



REST.

JESUS SHAPED RHYTHMS

SERIES GUIDE

Blacktown Anglican Church

www.bac.org.au

Version 1.0 2022

Luke Thomson

Free to copy and distribute

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Rest

Few people in our culture are skilled at rest.

It might sound strange to consider it a skill. But the irony is that it takes intentional effort to rest, and to rest well.

Over four weeks, our sermons are exploring the topic of rest: how God teaches us the value, purpose and rhythms of rest. This booklet is intended to sit alongside the teaching, allowing you to pause and reflect further in your own time.

We learn much about how God has designed us for life in the Bible. Today, we are blessed with the understanding that science gives us into the details of how our bodies have been designed, and what they need in order to flourish.

The following pages are collections of ideas, reflections and advice that seek to bring together a theological understanding of humanity, and evidence based practices that assist us living well in our bodies. I hope that they will allow you to consider your own rhythms of life. And perhaps encourage you to make a few changes. Even small changes in this area can reap significant benefits.

As the new year begins, take four weeks to try something different. You may well discover that some of the hidden secrets about deep and meaningful rest are so simple that you've known them all along. May you experience the beauty, peace and rest that comes from life in a Jesus shaped rhythm.

Luke Thomson

How to

This guide contains four weeks of material, divided into several parts:

Review highlights the relevant Bible passages and main idea from Sunday's message.

Reflect provides a brief reflection on a Biblical idea or verse. Take time to ponder the verse for yourself throughout the day.

Relax is an encouragement to do something just for the enjoyment of it. So much of our life is measured on its productiveness. But unproductiveness—or play—is not just for kids. It's a healthy adult practice. There are some suggestions for you here that I'd encourage you to do even once. But you may also come up with other ideas and opportunities. It may help to do something you wouldn't usually do as a way of helping shake your body out of normal habit. And doing something with your hands is typically healthier for allowing your mind to rest.

Reset offers a brief overview of some of the more significant challenges our culture faces when engaging in meaningful rest. These are no small things to change, but don't be daunted by them. You might consider how your current practice could be altered to a healthier alternative. Even a small change to habit can be a significant step in the right direction.

At the back of this booklet, you will find some recommended resources that might help you further explore the topic of rest.

Week 1

Review

Passages: Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Key Idea: God has instilled in creation a sustainable rhythm for life.

Reflect

Psalm 127:1-2

¹ *Unless the LORD builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.*

*Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.*

² *In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.*

The first verse of this Psalm is often quoted by Christians, reminding one another that our plans succeed only when God's is in them. To attempt to act otherwise is an act of futility.

But the second verse is particularly striking: he grants sleep to those he loves. It must be said up front that a lack of sleep is no indication that God does *not* love you! Instead, notice the contrast made in the prior phrases.

Without God, it is futile to rise early and stay up late. Any parent of very young children knows this vanity. And when you finally get to sleep, it's full of

interruptions throughout the night.

But what makes this act vain in the Psalm? It is the rising early and staying up late in order to build or watch while God is absent. In other words, if God doesn't protect your city, the guards are powerless to save it.

So what's this got to do with sleep? Sleep is a gift from God for those who trust in his provision and protection.

There is no more vulnerable activity than sleep. We are mostly unaware and powerless about our surroundings while we doze away. It's why we install smoke alarms to wake us in an emergency. Or set our alarm so we don't miss work.

If your life—your plans, desires, safety and comfort—are entirely up to you, then it would be very difficult to ever get a good nights rest. A good nights sleep is available to you when you don't need to worry about these important matters, because you can trust in God's provision and protection.

When we know we are loved by God, we are able to rest from our labours because we know it is not all up to us. Sleep is a gift best enjoyed when you can rest well in the knowledge and comfort that God watches over you. That he cares for you. And he will continue to do so while you lie unaware of your surroundings.

Relax

I have recently discovered how therapeutic it can be to draw. I've never been very good at drawing the pictures I imagine in my head. But even 'drawing' words—designing how they look, colouring them in—has proved just as effective at enabling my mind to rest.

Take 10-15 minutes to sit and draw. It could be a picture. Or a word you're feeling. Take your time. Allow yourself to sit and be in the moment.

Reset

Along with food and exercise, adequate sleep is a vital part of a healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately, many Australians struggle to get the sleep they need. Some through lifestyle factors. Others due to one or more sleep disorders. In many cases, there are a complex array of factors that lead to less than ideal sleep behaviours. (If you have significant issues in this area, you should speak to your doctor).

How would you assess your quality of sleep? Does your body tell you that you're getting enough sleep?

What is one small change you could make to improve your sleep? (e.g. head to bed 15 minutes earlier; cut out screen time before bed; reduce caffeinated drinks or alcohol in the evening; create a 10 minute bedtime routine; get a more comfortable pillow; declutter your bedroom; make your room darker at night; listen to a sleep story).



As individuals, there are few lifestyle changes that can be made that are as simple as prioritising sleep and yet have such widespread positive impacts. Improving the duration and quality of sleep can reduce the risk of developing chronic health conditions, enhance mental wellbeing, and improve productivity and mental functioning.

Sleep Health Awareness Report

DISORDERS

More than 20% of
Australians suffer from
Sleep Apnoea,
Insomnia or Restless
Leg Syndrome



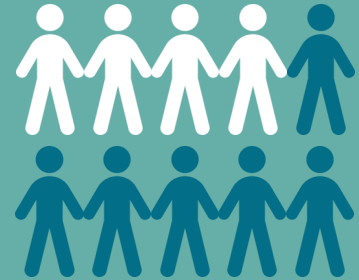


the attitude of wearing short sleep as a badge of honour ... needs to change.

Sleep Health Foundation

SLEEP

4 in 10 Australians regularly experience inadequate sleep



SCREENTIME

1 in 4 children report sleep problems associated with device usage before bedtime



[Inadequate sleep] ... impacts full and functioning healthy recovery from existing conditions, work productivity, mental functioning, exposure to accident risk, quality of life, and a range of health conditions. It is also associated with increased all-cause mortality.

Royal Australasian College of Physicians



Statistics and quotations have been retrieved from a Federal Government report on *Sleep Health Awareness in Australia*, released in April 2019.

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Health_Aged_Care_and_Sport/SleepHealthAwareness/Report

Week 2

Review

Passages: Ezekiel 20:11-19; Psalm 116:1-7

Key Idea: When we fail to follow God's rhythms for life, we find ourselves working against our created design.

Reflect

Psalm 62:1-2

¹ *Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.*

² *Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

Psalm 62 is a wonderful exploration of the rest that God provides us. In these opening verses, we see rest defined in a number of ways: salvation, a rock, a fortress, an unshakeable foundation. Later it also refers to this rest as a refuge and a hope.

In verse 1, the Psalmist expresses a truth he knows. But then in verse 5 he restates the verse to encourage his own soul to *continue* to find rest in God: “*Yes, my soul, find rest in God;*”.

All up, the Psalm is a beautiful song of hope and comfort. No doubt it was sung by God’s ancient people as a way to encourage them in their weariness.

But I suspect this Psalm also feels ancient enough to a modern reader that it makes it difficult for us to believe it is also true for us.

There are so many places today that people search for rest. Holidays to escape the ordinary routines of life. Quality sleep that often seems frustratingly elusive. Using our phones to escape our immediate surroundings—at least in our minds.

For many today, God is not perceived as a place to seek rest. He has rules and commands. He may be seen to prohibit enjoyment. But rest and refreshment? How could God offer these to a modern world?

Perhaps it helps to consider the reverse. Do we find deep and meaningful rest in these others places we might look? How often do we come back from a holiday lamenting it was too short and that we need another one? Or worse—that we need a holiday from our holiday!

Alisdair Groves writes:

“Rest that is self-obsessed, self-centered, self-indulgent—a rest that isn’t about the Lord and His kingdom but a rest that is rather some desperate attempt to hold onto feeling good enough, vacationing hard enough, getting enough time away, doing the right most fun things, getting enough peace and quiet so that I can finally feel better, right? It never lasts. I can attest, I can promise you from my own experience there is a never ending cycle of chasing after lasting rest and it doesn’t work. And it is a recipe for a Petri dish for addiction.”¹

So what is the solution? It is to find rest for our souls in God alone. Leaning into the rhythms of life he has created. A deep inner rest that comes from knowing our place in the world, accepting our limitations, and trusting with confidence that God’s way of life is the best way to live.

Relax

In the busyness of life, we need to be intentional to slow down and take time to rest. So often we’re multitasking even when we’re attempting to rest.

Take some time to listen to some of your favourite music without doing anything else. Just sit and listen. Enjoy it for it’s own sake. You might want to close your eyes as you listen, or lie down.

¹<https://www.ccef.org/podcast/rest/>

Reset

Perhaps surprisingly, there is currently a lack of research to confidently assess the impact of social media on the lives of individuals. It is quite possible that increased use of social media is a symptom rather than a cause of many other social challenges (such as reduced sleep, increased stress and anxiety, etc.).

However, what is clear is that social media is not a helpful place to turn to as a primary way of dealing with these issues.¹ And increased use often correlates to other negative impacts on a person's life.

So why not take a moment to reset a habit in a small way? For example²:

- When you go for a walk or run, don't look at your phone. Instead notice your surroundings – the trees, the gardens, your neighbours. And when you do see a neighbour, why not look at them, greet them with a smile and a hello.
- When sitting on a train or bus, look out the window and notice your world and let your brain have space to think, to stop, to imagine, to dream, to pray.
- Use your phone notifications – particularly your 'do not disturb' to take a break from being interrupted.
- Choose a time in the evening when you switch your notifications to sleep mode; turn it off at least 30 minutes before going to bed.



We all need to care for ourselves emotionally and part of this is the importance of disengaging, disconnecting, and creating margins, particularly around our use of digital devices. We might all benefit from building some healthy habits around our use of mobile phones to give us time to wind down, help our brains slow down, and relax.²

The Mental Health + Pastoral Care Institute



those who used social media more intensively on average had lower life satisfaction³

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

TIME

Australians spend an average of 1 hour 57 minutes per day on social media.⁴ That's 8.3% of our day.



it's more likely that people who are depressed, lonely, and have poor quality of life are more likely to turn to social media to resolve those pre-existing lacks in their social world, than it is the case that people who use social media are causally becoming more unsatisfied with their life⁵

Jeffrey Hall, Director of Relationships and Technology Lab at University of Kansas



¹<https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/blogs/anxiety-loneliness-and-fear-missing-out-impact-social-media-young-peoples-mental-health>

²<https://mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/wellbeing/break-from-digital-devices/>

³<https://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/Children-and-Young-People-Mental-Health-in-the-Digital-Age.pdf>

⁴<https://www.genroe.com/blog/social-media-statistics-australia>

⁵<https://www.apa.org/members/content/social-media-research-series>

Week 3

Review

Passages: Matthew 11:28-12:14

Key Idea: Jesus invites us to find rest in the rhythm of obedience to God.

Reflect

Psalm 116:7-9

- ⁷ *Return to your rest, my soul,
for the Lord has been good to you.*
- ⁸ *For you, Lord, have delivered me from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling,*
- ⁹ *that I may walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.*

Has it ever occurred to you that ‘rest’ ought to be our natural state?

I suspect that when most of us think about rest, our mind wanders to escaping our present circumstances. We long for the weekend or the holiday where we will have a chance to finally rest.

In Psalm 116, we in fact see the opposite. In verse 7, the writer encourages their soul to ‘return to your rest’. The reason to do so is because of God’s goodness.

The verses prior speak about experiences of anguish, distress and sorrow that have overwhelmed. They have disrupted the rest of the soul. And now the psalmist desires to return to what ought to be the norm: rest for their soul.

Verse 8 reflects on the ways God has rescued them from such unpleasant disruptions, before concluding with a picture of the rest desired: to walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

In other words, rest is pictured as the experience of ordinary life, health and flourishing—as opposed to death, distress and stumbling.

This brings to mind the story of creation in Genesis 1. On the seventh day God rested from the work of creation. But that doesn't mean God put his feet up and ignored his creation. Rather, it's a description of settling into the rhythms of upholding and sustaining the world.

Walking in the land of the living—the day in, day out rhythms of life—ought to be an experience of rest because that is how God designed us. But sadly our experiences are so often far away from rest.

The hint of correction for us in these verses (and in the Psalm more broadly) is to recognise God's goodness to us as the starting place for our soul finding rest. When we recognise that God's design for life—such as: the rhythms and patterns in creation; his commands and instructions for work and sabbath—is intended to be a blessing for us, we'll begin to find this kind of rest.

God's laws and commands are never intended to be burdensome. They are to point us in the direction of right and good and *restful* ways of living. Perhaps it sounds like a strange idea, but there is rest to be found in obedience. And that rest starts by recognising that God knows how we are made, he knows what is best, and his instructions are good for us.

Relax

Walking is good for us for many reasons. One worthy experience is to walk simply to observe and enjoy the world around you. It can be surprising how such a simple task can help you relax.

So take a 10-20 minute walk. As slow as you like. Leave your phone at home. And as you walk, notice what is around you. The sounds; the smells; the colours. Observe the details of trees and flowers.

Reset

Engaging in a hobby is an often overlooked aspect of having a rhythm of rest. There are many benefits to our overall health and wellbeing from engaging in something you find meaningful and enjoyable outside of your ordinary responsibilities. Do you have one? Do you need to create space for one?

Here are some suggestions from Emma Parkhurst, Assistant Professor at Utah State University¹:

1. Rather than trying to find 'hobby time' every day, try thinking of time in weeks to discover extra time hidden in your schedule. Dedicate a few hours for something you enjoy each week. Still struggling to find time for fun? Take a step back and say 'no' (or delegate) to lighten your load and make space for hobbies.
2. There are many times during the day we may find ourselves in autopilot mode. It's easy to lose track of time doing mindless things like checking social media or watching television. Tune in to how you're spending down time, whether it's in the morning or evening, and consider how you might use that time to indulge in something you enjoy.
3. More and more research supports taking 'micro breaks' during the work day to increase overall productivity. Take advantage of these short breaks throughout the day to do something that brings you joy, like taking a walk outside, listening to your favorite podcast or music, reading a chapter or two of a good book, or visiting with others.



studies show that good rest is not idleness. The most restorative forms of rest are active, not passive. Further, rest is a skill: with practice, you can learn to get better at it, and to get more out of it.²

Alex Soojung-Kim Pangis, founder of Strategy and Rest



New Zealand scientists have found that engaging in creative behaviour such as a hobby leads to increases in wellbeing that lasts until the next day. This appears to lead to an upward spiral of increased wellbeing and creativity. Some activities included in the research were songwriting, creative writing, knitting and crochet, visual art, and musical performance.³

Tamlin Conner

Department of Psychology, University of Otago

PASSIVE REST

75% of Australians watch TV in their free time for an average of 2 hours 55 minutes each day.⁴



Your hobby should be something that you can work on a little bit each day, or for hours at a time when you have the opportunity and wish to do so.⁵

Birch Psychology



¹ <https://extension.usu.edu/mentalhealth/articles/how-hobbies-improve-mental-health>

² <https://psyche.co/guides/how-to-rest-well-and-enjoy-a-more-creative-sustainable-life>

³ <https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/meaningful-life/purposeful-activity/hobbies>

⁴ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/how-australians-use-their-time/latest-release>

⁵ <https://www.birchpsychology.com/birchs-blog/2021/7/29/how-a-hobby-can-improve-your-life>

Week 4

Review

Passages: Hebrews 4:1-13

Key Idea: God promises eternal rest to all who trust in him.

Reflect

Matthew 8:23-24

²³ Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴ Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

Perhaps one of the more mundane details of Jesus' life is simply that he slept like any other person. And yet the idea that God would become human in the person of Jesus, and submit himself to sleep for approximately one-third of his time on earth is quite fascinating at the same time. If Jesus needed to sleep—how much more do we!

I suspect most of us have never considered how we glorify God in—and through—our sleep. After all, we're just lying there, unaware of our surroundings. Yet our habits and practices of sleep can speak a great deal about our view of God and of ourselves.

For instance, in Matthew 8, Jesus falls asleep in the boat when a huge storm arises. The disciples are in a panic, but we are told that Jesus was—somehow—sleeping right through the storm. When he is awoken by the disciples he rebukes them for their lack of faith. What did he mean? What was

Jesus teaching them by the mere act of sleeping?

When Jesus connects their fear to a lack of faith, he seems to be making his point: sleep is an acknowledgement of trust in God's sovereign power and control. And Jesus, by taking a nap, is expressing supreme confidence and trust in God's protection and provision.

So how do we glorify God in our sleep? By sleeping in such a way that expresses that God is God and we are not.

Trish Harrison Warren, in her excellent book *liturgy of the ordinary*, writes:

Our sleep habits both reveal and shape our loves. A decent indicator of what we love is that for which we willingly give up sleep. [...] My willingness to sacrifice much-needed rest and my prioritizing amusement or work over the basic needs of my body and the people around me... reveal that these good things—entertainment and work—have taken a place of ascendancy in my life. [...]

By embracing sleep each day we submit to the humiliation of our creatureliness and fragility. And in that place of weakness we learn to rest in the reality that our life and death—our days and everything in them—are hidden in Christ.

Sleep is a powerful way of expressing that we recognise our limitations as human beings. Of course, no matter how much you may try to work against it, eventually your body will collapse and sleep even without your help. But going to sleep willingly is a daily practice of letting go of our reliance on our own efforts, and trusting in God's gracious and limitless care for us.

Relax

Progressive muscle relaxation is an activity that focuses on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group in your body. It can assist in lowering blood pressure, decreasing muscle tension, and reducing fatigue and anxiety. You can find plenty of guided videos on YouTube that will take you through the process in 10-15 minutes.

Reset

There has been much research on the affects of gratitude to our physical, emotional and mental health. And the results are consistent: people with habits of expressing gratitude (in any form) experience a great variety of positive health benefits.⁴

Gratitude is a willing affirmation of something good that has come from somewhere or someone besides ourselves.⁴ It might be saying thanks to someone for a gift; saying a prayer of thanks to God; keeping a journal; leaving a note for loved one. It can take a great many forms.

What habits of gratitude do you have in your life? What small habits of gratitude could you begin? Perhaps it's making a regular time (e.g. while waiting at a traffic light), or writing a short note or email to someone once a week. It might be an intentional time of thankfulness to God when you pray. Consider a small change you can implement to grow this habit.



One group wrote about things they were grateful for that had occurred during the week. [...] After 10 weeks, those who wrote about gratitude were more optimistic and felt better about their lives. Surprisingly, they also exercised more and had fewer visits to physicians than those who focused on sources of aggravation.¹

Study on impact of gratitude

Journaling

Regular gratitude journaling has been shown to result in 5% to 15% increases in optimism and 25% increased sleep quality.²



When their week's assignment was to write and personally deliver a letter of gratitude to someone who had never been properly thanked for his or her kindness, participants immediately exhibited a huge increase in happiness scores. This impact was greater than that from any other intervention, with benefits lasting for a month.³

Study of the impact of positive psychology

HEALTH

Practicing gratitude improves immune function, thus decreasing the risk of contracting diseases.⁴

These three studies provided evidence that gratitude can have a significant impact on an individual's emotional, mental, and possibly even physical state. [...] this was one of the first articles suggesting that the benefits of gratitude may be far greater than we realized at the time.⁵

2003 studies by Emmons and McClullough



¹ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>

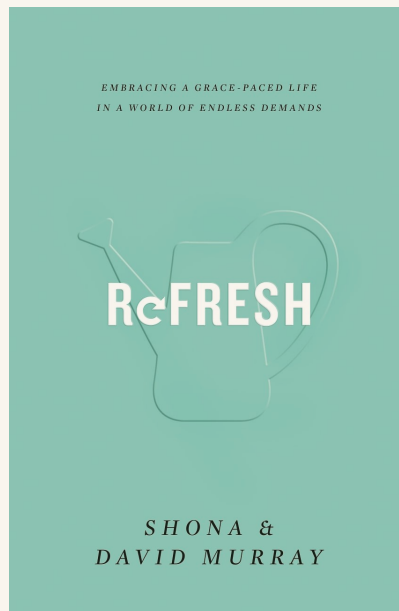
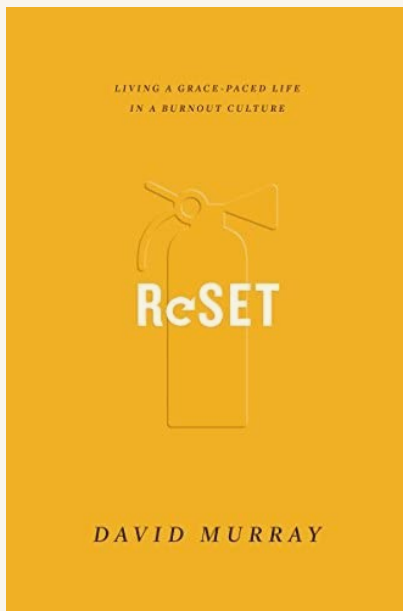
² <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-happiness-research/>

³ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>

⁴ <https://research.com/education/scientific-benefits-of-gratitude>

⁵ <https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-gratitude-research-questions/>

Resources



Reset

by David Murray

Summary

David walks through a 10-step process to help you evaluate your life, and guides you through many practical ideas and examples of bringing about healthy change to your patterns of living. David writes particularly to men, addressing some of the particular issues that men face, as well as providing counsel on how we can respond to them.

David has also teamed up with his wife to write a similar book that is especially for women, *Refresh* (which I have not read, but presume is similar in nature).

About the author

David is a professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a pastor of a church in Michigan, a counsellor, speaker and author.

Who should read it

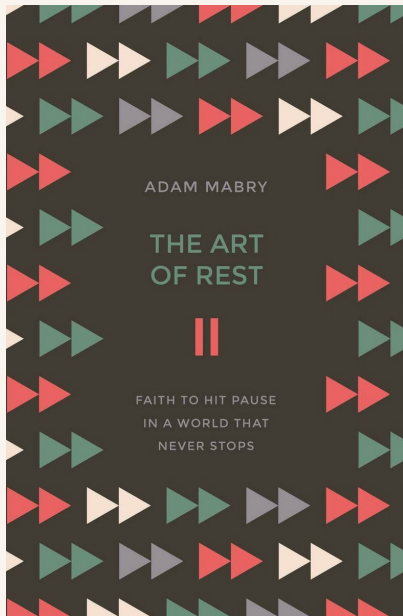
This is a helpful book for men who want to think deeper about who they are, and are looking for guidance in how to live better as the men God has made them to be.

There is plenty of practical advice, and he is very down to earth in raising and confronting many issues that men face.

(I presume this is similarly true for *Refresh*)

Difficulty to read





The Art of Rest

by Adam Mabry

Summary

This is a wonderful, accessible book that unpacks the Bible's teaching on the concept of rest. Adam outlines some of the surprises of the Bible's teaching, and what makes it so important and special. A great entry point into learning what God says on this topic.

About the author

Adam is the lead pastor of a church in Boston, Massachusetts.

Who should read it

If you've never thought too much about what the Bible teaches on rest, this book will provide an excellent overview in an easy-to-read format. It will gently push you to consider your own life and provoke helpful thoughts on changes you may need to put into practice.

Difficulty to read



Seventh-Day Rest - Sabbath

14 Episodes

What is the Sabbath? It's more than an antiquated law. It's about the design of time and the human quest for rest. The Sabbath and seventh-day rest is one of the key themes that starts on page one of the Bible and weaves beautifully all the way through the biblical story.



Podcast: Seventh Day Rest

by The Bible Project

Summary

Over 14 episodes, this podcast unpacks some important Bible passages and themes on the concept of rest. Topics include: the significance of the number 7; the sabbath day; Old Testament feasts; Jubilee years; and the future hope of eternal rest.

About the author

The Bible Project is a non-profit, crowd founded organisation based in the USA. They produce resources to show how the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.

Who should listen

This is a great in-depth study especially for those wanting to dive in to some more complex theological ideas.

Difficulty to listen



<https://bibleproject.com/podcast/series/7th-day-rest-sabbath/>



Resting Well

by John Dickson

Summary

This single episode (as part of John Dickson's brilliant *Undeceptions* podcast) explores some of the science and history of rest, with interviews with Alex Pang (a business consultant on 'rest') and Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton.

About the author

As well as ministering in Sydney for many years (and recently moved to the USA), John Dickson is well known for his writing on the Christian faith and production of several documentaries. He has lectured in history at several universities in Sydney.

Who should listen

It's an excellent one-off episode that would be especially worthwhile to anyone interested in considering the philosophy and theology of the concept of rest. It's full of great insights and surprises.

Difficulty to listen



<https://undeceptions.com/podcast/resting-well/>

