

Being Productive: Working from Rest (Part One)

Each year, Faith in Business focuses on a relevant theme in the borderlands of work and theology. The aim is to inspire positive practical change. In partnership with the Mockler Center in the USA and Stewardship in the UK, it has recently launched its new theme: 'Being Productive: Working from Rest'. Here Peter Heslam explains.

The Bible's first account of creation, told on its opening page, is very brief. Yet it is broken down into bite size pieces about what happens each day. Humans are made on the sixth day, and are immediately given a job description; they are to be fruitful, subdue the earth, and rule over all that God has made.

The reader might expect that the seventh day would depict humans embarking on this work. Instead, no tasks are undertaken, and even God takes a day off. Apparently, therefore, the first day of human existence was a day of rest! Perhaps the only activity humans got up to was walking with God 'in the cool of the day' (Gen 3.8).

It is customary in many countries, when chatting with friends and colleagues on Mondays, to ask 'did you have a good weekend?'. It is a fine custom, but it reflects the assumption that the week starts with Monday and ends with Sunday. For centuries, however, Christians have regarded their day of rest – Sunday – as the first day of the week. At its best, it embodied the notion that, given the six days of demanding work that lie ahead, one full day of rest was required.

We see this principle of working from rest in the life of Jesus. The gospel writers often show him withdrawing to find solitude before intense periods of ministry (eg Mk 1.35). He urges his disciples to do the same, on one occasion before they find themselves involved in

a major food hub operation to feed five thousand people (Mk 6.31–32)!

All this could sound like the basis for some sage advice to 'come apart before you fall apart'. But the Bible goes much further. As will become evident in this article series, scripture puts rest at the centre of the gospel. In fact, it presents rest as one reason why the gospel is good news. At the very heart of God's offer of salvation in and through Jesus Christ, is the offer of rest.

That offer, which comes directly from the lips of Jesus, is most elegantly rendered in the words of the Authorized Version (AV): 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Mt 11.28–30).

More recently, it has been imaginatively expressed in the Bible paraphrase *The Message*, as '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.'


If this year-long engagement with working from rest enables us, in our daily lives, to 'learn the unforced

rhythms of grace', it will have achieved an important goal.

But what about the first part of our title's theme, 'being productive'? Surely rest is about being unproductive. And is productivity not in itself a problematic concept, as it implies that what matters about work is not its intrinsic value but its measurable outcomes?

The first of these potential hazards will be addressed later in this series, when some consideration will be given to research on the impact of rest on productivity. Regarding the second potential hazard, it is important to note that fruitfulness does have greater theological credibility than does productivity. Indeed, the term frequently recurs in scripture, beginning with the commission given to Adam and Eve, alluded to above, to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1.28).

Another way of referring to fruit, however, is 'produce'. Whatever else a produce stall on a market might sell, it typically includes fruit. Accordingly, the words productivity and fruitfulness are often used interchangeably. But as the former is the term most often used in business and economics, it is the term Faith in Business is using, at least in its theme title.

Join us, therefore, on a voyage of exploration into how we can become more productive, not merely by resting from work but by working from rest! 



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