

Do you know any poetry? I mean something other than twinkle, twinkle little star. Looking round I see some clever and sophisticated people so I bet you do.

I have to say I can only remember about four lines of poetry and I usually get those wrong. I remember my dad would often say, "What is this life if, full of care, We have no time to stand and stare?— No time to stand beneath the boughs, And stare as long as sheep and cows:"

The lines come from a poem by WH Davies called Leisure.

I think for many of us they are very pertinent because we don't seem to have time and the idea of leisure is a bit of a joke.

Some years back when we did Lifeshapes the second shape we looked at was the semi circle. I began the session with a series of questions the last of which was this, 'Do you talk about your work more than your family while on a date with your spouse?' One person who shall remain nameless looked at the question and immediately said, "what's a date with your spouse?"

Well it is funny but as ever it's funny because humour has to be based on reality.

Reality is that for some of us we do not have time to stop and stare though I am aware that there may be some who have too much time to rest.

This morning I want to take some of your valuable time to look at God's word and see what it says about rest and try and start some thoughts going about how you might create space to rest. By rest I am not talking simply about sleeping or doing nothing but about having leisure, doing that which is not what we count as work. We recall from last week that work is that which we are principally engaged in during the week whether it is in or out of the home whether we are employed or unemployed and we might add whether we are paid or unpaid.

So what does the Bible say about rest?

### **1. Rest is God ordained**

If we look at Gen 2:2-3, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."

God rested and he blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

As we saw in Lifeshapes here is the principle that we rest to work. God rested from all his work but the six days of creation had come out of an eternity of rest and preparation and then he rested for the work of sustaining creation that was to come. Jesus reminds us in John 5:17 that, "My Father is always at his work to this very day. "

The principle is that we need to rest as God rested but that we rest not for our work. We work from rest.

Rest is God ordained because he rested and he gave us a rest. He ordained one day a week for us to rest. He "blessed" the seventh day – it is his gracious gift to us humans. He also "made it holy" that is he set it apart to be different because it was a day to rest not to work.

In the reading we had this morning we see Jesus showing that the Sabbath is a gift for us humans, there in v27, "the Sabbath was made for man". It is meant to be a blessing to us from God. As such it would appear from what Jesus was doing and saying it is not something for rules and regulations but a day to be enjoyed, a holy day, a set apart day, a different day. Above all it was meant by God to be a day on which we cease from work. The Sabbath is the day on which we stop doing what we normally do and find space to rest.

We should in this remember that to rest on the Sabbath is a command of God as much as not stealing not murdering.

God ordained rest for us as a blessing so are we receiving that blessing?

You people who go out to work, is there a day where, for the most part at least because we don't want to get into legalism here, you are not in contact with the office, not working on paid employment stuff? You youngsters at college, is there a day when you leave the books aside and chill? I have a feeling some of the parents might want me to say is there a day you pick the books up!

But then I know that for some, especially if our main task is in the home or if we are retired, it is harder to see a separate day. I do realise that children need care 7 days a week and meals need to be prepared. However, in this as in many aspects of our life of faith we need to be helping and encouraging each other. If you have a spouse who works outside the home then get him or her to help a bit more on what might be your Sabbath day, not just for the sake of giving you rest but because rest is God's will for us and therefore it is part of our faith life. If you are a single parent then it is to the church you should look for help to enable you to have space and rest.

God ordained rest for us and he ordained especially a day now it doesn't have to be Sunday because for some of us that is the only day we do work. But there should be a day which is different and, just as Gordon was encouraging us last week to make our work sacred not secular, so our rest should not always just be leisure activities and chilling but also times with God, which is why to have Sunday as our day of rest is best because then we can meet with the people of God and not just rest but be renewed and refreshed.

### **2. Rest is vital for life**

One of the things that we need to realise is that if something is given by God to us as a blessing it is good for us. Rest is good for us indeed I want to suggest it is vital to our wellbeing and to our fruitfulness both physically and spiritually.

Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full"(John 10:10). God's desire for us is full and fruitful life and rest plays a part in that.

More than that a. Jesus modelled getting rest and b. encouraged it in his disciples. In Mark 1:35, having presumably had a good night's sleep he goes off on his own to a solitary place to pray rest and prayer and then when the disciples had been out preaching in Mark 6:31 he encouraged them to "come with me to a quiet place and get some rest".

Friends if it was good enough for Jesus and we seek to follow him in every way then we should be looking and hearing from him about rest.

Rest is essential if we are to be effective at work both physically and spiritually.

Have you ever seen one of those Pirate ships at the theme park. They swing from one side to another getting higher and higher. I wonder as I watch if they will go right over and fear the calamity that might happen. Sometimes when we get our lives out of balance and work becomes all we do risk going over the top into the danger zone and then into burn out which necessitates a greater time of rest.

God has set into life a rhythm, we see it in the seasons and we see it in the way he has established the week and each day. Rest is a vital part of life and of living in rhythm.

### 3. Rest in my life?

So let's bring it down to us and to rest in our own lives.

Are you taking seriously the need to rest?

Each **day** needs a structure to enable us to rest and I don't just mean a few hours sleep at the end. We need time to rest and work, time to invest in relationships and leisure. What's your day look like at present? Where do changes need to be made? I have found that the times when I rest in the day vary. As the children grew older I would have a bath 5.30pm and through the rest there and then eating tea be ready for work in the evening. Each **week** offers the opportunity for a natural rhythm. We need the Sabbath day, whenever it is. But also in a week our evenings can get caught up in church activities. I have always tried between Monday to Thursday to leave one evening free from work.

Each **month** or longer period of time allows us a broader scope to look at the balance of life and the rhythm that we are living to. It may provide us times to schedule in celebrations such as Christmas or a birthday to give us more balance to our lives.

As you look at each **year** can you see how the rhythms have been or should be working out? Can you see those times of rest and work? Can you recognise holidays as times of needed rest which prepare you for the next phase of work?

But then in addition I think in life we have **seasons** which affect the rhythm of our lives. Often the summer helps us to be more relaxed and in August we shut down most things at church and we rest. But as well as the physical seasons, there are different seasons in our lives. Those times before we have children or while the children are young and highly dependent are very different seasons and they affect the rhythm of life. If we try and live and work in one the way we do in another well life gets out of balance and so do we.

How does your life look? What are the rhythms of it and do they need some change?

Please realise that we slowly grow into these things. People often say a baby looks like his dad. I usually think that is rubbish. However, as the child grows and takes on some of the traits etc he does become like his father. As we grow in work and rest so we grow in the likeness of God our Father but it is slow growth in the ways of God and the likeness of Jesus.

As we saw in Lifeshapes rest is a vital part of our life both physically and also spiritually. It is rest that enables us to be fruitful in our main ministry and that is our ministry at work. But also it is rest linked to abiding in Jesus which enables us to be fruitful as the people of God.

I am sorry but whether we like it or not God calls us to rest and Jesus gave us the example to follow.

As we close let me use Carmen Bernos de Gasztold's 'Prayer of the OX' as an example of prayer we might make our own

"Dear God give me time. Men are always so driven! Make them understand that I can never hurry. Give me time to eat. Give me time to plod. Give me time to sleep. Give me time to think." To which we might add give me time to stand and stare.