



Rest Lies at the Heart of a Blessed Creation

12.23.07 by Steven Purcell

Article:

And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest for a while."

[Mark 6:31](#)

Most of us own several devices that promise to save time: a microwave oven, a PDA, computers, email, cars, etc. Nevertheless, we are more stressed, medicated, and burned-out than at any other time in history. For some, the thought of taking a vacation or going on "retreat" might be considered a luxurious indulgence; for others a sign of personal weakness.

But Scripture speaks a different language. In the story of the Creation, rest turns out to be of equal significance to work and must be accepted on its own creational terms. In the biblical understanding, a day starts at sunset: "And there was evening, and there was morning, one day" ([Gen. 1:5](#)). So, rest precedes work. But rest also follows work, as we read: "By the seventh day, God completed his work which he had done; and he rested from all his work which God had created and made" ([Gen. 2:2](#)).

These two verses teach us that rest is not just a luxury for the wealthy or for those with four weeks of vacation a year. Rest lies at the foundation of creation: "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" ([Gen. 2:3](#)). Therefore, God commanded His people to remember the Sabbath day, and to keep it holy ([Ex. 20:8](#)). Continual work without rest runs against the natural created order. The words of the prophets in the Old Testament make it clear that Israel's failure to faithfully keep the Sabbath played significantly into their being led into exile. This fact would suggest that observing moments of rest is very difficult.

It probably says much about our attitude toward work and rest that in our understanding, the day starts at sunrise. In our purpose-driven culture (and churches), rest is deemed unproductive and thus granted to ourselves primarily out of necessity for the work of the next day. But restlessness can be dangerous spiritually. When our work is not shaped by rhythms of rest, our individual efforts acquire a weight of self-importance that blinds us to reality. We gradually believe that our individual efforts are responsible for our success. The Apostle Paul corrects this false notion when he says that even our good works "are prepared in advance for us to do" ([Eph. 2:10](#)). Rest is God's way of equipping us for the work that he has given us to do.

Rest and retreat are not only for those with a predisposition to quiet reflection—introverts, journal-keepers, and pensioners. Sabbath-keeping is the primary way men and women created in God's image remember that our work is not about us. We rise from sleep and go to work every morning as an act of stewardship for the creation that God has put in our care. By responding to God's instruction to observe periods of rest—every day, once a week, or on retreats—we participate in God's intention to bestow his Shalom on all creation, which of course will deeply influence our personal lives and relationships.