



PRACTICES

Rest

Summer 2018

Summer lends itself to a different pace. For many, there is no school, no studying, no exams. For others, regular meetings take a break. For all, sunshine fills more of our waking hours and extends our enjoyment of the day. The summer begs for a slower pace of life. Or, does it? Many of us fill our loosened schedule and longer days with more: more projects, more experiences, and more catch-up work. Even our vacations can be tainted by the bumper sticker phrase "work hard, play hard." We are not people who rest well any time of year. We operate as if we do not have God-given limits and the results are damaging to our bodies, our minds, our souls, and our relationships.

This summer, we'd like to encourage all of us to rest. That doesn't only mean sleeping in (though it can include that). Rest is a spiritual practice that we can mindfully engage in that the Lord will use to produce good fruit in us: thankfulness for our God-created limits, a deepening sense of peace and contentment, space to listen to the Lord, space to simply be with people, and a recalibration to the truth that we are not God but creatures.

In this booklet, you will find various ways to engage in rest. As you do, please keep in mind that the end goal of any practice, including rest, is not to get it right or get it done. Rather, the goal of a practice is to open ourselves to the Lord so that the Lord can do His good work within us. As you practice resting - simply being with the Lord - may the Lord remind you that He loves you not because you work, or are productive, or do good, but because He chooses to love you.

Enjoy!

"It can be hard to tell the truth about our human capacity and limits because few of us want to accept the losses that come with this truth. We can't say yes to everything. We can't go everywhere and see everyone. We can't have it all. We aren't indispensable. We are finite beings who need rest. And that is not a bad thing. It's a Godlike thing. God created us in His image. He is a God who works and then rests. When we rest we honor the way God made us. Rest can be a spiritual act - a truly human act of submission to and dependence on God who watches over all things as we rest." Adele Calhoun

Delight

O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him. Psalm 34:8

What is an activity you delight in? A pick-up game of basketball, a walk or run, a nap in the sunshine, a cup of something with a friend? Pick something delightful to do. Before you start, intentionally remember that you are with God and God is with you. Enjoy the activity as a gift from God, and enjoy God's presence with you. Tell God, during the activity and afterwards, what happens in your mind and your soul as you rest in this way.

*My heart is not proud, Lord,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.
Israel, put your hope in the Lord
both now and forevermore.
Psalm 131*

Rest for the Body

There is an unfortunate tendency in faith to separate the physical from the spiritual, considering the spiritual as “best” and the physical, including our bodies, as “lesser.” The truth is that God made us as creatures. Our bodies, and all the limitations and joys that entails, are not bad. Caring for our bodies honors that God made us as creatures, and that our bodies are gifts from Him. Our bodies and spirits are intertwined. As we care for our bodies, we are also caring for our spirits, and nurturing our relationship with the Lord.

In what ways is your body rested? In what ways in your body restless? Try out one of these ways to give your body rest, and as you do, talk with the Lord about what the practice reveals and what the Lord may want to share with you.

- Sleep in, as long as your body will allow. If children keep you from sleeping in, try going to bed earlier one night instead.
- Find a few, or many, minutes to sit quietly. Take deep and slow breaths. Notice where your body holds energy or tiredness, balance or tension, well-cared for or out-of-balance. Ask God to tell you about what you are noticing in your body. If you don't hear anything spoken clearly, that is okay. Trust that God is communicating to you anyway, and trust His timing. Take as much time as you are able and then end your time with thanksgiving that God has made you to be a creature.

“The Christian practice of honoring the body is born in the confidence that our bodies are made in the image of God's own goodness....As the place where the divine Presence dwells, our bodies are worthy of care and blessing and ought never to be degraded or exploited. It is through our bodies that we participate in God's activity in the world.” Dorothy Bass

Rest for the Mind

Do you find it difficult to quiet your mind: the random thoughts, the racing questions, the nagging issues, the desire to figure things out? Most of us would answer a resounding “yes” to this question. The background current of our culture teaches us that information enables us to master any situation. But the truth is that our minds also have limits. We cannot fathom God’s ways with our minds. We cannot figure out how to fix problems or tough situations by constantly thinking about them. We cannot control situations by understanding or learning more.

Just as in our human relationships, we cannot experience God by simply learning about Him. We need also to sit with God, allowing our minds to rest and trust that His wisdom is greater than our own and that God will share with us what He wants to share with us in His good time.

Is there a place of “unknowing” in your life: something your mind has been trying to figure out and master? Take that situation and question before the Lord. If you are able, take a quiet moment to sit in silence with the Lord. Offer the question or situation to Him. Ask the Lord to help you resist the urge to work out your own answers, and to simply sit with the questions. Rest in the Lord’s presence without expectation. After sitting for some moments (as long as your life allows), ask the Lord “What do my emotions and thoughts reveal within me that You would like me to become aware of?” End by thanking the Lord for His presence.

This practice is likely one that you will want to come back to multiple times, perhaps with the same place of unknowing in mind. It may very well be that the Lord will communicate His good and often surprising wisdom with you slowly as your mind becomes more accustomed to resting so that your soul may listen more deeply.

“Spiritual discernment is given as pure gift in God’s ways, in God’s time, beyond what the human mind can force (1 Cor 2:14). At this level we find ourselves loved to the extent that fear is cast out so we are free to hear and respond to the risky invitations of God. To hear at this level we must rest from our striving. We must let go of everything our mind is holding on to in order to receive the revelation that comes from beyond ourselves.” Ruth Haley Barton

Retreat

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to the disciples, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. Mark 6:31-32

The technical definition of retreat is the act of moving back or withdrawing. It's often used in the context of a battle when troops are battered and need to rest and regroup in order to engage in the battle more fully. A retreat within the context of normal life is much the same. The battle of daily life takes energy, resources, and can be challenging. We retreat in order to rest and soak up refreshment from the Lord so we may more faithfully follow Jesus in daily life.

While we love the All-Church Retreat and women's and men's retreats, the kind of retreat we are talking about here is different (though the retreats mentioned will have short periods designed for rest and solitude!). In a retreat of rest for refreshment, we cease from doing, striving, catching up, or gathering information in order to be with the Lord.

This summer, consider engaging in a retreat of rest. If that seems impossible in the summer, make plans **now** to schedule a retreat later. Block it out on your schedule and protect the time. One option is to sign up for one of the upcoming Day Apart Retreats that the church offers. At this retreat, tools for engaging in the rest of silence and solitude are provided, as well as optional times of debrief and prayer. For more information, see <http://1stpres.com/connect/retreats/>

Upcoming Day Apart Retreats

(Saturdays, 9:30am-3:30pm; Local unless otherwise noted)

- June 9 at St. Francis Springs Prayer Center.
- Oct. 6, 2018
- Jan. 19, 2019
- April 6, 2019
- June 8, 2019
- Oct. 5, 2019
- Jan. 18, 2020

You may also plan your own retreat: for a hour, a morning or afternoon, a day, or more. Below are two relatively close retreat centers that offer space for a day, or overnight. If you choose another place, like your backyard or a public outdoor space, be mindful that it is a location with limited distraction (if your laundry or paperwork piles distract you, home is probably not the best place to retreat).

- St. Francis Springs Prayer Center in Stoneville, NC <http://www.stfrancissprings.com/>
- Well of Mercy in Hamptonville, NC <http://www.wellofmercy.org/>

Further reading & Works consulted

- *Invitation to Silence and Solitude* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *Running on Empty* by Fil Anderson
- *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

