

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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## Rest and Re-Creation

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## Rest and Re-Creation

### Abstract

"Growing up Calvinist, I was raised with the famed 'Protestant work ethic'."

Posting about the balance of work and leisure from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/rest-and-re-creation/>

### Keywords

In All Things, God, recreation, rest, work

### Disciplines

Christianity

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# Rest and Re-Creation

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 [all in all things.org/rest-and-re-creation/](http://allthings.org/rest-and-re-creation/)

Neal DeRoo

I can't sit still. Usually, it's not a problem. In fact, it probably even helps me be 'productive' at work sometimes. Granted, it annoys my wife, who has to sit beside me in church or across the table from me at restaurants while my leg bounces or my foot taps. But in general, it doesn't pose too many problems.

Except on Sunday afternoon. You see, I'm fortunate enough that I can organize my life in such a way that I don't have to work on Sundays. Sunday is for worshipping God, resting, spending time with family, fellowshiping with friends—but not for work. This is great—except for those Sunday afternoons when we have no plans, no football game to watch, and nothing to do. This is where my inability to sit still becomes a problem. On these days, I usually spend my day wandering aimlessly around the house, hovering uncomfortably near my wife while she tries to do something else, or bouncing mindlessly from one website to the next in an unsatisfying manner. Even though I don't 'do' much, these days are not restful to me.

My inability to sit still has a lot of contributing factors, but one of them is almost undoubtedly theological. Growing up Calvinist, I was raised with the famed 'Protestant work ethic'—given that all work could be done for God, not working was as good as denying God's will for my life. To work, to be busy with one's hands and one's body—this was akin to breathing. And to be doing nothing was laziness, which was an invitation to the devil to tempt me to do bad things: "idle hands are the devil's workshop."

Before I go on, let me state clearly that I do think all work can be done for God, and that finding God through one's work can be a very important step in one's faith journey, as it recognizes that my relationship with God should impact all of my life, not just parts of it. This type of theology of work is important and good and I affirm it.

But I think we have to be careful in some Reformed circles not to over-emphasize the relationship between work and God. When we do, we can easily come to act as if it is up to us to save the world (or at least our little corner of it). In a faith based on God's redemptive action and God's free gift of grace, we've can convince ourselves that it is up to *us* to whip this thing into shape: if we don't do something soon, human activity will destroy creation; if we don't take a stand, this nation will lose its way; if we don't make the right strategic choices, this business or this school will close.

And so we work and we work and we work. We try hard and we try harder. We ceaselessly struggle to live up to some image of what we think we need to be: some vision of what "the world" needs us to be, or some vision of what God needs us to be, or some picture of what our family (or our friends or our boss or our students or our professor or our whatever) needs us to be. We work ourselves harder and harder until we all—like me—can't even sit still anymore.

But work is not what we were made for—at least not work alone. We were made to enjoy ourselves. Indeed, all of creation was made to enjoy itself, to be at peace with itself.

The Bible refers often to the need for Sabbath rest, the need for peace (shalom). Rest is not just 'doing nothing.' To define rest merely as 'not working' is to still let working be the standard against which all other things are measured.

The Biblical standard of rest is Sabbath. It suggests taking a break from the way we normally go about shaping and changing the world in order to more consciously and purposefully devote ourselves to

worshipping God. It is not just about *not* working—it's enjoying and celebrating the many gifts God has given us, and celebrating them both as gifts (to be enjoyed) and as God-given.

Included in these gifts is the gift of fun. If you polled non-Christians about what they think of when they think of Christians, I bet the word 'fun' would not come up very quickly. Nor would 'joyful'. But that latter one is right there in the fruits of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Gal 5:22-23).

*Joy.* We are told this will be a mark of the Spirit's work, and yet there seems to be so little joy among Christians. Perhaps that's overly harsh, but I hear a lot more talk about how things *should* be, complaints about how things *shouldn't* be (but are), and pressure to *change* how we are than I hear the hootin' and hollerin' of joyous celebration.

I'll grant you that joy is not always a loud celebration. Sometimes I've felt joy best as a quiet conviction that things are, at least for this moment, very, very good. It can be sharing a sunset with a loved one, holding a sleeping child on one's lap, or even reading a philosophy book that opens something in the world up to you in just the right kind of way.

While you might not all identify as much with that last one, hopefully you know what I'm talking about. Sometimes, in doing our work we can feel genuine joy, a deep-seated conviction that says "This is good." The joy that God seems to have felt in Genesis 1 when he looked around at what he had made and saw that it was good (Gen 1: 9, 18, 21, 25). It was very good (Gen 1:31).

For all the talk we give to finding God in our work, to being creative culture-makers, and forming, transforming, and re-forming the world in God-honoring ways, we should not lose sight of the fact that what is important in all this is *not* primarily our work or our activity. God is the one at work. We are called to work, not to save the world, but to participate in the work of God, via the Spirit, and so find rest, peace, and enjoyment in God.

We are to *enjoy* finding God in the world that God has made. Work is one way we can do that—but only one way. Our life is more than our work, and our worth is measured by something other than our productivity (not even by our productivity in service of 'the Kingdom').

I think we've done a lot, especially in the broader Reformed tradition, to emphasize the importance of a theology of work. Perhaps it is time now to focus a little more on a theology of play. We talk a lot about the goodness of creation—let's also begin to celebrate the divine goodness of recreation.