

 ALABASTER

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TOWARDS REST

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INTRODUCTION

We live in an age of busyness. Markets tune our lives to the pace of consumption and production. Daily, we are pulled by the persuasions of productivity, performance, and prestige. The common forces of exploitation and convenience dictate our social and economic arrangements. For new, old, and evermore reasons, we are chronically averse to rest.

God rests. From the very beginning, rest is marked with sacred significance among all of creation and the creative process. God calls individuals and communities alike into lives, rhythms, and conventions of rest. More than a mere afternoon nap, rest is a holy orientation and divine chronology that completes life as we know it. Just as God rests, we rest with God.

On this matter, God's way of life is stridently opposed to that of the world's. In rest, we witness a clash between stillness and hurry, calm and anxiety, and freedom and exploitation. However gentle in its

appearance, rest is no small thing. Rest calls forth worship, play, and liberation. Rest reacquaints us with our souls, our environment, and our relationships. Rest enables us to thrive amid crisis, fortifying our resistance against the constant and cruel patterns of oppression and overproduction that dominate our world.

Why does God rest, and why are we called to rest as well? How does rest influence our character, relationships, and contributions to the world? What is a more restful world like? This book is meant to move us *towards rest*, into recovering its wisdom and consequence in our lives. In it, we consider rest and its relationship to God, awareness, resilience, play, community, pace, and changing the world.

As we contemplate and practice these many qualities of rest, may our personal lives be rejuvenated, our families strengthened, and our communities reoriented towards justice and peace. And may we rest with God. Amen.





01
Rest & God



Introduction

“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 beings who need rest. And that is not a bad thing. It is a Godlike thing.”
– Adele Ahlberg Calhoun¹

Rest is a *Godlike thing*. When we rest, we are doing something sacred. Rest is at the heart of being *with God*.

In the beginning, God created the universe: the stars, the oceans, the mountains, and us. This creative endeavor included resting and proclaiming that what God had formed was *good*. When we, as God’s people, rest, we continue his creative precedent from eons ago. In rest, we are drawn back to the beginning, to the Creator.

Resting with God holds power and significance beyond relaxing or refueling ourselves. It is a way of declaring to ourselves, to the world, and to our Maker, that it is *good* for

us to be offline, playful, and unproductive. It releases us from remaining bonded to the day’s labor, enabling us to remember our dependence on God. Indeed, rest unlocks our unhealthy obsession with ourselves, our worries, and our idols, and allows us to partake in true humanity: playing with our children, remaining present to others, or simply breathing and delighting in nature.

We tend to resist rest because it counters social and market values of hurry, productivity, and purpose. We insist on resting when the work is *done*—but find there is always more to do. What if we changed our view of rest, so that it was not merely a stepping stone to the next goal post? What if it was not seen as lazy or self-indulgent, but profoundly meaningful and formative for ourselves, our relationships, and our communities?

Rest can transport us to an inner peace amid the most tumultuous storms. Rest can provide an honest assessment of our many burdens. Rest transfers our gaze from schedules to soul, where problems do not disappear but pale beside the aching appetite to be *with God*.

God Rests

All rest begins with the reality that *God* rests. God is the Author, Creator, and Center of rest—and models rest for us.

In Genesis 2, God finishes creating and rests. First introduced as creative and powerful, God is quickly depicted as valuing and practicing rest. “Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen. 2:3 NIV). Rest is a hallowed experience of remembrance. God models not



only how to rest, but how to *understand* rest. Rest is not merely a matter of routine, but a proclamation of goodness. God models rest as a *choice*. God does not solely rest from tiredness or necessity, but because it is simply worth it.

We do not often “bless” our times of rest, nor understand them as containing existential wisdom. Instead, our idols of work, money, and self frame rest as mere fuel towards future work. We understand rest as machines might, bereft of intimate connection to our Creator. This framing keeps rest to minimal, unspiritual importance in our life. We only rest when we feel we absolutely need to—when we are worn out and tired. This cycle leaves us beholden and bound to the same idols, instead of thriving in divine connection to God.

