

## Rest & Play: Living a Sabbath Shaped Life

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Summer is here, though you wouldn't know it by the volume of rain. Summer hails fun, diving into pools and wading through springs. It beckons rest. Summer is snail's pace. On the surface, Austin gets rest and play. We host an annual festival pretty much every day, and can retreat to our hills, lakes and pools to unwind. But beneath the surface, people are just as anxious, exhausted, and unfulfilled in Austin as anywhere else. With summer upon us, now is a great time to ask: What is rest/play? How do we do them well? We'll explore this question all summer. I'll introduce it today by asking three questions: What are rest and play (*meaning*)? What keeps us from rest and play (*challenge*)? How do we rest and play (*solution*)?

### Meaning of Leisure

Rest and play. Inviting words aren't they? Not like busy or anxious. Push rest and play together and you get leisure. Rest + Play = Leisure. How would you rate yourself on leisure? On a scale of 1-10 where would you fall? Canadian architect, professor and author Witold Rybczynski says, "*Leisure is the most misunderstood word in our vocabulary.*" What is it? Leisure is a laptop? Swarms of people asking you questions? Clocking in and out? No, when we think leisure, we think **non-work**. The cessation of labor. In fact, many of us view paid labor *as the means to finance our leisure*. We work to rest and play, work for the weekend. Leisure occupies a significant place, not only our budget, but our imagination. Clearing hump day, we lean toward the weekend checking movie times, who's playing where, and what new restaurant we can try? Work pays for leisure. Is this wrong? Not necessarily. Biblical faith avoids privileging the heavenly over the earthly, after all, "Every good and perfect gift comes from our Creator, gifts we are meant to enjoy with thankfulness. But, we can quickly leave the Creator behind while stockpiling his gifts. Since the 1900s our society has tripled in leisure time. Before electricity, there was no night-life. You worked by day and rested by night. But with the industrial revolution, and a little Red Bull, we can play well into the night. Surely there is more to it than non-work? If we break the leisure apart, we find something beneath Rest and Play. When you see children at play laughing, chasing one another around the play ground, do you think, Ah, they are non-working? No, they are onto something else. Sociologist Peter Berger says, the intention of play is **joy**, and that it points beyond itself, signals something greater than play. So it is with rest. When see someone stealing away for a quiet nap on a hammock, or enjoy a weekend away without responsibilities, do you think, Ah, what an opportunity for non-work! No, rest signals something greater. Perhaps **contentment**. While rest and play are non-work; they are much more. Put them together and you get *joyful contentment*. How do you rank on the leisure scale now? Joyful contentment.

### Challenges to Leisure

What keeps us from resting and playing *well*? J. I. Packer suggests two obstacles to true leisure. First, what you might call **pragmatic leisure**. The pragmatist sees rest as means to greater productivity. Instead of working to rest, you rest to work. You might not think of yourself as a pragmatist, but its their tucked away in our language. When you get away for a weekend, you might say something like, I need to recharge my batteries. Or I've gotta refuel

before I can get back to work. Your rest is chained to work, enslaved to productivity. The pragmatist justifies rest by saying, when I get back I'll be more *productive*. You value rest because it valorizes work. *I fell into this in my twenties and have struggled with it ever since.* I was won to the idea that productivity is the supreme virtue, make everything count. I'd always take shortest route, if people bored me in conversation, I'd start reading a book, right in front of them, allowed just enough time to get somewhere which meant I was frequently late. After we had kids, my wife had to talk me into spending time (and money) on family vacations. I've improved in rest and play over the years. I enjoy personal retreats, family vacations, and good culture, but whenever I get away for any length of time a sneaky little voice whispers, *You had better make this count.*" A couple of weeks ago I went to Vancouver with my wife for one last hurrah before my kidney transplant. Total rest and play. No other agenda. But sitting in the plane, reading a novel on the way, I heard a voice say *You better get some good insights for your preaching.* When I woke up it said, *Now that you are away you should really have a powerful encounter with God in prayer and bible study.* And even as I walked the streets, in the crisp Canadian air, it would interrogate me, *Do you really deserve this?* I felt pressure to justify it all. God says, *the pressure's off; I've justified you.* No you don't deserve it, that's what makes it a gift! You don't earn a gift, you receive a gift. But the pragmatist insists on using leisure, missing the intention of rest and play—*joyful contentment!* The second hurdle to rest and play is **hedonistic leisure**. If the pragmatist idolizes productivity, the hedonist idolizes pleasure. The hedonist sees pleasure as an end and seeks it flat out. They don't have any problem justifying a good time. Work buys pleasure. Line up experiences and knock em out! Show after show after show, movie after movie, binge watching, shopping, and exercising. New food, new places, new people. Why? Because true pleasure is found in our experience, not in Christ. The pragmatist and hedonist push rest and play to the extremes, miss their deeper meaning. Ecclesiastes puts it like this: *And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure (hedonist), for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it (pragmatist), and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind"*(2:10).

### Sabbath Shaped Life

How do we move from vanity to truly valuing leisure, from extremes to depths? Leisure scholars, (yes there is such a thing, you can really rely on their work!) say that for leisure to have its intended effect it must be to be spiritual. The unique contribution of Judeo-Christianity is the Sabbath. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 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. 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"* (Ex 20:8-11). A lot can be said here, I'll leave most of it to Austin Becton who will be preaching next week, so let's just make a few observations. First, the Sabbath was instituted before the curse not after it. When God finished creating the heavens and the earth, he rested on the seventh day and made it holy (2:1-3). Rest is **good**. Second, Sabbath is **rhythmic**. God worked six days, then rested. So also we work six days, and rest. There is a cadence to life, sleeping and waking, winter and summer, working and resting. This rhythm is hard-wired into creation. Studies

come out every year extolling the merits of sleep. We literally power down for a third of our lives, but Sabbath extends beyond sleep to rest and play. You are created to rest, not just work, and not just rest to work. For the Christian, rest has an inherent worth. In the rhythm of rest we enjoy God's good gifts of creation, culture, community, by supremely enjoying God himself. Someone asked Dallas Willard to describe Jesus in one word. You know what he said, "Relaxed." Probably not the word you would pick. Jesus got a tremendous amount of things done, but he was unhurried. He took personal retreats, avoided crowds, moved in an unhurried manner. He was so slow, his best friend Lazarus died before he got there. We are made for rhythms of rest. Are you practicing Sabbath, disengaging from work, retreating from the crowds? Sabbath is good, rhythmic, and **pervasive**. It isn't just non-work; it is rest. God rested. God. Why? Was he exhausted from speaking the universe into existence? Why did God rest? In the ancient creation stories, a god rested when creation was complete, and he would enter into the temple that overlooks creation and rest. Rest wasn't mere repose; it was rule, sovereignty. God rested on the seventh day because he was finished furnishing the world for us. **Sabbath is a reminder that God (not you) is the sovereign supplier of all good things.** So, what did it look like for Adam and Eve to enter that rest? Eat of all the trees of the garden, except one. Work and keep the garden, name the animals, enjoy one another's companionship, but don't eat of the tree. There was nothing they needed that God hadn't supplied. And as long as they didn't eat of one tree, they enjoyed a pervasive Sabbath. They rested while they worked and while they played. Rest wasn't restricted to non-work; it permeated everything. Rest filled the air; it came on the cool of the day. **Rest was trust in the sovereign supplier of all good things.** They played freely, and worked freely *because they trusted God provided all they needed*. Until one day they chose not to trust. Instead, they took matters into their own hands, and they did the one thing the supplier of all good things asked them not to do. They ate from the tree. Snatching the fruit, they broke the Sabbath right in two. Pervasive peace sucked right out of the garden. Why?! Because they listened to the whisper, the little voice that said, you know better, you could be greater, more productive, happier. Don't enjoy what he's given; ask for more. He's holding back on you. Sinking their teeth into a cheap promise, true rest trickled away. They broke Sabbath just to get the upper hand, and they went down with a thud. Are you breaking Sabbath, hungrily overworking and overplaying? God wants to lift you up, out of fretful worry and fleeting pleasure, to give you *joyful contentment*. How? It all comes down to who you trust. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** The burdens could be law-keeping, trying to earn God's favor, or the difficulty of securing provision in an agrarian society, we don't know exactly. They might be the burden of overworking or overplaying for you. Whatever it is, whatever is weighing you down, holding you back, you have to give it to God to get his rest. Trust not in yourself, but in the sovereign supplier of all good things, *even if it means not getting things you really want*. ILL. A closer reading of Jesus words in the original text go like this, "Come to me all who labor and are weighed down and I will rest you. Jesus is saying, I will rest you. Jesus is saying to you this morning, I. WILL. REST. YOU. Like my Father before me, I am the sovereign supplier of all good things. Everything you need I have. I am Lord of the Sabbath. Will you trust me? But what if I miss out on this delicious, attractive thing hanging down in front of me? I will rest you. Trust me, and your rest wont just fill a weekend, it will fill your soul. "Our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee," St. Augustine. Will you trust him? You have every reason to.