



THE PROPHETIC WITNESS OF REST

BY PRESTON YODER

VOL. 51 | NO. 8
A CMC PUBLICATION

A pastor friend thoughtfully told me this story:

I told my sister that I'm going to stop working on some pressing projects to take my day off. She responded, "You can't quit while there are more things to complete!" My sister has a corporate job and works 70+ hours a week. I think my decision to stop and rest can be a prophetic witness.

Can you relate to my friend's sister? Does your work command your attention seven days a week? Can you relate to my friend? Are you in a pattern of resting that leaves you standing alone in a culture that worships work? Many people strive for success in their business or occupation. Few strive to enter rest. Here are three reasons to protect a weekly day for rest, even if you are pressured to do otherwise.

[Jesus]restored a vision of the Sabbath rest meeting the needs of humanity.

#1. Rest Gives God Glory

God established a pattern of rest for all creation in the very beginning. "He rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done" (Gen. 2:2b ESV). God called his people to remember his rest by imitating his example. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8). In giving this instruction, God makes it clear that everyone (livestock included!) is expected to enter this rest. If we think our work cannot wait for a 24-hour period, we are thinking too much of ourselves. Let us think more about the One who created us. When we re-enact the rest that God established, our cessation of work gives him glory.

#2. Rest Replenishes Joy

The Jewish rabbis spent much time planning to enter rest effectively. Deeply committed to practicing ever-expanding

definitions of rest, they eventually forgot the reason for rest in the first place! Jesus reminded them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Jesus corrected their burdensome expectations, and restored a vision of the Sabbath rest meeting the needs of humanity. He knew God intended for us to recover joy as we enter rest. Do you remember how you felt when you were a child and discovered that school was canceled? I believe God intends for the "I don't have to go to school today!" joy to come over us when we think of Sabbath. What is keeping you from canceling cell phone, email, and your list of tasks for just one day a week? Take time to reflect on the work accomplished the last week. Take time to delight in all of God's good gifts! Take time to enjoy nature, food, a neglected hobby, or a nap. When we enter God's rest rightly, God will replenish our joy.

#3. Rest Prepares Us for Eternity

God has a future rest for us to enter. "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest" (Heb. 4:11a). God describes heaven as the ultimate rest for believers. How can we enter this rest? We must put our faith in Christ who died and rose again to save our idol-loving souls. His finished work moves us to be intentional about praising God now and forever. When we cease from our work, we enter weekly worship proclaiming, "Jesus is worthy of all our worship!" We join other believers in a weekly warm-up for the declaration we will make for eternity. One day God will permanently cancel hurriedness, anxiety, and idols that try to sabotage our weekly, joyful cessation of work. The warm-ups will have fulfilled their purpose. The restful songs of eternity will ring. What a glorious snow day that will be!



Preston is pastor of Shiloh Mennonite Church. He and his wife Liz serve as pastoral marriage counselors, and enjoy volunteer work and outreach in their community. They have three young daughters and live in Plain City, Ohio.



Farming the Entire Plot

BY JERRY



I recently stumbled across the Wikipedia entry for CMC, and I was struck by the first two sentences: “The Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC) is a Christian body of Conservative Mennonite churches in the Anabaptist tradition. Its members are mostly of Amish descent.” Is that last statement true? Drilling down a bit more, does this mean most CMC constituents have ancestors who were Amish, or that they were personally raised as Amish? The pastor of a large CMC congregation in Holmes County told me that 70-75% of their new church members come from the Amish. That is not surprising in Holmes County. If it’s true more broadly throughout CMC that most new converts come directly from the Amish, is this a trend we should seek to maintain, or one we should pivot away from?

The official results of the 2020 Census show that the resident population of the United States (all 50 states plus Washington, DC) was 331,449,281 as of April 1, 2020, an increase of 7.4% since 2010. Using numbers published by “Amish Studies – The Young Center” from Elizabethtown College, the Amish population in the US has grown from 244,770 to 344,670 over the same time period – an increase of almost 41%. If Amish growth rates stayed steady (something that cannot be sustained indefinitely) while the rest of the US population’s growth rate kept decreasing, Amish would comprise over 1% of the people in the US by the end of the century versus the 0.1% they currently comprise.

Why are the Amish increasing so quickly? Influencing this is large family size (an average of 7 children per family), along with a church retention rate of approximately 80%. Meanwhile slowing birth rates in the rest of the US lead to a rapidly aging population. By the end of the decade, immigration will provide more new people than natural increase (births minus deaths) and by 2034, older adults will outnumber children for the first time in American history. The percentage of the population over 65 is projected to increase from 17% today to 23% by 2060.

To illustrate the opportunities in front of us, let’s think about a farmer who has a 330-acre farm. Close to the farmhouse, there is a one-third acre plot where the family grows vegetables for personal eating. They plant tomatoes, peppers, zucchini and cucumbers in this plot, and spend lots of time tending to the

vegetables. Because they spend so much time focusing on the small plot, the harvest is abundant. Of course, it is good to pay close attention to the nearby plot and its produce – unless it comes at the expense of ignoring the rest of the 330-acre farm. Perhaps the larger plot is much harder to work. The soil is in decline, requiring more extensive preparation using expensive equipment, and large investments in hybrid seed and fertilizer. The family might enjoy the fresh produce more than the field corn or soybeans grown in the large fields.

Scripture instructs us: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:1-2 ESV). What an awesome responsibility we have to be stewards of the mysteries of God, and we are required by him to be faithful to that calling. Faithfulness requires us to make use of all the opportunities the Lord has entrusted to us – not just the ones with which we feel most comfortable. The same passage goes on to state that when Jesus returns, he will judge us by bringing to light things that are now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

The Amish in our communities represent a large and growing people group that need to personally encounter the risen Christ. We have a reasonable understanding of their culture and may feel more comfortable sharing Jesus with them than we do with the broader American populace. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the enormous open door we have to share Jesus to the rest of our country by crossing larger cultural barriers to invite others to new life. The best chance for unchurched people to come to faith may well be within a new church plant, a place without established power structures that often prevent newcomers from feeling like they belong. Good stewardship compels us to farm the entire plot God has entrusted to us – not just the small one that is close to our house.



Jerry leads the Finance Team at RI and serves as CMC’s Church Planting Catalyst. He and Donna have four adult children and one daughter-in-law. They love missions work and hosting international guests.



Birth Control: A Christian Perspective

BY MARIETTA RENNE

CMC's vision to mature and multiply churches includes learning to think critically and biblically about issues in our culture. When we eagerly seek for God's Word to speak to every aspect of life, we learn, we grow, and our gospel witness expands. -BH

Part 1

What Is God's Purpose for Sex as It Relates to Birth Control?

The Old and New Testament

Two reasons given in the Scripture for marriage and sex are unity and procreation. For example, Jesus, quoting directly from Genesis, states (emphasis mine):

Have you not read that he who created them *from the beginning made them male and female*, and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife [marriage], and the two shall become one flesh [sex]"? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate (Matthew 19:4-6 ESV).

Note the first "therefore" in Matthew 19:5. Why marriage and sex? *Because* he made us male and female. Marriage and sex are heterosexual by design. Furthermore, immediately after creating Adam and Eve, the first commandment God gave *the couple* was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28), and the Bible consistently refers to children as a "blessing."

First Two Centuries AD

For the first two centuries, the writings of the church fathers continue to teach that God's purpose for marriage and sex is two-fold, without either having precedence: unity and procreation. This is evidenced in the writings of Ignatius (c. 105), Clement of Alexandria (c. 195), and others.

Beginning of the Third Century through the Middle Ages

Citing Paul's praise of celibacy in First Corinthians, the church began to move in an extreme direction, viewing marriage as inferior to celibacy and viewing marital sex as a necessary evil for the sole purpose of procreation; furthermore, any passionate procreative act, even between a married couple, was considered sinful. By the fifth century, clergy were prohibited from marrying. A division among Christians was established between the "religious," referring to the clergy, nuns, and monks, who took vows of celibacy, and the "profane," referring to the laity who were permitted to marry as a concession to the need to propagate the human race.

The Reformation

Reformers such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin challenged this negative view of marriage and sex by allowing clergy to marry. Yet, surprisingly, it is the Puritans who are most credited with changing the view of the church at large. Quoting such Scriptures as Genesis

2:18, 1 Timothy 4:1-4, Hebrews 3:4, and Proverbs 5:18-19, the Puritans won the day on this issue. Marital sex, they argued, was not a necessary evil, nor was it solely for procreation. Rather, sex within marriage was also for pleasure, delight, relationship, and essentially romance, returning the church to an understanding of "twin purposes," each equally important.

The 1960s

This view prevailed until the 1960s, when the first oral contraceptive came on the market. For many Protestants, Evangelicals, and the culture at large, children became optional, but not for the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). The RCC accurately predicted that by separating the purpose of procreation from the purpose of intimacy, a cultural sea change would follow which would result in social acceptance of cohabitation, abortion on demand, rampant sexual promiscuity and immorality of all sorts, and corresponding increase in sexually transmitted diseases.

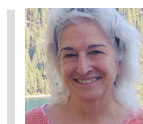
Sociologist Anthony Giddens made the argument that relegating procreation as optional in the purpose for sex results in a logical support for homosexuality, and predicted that we would see a rising tide of social acceptance, because, as he saw it, if procreation is optional regarding the purpose for sex, so is male and female.¹

Today

Today, no one thinks sex is solely for procreation. However, the church seems to split into two main camps: those who believe God's purpose for sex is two-fold (equally for marital intimacy and for procreation), and those who believe that God's purpose for sex is primarily for marital intimacy and procreation is secondary.

Stay tuned for Part 2 next month: How to answer the next question will depend entirely on how one answers this first question. In Part 2, we will discuss the following questions: Is birth control fundamentally opposed to God's purpose for sex or can birth control be incorporated into God's purpose for sex? And, what are the various mechanisms of action of birth control and their theological implications.

¹ Hollinger, D. P. (2009). *The meaning of sex: Christian ethics and the moral life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.



Marietta holds a Doctor of Nursing in nurse-midwifery. She worked as a certified nurse-midwife for 23 years and CEO of New Life Nurse-Midwifery Care in Marysville, Ohio. She is working toward becoming a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). She and her husband are members of Shiloh Mennonite Church.



“To Walk Alongside Them”

BY MADALYN

Rosedale International (RI) recently celebrated the retirement of two long-term workers to the Mediterranean. After twenty-seven cumulative years of service, Pablo and Judi have returned to the United States to retire from mission work. We invite you to join us as we honor and celebrate their work and look toward their new season of life in Columbus, Ohio.

Pablo and Judi’s service with RI (then Rosedale Mennonite Missions) began with voluntary service assignments to Costa Rica in 1972 and 1973, respectively. During this time, the two met and began their journey together. In 1987, Pablo and Judi answered the call to Ecuador, where for eleven years they raised a family and worked to plant churches and spread the gospel. Then in 2007, God again called them to mission work, and again they followed—this time to Granada, Spain, where they lived for the last thirteen years.

“You can’t force [Jesus] on anybody; you have to trust the Holy Spirit to be at work.” – Judi

In Spain, Pablo and Judi focused their energy on forging relationships. Although the majority of Spaniards identify as Catholic, Pablo explained that very few are practicing or born again. Judi credits this, in large part, to the rigidity of Spain’s religious system. “There are many people with deep needs who are so turned off by the religious system—in reaction, they’ve thrown everything [about Christianity] out the door. They’ve never had anyone to walk alongside them on a daily basis, fleshing out the concept of who Jesus is—the true Jesus of love and compassion and forgiveness and acceptance.”

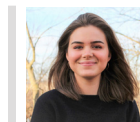
“We wrestled with following Jesus and wanting to share that with friends who weren’t *there* yet. You have to respect where they are in their spiritual walk while knowing that their life could be so much more joyful if they would know him on a personal level. But you can’t force that on anybody; you have to trust the Holy Spirit to be at work.”

Within this tension, Pablo and Judi look back on many moments of joy from their time in Spain—baptizing a friend on the bank of a river; singing in several choirs; spending hours around the dinner table with friends; evenings spent singing and praying with a young man from Togo. They worked diligently to plant seeds and prepare for harvest.

Kevin, RI Mediterranean Regional Director, speaks highly of their work in Spain. “I’ve observed Pablo and Judi striving to engage in the lives of their friends, loving them as Christ loves us. I’m reminded of Paul’s message to the church in Corinth: ‘I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people.... I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I’ve become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life’ (1 Cor. 9:19-23 MSG). Pablo and Judi have lived out Paul’s words exceptionally well.”

As they look toward the future, Pablo and Judi are excited to build their life in Columbus and spend time with their children and grandchildren. And although they will no longer serve with RI, they don’t truly consider their time on the mission field to be over. “We tried to be normal people in Spain. We didn’t come with a big agenda; we wanted to be with people and bring Jesus into the conversation. That’s something we can do anywhere,” Pablo reflected. “The idea of Kingdom building took root in our lives long ago and has become part of our vision. As long as the Lord gives us health and strength, we want to be focused on that.”

RI is grateful to Pablo and Judi for their many years of hard work and dedication to spreading the gospel. Please pray for them as they make the transition into a new culture and a new stage of life. Pray that in this season, God would bless, guide, and protect them, and would continue to lead them to opportunities to share his good news.



Madalyn lives in Rosedale, Ohio. She recently graduated from Grace College & Seminary and serves as Media Coordinator at Rosedale International.