

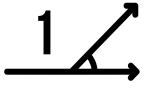
REST: 7 day devotion



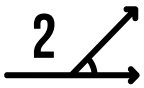
Why 'rest'? It's a question with a few angles:

Angle 1: Why participate in the activity of 'rest'?

Angle 2: Why consider the topic of rest in a form of a few short devotions?



To the first angle, I believe the last few years of the pandemic have left many weary (it has for me at least, and a few other people I know too). So in this place of weariness, how can one find renewal? What are the biblical patterns and purposes of 'rest'? These devotions seek to map out some answers.



To the second angle, the shape of 'biblical rest' is not the same as the pattern offered to us by our culture. Unfortunately, our culture has shaped us to think that 'rest' is equivalent to 'time off', a bit of a break, or at worse: leisure. Therefore these devotions seek to reframe 'rest' toward a more biblical pattern and understanding.

While a part of 'rest' certainly is a downing of tools, the vision of 'biblical rest' is bigger, more beautiful and a more deeply renewing gift from God than just stopping work. Yes, rest, in part, is about putting the tools down. But, it's also about the inner peace that frees one to say no to 'more'; enjoying relationship with God in prayer; living in step with God's calling on our life; feasting at a table set by Jesus. This and much more!

May you find some rest, renewal, both in these devotions and the pattern of life they encourage.

Simon Hill



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"What do you do?" It's the common question we ask when getting to know a new acquaintance.

If "doing" is so important in how we define ourselves, as in it determines our identity ('who' we are), then we are more "human doings" than "human beings." With such a view, we are defined by our 'productivity,' not our 'being'. The unfortunate consequence of being defined by our productivity/doing, is it leaves us with little space to rest. Even on holidays we would need to be 'doing' something or we aren't worth so much.

Questions:

1. In your thinking, how does your work integrate with your identity?
2. "Who" are you when you aren't working or are without work?

We weren't defined by our 'doing' from the beginning. God did not create us to then define ourselves by our productivity. The good news about rest is that its foundation is not only that we can do it as a reward for/after working. The foundation of rest is that God Himself, rested on the seventh day - rest is the right pattern of being - the way to enjoy the goodness of creation, and enjoy a job well done.

John Stott points out that the theologian, Henri Blocher argues that the climax of Genesis 1 is not the creation of human beings as workers but the institution of the rest day. The point then is not the human task of work/toil (subduing the earth), but the laying aside of our toil, to take a day of rest.[1]

Further good news about rest is that in the Garden of Eden, God's first act towards humans was not instruction about their required productivity. God's first act towards them was to bless them. The blessing of humans didn't follow from what they produced, rather it preceded it.

Today let God's blessings empower your work, so that striving can have its proper limits, and what you produce comes out of a place of rest.

Bible Reading: Genesis 1:28

Questions:

3. What are some of God's blessings to you? In creation? In Jesus?
4. How might you turn the system around? Could you start with seeking blessings from God first, rather than from your work?

[1] John Stott, The Radical Disciple: Wholehearted Christian Living, p.59.



NOTES

How do you spell 'Freedom'? Naturally, the correct dictionary entry is well known, but the biblical concept is spelt 'S-A-B-B-A-T-H'. What it means to be *free*, is to be *able* to rest; to be *able* to say 'enough, I'm done!' A slave cannot rest, they must *keep* working, *keep* producing, *keep* performing. The slave is under the whip which demands "*more, more, MORE!*" The problem that Israel had during their captivity in Egypt was that they were denied the Sabbath - a day of rest instituted by God at creation. So the Bible describes the experience of slavery not just as captivity, but of work without resting.

Questions:

1. Has there been a time in your life where you have been unable to rest?
Have you felt like a prisoner to your job or someone/something else?
2. How might the experience of the Israelites inform your own?

Part of the miracle of life in the desert (after being rescued from slavery), was not just God's provision of food (the manna—a bread like substance that fell from the sky and provided the nutritional needs for God's people, see Exodus 16:1-36 and Numbers 11:1-9), but that on the sixth day more manna could be gathered for the seventh day, and it did not spoil and could be eaten on the seventh. Yet at any other time of the week, if manna was gathered for two days in advance the manna rotted on day 2. Rescue from slavery in Egypt, brought not just better 'work' conditions, but also a new way to experience God's provision: through the manna and connected 'rest' on the seventh day.

There is a modern form of slavery that we can also unwittingly opt into. In this type of slavery, we find it hard to get off the exhausting merry-go-round of life, we struggle to say 'no' to doing more things. We become captive to doing 'more'.

Questions:

3. In what areas of life are you most tempted to become enslaved, losing the ability to rest?
4. How might God help you to be free of that now?

Bible Readings: Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15

These verses are part of the recording of the 10 commandments given to Moses, and both deal with the command for the Sabbath - the day for rest. But note how the reasons given are twofold. Exodus points to God's creation, whereas Deuteronomy points to Israel's time in Egypt and their subsequent rescue as the motive to take the Sabbath. How can the freedom you have in Jesus, give you permission to rest? Today? This week?



NOTES

When I watched a movie about the life of bushranger Ben Hall, what struck me was that he was always looking over his shoulder, sometimes physically, but certainly psychologically. He always lived with the concern that someone chasing him would catch him. Hall was 'free' to move around the Australian bushland, but only with eyes in the back of his head. And only with the fear, that one day the law would catch up with him. So in this state, Hall was restless. He couldn't stop, sow a crop and wait for harvest or even sit still. Hall needed to always cover his tracks and move in the dark so that he couldn't be seen. Yet if Hall hadn't committed offences against the Crown like he did, he could have rested easy each night.

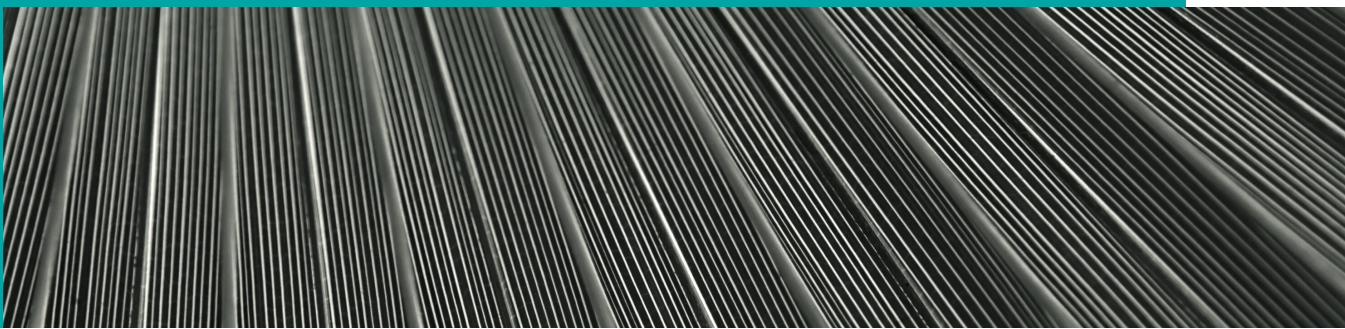
A similar dynamic happens between humans and God. Any disobedience on our part, causes some distance, some separation, between us and God. We wonder on a deep internal level what will become of us because of what we did. This brings a restlessness, a fear, an uncertainty about our future and doubt about whether we are loved or not. Such a dynamic can be observed right from the beginning. Once Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they hid from Him in the garden, to escape being caught, and physically sought to cover themselves. In their disobedience, they needed to hide.

Questions:

1. Where has disobedience robbed you of rest?
2. How was rest restored?

Israel's disobedience on the way to the Promised Land; and during their years wandering in the desert, becomes the motivation for the writer of Hebrews (the New Testament book) to urge followers of Jesus to remain faithful to him. The author of Hebrews uses the Promised Land as a picture to illustrate that an objective will not be realised if one does not remain faithful to Jesus. However, the objective now is not a piece of land in the Middle East, but the ultimate 'Sabbath rest' - described as eternity with Jesus. Interestingly, the framing of the goal is not 'heaven', not 'eternal life' (though that is implied), but 'rest'! Rest is the ultimate goal! And it is obtained through faithfulness to God.

We have a glimpse of this rest now through living in obedience to our heavenly Father, as we find life in God's patterns, as He has intended us to live. The alternative, like Adam and Eve experienced once they gave up on God's pattern for them, is to live in the resulting restlessness. The gift Jesus gives us is that he suffered the ultimate restlessness on the cross to bring us an eternal rest based on grace. In Isaiah 57:20 we read: "The wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. 'There is no peace for the wicked.'" As Jesus suffered on the cross, he carried our sin and failure. Jesus was going through the ultimate restlessness so he could assure those who trust him of the ultimate, eternal rest.



Questions:

3. How does Heaven being framed as 'rest' impact your view of it?
4. How does Jesus' work on the cross draw you safely back to him to pursue rest in him?

NOTES

DAY 4: STOPPING TO EAT AT GOD'S TABLE

In the busyness and the storms of life, it is not easy to find rest. While some problems are self-inflicted, there are also times when the enemies of rest; anxiety, sleeplessness, conflict, family/work demands and sickness are continually beating down on us. One clear sign of restlessness is being unable to enjoy the simple pleasure of a good meal.

King David endured many of these demands during his life. In Psalm 23 David frames rest in the midst of chaos as:

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies. (Psalm 23:5a)

No matter what seems to be overwhelming us, God invites us to sit with Him and eat at His table. To be filled, to be satisfied with His provision.

In another Psalm, David writes of a dreadful experience, yet in that too he can remarkably find rest:

3 Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.
4 One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple. (Psalm 27:3-4)

It's remarkable that even though it's war time, David's heart is not troubled - he's not troubled because what transcends his circumstances is that he is satisfied by dwelling in the beauty of God. This is the majesty, the greatness, the awe of God. If David is good with God - what else could be the problem?

Today, hear the invitation from these verses. God is extending an invitation, for us to remain in the fight for our sanity and safety; to step off the battlefield and into intimacy and communion with Jesus. As we get close to him, he provides for us in many ways. As we eat from the table the 'bread of life' and drink 'living water', we are drawn into the truth that Jesus has fought for us: rescuing us and bringing us to our heavenly home.



Questions:

1. When feeling overwhelmed by 'enemies' (whatever they might be) how might 'food' from God's table bring rest and refreshment?
2. How can you answer God's invitation to intimacy and communion to enjoy victory over chaos?

Bible Readings: Psalm 23 & 27

NOTES

When we talk of learning from Jesus, what do we often talk about learning from him? Being merciful and compassionate? Being forgiving and sacrificial? Being patient? How about, not being in a hurry?! From the gospel accounts it just doesn't seem like Jesus was ever in a rush. Sure, he was focused and on task, but not in a rush, not irritably wanting others to "hurry-up!" There were moments too when Jesus was urged to act, but said, it wasn't his time (John 2:1-4; John 7:1-13, 30).

Perhaps Jesus' most quoted lines on rest, are in Matthew 11: 28-30, where he says:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The boundaries of Christ-likeness do not stop at being 'forgiving', 'humble' and 'kind'. They extend to taking on the yoke of Christ-likeness to 'learn from' him. In this context it is being able to be unhurried, to know rest, to spend time in prayer with our heavenly Father. That means to give Him our burdens, and being connected with God, have our burdens carried. While Jesus had long and demanding days, for example in Mark 1:32-34, Jesus' response was to get up early in the morning for solitude and prayer (v.35). 'Rest' doesn't mean laziness. It means finding ourselves through connection with God.

There is actually no yokeless life. We all serve someone or something. We are all being driven by something. We all have a target we are aiming at that we think, or assume, is the good life. However, Jesus is the one who offers an easy yoke. It's easy because his redeeming work for us is finished. We don't have to justify ourselves to God (ourselves, or anyone else) through our activity. Jesus alone did that.

Question:

1. How might you be able to slow down in a part of today that you usually rush?

As you do slow down, take time to enjoy the moment. Give thanks to God that you are His loved child. Learn from the one whose life was marked by a moment when carrying our burden cost his life.

Bible Readings: Matthew 11:28-30, Mark 1:33-35



NOTES

When you've felt exhausted, burnt out, or used, have you ever wondered "Is it worth the struggle?"

So much of the 'why' beneath the reason we live fast paced lives is the trust that it's all worth the emotional and physical exhaustion to get there. But is it?...*Really?*

The enigmatic book in the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes, grasps the prickly issue boldly, and honestly. Much stress, overwork, busyness and striving is a vanity, a chasing after the wind!

The teacher warns that the pattern of life that brings our bodies stress, exhaustion and leaves our minds blurred, distracted and uncreative is 'vanity', 'a chasing after the wind'. It's pointless. It's not the good life, rich with meaning or a fulfilling purpose. The kind of life that steals rest, or worse, constantly prevents rest, is not the one God designed us to live. Ecclesiastes' brutal point to our age (and I suspect most ages!) is that in the end, there's no satisfaction generated from the pursuits of pleasure, power or accomplishment. Satisfaction is not found 'under the sun', [2] but 'in relationship with God'.

Working to provide for the basic physical necessities of life (like food, shelter and clothing) is an unavoidable part of life, and these basic tasks also have their own busy season (like harvest, tax season, reporting season...depending on one's occupation). Ecclesiastes, is not teaching that busy seasons in life can be avoided, or that the busyness in these seasons is bad in itself. However, it is warning that the result of any striving, the outcomes from any busy season, will not bring deep satisfaction, or rest for the soul. Peace, when taking a break or even in busyness, comes from living under God, relating to Him and finding one's purpose and hope in Him.

Bible Reading: Ecclesiastes 2:22-26; 3:1-14

Questions:

1. Do anxieties arise for you when rest becomes a priority? What are they?
2. How might some of the toil in work/life be eased if you could live without having to prove yourself?

[2] 'under the sun' is the way the book fames a worldview without God.



NOTES

Isaiah 40 begins with healing words: "Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

The next verses (v.3-5) are used to ultimately describe John the Baptist (which are recalled in Mark 1:3 and John 1:23). So the comfort, the forgiveness of sins, comes to its ultimate fulfillment in and through Jesus. But Isaiah 40 also has another well known verse that has given countless weary people hope, and a picture of renewal. Isaiah 40 (in particular verse 28):

28 Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and His understanding no one can fathom.
29 He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
30 Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
31 but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

The point of rest, is not simply recovery. It's to enjoy what has been accomplished and to then, with renewed strength, do some more work Running and walking without growing weary or faint.

Bible Reading: Isaiah 40

Questions:

1. What is this new strength that renew us? (Based on the context of Isaiah 40)
2. How might the image of soaring on wings bring hope and perseverance for the weary?
3. How might the fact that God does not grow tired or weary (40:28) encourage you to persevere?



NOTES

There are several materials around rest and the Sabbath that are worth engaging with. Not all agree with each other, which is ok and in part, a way for our discernment to grow.

Resources to follow up:

Walter Brueggemann. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying NO to the Culture of Now*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2014.

John Mark Comer. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*. Waterbrook Press, 2019.

John Dickson's podcast "Undeceptions" on rest:
<https://undeceptions.com/podcast/resting-well/>

Speak to a staff member...

Just drop us a line, we'd love to continue to discuss this topic with you.

email: office@engageworkfaith.org.au

web: engageworkfaith.org.au

Or ... nothing ... just rest!

At times rest can be lost in the pressure to do more, do something in response. Maybe the doing is to deeply rest?

