

Article for 32963

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Just a Spoonful

Are you old enough to remember the television ads for Geritol? We are! In these ads, exhausted people stared sadly at us out of the television screen as an announcer told us that these sleepy looking people had the dreaded condition known as “iron poor blood.” This was a condition, apparently, that led to extreme fatigue, but could be cured by a spoonful or two of that over-the-counter elixir, Geritol.

Perhaps we live in a more sophisticated age nowadays. We no longer seem to expect our problems to be overcome by a spoonful of anything. But, despite our greater sophistication, we don't think we've found any cure for our society's ongoing epidemic of fatigue. In this time of economic uncertainty especially, we are committed to working harder than ever, and often find ourselves exhausted.

We Americans work longer hours than the people in most other developed nations. We work longer than our Canadian neighbors, longer than the British, French, Italians, Swedes, Germans, or Norwegians – in some cases, literally hundreds of hours more over the course of the year.

And, as we all know, our obligations don't conclude when the time clock tells us it's quitting time. We then face family responsibilities, volunteer duties, professional expectations, and social commitments. It's no wonder we are exhausted and looking for a little peace and quiet. We all need a good long break. But we just don't seem to know, as a society, how to structure our lives in ways that honor our needs for productivity with our needs for rest.

Maybe we can find help for this modern problem from a very old source. The Rule of Benedict, which is the governing document for the lives of Benedictine monks, is over fifteen hundred years old, and has ordered the lives of monks for all that time. It helpfully suggests a balance among the functions required of monks during the course of the day. Its suggestions are as follows: eight hours a day for work, four hours for prayer, two hours for eating, two hours for reading and resting, and eight hours for sleep. Now that may just sound like an antiquated and unworkable schedule for us, but maybe we should think again. People who are able to follow such a balanced program of work and rest apparently live longer and claim greater life satisfaction than most of the rest of us do. That's a pretty good recommendation for the program.

And of course, attempts to find an appropriate balance of work and rest are far older even than the Rule of Benedict. Although Benedict spelled out his idea of the balanced life rather fully – the same idea occurs in the Book of Exodus, which is far, far older. “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest.”

So how are you balancing your life these days? Are you finding time to work – plus ample time to rest, read, pray, eat and sleep? What if you actually worked just six days, and on the seventh rested and gave yourself to other worthwhile pursuits, instead of to work. Imagine what just that “spoonful” of change could do for you?

