

Rest

INTRODUCTION

Life is not necessarily like a sprint or a marathon. It is not a short-term burst of frenetic output or a ceaseless grind of labor. It is more like a workout regimen, wherein we practice appropriate and healthy rhythms of hard work and healing rest. Work and rest are two vital aspects of human life. They are interrelated yet have independent value. They are interrelated in that rest humbles us in our work, rejuvenates us for our labors, and provides mental, emotional, and spiritual room for inspiration and creativity. They are independent in that they are both part of the created order, as fundamental elements of God's good world before the fall. God rested not out of rehabilitative necessity for later work, but to merely delight in the fruit of His labor. We do well to attend to rest as a virtue corresponding to our finitude and constitution as image-bearers of our Creator. It is an end in itself, comprising enjoyable activity and/or inactivity.

PRINCIPLES

1. An Example

As stated above God rested upon completing the creation project and, thereby, provided a model for us to follow. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation" (Gen 2:1-3). The pattern of six days of work and one day of rest was stamped into the story and structure of creation.

2. A Commandment

Beyond the implicit example provided for us at creation, the Lord gives us an explicit command upon the redemptive event of the Exodus in Exodus 20:2, 8-11:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery... Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

3. A Test

The work of our hands, the devices and desires of our hearts, are finite, incomplete, tainted with self-interest, and out of our control. The outcome is the Lord's and we are forever reliant on his promises. To deny healthy rhythms of rest is to disbelieve that God is our ultimate provider. Consider Psalm 127:1-2: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved asleep." God has promised seven days of provision from six days of labor. Do you trust Him?

4. A Gift

As stated above the pattern of rest is not a result of the fall. Therefore it is not merely an answer to sin, and definitely not a punishment. The good practices of rest remind us that we are fundamentally human beings not human doings. Jesus applied this logic to the Sabbath commandments by asserting that "the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Rest, as in other disciplines such as fasting, sacrifice, and submission, is an act of obedience that appears costly but is of value in that it glorifies God and brings us closer to him. Let us receive this gift of rest for our good and joy.

5. Selected Quotes from "The Power of Deep Rest" by Tim Keller

- "Anyone who cannot obey God's command to observe the Sabbath is a slave, even a self-imposed one. Your own heart, or our materialistic culture, or an exploitative organization, or all of the above, will be abusing you if you don't have the ability to be disciplined in your practice of Sabbath. Sabbath is therefore a declaration of our freedom. It means you are not a slave—not to your culture's expectations, your family's hopes, your medical school's demands, not even to your own insecurities. It is important that you learn to speak this truth to yourself with a note of triumph—otherwise you will feel guilty for taking time off, or you will be unable to truly unplug."

- “The Sabbath legislation in Israel was enacted after the Exodus from Egypt. It was unique among world cultures at the time. It limited work, profit taking, exploitation, and economic production in general. Every seventh day no work could be done in the fields, and every seventh year the field was to remain fallow and not be cultivated at all. This surely meant that in the short run Israel was less economically productive and prosperous than its neighbors. But it was a land of free people. In the long run, of course, a deeply rested people are far more productive.”
- “We are also to think of Sabbath as an act of trust. God appointed the Sabbath to remind us that he is working and resting. To practice Sabbath is a disciplined and faithful way to remember that you are not the one who keeps the world running, who provides for your family, not even the one who keeps your work projects moving forward. Entrepreneurs find it especially difficult to believe this. They have high levels of competence and very few team members. If they don't put in the hours, things don't get done. How easy to fall prey to the temptation to believe that they alone are holding up their corner of creation!”

PRACTICALS

1. Daily

Rest is a built-in structure to our daily existence through the simple necessity of sleep. Sleep is a rhythm that we cannot escape, though we try. In an age of electricity, technology, internet, etc. the lines between morning and evening are increasingly blurred. And the main thing that is being pushed out is rest. So develop and protect a healthy sleep schedule. And beyond that find ways to practice true rest at intervals throughout the day.

2. Weekly

One day a week we are commanded to put down our work and rest in observation of the Sabbath. This day of rest should normally occur on the Lord's Day (i.e., Sunday) so that aspects of it can be shared with others who are resting coterminously. A significant portion of the day should be devoted to public and private worship, while the rest can be devoted to healthy recreation and/or holy inactivity.

3. Yearly

One way to diligently practice holy rest is to observe the church calendar. This tradition arranges our attention, energy, and observations upon the major events and themes of God's redemptive story. In these seasons there are times of cessation of activities (especially during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent) and times of celebratory feasting (e.g., Christmas and Easter).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do I feel rested most days? Am I getting enough sleep? Am I getting enough time off from work? Do I spend enough time in life-giving, truly restful activities? If not, why not?
- Does my life reflect healthy rhythms? If not, what can I do to establish new rhythms that reflect the image of God?
- Is rest a priority in my life? What are my enemies of rest? Does my idol of productivity or comfort or efficiency, etc...get in the way of rest? Am I trusting God enough to truly rest?