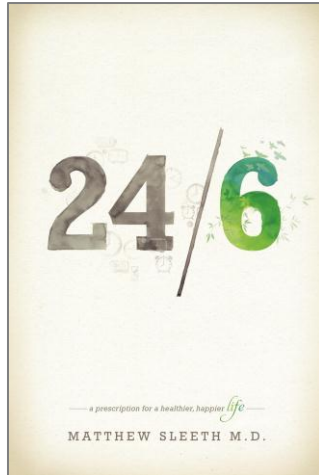


Matthew Sleeth M.D.
Interview Questions for 24/6



1. Why did you write this book?

As a physician, I saw people get ill from our 24/7 way of life. I watched patients walk out of the ER while having a heart attack because they were worried about losing a business deal. I've seen wealthy parents leave sick children to fend for themselves while they went off to earn more.

On a personal level, I routinely worked a ridiculous number of hours as chief of the medical staff at my hospital. But you don't have to go to medical school to feel like your life is out of control. Whether we are doctors, lawyers, or Indian chiefs, most of us today work too much. And we don't just work at one thing anymore. We drink coffee and drive cars. We drive cars and talk on the phone. We talk on the phone and shop on the Net . . . and fix dinner . . . and watch the news.

In the last twenty years, work is up 15 percent and leisure is down 30 percent. Yet those statistics don't even account for multitasking.

If my lifetime of fifty-plus years has a lesson to teach, it is this: one more time saving device is not really going to give us more time. And the answer to our problems is not to work longer, harder, or faster.

The answer lies in remembering the rhythm of working six days and stopping one. When my family and I started observing this rhythm a decade ago, it brought us a healthier, more joyful life. I wrote 24/6 to share this prescription with others who are feeling the ill effects of our technology-driven, always-on culture.

2. How did society lose its Stop Day?

Just a short while ago, almost everything stopped one day a week. Gas stations, banks, and grocery stores locked their doors at night and on Sundays. No more. We are no longer a society that goes to sleep at night or conducts business six days a week. Now we go 24/7.

What got taken away is rest. Sunday was the day when libraries and pharmacies barred the door and people got dressed up and drove to church. Those without particular religious convictions simply took the day off. Jews marked Saturday as a holy day and called it "Sabbath." Seventh Day Adventists did likewise. Most Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian clergy relaxed on Mondays. Irrespective of faith, society was given and even guaranteed a day each week when they could rest.

The change happened so gradually that no one objected. And then technology sped up the pace of change. Today, when I ask students in Christian colleges, less than 5 percent are taking a 24-hour day of rest.

3. What effects has losing Stop Day had on us?

Subtracting a day of rest each week has had a profound effect on our lives. How could it not? One day a week adds up. Fifty-two days a year times an average lifespan is equal to more than eleven years. Take away eleven years of anything in a lifetime, and there will be a change. This is a law of the universe: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Subtract over a decade of sleep, work, or education, and the entire character of one's existence is altered. Multiply eleven years times a third of a billion Americans, and you are looking for a lost continent of time.

Unfortunately, in our society, it's not Monday that got mislaid; it's our Sabbath, our day of rest. If there is to be any hope for recovering the Fourth Commandment, we must first admit that something is missing.

4. Why is the Fourth Commandment so important?

The Fourth Commandment is the longest and most inclusive of all. If the Ten Commandments were a pie and you had to choose one slice, choose the Fourth Commandment. You'll get one-third of the pie—it's longer than all of the six commandments that follow it put together.

And its placement is not by accident. The first three commandments are about God; the last six are about humanity. The fourth acts as a fulcrum. It is a bridge between the two sections. The Sabbath commandment embraces the

wealthy, the slave, and the illegal immigrant. It pertains to minimum-wage workers and to students. It covers animals. It includes children. The Fourth Commandment applies equally to men and women. It is made to protect those who believe and those who do not. It is to be followed by humanity, and it is observed by God himself.

I find it disconcerting that the Fourth Commandment has become optional for many Christians. We all agree that murder, stealing, adultery, and worshipping other gods are not good ideas, but in our 24/7, always-on world, the Fourth Commandment has been ripped out of our Bibles. As Jesus said, we are not meant to save the Sabbath; the Sabbath was meant to save us.

5. But didn't Jesus release us from the law?

At the time Jesus started his ministry, the Sabbath had turned into something it wasn't meant to be. People had added so many derivative laws and amendments to the Fourth Commandment that it wasn't a celebration anymore. It had turned into work.

Jesus didn't come to abolish God's laws—especially the Ten Commandments. Rather, He came to point like a compass toward the *intent* of the laws, and the intent of the Sabbath is the exact opposite of rules and regulations.

It is often said that Jesus came to keep us from being condemned by laws we couldn't keep, and that is true, but Jesus also said he didn't come to take away one jot or tittle of the law. So when the commandment says don't kill—Jesus doesn't say it's all right to murder. Instead he says don't even be angry with someone.

The *intent* of Sabbath is holy rest.. The Sabbath balances the *active* parts of your life with the *holy* parts. Jesus needed both to be fully human, and so do you.

6. What does the 24/6 way of life have to do with the character of God?

The command to keep the Sabbath reveals something very important about the character of God: God stops.

Stopping is a problem for humans. We get a comfortable house, and then want a bigger one. We get enough to eat, and then we want more.

God doesn't need to rest after creating the universe because he's tired. He rests because he is holy, and everything that God does is holy. God rests. God is holy. Therefore, rest is holy. It's simple math.

Rest shows us *who* God is. He has restraint. Restraint is not doing everything that one has the power to do. We must never mistake God's restraint for weakness. The opposite is true. God shows restraint; therefore, restraint is holy.

7. How has Stop Day strengthened your relationship with God?

On Sabbath we come to rest, and we draw near to the Lord. We retreat. We spend time together. It is an appropriate time for prayer, church, and Bible reading. But something even more intimate happens on Stop Day. There is time just for being with the Lord.

When I am alone with someone new, like when I've been picked up at the airport, I make polite conversation. That's what's required when you are just meeting someone. It's called small talk. When I'm with old friends, or with Nancy and the kids, we catch up and reconnect, but then we also talk about things of importance. If we have sufficient time, we get to comfortable silence—the “you say it best when you say nothing at all” time.

The same happens with God. When I don't have much time to spend with God, I get started with small talk. I let God know what I'm worried about and what I'm thankful for. I don't think there's anything wrong with that, nor do I see any advice counter to this in the Bible. But just as with family, it's the part beyond the small talk that restores my soul. It's not small talk but God-sized quiet time that define my intimacy with the Lord. You need quality *and* quantity time to make intimacy happen. Fortunately God designed our schedules to accommodate both.

8. In 24/6, you say that the laws against working were made to benefit people, not the other way around. Briefly, how can it be profitable for a business to be closed one day a week?

It took a while for me to feel as good about resting on Sabbath as coming home from a productive day at work. Work seemed more real. The hospital gave me money for working. I could buy things with money. Not so for a day of rest. But I was accounting in earthly terms. I was not taking Christ's advice on laying up treasures in heaven.

Chick-fil-A, Hobby Lobby, B&H Photo, and many other businesses close one day a week. In shutting their doors, they declare their faith. They say that

something is more important than profit. The customer is not always right. One day a week, God is.

I recently spoke to David Green, the founder of Hobby Lobby. His business was taking in \$100 million per year on Sundays when he decided to start observing a company-wide Stop Day. Going 24/6 seemed like a crazy move, but the stores actually became more profitable when they closed on Sundays to give their managers and employees a day off. And their spiritual lives became richer.

Sometimes inactions speak louder than words. If you believe in 24/6, find businesses that close one day a week and patronize them on the other six.

9. How is giving connected to the Sabbath?

Giving money to others makes no worldly sense. It is therefore on equal footing with the Sabbath. When we grant others Sabbath rest, we act as God's anointed agents. The longest of the Ten Commandments tells us to remember the Sabbath, but the majority of its verbiage is about giving the Sabbath away.

For a believer, there is no separating the Sabbath and giving. They are conjoined twins that share the same heart. The "work" accomplished on our day of rest is not just the renewal of our souls, but the recharging of our impulse to give. When we grant others a day of rest, not only do we act in obedience, we act in generosity. It is good to take a Sabbath; it is godly to give one.

Unfortunately, Christians have a mixed record as far as giving their Sabbath away is concerned. Ask someone who works in a restaurant when their least favorite time is to wait tables. "After church on Sundays" is what you'll hear. The workers in the restaurant don't complain that we're demanding or rude. What they find fault with is our lack of generosity. There is no time when the teachings of the church are fresher in our mind, yet what have we learned if we stiff the waitress an hour after we leave the pew? How much worse will our behavior be twenty-four hours later?

If you get nothing else from this book, please, double down when it comes time to tip after church! Better still, go with a 50-percent or 100-percent tip. If that kind of generosity got to be the rule, how long do you think it would take until everyone in the food industry began wondering what's going on at church?

10. What does a Sabbath look like for your family?

My wife Nancy and I have been married for more than 30 years, and we've established our own Sabbath traditions. The day before our Stop Day, we

usually go to the grocery store, so we have food on hand. We also do a liturgical cleaning of the house. It's important that our home is clean and organized because we don't want to be distracted from our rest by unfinished chores. If we plan to drive somewhere for a hike on our Stop Day, I fill up the tank the day before. Nancy has a ritual of finishing up her email and closing her computer. I take off the wristwatch she gave me thirty years ago. It's wonderful feeling to go to bed on Sabbath eve, knowing that God's got your back for the next 24 hours.

No matter how pressing a deadline is—we don't work on Stop Days. I'm not saying there isn't great temptation sometimes. But we don't work. "Ya gotta stand for something or you'll fall for anything."

I particularly enjoy the peace and quiet that settles over our city on Sunday mornings, so Nancy and I are often out for a long walk early in the day. On the other hand, if we feel tired on Stop Day morning, we can roll over and go back to sleep.

What do we eat on Sunday morning? Cheerios with frozen peaches and one scoop of ice cream works for me. Chocolate does the trick for Nancy. We don't labor overelaborate meals—although I know that for many families Sunday dinners are a cherished Sabbath tradition.

11. How do single parents or families with young kids take a day of rest?

With a little planning, it can be done! Many parents keep a set of toys, books, or movies that children are allowed to enjoy only on their Stop Day. One of our friends makes cinnamon swirl bread and slices it up the night before. She leaves a note that the 8-year-old can read to the younger siblings, and then the kids feed themselves breakfast so Mom and Dad can doze for an extra hour.

Pastors and church workers also often have a hard time keeping the Sabbath. We need to remember that what we do speaks louder than what we say—to our colleagues, to our congregations, and to our children.

If you can't keep the Sabbath on Sunday, move it to another day. The important thing is not the day of the week, but that you come to a stop, one day out of seven.

12. Any final thoughts?

After practicing the Sabbath for a decade, I don't know how I could survive without a weekly day of rest. For me, Sabbath has become the highlight of the

week, what all the other days spring up from and build up toward. My busy work week is balanced by a rest day. It renews and restores my soul.

Sabbath is the most solid and tangible time of our life. It is a part of heaven, and a glimpse of God. Stop Day is nothing less than grabbing on to the robe of the Maker of the universe.

If you are not keeping a weekly day of rest, give it a try. It changed my life. It can change yours, too.