How (and Why) to Give the Gift of Rest

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Abstract
"Rest is an acknowledgement that we are finite and can't do it all."

Posting about providing the gift of rest to others 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.


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I love being busy, and I need frequent reminders to rest. I’m not the right person to write advice about how to rest well! What I can do, though, is to reflect on the gift of rest—a gift that I have received through others’ generosity and ministry.

Rest is More than Fuel

Rest is often portrayed as something that we can do for ourselves in order to “get ahead.” In a culture that treasures busyness and workaholism, the typical argument for rest is that it can result in greater productivity. While productivity can be a good thing, it should not be our ultimate goal. We should not worship the work of our hands, or of our minds. That’s called idolatry.

Why is rest important? Because our rest can be an obedient act of worship that gives glory to God, who commands us to rest in order to remember his creating and sustaining grace. Rest is an acknowledgement that we are finite and can’t do it all. It is a reminder that we must repent of trying to be our own “crazy busy” gods who want to know everything, do everything, be everywhere. Rest from our striving can redirect our focus. It can remind us to rely on God and thank him for his care—including his work through the larger body of believers.

By resting, especially when we “really can’t afford to,” we humble ourselves. We engage in spiritual discipline. Rest is more than a way to boost our physical, emotional, and intellectual strength. It is an exercise of faith and a reminder of God’s providence.

Receiving (and Learning to Give) the Gift of Rest

My family and I have received the gift of rest in many different ways, including from our friends and relatives, from coworkers, and from the congregations that my husband has served as pastor. Others have given us rest in the form of meals, child care, hospitality in their homes, invitations to enjoy special events together, or even a day or two away to regroup as a family.

Along with these memorable gifts of rest, we are also grateful for the ways that people generously extend rest to us through everyday interactions. Both of us have administrative responsibilities, and through others’ thoughtfulness, we also experience the gift of rest in the midst of our work. For example, when others guard the pastor’s day off (typically Mondays) and save routine appointments for workdays, it gives my husband time for the kinds of rest that most take on Sundays. We have been thankful for these acts of care, which have helped to refresh and sustain us through jobs where at almost any given time, either one or the other of us is on duty or on call.

Here are seven other “everyday” ways that we have received the gift of rest in our work. We try in turn to give these gifts to others, though we admit we always have more to learn about how to do this better. Perhaps this list will give you ideas for sharing the gift of rest, too. Some possibilities to consider:

1. Encourage coworkers to rest—to go home at the end of the work day, to let email wait until morning, to take scheduled days off, to enjoy vacations with arrangements for others to temporarily cover responsibilities, even when challenges arise. Regardless of whether employees are male or female, married or single, responsible for young children or not, rest is important for everyone. It is
also healthy for all of us to realize that no one is “irreplaceable” in terms of covering workplace tasks.

1. **Limit the ripples of off-hours work.** If it is necessary to catch up over an evening or out-of-office day, one way to preserve others’ rest is to work on items that do not require immediate communications to others. If you need to write emails, you can write and save a draft to send later, or use the “delayed send” feature to schedule emails to arrive during normal work hours. When a delayed send is not practical, another option is to start with, “This can wait until…” If you are a supervisor, it can help to note why you are making an exception if you send an email outside of regular hours, and to clarify that a response is not expected before the next workday. We can allow others to rest by making clear that we anticipate they will respond during normal working hours and do not need to be constantly checking their email.

1. **Time weighty issues appropriately, avoiding “email grenades”** or last-minute requests that open difficult or time-consuming conversations at the end of a workday or just before a weekend or holiday. Consider scheduling a time for thoughtful dialogue about concerns you want to share, rather than simply sending an email presenting a complaint or critique. Making things better normally requires an investment of time, care, and interpersonal interaction. Scheduling that conversation for a meeting allows others to rest from prolonged, complicated written exchanges and allows for you to share in the effort in solving problems.

1. **Add others in judiciously.** Another way to give the gift of rest is to include others in emails and meetings only on a need-to-know or need-to-participate basis. This prevents a flood of communications, meetings, and information, and it minimizes long, complex interactions over routine items that could be handled without everyone weighing in. Sometimes informing with a summary after the fact is more helpful than adding numerous people into a meeting or sending constant email cc’s, forwards, or reply-all messages.

1. **Practice the 24-hour rule.** In especially challenging or upsetting situations, discern whether it is possible to wait 24 hours to pray, reflect, calm down, and think of a variety of possible responses or next steps. Practice “high inquiry, high advocacy”: use the time to think of questions you could ask to learn more and to imagine the best intent on the behalf of everyone involved. Taking time to collect your thoughts and emotions can give rest to you and to those who will be involved or affected.

1. **Keep it in bounds.** Consider how to avoid scheduling meetings or work obligations that require others to rearrange their normal out-of-work routines (however fun these extras might seem to you). Think creatively about how to schedule theses extras in order to protect others’ available times of rest.

1. **Say thank you and recognize good work.** A note of appreciation, praise for a job well done, or encouragement can give colleagues, reports, and even supervisors a little peace of mind that they are making a difference and are cared for. Hearing encouragement from others can allow mental or emotional rest from worrying or constant striving.

I hope that like me, you already regularly receive some of these everyday opportunities for rest. What a gift to have friends, family, and colleagues who minister to us by helping us to “lie down in green pastures”! We are blessed when others help us to live in better accord with God’s good design for rhythms of work and rest. How will you give the gift of rest today?