

TAKE A BREAK

A Theology of Recreation

Mark 6v30-32

This is the time of year when our thoughts turn to holidays and a break from work or studies. Of course, not everyone can afford to go to sun-drenched beaches in distant lands, but even if it is a home based break a holiday is welcome. And if you are perpetually giving out – especially caring for others, then you certainly need to take a break sometime. So over these summer weeks I want to consider with you a Christian view of leisure. This will involve a wider perspective than your annual vacation – I’m working out a theology of recreation.

I’ve rarely come across any discussion of the subject in Christian writings. There is plenty about work, but not much about leisure. Maybe this lack is because of the so-called “*Protestant Work Ethic*”. Nations like ours, along with Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Canada and United States, seem to have such a different approach to work and lifestyle compared to nations like France, Spain, Italy and Latin America. Historians and sociologists tend to trace this back to the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century when hard work and a sober lifestyle were regarded by the Reformers, and then the Puritans, as signs that you were among God’s elect; and they brought personal success as well as prosperity to society. So, over the years I’ve heard plenty of teaching on work but I can’t recall anything on leisure. The nearest has been something on the significance of “Sunday” and whether it is a Christian “Sabbath”.

But I have a message from God this summer which can be summed up like this: “Take a Break!”

My starting point is a moment in the ministry of Jesus recorded in Mark 6v31. The disciples had just returned from a mission involving intense activity. “*The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest awhile.” For many were coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat.*”

Jesus recognised their need to take a break. The irony is of course, they didn’t get it straight away. Suddenly there were fresh demands and Jesus’ heart went out to the needy people pressing in on them. This doesn’t take away from the substance of our theme; but it does remind us that there are times when we *will* forgo leisure as vital needs arise.

What I want to emphasis is this: *recreation is a gift from God*, therefore leisure, rest, holidays, taking a break – is *something you can share with God*. You are not taking a break from your Christian life or leaving the Holy Spirit back at home to look after the house. Some say they are too busy in the normal humdrum of daily life, to pray and read their Bible or read Christian books. But they say they will do it on holiday when they have more time. The trouble is these patterns you have developed are usually taken into your holiday as well. So, if this rings a bell with you, why not plan a short Bible study for each day you’re away? Take a book that will stir your spirit – maybe a biography or a classic you read years ago, or something recommended. In our text Jesus invites his disciples to come *with him* and rest awhile. Think of it like this: it is *not you* inviting Jesus to join you on holiday - *it is Jesus inviting you to come with Him*.

So what might a Christ-centred view of leisure look like? It certainly isn't "doing nothing". It is not wasting time or being lazy. And rather than just being a respite from the real business of life, recreation is an essential aspect of our being human and it functions for our well-being in all sorts of ways.

1. IT IS NECESSARY FOR OUR HEALTH.

In this incident the disciples are full of what has happened on their mission. But exhilaration is often followed by exhaustion. They needed to take a break in order to be able to pick up the work again. Recreation is, literally, *re-creation*. The body and the mind cannot be subjected to unremitting work without ill-effect. We will work more efficiently if we take time out. We will be the healthier for it.

I recall reading, years ago, a review of the autobiography of William Sangster, a great evangelical Methodist leader in the mid 20th century. I made a note of one extract from the review. *"A strange thing happened to me as I read this book. I began to have the feeling that Sangster might have done more had he not been such a tornado of energy, rushing from town to town and from continent to continent to preach. I wondered how to say so. And lo, and behold, near the end of the book I discovered that Sangster had made the same discovery himself. "I rushed about too much. I talked too much. I was proud of my health and work. I never had time really to look. The trouble was in the will – I lashed the body on, imprisoned in a timetable."*

Taking a break is necessary for your health. God had this in mind when He gave the wonderful gift of a day of rest, modelled on His own rest on the seventh day of Creation. For the Hebrew people life was hard. They worked long hours and their work was heavy manual labour. They had no labour saving tools. The Sabbath day was a day of refreshment; for the people it was the highlight of the week. They could lay aside their duties. It was a wonderful day, an oasis in the week. It was a full day's holiday every week! It was even built into the Covenant God agreed with them: "You must take off 52 days in the year, plus some extra days for special Festivals of Thanksgiving and Celebration!"

So take a break! But we don't just need physical rest. If your break is really going to be a rest in the fullest sense, then there should be something of Psalm 23 about it: *"The Lord is my shepherd ... He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul."* We need a *restoring* of our soul, of our whole being – and that is something God specialises in.

We need this especially when we are burnt out. When the prophet Elijah was exhausted and feeling very low God prescribed sleep, he laid on meals with waiter service in a shady place, and then sent Elijah on a long trek through the Sinai desert – you might call it alternative stress (not unlike extreme sports today). But it was also a restorative pilgrimage to a mountain associated with Moses meeting God. And when he arrived God was waiting for him, ready to listen and *to whisper*.

2. IT GIVES US OPPORTUNITY TO ENJOY GOD'S WORLD.

In the hurly burly of life most people don't take time to stop and look at the glorious world God has set us in. But when we take a break this opens up before us. The Psalmist took

time to for this. The wonders of creation stirred him to worship. Psalm 148 is a great example of this.

Taking a break gives you the opportunity to slow down and take a good look around you; maybe to look at even small things more closely. The poet William Blake wrote:

*“To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an Hour.”*

Slow down and enjoy God’s world. I’ve found a number of things help me do this. I’ve dabbled with water colour painting; I’ve found this makes me sit and look very carefully at the scene before me. Liz introduced me to bird watching; sitting quietly in a hide with a pair of binoculars helps you take in colour and detail you would otherwise miss. And there is the digital camera searching for that spectacular scene or creative shot. Take a look at some typical holiday photos – they include mountains and sea, flowers and trees, birds and animals and of course sunsets. Or maybe take a walk at night in the country and look up at the heavens and look at the millions of stars that are invisible in the glare of city light pollution.

Any or all of these glimpses of God’s glorious handiwork can move you to worship. You might find yourself breaking out in prayer or song or meditating on some aspect of the glory of God. It may even move you to poetry. I came across this poem recently, written by an early Methodist minister called Thomas Jones in the late 18th century. He had evidently been out in the woods listening to birdsong. Here is an extract from ‘The Mistle Thrush’.

Lowly bird, beautifully taught,
You enrich and astound us,
We wonder long at your song,
Your artistry and your voice,
In you I see, I believe
The clear and excellent work of God.
Blessed and glorious is he,
Who shows his virtue in the lowest kind.
How many bright wonders (clear note of loveliness)
Does this world contain?
How many parts, how many mirrors of his finest work
Offer themselves a hundred times to our gaze?
For the book of his art is a speaking light
Of lines abundantly full,
And every day one chapter after another
Comes among us to teach us of him.

There is something wonderfully childlike about this. You recapture something of the wonder and curiosity and joy of childhood. Taking a break can help us rediscover the world God has made and set us in. There are miracles all around us and moments of revelation waiting for us - if we will only slow down.

3. GOD MADE US TO PLAY

One biographer of the great American evangelist Billy Graham commenting on his ability to keep fresh writes: *“One part of the secret of Graham’s poise is that he is an integrated, balanced personality.”* He cites his wide reading, time in the mountains spent with his family and also his love of golf.

I was interested in the reference to golf – in other words, to sport. When people take a break many turn to sport. There is something deep within us that makes us want to play. It seems to be a universal human need. This may be more important than we think if we want to be *“an integrated, balanced personality.”* In fact, I believe we can say that *God made us to play.* It is part of what it means to be human.

The instinct to play is there from our earliest years. We learn and develop by play as children. A child’s work *is* their play. There is evidence that play is vital for the neuro-physiological development of the brain. When children play a connection is made between the areas of learning and experience. They are exploring, experimenting and collaborating when they play. All this is vital for their development.

If God made us to play, then this is an aspect of the image of God. It means God enjoys play and that He is fun to be around. *“In his presence is fullness of joy, at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.”* (Psalm 16v1) Jesus was attractive to children – they gathered around him. Kids don’t do that unless a person is fun to be with. This is not the impression of God many of us grew up. Sunday, for many, was the day you couldn’t do this, that, or the other! It certainly wasn’t fun. My wife remembers that when her family went on holiday, fun was put on hold on the Sunday; playing on the beach had to wait ‘till Monday.

But God made us *to play* as well as work. One definition of “play” I’ve come across goes like this: *“Play is anything we do for the joy and love of doing it, apart from any profit, compulsion, or sense of duty. It is the real living of life with the feeling of freedom and self-expression. Play is the business of childhood, and its continuation in later years is the prolongation of youth. Real civilization should increase the margin of time given to play.”* (Walter Rauschenbusch: ‘Christianizing the Social Order’) This definition seems to me to be very close to the way Adam and Eve might have defined “work” in Eden. Work in the Garden was not a drudge but a joy.

I think we draw too hard a line between work and play. Liz will sometimes catch me reading theology on a Monday and she’ll say, *“Hey, it’s supposed to be your day off!”* But I reply, *“But this isn’t work for me; it’s pleasure.”*

I think we can see God at play, not just on the seventh day (His day of rest) but in the first six days of creation as well, at work. In fact this is what Proverbs 8v30,31 says. In this biblical text “Wisdom” (personified) is recalling God at work in creation. *“Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.”* The word translated “rejoicing” can equally be “at play.” It is the Hebrew saw-khak’, which Strong’s Lexicon says is *“a primitive root; to laugh (in pleasure) by implication to play, to be in sport.”* *“I was beside the master craftsman, delighting him day after day, ever at play in his presence, everywhere on his earth, delighting to be with the children of men.”*

If Christ is the Wisdom of God, and we believe that he was with God in the beginning and that all things were made through him - then we can understand Proverbs chapter 8 as Christ speaking. Christ was enjoying himself; he was at play during the whole process of creation. Maybe this is why being creative is such a delight – whether it is with wood, glass, pottery, paint or metal, or with musical notes, or *with words* when you composing a poem , song or writing a story; or when you are creating a website or computer programme.

It's not a sin to have fun! The world needs to see Christians at play more often. Taking time out, developing hobbies, enjoying sports, enjoying country pursuits, sailing, climbing or walking; travelling to different cultures; reading widely; enjoying music, the theatre and the cinema; working in the garden – these kind of things make you more interesting and rounded. They keep you from getting stale and being a bore. Many of our un-churched friends have a caricature of Christians which needs to be challenged. They need to see us having fun. They need to see Christian at play.

And play keeps us young at heart. That's what is so lovely about being with small children – as we play with them it removes the serious masks we wear, our cares fall away, and we find ourselves aged five again. Jesus talked about the importance of being childlike (not childish). Some of us need to lighten up a bit and get on our knees with some *lego*!

As adults the way we play games and sport says a lot about us. It reveals something of our character. Just get the Monopoly board out or have a kick around in the garden and you'll learn a lot about each other. We see this in the world of elite sportsmen. Some with great ability don't come out well in a character rating. This is why I'm always delighted when I hear of Christians excelling in the sporting world and at the same time demonstrating Christ-likeness. Eric Liddell was famous for this long before the Oscar winning movie '*Chariot's of Fire*'. One of my boyhood heroes was the England cricketer David Shepherd, who was an Anglican vicar and later went on to be appointed Bishop Liverpool.

Like most things, play – whether it is sport or music, or anything else, can take the place of God. It can become all-absorbing. You hear people say "Football is my life!" This doesn't make you an integrated, balanced personality. It is when God is at the centre and you can enjoy the fun with Him, that it is at its healthiest.

4. IT MEANS OUR FREE TIME IS SIGNIFICANT.

In the Bible we can see a rhythm to our life of work and rest. This is how God made us. This means all our time is significant, including our "free" time. I think we can go further and say that *all our time can be an expression of worship* – something we do to honour God.

When we take a break we are not "killing time". It is not "empty" time. It is full of meaning. In fact many of us are at our most creative when we take a break. Some people find themselves earning a living in ways they do not find fulfilling – they simply have no other choice; but watch them pursuing their hobbies. The so-called "Pitmen Painters" were a fine example of this. In 1934 a group of Ashington miners enrolled in painting classes in their spare time and they began to sell their paintings at local markets to supplement their wages. But to their surprise they found themselves getting critical acclaim from the art community. They were even given prestigious gallery exhibitions during the 1930s and 1940s. Their work has been on exhibition at the Woodhorn Museum.

All our time is significant, even time when you have no option and are *forced to take a break*, for example when you are unwell or injured, or maybe looking after a loved one. The Bible says that all our time is in God's hands. There is often a specific reason for such times. For years, friends told Terry Virgo he should write a book about what a New Testament church looks like but he said he didn't have the time. Then he developed a back problem and was taken out of action for a few months. During that time he wrote "*Restoration in the Church*", a book which brought the message to thousands and accelerated the growth of our *newfrontiers* family of churches.

All our time is significant and valuable and has meaning. Some of you make your free time significant *by being volunteers*. Many of you devote your free time and your energy and skill every week serving either in the community or in some ministry of the church. You don't get paid for it; you are free to do it or not; you can stop in an instant and nobody could complain. It still involves hard work and many a challenge, but you do it for the love of it - because you enjoy it, and because you are serving God.

I think "*Free time*" is a good expression. Recreation with God at the centre should be joyful and liberating. "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free*". (Galatians 5v1). But a word of caution; the text goes on: "*You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.*" (Galatians 5v13) If even our recreational time is worship and lived out in God's presence, this means there are boundaries over which Christians cannot stray.

This has always been the case. The world of the early Christians was steeped in Greek culture with its associations with idol worship and pagan ceremonies and shrines. When Paul visited Athens he didn't marvel at the wonderful statues - he was provoked in his spirit, because they were objects of worship. Nor could the believers attend the arena where gladiators slaughtered each other or tormented wild animals, to entertain the masses.

Theologian Jürgen Moltmann wrote a book called '*Theology and Play*'. He argued that we should begin thinking about recreation with the question "*Whom does it serve?*" Does it serve *to liberate and make us more whole*, or is it perpetuating practices that *alienate* us from others, or from God's creation, or from God Himself? He cited the example of Roman Emperors using the games in the amphitheatre as a means of drugging the masses so that they wouldn't notice their oppression. In other words, this kind of sport was not liberating.

Today we still need to take care about how we use our leisure time. Not all 21st century recreation will develop godly character. There will be parties it is not good to go to. There will be districts in some cities you will not visit, movies you will not watch, books you will not read and internet sites you will stay clear of. Some people's leisure time ends up making them addicted to gambling, drugs, alcohol and pornography. The truth is - leisure activities can take us further from God. Jesus told a parable in which a rich fool says: "*I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'*" But God said to him, '*You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?*' (Luke 12v19,20)

So ask yourself these questions: Could I face Jesus while doing this? Is this re-creative or destructive? Will this cause other people to misunderstand what it means to be a Christian? Can I do this to the glory of God? Can I offer this time to God as worship?

5. IT HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO US ABOUT RETIREMENT

The perspective of many is that “retirement” is when you take a *long* break! Some people look forward to spending three or four days a week on the golf course. Those who have had stressful jobs or have done heavy manual work are ready to sign off. Married couples look forward to having more time together or time to spend with their family. Some fly off to other parts of the world and spend summers in the sun.

However, many find that this is all an illusion. They end up busier than they have ever been once they retire. My brother-in-law is scheduled to retire later this year but I know how his time will be filled. He has two daughters and one son who live miles apart and in the last three years they have produced five grandchildren. They will soon fill his diary.

And, of course, health issues and bereavement come to spoil our party in our later years.

So, is there a Christian perspective on retirement? The concept is a relatively modern invention. There is nothing in the Bible about Retirement. The Christian has an eternal perspective, and this makes a difference to the way we view our senior years. The idea that we *deserve* retirement, and that we must get a good long one in before we die should be alien to us as believers. We have an eternal hope. The “rest” the Bible speaks of - and which we long for, is not to be found on this earth.

At the moment the retirement age is still hovering around 65, although we can see this beginning to be stretched forward. So, in our mid 60’s we need to be careful we don’t talk ourselves into feeling old or think we are past it. The average life-span in the UK is now 79 years 4 months – 77 years 2 months for men and 81 years 6 months for women. The author W. Somerset Maugham wrote a personal memoir called ‘*The Summing Up*’ in 1938, at the age of 64. It was a bit premature. He went on to live to 91!

In our sixties we can still have great exploits ahead of us for the advance of the Kingdom. The great heroes of the Bible and in church history would have scoffed at the idea of retirement. Caleb must have been a remarkable man. Forty years on from having been one of Moses’ twelve spies sent into the Promised Land, Caleb could say: “*So here I am today, eighty five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.*” Caleb certainly hadn’t settled down with a retirement mentality. He had retained a warrior spirit. When I get to be 65 will I have a retirement mentality or retain a warrior spirit?

Many people are longing to retire yet there is something artificial about suddenly stopping work. Yes, we need to slow down and be realistic about what we can take on because we haven’t the energy we once had. But for many (men especially) retirement is short lived. Ralph Winter, founder of the Centre for World Missions discovered that in New York City half of those who retired died within 2 years; he writes: “*Most men don’t die of old age, they die of retirement.*” Some of my heroes are men and women who have retired from their paid employment but have not retired from advancing the Kingdom of God. They may take more time out now - but they retain a warrior spirit.

Recently, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, one of the great heroes of South Africa’s fight against apartheid, announced he was to retire. It took his staff completely by surprise; they expected him to go on forever. He turns 79 years in October and feels that this birthday is the time to

escape from his exhausting schedule. In an interview in *The Sunday Times* (1st August 2010) he said: *“Instead of growing old gracefully at home with my family – reading and writing and praying and thinking – too much of my time has been spent at airports and in hotels. The time has now come to slow down, to sip my rooibos tea with my beloved wife in the afternoons, to watch cricket, to travel to visit my children and grandchildren, rather than to conferences and conventions and university campuses. Now I will have the time to serve (my wife Leah) hot chocolate in bed in the mornings, as any doting husband should.”* Desmond Tutu, we salute you! Take a break – knowing that you have an even more wonderful rest awaiting you.

We are all different. Some have greater health problems or less capacity than others. Others are simply remarkable. The apostle Paul was around 50 when he wrote his letter to the believers at *Rome*, at a time when life expectancy for a man was around 45. He had already been through 39 lashes five times, three times beaten with rods, once stoned, three times shipwrecked - but in this letter he is planning a new mission to Spain. John Piper writes. *“Paul was probably killed in Rome before he could ever fulfil his dream of preaching in Spain. But one thing is certain. He was cut down in combat, not in retirement. He was moving on to the frontier instead of settling down to bask in his amazing accomplishments.”*

Paul retained a warrior spirit. He was going on from strength to strength to the very end. Among his last recorded writing is this. *“I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.”* (2 Timothy 4v6f)

6. IT HAS A VITAL SOCIAL FUNCTION

Friendships are deepened when you are relaxing or having fun together. Our youth group *Level X* have just returned from the annual *newfrontiers* youth conference, *New Day* in Norfolk. This has always been a great occasion, with thousands of young people – and worship at the heart of everything. But one of the highlights is being together as a group. Next weekend many of us will be taking a break together over the Bank Holiday weekend at our annual churches camp, *NORTH 2010*. We have our biggest ever number going this year. These times play an important part in drawing us together.

This social dimension of holiday was something the Jewish people understood. Their annual Festivals were great occasions for the community. Whole families made pilgrimage together with other villagers to Jerusalem for the Feasts. There were joyful processions with harvest produce. They shared communal meals; they made music together, danced, told stories to one another and recalled the great things God had done for them. During the Feast of Booths they made shelters on their balconies at home and slept under the stars for a week. There was laughter in the air at these great Festivals. They were community celebrations.

Weddings were also times for people to take a break together - to dance, laugh, eat and drink and generally have a good time. These weddings didn't just last for three hours one afternoon - they went on for a week or two with family and friends coming in and out. Jesus loved weddings. He chose a wedding for the first of his miracles, transforming ceremonial water (used for religious purposes) into the best wine you are ever likely to taste. Imagine the shock to the system for those disciples who had been following John the Baptist before joining Jesus. John lived a basic existence out in the Judean desert and his diet was locusts

and wild honey. But now they're with Jesus at a wedding banquet and drinking wine and dancing. No wonder Jesus earned the nickname "*wine bibber*"; he just didn't fit the Elijah or John the Baptist stereotype of the prophet. Jesus enjoyed being at the centre of a party. He enjoyed relaxing with other people. Many of his best conversations were in a home at the meal table.

Families also need to take a break together - parents with their children, or a husband and wife taking a few days out together. These are times for fun and making memories. And holidays don't even have to be all sunshine. One of our wettest ever vacations was in south Wales when Phil was about seven years old; yet he remembers it as one of his best ever childhood holidays because he had our full and undivided attention for the whole two weeks.

Recreation has a vital social function. This is why it is good for our small groups to invite friends and neighbours to social events – not just worship services and evangelistic events. It is a reason for the success of Alpha - eating together, getting to know one another as friends, often in a home.

7. IT HELPS US STOP AND TAKE STOCK.

The daily routines and pressures of life can make us feel like we are stuck in a rut. Taking a break can help us get off the merry-go-round. Psalm 46 says "*Be still and know that I am God.*" We might change that to "*Stop, relax, pause, rest up, cease your frantic activity – and know that I am God.*" Spend some time thinking about your life and your priorities. Gordon MacDonald's book '*Ordering Your Private World*' is a mini-classic on this theme. When I read it, many years ago, it made me change the way I lived. I had to make adjustments in line with the things I realized were most vital in my life.

So, take the opportunity a break offers for self-examination, appraisal and evaluation. When you do this with God at the centre it will always be fruitful.

This is one of the reasons many churches build in a sabbatical for their leaders. I had one as Baptist minister, one when at CCK Brighton and another as I was about to leave New Community Church in south east London, to begin church planting in Northumbria. Other professions have this practice too; some university professors have a year out. The concept of the sabbatical is drawn from the biblical practice, every seventh year, of giving the land a rest. You will find the details in Leviticus 25v1-7. There was to be no sowing, pruning, or reaping on pieces of land that had been worked for six consecutive years. The land had to lie fallow for one year. The rest would benefit the soil and future yields would be bigger and better. So a sabbatical break for study and travel is to allow time to recharge your batteries and take stock of your life and work.

Not all of us can have a sabbatical, but even if it is just a few days - we all need time to stand back and look at how we are doing. I suspect all of us need some time alone to do this – even the most gregarious. We need personal space, room to breathe. That's what taking a break can offer.

For some, a break may offer an escape from other people's agendas. Many of us are at the beck-and-call of our boss at work, or the school/college syllabus, or our children's needs or others who depend on us. No wonder those who care for people day in and day out need "respite". For others it may simply be *change* that works for them. We all need a change

from time to time. We say “a change is as good as a rest.” It stimulates and reinvigorates us. If you live and work in the city then country air, climbing a mountain or sailing might be what you need.

Taking a break is a good reminder that God wants us to be restful people, not strivers. Yes, work hard, but don't imagine that unceasing toil is the key to success. Psalm 127v1,2 says:

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house,
its builders labour in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchmen stand guard 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.

This is essentially a grace message; it is about a life of dependence and trust in God rather than one which depends on my efforts. This is at the heart of Jesus' words to Martha when she was fretting over her sister enjoying Jesus' presence leaving her to do all the work. *“She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”* (Luke 10v38-42)

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So, over these summer weeks we have been considering a Christ-centred view of leisure. We have thought about some ways in which taking a break functions for our well-being.

- It is necessary for our health
- It gives us an opportunity to enjoy God's world
- God made us to play
- It means our free time is significant
- It has something to say to us about Retirement
- It has a vital social function, and
- It helps us stop and take stock

But I want to close with a suggestion I came across recently; that *recreation gives us a glimpse of Eden*. In the Garden there was delight and laughter and everything was made for man's enjoyment, and a deeply personal and intimate relationship with God was at the heart of everything. Perhaps our passion for recreation – whether it is sport or holidays in the sun, is a craving to fill the void left after *the Fall*. Maybe it provides a temporary relief.

However, it cannot satisfy the craving. Indeed it is possible to be brilliant at sport and yet for feel unfulfilled and empty. You can have several lavish holidays every year or take three months out every winter in some foreign climate – and still be restless, weary and burdened. If this is true of you, then Jesus makes you an offer this morning. He says: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.... you will find rest for your souls.”* (Matt 11v28f)

John Wilthew. July / August 2010