

Lifecraft from God – Resting in order to serve

When was the last time you had a holiday? Where did you go? How was it? For those of us who work, a holiday can seem like a tranquil oasis of escape from our busy lives of working nine to five, receiving countless emails and sitting in traffic as we commute to and from our workplace. Sometimes, work is a calling, but many times we find ourselves working because we need to - to pay bills, to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. And then, for a precious week or two, we go on holiday. We recuperate as we tour art galleries, eat too many cream teas or relax on the beach. Once we've finally got there anyway - first there might be more stress to battle: the holiday traffic, the trials of the airport check in desk or strikes at the ferry terminal.

In our post-modern western society, we seem to have got the wrong end of the stick somewhere when it comes to work and holidays. We seem to work until we need or can afford a holiday. We then collapse in a hammock for a fortnight, completely divorced from our usual lives and then return home for the cycle to start again. And somehow, we know it's not meant to be like this - even if we have managed the "holiday of a lifetime"; maybe Disneyland or a safari.

There is I think, a reason that the feeling of working for a holiday doesn't sit right with us - I think it's because the order is wrong, and that work in order to holiday is not a concept that is God given. So what do we replace it with? Today, I want to suggest to you that the alternative is a healthy and wise approach: rest and service. We don't work to have a holiday - we rest in order that we may serve.

In Mark chapter 6:30-31, it says this:

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

We are looking at Proverbs at the moment in this series we are calling Lifecraft from God. And when we look at Proverbs, at first glance there may not appear to be too much about rest. But looking deeper, it is there. Proverbs 23:4-5 says this:

*Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist.
When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.*

There is a clear plea not to work ourselves to the bone, because we will always spend what we earn and the cycle will start again. But, Proverbs also teaches us that there is a balance to be struck somewhere. The writer of Proverbs says in Proverbs 24:30-34:

I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received

instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

So does this imply that rest is bad, because the moment we stop working we are headed to poverty and we should keep working even if we are tired? No – rest is very good; necessary even. It is the purpose of the rest that is important. I want to spend a few minutes today having a look at Jesus' invitation to rest awhile, with a little help from Proverbs to see what rest might look like from a biblical perspective.

THE NEED FOR REST

We all need time to rest, and this is illustrated and established right at the beginning of creation, when God rested on the seventh day as we can read in Genesis 2:31:

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.

The principle of rest served as the basis for the Sabbath day, which was later was commanded of the Israelites as a weekly observance as one of the ten commandments in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5:

12 *“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. **13** Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **14** but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. **15** Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.*

It is clear in the bible that early on God approved of and valued rest. He rested himself on the seventh day after creation. He knew it was so important for mankind to take time to rest on a regular basis, and also likely knew it was so likely to be overlooked that he mandated it in the Old Testament laws. And He went further, mandating a host of other Jewish holidays which, if you wish to later you can read about in Leviticus 23. The feasts of:

1. Unleavened Bread, with two days of rest
2. The Feast of Harvest (Pentecost), one day of rest
3. The Feast of Trumpets, one day of rest
4. The Day of Atonement, one day of rest
5. The Feast Of Tabernacles, two days of rest

Included with several of the above were required trips to Jerusalem and seven-day feasts, including one week of living in tents. These were in addition to the weekly Sabbaths.

In total, I am informed that there are approximately 70 days each year "no customary work" was to be done. Days of rest.

Now this is the Old Testament and the Jewish Calendar, but Paul writes in Romans 15:4: For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

TAKING TIME TO REST

God created mankind with an inbuilt need for rest. So we need to rest for our physical, mental and spiritual health. But as I alluded to earlier, there are two dangers we need to avoid and we need to strike a balance somewhere between not enough rest, and not enough work. There is a story which goes like this:

One man challenged another to an all-day wood chopping contest. The challenger worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The other man had a leisurely lunch and took several other breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the challenger was surprised and annoyed to find that the other fellow had chopped substantially more wood than he had.

"I don't get it," he said. "Every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did."

"But you didn't notice," said the winning woodsman, "that when I sat down, I was sharpening my axe."

One helpful way to start to think about it is this. Biblical rest is not about not doing anything. Biblical rest is about consciously choosing not to work and replacing that time with something restorative. Let me say that again: Biblical rest is not about not doing anything. Rest is about consciously choosing not to work and replacing that time with something restorative. Rest is an active process.

Let me give some other examples which might help with this concept:

Consider:

The triathlete in training for a competition. He or she will build "rest days" into the training schedule for their body to recover from the rigours of cycling, swimming and running. The rest days are important because it allows the body to recover and prepare for the next long run or pool session.

Consider the way music is written and arranged, especially classical music. It has rhythm and the notes that are played are important, but equally important are the times when the notes are not played - the rests. Not all of the instruments in the orchestra play all of the time and the times of rest add to the rhythm and phrasing of

the piece of music but also texture. For example the string instruments are playing and the horns, trumpets and trombones are resting. The rest in music allows the phrasing of the melody to take shape, like punctuation in a sentence, or the emphasis on a point, so the impact of the brass section when they rejoin the piece is all the more obvious because they have rested. And in resting they have not been doing nothing – they have counted the beat in their silence and followed the conductor so that they know when to rejoin the rest of the orchestra. What is not played - the time of rest - is just as important as the notes that are.

For followers of Jesus, biblical rest is active - we rest in order that we may continue serving God in an impactful way and rest to prepare ourselves for the task that is ahead. There is a whole world of difference between spending time resting ahead of planned activity and collapsing in a heap after a task is done. There is a world of difference between resting in order to serve and working to holiday.

So what does practical biblical rest look like and what has that got to do with Proverbs?

Well there are two types of rest that are important - physical and spiritual.

Physical rest, to refresh the body may take the form of a good night's sleep or a holiday - I said the word! The latter may involve travel, meeting with friends or making planned cultural visits or going to sporting events or concerts. In some ways these are like the Old Testament feasts from Leviticus that I mentioned earlier. And through resting we can prepare ourselves for the next period of service and hopefully enjoy benefits such as reduced stress levels, weight control, improved memory performance and overall good physical health. In the passage that we started with, Jesus invitation is partly to this kind of rest - to get away from the hustle and bustle and chill out for a while.

But secondly there is Spiritual rest, to refresh the spirit, and this is the other rest that I believe Jesus is inviting us to – to spend time with him. Spending deliberate and conscious time in things like a daily devotional period, choosing to meditate on God's word. The benefits here include a closer walk with God, inner renewal and peace of mind as we put things into perspective talking them through with Him.

Proverbs, whilst warning us against the dangers of too much rest, is full of the benefits of spending time with God and promises of what will happen when we do:

Proverbs 1:7

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools^[a] despise wisdom and instruction.*

Proverbs 2:6

*For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

Proverbs 3:5,6

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.*

*Proverbs 18:10
The name of the LORD is a fortified tower;
the righteous run to it and are safe.*

*Proverbs 28:5
Evildoers do not understand what is right,
but those who seek the LORD understand it fully.*

Both the body and spirit need periods of rest and it is through the times of rest that God teaches us important lessons and prepares us for the service ahead. As a family we first came along to Leeds Vineyard in September 2006. We arrived tired and in desperate need of rest; and that is what we found here. This community of faith provided a safe place to be. We grew to be part of a community as God rested us here. But he rested us for a purpose - it was not a holiday camp - but rather it was preparation for the roles that he had for us in the future: in childrens ministry, serving with the cafe team, playing in a worship band, leading a house group and a marriage course, overseeing clusters of housegroups, working alongside Gwen as a befriender for Christians Against Poverty, preaching occasionally on a Sunday morning and serving for a time as part of the leadership group. It sounds quite tiring listing it all, but in truth, much of it wasn't, because that service all came out of and was sustained by periods of rest.

And over the last few months, as our time in Leeds has drawn to a close, God has again given us the opportunity to rest as one by one we have withdrawn from various of these roles that we still held, and we consistently see ourselves being replaced by more gifted people.

So how do we find rest. Well firstly it is promised, so we don't have to do much looking. Jesus promises "Come to me and I will give you rest". But even that reminds us that it is an active process and that involves making the conscious decision to go to Him. Practically speaking, we may need to consciously block out some time in the week, for "festivals" of physical rest. And spiritually, we need to consciously times and places to spend time with Jesus. To find places that allow for privacy and times when we will not be interrupted in our schedule. There are not necessarily and "right answers" for where and when, but for us to be as effective as we might wish to be, it is important that they are found. So individually:

- a. Isaac liked the evening in the field - [Gen 24:63](#)
- b. David and Daniel liked morning, noon, and evening in their bed or room respectively.
- c. Jesus preferred early morning in deserted places - [Mk 1:35](#)

But also note with me that the old testament weekly and annual rests include times of celebratory rest with others - on a Sunday morning or evening perhaps. That is one of the purposes of weekly worship.

There is an old poem which I remember hearing for the first time some 25 years ago, but in reality is much older. Unfortunately much of the wisdom is probably now lost and it is as likely now to be found embroidered on a tea towel in a cheesy gift shop. It does however have a huge amount of truth in it. It goes like this:

I got up early one morning
and rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish
that I didn't have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me,
and heavier came each task.
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.
He answered, "You didn't ask."

I wanted to see joy and beauty,
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me.
He said, "But you didn't seek."

I tried to come into God's presence;
I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning,
and paused before entering the day;
I had so much to accomplish
that I had to take time to pray.

No man can work without rest and none of us who professes to be a follower of Jesus can follow him effectively for long unless we choose to spend time resting with Him. How can we shoulder all of life's burdens if we have no contact with him who is the Lord giver of all good things? We can't. How can we do God's work unless it is in God's strength? We can't. How can we receive that strength unless we seek in quietness and in stillness of the presence of God?

Of course there is the danger that we can rest too much and too much inactivity is unhealthy, however we might dress it up. The triathlete who spends all his time resting will probably drown the next time they attempt the open water swim. But more seriously, is devotion that does not result in action real devotion? Is prayer that does not spur us to action real prayer?

The goal of resting with Jesus through prayer and worship and reading his word is not to avoid meeting with people, but to prepare ourselves better for when we do. We rest spiritually and physically in order that when we serve, we can do so wholeheartedly and to the best of our ability and in a way led by God because we have spent time with him and know what is on his heart.

The life craft of following Jesus through rest and service is the alternate rhythms of meeting with God in both the secret place and in corporate worship, and then serving Him as we are led in the work place or the community. It is service out of rest. It is not the holiday after working ourselves to the bone.

CONCLUSION

The life that we have as followers of Jesus is more akin to a marathon than a sprint. We need to have endurance so that we can complete the race. Just as physical strength requires both exercise and rest, it is the same with our faith. That endurance is built up through both the times to rest and the times of service. We need both, so that we can maintain the proper balance and avoid being physically or mentally and spiritually burned out. We need the periods of activity, times of what Robbie Dawkins would call "doing the stuff", and we can be thankful that in the wisdom and provision of God there is to be opportunity for both.

So let's take up the invitation that I believe Jesus is offering us this morning. "Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest a while." Rest a while, so that we will be ready to serve Him.

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