

WORK

Week 8: Work, Rest, and the Rhythms of Life¹

“Business leaders should be honest with interviewees about the time demands a job imposes. . . . Managers should take special interest in workers with few skills or low mobility” (141). **What structural and practical elements can employers, churches, schools, and other workplaces put in place to enable and encourage healthy rest?**

“Resting resembles tithing. Both are symbolic acts and confessions of faith. The say, ‘We can accomplish more in six days with His favor than in seven days without it.’ By resting, we confess that we can prosper without tireless toil” (141).

LIVING BY FAITH

People *worship* work. They make sacrifices for work. They put their faith in a job to bring personal blessing and stability. They glorify others who succeed in the workplace and seek their own glory in a career. “Work is a seductive deity. ‘Serve me,’ it promises, ‘and I will give you security, respect, and wealth’” (142).

The gospel is the story of how we cannot work our way into favor with God. We receive everything from him as a gift:

- Psalm 37:9-11
- 1 Peter 1:3-5
- Luke 12:32

“So let us work hard enough, then pray with Moses, ‘Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands!’ (Ps. 90:17)” (143).

Food for Thought:

Do you rest from your ordinary labor one day each week? Why or why not?

Why is it so hard for some of us to stop working one day a week, or even to stop working and go to sleep?

How can laziness in our work rob us from joy in our rest?

As Western Americans, we are in a constant battle for time. We try to make good time, save time, and fear wasting time. Some of us have a hard time being fully present in our relationships or rest because of the crushing weight of wanting to *accomplish more*. “If someone asks, ‘How was your day?’ we reply, ‘Good! I got a lot done!’” (130)

Evaluate yourself:

- Are you typically early, on time, or late?
- How often do you check the clock?
- Do you typically overestimate or underestimate what can be accomplished in a day?
- How would you describe the way you most often feel when going to bed: Guilty, anxious, satisfied, overwhelmed, tired?

The Scriptures call Christians to manage our time well, but that doesn’t mean we squeeze every dollar out of the clock. Many things are more valuable than money—and work.

- We are called to make the most of our days (Eph. 5:16)
- It takes wisdom to use our years wisely (Psalm 90:10,12)

CREATION AND RHYTHM

“The God-given rhythm of life both corrects laziness and offers relief to those who feel pressure to be industrious at all times” (131). **Read the passages below and consider how the Sabbath *should* have been received by the newly freed Israelite slaves:**

- Exodus 20:8-11
- Exodus 31:12-18

Did the people of Israel receive the Sabbath as a blessing? Was it hard for slaves to accept a rest day? **Read Exodus 16:23-30. How do you struggle to receive rest as a gift? What makes your rest *restless*?**

¹ This study is a distillation of Daniel Doriani’s *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity and Transformation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019). It is meant to be taught in conjunction with the book, not as a replacement.

“As fallen creatures, we typically work too much or too little, so we need to consider God’s ways” (131). Ronald Wallace makes an interesting observation about the Lord’s work in creation: “He did not wholly immerse himself in his work, he held something back. He detached himself from creation, so that we can distinguish God’s work from God himself.” If God is more than his work, surely we are meant to be as well.

FALL: WORK AND OVERWORK

Time is a valuable resource not to be intentionally wasted, and efficiency fights the fallen world’s tendency toward waste:

- Farmers must work during the right times (Prov. 10:4-5; 20:4)
- Wealth should be preserved (Prov. 29:3; Luke 16:1)
- The godly should act when the time is right (Eph. 5:15-16)

“That said, we must not read the Western passion for efficiency into the Scripture. After all, when God created humans, he gave us a need for sleep and rest...God doesn’t seem to *hurry* as we do. His covenants unfold over centuries” (133)

Kristin van Ogtrop, editor of magazines Glamour and Real Simple, lamented: “I will never be able to share the surprise [my kids] feel when they find a cicada in the grass, because stopping to marvel at the cicada means I will miss my morning train . . . before I know it, my boys will be grown. . . . Four little feet jumping on the bed will be a distant memory.”

We live in a world where career success and paid labor are the best way to measure one’s value. **What difficult decision have you had to make in the past regarding work and other priorities?**

OVERWORK AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

We might picture the overworked employee as a slave to his company, but the truth is many people are also tempted to overwork because they believe in their work:

STRUCTURAL REASONS

- *longer hours—a necessity for those at low-paying jobs*
- *Employers prefer fewer employees*
- *Job insecurity*

PERSONAL REASONS

- *Quality of life decisions*
- *Pride, ambition, ego*
- *Dedication to an understaffed cause*

“Sadly, believers often conform to culture instead of questioning it” (135). Some of us are constantly tired and never able to do good work because we never stop to rest. Some of us cannot do good work because we never devote our time 100% to work but always mix work with leisure. **Do you find it harder to 100% rest or 100% work?**

THE DAY OF REST—PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

“God’s law, grounded in his work in creation and redemption, cuts through our bad habits with bracing simplicity in Deuteronomy 5:12-15:

- Addresses both idlers and overachievers
- Not merely personal, but social
- Not an hour or an evening, but one whole day each week

Imagine being a newly freed slave, and the God who rescued you tells you that you now get one whole day a week to rest from your toil. What a gift! The unwillingness to rest is a spiritual problem just like an unwillingness to work. It is a declaration in the face of our Creator: “I am not a finite creature!” It is the cry of an ungrateful heart to a gracious Father: “I don’t need rest!”

The author of Hebrews explains that the Old Testament Sabbath points forward to the eternal rest we have in Jesus Christ (Heb. 4). **Read Colossians 2:16-17 and Romans 14:4-6. How do these guide the way we practice patterns of rest as Christians?**

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The Pharisees perverted the Sabbath by turning it from a gift into a burden. When and how we rest each week is largely left to the Christian conscience. However, we must be careful not to “create excuses for working and so deprive ourselves of rest” (138). **Is play or sport allowed on the Lord’s Day? How rigid are you in protecting rest?**

REST AND WESTERN CULTURE

In modern society, a weekly day of rest has been subsumed by *the weekend*—a mix of leisure, activities, sports, and more work. We don’t rest like we should, because rest actually takes discipline—and work! **As Christians, how can we give others the gift of a day of rest, just as God has given us?**

- Parents and children
- Employers and employees
- Teachers and students