

# Rest: The Luxury We Cannot Live Without

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One thing exciting about life is that we are given many opportunities to keep growing. And unless we do not want to learn or we think we are already perfect, we will continue to learn and change. As we learn, we will get surprising lessons along the way. For me, one of these lessons involves the importance of rest. It has taken more than thirty years to learn this, and I am still learning.

My lessons began when I was a 30-some year-old mother of two boys trying to cope with all that I needed to do. Aside from taking care of all the household chores and the needs of the two boys, I had just started doing some teaching and speaking besides managing a small private practice. My challenges were not that great compared to what many moms of today face, but it was difficult for me. I realized I was “browning,” a term I got from a friend (thanks, Agnes), which means *close to burnout*. I realized this when I did something that would not be considered “Ruth-like” at all. On a Saturday morning my husband attended a meeting of church leaders at the home of the main church leader. I was very stressed that day and, in my frustration, I drove to the meeting place, barged through the door, and confronted the head leader. I told him that he could not take my husband away from me every weekend! After doing this, I realized that I was not handling life well.

As usual, the Lord brought lessons into my life in special ways. At about this time, I received an invitation to speak at a retreat. Guess what the topic was? Burnout. That assignment saved me! As I prepared for the retreat, I read a lot of materials that were very effective in helping me make changes that made life more manageable and enjoyable. One change was very simple, but the results were tremendous! It was to take a break from work matters that normally occupied my mind every day and almost all the time. I made the decision to not do anything related to my profession and work for at least one day a week. I don't really call this a Sabbath (some would). I just called it a break. I chose to not do any work-related work on Saturdays. Saturdays became my break day. Aside from not doing work-related work, I occupied my day with things that I enjoyed doing—cleaning the house, baking, playing the piano, singing, and other hobbies. When my husband noticed that I was not typing away on my computer while the kids were taking naps and that I was actually putting jigsaw puzzles together on Saturday afternoons, he said, “I see you're becoming lazy.” I ignored his comment as I knew what I was trying to do. This purposeful break saved me from going down the road to burnout. With it, the kids had a happier mom. This lesson served me well for many years and continues to serve me well now.

## “Hurry Sickness”

However, lessons about rest did not stop there. I had read about “hurry sickness” in Dr. Archibald Hart's book, *Adrenaline and Stress*, but I never thought of myself as someone with this “sickness” until one unforgettable trip. In 2014 I went on a Bible tour of Greece and Turkey with my very close friend who was 79 years old at that time. She was actually more fit than I and did not have the knee problems that I had. During that trip she kept telling me that I was too rushed and constantly in a hurry. When she said these things, they brought to mind many conflicts I had with my husband in our marriage. My husband had a nickname for me: “slave driver.” He would not be done with one chore before I would already have another one lined up for him to do. My friend's observations, given to me in a gentle way, broke through my defensive walls and made me see clearly that I did have “hurry sickness.” Again, the Lord also spoke to me through books, sermons, and devotionals during this period.

An invitation came to me from a group reading *Soul-Keeping* by John Ortberg. They invited me to share my gleanings from the book. Wow! That book opened my heart and mind to what was really wrong in my life. I

could no longer deny that I had “hurry sickness” and my spiritual life was suffering because of it. Although serving as a missionary and a provider of services to missionaries, I was actually feeling somewhat distant from the Lord and I longed to draw closer to him. I had heard about spiritual formation, the importance of spiritual disciplines, and so forth. But I never really thought that there was something wrong with my spiritual life until I admitted that I lived a very hurried life. I was restless; unless I accomplished something every day, I would feel that the day was wasted. Someone pointed out to me that Jesus was very busy, but he was never hurried. He always took time to be alone with the Father. He always made relationships his priority and made time to enjoy life. After all these realizations, I asked the Lord to help me adjust my life in such a way that I would learn to slow down. I coined a phrase that I still use to remind myself of this truth: “Do not be too busy for the Lord that you forget the Lord.”

In this process of change I realized that there were reasons behind my hurriedness. In order for me to overcome “hurry sickness” and continue to make changes, I needed to deal with distorted beliefs and lies and bring them into the light of God’s word.

These are some of the lies or distortions in my thinking that needed adjustments.

1. I am only acceptable and lovable if I do something that others consider worthwhile. I work because this is how I will make God love me. The measure of my worth is from what I do.
2. God wants me to sacrifice for his kingdom’s sake, which means I should never waste any time in things unrelated to serving him in ministry.
3. God said he will take care of my family and everything else if I sacrifice them for his sake. That means it is okay to put my ministry over my family and other relationships.

These three views, which in my case were actually not always conscious to me, pushed me to unhealthy living. They most likely came from early experiences and imprinting in my life. Gradually the Lord showed me through his word the truth to correct the lies I had believed.

First, Jesus loves me just the way I am. He accepts me even with my weaknesses. Jesus understands my weaknesses and does not expect me to be perfect. I do not need to earn salvation; it is a free gift from God.

Second, all of who I am is what I bring to my ministry. If I am unhealthy, it will be reflected in my ministry. Jesus’ example of spending time with friends and taking his disciples away for some quiet shows that rest is important, and it is okay to take breaks and enjoy some fun time. Jesus actually modeled for us the importance of taking breaks from what we consider as ministry and spending time with the Father on a regular basis as the source of our strength.

Third, the greatest commandment is to love God and love others. Included in *others* are our family members. St. Paul, in his instructions in I Timothy 3 for church leaders, mentions the importance of healthy family relationships as an important qualification for anyone who serves the Lord. If marriage is not important, if loving your spouse is not important, why does scripture use it as a word picture for our relationship with Christ (Eph. 5:25-33; Rev. 19:7; Rev. 21:2, 9; Rev. 22:17)? Thus, sacrificing marriage and family for the sake of ministry is not a good example of obeying God’s commandment to love others as oneself. Of course, there are children who fall away and rebel not through the fault of parents but through personal choices. But in many circumstances, it is the lack of attachment and security in relationships that causes families to have difficulties. The most important relationship for a child growing up is the relationship with his or her parents.

As I revised my distorted thoughts to more biblically balanced thinking, I experienced less guilt and shame and more freedom that God gives to his children. Together with the realization that I had some distorted thinking in relation to my worth and to being acceptable to God also came the realization that “hurry sickness” and lack of rest will have many serious consequences.

First, busyness and clutter will block us from hearing God's still small voice. Busyness makes our inner souls restless and unable to be still long enough to truly commune with the Lord. Second, priorities go wrong and our relationships then get damaged. When children resent parents and parents feel guilty for not taking good care of their kids, long-term consequences can occur. Third, hurry and lack of rest lead us to act in unChristlike ways – with anger, harshness, blaming, impatience, and lack of self-control toward others, to name a few. Our busyness can stress others out. Fourth, our bodies will keep score and we cannot live healthily when we are hurried and do not rest.

## **What is Rest?**

So what is rest? For me, the list looks like this:

1. Rest is spending time quietly alone with God and enjoying his presence.
2. Rest is pausing from busyness and doing something different or just not doing anything.
3. Rest is spending time with relationships that rejuvenate rather than drain.
4. Rest is paying attention to one's surrounding and enjoying beauty wherever you see it.
5. Rest is playing non-competitively or spending time on your favorite pastime or hobby.
6. Rest is taking a break from technology and the demands from others.
7. Rest is taking time to sleep or nap.

Rest comes in different forms for different people. But three things that we cannot do without are time with God, relationships with people, and sleep!

Rest, indeed, is a luxury we cannot live without. We need to make sure rest is a priority to take care of God's temple and to truly be representatives of Christ, who taught us that communion with the Father, investing in relationships, and spending quiet times alone and resting are all necessities for all who follow him!

## **Doing the Work and the Rest-Balancing Dance**

One question that usually arises when we talk about rest is, How can I rest when the reality is I have so much that I need to do? If I rest, I get more behind and get more stressed. This is the struggle of most people in our day. Even if computers and other gadgets are meant to make our lives easier, they actually have made us busier because we think we can handle more! By the time we realize it, we are already deep in the groove of busyness and it is very difficult to climb out of it. Where and how do we begin?

It begins with the change of heart and mind. You have to be convinced, first, that rest is necessary to function better and live longer. You cannot afford to realize this only after you reap the consequences of a hurried and out of control life. That would be too late. Continuing to learn more about yourself and how your upbringing has molded you will go a long way to helping you see where your hurriedness and driven behaviors come from. You will need determination to make changes, which will be slow. It will be a life-long but worthy project.

Begin now!

## **Suggested Readings**

1. Hart, A. (1995). *Adrenalin and Stress*. Dallas, London, Vancouver, Melbourne: Word Publishing.
2. Ortberg, J. (2014). *Soul Keeping*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
3. Tan, S. (2003). *Rest*. Ann Arbor: Servant Publishers.

4. Witt, L. (2011). *Replenishing*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

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