



Activity and rest

rural mission

We often tend to assume that it is the activity-driven, busy, doing bit of our lives that God can use. Working for God's kingdom involves just that, work. We see mission as transformation, in terms of making things happen, but this is not what the Bible tells us about God's plan for created life.

The pattern is set back at the beginning in Genesis when the creator God causes all that is to come into being. We are told that God creates the universe, but that after that period of creation he rests (Genesis 2, 1-3). Doing is balanced by a period of being, in which contemplation and reflection can take place. Rest is part of work, and without it that work is incomplete. The people of God recognised that God's activity should be reflected in human affairs and so the Sabbath became a holy day, dedicated to worship and reflection on God, the building up of relationship with God through prayer and praise, and not interrupted by the demands of ordinary human work. Just as in living things sleep is required to allow the body to rest and repair itself, so rest from work is required to take stock and



make sense of what we have done. So important is this idea as a spiritual concept that it is built into the commandments (Exodus 20, 8-10) and into Israel's law, affecting human life, the natural world (fields must be allowed to lie fallow) and social affairs (debtors must be given relief from debt).

In our society, and so often for workers in the countryside, people do not get a day of rest, have to do without sleep, or cannot afford to stop or have time off. When this happens the importance of the concept of rest as a means of spiritual

growth can get forgotten. Yet without it, without even provision for it, we can start to lose sight of an even more important feature of our faith. There is a reason why the 23rd Psalm is so loved as scripture text and hymn. It is a picture of rest and relief in perfect relationship with God and so a description of heaven. God 'makes me to lie down in green pastures'. This is a place where anxiety and fear is past, all fear of living and dying gone; where God restores the Psalmist's soul. It is a refreshment, as after long sleep; where God's servant is served and rests in the Lord's house forever.

Consequently, all rest, including the time we are asleep, is a way of knowing more of God and a preparation for life with God. We forget this at our peril. Worship, too, needs to remind us of our need to rest. Busy worship can overlook the need for peace, rest and silence, the space where the Lord is encountered. Jesus promises us rest. Long before we are dead, we too should learn to rest in peace. ■

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