

DISCUSSION GUIDE

FELLOWSHIP OF THE ROCKIES

HEALING LIFE'S HIDDEN HURTS: REST
PSALM 23

AUGUST 31/SEPTEMBER 1, 2013



FROM THE SERMON

1. Rest is a command.
2. Rest is a blessing.
3. Rest is a benefit.

GETTING STARTED

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Eat your vegetables. Don't jump on your bed. Brush your teeth. Don't fight with your brother. Finish your homework.

We all grew up with rules in our homes. We may not have always understood the reasons behind them, but we were expected to follow them nonetheless.

What rule did you have the most trouble following as a child? Why was it so difficult for you?

How different would your home be without any rules? How would it be the same? How about your workplace? Community?

Why do you think we are so slow to obey God's rule to rest?

Rules protect us, keep us safe, and hold us accountable to certain standards or criteria. Just like the rules in our homes, workplaces, and community, God has given us foundational principles for right living, including the command to rest. God's rules are given for His good purposes for our lives, not simply, "because I said so." Today we will unpack God's command to rest, and examine what Psalm 23 has to teach us about rest.

DISCUSSION

Spend some time talking about guilt through the lens of Psalm 32 and 51.

Sabbath is a day of rest, considered holy to God because of His rest on the seventh day after creation. It is viewed as a sign of the covenant relation between God and His people and of the eternal rest He has promised them.

Honestly evaluate your practice of Sabbath rest. Do you consistently practice it? Do you only rest once you have reached the end of your abilities to perform?

> READ PSALM 23:2.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. Psalm 23:2 (ESV)

Today we will turn our focus to the second verse of Psalm 23, understanding how our Shepherd provides rest for us.

Can you think of a time in your life when the Lord has made you lie down? What about a time when He has led you beside still waters?

Sheep needed green pastures and quiet waters. Green pastures suggest lush provisions. Sheep needed waters that brought refreshment, and they preferred still rather than rushing waters. A good shepherd thought in terms of what his flock needed. Sometimes these provisions were not easy for the shepherd to find. Shepherds had to know where to find pastures that could feed their flocks through the dry season. Streams dried up, and water became difficult to find. Observe that the poet described the Lord as leading His sheep. In Palestine the shepherd went before his sheep, guiding them in the direction they needed to go.

Sometimes God does not lead His children to green pastures or quiet waters. Instead, God leads and shapes His children through difficult circumstances. God is loving, merciful, and kind. God also has His purposes for His children. We grow toward maturity as God's children as we respond positively to Him in the difficult testing times. Perhaps we need to remember that sheep exist for the shepherd's purpose, rather than the shepherd existing for the sheep's benefit. God is not our servant, dedicated to making our lives better—according to our definition of "better." Rather, we are His children, "the sheep of His pasture" (Ps. 100:3).

> READ EXODUS 20:8-11.

⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11, ESV)

The Fourth Commandment concerning our relationship with God deals with keeping the Sabbath Day holy. God set aside the seventh day for Himself. The Sabbath stood at the heart of ancient Israelite religion as the weekly observance in which society ceased normal activities in order to worship. The Israelites believed that by observing the Sabbath they were imitating the example of God at creation (see Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11). In an effort to obey God's command to keep the Sabbath, the people sought to determine what constituted work on the Sabbath. A large body of laws developed as a result of this attempt to interpret, define, and apply Sabbath observance. By Jesus' time these laws were numerous and virtually equal in authority with the original command (see Matt. 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-18). The Jews observe the Sabbath to commemorate God's rest on the seventh day and also God's deliverance of His people from bondage in Egypt (see Deut. 5:15). Since Christ arose on the first day of the week, most Christians observe Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day of celebration and worship. We run into real problems when we attempt to define minutely how God's day is to be kept holy.

How is the way you treat your Sabbath different, or set apart, from the way your neighbors or others may treat that day?

How are Sundays different now than 50 years ago? What have we gained during that time? What have we lost?

God's day is kept holy when we glorify God through what we do on it. If we do not work on the Lord's Day, but do not serve God on that day either, we have failed to keep the intent of the Fourth Commandment. The Fourth Commandment reminds believers that every day is a gift from God. All time belongs to Him. We are to be good stewards of the time He has allotted us, including observing a day of rest and worship each week.

Read Jesus' words in Mark 2:27. How should we live in response to this verse today?

Jesus elaborated on the real intention of the Sabbath in this maxim. God provided the Sabbath for the benefit of man and not man for the Sabbath. This reveals a tension between religious expectations and human need. Did Jesus break the Fourth Commandment by failing to adhere to Sabbath rules? No. Instead He provided a new focus on the real purpose of the Sabbath, which was to help believers and not to constrain them. Food for the hungry disciples allowed them the opportunity to fulfill the intent of the Sabbath. Through it they gained strength with which they could serve God more faithfully.

> READ EXODUS 31:14-17.

¹⁴ You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. ¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.' (Exodus 31:14-17, ESV)

God uses the Sabbath to remind us that work is not our life. God charged Moses with strict enforcement of the Sabbath because it was a special sign between Him and the Israelites. The Sabbath would be unique to Israel, a nation that God set apart from the nations to be holy. The specific conditions of the Sabbath would now follow, along with the penalties for violations. Violators of God's command severed their ties with God and the terms of the covenant.

Why is it so hard for us to accept the fact that God instituted the Sabbath to be a blessing to us? What does our view of the Sabbath say about our view of God and ourselves?

Observing the Sabbath was a way the Israelites could maintain their relationship with God and keep their covenant with Him. Thus their observance of the Sabbath (or lack thereof) reflected their spiritual condition; it

was a measure of their righteousness. Beyond this, in Leviticus 25:1-7, the Israelites were urged to observe the sabbatical year. This was a year in which the Israelites were not to plant crops; instead, God promised them a doubly abundant harvest in the sixth year. Crops that grew voluntarily in the sabbatical year were designated for the benefit of the poor. Thus the land was to enjoy a sabbatical rest along with the people.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 92:1-2.

¹ It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High;² to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night. (Psalm 92:1-2, ESV)

Why is it so hard for us to accept the fact that God instituted the Sabbath to be a blessing to us? What does our view of the Sabbath say about our view of God and ourselves?

The subtitle calls Psalm 92 “a song for the Sabbath day.” The Sabbath day was reserved for rest and worship. God’s people passed the Sabbath by reflecting on Him as Creator and as Redeemer. The Sabbath day always included public worship, when the faith community gathered to sing, to pray, to read the Scripture, and to praise God. While private worship is beneficial, community celebration of God is in view here. The psalmist declared it was good to praise Yahweh. The term good refers to that which is pleasant, beneficial, and appropriate. If worship is so good and beneficial, why do so many people view it as drudgery? The psalmist declared praising and singing to be beneficial to those who worship God.

Read Isaiah 58:13-14. How have you experienced the benefits of the Sabbath in your own life? What blessings have come from observing it?

In Isaiah 58, we learn that the Israelites had desecrated the Sabbath by working, which showed the false belief they could supply their needs and desires. They needed to cease work, reflect on God’s goodness, and recognize God supplied their needs. God suggested the proper way to honor the Sabbath. The Israelites needed to refrain from their normal work and reflect on God and their relationship with Him. They needed to treat the Sabbath as a day of delight, meditating on God’s goodness and joyfully committing to serving Him who provided their needs. The people needed to focus their lives on God rather than on their selfish desires. By developing their relationship with God, the Israelites would find a fulfilling life that abounded in righteousness, selflessness, and service.

If the Israelites could delight in God and live for Him and others rather than pursue their selfish desires, they would find new life. God would bless His people by fulfilling the promises He made to Jacob. By losing their lives in God’s service, they would find more satisfying lives, not in material wealth, power, and fame but in God’s presence, the joy of service, and reconciliation with God and others. We cannot serve others as God wants if we do not maintain intimate fellowship with God. Worship leads to service; and service requires continued refueling through prayer, praise, and Bible study in worship. When we link genuine worship focused on God with loving service given in His name, we please God and experience the abundant life.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

APPLICATION

Read Ephesians 5:15-17. What does it practically look like for us to live out Paul's words in light of observing the Sabbath?

One evidence of being careful in how we live is that we do not waste our time. Rather, we use our time in positive and godly endeavors. Of course, the ways we can use time well are different now than in Paul's day. Paul could not have imagined listening to sermons or uplifting Christian music on an iPod® while exercising or commuting. Likewise, the ways that we can waste time are also more varied now than Paul could have imagined. Making the most of the time we have is as urgent as it ever has been. We are called to live intentional lives. Practically, this might mean that we have goals, make a to-do-list, and leave down time for developing relationships, renewing our minds and bodies, and growing deeper in our walk with God. The battle for a restful life isn't a battle we fight alone. Rather, we can encourage one another in our walk as the body of Christ.

How can you add more margin in your daily life? What does that practically look like? How do we know if we are on the verge of being overscheduled? What can we do when this happens?

What is the greatest thief of time in your life? What is the greatest distraction from keeping the Sabbath?

How might taking time for your personal relationship with the Lord affect the way your life is scheduled? Why are we so quick to let this go? Why is it so important?

DIG DEEPER

Have you set aside a specific time this week to truly rest and observe the Sabbath?

Is there anything God's Spirit is prompting you to make more time for in your daily life? What can you do to allow God to shepherd you in these things?

Read and meditate on John 15:1-8. Does your daily life reflect your abiding in Christ? Where is there room for improvement?