

Formed in Christ: A Study of the Practices of Following Jesus

Week 6: *Rest*¹

REVIEW

“Grace is opposed to earning, not to effort” (Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*).

“We must seek out ways to live and act in union with the flow of God’s Kingdom life that should come through our relationship with Jesus” (Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*).

“Christian holiness consists not of trying as hard as we can to be good but of learning to live in the new world created by Easter” (Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 253).

INTRODUCTION

“I feel thin, sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread” (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*).

“The Busy Trap,” Tim Kreider (<http://goo.gl/iT8yg1>)

“It’s almost always people whose lamented busyness is purely self-imposed: work and obligations they’ve taken on voluntarily, classes and activities they’ve ‘encouraged’ their kids to participate in. They’re busy because of their own ambition or drive or anxiety, because they’re addicted to busyness and dread what they might have to face in its absence. Almost everyone I know is busy. They feel anxious and guilty when they aren’t either working or doing something to promote their work. They schedule in time with friends the way students with 4.0 G.P.A.’s make sure to sign up for community service because it looks good on their college applications.”

“Even children are busy now, scheduled down to the half-hour with classes and extracurricular activities. They come home at the end of the day as tired as grown-ups.”

“The present hysteria is not a necessary or inevitable condition of life; it’s something we’ve chosen, if only by our acquiescence to it.”

“Busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness; obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day.”

“Rest is a radical thing in our day and age” (Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 64).

I. What is REST?

i. Definitions

“Sabbath is God’s gift of repetitive and regular rest. It is given for our delight and communion with God. Time for *being* in the midst of a life of *doing* particularly characterizes the Sabbath” (Calhoun 40).

¹ Works consulted: Willard, *The Great Omission*; Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*; Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*; Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*; Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*; Buchanan, *The Rest of God*.

“Sabbath is both a day and an attitude to nurture such stillness. It is both time on a calendar and a disposition of the heart. It is a day we enter, but just as much a way we see. Sabbath imparts the rest of God—actual physical, mental, spiritual rest, but also the *rest* of God—the things of God’s nature and presence we miss in our busyness” (Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 3).

“...Without practices—without *gestures with which to honor* fresh ways of perceiving—any change of mind will be superficial, artificial, short-lived...Good practices are both catalysts and incubators for new thoughts, they initiate them, and they nurture them. But they do even more: *they make real our change of mind*” (Buchanan 6-7).

ii. Biblical Passages

“2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. **2** 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. **3** 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)

“8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, **10** 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. **11** 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.” (Exod 20:8-11)

Heidelberg Catechism #103

Question 103: What is God's will for us in the fourth commandment?

Answer: First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I regularly attend the assembly of God's people to learn what God's Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through the Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

Psalms

“6 There are many who say, “Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!” **7** You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. **8** In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Ps 4:6-8)

“10 Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Ps 46:10)

“62:1 For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. 2 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.” (Ps 62:1-2)

“12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” (Ps 90:12)

“7 Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.” (Ps 116:7)

“127:1 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. 2 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 sleep.” (Ps 127:1-2)

“2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.” (Ps 131:2)

Gospels

“25 At that time Jesus declared, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’” (Matt 11:25-30)

“38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” 41 But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

II. What are the challenges and difficulties of REST?

“In a culture where busyness is a fetish and stillness is laziness, rest is sloth” (Buchanan 3).

“It is the easiest thing in the world to work all the time, compared to the incredible difficulty of spending one hour or one day of rest in a proper way” (Eugene Rosenstock-Huessy, *Out of Revolution*, 14).

“Busyness kills the heart...*Busyness makes us stop caring about the things we care about.* And not only that. Busyness also robs us of knowing God the way we might” (Buchanan 48).

“18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” (Mark 4:18-19)

“For most of us, it isn't heresy or rank apostasy that will derail our profession of faith. It's all the worries of life. You've got car repairs. Then your water heater goes out. The kids need to see a doctor. You haven't done your taxes yet. Your checkbook isn't balanced. You're behind on thank you notes. You promised your mother you'd come over and fix a faucet. You're behind on wedding planning. Your boards are coming up. You have more applications to send out. Your dissertation is due. Your refrigerator is empty. Your lawn needs mowing. Your curtains don't look right. Your washing machine keeps rattling. This is life for most of us, and it's choking out spiritual life...As much as we must pray against the Devil and pray for the persecuted church, in Jesus's thinking the greater threat to the gospel is sheer exhaustion. Busyness kills more Christians than bullets” (DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*)

III. Why should we practice REST?

a. The practice of rest enables us to image our God.

“God created us in his image. He is a God who works and then rests. When we rest we honor the way God made us” (Calhoun 64).

b. The practice of rest breaks the pattern and addiction to busyness, rush, and hurry.

c. The practice of rest exposes our hearts, idols and false selves.

“The presence of extreme busyness in our lives may point to deeper problems— a pervasive people-pleasing, a restless ambition, a malaise of meaninglessness” (DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*).

d. The practice of rest enables us to acknowledge our human limits and live within them.

“Sabbath is God’s way of saying, ‘Stop. Notice your limits. Don’t burn out.’ It is a day he gives us to remember who and what work is for as well as what matters most. Sunday generously hands us hours to look into the eyes of those we love. We have time for loving and being loved. Rhythmically, the Sabbath reminds us that we belong to the worldwide family of God. We are citizens of another kingdom—a kingdom not ruled by the clock and the tyranny of the urgent. God’s Sabbath reality calls us to trust that the Creator can manage all that concerns us in this world as we settle into his rest” (Calhoun 42).

e. The practice of rest enables us to delight in God, family, seasons, meals and all good gifts of creation.

“This is the essence of a Sabbath heart: paying attention. It is being fully present, wholly awake, in each moment” (Buchanan 50).

f. The practice of rest is an embodied act of entrusting yourself to God.

“Rest can be a spiritual act—a truly human act of submission to and dependence on God who watches over all things as we rest” (Calhoun 64).

“If God works all things together for good for those who love him and are called to his purposes, you can relax. If he doesn’t, start worrying. If God can take any mess, any mishap, any wastage, any wreckage, any anything, and choreograph beauty and meaning from it, then you can take a day off. If he can’t, get busy. Either God’s always at work, watching the city, building the house, or you need to try harder. Either God is good and in control, or it all depends on you” (Buchanan 63).

g. The practice of rest creates space for restorative time with Jesus.

h. The practice of rest enables us to enjoy God’s GOOD gift of work.

“Before we appreciate God’s gift of rest, it is vital we appreciate his gift of work” (Buchanan 16).

IV. How do we begin the practice of REST?

- a. Work faithfully in the time allotted for work.
- b. Practice silence & solitude as complementary disciplines.
- c. Plan ahead for your day of rest.
- d. Discuss with roommates or family members how you can arrange regular patterns of rest, refreshment, renewal and relationships.
- e. Don’t check your email outside of work hours or at least not on Sundays. Maybe even turn your phone off for a time!
- f. Take a break from social media.
- g. Use your vacation days.

Questions for Reflection

- What do your current practices of rest look like?
- What exhausts you or keeps you working past your limits?
- Do you find it difficult to rest regularly? Why? How does that answer expose your heart?
- How does the gospel address those particular issues?
- What is appealing to you about the practice of rest?

RECOMMENDED READING

The Rest of God, Mark Buchanan

Crazy Busy, Kevin DeYoung