your gifts do those things and so many more, I invite the ushers to come at this time to receive your gifts of tithes and offering to continue to the work of this community and the outreach beyond these walls as well.

- Adding a quick clip...

Here's something I want you to consider. There is a group of 44 or so persons leaving Lewisburg and their normal schedules to take Sabbath time helping others, schedules will be put on hold, sporting events will be missed, time away from home will be spent sharing our gifts and recognizing other gifts when we are least expected. I want you to take time to talk to those who take this time and go on the trip to ask afterwards if they had any regrets for taking this Sabbath time, for missing events and not attending to daily life while they were on the Mission Trip spending Sabbath time with friends and family doing work Jesus taught us to do.

Jeremiah 17:21-23

²¹⁻²³""This is God's Message. Be careful, if you care about your lives, not to desecrate the Sabbath by turning it into just another workday, lugging stuff here and there. Don't use the Sabbath to do business as usual. Keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors.

²⁴⁻²⁶""But now, take seriously what I tell you. Quit desecrating the Sabbath by busily going about your own work, and keep the Sabbath day holy by not doing business as usual.