

## BIBLICAL REST

### Rest - and how to be a great wedding guest!

*I'm not a great fan of weddings.* I know, I'm a pastor of a church but I'm still not a fan of weddings. Some years ago Deb and I were invited to a wedding at King's – we have quite a few each year. I wasn't doing the service – I've delegated that task now to others on our team.

The reality was - **I didn't want to go**, but Deb did. I looked at my schedule leading up to that weekend. At that stage we were doing only two meetings on a Sunday but I thought, you know, I want some **down time**. I just want to be at home, to be cared for and looked after. *Anyone relating to this?*

I'm a godly husband, so I say to Deb, 'We'll go!'... but my initial reaction is right because by the time Saturday morning arrives, the last place I want to be is at this wedding and the trouble is *I'm not very good at hiding such feelings*. So we turn up at the wedding and Deb knows how I'm feeling and now there's *a little bit of tension* between us because emotionally I'm dying on my feet. I just don't want to be there. I don't want to connect with any more people – I'm **peopled out**. But my wife doesn't want to get isolated from the church because I'm burned out – she wants to connect, to build friendship and support this wonderful young couple who are getting married. And now I'm starting to tell people - I'm talking to my fellow elders and I'm saying, 'I want a break. I don't want to be here.' So Deb says to me, 'Shall we go?'

**This is not a good question.** This is a no win question, ok? 'Shall we go?' means I say, 'No, let's stay.' And I'm continuing to die. But if I say, 'Yes, let's go!' – I'm dead anyway. So we decide to retreat from the wedding after the service and go home but then we have a decision to make because we've been invited to the reception. I love receptions. I don't. I'm lying...

... So we go home after the wedding service and we have a meeting in the kitchen away from the boys. This is a **sharing of hearts moment**. Deb is saying to me, 'Look, Steve, I want to go. I want to meet people; I don't want to be isolated. I need friendship.' I'm saying, 'Love, you realise that this is a work situation for me. When I walk in there it's like video screens all around – this pastoral situation, that person – it just goes on and on' **It's not a social experience for me – it's a work experience**. So we discuss the situation. It's pretty painful. The discussion is open and frank but we decide to go. *This is the Right Thing to Do*.

We walk in. It's 300 people at a buffet and everyone is milling around. We're late and we're trying to find some friends to sit with. At this point someone makes a bee-line for me. Deb is there, the boys have disappeared and this is how it goes.

'You're Steve Tibbert!'

'Yes, I am.'

'Ah. I need to talk to you about a particular church.'

And it's something about a church elsewhere for which I have no responsibilities within Newfrontiers and the guy is offloading what he feels are the real issues and how he believes we're not doing enough for this particular situation. Deb catches my eye. She dies a little. I die a little. She walks off to find some friends and I graciously serve this individual with his problem. *Can anyone else relate to this?*

So, when I speak about rest I'm speaking to myself as much as I'm speaking to anyone else. This is a **continual challenge** for me.

## **Rest – the critical factor**

### ***Biblical Foundation:***

This material will be very familiar to most but it is important to look at the basis for what we believe about rest. It is right at the centre of the beginning of our world, in creation.

*"1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. 2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work 3 And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." Gen 2:1-3*

God himself took a day off after creating. He had a **break**. He **paused**. This is picked up in the Old Covenant – in the Ten Commandments.

*"11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Ex. 20:11*

**Rest. A break. A pit stop.** The New Testament picks up the **Sabbath principle**. It does not connect it with a particular day of the week but we know that in the life and three year ministry of Jesus that He withdrew, He prayed, He drew on refreshment.

I believe that **if we rest more we will be stronger in God**, we will be **more effective in caring for our families** and we will be **more fruitful in the churches we lead**. Many of us think that if we worked a little harder we would be more fruitful – I'm saying that *rest is the critical factor*.

## **Rest and patterns of life**

God has built rest into the **normal patterns of life**. There's a *daily pattern*. It includes that moment when you put your head on a pillow. It's called **sleep**. I love sleep. I don't see it as a distraction from work. Eight hours. Wonderful. It's **physical** rest and even better for me, it's **mental** rest. I like the moment when it all goes away and when I open my eyes it's morning and I'm refreshed.

There's also a *weekly pattern*. God wants us to have at least one 24 hour break each week. I have to confess that I like other slots of rest in the week as well. And there are *annual patterns*. There are seasons and there are slots of rest built into those seasons – I suggest that they are called **holidays**!

*I meet so many pastors who don't take their holidays!* I have had this issue sometimes with some of my team members and I really stress to them how important this is. **This is not a problem of the work ethic of Christian workers**. We are totally committed to what God has called us to do, but we can get out of shape if we don't address the patterns of our work. In my contract of employment I have a **sabbatical** every seven years. Excellent! That's three month's rest. Sorry, I mean study and reflection...

**Remember, I'm not saying that we aren't going to work hard. I'm not saying that we're not going to build big churches. I'm not saying that**

**we're not going to touch nations. I'm arguing that if, as a movement, we build a culture of biblical rest - then we'll be more fruitful.**

### **Rest and the Long Hours work culture**

So why do we work so hard? What drives us? Let's look at that for a moment.

**Cary Cooper, Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University** says of the UK,

*'If you work constantly longer hours – over 45 hours every week – it will damage your health physically and psychologically.'*<sup>^</sup>

In the UK we have the second longest working hours in the developed world, second only to the USA. We have longer hours than Japan, so that's l-o-n-g hours and that's our culture. *For some of us as church leaders this impacts us more than we admit since we have guys in our churches who are in business and we don't want to be seen as slackers.* We're still shaped by the 'Oh, you only work on Sundays' attitude. I believe that church leadership is far more demanding than being in business!

**Derek Simpson, the General Secretary of the union Amicus** says, *'It's no coincidence that the UK is the least regulated economy and is also the least productive in the industrial world.'* Amicus also did a survey where they found that **almost 1 in 5 workers were put off sex because of the long working hours.**

I want you to know that when I read that I was really concerned. I've honestly just never been there. This would worry me. I'd better continue. The union said that a third of people said they didn't have enough time to spend with their partners, husbands, wives or children. *Community work, socialising, personal fitness and hobbies all lost out to excessive working hours.*

### **Burnout!**

**God has ordained rest.** And while many people in the UK find their sense of personal value in work I would suggest again that many of us would serve God, family and church more effectively if we **rested more.** Taking a training illustration from the world of swimming – research on college swimmers in the US shows that every year 10% of this group experience 'burn-out' because they overtrain. They train so much and put in so many lengths they reach a point where performance drops off.

In the last couple of years I have sat with at least two pastors who are experiencing burnout – both significantly. **When we are serving God, called by Him, we may feel trapped by our call.** We serve not some shareholder in a firm but the Owner of Everything! This can magnify our **sense of responsibility** and drive us to **overwork** and so to **underperform.**

We all come to understand the goldfish bowl of Christian ministry. This is what I referred to when I talked about the wedding reception. **That for us, work, church and friendship are all integrated and it's sometimes impossible to know where one ends and another begins.** So you can feel you're on duty all the time. Living in this bubble means we can get 'peopled out'. Some of you are far better at handling this – your capacity for people is greater at the moment! But note – this message is relevant to you and I know this because of some research done by **Sean Gubb** from the **Farnham Church.** Sean surveyed lead elders within Newfrontiers churches and 70% of you responded. 30% didn't... I

was one of the 30%. Why didn't I respond? Because I was too busy, ok? Or I had such excellent boundaries - I was resting and didn't do it...

### **Exhaustion as a badge of honour?**

One of the conclusions that **Sean Gubb** came to in his **survey of lead elders** is that overall the (Newfrontiers) movement scores more highly in the scale of **emotional exhaustion**. Some of this emotional draining can come from **working outside our gift**. Also he discovered that most of the leaders want to be preachers and teachers. They don't want to be managers, administrators or fund-raisers for the churches. However, for church planters and those leading smaller churches (which make up 80% of our movement) a 'generalist' gift is what is needed. A bit of everything to cover all the bases until such time as the church grows to a point where you can delegate some tasks. *Meanwhile you will be more easily drained by those areas that you are less confident about and not so gifted in.*

When it comes to meetings – especially strategy meetings - I could sit in them all day. I can go from 8am to 10pm and find that the whole day has fuelled me. That's just the way I'm wired. My team, however, have other gifts and other areas that energise them. If we're in meetings all day, by mid-afternoon they are trying hard to stay focussed and with me. *But if your expectation of what full-time Christian ministry really involves is different from your experience then that will add to the emotional drain on your life.*

Could I go as far as to say that we could fall into the **trap of seeing exhaustion as a badge of honour?** When was the last time you spoke to a lead elder and in response to your question, 'How are you doing?' the reply was, 'I'm remarkably fresh. I just feel totally on top of everything. My wife is loved. My children are getting quality time. I've got time to enjoy life while the church is prospering.' I don't think there would be many conversations like that!

### **The delusion of the slower day coming**

Again, please note, I'm not speaking against hard work. Work is good. I work hard. If I listed my responsibilities you might become tired just listening to them. **Many of us might be tempted to think that there is a slower day coming. It isn't.** *In fact, there is more work coming.* There is a vision for 1000 churches. There are the major cities of the earth to be touched and reached. There's the poor to care for. There's a culture of constant change. In fact **there will be more to do in the next two decades than we've done in the last 50 years and I'm suggesting that we will only be able to do it if we rest well.**

I hope I've got your attention. I hope you can relate to this.

So – why do we find this so difficult? You know about icebergs. You see only 10% of the volume above the surface. At this point I could get into all the hints and tips on how to manage your life... but most of you know them already. These are the surface things. What I want to do is go below the surface – *what is happening on the inside of you when it comes to the choices you make and the boundaries you set.*

Part of my preparation for this subject was to listen to a fantastic talk on work and rest by **John Ortberg** (formerly of **Willow Creek Church, USA.**) He describes people falling into two categories (I think there may be more, but these two make a good start!). Firstly there are **compliant pleasers**. They have a hard time saying 'No'. They want to avoid conflict, they prefer peace and they can be

motivated by fear. They feel guilt and blame if they don't step up. They are nice people, they are pastoral people, they are really likeable people! I like these people and enjoy being with them – I really do! The trouble is, **resentment** can build up deep inside them as they continue to care for people **while others don't step up to help**. From time to time – as if out of nowhere – they explode. *Anyone out there like this?*

### **What are you trying to prove?**

Along with the **compliant pleasers**, the second group are the controllers. **Controllers!** According to Ortberg, 'when you hear the word 'No!' you hear the word 'Maybe'... When you hear the word 'Maybe' you hear the word 'Yes!'... 'No' is a personal challenge which requires the steamroller approach. Controllers have a tendency to not respect the boundaries of others. If I ask controllers to identify themselves, they won't – compliant types will admit to their tendencies, controllers say, 'I'm not admitting to that!' And what happens when a peaceful compliant type meets a controller? They get married and, you know, it starts really well. *Do this. Yes. Do that. Yes.... Oh, yes.*

We all have external circumstances that bring pressure to our lives. The issue is what is going on under the surface and what motivates you to respond in a particular way. *What are you trying to prove? Who are you proving it to? Yourself? Your peers? Your parents? What's driving you? Who are you trying to impress? Who are you comparing yourself with? Why are you shaped by the expectations of others? Do you have a competitive spirit? Are you at peace with yourself? Are you at peace about your measure in God?* Honest answers to these questions will reveal what's underneath.

### **Rest for our souls!**

So where, in the face of the dynamics previously discussed, do we find **rest for our soul?** This seems to be the starting point for the way ahead. No surprise then that ultimately and first off **this can only be found in God and in His Presence**. It's been interesting that as I have sat with the guys who have experienced burnout in recent times we have found that their **identity is wrapped up in their work** – more than they thought at first. That's how many guys are wired. I have done some personal reflection on this and tried to find out how much my own identity is founded on God's love for me and His acceptance of me in grace, rather than my performance and what I do and achieve. In Ex. 33:14 God says *'My presence will go with you and I will give you rest'*.

A couple of years ago King's church stopped growing for the first time in 10 years. One of the biggest challenges for me in that situation was asking myself, 'Is this it then, Steve?' **Keeping one's peace in God at a time like that is a challenge**. I'm looking to grow a big church – unashamedly that's what I'm going for. I don't know if it will happen – ask me in 20 odd years when I'm preparing to hand the baton on to someone else! *But what do we do if the prophetic words that we've had spoken over us don't seem to be coming about? Or if our hopes and dreams seem to go cold and stale?*

God is not impressed by the size of your church, nor the scale of your ministry. **It's all grace. It's all from Him**. We are stewards of that grace and one day will give an account to Him. As that grace comes from God, so does the peace that comes from knowing we are loved by Him. If we get hold of this fact, it has the power to transform our lives at a foundational level.

I love being in **God's presence**. I love **corporate worship** and I love our times of **Prayer and Fasting** – three times a year we assemble as Newfrontiers leaders and I love it because I can get away from the demands of church and be in God's presence for two days with my mates! *It forces me to dwell in God's presence in a way that I don't tend to do elsewhere.* I would suggest that if you find yourself too busy for Prayer and Fasting then you need to look at that.

You may have come across a version of the following illustration but it bears retelling!

*A philosophy professor stood before his students with a very large empty glass jar which, without comment, he proceeded to fill with golf balls. He asked them if the jar was now full – they agreed it was. He then took some small pebbles and poured them into the jar where they rolled into the spaces between the golf balls. He asked again if the jar was full. Everyone agreed it was.*

*Next he poured sand into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up every other space. He asked again if the jar was full and was met with a unanimous 'Yes'.*

*Finally, from under his desk he produced two cans of beer and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty spaces between the grains of sand. The students laughed, at which point the professor told them that the jar represented their life.*

*The golf balls represented the important things – family, children, health, friends and favourite passions. If everything else was lost and only those things remained, life would still be full. The pebbles stood for everything else that matters – like jobs, house and car, while the sand is everything else – the small stuff that crams into our days.*

*'If you put the sand into the jar first' he said, 'there will be no room for the pebbles or golf balls... If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Spend time with your children, your parents and grandparents. Take your spouse to dinner. Get your medical check-ups and play those rounds of golf. There will always be time to clean the house and see to household repairs. Set your priorities – the rest is just sand.'*

*One of the students asked what the beer represented. The professor smiled. 'The beer shows that no matter how full life may seem, there's always room for a couple of beers with a friend!'*

Amen! Preach it brother!

It's important to set **priorities** or other things will swamp you.

Deb and I did this with regard to our home life. In a real desire to understand the pressures on her, I asked Deb what took so much of her time at home. 'The washing' she said. 'I have to pick it all up from the bedroom floors, put it into the basket, wash it all, dry and iron it and put it all back so that the whole process can begin again.' *Anyone relating to this, guys?* As we were on holiday when we did this review, I had spare capacity and time to think about this! I nearly made a spreadsheet to track what's happening, recruiting the boys to do their bit, streamlining the process ... But then I got it! I want my wife not to be tired and to be available when I come home and the decision to employ some help in the house as a result of that review was a positive thing.

Now I know not all of you are in a position to be able to do that, but the process still holds. **Life moves so fast sometimes that you have to reposition the priorities where they should be.** *It's no good thinking that things will calm down soon – experience shows that's not true!*

This brings me to another important point. **Home must be a place of rest.** *If home is not a place of rest in Christian ministry then things are going to be really hard.* I have observed, just from my own life and those of my team members, that in times when a family member is sick, times of demand that result in lack of sleep, dealing with elderly parents, to name but a few – all these issues put into a context of a demanding ministry – *these can destabilise a home.* They can come out of the blue and rob us of any refreshment we might have found in our homes previously.

The most important relationship is always that of **husband and wife.** *If your marriage is not strong enough, if it's not overall a positive thing that refreshes and refuels you both, then you will struggle even more in Christian ministry.* There will be struggles even if you have a strong marriage!

**Invest in your marriage!** One way that Deb and I do this is that we read at least one book on marriage every year. This year we have read 'For Women Only' and 'For Men Only' by **Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn.** I've been married for 20 years and what I read gave me new insight into my beautiful, creative wife! **We discussed what we had each read – it gave us the chance to look at things from a point of view that we would not necessarily have got to on our own.**

Like the following... (and I will caricature somewhat to make my point!) I want you to imagine a husband coming home from work. The guy comes in – he's exhausted. His wife wants to connect emotionally, talk about the day... The husband has no emotional capacity to connect in this way. Because of the way he's wired he still wants sex because for him that is emotional connection. It's not just a **physical** thing. A godly wife wants to respond but it's a lot easier for her to do this once she's connected **emotionally.** In a poor marriage situation you can quickly get a downward spiral. The guy, wasted with ministry, can't connect with **romance** and giving **time** and **affection** and **listening** to his wife. While the wife struggles to respond physically because she's not having her emotional needs met.

In a piece of research done on the topic of meeting each others' needs, men were asked 'How much time does your wife want to speak to you in a week?' Their response was '15 minutes, twice a week'. Are you ready for the next bit? They then asked the wives – 'How much time do you want to speak with your husband?' Guess what their response was? **One and a half hours - per day.**

Just hearing that statistic made me feel tired. Do you know why this is important? *It's actually critically important for those of us in ministry because too many pastors and their wives fall morally. Too many fall out of the race because of emotional burnout.* You hear of the wife who got attached to another guy at work or emotionally involved with another guy at church. Normally such an attachment ends up in bed. And the guy who's emotionally washed out and whose wife is not responding sexually is more vulnerable to some-one else. That vulnerability can also end up in bed.

**I don't want that to happen to anyone reading this. I really don't. There's too much at stake for God, His church, your life call, your children – so**

**it's very important that we have appropriate rest and that our home and marriage is a vital point of refreshment.**

So here's the question. Here's the application. Guys - ask your wife, '*Am I meeting your emotional needs?*' If in the course of that discussion she says that she needs an hour and a half to talk each day - listen to her! Because in a moment she is going to ask you this question: '*Am I meeting your sexual needs?*' At which point you can say, '*An hour and a half each day...*'

As a result of this blog I'll be welcomed everywhere by male leaders with high fives! But seriously... men and women, husbands and wives need to understand how the other half ticks on this topic!

### **Refreshment from elsewhere**

Another thing that can help in refreshing us is to take up **an interest beyond ministry**. Bird watching? Train spotting? Golf? Give yourself to something else for that time. For me it's sport. I'm not a natural athlete but I watch sport and have all the Sky Sport channels. I think all church leaders need Sky Sports (more high fives!)... Deb is different (surprise!) - she reads. What is *your* other interest that takes you out of this goldfish bowl?

Also **friendship** is important. Now for some of you this is an area of pain. If you are involved in a church plant and you've moved from your home town and church then you're just longing for someone to connect with. And it's complicated in ministry. You have to **be intentional about making good friends** in such situations - it might not 'just happen' by itself. **You need to connect with some people that fuel you and don't drain you.** *Some people I've seen are so compassionate that they spend all their time with those that they are pouring their lives into. Sometimes this can be feeding a lack or void within - but true friendship is essential.*

I'm a task orientated person. As a result I have come to the topic of rest and seen it as a **task!** After 6 years of leading a church I realised that the prospect of doing what I was doing for 30 - 40 years was daunting. In making rest a task I **plan ahead for it**. So, the first things that go into my diary each year are my *holidays, all my time off and my study breaks*. **These are all essential for my sense of well-being and my ability to stay the course long-term.** I'm not suggesting that you must do this in the same way but I would say that you need to take the principle of rest as a task and apply it to your own life and situation.

### **Holidays and study breaks**

I have a week off at Christmas and then the first week of January is a study break. My study break is very different to my normal routine. I read, prepare, pray - and play 18 holes! At Easter, I have the same routine - a week's holiday, a week's study break. **I am far more creative as a result of those study breaks because I have just come off a week's holiday and it would be my view that the leading edge of my church comes out of those times.** It makes me more fruitful. Then in the summer I have six weeks out. Some of you are now asking - 'What happens to your church?' Your church is far more robust than you realise - it can survive without you. And if it can't - then you haven't built anything. In fact you have filled the gaps so much that you have left no space for others to come through. *Sometimes, by getting out of the way, hearing from God, being refreshed, I find that I see things totally differently after just a week or two. And build team. Allow others to help you. Give away as much as you can!*

**The purpose of rest is to enable you to run well!** Please think about the principles that I have laid out here and apply them in your situation. I really believe that doing this will enable you to run well.

The aim of running is to **get to the finish** – be intentional about running well, resting well and finishing well! My aim is to go through the finishing line at speed – **to the glory of God!**

The End!

**Steve Tibbert**

***King's Church Catford  
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[www.kingscentre.org.uk](http://www.kingscentre.org.uk)