

Luke's Journal



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Rest

God, Rest, and Me

**Sabbath Observance:
Is it for me?**

**Why Rest is so Challenging
for Children and Teenagers**

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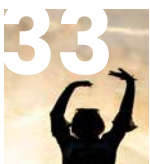
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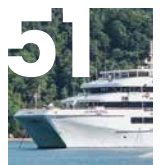


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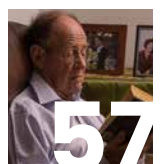


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Luke's
Journal

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Technology
Copy due 30 April 2022

Evolving Professionals
Copy due 31 Aug 2022



EDITORIAL



Rest

As I write this editorial, it strikes me that the topic of this issue is vital, both for such a time as this, and for the flourishing of our generation.

The Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV2 virus continues to mount its pressing presence (both in Australia and around the world) in a multitude of ways – illness, understaffing across all sectors, disrupted supply chains, cancelled elective surgeries, delayed response to true emergency calls, and deaths. Uncertainty and a sense of languishing¹ pervade the collective psyche in parallel with the global pandemic. The effect on the global poor is compounded – from food and supply insecurity to the rise of COVID-19 cases exacerbated by overcrowded living conditions.

On a local scale in the West, events and social gatherings are impacted, including church services, while parents of young children are living a hybrid mix of working from home and child-minding. Ironically, several potential contributors to this issue of Luke's Journal were unable to write articles due to their need for rest! For many of us, an increasing workload is overflowing into personal life in the current COVID-19 climate.

What a time in our lives to need to read about *Rest!* I am convinced of this as I see healthcare workers (from frontlines to behind the scenes) being increasingly pushed to the limits of their physical and mental capacity. I also see this

same generation being impacted by the pervasive presence of technology and our globally-connected world, such that we tend to prize “busyness” above other treasures (Matthew 6:21).

In response, there have arisen voices from within and around the healthcare field intentionally pushing back. These raise alarms over the harmful effects of overwork and advocate for a shorter work week² – perhaps a call back to the ancient pattern of work and rest (Genesis 2:1-3). While a purely secular approach to finding rest seeks to restore inner strength in a vacuum,³ a Christian response acknowledges that our limitations point to our true humanity – that we are creatures, dependent on our Creator God.

Sally Schwer Canning, a community psychologist and professor at Wheaton College, writes that she hesitates at teaching “self-care” and seeking “balance”, finding that the metaphors of being good stewards and endurance runners are more accurate in the search for human flourishing.⁴ What these metaphors reveal is that the pursuit of a worthy goal involves a lifestyle that distinguishes priorities from distractions.

This is the same thrust behind John Mark Comer's book “The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry”.⁵ Comer urges Christ-followers to re-align our lifestyles with that of Jesus' example during His earthly ministry. I'm convinced that all of us Christ-following care providers can suffer from the effects

of “hurry sickness”, or are caring for those suffering from this. Comer puts forward a four-fold lifestyle for such an illness: **simplicity**, time for **silence and solitude**, to observe the **Sabbath**, and to **slow down**. Henri Nouwen also reminds us that “*silence without speaking is as dangerous as solitude without community. They belong together*”.⁶

And to what end? To seek the glory of God and towards heaven, yes, but also towards human flourishing, or an abundant life, as Jesus called it in John 10:9-10.⁷ What can that look like for us caregivers at work, home, church, neighbourhoods, and crossing cultures? I wonder if it can look like caregivers also being care-receivers. This was impressed upon me during a short-term medical trip to Vanuatu where God led me to a place to receive Him as my Help and Rest before I could then give and receive help for and *from* others.

In this issue of Luke's Journal, you will find invitations to find rest and life in Jesus Christ – from the perspectives of a medical student recovering from burnout, a dentist's observation of bruxism linking to lack of rest, an emergency physician's call to rest in your identity as an image-bearer of God, and a nutritionist's research observations on our need to “rest and digest”. You'll also find a number of self-submitted articles and “Fire in the Belly” articles, including one from Prof John Whitehall.

■ ■ **May reading this issue bring you to that beautiful and complete picture of rest in Psalm 131:**

*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.*



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6. Nouwen, Henri. "Can you Drink the Cup?", Ave Maria Press, 1996, p106
7. "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:9-10 (ESV)



India Covid-19 Appeal

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God, Rest and Me

Madonna supposedly said “I’ll rest when I’m dead. I’m hungry and life is short.” We might not have her fame or musical gifts but many of us share the same attitude towards rest. We postpone rest to a distant time for the sake of getting more done now. That approach might get results in the short term but it is neglecting the rich teaching of the Bible on rest both now and in the future.

The concept of rest arrives early in the Bible’s story. In Genesis we read that after God had finished His work of creation, *“on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creation that he had done” (Gen 2:2b-3).*

God’s rest was not a physical necessity (since He is all powerful) but a sign to us that not working is good. The seventh day of rest is actually holy.

Centuries later, when God expressed His will for the nation of Israel in legal form, the command to rest made it into the ten commandments. In commandment four, He required the whole community to rest on the seventh day in imitation of His activity in creation (Ex 20:8-11). This command

to rest was for people’s refreshment and to make it clear their days of slavery in Egypt were over, for it is slaves, not free people, who work seven days a week (Ex 23:12; Deut 5:12-15).

The Sabbath command was a basis for several laws in the Torah about rest, including laws requiring a one-in-seven-year rest for the fields themselves (Lev 25:4). Interestingly, in anticipation of people’s tendency to skip rest during busy times, the command to rest on the seventh day applies even during harvest (Ex 34:21).

“God’s rest was not a physical necessity... but a sign to us that not working is good.”

For the Israelites, law obedience was not only an expression of respect for God but also an expression of trust in His provision. Resting faithfully, even during busy times, demonstrated a belief that a good life and prosperity ultimately came from God rather than endless toil.

Rest in the land

As Israel conquered the promised land, and began to occupy it, the concept of rest broadened to include rest from warfare. God promised His people:

“... you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety” (Deut 12:10).

This promise was fulfilled for leaders such as Joshua, David, Solomon, and Jehoshaphat as their enemies were defeated and the land had periods of peace. The Bible explicitly describes these times as “rest” (Josh 21:44; 2 Sam 7:1; 1 Kings 5:4; 2 Chron 20:30). Rest is not just about a day off each week, it is about God’s provision of peace and protection from hostile enemies.

In Psalm 95:11, God takes ownership of this rest – He describes the state of peaceful occupation of the land as “my rest.” The people cannot enjoy it apart from him. The Psalm warns its hearers that hardness of heart and ignorance of God’s ways will lead to their exclusion from His rest.

The hope of rest

As the story of Israel continued, it became clear that peaceful rest in the land was not going to continue in the long term. The perpetual sin of the people and their leaders made that impossible. Because of His justice and righteousness, God punished His people with military defeat, exile, and enslavement to foreign powers. There could be no rest for people who were in perpetual rebellion against their God.

In the prophets, true rest moved from present history to become part of the eschatological hope of the nation. This hope is expressed particularly in Isaiah chapters 40 to 66. This section looks forward to a time beyond the exile and begins with a message of comfort to the nation: *“her hard service has been completed”* (Isa 40:2). God promises He will gather His people like lambs (40:11) and Israel’s enemies will be no more (41:12). The passage describes an eternal era of peace (66:12).

There is hope here because God will deal with the spiritual issues besetting His people. He will forgive sin (43:25) and pour out His Spirit on his people (44:3). Key to this hope is the ministry of a servant messiah figure who will bear the people’s sins. This messiah will endure the punishment God’s people deserved so that they might have peace (Isa 53:5).

In view of this future, Isaiah invites his hearers to come to God in hope for rest:

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isa 40:29-31).

Here is a promise of rest that outstrips the earthly picture of Israel in the land.

Rest and Jesus

With time, in the Bible, we meet Jesus of Nazareth, the fulfillment of all of the promises of Isaiah. Here on the stage of history is God’s servant king bringing forgiveness of sins, healing and hope. This is true rest for the weary. As he preached in Galilee he made this invitation:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30).



Photo by Sixteen Miles Out on Unsplash

There are great riches in these words of Jesus. Here is hope for the weary nation of Israel that is burdened by sin and judgment. Here also is hope for everyone longing for rest. True rest for our souls can be found with Jesus.

Jesus invites us to come to him and enter into a personal relationship; he invites us to submit to his lordship (his yoke) which is light and easy; and learn from him as his disciples. It is not necessary to have completed our various jobs and tasks before coming to him. It is not necessary for us to tidy up our sinful lives. The invitation is there for anyone overwhelmed right now. Pastor and author Dane Ortland writes:

“You don’t need to unburden or collect yourself and then come to Jesus. Your very burden is what qualifies you to come. No payment is required; he says, “I will give you rest.” His rest is a gift, not a transaction. Whether you are actively working hard to crowbar your life into smoothness (“labor”) or passively finding yourself weighed down by something outside your control (“heavy laden”), Jesus Christ’s desire that you find rest, that you come in out of the storm, outstrips even your own.” [1]

In Jesus we find rest. Ultimate Sabbath rest is in him. It is fitting that only a few verses on, in Matthew 12:8, Jesus describes himself as *“Lord of the Sabbath”* (Mat 12:8). Jesus is the king over God’s eschatological rest.

How this state of rest (including victory over hostile forces) is achieved is made clear in the story of the gospel. Although

Jesus came to the nation as Israel’s king, he was rejected by the people because of their sin and hardness of heart. When he died on the cross he took upon himself all our sin, guilt and judgment. He was fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah 53. At the same time, he secured all the promised blessings, including rest and peace. When he rose from the dead he was confirmed as the living Lord over the kingdom of God.

The hope of rest

The book of Hebrews draws together the themes of Sabbath, rest in the land, and the gospel message of Jesus. Those who have believed in him have entered God’s rest just as Jesus promised (Heb 4:3). Spiritual rest is real and present for us now.

However, there remains the hope of rest in the future, when all of God’s plans and purposes will be finally completed. During this current era of temptations and sufferings we need to make sure we enter that future rest as well:

“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience” (Heb 4:9-11).

There is a paradox of sorts here for us in this age: we rest in Christ yet also make every effort to enter God’s final Sabbath-rest. We take sin seriously, for every sin is a danger

that needs to be resisted. We rest in hope, while at the same time making no allowance for spiritual laziness.

God, rest, and me

Madonna planned on resting when she was dead, but for the Christian the invitation of rest in Jesus is available now, even as we have a hope of rest after we die. So what then are the implications and applications of the Bible's teaching on rest? Here are three:

1. Don't sanctify your busyness: As Christians we can be tempted to regard our busyness in work and ministry as a holy state. "Look how hard I am working! What a saint am I!" However, God is a God of rest who blessed the seventh day when he rested. Busyness has its place but if disconnected from rest, it is not holy or godly. You may need to repent of sanctifying your busyness.

2. Find your true rest in Jesus: Real rest does not come from holidays or long service leave. Without Christ we will never find true rest. We will always be burdened by sin, guilt, and hopelessness. In Psalm 62, David meditates on true spiritual rest:

*"Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him..."*

*...Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him" (Ps 62:1, 5).*

If you do not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus this is the most urgent issue on your list of things to do; come to him today in humble prayer. Likewise, the invitation to rest in Jesus is the greatest comfort you can offer your exhausted colleagues.

If you do have a relationship with Christ but this relationship has stagnated, then that is a problem. Neglect of Jesus is a barrier for true rest. This issue is now the most urgent on your list of things to do. Set aside everything else and give time to Bible reading, meditation on God's word, and prayer. Make time for fellowship with your spiritual brothers and sisters. As Hebrews says:

"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it" (Heb 4:1).


We need to find our true rest in Jesus.

3. Put your hope in God's heavenly rest:

In the midst of busyness and exhaustion we need to ask ourselves where is our ultimate hope? Is it in the completion of our tasks? The next step in our career? Or in the next holiday or retirement? These things are all good but are false hopes if that is what we are looking forward to most. The only firm and reliable hope is God's end-time rest where sin and conflict are no more. This is what Hebrews says:

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb 6:19).

This is where we need to look for ultimate rest, not work/life balance, retirement or other things. This hope is true eternal rest in fellowship with Jesus.

Praise God for His kindness and provision for us weary sinners. May He keep us in His care, correct our waywardness, and guide us to rest in Jesus. 

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Brunch or Bible study? A Biblical Approach to Rest

Recently I've discovered something – I write essays to have a rest. I've been studying part time while also working part time as a GP and being Mum to a 15-month-old. Compared to the demands of patients and caring for an even more demanding toddler, writing essays is restful! But I think I'm not the only one who rests in unexpected ways. I know people who find all sorts of things restful, from running marathons, to exploring family history, to painting their house, or taking pictures of their food. If such diverse things can be considered rest, what even is rest? What is the purpose of rest? In looking at what God has to say about rest, I observe one thing rest is from, and two things rest is for.

We rest from work

When we rest, we stop working. Now this might sound obvious, but we're so bad at doing this that God had to command us to rest! In Exodus 20:9-10, God mandates a Sabbath day rest for his people, saying 'Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within

your gates.' (ESV) God commanded that all people in Israel rest on the Sabbath. The reason given for doing this is the pattern that God provided in Genesis 2:2, of resting on the seventh day following His work of creation. God doesn't need to rest, but by ceasing from His work He graciously provides a pattern for us to follow. Because we do need to rest, whether that's from the mental strain of our work by getting out and running a marathon, or from the physical strain of chasing after a toddler by sitting in a chair and writing an essay. Not because work is bad, but because work is hard. Since the Fall, our work has become hard and often painful (Genesis 3:17-19). Even though the Sabbath is mostly not mandated in the same way now as it was in the Old Testament, it reveals to us the importance of resting from our work.

But in modern society, finding rest seems to be getting more difficult. I've found this especially working from home. In the first COVID lockdown, I was set up with a home connection to our work server for the first time. I found I was often tempted to check one more result, or contact that patient to ask one more clarifying question, now that I could just go into my study and

open up the laptop. This meant that I was thinking about work even when I was eating dinner, or trying to sleep. But in Deuteronomy 5:15 God gave the Israelites another important reason for keeping the Sabbath, remembering that they had been rescued from Egypt by God. The Sabbath reminded the Israelites that God was the one who had ultimately done the work of looking after them by redeeming them from slavery. And in Exodus 16:21-30 God provided enough bread for His people to last for two days, so they wouldn't have to work on the Sabbath. Just as God rescued Israel from Egypt, and provided their food, He also looks after us, and He can keep things going without us. He provides for the birds and the flowers, and we are so much more precious to Him (Matthew 6:25-34). The world won't end if we take a break! I doubt that any patient would thank me for waking them up in the middle of the night to give them their cholesterol result, but even if they did, God doesn't need me to do that! God is watching over us and our patients whether we're working or not, 24/7. We can have a rest.

We rest for fellowship with God

And this leads nicely into the second thing that I have realised about rest,

which is that it is for fellowship with God. By making the seventh day holy, God was setting apart a day for Himself (Genesis 2:3), and he required the Israelites to also set apart the Sabbath for time with Him (Exodus 20:11). Many of the festivals in the Israelite calendar were also set up to create a holy space for the Israelites to reconnect with God, whether in thanksgiving or repentance. There was the Passover which reminded them of when God rescued them from Egypt (Exodus 12:1-20), Pentecost (Numbers 28:26) when they remembered God's good gift of the harvest, and the day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32) which reminded the Israelites of the need to be cleansed before the Lord from sin. Space was created apart from work in order to worship the Lord.

God is also the only one who can give us spiritual rest. Many of the Psalmists sang about the rest their souls needed that only God could provide, for example in the beautiful words of Psalm 23:1-3a (ESV) 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.' We experience spiritual rest even more fully now, having received Christ's forgiveness, as we don't need to strive to earn God's favour. As Jesus says 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28 ESV). Hebrews 3 and 4 also speak of the rest God gives to those who share in Christ. And Revelation similarly describes the ultimate rest we will experience once we die, when we will have rest from all suffering and dwell with God forever (Revelation 14:13, 21:3-4) – not necessarily meaning work will cease, but it will no longer be the painful toil that it is now. Seeing rest as a means of fellowship with God doesn't mean we need to feel bad about going

for a run or Instagramming our coffee, but we can see these moments as an opportunity to be thankful to God for His many blessings to us. God rested on the seventh day to enjoy the creation He had made (Genesis 2:2-3), and we too can rest by enjoying God's wonderful creation and praising Him for it, as well as by setting aside specific time to talk to and listen to Him. Knowing that rest is for fellowship with God also helps us find rest even at those times when life feels absolutely overwhelming, when there doesn't seem any opportunity for rest. When we feel like we're drowning


"We experience spiritual rest even more fully now, having received Christ's forgiveness..."

under the weight of our circumstances or our own burden of anxiety and guilt, our souls can still find rest in our Lord, knowing that He has forgiven us, is caring for us, and will bring us home.

We rest for fellowship with others

A final thing that I noticed about rest is that rest in the Bible often looks a lot like a party. Many of the days of rest in the Old Testament involved eating meals and celebrating as a community (e.g. Deuteronomy 16:9-15), and similarly many of the pictures Jesus used for heaven involved a feast (e.g. Matthew 8:11). We've seen that in Exodus 20:10, God commanded the whole community of Israel to rest on the Sabbath regardless of status. Old and young, male and female, servant and foreigner, we're all freed to participate

in worshipping God together. Just to reassure the introverts among us, this isn't the only way to rest. Jesus himself would often withdraw from the crowds to pray alone (Luke 5:16). But if being alone is the only way we rest, we're missing out on a really important kind of refreshment. Meeting with other Christians is important in encouraging us and renewing our motivation to love and do good (Hebrews 24-25), and also strengthens us in our faith (Ephesians 4:11-13). I asked my husband, who is an introvert, whether he found church restful. He said it was restful in a different way. Even though he is very happy in his own company, he found being among a group of people who knew and cared for him, that feeling of belonging and encouragement of worshipping the Lord together, was refreshing in a way that time alone couldn't be. Working in healthcare, our days can often be filled with listening to the distress and needs of other people. When we finally arrive home, sometimes the last thing we feel like doing is going back out to a Bible study full of more people. But using our rest to share meals with other Christians, or to reflect on the Lord's words and spur one another on is refreshing to our souls in a way few other things are.

Having reflected on these things, I have felt affirmed in finding rest in my essay writing, but have also felt inspired to thank the Lord for the many good things in my life and the chance to change pace by sitting in peace. I have also felt a greater encouragement to give my work worries over to the Lord, and take time to catch up with that sister over coffee. I hope that you also feel encouraged to rest from your work, enjoying the goodness of our Lord and the fellowship of others, however that looks for you! 



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Rest and Mental Health: An Evangelistic Opportunity

“People of Australia, on my way here I couldn’t help but notice that 4.8 million of you currently have a mental health or behavioural condition and that 46% of you will experience that at some time in your lives.’ That must be exhausting for you, but you seem unaware of the rest which Jesus offers. This is what I am going to proclaim to you...” (with apologies to the Apostle Paul! [Acts 17:22-23]).

The proclamation of the good news of Jesus has always been, and must always be, context sensitive. The incarnation demands such sensitivity, and it is also necessitated because human existence is inherently embedded in social, cultural, linguistic and historical contexts. When Paul presented Christ to the Epicureans and Stoics of Athens (Acts 17), he did so on the basis of his observation of their context. He found in Athens a cultural artifact, in that case a shrine, which he pressed into service as a starting point, and to some degree an organising motif, around which to present Christ. Were the Apostle Paul to visit Canberra, I don’t know if he would highlight mental ill-health as

such a cultural artifact, but it occurs to me that it holds potential as a starting point, and as an organising principle, around which we could present Jesus.

As a counsellor, I hardly ever meet a client who doesn’t say how exhausted they are. They tell me they are “running on empty”, “tired all day long”, “don’t have the energy for (anything)”, “can’t remember the last time [they] got a decent night’s sleep”, and so forth. Mental ill-health and exhaustion go hand in hand and mutually reinforce each other. It takes huge amounts of energy to “push through the mental fog”, to filter the intrusive thoughts, to reassure yourself in the face of anxiety, to talk yourself down from a triggering event, and to fight the internal confusion – all of which quickly add up to exhaustion. Conversely, if

“Mental ill-health and exhaustion go hand in hand and mutually reinforce each other.”

I’m already run down, then it is likely that I will have less resilience and less resources with which to care for myself and my mental health.

All of this is on top of the existing pressures in our society on sleep and rest. Some of these pressures are cultural factors such as fast-paced and competitive lifestyles; work conditions and shift-work; and leisure activities that intrude into healthy sleep practice (such as excessive alcohol consumption or computer gaming). Still other pressures on sleep/rest come from medical conditions such as obesity and apnoea.

It is not surprising then that we find ourselves surrounded by a plethora of interventions to help ease the epidemic of exhaustion. Broadly speaking, these interventions fall into categories reflecting the dominant worldviews of our culture. On the one hand, Australia is deeply indebted to the modern scientific worldview with its emphasis on data, diagnosis, and medicalised treatment (especially in relation to mental health and exhaustion, pharmaceutical interventions). Increasingly, however, interventions from other worldviews have found acceptance. These tend to

focus on the mind/body relationship, and disciplines such as mindfulness, meditation, relaxation, yoga and tai-chi are seen as the paths to rest.

While wanting to leave room for each of these interventions in holistic approaches to mental health and exhaustion, my Christian faith and worldview suggest another vital dimension. In the narrative of scripture, rest is profoundly *relational*. Rest is something God does when he has brought order out of chaos in creation (Gen.2:2). Rest is something that characterises right relationship with God (Ex.16:11-30) and is even used as a metaphor for faith (Heb.4:9, cf John 6:28-29). Rest was enshrined in the fourth commandment at the establishment of the nation of Israel (Ex.20:11). Weekly and yearly cycles of rest mimicked the divine rest (Deut.5:14, Lev.25:4) and in the rest of the jubilee, relationships were restored (Lev.25:10-13). The prophets anticipated a time of rest and restoration (Is.14:7, Jer.31:2); the poets sang of lying down in green pastures and feasting in the presence of enemies (Ps.23:2,5). The relational dimensions of rest cannot be denied, as the lion and the lamb testify (Is.65:25).

The Gospels testify that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2 and parallels). And while that title may not be immediately transparent to us, he clearly moves the issue of rest away from legalism and reasserts its relational character. Jesus' bold invitation is unselfconscious:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV)

Jesus holds out to his hearers, to the weary and burdened, a rest that is distinctively His. His gentle and humble-hearted character undergirds that rest and stands in stark contrast to the violent insurrectionists of first century Palestine and the pride-filled religious leaders of his day (and maybe ours too?). Jesus is not a threat to his hearers, nor condemning of them. They can find rest by walking with him.

Interestingly, this relational nature of rest has recently been emphasised in attachment-based psychotherapies. In John Bowlby's theory,² the human infant has an inbuilt survival mechanism which causes them to bond with their caregiver, thus maximising their chances of having their needs met. Disruption to the bond results in distress or separation anxiety. Subsequent elaboration and application of the theory to adults locates a safe harbour – the restful place – in emotionally accessible, responsive and engaged relationships.³

“Rest, in attachment terms, is satisfaction of needs; it is safety; it is the absence of distress...”


Rest, in attachment terms, is satisfaction of needs; it is safety; it is the absence of distress, and rest is achieved in the context of a secure relationship. In their 2007 review of the literature, Troxel, et al⁴ noted the existence of a bi-directional relationship between quality of sleep and marital quality. Not only does poor sleep adversely affect the relationship, but for better or for worse, the quality of the relationship also influences sleep. Similar relational dependencies have also been observed in other relevant domains such as emotional regulation in workplace conflict⁵ and even pain perception.⁶ Attachment theory then adds a degree of contemporary secular support to the distinctively Christian understanding that rest is relational.

Returning then to our Australian context and the epidemic of mental ill-health, we note the pervasive experience of exhaustion among people with mental health conditions, and we rejoice in Jesus' invitation to rest in Him. This field does appear to be ripe for harvest (John 4:35), and if we are to send out workers into this field (Matt.9:37-38) we may find that the workers need clarity about Jesus' offer of rest (derived from Matt.11:28-30):

- Rest is profoundly relational. It is not primarily physiological or even psychological. Humans rest in trusting, supportive, emotionally-available relationships.
- Jesus offers that rest to the weary and burdened, without reference to capacity or capability (or mental stability).
- Jesus does not offer a rest that is inactive or directionless (hence the references to yoke, burden and learning).
- Jesus' offer is not that the cause/s of exhaustion will evaporate (although that may happen), but that there is refreshment, emotional co-regulation and deep connection in relationship with Him.

Perhaps in this way many in our land may come to believe as Dionysius and Damaris (Acts 17:34) did, or to testify with Saint Augustine of Hippo:

“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

– Confessions (Chapter 1) 

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An important message about Vaccination in Australia presented by Dr. James Yun on behalf of The Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship of Australia.



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Rhythms of Rest

Rhythms and Rest are important in how we are made.

We know this intuitively and experientially.

We feel awful if:

- **we don't sleep well each night.**
- **we work long hours.**
- **we work through the 'week's end'.**
- **we don't take vacations.**

All of us get short-tempered and irritable if we don't 'stop' whatever our work entails to reflect, enjoy, refresh and connect. These last two years of covid have taken their toll on me. For the first time in ages, leaving my workplace was only leaving 'face-to-face' work behind. Each evening became filled with 'study' work – learning and upskilling on so many different facets of pandemic life... that were then out-of-date by the next week! The cycle repeated over and over, replacing only the content: symptoms, testing, personal protective equipment, cleaning, item numbers, telehealth, digital messaging, vaccinations, modules, conspiracy theories, webinars, lunchtime updates – the list seemingly endless! As soon as one topic was

'mastered', the content would change. It was a never-ending hamster wheel of change. I was exhausted.

This year, we've all been there.

Various studies¹ show the negative effects of long working hours on the health of workers. This includes increasing risks of cardiovascular disease, chronic fatigue, stress, depression, anxiety, sleep quality, all-cause mortality and detrimental health-behaviours (alcohol use, smoking, and physical inactivity). Shorter sleep duration leads to the worst health outcomes.

“Various studies¹ show the negative effects of long working hours on the health of workers.”

The very earliest accounts of humanity, outlined in the creation narrative of Genesis, run the refrain: “*And there was*

evening and there was morning, the [numbered] day.” God designed us in His image, and that includes a time of rest and reflection: “*And God saw that it was good.*”² By the end of the first chapters of the Bible we have a daily and weekly rhythm that incorporates times of rest, reflection and delight. This includes a weekly Sabbath rest – “*So, God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation.*”³

When God rescues his people from Egypt, one of the first things He does is to designate months and years, instituting festivals and seasons in which to remember Him, starting with the Passover festival⁴. Once they are safely away over the Red Sea, with Egypt's mightiest in spectacular ruins behind them, God gives Israel the Ten Commandments in order to delineate how they will live as His chosen and saved people. They have been a slave nation – worked to the bone for hundreds of years, with no allowance for rest. The fourth commandment is a stark contrast to this slavery, and a reminder to trust God and revel in our being made in His likeness⁵. And so, we find ourselves in the 21st Century,

still dividing our time into days and nights, and weeks with weekends, and months and years, with festivals and remembrances for significant dates in our history, even if we have lost sight of the reason behind these rhythms.

Monks go even deeper. Their **day** is characterised by intentional stoppages in order to spend time with God. Seven times a day, the Trappist monks attend to the Daily Office⁶ (daily 'Opus' meaning 'work'). The Daily Office is the 'work of God' and nothing is to interfere with that priority. The Westminster Shorter Catechism⁷ reflects this in its first question, "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." Stopping for the Daily Office and Sabbath is not meant to add another to-do to our already busy schedules. It is the resetting of our entire lives toward a new destination – God. Peter Scazzero, in his book, "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality"⁸, describes it thus:

"We live in a blizzard. And few of us have a rope."

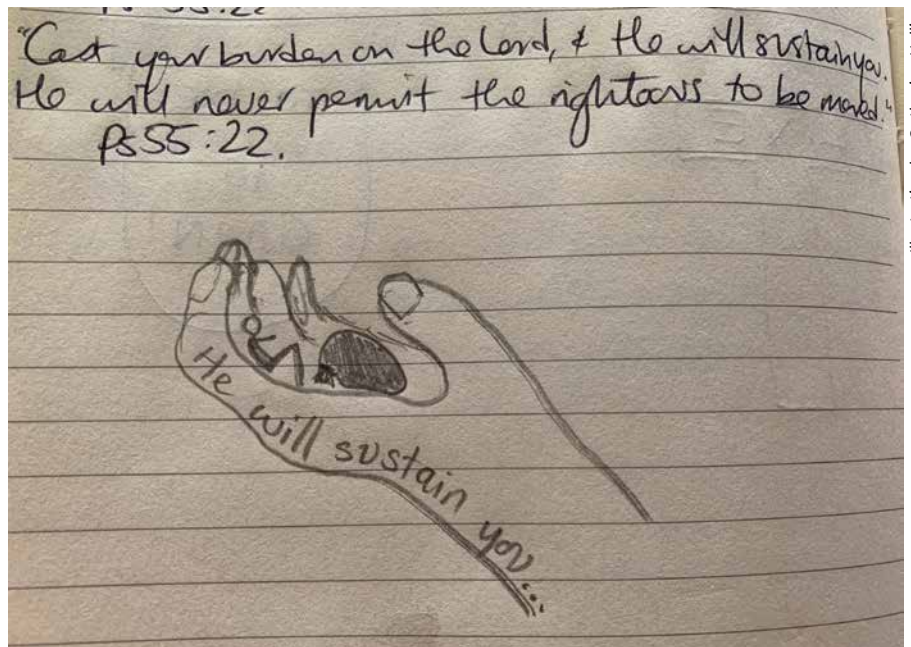
He then goes on to describe fierce sudden blizzards that require farmers to attach a rope from their house to the barn so that they can know their bearings and not die, (perhaps only metres from safety) in the course of their daily work.

"The Daily Office and Sabbath are ropes that lead us back to God in the blizzards of life. They are anchors for living in the hurricane of demands. When done as a 'want to' rather than a 'have to', they offer us a rhythm for our lives that bind us to the living God."

I must admit, the thought of this is daunting. I have difficulty taking time each day in a traditional 'quiet time', let alone several times a day! However, when I do spend sustained personal time with God, the benefits of that overflow to every aspect of my life...

Over the course of my life, there have been various Rhythms of Rest:

- On Beach Missions or Mission Trips – morning devotions and prayer were written into the timetable.
- As a young mum unable to sleep in the middle of the night – this gave me the (questionable) blessing of undisturbed solitude to spend time talking with God.
- Breast-feeding gave me several opportunities a day to 'stop' and enjoy God's creation in the wonder of a newborn.



"Jot drawings aid me in memorisation of Bible verses. This one captures the sense of relief in casting my burdens on the Lord who sustains me."

Illustration by Catherine Hollier

- Praying for the day on the way to and from work, on my walk around the park.
- Listening to the Bible in One Year⁹ whilst showering and dressing each morning.
- Weekly youth groups, small groups, Friday night dinners and church services.
- Four-hour blocks of time on Monday mornings to stop and read and journal.
- Working through various books – devotionals, marriage enrichment, personal development.
- Weekly Bible memorisation with a group of women at church.
- A week of vacation every school term – at least three away from home, and two weeks in a row at least once a year. Some vacations are at the same place each year, with plenty of time for inactivity, whilst others involve exploring, new experiences and variety.
- Seven-yearly 'Sabbaticals' where I take several months or the entire year off from regular work to travel, study, explore or tackle large unpaid projects.

Without question, time spent with God is not wasted. Every time I stop and focus on God, it changes me and affects my relationships. At work, I find that I often connect with people over what I have been reading recently. This is so much more beneficial when it has godly content.

Michael Horton makes a gardening analogy in his book, "Ordinary"¹⁰. He describes the Christian life like taking care of a garden. The daily 'work' of gardening is very mundane: watering, weeding, fertilizing, mulching, pruning and the like. The purpose, however, is not in the work, *per se* – it is in delighting in the beauty and joy of the garden whilst at rest (perhaps with the resonance of, "And God saw that it was good!"¹²). Likewise, Christian 'work' may seem somewhat mundane: prayer, Bible reading, worship, church, small groups and Sabbaths. However, the purpose is in order to delight in God, to worship Him, and rest in His presence.

How might we do this?

Firstly, it springs from the desire of reorienting towards God. The aim is not legalistic, but relational. God has made us all differently, so that expression of focus will look different for each of us. It may be triggered by nature, the five senses, our breathing, scripture, times of the day, eating, or anything else that helps us to pause. Scazzero⁸ notes the following four elements for a Daily Office:

Stopping – so that our time with God is unhurried. We give up control and trust God to run His world without us.

Still – moving into God's presence and resting there. This may involve concentrating on breathing (inhale Holy Spirit, exhale "Have mercy on me"), eyes closed, five senses, mindfulness.

Silence – quieting other voices to attend to God.

Scripture – psalms, Lord’s prayer, worship songs, devotional classics, Bible in a year, meditation, memorization, nature.

There are many books that can direct us to different ways of attending to God deliberately in our day. A general rule might be: **If it helps, do it. If it does not help, do not do it – including the Daily Office!** The purpose is to remember God and commune with Him through our days. Yahweh is a God of grace, who loves us because we are His children, not because of what we do. We are not to be like the Pharisees who, “*Tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders,*”¹¹ in meeting with God through the day.

On Sabbaths, we imitate God by stopping our work and resting. It is a gift from God to stop our work and to delight in Him. It is a reminder that we are deeply loved by God for who we are, not for what we do – human beings, not human doings. This is particularly hard for many of us with Type A driven personalities, especially in round-the-clock jobs like health. Covid and isolation have given many of our friends and relatives a chance to stop their regular work and rest – taking the opportunity to do enjoyable things for which they otherwise don’t have time or opportunity. Facebook feeds have been full of home-cooked meals, gardens in bloom, craft and garage projects, books read, renovations and art! Our dental colleagues have perhaps had more opportunity for this than our medical friends, but I must admit to being pleasantly surprised at the extra time in my weeks with the transition of many meetings online. Whilst it may not be possible to always have the same time each week due to rosters, shiftwork and other demands, selecting a time period and protecting it is key.

Again, Scazzero⁸ suggests the following for treasured ‘Sabbath-keeping’:

Stop. We have limits. God does not. I have a poster on my wall, “Remember that God is still in heaven and I do not have to do everything.” Stopping acknowledges that we are not in control and demonstrates our trust that God is in charge and He does not need us to bring about His purposes.

Rest. Do whatever delights and replenishes you. Tim Keller, in his article, “Wisdom and Sabbath Rest”¹² suggests the following:

Some time for sheer inactivity – time doing nothing, similar to Israel’s

practice of letting a field lie fallow every seventh year to produce whatever happens to grow (Lev 25:1-7).

Pleasurable rest – something that sparks joy. Preferably a balance of the following:

Contemplative rest – prayer/ worship/ Scripture/ journaling

Recreational rest – something that refreshes you – exercise, hobby, art, craft, books, movies, board games, etc.

Aesthetic rest – exposure to beauty, nature, gardens or the weather.

Recharge – this may be with or away from others, depending whether you do this best on your own, or with people. Likely it will be away from technology in the form of phones, email, computers or social media.

“On Sabbaths, we imitate God by stopping our work and resting. It is a gift from God to stop our work and to delight in Him.”

Delight. The Hebrew phrase, “*It was very good,*” (Gen 1:31) communicates a sense of joy, completion, wonder and play. Slowing down to pay attention and delight in people and our senses is restorative.

“*Taste and see that the Lord is good,*”¹³ is a helpful refrain for the Sabbath. Repeating this and deliberately exploring all five senses every time I eat something helps me recentre and remember how good God is!


Laughing and having fun, catching glimpses of *perichoerisis* (the ‘dancing around’ relationship reflecting the mutual indwelling of the Trinity), is helpful when I am tempted to be sombre and serious, weighed down with the responsibility of life.

Contemplate. The Sabbath is always “*Holy to the LORD*” (Ex 31:15). Worshipping with God’s people, feasting on His presence, reading and studying scripture, praying and singing give us a taste of the glorious eternal party of music, food and beauty that awaits us in heaven. Keeping this earthly life in heavenly perspective gives us hope,

strength, focus, courage and energy that staves off burnout and compassion fatigue. We can overflow with God’s never-ending love as we remember His love for us throughout Biblical history.

Enjoy the Sabbath as the gift of a **‘no-obligation’ lockdown day EVERY week** – a silver-lining of COVID-19!

Scazzero⁸ finishes,

“If you begin to practice stopping, resting, delighting, and contemplating for one twenty-four-hour period each week, you will soon find your other six days becoming infused with those same qualities. I suspect that has always been God’s plan.” 

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Finding Rest in the Furnace of Work

The Lord is a refuge and safe haven for Christian doctors and dentists when faced with challenges in our professional lives as well as in our personal lives. It's possible for us to become so caught up in thinking in an objective scientific way about the clinical needs of the patient in front of us that we forget that our knowledge, our insights, and our strength all come from the Lord. We can draw on that divine source in difficult moments when we are not sure what best to say, or when it's not immediately clear how to handle the situation.

By using "micro prayers", I have often found fresh insights or suitable words are provided, by God's grace, to suit the needs of the moment.

By using micro prayers during the working day, we not only remain more conscious of our servant role as health professionals, but we also apply Lordship to our professional lives on a regular basis. This "hand on the tiller" approach helps us navigate through difficult situations and to grow in trust. Gaining peace as a state of mind because of frequent connection with the Lord is exactly what Isaiah is talking about in chapter 26:

"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you" (Isaiah 26:3)

In our everyday world, there will be struggles and problems, but we can take heart because we are linked to Him who overcomes these (*John 16:33*).

Through micro prayers, we can also enter more into that sense of rest in the Lord to which we are called. We can hand over burdens and difficulties so that we don't carry these alone and become unduly stressed.

In some situations, those stressors may come more so from people we work with rather than from those we care for. It doesn't matter - the same principle of the micro prayer that addresses the need of the moment for that person and that situation still applies. In my experience, the frequent use of micro prayers has allowed me to stay calm and mentally positive despite situations where I had to keep many balls in the air at once. An example of a situation like this was during my university career when I had to supervise a large group of students in the clinic and work out when to provide hands-on assistance while ensuring the clinic ran smoothly,

with many people coming and going.

Micro prayers aren't always about yourself and your own needs. Often, they are about your patient or student or colleague or anyone who you see as having a need at that moment. By offering all these needs up to the Lord, we can remain mentally at rest and experience the peace of God - which is exactly the promise of *Philippians 4:6-7*.

In dentistry, we often see physical examples of situations where patients are in a situation of stress and turmoil and they take that out on their dentition by clenching and grinding, applying enormous forces that smash restorations on the teeth and lead to aggressive patterns of tooth wear. Whenever I see this clinical presentation, it reminds me of the descriptions of teeth gnashing that occur in the Scriptures.

There are many examples in the Old Testament where gnashing of teeth was an expression of intense anger (*Job 16:9; Psalm 112:10*), including anger and hatred with shades of contempt (*Psalm 35:16; Psalm 37:12; Lam. 2:16*). The same is seen in *Acts 7:54* which describes the angry reaction of the unbelieving Jews of the Sanhedrin towards Stephen. They

were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. In the New Testament, gnashing of teeth is combined with weeping, especially in the Gospel of Matthew where it relates to emotional distress and other strong emotional reactions to situations, including punishment or being banished (*Matthew 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 25:30*). *Luke 13:28* describes a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when the unsaved see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God at the time of judgment, indicating emotional suffering once they recognise the difference in their fate.

Today we know that patients who clench their jaws and grind their teeth while awake have significant underlying issues with their mental state. Bruxism, which is habitual non-functional forceful contact between the biting (occlusal) surfaces of teeth, is involuntary. As well as severe tooth wear, it also causes headaches, temporomandibular pain and masticatory muscle soreness. Awake bruxism and the associated severe tooth wear have been associated with intellectual disability, frontal neurological disorders, and the use of certain psychotropic medications or addictive substances, especially opiates and MDMA (ecstasy). Medications such as duloxetine, paroxetine, venlafaxine, barbiturates and methylphenidate can cause bruxism during sleep. With psychotropic agents, tooth grinding while awake is a form of oromandibular dyskinesia secondary to extrapyramidal effects of these medications because of their antagonism of dopaminergic receptors.¹⁻⁵ The problem of tooth grinding is particularly prominent in long-term users of heroin and other “hard” narcotics who have high levels of jaw clenching and tooth grinding (bruxism) as well as tooth wear and jaw joint disorders.⁶

Recent research indicates that tooth grinding is surprisingly common. A 2019 umbrella review drew on 41 systematic reviews and concluded that among adults, the prevalence of awake bruxism was 22%-30%, and sleep bruxism was 1%-15%. They noted that the latter was aggravated by multiple factors including the excessive use of alcohol, caffeine and tobacco, and exposure to second-hand smoke.⁷

Just as in adults, bruxism in children is more common in those with emotional problems and may reflect life stressors

that have been experienced or are anticipated.⁸⁻¹⁰ Bruxism can occur at a high rate in certain groups of children with disability. In a recent study of girls with Rett syndrome, we found over 98% had some oral parafunctional habit, with many grinding their teeth both when awake as well as during sleep.¹¹ Those who were grinding their teeth during the day had an increased need for restorative dental treatment.


So what is the common theme that links all of these clinical pathways surrounding involuntary tooth grinding? These are all situations where individuals are in need of compassionate care because of the situation they are experiencing in their life. When someone presents with tooth grinding while awake it is a semaphore or a “canary in a coal mine”. It flags the need for a closer look, and greater compassion and understanding for that person.

“... patients who clench their jaws and grind their teeth while awake have significant underlying issues with their mental state.”

We need to learn from Jesus, the suffering servant, who felt compassion and followed this up with action. The Gospels often refer to Him having compassion and being moved with pity. He sympathised with the pain and distress of others. He recognised the hurt of the individual even when there were throngs of people around him. We can learn some important lessons from that.

Jesus shows us the face of a God who is compassionate, rather than cold or unfeeling. His heart went out to those in need. We need to see beyond the patient to appreciate the burdens of their life and the complexities that they have to deal with every day. The better we understand the context of their problem, the more we can see the world from their perspective and notice their confusion, vulnerability and helplessness.

By sharing a kind word and showing our patients that we acknowledge the challenges they are facing, we can help ease their burden and share with

them a moment of kindness. A micro prayer at the moment of need can enable us to look at and respond to our patients and colleagues through the lens of the compassionate love of Jesus. My prayer for all of us is that the Lord will soften our hearts toward others and give us a heart of compassion, so that we can reach out to our patients and colleagues with kindness and mercy. When that happens, we will enjoy His peace and His rest. 

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Don't Give Up: Balancing Shiftwork, Sleep, and Meeting Together

“Sorry guys. I’m pretty exhausted tonight.”

These were the words that would regularly come out of my mouth at Bible study. I was exhausted. Working overtime, after hours, evenings, nights, double shifts, 20 days straight. This was my new life. Not only was I struggling with long hours, but also the new weight of responsibility that comes with transitioning from a care-free medical student to a responsible-for-people’s-lives junior doctor. I had only once before stayed awake a whole night. Now, I not only had to stay awake during the night, but also function in emergency situations as if it was daytime. Driving home safely was a challenge.

I went to church and Bible study when I could, but I was barely able to serve or contribute in any way. Still, when I wasn’t working, I turned up. Sometimes I fell asleep. Sometimes I had energy. Sometimes I didn’t. Sometimes I was able to concentrate. Often, I couldn’t stop thinking about whether I’d done the right thing for a patient that day. Either way, I was overwhelmed and exhausted and I often didn’t feel up to being there.

This is a typical story for junior doctors, doctors-in-training, and doctors in general. Devotion to our profession is expected and, particularly during training years, demanded. How do we prioritise God when we frequently miss church or fellowship gatherings because of our inflexible and exhausting work schedule?

The medical profession is not alone when it comes to Shiftwork.¹ In fact, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that 16% of Australian employees work Shiftwork. But how do people do it? How do you work in a job that is so demanding of your time that you feel constantly exhausted and have no mental or physical energy for living out your faith?

Practically, it is wise to develop good habits early if at all possible. In the sleep world we talk about sleep hygiene – creating good sleep habits that encourage restful sleep, and thus more energy during the day. This is difficult to maintain as a Shiftworker, but some things are worth considering:

- 1. Maintain a good sleep environment.** Invest in blackout blinds, good quality well-fitting earplugs, an eyemask. Consider temperature control. Put the dog out.

- 2. Minimise screen-time before sleep.** Light on the back of the retina provides a negative feedback loop to the production of melatonin, a hormone that drives sleep. Phones with blue light filters are not adequate if you are struggling to initiate sleep. Read a book (not online), or listen to a podcast. Don’t have a TV in your bedroom or watch Netflix on your laptop in bed. People often use screens as a distraction particularly when you have significant stressors during the day. Whilst it may help distract you from trying to remember if you prescribed the right warfarin dose for your patient, the light from the screens and constant flickering subconsciously wakes your brain up. This leads to difficulty initiating and maintaining sleep.

- 3. Maximise light exposure at the appropriate time.** Good light exposure on waking helps keep melatonin levels at bay and increase alertness. If you are doing an evening shift, go for a brief walk in the sun before you start your shift. If you are coming home from a night shift, don your aviator sunglasses as you walk out of the hospital and drive straight

home, minimising bright light exposure before your day-sleep.

- 4. Avoid caffeine close to bedtime.** As a junior doctor you may have become addicted to the glorious smell and taste of coffee, even believing yourself to have developed tolerance to its alerting effects. But this is best avoided prior to sleep.
- 5. Don't exercise too close to bedtime.** You may want to keep up with your buddies on Strava, but exercise at an appropriate time, for example before your shift, or at least 1-2 hours before going to bed. Exercise wakes the body up.
- 6. Become a creature of habit.** When not doing irregular shifts, go to bed at the same time and get up at the same time. If you are on a run of nights or evenings, habits can still be maintained that are appropriate for those shifts: go home, eat, read, shower, sleep. Turn your phone off whilst asleep, if possible. At least put it on silent to minimise waking from those frustrating scammers with seemingly normal phone numbers; or even just your mum checking to see if you have slept well today!
- 7. See your doctor if you are struggling with sleep and/or shiftwork.** Check in with your local general practitioner, who has been there before and can exclude pathological causes, as well as access appropriate aids.

And how do you live out your faith when you are too busy and exhausted? Consider factors that you cannot control and factors that you can.

Things you might struggle to control may include your roster and your overtime, particularly when you are on a training program. Talk to your colleagues about how they manage, what they have put in place to be able to make it to regular church events and serve at church. If you are a trainee, consider what the job looks like at the end of all that training and how you might be able to prioritise Jesus in your life.

My husband has been a shiftworker in an emergency department for eleven years. It is only now, after completing his training, that he has had the ability to take a regular weekday off work. This allows him to spend quality time with our youngest daughter who is not yet at school, and attend Bible study each week. He has always attended where possible before, however now he not only attends regularly, but also leads



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and encourages his brothers in Christ. Similarly, I have arranged my work so that I don't work a full week – I usually have Tuesdays off and that has allowed me to lead a women's Bible study group for the last couple of years. This wasn't possible during training time, but now I can attend regularly and also commit to leadership.

One factor that you may be able to control is turning up to church or Bible study when you are not rostered on shift.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Whilst you may not feel your best, it is encouraging for others when you turn up. By being there you too will be reminded of and encouraged by God's love, peace and hope.


It might feel like you don't have time for church or Bible study, or that you can't commit due to unpredictable hours or study demands. However, not turning up means you miss out on the encouragement from your fellow brothers and sisters to stay strong in your faith. With all the other stress of life around you, you need all the support you can get. Going to church in itself does not bring salvation, but God knows we need fellowship and mutual encouragement to help keep our faith strong. Do not be like the seed that *“fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants” (Matthew 13:7)*, but continue to be part of Jesus' body who, being *“joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:16)*

“With all the other stress of life around you, you need all the support you can get.”

Finally, with all I've said, remember God's grace. It may feel like you have been drawn away for a time by the world around you. Maybe you feel lost and struggle to get to church on Sunday or your Bible study group. Attendance doesn't make you a Christian or guarantee your salvation. Rather, I encourage you to attend to build your knowledge of and love for God through the teaching of God's Word and through mutual encouragement with your Christian brothers and sisters.

If you're struggling to attend for whatever reason, turn to God, who listens to our prayers. Always remember His character:

“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.” (Exodus 34:6)

Despite the shifts, the stress, and the exhaustion, God is still always faithful and offers peace, love, joy and a hope that lasts for eternity (without shiftwork!!). 

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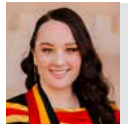


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Defining Rest: A Routine or a Relationship?

Rest. Is it merely the absence of busyness, or perhaps a dedicated time of peace and quiet? If either of these are the true definition, it is likely to be unattainable even by the best of us.

As a final year medical student, a lifelong struggle with anxiety firmly gripped my heart, and impacted me to the point of not being able to attend my placement without crying, feeling trapped and subsequently, needing to take time off from placement for seven weeks to try and recover. I was forced to take a time of physical and emotional rest because I couldn't carry on without it.

Now, as a junior doctor, my shifts are rarely something that allow for rest. I spend my time busily attending to the requests and needs of others, staff or patients, and trying to live up to the expectations of my seniors and supervisors, let alone my own inner critic. A lunch break seems a luxury, and even then - the phone doesn't stop ringing. My time is not my own, and taking the time to "rest" seems like an option there is little allowance for.

The standard definition of rest is to "cease work or movement in order to relax, sleep, or recover strength" or "an instance or period of resting" or "an interval of silence of a specified duration". If we rely only on this

definition, it is based on our ability to cultivate time in our calendar, our ability to prioritise and to shut out distractions. If we aren't careful, we can become so busy trying to pursue "rest" that it becomes just part of a routine where we may rest our bodies, but our spirits are just as anxious or stressed. As a Christian, I believe rest isn't something we have to strive for, but a connection we have with the Prince of Peace - Jesus. Rest isn't just about resting our physical body, but also our emotions, our mind and intellect, and our spirit.

When we realise that rest is not about a routine, but about a relationship, everything changes. Even in the midst of the tears and the fear of attending placement as a final year student, I spent more time in worship - learning to belong in the arms of the one who is always holding me. I learned to take in the small moments of a busy shift as a junior doctor - steadying my hand before inserting a cannula, taking a breath as I sign into the computer during a ward round. While silence, quiet, candles and face masks may be the world's definition of rest, I've learned it is something much more precious than the fading, interrupting world of busyness that threatens to disrupt that space every chance it gets. If our peace lies in the world and its provisions, it won't last very long.

What I've discovered is that peace is something cultivated through relationship - that even if my world is crumbling around me, the Lord is with me, and that it is His strength that builds my faith. When I am weak, He is always strong, because of His great glory. When I am breaking, He is ever faithful to redeem me and build me up again. Resting in Him means that the source of my value does not lie in the opinions of men or in anything I can do, but in who He has created me to be.

Rest is the beginning of restoration. When we learn to submit our failures, our desires, our dreams and our disappointments, we can find rest at the foot of the cross. In submission, our spirit is connected and God partners with us in sharing His peace. Only then can He begin to restore us to who He has truly made us to be - His children.

There will still be moments and days where I don't get the time to physically rest, but my hope is that I will always know where my true rest and peace comes from - and I pray that you would know the same.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)





Finding True Refuge: The lessons God taught a burnt-out medical student

My year out of medicine began with me rocking up to the head of 4th year's office in scrubs, after a long day on the O&G ward, asking if he had time to answer a 'quick question'. "Only if it's quick!" the doctor answered brightly, with minutes ticking down until his next Zoom meeting. I sat myself down in the opposite chair: "I'm wondering if it's possible to take a year off medicine."

That kickstarted a chain of meetings, where I presented my reasons formally to him, then to the Student Support Officer, my GP, and the Head of the School of Medicine, before filling out a formal submission online, and then waiting agonising weeks for my request to be approved. It felt like jumping through hoops with a broken leg, and by the time the email of success landed in my inbox, I had no energy left for happiness, only relief.

I told the faculty and friends around me that I was taking a year off to "clarify my life direction", "broaden my experiences" and to "have more time for ministry". In reality, the biggest reason was that I was burnt out, and had probably been running on fumes

since late 2019. Several years of intense study, personal challenges and burning the candle at both ends had left my tank dry. I was so tired that I'd come home from placement during long lunch breaks to crawl into bed; so emotionally exhausted that stories of suffering filled me with dread rather

"Several years of intense study, personal challenges and burning the candle at both ends had left my tank dry."

than compassion; and so troubled that my deepest questions about life and faith spilled to the surface like worms on the pavement after a downpour:

"What's the calling of my life?"

"Why am I doing medicine?"

"If everyone is going to die eventually, isn't the most important thing their spiritual state?"

"Why doesn't God do more to save those who haven't heard or understood the gospel?"

"Is He truly good if He doesn't save all?"

I shared with a friend that I felt like international student ministry and living cross-culturally by share-housing was eroding my sense of self and making me less sure of who I was. Whilst I still believe there is a deconstructive element to cross-cultural ministry,¹ I can now see that part of my experience came from the "depersonalisation" that occurs in burnout.

"Burnout is an untidy agglomeration of external symptoms and private frustrations!"² proclaimed the internet. It was my reality.

If the statistics are to be believed, 76% of employees feel burnt out at least "sometimes", while a further 28% of this group experience burnout "very often" or "all the time"³ You've probably read articles on it, been to a seminar about it, or laughed at a meme about it. You may have been through it!

The ill-defined problem can refer to anything from the Irreversible Tragedy in Ministry (see chapter 12 of David Bennett's biography of Hudson Taylor for a good example of this)⁴ to a throwaway comment after a tiring week: "I'm just so burnt out!". A condition that is poorly researched, not recognised as a mental health condition by the DSM-V,⁵ and a frustratingly nebulous extension of normal fatigue and stress, it is difficult to pin down what we're actually talking about. As my Dad once said, "If you read the list of symptoms for burnout on the internet, it sounds like it's diagnosing everyone!". And in a world where we are groaning for the New Creation (Romans 8:22) and are not truly at rest in our bodies (2 Corinthians 5), you've got to wonder if the inability to find refuge on earth is just part of the human condition.

However, the most helpful definition I've found on burnout is the Maslach Inventory triad:⁶

Emotional exhaustion - feeling emotionally depleted and worn down⁷

Depersonalisation - feeling cynical, detached, and treating others impersonally

Reduced sense of accomplishment - loss of satisfaction and achievement at work, as if your efforts no longer mean anything anymore⁸

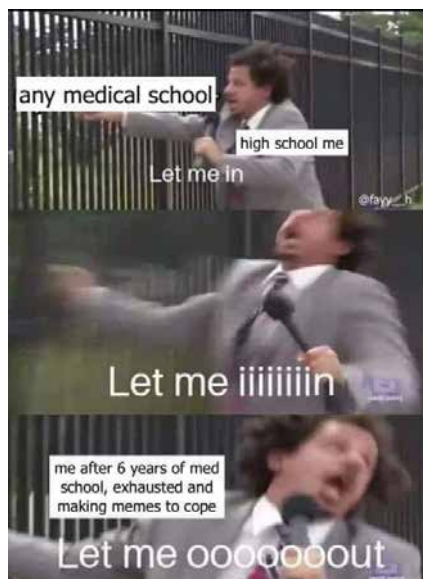
For me, the last point manifested as existential and spiritual questions, where I felt disillusioned about the purpose of my life, and why God had even created the world if this was the way things were.

If you've read that triad and feel exposed, or someone close to you has raised concerns, that may be as good a sign as any that you are burnt out. It's more than just stress, it's more than just fatigue, and it requires action. The danger of continuing in this state is harming relationships, becoming increasingly pessimistic, and even developing concurrent mental health conditions like depression. For myself, I realised that if I continued like this, I would become a cynical doctor who resented my patients and a hardened Christian whose faith was characterised by duty rather than joy. To confront the issue I took a year out of my degree, stepped back from volunteer ministry, and met with a psychologist and mature Christian to work through the internal factors and theological struggles that were driving my burnout and stalling my recovery. For you, it might mean dropping some commitments, taking

extended leave, visiting your GP for an action plan, or even a career change. My aim in this article, however, is not to change your workplace's culture, manage your burnout, or even to pretend that I am qualified to do so. What I would like to do, is share three gospel truths that shone more brightly for me during a season of burnout, and which I hope can be beacons for you:

1. 'Then God rested'

"Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Exodus 20:9-11



One of the beautiful truths of Christianity is that God invites us to rest. A rest for our bodies, with a Sabbath one day a week (Exodus 20:9-11); a rest for our souls, with a Saviour to follow whose burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30); and a rest for eternity, as we enter the finished work of Christ by faith (Hebrews 4). Instead of "rest" being a legalistic command, it is actually a gift from God to enjoy. Lili Reichow, in her L'Abri lecture "Come & Rest: An Invitation to the Exhausted" makes the point:

"Yes, rest is re-energising... but if we rest so that we can continue to be busy, so we can continue our activities, we've missed the point... because rest comes from Christ and is an offer to be enjoyed, not a pragmatic offer so that we can continue to do something! This is an exercise of re-centring

*of identity - we don't need to be perceived as those who can do it all, who can hold it all together. [We can] embrace being beloved children."*⁹

If you're feeling run down, embracing the Sabbath again might be just what you need. Or you might need an extended break. Or you might need to explore the 7 different types of rest that Dr Sandra Dalton-Smith outlines in her TEDx talk: physical, mental, sensory, creative, emotional, social and spiritual.¹⁰ God's command to rest is not a call to a life of monasticism or leisure, but it is a call to embrace regular patterns of rest, and to come and rest in the arms of a loving Saviour who has all things under His control (Matthew 11:28).

2. Creatureliness

"When [Elijah] came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night." 1 Kings 19:3-9

A man who had lived his entire life for God and one of the most iconic prophets of the Old Testament, Elijah, has reached the end of his rope in 1 Kings 19. He is depleted physically and spiritually. But instead of God exhorting him to continue or rebuking him ("this wouldn't have happened if you had taken more sick leave when you were ministering to the Israelites!"), God gives him a meal, rest and some water. He is ministered to by angels! This highlights the second truth I want to share: God calls us to follow Him in our creatureliness.

Part of the literature around burnout involves the idea that unrealistic expectations about yourself and your capacity create a gulf between your "actual self" and your "ideal self",

leading either to low self-esteem about where you are,¹¹ or relentless striving to close the gap.¹² If that's true, then surely Christians should be even more prone to burn out, because we feel that difference acutely!

"For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing." (Romans 7:19)

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way" (Isaiah 53:6)

"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard" (Romans 3:23).

If you are a Christian doctor, you may not only feel like you have fallen short in your diagnostic acumen, but also in your church involvement, your Bible reading, your character, or your love of God. However — and this is an important distinction — humans had limits even before the fall, and limitations are different to sin. That is to say, our limitations are not part of the curse, or something to be pushed back against in hope of the New Creation, but they are actually part of us living in a right relationship with God, as creatures depending on their Creator. Jen Wilkin puts it this way:

"Why am I limited and God is not limited? Is it because of sin?"

That's what we think in our head,

Well, that must be Genesis 3. Genesis 1 and 2, where everything was gonna be awesome, I was probably going to be unlimited.

But then you start looking at it and you're like,

No. Actually Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, but not as God.

They were created with physical bodies which were limited—they could only be in one place at one time. The idea of rest is in the creation account. They needed to rest. Their strength was not inexhaustible. There was food given to them, so they needed to eat to sustain their energy. They needed to reproduce themselves. There are all of these things that you begin to see,

Oh wait a minute. The reason that limits exist for humanity is because God designed us to be limited.

Then we can begin to ask,

What lessons might we learn if we reflect on the fact that God is limitless and I am actually limited by design?

Maybe those limits were given to me so that I would turn to the Lord in them."¹³

Our inability to do more for the Kingdom is frustrating, but it isn't sinful. Feeling too tired to lead a youth group after a 60 hour work week is discouraging, but understandable. This is exactly what is happening in 1 Kings 19 — God is calling Elijah to follow him as an embodied image-bearer living in a fleshly temple, and is ministering to him in that space — with food, with sleep, with water, and with words of encouragement directly from the mouth of the Almighty.

"If you are consistently pushing past feelings of dread because the sense of guilt or obligation is stronger, it will burn you out."

One of the jobs I worked in during 2021 was caring for a teenager with a drug addiction. He was not a believer, but he did spend a bit of time exploring Christian themes. One song he used to play over and over went like this:

***"I know I'm made of clay that's worn
Blighted by imperfect form
But I will trust the artist molding me
I am creation, both haunted and holy
Made in glory...Creature only."¹⁴***

If you are consistently pushing past feelings of dread because the sense of guilt or obligation is stronger, it will burn you out. Now this is tricky, because there are times when we *shouldn't* honour our feeling of dread — after all, we follow a Saviour who took compassion on the crowds and ministered to them even in His grief and fatigue (Mark 6:30–34). But it does mean that we should be wise in how often we do that and take caution against ignoring our creatureliness. And it does mean that we should remember the Saviour who stood in our place and died for our sin — serving Him out of a place of being justified already, rather than needing to earn our status before Him (Romans 3:28).

3. An Eternal Source of Refuge

Finally, I want to ask you, reader: where is your Refuge? Your Hope? Identity? Confidence? Trust? Because it will burn you out to put your trust in your own ability to control the world rather than in God.

Is your refuge in your own ability to conquer death with life-saving medical treatments, or is it in God, the author of life who defeated death and *"brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"* (2 Timothy 1:10)?

Is it in Knowing Everything, as a medical student about to sit an exam or a consultant who likes to stay on top of all the latest literature, or is it in the God who knows every hair on our heads, and the movements of every macrophage? (Matthew 10:30, Psalm 139)


Is it in being faultless in your diagnosis and bedside manner, or is it in the faultless Lamb of God who does not turn a blind eye to our imperfection, but who absorbed the full weight of it and washed us clean through His death on the cross? (1 Peter 1:18–19)

Is it in the value and significance you have because of the letters after your name, or is it in the new name that the Son of Man has given you? (Revelation 2:17)

Is it in the refuge that you can find in busyness, or luxurious holidays, or alcohol, or pornography, or an idolatrous use of even innocuous things like Netflix and comfort food... or is it in God Himself, who is our fortress and refuge? (Psalm 91)

Because the only true and lasting place you will find refuge is in knowing the God of the Bible, and the only way to know Him is through His Son, Jesus Christ. There is a lot in this life that we can't control, and a lot of occupational factors contributing to burnout that we can campaign against, but ultimately have to live with for now. But what we *can* hold to during a life of little refuge, is the everlasting refuge we can find in God. This does not take away the tricky tension between God's sovereignty and our responsibility — trusting the God who inscribed the Ten Commandments on stone tablets with His finger doesn't mean that you don't need to take notes during ward rounds anymore, for example (Exodus 31:18). But it does mean that any action you do will stem from a quiet confidence in the God who alone can wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4).

In the end, my year away from medicine was more crisis-filled and stressful than any other year in my life – I managed to rack up 500+ points on the Holmes-Rahe scale, and make it back to my final year by the skin of my teeth. But nevertheless, I recovered, and God answered my prayers for a wider life experience, more time to read, and a deeper relationship with Him. The experience of having everything stripped away taught me to depend on God in a way I'd never had to before, and learn to find ultimate refuge in Him. I pray you have a smoother road than mine, sibling in Christ.

But I pray too, that you come to know God more richly. My brother, my sister: if you are burned out, please know that there is a life of joy waiting for you on the other side. You will be able to see in colour again. 

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Recommended resources:

- "My Burnout Prevention Plan" – Valerie Ling
 "Zeal without Burnout" – 7 keys to a lifelong ministry of sustainable sacrifice, Christopher Ash
 The Centre for Effective Living – a NSW Christian psychology practice that specialises in burnout



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Rest and Digest: The Importance of Rest for Growth and Healing

Clockwise from top left: American ginseng (Panax quinquefolium), Korean ginseng (Panax ginseng), Rhodiola (Rhodiola rosea), Siberian ginseng (Eleutherococcus senticosus). These are examples of herbal adaptogens, used for protecting against the effects of physical, biological and mental stress and promoting longevity. They also possess individual secondary actions such as antidepressant, anxiolytic, and immunomodulatory effects, and neuroprotective, antioxidant, and tonic properties.

What does it mean to “rest and digest? As a believer in Christ Jesus, herbalist and nutritionist, I would like to combine what the Scriptures teach about this topic with naturopathic principles.

Mindful Rest and Digest

As clinicians, we know the benefits of relaxation and obtaining adequate sleep. However, in striving to give our patients the best care, we often neglect the need to maintain our own health and wellbeing. When this happens over a long period of time, it can lead to “burnout”, which was found to affect almost half of physicians in clinical practice.¹ Physicians in the 45–54-year-old age group were shown to be particularly vulnerable, and this is the period where they should be most productive and financially stable. Some of the causes of burnout were excess time spent on administration and medical record keeping, long working hours and lack of respect from colleagues. Furthermore, an imbalance between effort and reward led to work dissatisfaction and dysregulation of

the hypothalamic-pituitary axis. This may explain the association between job stress and chronic illness, such as cardiovascular disease and depression.

Since work-related burnout is so prevalent and can have severe and long-term health consequences, more attention needs to be given to ways of preventing this condition. While we may not have much immediate control over our work environment, we can reduce the impact of stress on our physiology by acknowledging the need for daily rest and good sleep hygiene.

Chronic sleep deprivation can have disastrous effects on patients as well as clinicians. Chronic sleep deprivation is linked to an increase in metabolic dysfunction and weight gain, medical errors,² depression,^{3,4} heart disease⁵ and cancer.⁶ In an analysis of over 113,000 women in the United Kingdom, Body Mass Index, waist-hip ratio, waist-height ratio, and waist circumference were higher when participants slept in a brighter room at night. These changes

were found despite keeping calorie intake and daily activity levels constant. It is proposed that the rhythm of melatonin production plays an important role in metabolic function and may influence circadian-clock gene expression in the peripheral tissues.² Disruption of the normal circadian rhythm over a long time can also increase the risk of cancer by several mechanisms.⁶ For example, circadian clock components directly or indirectly regulate gene expression for nutrient metabolism, redox balance, autophagy, DNA repair, protein folding and cellular secretion. Many circadian clock proteins also physically interact with proteins involved in tumorigenesis pathways.

Physical Rest and Digest

These circadian rhythms are not only sensitive to light exposure and sleep patterns, but they also respond to changes in feeding times.⁶ Allowing our digestive system to rest overnight is just as important as restoring our minds with good sleep quality. Data from the Women’s Healthy Eating and

Living (WHEL) study of patients with breast cancer revealed that women who fasted for more than 13 hours overnight had a significantly lower risk for breast cancer recurrence compared with women who fasted for less than 13 hours overnight.⁷ A prolonged nightly fasting interval was also associated with significantly lower concentrations of HbA1c and longer sleep duration in this cohort of patients with early-stage breast cancer. A population-based case-control study in Spain reported that sleeping two or more hours after supper produced a 26% risk reduction in prostate cancer and 16% risk reduction for breast cancer compared with subjects who slept immediately after supper. A similar benefit was observed in subjects having supper before 9 pm compared with supper after 10 pm.⁸

Resting our digestive system between meals as well as overnight is critical for keeping the gut microbiome in balance. It is recommended to allow at least a 3-hour window between meals. These periods of fasting daily are vital for the effective functioning of the migrating motor complex (MMC). The MMC occurs approximately every 90–120 minutes to sweep residual debris through the gastrointestinal tract. Several studies have demonstrated that the MMC is protective against small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO).⁹

We can further optimise digestion by managing our stress levels on a regular basis. Chronic stress can alter the function of the digestive system by disrupting the communication between the brain and the gut through the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and the autonomic nervous system. It can influence gastrointestinal motor activity, gastric secretions, and emptying, all of which can cause abdominal discomfort¹⁰ and increase the risk for gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). In one study, biopsies from the lower esophagus of patients with reflux chest pain syndrome demonstrated the highest level of immune cells compared with healthy controls. These patients also rated highest in psychological scores, indicating a potential connection between stress and oesophageal hypersensitivity.¹¹ In a prospective observational study,¹² psychosocial distress was associated with symptom severity among patients who were non-responsive to proton pump inhibitors. Also, high levels of anxiety and depression may result in poorer quality of life in patients with GORD and noncardiac chest pain (predominantly

of oesophageal origin) than patients with GORD-related cardiac chest pain.¹³

Stress also impacts on the severity of symptoms and quality of life in patients with IBS. The presence of more-negatively perceived adulthood life events was associated with worse IBS symptoms and a dysregulated stress response, as shown by a decrease in adrenocorticotrophin hormone production with corticotrophin releasing factor stimulation.¹⁴ Thus, IBS patients may benefit from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to help reframe, reinterpret, or modify the impact of these negatively perceived or stressful life events on their symptoms.¹⁵ CBT may work through the autonomic nervous system, specifically via the gut-brain axis. In IBS, a reduction in parasympathetic activity and an increase in sympathetic nervous system activity is common. Stress may lead to reduced vagal tone, which

“What an abundance of inner joy and true riches awaits the believer who meditates on God’s Word daily.”

then impacts on gut motility and sensitivity, and peripheral inflammation and gut permeability. Conversely, the vagus nerve may relay information to the brain regarding the gut microenvironment.¹⁶

Spiritual Rest and Digest

As Christians, we have the privilege through the blood of Christ, of bringing all our burdens to our Heavenly Father, who hears our prayers and walks through the valleys with us. We can connect to our Creator through prayer and this has been reported as a coping strategy in the medical literature, because it “provides context and social connection, keeping a person’s perceptions of stress well managed, thereby making prayer a part of the class of significant coping mechanisms”.¹⁷ A total of 1259 nurses (96% female, 4% male) completed a demographic questionnaire and the Prayer Function Scale (PFS). Results were statistically significant for showing that female subjects, who were married, divorced, or widowed; participants with 21 years or more of experience in nursing; and those with diploma or associate degrees in nursing reported


more use of prayer for assistance, acceptance, calm and deference than the nurses from the other identified demographic groups. This confirms what we as Christians already know, but often neglect to prioritise in our busy lives. The apostle Paul encourages us to, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4: 6-7). Our Lord Jesus Himself invites us to *“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matt 11:28).

After creating the world in six days, God rested on the Sabbath. *“Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it he rested from all his work which God had created and made.”* (Genesis 2:3). We are called to keep the Sabbath holy and our children, servants, livestock and any stranger on our property are instructed to do the same (Exodus 20:8-10). I know that I often fail to honour the Sabbath by completely resting from any kind of work. However, God commands this and will reward those who keep His commandments with mercy *“from everlasting to everlasting”* (Psalm 103: 17-18).

Finally, in terms of “resting and digesting” spiritually, the person who “meditates day and night” in God’s law is compared with a tree,

“Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:2-3)

What an abundance of inner joy and true riches awaits the believer who meditates on God’s Word daily.

Let us then, dear readers, put into practice the basic principles of health that we teach our patients. These include good sleep hygiene and stress management to prevent “burnout” and chronic disease, eating a healthy diet and fasting overnight as well as in between meals. It also involves resting on the Sabbath and connecting with our Creator through prayer and meditation. In this way, we will not only benefit like a fruitful tree long term, but our patients and our colleagues will also receive the joy and peace that comes from leaning on our Lord Jesus in everything every day. 

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Finding Rest in our Hurried World

I am created in God's image.

Have you stopped to consider every aspect of this truth – that you are created in God's image? Being created in God's image has direct implications for how I live my life. That is not new information for anyone who has spent any time immersed in Scripture or engaged in corporate worship and biblical teaching. The question which comes to mind, though, is have we really thought this through as it applies to every aspect of our lives?

Recently I read a great book¹ that has shaped my thinking regarding how I view busyness and hurry, in light of being created in God's likeness. The ebb and flow of day to day and week to week calls me to reflect my godly nature and the person that God is leading me to become. What does this mean? What is the ebb and flow we observe throughout the scriptures, beginning right in the beginning?

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 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." (Genesis 2:1-3)

For me, this is an immense challenge. I work as an Emergency Physician – there is no ebb and flow, there is no "rest", it is a 24/7 job that overflows and fills my non-rostered days alongside my rostered workdays. I am also a wife, mother and daughter, a friend, a worship leader and sometimes a writer. These roles, too, can call on my time 24/7. I don't think my "brain" ever turns off – it is constantly solving, planning, processing... It is EXHAUSTING. I am exhausted.

"Jesus, himself, took time away from the crowds to rest. He recognised the need for his disciples to rest."

I have been socialised to believe that I must be busy, serving, doing, caring, to have value. Yet this flies in the face of what I know in my heart – I am created in God's image, and I am enough. No amount of doing or "not doing" can change that I am unconditionally loved by God. Added to this, God calls ME (and you) to REST. How can I learn to rest – how can I break this endless rush of life, the lack of ebb and

flow, the constant drive to busyness, the pull of social media, the artificial availability at all times of day and night, thanks to our "connected" society?

Jesus, himself, took time away from the crowds to rest. He recognised the need for his disciples to rest. *"Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'" (Mark 6:31)* Now that resonates with me – sounds like my every day – so many people coming and going, so many demands on me and my time, so easy to be pulled into feeling the need to be constantly busy and serving that I don't even take the time to eat or nourish myself. God has challenged me to hear that invitation of Jesus to his disciples – *"Come with me by yourself to a quiet place to rest"*.


God has led by example – He has instructed us to rest, He has given us, as an example, the life of Jesus which clearly demonstrates that rest should be a priority. We can't deny Jesus' "work" was important, that He had many demands on his time and gifts to offer, that He could have 'worked' 24/7 to serve those who needed him, but He chose not to. Jesus must have felt the pressure to perform – He only had a short chapter to fulfil God's

calling on His life. Yes, Jesus **chose** to seek rest and solitude. He walked away from the crowds so that He could be restored, rested, and in tune with His Father. Jesus knew that this was a necessary part of His humanity – to rest. To be courageous enough to put aside the “to do” list, the responsibilities, the “musts” and “shoulds” to be able to give the best of himself when called upon. He needed to be rested.

How can we be reminded of this truth in our day-to-day life, with our day-to-day hurry and constant distractions? One of the challenges offered up by Pastor Mark Comer, in his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*¹ was to reclaim the Sabbath as a day of rest and freedom from work and distraction. Obviously, the practicalities of how this might look are different for everyone, especially, if like me, you work a 7-day roster. However, it is worth considering. I tried it. The challenge was to turn off my mobile device – no SMS, no Facebook scrolling,

no WhatsApp, no keeping up-to-date with my daily influx of emails. I managed for most of a single Sunday, but I have not revisited the challenge. It was so very hard. Yet it gave me a peace and a time of rest and real connection with my God and my family when I didn't have the distraction of the devices and the way they act as a conduit of all the “work” that remains outstanding. This trial of “disconnection” from the world, and reconnection with the biblical “sabbath” was a stark reminder of how challenging I find it to rest, to set apart time for restoration and reconnection with God. Comer calls us to “slow down and simplify our lives around what really matters.”¹ So, it is time to ask myself, what is it that really matters? The things that really matter to me are relationships – relationship with God, relationship with my family and friends. It is certainly not constantly “doing”. How can I best be present in these relationships? I need to slow down, simplify my life, be rested, “learn the unforced rhythms of

grace.”¹ But how – how do I rest? I am still working on that, but I think it starts by recognising my busyness, slowing down, and choosing not to do things so I might have the margin to embrace rest, solitude, and time with my God. What does that look like for you?

Let me encourage you to take hold of God's promises over your life. Take hold of the words of Jesus: “*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*” (Matthew 11:28-30 *The Message*) 

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A Prayer for Those who Check Email Inboxes

As I take this moment of pause before opening my email inbox,
 I admit that I never usually do this –
 pause before checking my emails (who does that?) –
 and feel the emotions that can rise up –

anxiety (“I really don’t have time to check all these emails!”)

weariness (“Not another notice about how COVID continues disrupt our lives!”)

dread (“How many unread emails are there waiting for me now?”)

urgency (“I need to check them all!”)

frustration (“I’d rather not be checking my emails right now.”)

impatience (“Where is that reply that I’ve been waiting for?”)

It seems like the deluge of unopened emails that awaits me has a mind of its own,
 threatening to drown me with its pressure and demands.
 Lord God, you have given me capacity to handle many demands thrown at me
 but I am still only human.

I confess that my desire can be to know as much information as I can, to keep researching more, reading more –
 to know what is happening around the world, with the global network tempting me towards omnipresence,
 to satisfy my curiosity, with pride driving me on to grasp omniscience,
 or to quell my anxiety, to try to stay in control, grasping at omnipotence,

I confess that my eyes grow weary, yet the temptation remains to stay online and keep reading more, and neglect sleep or rest.

Give me wisdom to know when to stop scrolling.
 When I am anxious for a reply, remind me what I can control and what I can’t.
 When I am weary, give me reprieve.
 When I dread opening the inbox, spur me on with Your grace and strength.
 When I sense the urgency rising up into panic, remind me to take in a breath and slow down my thoughts, and submit my work to You.
 When I am impatient, grant me space to re-examine my desires and lay down my plans before You.

Help me to
 read,
 categorise,
 respond,
 and draft a reply that can be helpful,
 inviting,
 clear,
 collaborative,
 and purposeful to the human being at the receiving end,
 For their good and to Your ends,
 even by my reading, considering, typing, and replying.
 In the sovereignly gracious presence, knowledge, and strength of Christ Jesus,

Amen.

This prayer was inspired by “Every Moment Holy”, a book of liturgies for daily life written by Douglas McKelvey (www.everymomentholy.com).



Searching for Sabbath: How We Can Find Rest in the Whirlwind of Early Parenting

I sat with my friend as the kids perused their playmates with giggles and waves. Half-eaten sandwiches and hot chocolate stains were scattered across the table – a chaotic painting of parenthood.

As we talked about the future challenges we might face, my friend remarked, *“Thankfully it doesn’t happen all at once. God gives us time to enjoy and work through each stage.”*

In the following months, I appreciated the truth in this. How did we make it through the storm of sleeplessness, the initial pain of learning to breastfeed, the navigation of all sorts of advice, healthcare visits and anxieties? How can we look forward with peace knowing that everything will be ok? With every cry for help and discovery of what works, we remember the faithfulness of God.

Isaiah 41:10 says this:

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

God is faithful. He knows us; all our desires, what we can handle, and how we will react. He gives us time

that is enough, even when it seems to fly right by. The demands of early parenthood can be tiring, but the concept of keeping a “Sabbath” has never been so important and we know God makes a way for it because He loves to give rest to the weary.

Sleep?

While getting that perfect night’s sleep may not be possible with little ones, we can at least try to get some in. There is so much sleep advice available and every family will find what works for them. One big thing we have learnt is to accept and ask for help. Even an hour of someone watching the kids while we lie down or have some time to ourselves is worth it. I have often remembered, and been encouraged by these words from a past sermon: *“Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to get some sleep.”*

Be still my mind

Every day I have my plans: wake up and get ready, get the kids ready, breakfast, pre-school drop off, groceries, laundry, dishes, prepare dinner, reply to messages, organise photos. Somewhere in the whirlwind of things to do, there is a gentle voice urging me to slow down and take a moment for rest.

It is not wrong to make plans. Being organised and prepared is a necessary part of looking after a young family. However, there is a problem when my mind is constantly looking for what to do next, and when I cannot rest my racing thoughts. What about God? God who gives rest to the weary and heavy-laden, God who deserves the best and first of my attention.

Be still my mind. In the craziness of my daily schedule, I can pause to worship God. Just constant small time-outs to say *“Thank you Lord”*, to listen, hear and be refreshed in spirit. I find I get anxious when I don’t make time to pause and reset my mind. However, a simple Scripture brought to mind, or even five minutes reading a passage in the Bible can completely change my perspective on things. God’s word reminds me to cast my cares on Him, and that it is what He thinks that is most important, not what others may speak to us. God’s promises, His love and His faithfulness give rest to my anxieties and restore hope in my patterns of thought.

There is a village

Being a parent can seem lonely sometimes, but having people to support us and share the journey keeps us encouraged and refreshed. Social

support networks are well known to contribute to wellbeing. As parents, these may come in the form of family, friends, parent groups, playgroups, and other child-related music, dance and sporting communities.

Whether through long-term relationships or a fleeting contact, many people have contributed to much needed moments of encouragement and we are thankful for this. We have been grateful for practical help, prayers, words of encouragement and the simple joy of seeing smiles on faces.

When things feel overwhelming, it is good to know that others have been there before and that we are not alone. What a gift God has given in friendship and fellowship.

“Peace, I am with you”

Jumping into parenthood changed many things; priorities, lifestyle, work and the way I served at church. I reflected, observed, reasoned, feared and matured as I came to understand the heart of a parent. I realised that without trusting God, there would be no end to worry because so many things are out of human control or are

simply unknown possibilities. Sickness and tragedy could hit at any time, friendships could change and who knows what the future really holds?

“When things feel overwhelming, it is good to know that others have been there before and that we are not alone.”

With all these changes and uncertainties, the greatest thing that gives me rest in my parenting journey is the knowledge that God is with me. We all may at times feel judged, inadequate or simply overwhelmed. Yet, there is a peace that comes from knowing that God cares, that He knows all things even before they come to pass, and that He is always there and waiting to speak with us. We can pray about anything, knowing that our Heavenly Father loves us and is good to us.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

Sabbath

The hymn “Be Still My Soul” has the following verse:


*Be still my soul, thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past*

*Thy hope, thy confidence,
let nothing shake*

All now mysterious shall be bright at last

*Be still, my soul, the waves
and wind still know*

*His voice who ruled them
while He dwelt below.*

The journey of parenthood may traverse a turbulent sea but God is able to still the waves and wind. So, we remind ourselves to rest our bodies, still our minds to hear His voice, and let His peace fill our souls. 



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Why Rest is so Challenging for Children and Teenagers

The last two years in the pandemic have thrown a number of challenges to families, including how we 'do' rest. The upheaval around schools stopping and starting, parents staying at home from work, and limited contact with family and friends has disrupted our normal pattern and rhythm of life. One of the most important rhythms for our life is work and rest.

Practising as a Clinical Psychologist I have found myself a curious observer in how each family I support responds to rest with a change of study and work rhythms through the pandemic. Some families have told me it has been difficult to adjust, and that the old rules don't apply when it comes to rest and work for children and teens. Others say their experience with online learning has been so positive that they can't see a way back to the usual ho-hum of life.

What is intriguing is how our concept of what rest is, and should be, has become increasingly confused with our desire and demand for entertainment. I have rarely encountered a family that could say their child spent less time in front of a screen during the last two years. Most would say screen time has increased; many would say by some margin. Part of the difficulty in separating our work

and rest is that we use the same tools (screens) for both! This is one challenge among many for families looking to understand how to best use rest and recreation time for their children.

Defining rest isn't complicated to understand. Rest functions to help us recharge our bodies and minds from work, to enjoy God's creation, get perspective, and put work in its proper place. It is God ordained from the beginning of creation, when God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh (Gen 2:2-3). God's good idea and model isn't just for some, it is for all and without a pattern of work and rest, chaos soon takes hold.

How can we understand the challenges with rest for children and teenagers?

It can be helpful to look at the principles at play. First, just as God modelled what work and rest should look like, so parents model rest to children. In fact, our model of work and rest is likely to be imprinted, modelled and implemented in our decision making as we navigate rest for our children (Prov 22:6; Prov 29:15). The old adage "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" can be very true of parents and children with work and rest rhythms.

When work and rest rhythms are not 'in sync' it can lead to a myriad of issues, and potentially anxiety and depression.

Take, for example, the classic complaint by a child, "I'm bored, I want to watch TV." As a parent you can easily be tempted to give in to this complaint regularly. Why? In part because it seems to make life easier for us! We can focus more on what we want to do. Children are very watchful and aware of how a parent decides to work and rest. Children also very easily pick up on our habits, so when they see us spend excess time on screens they can also feel entitled to the same access. The same can be said for other habits, for example, the way we eat, activities we enjoy or the way we talk. Albert Bandura, a famous social psychologist, demonstrated the profound impact of children's ability to mirror adult behaviours through observation and imitation, even to the point of aggression.

So, in approaching what rest looks like for our child and teenagers, we need to ask ourselves first how rest looks for us. Can we overindulge in entertainment? Are we too involved in our work to spend time with our children? How do we set our priorities balancing work and rest?

Another area to consider is whether we buy into what society determines as rest or stand firm on embedding a culture in our own family that offers a different perspective on rest. It can be very easy to go along with trying to please each of our child's whims. You might often hear the catchcry, "Because [insert name] does this, I want to do that." Yet, rather than giving a simple yes or no response, it can be much more valuable to pause and notice what the driver behind the statement is.

A child's perspective is usually more black and white than ours; sometimes they just have to have something, no questions asked! This tells us they don't have the same nuance or wisdom about a situation as an adult because their brains are still developing. Yet, just like us, they want to be 'self-appointed sovereigns.'¹ 'Gaining wisdom' for children means they will need to learn to hear and follow our decisions for their good, particularly in learning the importance of authority (Exod 20:12; Prov 22:15).

Teaching wisdom as a parent also means listening to your children and discerning what they really need; not just giving children what they want, or refusing to give them anything they do want.

Learning to give in to peer pressure can put children on a difficult path to navigate normal peer pressures, eg. temptation to abuse alcohol and other drugs; or push boundaries in sexual relationships. Demands or requests from children to do something "because X does" invites parents in, giving them a window of opportunity to see what their child is really desiring and what they feel passionate about. Is their desire focused on fitting in and being accepted by others, or could it genuinely help them grow in friendship with their peers? Would you be confident this opportunity will grow relationships in a God-honouring way for them or lead them away from the truth and from friends who make wise choices?

Possibly one of the biggest barriers and challenges to rest in our world today is the temptation to "do" rest solely as an individual. We can start to genuinely believe that rest is found primarily in our autonomous desires.

Rest is used as a tool in our society to define our identity and show others who we think we are. However, it is a God-given pattern for rest to also be found in family, friends and healthy activities. In the end, none of these areas function well as the ultimate place for rest. Jesus shows us that true rest is ultimately found in him (Matt 11:28-30).

As children become teenagers, they will lean towards finding rest with friends and may believe they will find ultimate rest and identity in their peers. Parents can feel their role is limited, yet this couldn't be further from the truth.



While parental guidance and protection in teenage years does change as the child grows towards adulthood, influence persists when families continue to rest and have fun together. Whether it's sharing terrible dad jokes, sitting together for dinner, camping trips, watching basketball or soccer games, resting together grows relationships and buffers against the risk of mental health issues. More importantly, it shows and encourages children to value other-centredness in rest. This characteristic is a marker of growing maturity in faith.

Overcoming challenges through connecting in conversation


So often we think: "I need some tips and strategies to get started, so what can I put in my toolbox?" That's a common experience - part of our desire in finding solutions is to problem solve where it could improve. Often it can be more useful to consider how a humble conversation between the parent and child might look. It might be as simple as the parent saying, "I just want to find some quiet time with you; your dad and I are keen to hear

some more about what you enjoy and what you want to do. Let's catch up and talk about it." When a child or teenager presents a demand or request for rest, instead of becoming defensive and shutting down why that might not happen (if you don't like the idea), this could be an opportunity to learn more about why they want to do that.

If they are persistent about a particular activity, for example, video gaming or frequently seeing a particular group of friends it might be useful to help them think through the consequences and outcomes of choosing that one activity over every other.

Create a pros and cons list, or ask them to consider how others in the family might feel if you committed all the time in the family to helping them do what they want. Where possible, it is particularly important with teenagers to work towards a place where you can both agree on an outcome. Negotiating that autonomy can be difficult, but when teenagers feel respected by their parents it is quite

possible to agree together. This builds trust and creates opportunities for them to come more confidently to their parents both in the good times and in the difficult times when they most need a parent to speak with.²

Our world has presented many new challenges in how we rest. While the role and influence of parenting is under pressure from our changing world, the importance of a parent's role has not changed. Parents should take heart that their effort is not in vain (Prov 29:17). Those parents that desire to be faithful ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor 5:20) can stand in confidence that One far greater than them is working through every moment, rhythm and season of their child's life. 

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Working in Rural Towns: Boundaries for Healthcare Workers

Boundaries around work and home life is an issue that many can struggle with. The push for efficiency and results has kept many people at work longer and minimised other parts of life. Instead of laying down rules for how to manage boundaries, I'd like to share some thoughts about working and living as a doctor in a small town. I hope some of these principles would be applicable to everyone, and might spur you to think about your own boundaries around work and home life.

I recently completed a ministry orientation course¹ with my church in order to serve on a Sunday. Something I found helpful was the discussion on boundaries.

God has given us the gift of boundaries in creation and in the Bible, creating order from chaos, defining relationships.

Boundaries are culturally and socially determined and include spiritual, financial, physical, emotional, language, sexual and other boundaries.

We will need to cross boundaries regularly, for example speaking to a person, sending a text message, shaking someone's hand, or challenging another person's point of view. These can all be part of normal and acceptable boundary-crossing within a ministry context.

"...boundaries are something that is given to us as an example in the Bible."

Something that I had not considered before was that boundaries are something that is given to us as an example in the Bible. God laid down rules and laws for his people in order to create order and to encourage the flourishing of his people. Another thing I hadn't considered was that we have so many hard and soft boundaries that we cross everyday. Sending a message to someone crosses the space between two people, and we have social etiquettes around how we act. Boundaries are good things, and where we set them can determine how people treat us, but they don't need to dictate how we live. Instead, if we think about which lines are fixed and which are moveable then we can encourage the flourishing of ourselves and our communities.

My first experience living in the country was during medical school at the rural

clinical school. I got to experience how the boundaries around life and work were different from being in the city. The students lived in a housing complex together and we saw each other everyday at the hospital and then again at home. We got to learn each other's idiosyncrasies and hobbies like one house's fondness for home brew and one student's experimentation with hydroponic plants. Going to the local shop or restaurant meant you would probably see somebody you knew. It meant we all got to know each other pretty well. This presented opportunities for people to see what it means to be a Christian by getting to know me. It also presented me with the challenge of living like a Christian.

Something that seemed to naturally flow from so much time together was the need to have time apart and time alone. We didn't need to state our boundaries around this time as we just seemed to adjust to each other and there was ample space for us to be alone when we needed to be. When we initially moved in, we clearly stated who's rooms and parking spaces were going to be assigned during the various rotations and since everybody kept within these agreed boundaries there was little conflict.

I found living in regional towns enjoyable and rewarding both personally and professionally during medical school. Being one of only a few medical students in a smaller town gave me more opportunities to see and do things I wouldn't have been able to in the city. There was always a sense that God was directing my path to work out of the big city, and I went through the rural generalist pathway in order to become a rural GP. I didn't have a clear sense of where I wanted to end up after I became a GP, but I felt as if my time in the rural clinical school was pointing me in that direction. I enjoyed taking a sense of ownership and responsibility, and had generally been well supported by those supervising me.

My first term as a General Practice Registrar was in an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. Several of us were placed in small Aboriginal communities to work as doctors in Aboriginal health centres. The work life balance was great because the doctors would cover working hours and the nurses were on call after hours and on weekends, so fatigue was not an issue. During our orientation, we were given a cultural background to the social structures around Aboriginal culture, as well as the types of people who tend to work in remote Australia. Many social relationships had fixed ways of relating to each other. This brought a whole new dimension to living outside of the city. Moving to a remote community meant I had to find my place in a different set of boundaries.

I found working with Aboriginal people to be challenging and rewarding in equal measure. I found acceptance in the church because I was a Christian, and this gave me entry into the lives of people where others did not have access. Boundaries can hold people together as well as apart. When the most important boundary that holds people together is Jesus, every other difference becomes less important. Something interesting that seemed to happen when I entered into this seemingly rigid social structure was that they made a somewhat special category for me in their social structure. I was able to receive a skin name in their culture, but with allowances for who I was in the community and what my role was. These seemingly hard boundaries were softened for a purpose. This taught me that sometimes our social norms can change when we need them to, and that our own personal boundaries can change when we need them to.

Being one of only a few doctors in the community meant that I had to see some friends as patients. I didn't see this as a particular issue because if there were particularly sensitive issues, these patients had the choice to see another doctor within the clinic. If I did see any of my friends as patients, I would try to make sure that it was in a clinical setting with the same treatment and rules as any of my other patients. Something I was wary of was being subjective, and I would run my decisions past a colleague if I had the sense that I was not being objective.

“Moving to a remote community meant I had to find my place in a different set of boundaries.”

I now work in a rural hospital in Western Australia. The boundaries around work hours are set by an 80 hour fortnight and an on-call roster, with several other doctors helping to keep the hospital running. Social boundaries are not so set in stone, and I see patients in the local supermarket and stop to have conversations sometimes. For me, it's nice to be able to have a social as well as a medical continuity of care.

Certain boundaries should be considered by all health professionals, and some of these will need to be tempered by the circumstances that you are in. Apart from the bounds of the law and the Bible, personal boundaries should always be subject to wisdom. Below are just a few areas that boundaries can be considered, and each of us should seek out God in the ways in which we need to be seeking out His will for how we set those boundaries.

Work boundaries Time

For many of us, time seems to be the greatest resource that we can give to people. We are all given the same number of hours in the day and are bestowed with the responsibility of how to use it.

Psalm 90:12 says “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

Along with every other gift that we have, we should seek out God in how

we spend our time. Each of us will go through different seasons that have different demands on our time. In all of these periods it takes wisdom from God to know how much time we should devote to each endeavour.

Patients

Metropolitan health professionals often have a choice about how near they want to live to their patients, how involved they become in the community they practice in, and who their patients are. Even in small towns we can choose to live in a world separate from the patients we treat, only seeing them in a clinical setting and forming our own social enclaves with work colleagues. The medical culture in Australia seems to set the professional distance from a patient at an arm's length. The reasoning behind this is to protect objectivity and patient care (Good medical practice).^{2,3}

If we look at the example of Jesus as a healer - He saw everyone who came to Him, but He sometimes needed to be alone (Matt 14:13; Luke 5:16; Mark 1:35). He intentionally sought out his own people to teach and to heal but did not refuse foreigners from following him (Mark 7:24-30; Matt 8:5-13; John 12:20-26). It is natural for us to need time away from people to rest and restore ourselves. At the same time, we are sometimes called to do more than we feel capable of.

If we are to follow Jesus' example, we should not look like our non-Christian colleagues in how we interact. While it may be acceptable to stay at an arm's distance from our patients, if our conscience is not right about this we should listen and not be afraid to engage with what is uncomfortable.

Social Media

Social media is worthy of special mention and thought. Although social media can be unnecessarily time consuming and require boundaries around how much time we spend using it, we need to be careful about what we post on social media (see 'Nobody Expects the Spanish Inquisition!' - John Steenhof).^{4,5} In our current socio-political environment, AHPRA and the Medical Board have wide powers to suspend registration based on what we post on social media, and some have come to harm because of it.

Relationship boundaries

Friendship is something we all need. God created us to be in relationship with one another. In Genesis 2, the

first thing that God declares to be 'not good' is Adam being alone. We all need friendship and a sense of fellowship. In General Practice particularly, I found it often felt lonely because of the professional distance between yourself and your patients. Having friends that you can talk to about your day is important, especially when difficult circumstances around your home and work arise. Being part of a church means that you will always have a family wherever you go. If we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit and follow His leading we will receive a family here on earth and in eternity (Mark 10:29-31).

Financial

It can be helpful to think about boundaries around your finances. For most health professionals in Australia, the question will not be how much can I afford to give away but how much should I give? This question will have a different answer for everyone, but it is difficult to say you are giving away too much if you aren't giving at all. Having a church that you give to regularly is a good start. Setting aside a portion that you put aside for the needs of others around you and for those overseas can also be helpful.


Something that is easy to do is to go through the year and not think about how much you spend. I find that when I look closely and honestly at my finances that it is often emotionally draining as a process. However, looking at our budgets can be a way to honour God with what he has given. If your conscience is prompting you to give more, it might be time to have another look at your budget.

Technology

For some of us, the distinction between work and home time has been blurred due to the digital age and the ease by which we are now contactable. Telephone, email, and text messaging have made contacting people easier. COVID-19 has meant that more of us have been working from home, and the physical boundary between work and home has been lost for many. Technology has also filled our lives with potentially endless reminders, emails and constant interruption. Simple things like turning off notifications and setting times to check emails can make our lives a little bit less interrupted, but setting boundaries around when you can and can't be contacted may require some difficult thought and discussion.

Sabbath

Burn-out is something that many of us face. The realities of living in a fallen world with sin and corruption can be destructive to our souls. Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath was given to us as a day to rest and to stop work. While this may not be the cure for burn-out, it is certainly something we should think about.

A helpful boundary around work is having a day off once a week, and having time off from work for rest and recreation. Having a day off also gives us the chance to look forward to the ultimate rest we will have in heaven (Heb 4:9-10). 

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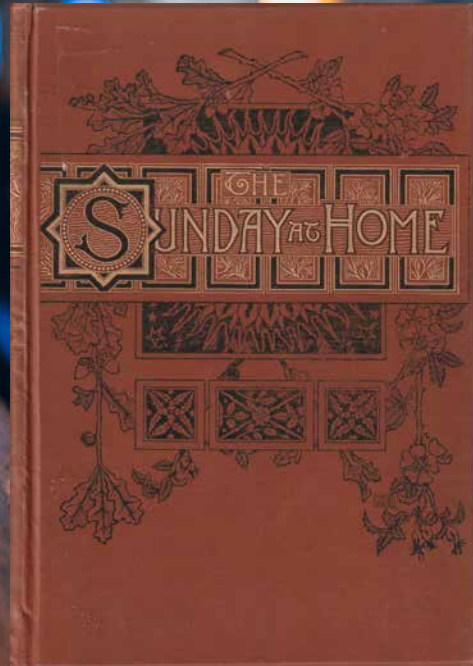
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Sabbath Observance: Is it for me?



If you are a medical professional and you want to avoid physical and mental burnout, feel strained in family relationships, or distant from the Lord, God has the answer for you. It's called 'the Sabbath', and it was made for Christians. So let's look at the basics.

Who is a 'Christian'?

A Christian is a **bearer of Christ's name**, and this comes first and foremost above all other roles we may have: doctor, dentist, nurse, parent, etc.

As such, a Christian is to be:

- **Glorifying** God. Question 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks: "What is the main purpose of mankind?" Answer: Mankind's main purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.
- **Holy**, set aside for His service. Every aspect of our lives must submit to the leadership of Jesus Christ, so that there is no compartmentalisation that places 'God stuff' in a separate box away from 'making money', 'family', 'leisure', 'career', etc. In John 15:4-5 we are told, "Abide in me, as I also abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit

unless you abide in me." In Matthew 22: 37, Jesus replies, "Love the Lord your God with *all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*"

- **Trusting God** for all needs, both spiritual and physical. Matthew 6: 28-34 tells us to, "Seek first His kingdom." When we prioritise God's kingdom and trust God, who is "the sovereign disposer of all things good for those who are in Christ Jesus"¹, He will provide all things necessary for our lives as we submit to His will. Illness, money and FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) won't have a hold on us.

What does God say about this 'Sabbath' then?

My hope is that this article convinces you that it is legitimate to apply the 'sabbath' principles to your 'Lord's Day'.

Genesis 2:1-3 "So on the seventh day He rested from all his work. 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."

God was not tired, but was setting a precedent for His creation.

Mark 2:27-28 "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The Sabbath is for our **benefit** - for spiritual, relational and physical health, but not for selfish indulgence. Though it is a day made for us, the principles of Christian living apply like any other day and there are many opportunities to appreciate God's grace.

Exodus 31:12-17 "You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy."

The Sabbath is a lasting **covenant and sign**, setting God's people apart and bearing witness to the unbelieving world that we have different priorities and trust God for our needs. It can be a powerful witness to unbelievers and to our community.²

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

Now the theme of redemption is added, pointing to the eternal rest we can expect as redeemed children of the Father.

Hebrews 10:24-25 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

We are living in times of unprecedented challenges, changes and attacks on Christianity. Now is the time for Christians to return to God and use the grace given to us to **stock up** on God's rich provisions in preparation to **give** generously.

Recently, worldwide persecution of Christians and destruction of churches has become much more prevalent. Public worship is no longer possible in much of the world. In Australia, we may not always enjoy the freedom to meet that we currently have.

Zoom is just not the same! It's hard to feel close to and meet each other's needs one to one on Zoom! We have so loved being back with our church family now that restrictions have eased. Zoom was necessary and valuable in continuing public worship during restrictions, but it has now also given some churches and individuals the opportunity to be slack in resuming physical meetings on the Lord's day, and even with Bible studies.

Matthew 11: 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Although it may not be fashionable to do this, I urge you to read your Creator's instruction manual, the Bible. He made us and He knows what things are good for us. Rest is one of them.

Isaiah 58: 13-14 "...if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD"

The Sabbath should be **a delight**, approached with an attitude of gratitude.

Romans 6:11-18 "...you are not under the law, but under grace...." (read the rest of Romans 6 as it is very helpful)

We are indeed not 'under the law' in regards to our salvation because Jesus perfectly kept the law for us, but in regards to godly living, His ten commandments are a prescription for living that honours Him and respects others. Keep in mind these commandments were given to the Israelites while they **were** His people

"In Australia, we may not always enjoy the freedom to meet that we currently have."

(not to **become** His people), and to prepare them for the Promised Land, as we are also being now. Keeping the Sabbath is not a legalistic requirement. If we think it is, we're missing the whole point of the gospel.

Putting 'Sabbath' into practice

Well, what about putting this into practice for medical professionals or spouses of the same?

We live busy lives and are probably more prone to burnout than most other professions. Putting into practice what it is to be His children and what He says about the 'Lord's Day' can be a challenge but one with both temporal and eternal benefits.

The first and most vital part of the day is **corporate worship**. It is most easily accessible on Sundays and should be a high priority. Attending church gives an anchor to the day. Public worship is a privilege, a command, and a reminder to rest in His finished work. It rightly ascribes glory and majesty to the King of kings.

God speaks to us through the preaching of His word for our eternal good. Believers have been freed from the law by Christ who fulfilled it. As such, we can set aside a day of rest with hearts thankful to God. We can acknowledge dependence on his faithfulness while anticipating the full rest of God's presence in heaven.³

Families - If you have children, the day also lends itself to a particular time for teaching our children. We might perhaps do this in a more relaxed setting, sharing about God's goodness in the history of the world, and in our personal journey of walking with Him. In

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 we are instructed to "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Rest from usual activities and concerns. This is the hard part.

In regards to paid work, medical people work in an essential service area, so there will be times when you have to work. However, this is different from actively seeking Sunday work when you don't have to. A serious pandemic in our society occurs when teenagers in Christian families enter the workforce. The type of jobs typically available to them frequently involves Sunday. This has the potential for fragmenting family worship and adding to marginalisation of church attendance.

Rest from usual weekly activities can be a grey area. We need to at least minimise chores on the Lord's Day and not get stressed about things that we feel must be done. This includes housework, shopping⁴, organised sport⁵ and even some leisure activities. We will find that some things can be put off, or with better preparation for the day, can have been done earlier.

I must say here that one of my passions is to challenge students with this: that they don't need to study seven days a week. God has ordained you to rest one day a week (at least). If you honour Him in this, He will honour you. Ask yourself, do you really need to study Sundays? What is study keeping you from doing on the Sunday that's more in line with God's priorities and will benefit you and the community of saints? I'm not a super Christian, nor particularly smart, but throughout my seven years of university I rarely did any Uni work on a Sunday. When I moved from country Victoria to Sydney to study, I was 'adopted' by a family from a small church and spent the day with them, usually attending church twice and getting involved in various church outreach programs. I don't think I ever failed a Monday exam because I didn't study Sunday (but I did study hard the other days!).

Sunday rest often requires some preparation during the week. This can reduce pressure to fill the Sunday with jobs that could have been done through the week. Could you have done that assignment through the week to

keep Sunday free? Don't stay out late on Saturday night so that all you do is sleep on Sunday, including during the sermon (a common malady that I've observed).

If you are struggling with issues in this regard, or in doubt about what is acceptable activity on the Sunday, apply the motivation test: *"Is this activity primarily for my selfish benefit or will it glorify God as it fits in with His overall direction for Godly living?"*


PRAY, ask God for clarification of His desires for you and your family and the HOLY SPIRIT **will** guide you!

Keeping the Sabbath has consequences:

- There are all the obvious **positive** things I've already mentioned, primarily that we are being obedient to God's will.
- There may be **losses** in terms of lost income, opportunities, meeting with family and friends etc. but keep in mind that godly living involves sacrifice.
- Less secular involvement in sport or other leisure activities may be difficult, particularly for kids. These things are not bad in themselves but can usurp more important things, especially on Sundays.

In summary

The believer, knowing he or she has been freed from the law by Christ, who has indeed fulfilled it, can set

aside a day of rest with a heart of thankfulness to God and acknowledge His faithfulness while anticipating the full rest of God's presence in heaven. This day of rest in this context is a great source of assurance and hope for the believer as he or she navigates life in a still sin-scarred world and looks forward to when all things will be made perfect. 

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
(Romans 15: 13)

References:

1. John Wesley c1800
2. Some years ago while on holidays, we dropped in at a friend's oyster farm on a Sunday. Some people were working in the next shed and told us, "Those people are Christians so they're never here on Sundays."
3. I'll just mention something that I have noticed over the years. Students who come from other places to a city to study, often gravitate towards Uni churches, which is understandable. Having been part of a few smallish churches over the years, young students attending these churches can be a blessing and greatly blessed by the fellowship of a wide age range church, including older saints, rather than where all the other students are going. Please give it some consideration if you're in that situation.
4. My wife Anna and I have always tried to avoid any shopping on Sunday, not so much because we are causing other people to work (they carry their own responsibility), but again to set the day apart and not let it become a day

which we fill up with leftover tasks from the week. Such tasks have a habit of snowballing so that corporate worship can be relegated to an *'if there's time left'* activity.

5. Sunday sport is another way in which pursuing Christian rest and fellowship can be seriously compromised. The secular world cares nothing for pursuing godliness and Sunday is a prime day for organised sport, especially for kids. Kids' sport is a minefield which can be very damaging to family and church involvement. This is something we tried hard to avoid as much as possible when our kids were at home. To be blunt, we need to ask ourselves the question, *"What's more important, our kids' souls or sporting prowess?"* Fortunately, there are Christian sporting associations that play during the week and hold matches on Saturdays for that reason (though *"Christian"* sportsmanship is sometimes lacking!).

Other Bible passages for study:

Exodus 31:12-17

Sign of the covenant

Deuteronomy 5:12

Remember you were slaves

Psalms 92

It is good to praise the Lord

Isaiah 66:22-24

Come and bow before me

Jeremiah 17:22-27

Consequences of disobedience

Matthew 12:3-8

Something greater than the temple is here

Galatians 3:10-14

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Do not put your hope in wealth but in God who richly provides

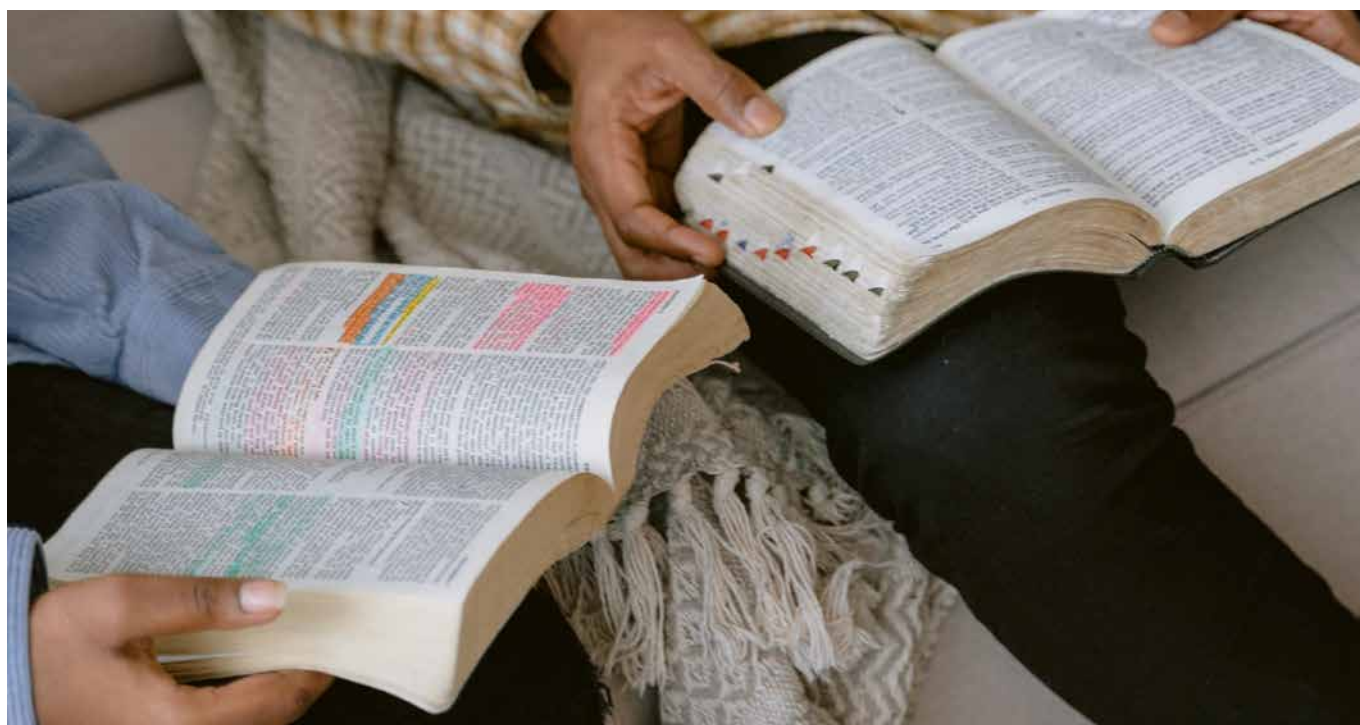


Photo by Tima Miroshnichenko from Pexels



Photo by Ivan Samkov from Pexels



Rest and Relaxation: A Gastroenterologist's Perspective

Much has been written about burnout among health professionals, especially during the last two years. While many workplaces focus on resilience training of staff, the counter-argument has been that employers should instead seek to improve working conditions rather than shift the onus onto the employee, indirectly implying that burnout is a consequence of personal weakness or a lack of resilience.

Indeed, burnout is not simply fatigue from working too hard, but actual injury to the morale (moral injury) from not being able to deliver what one believes is the right thing to do for the patient due to circumstances beyond one's control.

Although the topic of burnout itself is beyond the scope of this article, I would nevertheless like to share here some of my thoughts on rest and relaxation.

What is rest? In a strictly physical sense, it is the absence of motion. While it is easier to bring the physical body to a complete rest, it is not so easy to bring the mind to rest. In this regard, mindfulness training, meditation and such practises have become very popular. However, mindfulness and yoga are not the answers to burnout. It

is not simply resting the body and mind that is the answer because burnout is not the same as tiredness from overworking.

Is there a spiritual perspective on rest? This brings us to the concept of rest in Genesis. Was God tired after creation and needed a good day of rest? Does God get tired and need relaxation? Why was there a rest day?

I wonder if that was a hidden message delivered to us through Moses. Stop, pause and reflect. Look at what you have done so far and pat yourself on the back for getting through life one week at a time. There can also be rest stops at the end of every day, or even several times throughout the day to stop, pause, reflect and pat yourself on the back.

Relaxation on the other hand is much more than rest. Some people relax by going for a long run or doing a vigorous gym workout. Others relax by sleeping on the couch or binge-watching their favourite TV shows. My idea of relaxation is doing something creative such as singing, piano, guitar, cooking and drawing digital art on my iPad.

I am a gastroenterologist and take great pride in my procedural skills, hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills.

A few years ago, I started taking piano lessons. I realised that learning piano as an adult is hard. I get bored very quickly with exercises and practising scales. I want to play a song and make music. So instead of usual music books, I take lessons in playing hymns and choruses.

There are many hymns and choruses that are part of my childhood memories and college life in Christian Medical College, Vellore. Playing these songs on the piano takes me back to those good times; it is my time of prayer and meditation (as I don't have the discipline to read the Bible or pray daily).

All of this was very relaxing, but what was more amazing was when I realised that my endoscopy skills were getting better from learning the piano. That is just one example of a recreational activity that has helped me rest, relax, uplift my spirit while also benefiting my work life as well.

How do you relax? Have you been able to relax in a way that has also benefited your work or life in a way that you didn't expect?



BOOK REVIEW

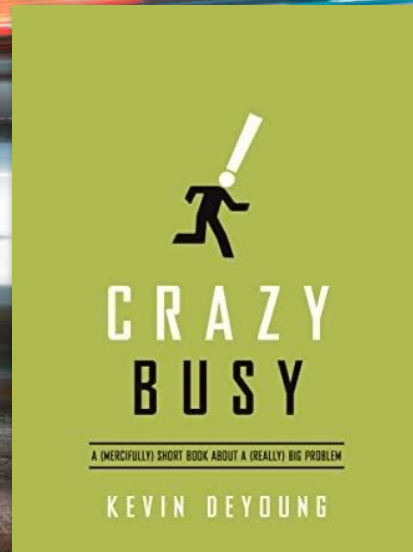
Dr Olivia McGrath

Dr Olivia McGrath is currently a resident at Eastern Health in Victoria. Whilst she would love to become a physician, she is keen to go wherever God takes her and wherever she can glorify Him the most.



Crazy Busy by Kevin DeYoung

A (Mercifully) Short Book about
a (Really) Big Problem



It's perhaps ironic that it took graduating medical school and being assigned this review to finally read *Crazy Busy* by pastor Kevin DeYoung after it was given to me by a friend over three years ago. Maybe that's also why it didn't resonate as strongly as I had hoped it would. For I, like many other health professionals, have likely been busy since secondary school and learned over time to prioritise by necessity. To me, this was DeYoung's central message: prioritise.

Nevertheless, over a few summer evenings nearing the end of my internship, I read this short book covering a biblical approach to busyness. During COVID times, when many extracurricular activities have been abruptly stopped, to me, these past two years have provided a greater insight into a hectic schedule than this book. Maybe it's an unfair time for me to critique it.

It's a hard topic to tackle, I'll give DeYoung that. He emphasises that everyone needs to come to terms at some point in their life with what's important – to consider how many hours of the day have passed where nothing productive, nor worthwhile, nor Spirit-filled was done when mindless scrolling could've been swapped out for family time, reading emails for a book, housework for a walk, or, ultimately, anything for

prayer, reading the Bible, and growing in our relationship with God. We're left with the age-old question, what deserves our time?

He does well to incorporate biblical examples of work and rest. As such, most of what is written could be found from reading the Bible. But the Bible is, I'll admit, a difficult read, so it's helpful to have a succinct reminder. I also found it helpful to appreciate just how many times Jesus leaves his company for solitude and prayer and when He doesn't heal *just one more* but knows when to move onto another town. DeYoung states what I believe many health professionals need to hear:

"You are unique. Your gifts are important. But you're not irreplaceable."


"You're only indispensable until you say no."

However, he extends his exegesis to imply that the busyness of us *mere mortals* is always wrong, whilst Jesus' busyness during his three years of ministry was holy and blameless, for, well, He's God. I didn't quite appreciate this black and white view. It's like when people argue that we can never be angry, but Jesus flipped tables, for well, of course He could, He's God!

Yes, Jesus may not have procrastinated, and His mission was directly from God, but DeYoung's argument was too simple and lacked

nuance in comparing us to Jesus. Likewise, he looks to the past with rose-coloured glasses, suggesting our modern world with its technology and multitasking is pulling us further from God, again avoiding the opposing view of the increased productivity and interaction that can arise.

A final flaw comes with his somewhat paradoxical ending. At the turn of the final page, this book left me feeling like I needed to do more – to join a choir, volunteer at church, and cook for my family. Anything to make my life more fulfilling and glorify God. I know this wasn't the book's aim – DeYoung quotes author Tim Kreider with a gem, a lie with which we convince ourselves: *"Obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day."* I'll be honest, I've fooled myself into that thinking more than once.

Again, maybe I'm aching for more in my life than just work thanks to the pandemic. I am craving variety, relaxed socialising with friends, and to be able to contribute to our globalised world. Going into 2022, this book may become more relevant, and I'll have to reread it. Overall, though, it's a reminder to find a Godly balance. To anyone who restlessly rests at either extreme – being too busy or too idle – I would recommend this book. 

BOOK REVIEW

Dr Catherine Hollier

Dr Catherine Hollier is a part-time GP in Newcastle who loves to have time for both clinical and ministry work. She is a firm advocate for regular rest and loves reading and jigsaw puzzles, especially if she is in sight of a beautiful view!



Sensible Shoes by Sharon Garlough Brown

At the height of the pandemic, after 18 months of lockdown, I desperately needed a holiday. Thankfully, this coincided with our annual seaside family trek to Crescent Head. It was then that I picked up a book I had heard much of, and was entranced...

Sensible Shoes, by Sharon Garlough Brown, is the first of a tetralogy following the lives of four Christian women who meet at a spiritual retreat. I have never read a Christian novel before, and found it fascinating. I could identify with various traits of the characters, and it gave me several reasons to stop and pause to reflect on my own life. Before long, I was scribbling in the margins and dog-eared the pages to come back to – only briefly halted when I remembered it was a borrowed copy! I soon decided I would buy a replacement and use this as my own.

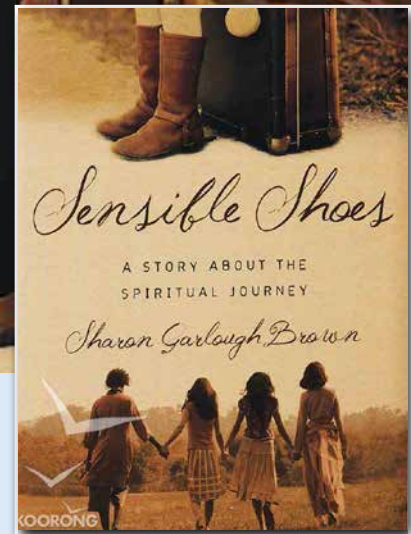
The theme of the book through the story, is to introduce us to various spiritual disciplines to create space to encounter God – “where we can be deeply touched and changed by God’s extravagant love for us.”

Several spiritual practices are described including breath prayers, labyrinths, lectio divina, images of God, timelines, a daily examen, wilderness prayers, putting myself into the story, self-examination and confession, and rule of life. Some of these I had heard of, others were new to me. Without necessarily endorsing each of these, they nevertheless gave me a chance to “taste and see that the Lord is good”. Most involved a slow review of Scripture, seeing what God reveals of himself, and contemplating my response to Him. The questions raised were penetrating and thoughtful.

As well as outlining these ideas, the characters are generally realistic and flawed. Although at times the writing was a little forced, there was much to resonate with: different ways that I relate to God – different perspectives from within each character to see faults in myself, and the stories I might tell myself to whitewash my motivations as ‘righteous’. Sharon gently peels away the carefully constructed masks and nurtures each vulnerable character into facing a righteous God who cares and loves them as they are, redeemed by Jesus. She does not tie up each conundrum and resolve it neatly, but leaves some relationships open, tense and unresolved, much as in real life.

Garlough Brown has obviously put a lot of thought into the series, touching on many differing life circumstances. She includes singleness, widowhood, death, overzealousness, perfectionism, childlessness, divorce, marriage to a non-Christian, second marriage, step-children, love, duty, obedience, unbelieving children, and so on. I loved how she used the names of the characters to reflect something of their story, much as the Bible often does. She also knows how to deliver a literary turn of phrase to describe events and people, eg. “Charissa’s mother had once cautioned John about her daughter’s power to bring her own weather system into a room.” Evocative stuff!

Sensible Shoes prompted me to consider God many more times through the day, by being prompted to “stay with what provokes you”, slow breathing and stopping to remember God intentionally. The exercises pushed me past a superficial reading of Scripture to consider how knowing God and His character would change my understanding of Him and from that, the way I live.



It took me several days to finish the first book, pondering and reviewing my own life along the way. There were pros and cons to this – it did make my mind very busy in a time I wanted to rest and rejuvenate; but it was nevertheless refreshing. I do admit being pleased in reading the following three books that there was less self-reflection, and more story, so that I could enjoy the remainder of the series without quite so much intensity!

Over the following term, I worked sequentially through each of the various practices in the first book, giving myself much food for thought in contemplating God, and being changed in light of that. Several of my friends have also been reading this series and we have enjoyed sharing different insights gained.

Interestingly, there is a local artistic Christian couple who run retreats at their property at Fosterton¹ who are planning a Christ-centred retreat with our group using similar spiritual ideas. Maybe there is something similar near you?

Written as it is, through the stories of four women, this book series is likely to resonate more with women than men. I thoroughly recommend it to anyone who loves to read novels, but who also appreciates a gentle mirror being used to reflect on our response to God through many circumstances. Enjoy!

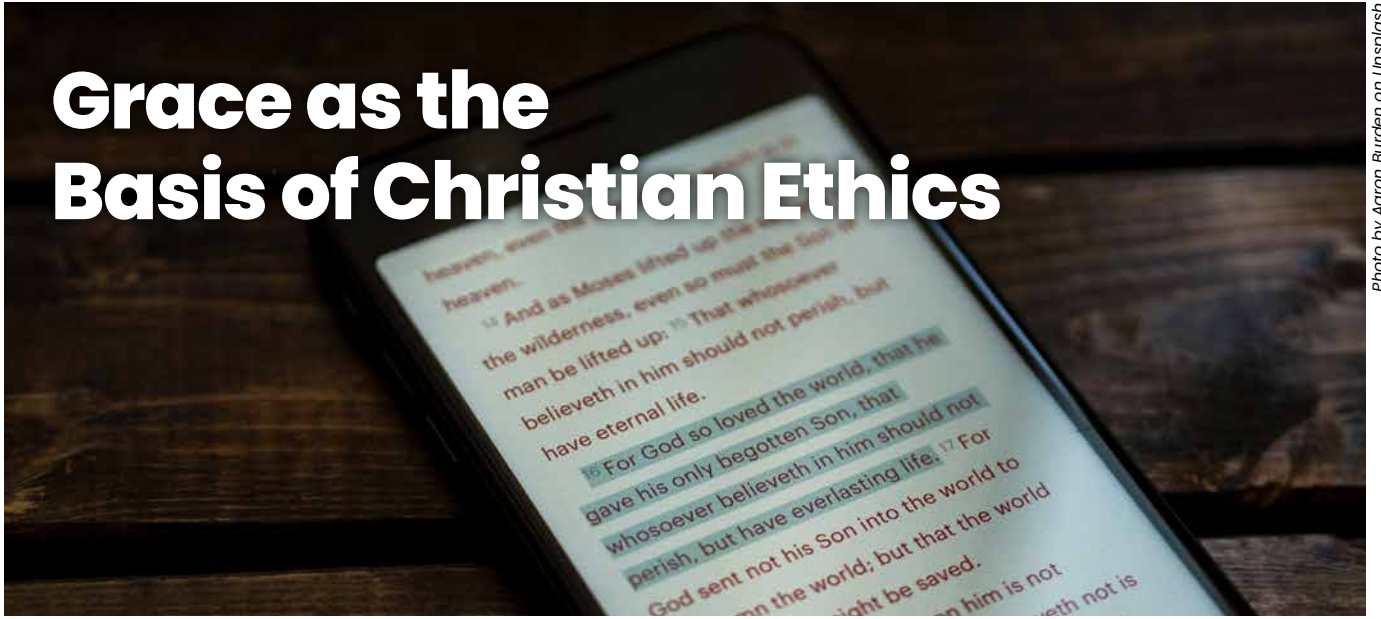


References:

1. <https://www.fostertonretreat.com.au/retreats-1>



Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash



Grace as the Basis of Christian Ethics

What would it be to start an essay on ethics with grace? Think of Dr Luke's story of Zacchaeus, the short rich chief tax-collector, who famously climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of the Carpenter of Nazareth, the radical rabbi who had captured the imagination of outcasts.

What was it like to be frustrated from seeing in the crowd, because you were short? What was it like to run on ahead, to climb the tree, and watch the crowd go past underneath, thronging the Master? What was it like to see the Master stop under the tree and invite himself as your guest to your home? What cleanliness rules did the Master break with this behaviour? Thus a cheat and a traitor was confronted by sheer unadulterated goodness. The narrative is stark, but as a result of that transforming encounter, Zacchaeus offers half his possessions to the poor, and promises to repay fourfold anyone whom he had cheated. In the face of criticism for being a guest of a sinner, the Master proclaims that Zacchaeus has been saved and that he is included with the sons of Abraham. The Lord concludes with his famous aphorism, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." (Luke 19:10).

Every Christian has had a transformative encounter like Zacchaeus'. As a young lad I learnt of the overwhelming love of God in Christ that accepted me just as I was, and that inspired me to live out that love. There have been many embarrassing occasions where I have failed to live up to those ideals, but the Divine Grace is constant and inspires me

to continue to walk in the footsteps of the Master healer.

Charles Taylor somewhere in his massive tome, *A Secular Age*, describes the challenge of getting people to conform to the Modern Moral Order. There are two big questions. *Why should I conform?* – this is a question of motivation – why must I do the right thing? Secondly, *how can I conform?* – a question of ability, of power, of moral strength, to do the right thing. Many moral theories struggle with both of those questions, but for followers

"Thus a cheat and a traitor was confronted by sheer unadulterated goodness."

of the Master, St Paul's comment drives both questions, "The love of Christ constrains, or urges us" (2 Cor 4:14). Therefore we live, not to ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us. *Why should I? Because Christ loves us. How can I? Because the love of Christ inspires us, and the Spirit of God empowers us.* This is quite a different set of ethics from rules-based, or virtue-based, or consequentialist-based ethics. It is relational and self-aware: *I have been touched by grace, I will live by grace, and I will live graciously.*

Grace reminds us that we are broken. Grace stops us judging. George Berkeley summarises it well:

"Nothing softens the arrogance of man's nature like a mixture of some frailties; it is by them we are told, we must not strike too hard upon others, because we ourselves do so often deserve blows. They pull our rage by the sleeve, and whisper gentleness to us in our censures, even when they are rightly apply'd."

The story of Jesus is told in a particular context, namely the context of the disapproval and judgmentalism of the scribes and Pharisees whose rules-based self-righteousness blinded them to the goodness of Christ. They had condemned Zacchaeus as a man not fit enough to be associated with.

The contest between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees is not trivial; it cost Jesus his life. For Jesus, there is something very evil about the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. It was judgmental and graceless. It was hypocritical and could not empower change. Mostly however, it is malignant. It is prepared to kill in the name of God to stifle dissent. In Luke 15, Jesus tells the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost sons directly against the gracelessness of the scribes and Pharisees. Further, Jesus in his story of the Pharisee and the Tax collector contrasts self-righteousness and shame (Luke 18:9-14). Dr Luke introduces the story saying that the story was told against those who trusted in themselves that they are righteous and regarded others with contempt. The tax-collector who confessed his sin and pleaded for mercy from God went home from the temple justified,

whereas the self-righteous Pharisee was left within his own sense of importance before God, blind to his parlous plight. It is interesting that only our colleague Dr Luke tells these stories. Does the medical profession have special insight here? Or did these stories arise because Luke was a close companion of Paul?

The apostle Paul was very conscious of where he had come from. He was a strict Pharisee and a former persecutor of the church, driven by the same murderous self-righteousness that killed Jesus before he saw the light. He declares very clearly that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom he is the foremost (1 Timothy 1:12-15).


Is there then no righteousness with Christ? On the contrary, Matthew makes it clear that the righteousness of Christ

is far superior and qualitatively different from that of the Pharisees (Matt 5:17-20). It has integrity, is not hypocritical, it is inward as well as behavioural, and it cares for the broken and the rejected. It empowers the dispirited. It seeks out the lost and brings them home.

St Paul contrasts the flawed legalism of the Pharisees (and of his former life) with life in the Spirit. That life cannot be legislated, but its fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are the true markers of an ethical Christian life. FF Bruce remarked on this passage, “*You cannot grow apples by act of parliament*”. Attempts to impose a Christian ethic from the outside will come to nothing. It has to arise from within.

What are the implications for us a

Christian doctors and dentists? For me as an addiction physician, such a gracious ethic motivates me to accept my patients where they are, and inspires me to provide care to those who are on the edge of society. It teaches me to be careful not to judge and condemn, but to seek to come alongside, to listen, to try to understand – not just the behaviours, but the context within which those behaviours occur. To do so is costly. It lays us open to criticism. In doing so we follow the footsteps of the Master who sat with people conventional society would despise.

As we in the CMDFA and the ICMDA seek to explore a Christian ethic, may we be very conscious that we are walking in Christ’s footsteps, guided by His Spirit, and live out His ethic. 

Georgina Hoddle (RN)

Georgie is a registered nurse with experience in orthopaedics and trauma, ageing and disability. She currently works for a Federal Government accredited agency in COVID-19 prevention. Georgie is the Vice President of Nurses Christian Fellowship Australia and trains Christian healthcare workers to be witnesses to Jesus Christ through the Saline Process. She is also co-author of the new course *Spiritual Care for Australian Nurses (SCAN)*, endorsed in 2021 by the Australian College of Nursing.



VALE

Rev. Ian Johnston


(June 1948 – 30 Dec 2021)

Reverend Ian Johnston was a dear friend of the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship (CMDFA) in Newcastle. He was often encountered at local meetings, the Hunter Christian Health Professionals (CHPN) Prayer Morning and Saline Process events, as well as his paid position in the Presbyterian Chaplaincy at John Hunter Hospital. Over the years, staff members and other chaplains regularly met with him in the hospital canteen on a Tuesday for fellowship, counselling and prayer. An encounter with a patient has been documented by Ian in prose, entitled “Ode to a Farmer’s wife”.¹

Ian was also an affiliate member of Nurses Christian Fellowship Australia (NCFA) and spoke at a workshop on *Healing and Wholeness in a Broken World* a few years ago. His generous spirit and humility were also evident during the Saline Process Witness Training he attended in February 2019.

Although his life had humble beginnings in country NSW, his conversation was richly peppered with events and stories of his life-long adventure with God – from country Australia to the Arctic circle. On 8 January 2022, more than 150 people gathered at the Hunter Christian Church to celebrate the life of this man of God. More than a thousand people have viewed the live stream

video through Facebook. Ian’s faith and humour, as well as the wonderful family he and wife Rosie have raised with Jesus’ love at the centre, will live on.

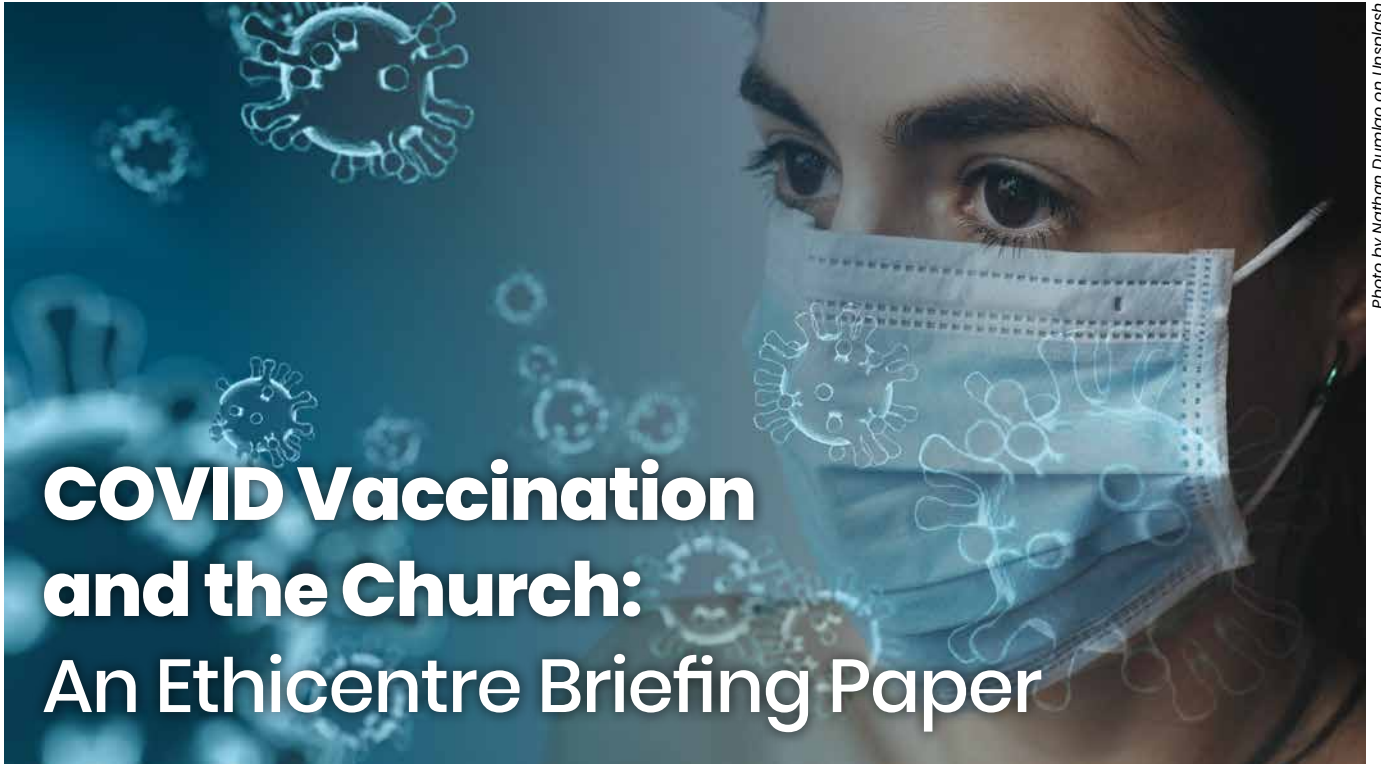
Ian’s last message to us was this: “But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned to me by the Lord Jesus – the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God” Acts 20:24 (NLT). 

References:

1. “Ode to a Farmer’s Wife” – Luke’s Journal 2020 | Ageing Gracefully | Vol.25 No.3 <https://lukesjournalcmdfa.com/2020/12/09/poem-ode-to-a-farmers-wife-ian-johnston/>



Photo by Nathan Durmiao on Unsplash



COVID Vaccination and the Church: An Ethicentre Briefing Paper

The recent announcement by the Australian government that increased freedoms would be available to citizens who were double vaccinated for COVID-19, or have exemption on medical grounds, has caused significant consternation in the Christian community. Issues of conscience and concerns about exclusion have been raised as reasons why such measures should not be introduced.¹ This paper has been written to consider how Australian churches should respond.

Why we use vaccinations

There is no doubt that vaccination can be an effective public health strategy to curb the spread of infection. We each have a God-given immune system that constantly protects us against infections. As we are exposed to a disease, our immune system naturally works to both defeat it and provide us with immunisation against a future attack. However, diseases such as COVID-19 can be life-threatening or leave us with serious health problems. Prevention is always a safer option. Vaccination can help us avoid or reduce severity of future infection. Vaccines trigger our immune systems to respond and develop immunity to that disease, without having to actually experience it.

Safety and efficacy

The COVID-19 virus is a new virus with new vaccines. Rare but serious adverse events associated with vaccine use have been reported: blood clots for the Astra Zeneca vaccine and cardiac problems with Pfizer. Early recommendations restricting the use of the Astra Zeneca vaccine were based on a risk-benefit calculation for the individual, a calculus which changed when the Delta variant of COVID-19 appeared. The Delta variant is highly transmissible, estimated to be 60% more transmissible than previous variants.² In light of this new situation, COVID-19 vaccines are a safe and highly effective way to avoid serious illness, hospitalisation and death.² The revision highlights one of the problems in this conversation – the constantly changing landscape as more is learnt about COVID-19 and its management, leading to changes in health advice,

“...vaccines are a safe and highly effective way to avoid serious illness, hospitalisation and death.”²

which can be seen as contradictory and confusing when in fact it is a commitment to keep up to date. This has led to some citizens being unsure of which authority to trust when it comes to health advice.

But we now have solid evidence of the impact of COVID-19 vaccines from research involving millions of participants. Double vaccination has many proven benefits.³ It:

- Significantly reduces the risk of catching the virus
- Reduces the likelihood and severity of symptoms if you do catch it
- Makes hospitalisation 73% less likely
- Reduces the risk of developing Long COVID by 49%

However, while the rate of infection among those who are fully vaccinated is low, risk of infection still remains, especially with increasing age.⁴ Therefore it is important to know how vaccination impacts transmission of the virus. In fact, vaccinated people are much less likely to pass on the virus: double vaccination reduces the chance of onward virus transmission by 40–60%.⁵ The reason for reduced onward transmission is that there is significantly less virus detectable in vaccinated people.⁶

In summary, vaccination protects not only yourself, but those around you.

The goal of community vaccination programs is to achieve herd immunity. Herd immunity works through achieving sufficient population immunity that the transmission chain of a disease is broken. This protects the community from infection. While research is ongoing, it is calculated that 70–90% vaccination will be required to achieve herd immunity.⁷

Why vaccine passports

In a liberal society, restrictions imposed by the state on an individual's liberty are justified only to prevent harm to others (rather than harm to ourselves). Unvaccinated individuals present a risk to society by being more likely to get infected and thereby infect others, possibly overburdening the health system and preventing others from accessing care (as is currently a concern in NSW). In the attempt to achieve herd immunity, incentives and disincentives for vaccination against COVID-19 have been widely discussed.⁸ One idea that has been proposed is a system of vaccine passports, similar to those which have been introduced in many countries.⁹ The idea behind a vaccine passport is that you cannot justify restriction of a vaccinated person's liberty as they do not pose sufficient harm to others.

Vaccine Passports and Christian gatherings

For Christians a major concern raised by the introduction of vaccine passports is the question of whether double vaccination should be a requirement for attendance at a church meeting.

A duty to gather?

A biblical text frequently cited in connection with this discussion is the exhortation in Hebrews 10:24–25: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Several observations about these verses should be borne in mind as we consider their relevance to the present discussion:

(i) The situation being addressed in the letter to the Hebrews is not one in which the readers have found themselves temporarily prevented from holding large, face-to-face

gatherings. Its challenge is not to believers who are conscientiously minimising health risks by complying with a public health order; it is to believers who are growing slack in their care for one another and shrinking back from publicly identifying with Christ and his people.

(ii) The reference to "meeting together" in verse 25 is grammatically subordinate to the primary exhortation in verse 24: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds." Its function within the sentence is to unpack what it will look like for the readers to obey the primary exhortation. It would be ironic in the extreme if we were to seize on the words about meeting together and use them as a justification for rushing back prematurely (and without vaccination) into face-to-face gatherings, without giving careful consideration to the "love and good deeds" we are meant to be spurring each other on toward.

"Unvaccinated individuals present a risk to society by being more likely to get infected..."

(iii) The kind of "meeting together" that the verse encourages as a vehicle for mutual encouragement does not necessarily require large, weekly, extended, indoor gatherings. There are other ways in which we can fulfil the purpose of the exhortation in this verse.¹⁰

Nevertheless, it is true that face-to-face presence with other believers is basic to how the Christian life is normally to be lived, and Christians who are physically separated from one another will long to gather in person as soon as the circumstances that prevent it can be overcome. In our current context, this gives us as Christians a further motivation to embrace the opportunity of vaccination, if that will help to create the conditions under which such gatherings will be safe and legal.

Conscientious objections

For a small number of vaccine-hesitant Christians, the objection to vaccination is a conscientious one,

arising from the fact that the process of developing some vaccines involved the use of cell lines derived from human fetuses electively aborted decades ago. The use of fetal cell lines in pharmaceutical research is certainly a matter that ought to be of concern for Christians. Nevertheless, there are good reasons why Christians who place a high value on all human life should support rather than oppose the use of the vaccines currently available for COVID-19, none of which contain fetal cell tissue or contribute in any direct way to the destruction of fetuses in our own time.

¹¹The conscience of those who remain unpersuaded by those arguments should be respected, but respecting a person's conscience does not automatically confer on them a right to act in a way that endangers the health and safety of others.

Non-conscientious objections

Other Christians (and other members of the broader community) resist vaccination for a variety of other reasons, including anxiety about the vaccines' extremely rare side-effects or scepticism about expert opinion, government policy or the motives of the pharmaceutical industry. Objections of this nature may be firmly held, but in most cases they are not of the sort that should rightly be described as matters of conscience.¹²

Questions for Christian leaders and congregations

In the COVID-19 era, churches will be aiming to be inclusive, respectful of conscientious convictions, and safe for all those who attend. Given the current state of our knowledge about the vaccine and assuming levels of community transmission and hospitalisation that are within the capacity of our health system, it is reasonable to anticipate that there will soon be a time when opening our churches to those who are double vaccinated will be unproblematic. But what about those who are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons, or the children in our church communities who are too young to be vaccinated? What about those who object to vaccination for conscientious reasons, or because they distrust the experts, the authorities or the pharmaceutical industry? And what about the frail and sick members of our church family, for whom infection still poses a serious risk even after vaccination?

Biblical principles

What biblical principles apply as we seek to address questions such as these?

1. Love our neighbours (Mark 12:31):

In the absence of any convincing argument to the contrary, accepting vaccination should be strongly encouraged as a way to reduce the duration and severity of the pandemic, lessening risk of illness and death, the stress of lockdowns and the strain on our healthcare system. It is an obvious and practical way in which Christians can obey God's command for us to love our neighbours.

2. Obey our leaders (Romans 13:1):

Our government has a legitimate, God-given responsibility to protect the safety of its citizens and safeguard the interests of the most vulnerable. It is not overstepping the boundaries of its mandate if it requires religious groups to install smoke detectors in their buildings, obtain WWCC clearances for their staff and volunteers, or observe public health regulations to restrict the spread of a pandemic. There are situations in which our duty as Christians to love God and seek the good of our neighbours may require us to stand in civil disobedience against an unjust law, but it would be a rare situation indeed in which conscience required us to disobey the public health measures put in place by a democratically elected government.

3. Respect the consciences of others (Romans 14):

Those whose are genuinely convinced that it would be morally wrong for them to accept the vaccine should not be coerced into sinning against their conscience. But conscientious objection usually comes at a cost of some sort and the safety of the most vulnerable members of the church and the wider community should not be held hostage to the desire of others to do as they please, irrespective of government health orders or the risk to others.

4. Prioritise the weakest and most vulnerable (1 Corinthians 12:21–26):

In both our duty to the wider public and our care for the congregation with whom we gather, we are to prioritise the needs of the weakest and most vulnerable. This is the case even when (and perhaps especially when) they do not have a loud voice of their own to broadcast their opinions and lobby for their rights.

A path forward

Given our responsibility to love our neighbours and prioritise the interests of the most vulnerable, there are good and persuasive reasons for us to support and implement a system in which proof of vaccination (or medical exemption) is a standard requirement for attendance at large indoor gatherings such as church services. Because of the high levels of vaccination that would be required for herd immunity, the interconnectedness of the world's populations and the likely emergence of new variants of concern, a requirement of this sort may continue to be necessary for some time into the future (along with other measures such as social distancing, mask wearing, and frequent handwashing).

But this should not mean that we exclude those who have not been vaccinated from the fellowship of the church or from the circle of our ministry. If a regime of vaccine passports is to be with us for some time into the future, then our energy should be expended not on fighting against it but on finding safe, inclusive and responsible ways to gather and minister within such a context. One obvious option would be to advocate for a system that permitted those who remain unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated to produce evidence of being COVID-negative as a condition for church attendance. Another would be to continue and expand the range of online opportunities for Christian fellowship and online communication. And, as restrictions on outdoor gatherings continue to be relaxed into the future, another would be to take more of our gatherings, both small and large, into suitable outdoor spaces.

With care, creativity and a willingness to pursue the good of others ahead of our own convenience and advantage, it should be entirely possible for us to practise *both* our call to minister the gospel to all people *and* our responsibility to love our neighbours and care for the vulnerable, without requiring one of these commitments to trump the other.



Acknowledgements:

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Fire in the Belly

Dr John Whitehall

Professor John Whitehall has been interested in the growing phenomenon of gender confusion in children since 2016. He has authored articles in *Quadrant Magazine* (<https://quadrant.org.au/writer/john-whitehall/>), submitted to enquiries and courts, criticising legislation mandating hormonal affirmation as an affront to human rights, particularly that of children to be free from experimentation.



Photo by Barcelos Fotos from Pexels

Nationwide Education to Promote Gender Fluidity Renewed offensive on the school front

An article by Western Sydney University academics Tania Ferfolja, Jacqueline Ullman and Lucy Hobbs, entitled 'Parents' perspectives on the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in K-12 schooling: results from an Australian national study', published in the journal 'Sex Education' in September 2021, is likely to represent a renewed offensive against the traditional belief that gender accords with chromosomes.

It proclaims the need to institutionalise the teaching of gender fluidity at all levels of education: all children should be made aware there is no binary difference between boys and girls; and change is possible.

The concept of there being only two genders must be confronted, according to the authors, because they 'reinforce the idea...that mistreatment of people on the basis of their gender is thus legitimate and understandable' and results in 'negative ramifications for all members of the school community'. They argue the 'normative discourse' of two separate genders leads to a 'culture of limitation' reflected in 'underlying racism, sexism,

homophobia and cis-genderism that intersects with neoliberal, neoconservative and patriarchal discourses that subjugate, limit, and marginalise individuals who do not fit the dominant, normative personage: perpetuated as heterosexual, cisgender, white, middle class and male'.

It may be assumed the authors believe this litany of social evils will be reduced when children are taught from the earliest age that they may not be the

"...all children should be made aware there is no binary difference between boys and girls; and change is possible."

boys or girls they were led to imagine and, if they wish, they could move from one state to the other. Using the language of Michel Foucault, whose philosophical scaffold is apparent in various publications of the authors, this liberating 'discourse' would lead to the creation of new 'normative' and

desirable state of sexual liberation. Regrettably, the authors do not provide any details of the mechanics of their educational creativity. What, exactly, will be propounded to children is undisclosed. Nevertheless, we are encouraged to trust them for they are teachers of teachers.

Avoiding curricula details of sexuality, they concentrate on the uncontroversial proclamation of the need for children to be taught tolerance and to avoid bullying. Their importance would be propounded at all levels of education (as if such basics were being routinely neglected by parents and other teachers). 'There will be no discrimination in public schools on the bases of colour, class, creed or professed identity'. What parent would disagree with that?

[In prior years, Ferfolja and Ullman delivered an opposing submission to the NSW Parliamentary consideration of the 'Parental Rights 2020' introduced by Mark Latham. That Bill sought to prohibit the 'teaching of the ideology of gender fluidity to children in schools'; to require 'schools at the beginning of each academic year to consult with parents about courses of study that will

include teaching on core values' and to 'allow parents to withdraw students from instruction on core values where parents object to the particular teaching on these matters of parental primacy'.²

'Ground breaking research'

For the introduction of their 'progressive' programme into the established curricula of 'Relationships and Sexuality Education' (RSE), the authors sought the opinion of parents of children 'attending a government (public school)', presumably in Western Sydney. The basic question was, "Did parents perceive the need to extend RSE from its traditional foci on the sciences of anatomy, biology and microbiology to include study, at all levels, of 'gender and sexual diversity'?" Details would confound the answer: a generic appeal for tolerance for confusion over identity is, of course, quite different from its promotion; and nowhere is it revealed what exactly would be taught at each level of schooling.

'Landmark' results

The authors sought to evaluate the opinion of parents of children in a school by means of a questionnaire distributed through 'paid advertisements via social media'. Through statistical device, their replies would then be extrapolated 'to produce nationally representative estimates'.

The conclusion of this (self-proclaimed) 'timely, and groundbreaking... landmark' research was that over '80% of parents supported the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive relationships and sexual health education topics across primary and secondary government schools'.

To this end, restrictive laws such as those that defunded the Safe School programmes (in which promotion of gender diversity was camouflaged in anti-bullying guise), would be abolished and 'most teachers and pre-service

teachers across all key learning areas would require targeted support and training.'

Another 'landmark study'

Back in October 2018, the Victorian Labor government's LGBTI task force, its Commissioners for Gender and Sexuality, Health Complaints and Mental Health, the Victorian Human Rights Law Centre and the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society at La Trobe University (whence had arisen the Safe Schools Programmes), had released a research paper entitled, 'Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice, Responding to LGBT Conversion Therapy in Australia'. Despite its conclusions being based on only fifteen self-selected, anonymous and unverified complaints received after widespread solicitation in LGBT precincts, the paper called for the Health Complaints Act to be strengthened and to consider 'legislative and regulatory options to restrict the promotion and provision of conversion therapies and similar practices, including by faith communities and organisations and both registered and unregistered health practitioners'. The 'research' was more than successful. In January 2020, the Labor government of Queensland passed Health Amendments that would incarcerate anyone obstructing the 'affirmation' of anyone, including children, to a gender incongruent with chromosomes. The government cited the La Trobe 'research' as evidence.

In August 2020, the Labor/Green government of ACT, on the same 'evidence' enacted a *Sexuality and Gender Identity Conversion Practices Bill 2020* with incarceration of up to 12 months for anyone obstructing 'affirmation'. Then, in February 2021, the Andrews government in Victoria passed *The Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act* which promised incarceration for up to ten years and tens of thousands of dollars in fines to anyone obstructing

'affirmation'. Such obstruction would include professional counseling, psychotherapy and prayer.

Conclusion.

If 'landmark' prohibition of psychotherapy for gender confused children can be based on 15 anonymous, self-selected, replies from a committed audience, imagine what weight will be given to the alleged approval for teaching about gender fluidity on the basis of replies from 2093 parents provided to the academics from Western Sydney University? That gender identity is fluid and unrelated to chromosomes threatens to be imposed at all levels of education, and given statistical extrapolation, in all states.

Those seeking to emphasise the 'social contagion' of gender confusion, the associated prevalence of mental disorder and family disruption, the positive results from psychotherapy, the experimental nature of 'affirmation', the brain altering negative results of hormonal treatment, the destructiveness of breast and genital surgery, and, finally, the end result of a higher rate of suicide in transgendered adults, will face increasingly 'weaponised culture and law' and the prospect of confinement to 'moral concentration camps'.³

Is the warning of Brutus too late?

*'The enemy increaseth every day; We, at the height, are ready to decline.'*⁴

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Dentistry on Youth With A Mission Medical Ships

Practising dentistry whilst living on a boat in rural Papua New Guinea (PNG) is not what most people think of when in the middle of dental school. However, it's the kind of unique experience that makes dentistry on Youth With A Mission Medical Ships (YWAM MS) unforgettable and almost idyllic.

I first heard about YWAM MS from a Dental Journal in 2016, although YWAM MS has been working in PNG since 2009. It was curiosity more than anything else that led me to my first outreach in 2017. I couldn't understand how you could practise dentistry on a rocking boat, or how a makeshift clinic could be set up under a mango tree with the entire village as your audience. Initially, I planned to sign up for just one outreach to challenge my comfort zone, but by the end of my first day onboard, I had decided I was coming back.

PNG is Australia's closest international neighbour and home to over 8.5 million people. A majority of the population lives in rural communities separated by difficult terrains and a lack of infrastructure. Consequently, health resources including clinicians, medications and education are scarce.

In 1997, PNG had just seven dentists.¹ For well over twenty years, the country's only dental school at Port Moresby was closed resulting in a significant shortage of dentists, dental therapists and specialists.² Since teaching recommenced at the university in 2015, 120 dentists have



Photo by Ywam

successfully graduated, although most are concentrated in the capital Port Moresby.¹ Large areas of the countryside have either no access to oral care or only limited access in the form of visiting oral health therapists. YWAM MS collaborates with the PNG

National Department of Health and works in alignment with the National Health Plan which outlines healthcare to rural regions in the country.

The YWAM PNG houses over 130 volunteers including those involved in primary healthcare, optometry, media and hospitality. Everyone on the ship pays their own way, with volunteers serving from a couple of weeks to a few months if not longer. While most volunteers on the ship are from Australia and PNG, some volunteers make the trip from all over the world, including Europe and America.

The ship has a purpose-built dental clinic with four dental chairs. The dental team consists of dental assistants, therapists and dentists, that are made up of a mixture of overseas volunteers as well as locals. Oral health problems resemble those in the wider Asia Pacific and range from dental caries to periodontal disease and oral cancer.³ Treatments offered include minor oral surgery, restorations, periodontal therapy and oral health education.

With the ship anchored in a bay, patients are ferried to and from the ship for their dental treatment. In communities that are quite a distance away, a clinic can be set up on land



Photo by Ywam


using a portable dental chair. In 2018 I had the opportunity to be part of a patrol team that took a five hour boat ride up a river and spent three days in a village providing dental care. For many people there it was the first time they had seen a dentist.

I have been fortunate to have met some amazing people from all over the world - many who have influenced me personally and the way I practice dentistry. YWAM MS is non-denominational and my personal

highlight has been the Chapel services held every Sunday evening on the sun deck. The opportunity to worship and pray alongside people from all over the world is both special and surprising given how remote the location is. It has had a huge impact on my faith and every trip has opened a new outworking for me and I leave every outreach encouraged and refreshed.

I found rural PNG communities are very open to talk about their faith and have an expectation that prayer is a

part of the healthcare they receive. PNG is a Christian country and was recognized as one by Parliament a few years ago. Prior to my trip to PNG, I never had the opportunity to see prayer as an integral part of providing health care and was initially taken aback when patients expected prayer as soon as they sat in the dental chair. These experiences have opened my eyes to the unique opportunities we have as health professionals in living out the Gospel in not only Papua New Guinea but around the world as well.

I would recommend an outreach to any health professional, especially to those young dentists looking to build skills. 

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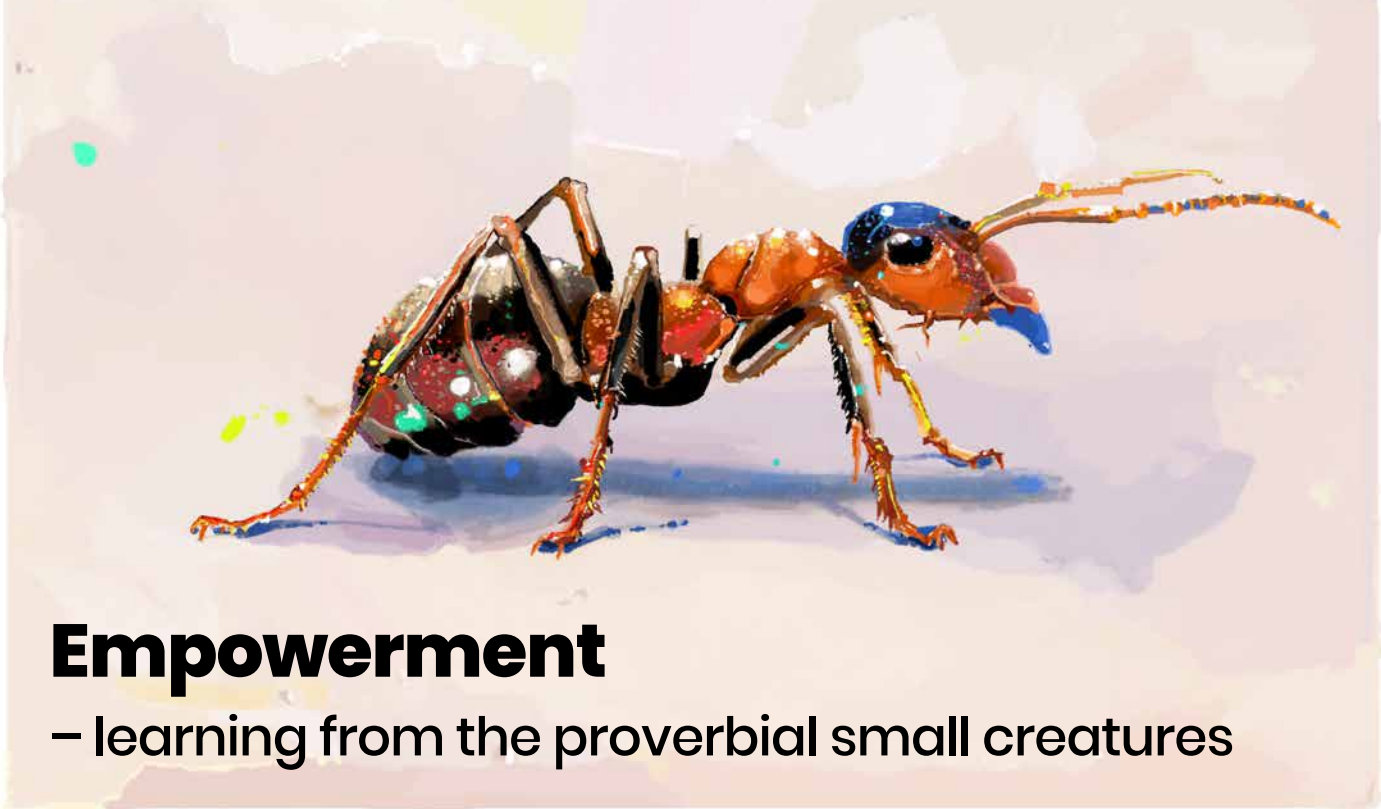
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Empowerment

– learning from the proverbial small creatures

Disempowerment is at the heart of poverty, therefore effective responses focus on empowerment rather than transferring resources. The goal is for communities to meet their own needs rather than depend on aid. How can the poor be empowered?

Agur, son of Jakeh is the author of Proverbs chapter 30. In Proverbs 30:24-28, he wrote about creatures that are small and wise but we miss the point if we don't realize that he was really talking about people. While good community leadership is important, there's a lot that small people can do. These proverbs about small, vulnerable creatures show what small people can achieve if they are wise.

"Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise:

Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer;

Hyraxes are creatures of little power, yet they make their home in the crags;

Locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks;

A lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces."

What are the implications for empowering the poor?

Ants – Plan ahead

"Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer."

There is much to learn from ants: power in numbers, cooperation, productivity and persistence. The quality that Agur highlights is, "they store up their food in the summer". Ants plan ahead: they work hard in summer to ensure adequate food for winter. Ants are proactive. You can't pay tomorrow's bills today, but you can do today's work and bank today's savings. The wise focus on what they can do today.

Agur wrote about small creatures because they represent vulnerable people: these principles are particularly relevant to the poor. Savings groups are a very effective empowerment strategy and they basically apply this lesson from the ants. Many people who were once poor, malnourished and uneducated now own their own businesses because of savings groups.

Savings groups meet weekly and only the poorest can attend. At first they

learn literacy and numeracy because they missed out on school. Then they start saving. Each member brings something like 20 cents every week which is banked on behalf of the group. Each week they learn about issues like nutrition, hygiene, health, family planning, safe water or sanitation. As the group accumulates assets they also learn business and vocational skills to enable them to earn a better income. In time, they take out loans from the group savings for income generation ventures. Many participants in Tearfund projects have gone through a process like that and now own their own businesses such as small shops, fishing, rickshaws, livestock or poultry breeding, or food production. Five years before, they could not even read but now they own businesses. How did they do it? They learnt from the ants. Every week, they learnt something new and made small changes that together result in a huge change. Each week they saved a little and eventually established their own businesses. One step at a time, with the help of project staff, they learnt to read, write and do arithmetic and all the other skills they needed to become healthy and sustainable.



Image: Tearfund

Hyraxes – Make safe choices

“Hyraxes are creatures of little power, yet they make their home in the crags.”

Hyraxes or rock badgers are about the size of rabbits but with short legs like guinea pigs. They eat plants and live in Africa and the Middle East. Hyraxes are big enough to be a meal but small enough to be easy prey.

They protect themselves by living in crags and crevices between rocks out of the reach of predators. Even though they are defenseless, they survive because they make safe choices. The point is that people who are not powerful can protect themselves if they make wise choices.

Safety is a common aspect of development projects Here are some examples...

Providing safe places.

Some projects build flood shelters where the poor can escape floods and cyclones.

Disaster management teams consisting of trained and equipped locals also warn of approaching disasters, rescue, and provide first aid, relief and rehabilitation.

Teaching how to avoid risks or dangers.

In Nepal women are encouraged to register their marriages with the government. This protects them in cases where husbands take new wives and deny ever being legally married to their first wives. Teaching safer migration (like using the banking system to avoid getting robbed) helps protect Nepalese who travel to India for seasonal work.

Informing people of their rights.

The poor are often unaware of their rights, especially if they can't read. Some countries, like India, now have social security benefits for the unemployed, elderly or widows but many poor people don't know they are eligible and would not be able to complete the forms. Projects can help them access their rights and benefits. People who know their rights and entitlements are in a much safer position.



Photo: flood shelter EFICOR India – Tearfund



Image: Tearfund

Locusts – Power in community

“Locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks.”

Locusts demonstrate power in numbers. One locust can't do much but together they can quickly strip farms bare. Agur makes two points here:

1. Team work – working together.

Locusts “advance together”. ‘A champion team will always beat a team of champions.’ People who are united and work together achieve far more than a group of individuals.

That is another benefit of savings groups. Apart from the economic benefits, groups provide a context to help the poor work together. A lady in Bangladesh said that she faced her problems alone before the project began. She rose early and worked hard all day to provide food for her family. She knew other ladies in the village but they were all so busy just trying to survive. When the savings group started, they all met weekly and discussed their problems and worked out solutions together. Some groups are established without the savings and loans component just to help the poor work together. They're called self-help groups where the poor learn and work together to meet their needs.

2. “Locusts have no king” – self-organizing community.

Locusts seem to work effectively without anyone telling them what to do. People are like this in some areas of life. Who organizes for cities like Sydney to be fed every day? The answer is no one, but at

another level, everyone. Households get food from shops and shops get food from food producers. No one is trying to feed Sydney: businesses are just making a living and shoppers are just purchasing food but, in the end, Sydney gets fed. It is not necessarily fair or just, but people get fed. If you could work out where the food came from to feed Sydney last month, that might not tell you where it will come from in future. People come and go, food changes with the seasons and producers also come and go. Food supply involves complex, social systems that are usually not master-planned. Some things need to be planned like public transport, road construction and water supply but other things just happen as people interact with each other. Communities are a wonderful resource. Many needs are met just by being connected with others.

Some responses to poverty involve building new things that need technical design. Mechanical projects like drilling wells or building toilets are planned in a problem solving way. Other situations need a different approach. Improving food production requires coming to grips with how communities already get food. The people must have some food or they would be dead. Their food might be inadequate but they must have food. Maybe we need to ask questions like: Are all the farms producing poorly? Do any farmers produce good crops? What are they doing that the other farmers can learn from? That is more like what we do in Australia. If there is a food production problem, we don't scrap our farms and start again but seek to improve what is already happening. Human beings, like

locusts, often meet their own needs and it is often better to help them improve what they already do than try to introduce a different approach. This kind of development is called Appreciative Inquiry or Assets Based Development. Instead of just asking, what is wrong? We ask, what is good in this community? And how can it be improved?

Solutions can be unrecognized even when right under our noses. Some early Australian pioneers perished in places where indigenous people thrived. They were surrounded by food they could not see. There are over 30,000 edible food plants in the world but most people only know about a few of them. Bryant Myers tells the story of a project in Vietnam addressing child malnutrition in a poor community of rice farmers. While most were malnourished, the project staff noticed that a small minority were well nourished. What were they doing differently? Investigations revealed that most in the community were only eating rice and were malnourished as a result. The well-nourished minority were also eating rice but added small shrimps and crabs that lived in the rice paddies as well as the green tops of sweet potatoes. The majority were unaware that sweet potato tops, shrimps and crabs were edible and nourishing. Food aid was not required and the solution to severe malnutrition had been available all the time and was being practiced by a minority who were also unaware that they had a different diet to the majority. This type of development is called Positive Deviance because it focuses on practices that deviate from community norms.



Photo by Tearfund



Image: Tearfund

Lizards⁴ – Access to where others cannot go.

“A lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings’ palaces.”

Lizards enter houses and most people don’t care. We would not let horses or cows do what lizards do in our houses.

There are advantages in being small. Most people could not enter the king’s palace in Old Testament times, not even the wealthy or heads of foreign countries, yet kings had ordinary people, even slaves, around them as cooks, servants and guards. The point is that some ordinary people have access to kings when powerful people would be excluded. These ordinary people can influence the powerful for good and the powerful can assist ordinary people. Old Testament examples include the slave girl in the household of Naaman, commander of Aram’s army, who influenced him to seek help from Elisha to cure his leprosy and Naaman converted to the God of Israel.

(2 Kings 5) Joseph as a slave in prison influenced the Egyptian Pharaoh resulting in the saving of many lives and the alleviation of Joseph’s own suffering. (Genesis 41-50)

This proverb is about people who may seem unimportant but work in the farms, businesses and households of those who have influence in government and the community. They can influence decision makers who might shut out people of higher rank. Also these vulnerable people


had access to powerful people they could call upon for help.

Empowerment projects encourage and train the poor to talk to politicians, government officials and community leaders about needs in their communities. Some of the poor have even managed to join community committees or organisations and some have been elected to various levels of government. They have become lizards in king’s palaces. This proverb encourages the poor to use what influence they have in the contexts they can access.



Photo by Tearfund

Conclusion

Let’s learn from the small creatures: help the poor to plan ahead like ants; make safe choices like hyraxes; harness the power of community like locusts; and go where others cannot go like lizards. 

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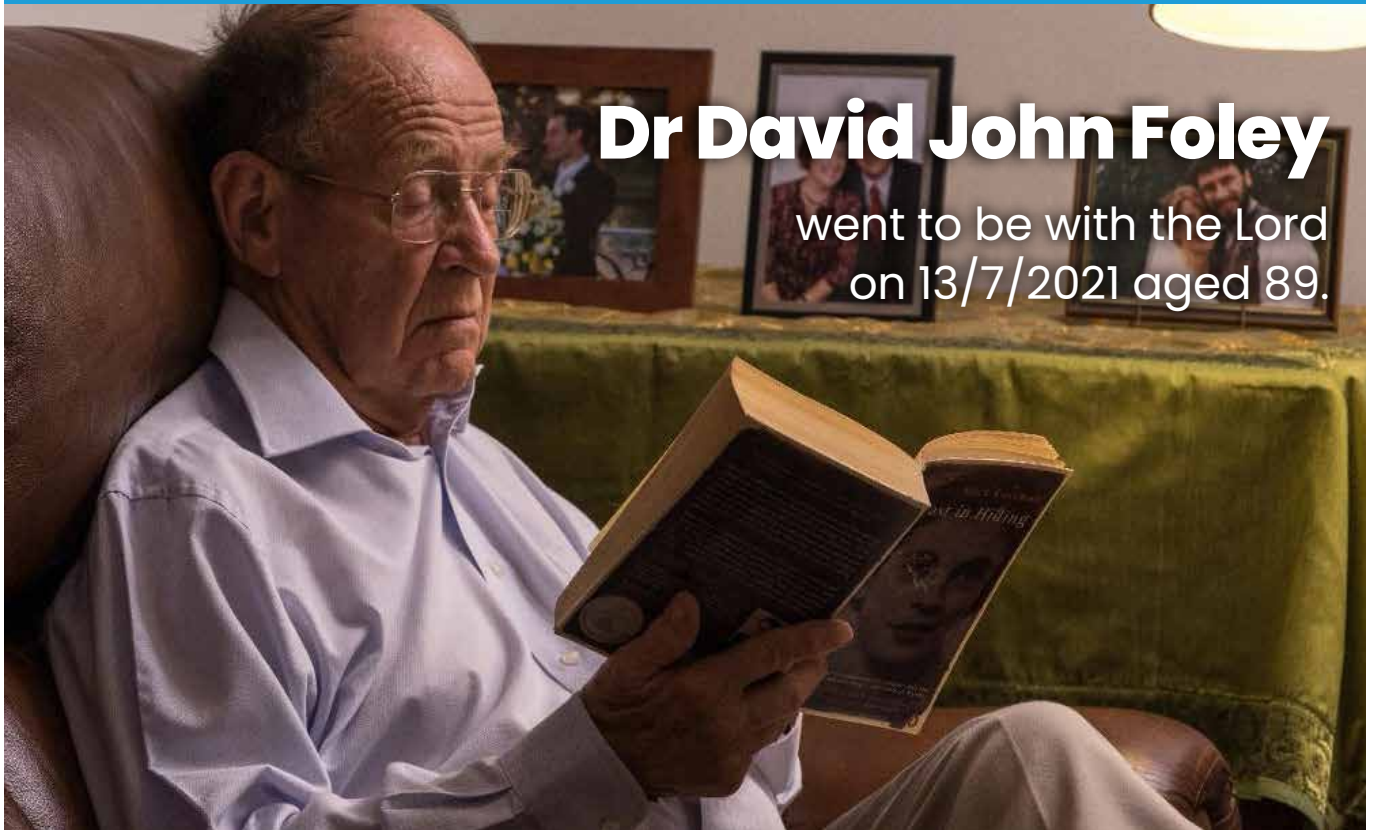
<https://foodplantsolutions.org/bruce-french/>

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1. See page 244ff of *Walking with the Poor* by Bryant Myers.
2. <https://foodplantsolutions.org/bruce-french/>
3. Myers, Bryant. Page 263.
4. Some translations translate this word as ‘spider’. This is the only place in the Bible where this Hebrew word is used and there is some difference of opinion as to what the word means although ‘lizard’ is most likely. It makes no difference to the meaning of the proverb. See page 468 of Hubbard, David A. *The Communicator’s Commentary. Proverbs*. Dallas, Texas: Word Books. 1989



VALE



Dr David John Foley

went to be with the Lord
on 13/7/2021 aged 89.

John graduated in medicine from Bristol, UK in 1955 and gained a DA in anaesthesia in 1959.

He moved to Geelong, Victoria with his wife Betty, and was elevated from Senior Medical Officer to Medical Superintendent during the 3 years at the Geelong and District Hospital (now the University Hospital, Geelong). In 1963 he resigned to move to Papua New Guinea. John was primarily an Australian Government doctor at the Port Moresby General Hospital from 1963 to 1971 and would relieve missionary doctors in the highlands during his annual leave. He was instrumental in commencing the training of anaesthetic assistants using appropriate technology for under-resourced settings.

Dr Ken Clezy, a surgeon who worked with John in PNG and who attended the same church in recent years writes: "John arrived at the Port Moresby General Hospital to find no other person with a DA, and anything up to six theatres being served by general duties medical officers, some with little interest in anaesthesia. He soon

realised that staff, other than doctors, could be taught and would take pride in doing a good job. The idea was resisted on spurious legal grounds but he wasn't deterred. That his idea proved so successful meant that the whole country was (and is) better off than anyone could have imagined."

John and Betty soon became valued members of the Port Moresby Christian community and made life-long friendships. The grace of God in them both was a challenge and an example, with an eternal value that is incalculable.

From John's writing, shared by Lyn Foley:

"I felt that my major contribution has been the development of the anaesthetic assistant course and the development of an Intensive Care Unit where we could concentrate on serious cases."

"We saw many patients suffering from snake-bite, commonly the Papuan Black Snake. The usual effect was about five days of paralysis, needing

UK 1932– 1959

Geelong 1960 – 1963

PNG 1963 – 1971

Mt Gambier 1971– 1999

Adelaide 2000 – 2021

artificial ventilation. For this, they had a tracheotomy, and relays of students manually ventilated them until the paralysis was reversed. I became involved in their management and was eventually able to persuade the Department of Public Health to buy a Bird Mark IV ventilator. I demonstrated this to a medical meeting explaining its purpose. However, its first use was on the 5 year old son of one of the expatriate doctors, who had a crushed chest from being run over by a grader. David Bowler, the paediatrician, was the only other doctor in the country who had experience of the Bird, so together we cared for this child during several days of ventilation, until he

could manage on his own. It was the only time I ever slept in the hospital. In 2007, I met the child's father and learnt he was well and working in Melbourne. "

"It was a very busy time, running anaesthetics for a 400 bed hospital, with limited assistance. Besides this I taught medical students some pharmacology and was involved in the setting up of the Medical Society with its journal. "

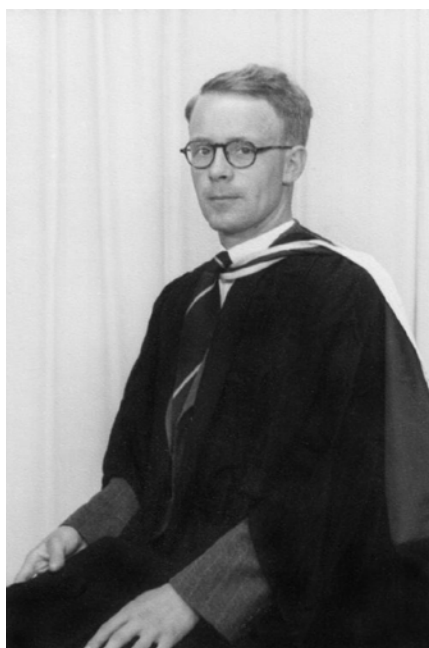
From 1971, John spent most of his career as a GP anaesthetist in Mt Gambier, South Australia, raising four children with Betty, who died in a car accident in 1984. John later married Lyn and had two more children. Lyn Foley recalls some medical challenges he faced including attending a teenage girl who had unexpectedly delivered her baby at home. He faced the extreme dilemma faced in handling a case where a mother in mortal danger refused blood transfusion on religious grounds and died. Dr Owen Lewis recalls the ethical discussion raised by John in the practice meeting

John was a deacon in the Mt Gambier Baptist Church and later served as President of the Baptist Union SA. When not giving anaesthetics, John had a special interest in the care of drug and alcohol affected individuals. John did not encourage the use of alcohol but was often the recipient of gift bottles from grateful patients. These tokens found their way to Peter Charlton's room!

Dr Peter Charlton was a partner of John in Hawkins Clinic for over 40 years. He speaks of the enormous support John was in the early days - not only in provision of anaesthesia, but in helping to stabilise patients in the emergency department when fellow GPs were on duty. Another fellow Christian GP of the town was Dr Jonathon Markey, who says, "I was always slightly in awe of John, in terms of his experience as a Christian and how it interacted in his role as a doctor. I do remember that he organised a conference in Mount Gambier of the Christian Medical Fellowship, which we all attended."

John was called on to work as medical superintendent in Mt Gambier Hospital during the painful transition from private practitioner staffing to the days when GPs could no longer admit public patients since salaried staff were appointed. One of the partners in Hawkins Clinic, Dr Diana

Cross, a GP Obstetrician, recalls how John was able to swiftly deal with bureaucratic processes and smooth difficult pathways for doctors. Dale Beatty worked as practice manager alongside John for many years, and recalls transitioning from hand-written to digital record-keeping. John, whose writing on the 6x4 inch records cards was legendary in being indecipherable, led the way: first by starting to type his notes for the newer A4 record system, and then slowly and steadily persuading others in the practice to convert to clinical software record-keeping over a ten year period.



Lyn remembers that John was very keen to have medical students visit their home for a meal during their time in "the Mount", particularly if from overseas.

"I think it was partly to get people to the country to work but also to show how a Christian home might work." She writes, "We moved to Adelaide at the very end of 1999, ready for the 2000 school year. After a break, John began work at the Brian Burdekin Clinic, a Catholic initiative for the downtrodden. At that stage, it was run by the Singing Nun's nephew, Dr Damian Mead. I think John must have begun some time in 2000 and finished at the end of 2004. He also took on some tutoring of Adelaide Uni medical students around that time."

In an envelope dated December 1996 which was sealed until after John's death, Lyn found this paragraph regarding his work. John wrote, "In my work I have been conscious of great

limitations. I have tried particularly to serve the poor and disadvantaged, only wishing to know how to convey to them the love of God. It has been my disappointment not to have found a way to do this more explicitly. I can only trust that my attitude has at least sometimes conveyed to them a compassion that is rooted in the love of God, and that somehow they may have sensed this beyond me".

John was a faithful and encouraging member of the CMDFA since the 1970s. Living remotely from the capital city, involvement was limited, but he sponsored a South-East Regional event to encourage local Christian practitioners, and later moved to leadership in the SA Branch.

At an early stage in the development of Luke's Journal, he became Editor and continued to serve in this role well into his retirement. Under his leadership, Luke's Journal became a highly respected journal, now with an online presence. Paul Mercer, who co-edited Luke's Journal, writes, "John was a person who stood for Christ through thick and thin. He was committed to a strong sense of Christian vision of fairness, justice and compassion. He was committed to encountering the scriptures authentically and loved the Church despite its warts and all. John will be missed." In John's final editorial piece of December 2016 (p3), he gave examples of issues that need exploration with the help of Scripture. These included "fair remuneration while not being greedy; opportunities for training for young doctors and dentists while balancing the disruption of family life; and the more equitable distribution of health resources in Australia and the world."

John Foley and Paul Mercer shared the editorship of Luke's Journal between 2006 and 2016. Paul says that John was a person who had excellent attention to detail and, with wisdom generated from a long and faithful journey with Christ and a very significant medical career, proved an excellent person to review, edit material and contribute in terms of writing editorials and other material. "In fact, John and I prepared our first editorial together, which I think he wrote in January 2006. There he paid a significant compliment to David and Denise Clarke for their previous valuable high standard work in getting Luke's Journal to the position it was in."

The theme of this first edition was, **"The Doctor as a Patient"**. With COVID-19, it is timely to consider how important this theme remains. John wrote, *"Of the articles in this edition, some are unusually personal and remind us that we care not only for the body and the mind, but for the whole person as a spiritual being"*. It was this holistic understanding of both work and faith that generated his contribution to the journal.

In that first edition, John also established a recurring contribution of articles entitled, **"Doctors who made a Difference"**. John chose the gospel writer Luke for his first reflection. I pick out his concluding comments, *"Over twenty centuries, Luke still shows us so many qualities that challenge us in our callings as Dentists and Doctors. He has a concern for accuracy and detail – he can describe events clearly and vividly. He loves mercy, and cares for the poor and needy without distinction. And through all of this, the Lord Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit are to the forefront, not himself."* This category of **"Doctors who made a Difference"** included Dr Thomas Barnardo and Dr William Williams, the hymn writer. Reflecting on the legacy of Barnardo, John wrote, *"His life is an example of what one man might achieve who is dedicated to a cause and is motivated by love for God and a sense of social need."* Paul Mercer describes these as recurrent themes for John in his own thinking and his faithfulness to the calling of God in his own life.

In an editorial on **"Leadership"** in 2007, John reflected on the biblical leader, Moses. He makes these comments, *"The Scripture comments on his [Moses'] meekness, yet he could blaze with anger and act decisively. His very human qualities made him effective, even while they limited his personal reward. His deal with God as Israel set out on the journey was 'if your presence will not go with me do not bring us up from here.' So should it be for us."* John was good at and seemed to enjoy making these very simple and clear conclusions from his encounter with Scripture.

Another editorial introduced the theme of **"Abortion"**. This is clearly an emotional and challenging topic for Christian Doctors, and contained these words, *"We hope that this issue of Luke's Journal will help us participate in the public arena faithfully, presenting*

biblical teaching with faith, courtesy, humility and informed experience." These words are also instructive in the thinking and integrity of John.

Indeed, John was responsible for the introduction of another feature of the Journal called **"Fire in the Belly"** where we were willing to accept and publish material that often we would not agree with. However, we felt it was honouring to CMDFA as a broad church, in a fellowship sense, so that people could express views that challenged other people's perceptions and faith journey.



In the November 2010 editorial on the **"Professional Life Cycle"**, John again wrote some very helpful words. *"Doctors are generally people of action and activity, often the criteria by which we judge ourselves and others. We like to be doing something and it is a wise man or woman who can stop and consider whether action is the best course. Indeed, in this competitive world, to be busy is to be on the road to success and to be too busy is so often a mark of distinction. But in the midst of their busy lives filled with action, Jesus called his disciples apart, to rest, and no doubt to reflect on the enjoyment of his care and company."* John encouraged readers in the contributions of this journal to "find yourselves secure in the love of God".

In August 2011, John wrote an editorial for an edition, **"What is it to be Human?"** He made this summary, *"To be human is to be the summit of God's creation, now flawed, but, when embracing his*

redemption, destined for eternal glory". He then reflectively wrote these words, *"To work in the health professions is to gain insight into the frailty of our humanity – even while sometimes we are amazed at its resilience, courage, and loving self-sacrifice. If fallen humanity can show such examples of nobility, what will it be when we are, as the apostle John writes, 'Like him, for we shall see him as he is'. Speed the day!"*

In April 2014, John introduced an edition of the Journal taking up the theme of **"History-taking and History-making"**. He concluded his editorial with these words, *"Scripture itself is a progressive revelation of God in history. The living Word reveals Himself in a person, but also in a narrative. And as our contributors observe for our patients, the history reveals the person. We discover it sometimes with wonder, but always with respect."* These words are very characteristic of John Foley.

In April 2016, John introduced a theme for Luke's Journal around **"Family Matters"**. He very pithily reflected that, *"While God's first intention for society is a happy family life, the devil's first intention is to use the family for sinful rebellion."* He ends his editorial with a very thick observation intellectually that, *"The church is a family of God, sharing His very life and nature."*

Dr Ken Clezy writes: *"In retirement in Adelaide, John took over the running of a radio program dealing with old hymns. He researched and presented this very well, and it became at least as popular as its predecessor. He was also greatly involved in local church life. As an elder of the Burnside Christian Church, John's godly wisdom and piety enabled him to help steer it through a very difficult period. Very few of those who worship at Burnside Family Church have any idea of what they owe to John Foley"*.

Lyn Foley recalls the many phone calls John made to Dr Paul Mercer, fellow editor in Queensland, and how much they stressed him, particularly in the years leading up to when his dementia was diagnosed.

John suffered dementia in his last years and was in residential aged care. He is survived by his wife Lyn, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. John was a courageous, straightforward and encouraging hero of the faith to many, not least to me.





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