

Why Is Rest Essential For Work?

June 14, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. This morning we continue in our series called, Work Matters To God. Today we are looking at everyone's favorite topic. Rest! Taking a break. Why is rest essential for work?

While we all like rest, statistics say we don't take a break from work even when we have the opportunity. An article in the New York Times talked about how Americans work so much they don't take vacations.¹ The article noted that at the start of summer 40 percent of Americans have no plans to take vacation in the next six months. This is one of the lowest percentages in the last 30 years. Twenty-five percent of U.S. workers do not get paid vacation time. For those of you that don't get vacation, this is hard. You have no opportunity for rest. An additional 33 percent of Americans will take a seven-day vacation, but that includes the weekend, so that is technically a five-day vacation.

One Associated Press poll from 2006 found that one in five carried his or her laptop with on vacation while 80 percent of Americans bring their cell phones on vacation. That was 2006. Today, I am sure those numbers have skyrocketed. I have to ask. How many of you take a vacation with your smartphone and laptop? Did having work with you help you relax? Were you less distracted on vacation because you had your cell phone and laptop with you? Absolutely not!

Today many companies give you a laptop. They expect you to take the laptop home with you at night so you are now working on your time, not just their time. They also expect you will take your company-issued laptop with you on

¹ http://paidpost.nytimes.com/mastercard/the-surprising-cost-of-not-taking-a-vacation.html?_r=0#.VX635jNr_t0

vacation because all vacations are now working vacations, which by definition, is not a vacation. A working vacation is like a fun root canal. It is a contradiction.

What makes it even harder to rest from work is we live in a 24/7 world that has no natural break times between work time and rest time. If we feel like it, at 3:15 a.m. we can go to a 24-hour gym for exercise. When we are done, we can stop at a 24-hour Taco Bell to eat a Chalupa and put back on the calories we just burned off. We can then go to a 24-hour Walmart to buy flowers and begin planting by 4:30 a.m. This is the world we live in. There are no longer times when we are forced to take a break from work.

Some couples even bring their computers with them into the bedroom so they can respond to e-mails. Instead of snuggling, they are typing and texting. When the alarm goes off in the morning the first thing we do is check our e-mail instead of check on our spouses. Work in our electronic world never stops. There is no rest in our work.

Our corporate heroes are not helping us. In an interview with Bill Gates he talked about taking six days off. He took those days between 1978 and 1984. That is six days in six years.²

Marissa Mayer, president of Yahoo and a former executive for Google, gets 700-800 e-mails a day. Imagine how many times her phone vibrates a day. She spends 14 hours straight on Saturdays and Sundays catching up on e-mails. She has learned to live on four-six hours of sleep a night.³

² http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Bill_Gates.aspx

³ http://money.cnn.com/popups/2006/fortune/how_i_work/frameset.exclude.html

This is the world we live in. It is a world without rest from work. This is not good. Today we will see why rest is essential for work.

We need rest to be restored physically.

We need the daily rest of sleep.

God built rest into the created order. Human beings are not machines. We cannot work continually without breaking. The first form of rest God built into our lives is the need for sleep. Our bodies need to rest. Our minds need to rest. We cannot go 24 hours a day without breaking. God designed us this way for a reason. He made night time for that time of rest. In previous generations, when they didn't have electricity, people went to bed much earlier because when the sun went down, the day was over. Today, with electric lights, we stay up late into the night and are massively sleep deprived. The average American gets two and a half hours less sleep than Americans did a century ago.⁴ The Center for Disease Control and Prevention claims more than 40 million Americans get fewer than six hours of sleep a day.⁵ Lack of sleep leads to diabetes, obesity and a host of other diseases. With no environmental cues forcing us to bed, and plenty of electronic gadgets to keep us awake, we are simply not getting the sleep we need, and our work suffers.

We can borrow time but we can't steal it. Staying up late into the night to get a paper finished may sound like a smart move because we are using sleeping time. Skipping a night's sleep didn't gain you any time. You will need to

⁴ Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 96.

⁵ David. K. Randall, "Rethinking Sleep," *New York Times*, September 22, 2012.

pay it back the next day when you are a walking zombie or you get sick or you get in a car accident because you couldn't stay awake. You can't cheat sleep indefinitely. You can only borrow it. You need to pay it back.

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. Psalm 127:2 (ESV)

Sleep is God's gift for the stressed-out worker. It is the way God refreshes us and recharges us. Working when we should be sleeping is refusing to be blessed by a gift from God.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22–23 (ESV)

God gives us a fresh day for a reason. The rest of a good night's sleep is part of the way God restores us. We can choose to ignore sleep all we want, but we will not be productive without sleep. We will only become stressed, irritable and sick without sleep. God didn't just build us to work. He built us for a rhythm of work and rest, making rest essential for work.

We need a weekly day of rest.

God didn't just design us for a time of rest each day, but he also designed us to need a day of rest each week. Around church you hear this day called the Sabbath.

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. Exodus 20:11

Let me demystify the Sabbath. The word Sabbath simply means stop. If we lived in ancient Israel and they had stop signs, every one of them would say

Sabbath in big letters. Sabbath means to stop what you are doing. Sabbath means that once a week we stop our work to get a break.

The word holy simply means different or set apart. If you have a room full of ladies with black hair and a blonde walks in the room, which one is holy? It is the blonde. She is different from the rest. She is holy.

A holy Sabbath day means a day when you stop work and do something different with that day. One of the purposes of a holy Sabbath is so we would get rest from our work and refreshment for our work by taking a break and doing something different. Just as essential as a night of sleep is a weekly day of rest.

Did you know that even God rested and was refreshed on the Sabbath day?

It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. Exodus 31:17 (ESV)

If God was refreshed after his work by the Sabbath day, what makes us think we don't think a weekly day of rest and refreshment? If we ignore this day, and work 24/7, we do this to our own peril. If we ignore a day of rest, all we do is eat into our work day by littering it with little periods of rest as we scan Youtube and Facebook on work hours.

There were two experiments conducted in history to abolish the seven-day week. One was done in Russia and the other in France during their communistic revolution. Both failed miserably. Why? We are built in the image of God and God designed us to need a holy stop day every seven days. If we ignore it, we ignore it to our own peril.

In the Old Testament, it was a boss' job to make sure his employees took a day of rest.

...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. Exodus 20:10 (ESV)

Some of you may have noticed that Chick-fil-A is not open on Sunday. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A, believed it was his responsibility to give his employees a day for physical rest and spiritual renewal each week. Since Sunday is the natural day of worship, the business closed on Sundays so their workers wouldn't feel pressured to work and skip church.

We need extended times of rest.

We don't just need daily rest and weekly rest but we need times of extended rest.

This week I was thinking on the Jewish holiday calendar and it struck me how much mandatory vacation the Jews were to take. These were not arbitrary vacations, but they were religious holidays where they were refreshed in God spiritually while they rested from their work physically.

Listen to some of their holidays. They had new moon holidays, Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Unleavened bread, the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Atonement, the Feast of Purim and the Feast of Dedication (which we know as Hanukkah). We thought we were really kicking it because we had the 4th of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas. They had a lot of seasons of extended physical and spiritual refreshment.

Incidentally, they didn't end up impoverished because they took too much time for rest and worship. On the contrary, they were blessed by God for observing the Sabbaths and religious holidays. The rest that appeared to ruin their productivity actually was honored by God so it increased their productivity.

“ ‘But if you listen to me, declares the Lord, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings and princes who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And this city shall be inhabited forever... But if you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter by the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.’ ” Jeremiah 17:24–27 (ESV)

When ancient Israel interacted with the surrounding cultures in the ancient world, those cultures did not observe the Sabbath as a stop day. It was only the Jews that chose to shut things down one day a week. This made them look weird. It felt weird. These were the guys that rested while everybody else worked. Look how Nehemiah reminded the Jews that they didn't need to fit into the 24/7 cultures around them.

In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Nehemiah 13:15–17 (ESV)

Nehemiah was furious when the business entrepreneurs, and foreigners living among them, wanted to open up Wal-Mart on the Sabbath day. When people should be resting from work and having a refreshing day, they were

buying and selling because they treated the Sabbath just like every other day.

The refusal to rest was what sent them into exile.

I know the first thought some of us have is we would love to rest but our culture won't allow it. We live in a 24/7 culture that doesn't allow rest. The truth is we live in a culture that allows more than many others in world history. We have a two-day weekend. When our founding fathers were working on our calendar they couldn't decide if we should rest on Sunday, which is the Christian day of rest and worship or rest on Saturday, which is the Jewish day of rest and worship. They decided to give us both days off. Some days I want to shake the hand of the guy who had that bright idea. It was a good one. I like having both days off. Historically, most nations do not offer their people a two-day weekend. This is a wonderful gift. We have more time to rest than we realize. The problem is we don't use that time for rest.

The biblical basis for an extended time of rest is not just from the Old Testament. We see it in the leadership of Jesus with his disciples. Jesus took his disciples on a vacation when things became too busy so his disciples didn't burn out.

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Mark 6:30–32 (ESV)

Notice Jesus didn't say, "Let's grab a Red-Bull and keep going." He said, "Let's get away to a place with no cell phone coverage and get some rest." That is the definition of a desolate place.

We need rest to be restored spiritually.

...because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Ezekiel 20:16 (ESV)

In Nehemiah's day, the way you knew people were walking away from God is they didn't want to keep the Sabbath to not just be restored physically, but be realigned spiritually.

When I was young, I drove an old Camaro. I bought it with a salvage title. It was rebuilt after a wreck so things were never quite right. One of its problems was the wheels were always going out of alignment. Every potholes, road rumble or even rolling over a dime would put the front end out of alignment so the vehicle wanted to steer off the road. It seems like I needed an alignment with each oil change.



In many ways our spirits are like my old Camaro. A work week with pressure from the boss, being cussed out during our commute in traffic, a constant stream of off-color jokes at the lunch table at work and a nasty fight with our spouses start to add up and knock our hearts out of alignment with Christ. Add to that an evening where we try to be refreshed by television, movies and music that are ungodly and it doesn't take long for us to end up out of spiritual alignment. We need regular times of spiritual realignment to stay on the road of following Jesus.

We need daily time in prayer and Bible reading for spiritual alignment, just like we need daily rest. We need weekly time in corporate worship and Bible study to recalibrate ourselves just like we need a day off from work each week.

We need holidays that are extended times of spiritual renewal, not just an extended break from our work. This is why we need Christmas not just as a time to break from our work but as a time for refocus on the coming of Jesus. We need Easter not just as a time to rest physically and to gather with family to make good memories but as a time to be realigned spiritually as we reflect on what the empty tomb means for our lives.

What if I can't afford time to rest and realignment my heart?

Taking time to rest, is always a test. It is a test of trust. Do you believe you are the one that drives the success of your business or do you believe God is the one that drives the success of your business? If you are the one behind your success, you can't afford to rest. If God is the one behind the success of your business he will make it possible for you to take time to rest physically and take time to be realigned spiritually. If God says rest and realignment is so important we must take it, that means we can't afford to not take it.

In the book of Exodus, the Israelites learned God makes it possible for his people to take time for rest and spiritual renewal.

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' " So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." So the people rested on the seventh day. Exodus 16:22–30 (ESV)

In Exodus 16, we read the story of God giving manna. God told the people of Israel to gather twice as manna on the day before the Sabbath because on the Sabbath God wasn't sending manna so they could rest from gathering. Not only did God provide extra manna on Friday, enough that would take them through the weekend, but he supernaturally sustained the double Friday manna through the Sabbath. All other days of the week the manna they gathered would rot and become worm-infested if they tried to keep it until morning. Do you see how God supernaturally provided for them the ability to take a break? Who was in charge of putting food on the table? Were they in charge or was God in charge?

On paper, it doesn't work to take a rest, but God made it work. Some of you think your job is too busy to take time for rest physically or realignment spiritually or to take a vacation. The reason you think you can't take this time is because you think you are in charge of your success at work. You don't trust God to take care of your business in your absence. Obeying God's commands to rest and have time for spiritual refreshment takes faith. It takes trusting that God will provide. Rest is always a test. Some of us know our action step. We need to schedule times for rest and realignment, trusting God that he will provide for our work.

How does Jesus change the rest?

There is a lot we could talk about when it comes to Jesus and the Sabbath. We could talk about how Jesus changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, which is why Christians worship on Sunday as we celebrate the day of

Christ's resurrection and look forward to the new creation instead of looking back and remembering the old creation.

We could talk about how Jesus restored the Sabbath to its original purpose when he said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." He took the day of rest that had become a burden because religious leaders had added lists of rules and regulations of what you could and couldn't do on your rest day and Jesus stripped them away. Jesus said the purpose of the Sabbath is simple. It is a day that is a gift from God to you. It is a day of rest to refresh you, not burden you.

As Christians, the one thing we need to talk about with Jesus and the Sabbath is that Jesus is our Sabbath.

All other religions are about working. All other religions are about the work we do to earn God's favor. As Christians, Jesus earned God's favor for us, now we just rest in God's favor by faith. Because of Jesus, we simply rest in God's love, we don't have to earn God's love. Jesus is our Sabbath.

While I don't think many of us do this consciously, a refusal to rest from our work each day, each week and for special seasons of the year may be rooted in our disbelief of the gospel. We think we have to provide for ourselves. We don't want to rest from our work and thank God for how he provided for us.

How do I rest for work?

1. Disconnect from technology.

E-mail, text messages and the computer can kill any form of rest in our life. Set blackout times in your life to turn off the computer and smart phone. If it

isn't every evening, set black out times a few evenings a week. Go for a walk without your iPhone. Actually turn off the cell phone and computer. Let them go completely dead. Get off the grid and read a book. Some of you are like me and all your books are on the computer. In that case turn on the do not disturb button or turn off all the notifications. I did that with my iPad. I turned off all notifications and beeps, bells and pops. If I don't do that, I can't Sabbath when I read. I can't take a rest without being interrupted.

Don't take your electronics to bed with you. In bed, give your spouse attention, not your cell phone or your laptop. People won't die if they have to wait until morning to hear from you. One of the most annoying parts of the cell phone is when you are with your spouse in bed enjoying the refreshment of being alone and your phone lights up the room as a trivial text message goes off. Take a rest. Get off the grid.

If you don't make these times, they will never happen. In today's world nobody is going to plan times of rest for you, you need to take leadership in your life and plan them for yourself or you will find yourself in a constant drip of work all day and night.

If you are a young adult, set times when you can get away from your phone to pray and read your Bible.

When you go on vacation, take a real vacation, not a working vacation. It will be hard for you but it is good for you.

2. Take a day for rest.

While the typical Christian day of worship is Sunday, and I think that is the best day for rest and worship, I realize everyone can't take Sunday as their day of rest. The electricity needs to turn on. The police need to be on duty. Gas stations need to offer fuel.

If your day of physical rest and spiritual restoration can't be on Sunday, find a different day of the week for it and force yourself to observe it. Remember that a day of rest to enjoying God's goodness and thanking him for what he has done is part of the creation order. You can ignore it all you want but you will only end up bucking the way God built the universe. We are not machines. God designed us to need rest.

3. Take your vacation.

Twenty-five years ago we were told that technology would make our lives easier and we would work less. That was a mistake. Twenty-five years ago the average American worked 40 hours a week. Today, the average worker puts in closer to 50 hours a week. The only nation that world that works more hours each week than America is Japan.

Most of us refuse to stop and take our vacations. Let me do a quick poll. Raise your hand if you took all of your vacation time last year? Most of us didn't take our time to rest.

4. Manage work so you are not working on the weekend.

Sometimes our 24/7 work-world teaches us to not manage our time. We don't get our work done in a timely manner during the week because we know

we will have to work on the weekend anyway. Sometimes this is unavoidable because of a crisis. Many times this is just an issue of better self discipline and time management to protect our times of rest with our family. Manage your time well and get your work done before the weekend so you can actually enjoy some rest.

5. Have a plan for your day of rest.

I am guilty of this. On my day off, I often have no plans beyond staring at a blank wall and listening to my heart beat. That may be refreshing for the first 30 minutes of my day but not making plans with my family doesn't give me, or them, anything to look forward to on our day of rest. We don't make the day holy, different, something we look forward to enjoying.

6. Give mom a break from the kitchen.

Exodus 35:3 gave the Israelites a strange-sounding Sabbath observance. They were not to kindle a fire on that day. That simply means the Sabbath was a day when mom didn't have to cook. She was given a break from her work in the kitchen. (Right now every mother loves this message.) I don't know how this will work out in your life. Maybe Sunday is leftover day so mom doesn't have to cook. Maybe Sunday you order pizza. You will have to figure it out for your family but mom deserves a holy Sabbath day too.

Conclusion

My friends, we live in a 24/7 world where, especially with our electronics gadgets, we never take a break from work. God created us to need rest. We need a rest from work each day, each week and for extended times during the

year. Those rests are not just times when we need to rejuvenate physically but they are also times when we need to be realigned spiritually. When we don't think we can take time for rest and realignment we need to remember who is in charge of the success of our business. It is not ourselves, but it is God. Just like the ancient Israelites were most successful in their business and in their walk with God when they observed their days and times of rest, we will also be most successful in our lives and in our walk with God when we observe our days and times of rest physically and spiritually. Remember who is in charge of the success of your business. It is not you. It is God.

This week I want us to plan and take our times for rest. As you do, remember we are not planning rest from work. We are planning rest for work. Rest is essential for work.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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