

Shapes for Living

Week 4 Playing. Bible study

Consider Genesis 2: 2-3:

² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.'

God sets the precedent – after working hard at creating the Earth, God rests. Is it no surprise then that we as his created beings, suffer if we too don't pay attention to rest and recuperation?

Let's take it further – to the *commandment* to rest; consider Exodus 20:8-11:

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.'

In this commandment, the importance of the Sabbath as a holy day links rest with spiritual nourishment and time spent with God.

Some questions:

Up until fairly recently, this commandment was part and parcel of our lives, represented in law (shop opening hours, pub opening hours, school days, etc.) and in the way we structured our work and play during the week. But in our modern 24-7 digital society, things are not so easy. How do you respond?

We traditionally think of 'time spent with God' on our holy day (Sunday) as being in church. But what other ways do we 'rest' with God?

Walking
Listening to music
Prayer
Reading
Eating together

Can you think of other ways you personally spend time with God?

Many recreational activities can conflict with our Christian traditions. Consider this statement which headlined a recent article in the Church Times:

'Is Parkrun the new church?'

(<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/12-october/comment/opinion/is-parkrun-the-new-church>)

How many people play football/rugby, go cycling, walk the dog on a Sunday morning? Do any of these aspects conflict with what you or members of your family want to do?

Jesus and his disciples regularly spent 'quality' time together, especially sharing a meal. His first miracle was performed at a party – the wedding at Cana.

After his resurrection, Jesus chooses two shared 'meals' to reveal himself to the disciples:

Luke 24: 28-35:

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us^[a] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.'

John 21: 9-14:

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.'

This tradition was also important in the early church, where formal places of worship did not exist yet and people gathered in each other's houses, often with a meal.

Acts 2:46-47:

⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home^[k] and ate their food with glad and generous^[l] hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.'

How important is it for us as Christians to not only to worship together but also spend social time and fellowship together? Do we do this?

Jesus also took time to be on his own, often struggling to find space and time for prayer as there were demands on his time and attention. Do you empathise with this?

'Play' is an important means of nurturing our body, mind and spirit. It is an integral part of the way we shape our living. God, our creator recognises this.