



March 15 - Made for Sabbath

• | WEEKLY READING - LUKE 4-8

| TODAY'S PASSAGES - EXODUS 20:8-11; LUKE 6:1-5; HEBREWS 4:8-13

MAIN POINT

God directs us to rest so that we can know Him more and experience the best possible life on earth.

BACKGROUND

Luke - The emphasis on religious practices leads to the next two controversies with the Pharisees, concerning the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a central practice in Jewish life, since it was observed weekly. Jesus' disciples, walking through grain fields, break off some heads of grain, rub them, and eat them. The Pharisees object, accusing them of violating the Sabbath by working, harvesting the grain. Jesus appeals to the example of David when he was fleeing from Saul, when he took the bread of the Presence and ate it. The account ends with a pronouncement: Jesus as the Son of Man is the Lord over the Sabbath. Jesus does not descend into a debate over what constitutes work on the Sabbath. Instead the story centers on Christology, emphasizing that Jesus is Lord. The Pharisees will understand the Sabbath if they see that Jesus is its Lord.

Hebrews - The author concluded his comparison and contrast between Moses and Christ (3:1-6) by indicating that his hearers' standing as Christ's "house" is contingent on their perseverance in their confidence in Jesus, their apostle and high priest. This motif of persevering faith in response to God's self-revelation is now developed in an exposition and application of Psalm 95:7-11. This portion of Psalm 95 is cited in full in Hebrews 3:7-11 and in part in 3:15; 4:3, 5, 7. The psalm draws a sobering warning from the example of Israel's wilderness generation, who experienced liberation from Egyptian slavery through Moses (3:16) but disbelieved God's promise and so died without entering his "rest," the land promised to the patriarchs. The psalm is attributed to David, after Israel's wilderness generation had died in the desert and after Joshua had led their children into the Promised Land (4:7-8). David's generation, living in the land in their "today," still needed to heed the summons to respond to God's voice in faith and obedience in order to enter God's "rest" (which, it is implied, transcends peaceful life in Canaan). So also do the Hebrew Christians who first received this sermon-letter, whose "today" of wilderness testing, pilgrimage towards rest in God's presence, and obligation to heed God's voice extends to our "today" and on until Christ's return.

CHRIST CONNECTION

We can focus on keeping rules and regulations and forget about the purpose of the rules. Rules—at least good rules—are intended to foster and support healthy relationships. Jesus makes an even more profound point: the OT law points to him as the sovereign Lord, the Son of Man, the King who is greater than David. The rest enjoyed on the Sabbath points to our rest in Christ, to the joy of living under his lordship. We can become obsessed with doing the right thing, and in such instances we may slowly begin to worship ourselves and become impressed with our meticulous obedience. Then, like the Pharisees, when Jesus the Messiah shows up we fail to see him for who he is; we see him only as a threat to our regulations.

THE FLOW

- 15 minutes - Conversation and relationship-building
 - 5 minutes - Create interest (icebreaker, activity, or quote)
 - 10 minutes - Year of Prayer guided prayer time
 - 40 minutes - Study and apply the Bible
 - 5 minutes - Prayer requests
-

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use at least one of these questions to introduce the topic of discussion.

- **If you were going to take a day off for rest, what would you do that day?**
- **Do you get enough rest? Why or why not?**
- **Do you think our culture values rest? Why or why not?**

Share information from BACKGROUND and CHRIST CONNECTION to help group members understand the context

Transition/Say - In Bible times when God told His people to rest, it was probably easier to do since they didn't have electricity, football, or cell phones. Still, rest is a principle God prioritized enough to include many times throughout the pages of Scripture, from Genesis all the way to Revelation. It's true; God says rest is important even for you, and He wasn't talking about sitting on the couch watching Netflix.

YEAR OF PRAYER - GROUP PRAYER

GUIDE YOUR GROUP TO OFFER THEIR PRAYERS OUT LOUD WITH THE ENTIRE GROUP OR PUT PEOPLE INTO GROUPS OF 3-4 TO PRAY TOGETHER.

Pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time of prayer.

All glory belongs to You, Father God, We come asking the Holy Spirit to guide our prayers, as we desire to glorify Your name—not because of what You do, but because of who You are. We adore you as Abba Father, as the Great I Am.

What words of adoration do you have to offer? (pause)

Father forgive us when we come to You with our own agendas. Forgive us when our good intentions turn inward and we forget the need to put You first in all things—especially when it comes to seeking Your face, before we seek your hand.. Forgive us when we fail to lift up Your holy name.

Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart, revealing to you any unconfessed sin. Be quick to agree with the Holy Spirit—confess and repent. (pause)

Help us remember that nothing fills the heart with wonder more than when we pray to adore God for who He is. To simply enjoy His presence and lift His name because He is worthy.

As we enter into a time of thanksgiving, consider Psalm 84:11, “For the Lord God is a sun and shield: The Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” Open our eyes to all we have in You, for which to give thanks. Thank You for loving us with an everlasting love.

Will you share your words of thanksgiving to our Lord and Savior now. (pause)

Father God, help us to focus on the things You would have us to pray for ourselves and what you’d have us pray for others. We pray in agreement that Your mighty power is at work in our lives right now. You provide all we need to do the things you call us to do for Your kingdom. Help us to never forget where our source of power comes from.

Share your petitions and intercessions now. (pause)

We have prayed in faith believing that You are the giver of all good gifts. In Jesus name, Amen

STUDY AND DISCUSS

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EXODUS 20:8-11.

20:8-11. The Fourth Commandment concerning our relationship with God deals with keeping the Sabbath Day holy. Anything set apart to belong to God is holy. A holy day then is a day devoted to God’s purposes. God set aside the seventh day for Himself. 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 (Deut. 5:15). We run into real problems when we attempt to define minutely how God’s day is to be kept holy. God’s day is kept holy when we glorify God through what we do in it.

- Since Christ arose on the first day of the week, Christians observe Sunday as the Lord’s Day, a day of celebration and worship. 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. Observe that in addition to keeping one day holy, God also commanded His people to labor and do all their work in the remaining six days (v. 9).

How is Sabbath rest described in this passage?

God didn’t need to rest after He created the world. He wasn’t tired. So why then did He rest?

What does it mean to keep the Sabbath holy?

The Israelites had just left 400 years of slavery, where they were never given rest from their work. With the Fourth Commandment, God taught them that they were created to function best when they rested and enjoyed all that God had provided for them. The journey ahead of them was going to be as physically demanding as their work in slavery, but they now served a God who lovingly provided for their needs and for their rest.

Is the command for Sabbath rest something that God still expects from believers today?

How is the kind of rest God commands different than the kind of rest contemporary culture values?

Taking one day each week to stop one's work and to worship God can be a difficult requirement to keep. Whether then or now, whether living on the edge of survival or basking in plenty, people are constantly tempted to work furiously to get more for themselves. God commanded His people to dedicate one day each week to remember that He supplied their needs and to deepen their relationship with Him.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 6:1-5.

- **6:1-2.** The Sabbath was central for the Jews in Jesus' day, which is hardly surprising since it was the sign of the covenant between Israel and the Lord (Ex. 31:12-17) and was observed weekly. The OT forbids work on the Sabbath day. The Jews of Jesus' day and thereafter continued to discuss which kinds of work violated the Sabbath. The Jews had very strict rules about working on the Sabbath. In the Mishnah, thirty-nine different activities are classified as work and are prohibited on the Sabbath.
- **6:3-4.** Jesus appeals to an event in the life of David, when he was fleeing from Saul in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. David and his men were hungry, and there was no food at hand; when he visited the high priest Ahimelech, he asked for some food. Ahimelech said that the only food available was the "bread of the Presence," the bread set out for a memorial before the Lord every Sabbath (Lev. 24:5-8). The leftover bread was reserved for the priests and was off-limits for David and his men (Lev. 24:9). Still, Ahimelech gave the bread to David and his men since they were in need. The Pharisees were guilty of sticking to the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law, and if they had read the OT rightly, they would have been more merciful.
- **6:5.** Still, the main emphasis in the account is not the need to show mercy. What stands out is Jesus' sovereign authority. Jesus again identifies himself as the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14, and in Daniel 7 the son of man receives the kingdom. Here Jesus declares that as the Son of Man he is "lord of the Sabbath." He is the King; he is the new David. All of the law pointed toward him. If David as king can contravene Sabbath law, then Jesus has the same authority. The Sabbath is subservient to him; he is not subservient to the Sabbath. The Pharisees were obsessed with a specific rule and failed to see that in their presence was their King, their Messiah, and their Deliverer. All of the OT must be interpreted in reference to him.

As Jesus and his disciples walk through grain fields on a Sabbath, his disciples eat some of the grain by plucking it and then rubbing it in their hands. Jesus is held responsible by the Pharisees for the actions of his disciples, and thus the Pharisees ask why the law is being violated. Presumably Jesus could have appealed to Deuteronomy 23:25, which states that one may, when in fields of "standing grain," "pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain." Apparently the Pharisees still define such an activity as work, though their judgment is debatable. But Jesus, as we shall see, does not focus on casuistic law. Charging someone with working was not minor, since death was the penalty for those who worked on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36). The Pharisees are concerned that such violations would bring God's wrath upon Israel, and thus they view Jesus as being far too casual with what God has commanded.

Does knowing the Pharisees fear of God's wrath help you understand their response to Jesus? Are there ways fear overcomes faith in your life?

How does Jesus respond to the Pharisees?

How does knowing that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath affect your view of rest?

Jesus' claim to be Lord of the Sabbath is a declaration of His authority over how we enter into the presence of God. The Sabbath was a gift of God's covenant for His people. We were made for the Sabbath because we were made to enter into God's presence. The rest of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection proved His claim to be true and paved the way for the Lord of the Sabbath to bring us into the promised rest!

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 4:8-13.

- **4:8.** Joshua had given rest to Israel in his day (Josh. 23:1), but God had more than political security in mind in the use of the term rest. Joshua gave his followers temporal rest by leading them to defeat their enemies. God has provided spiritual rest for those who approach him through faith in Jesus Christ as is made clear in verses 9-10.
- **4:9-10.** These two verses provide a conclusion (v. 9) and the explanation of the conclusion (v. 10). Then introduces the conclusion: God's people enjoyed a rest patterned after God's own rest on the seventh day. Sabbath-rest is a new word, appearing only here in the New Testament. The author of Hebrews may have coined the word to express the special significance which he wanted to communicate. God's people will share in God's own rest. Those who enjoy this rest will be believers, those who have approached God through Jesus Christ.
 - Just what kind of rest can believers enjoy? When do they enjoy it—now, at death, or in the resurrection? This rest is not merely the entrance into Canaan. It is a present experience with Christ in which the Lord provides his presence, peace, and joy to replace the labor and heavy burdens of life (Matt. 11:28-30).
 - God's own rest (see 4:4) becomes the pattern of the rest of the believer. God's rest involved the completion of his work and not mere cessation of activity. Believers have become complete in Christ (Col. 2:10), and they can live in the light of a fulfilled relationship to Jesus as their exalted head.
 - The work from which believers have rested is perhaps a reference to the minute details of Jewish sacrificial ritual and purifying washings. Concern about these insignificant details was unnecessary. Christ's full work on the cross made it possible for believers to trust him instead of their own works.
 - When do we begin to enjoy this rest? We can live in those blessings here and now by faith. However, our present enjoyment of these blessings is not the whole story. We will receive more at the time of the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23).
 - The writer of Hebrews called his readers to faith in Jesus and the enjoyment of the blessings which accompany that faith. Through faith in Jesus, believers today enjoy peace, joy, and fellowship with the living Lord as a part of their rest in him. This foretaste, which we now enjoy, will become a complete, unclouded experience of bliss at the time of the return of Jesus and the resurrection.
- **4:11-13.** This verse introduces an encouragement to seek God's rest because of the penetrating power of God's Word. Does it seem unusual to you that these believers are told to make every effort to enter that rest? This rest is a reality which believers must claim. The effort they must make involves obedience. The Jews of the Exodus generation had disobeyed. There was a clear possibility that these believers could also disobey and miss God's promised rest. Practicing obedience involves a determination on our part. Experiencing rest requires effort, but the blessing of rest makes the effort worth the cost.
 - Two additional features of this verse provide interesting insights. First, the writer of Hebrews included himself along with his readers when he said, Let us ... make every effort. Second, the effort needed for reaching rest is not merely renewed willpower. Christ reminded his listeners that those who would bear fruit must abide in him (John

15:5-7). The effort calls for Christ power, not willpower. A confession of helplessness and an ardent trust in Christ is the beginning of the effort needed.

Earlier in chapter 4, the writer of Hebrews wrote about the failure of the Israelites to enter into the promised land of God. Why did they fail to enter the promised land?

What does that failure to believe in God's promises have to do with our inability to rest today?

Though the Lord had promised to give the people a rich land, they did not believe in His promises. Because of their lack of faith, they failed to rest in the land but instead wandered around and around for 40 years. Today, still, a failure to trust in the promises of God will lead us to a sense of wandering restlessness. When we don't rest, life can feel like an endless cycle—constantly running, but never really getting anywhere. To truly rest we must understand that rest isn't always about sleep; it's more about completion.

What might an inability to rest because you overcommit yourself to activities show you about where you find your true significance?

Notice in this passage that rest isn't a specific period of time, but an ongoing state of Sabbath. Does that mean we can even rest while we are working? How so?

The true enemy of rest isn't a busy calendar; it's a failure to believe in the finished work of God at the cross. Because of the cross, we know that we are highly valued by God. Because of the cross, we no longer have to prove ourselves to others because God has justified us in Christ. We can only truly enter into that state of Sabbath rest through faith, trusting in God's finished work on our behalf. When we do, we will remember that because of Jesus, there is nothing else we have to do.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some changes you need to make in order to "make every effort to enter that rest"?

Does your Sabbath look like the Pharisees, a list of rules to obey, or like the disciples, a time to be sustained by the provision of our Savior?

What are some steps you can take to daily live in a Sabbath kind of rest, where you understand that Jesus' sacrifice means you don't have to earn God's (or man's) favor?

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY

Activity: "The Rhythm of Rest" (Visual Sabbath Exercise)

Step 1: Draw the Week (2 minutes)

On a whiteboard, draw 7 simple boxes in a row (representing days of the week).

Circle one box and label it: Sabbath.

Ask: "What usually fills the other six boxes?"

Let participants call out words and write them inside the six boxes:

- Work
- Responsibilities
- Emails
- Family demands
- Chores
- Activities
- Stress
- Productivity

Step 2: Define Sabbath Visually (3 minutes)

Now turn to the circled box.

Ask: "If Sabbath is different, what belongs here?"

Write answers inside the Sabbath box:

- Rest
- Worship
- Delight
- Trust
- Slowing down
- Gratitude
- Presence
- Trusting God to provide

Then draw an arrow from the busy boxes to the Sabbath box and ask: "What makes it hard to protect this space?"

Add words outside the circle:

- Guilt
- Busyness
- Fear of falling behind
- Habit
- Expectations

Step 3: The Exchange (3 minutes)

Draw two simple hands beside the week:

- One labeled Control
- One labeled Trust

Ask: "Sabbath requires us to move something from control to trust. What is that for you?"

Participants may say:

- My productivity
- My income
- My unfinished tasks
- My image
- My to-do list

Write responses near the "Control" hand and draw arrows toward "Trust."

Discuss briefly: "Why is resting an act of faith?"

Ask: "How can we bring the Sabbath presence of God to our everyday experience?"

Step 4: Personal Sabbath Practice (1–2 minutes)

Ask participants to answer: "One small Sabbath practice I could try this week is ____."

Examples:

- No work email for 24 hours
- A tech-free evening
- A slow meal with gratitude
- Extended prayer or worship
- Taking a walk without multitasking

Remember each of these are practical steps to the ultimate goal, to be in the presence of God.

Closing Visual Thought (30 seconds)

Draw a simple pause symbol (| |) over the Sabbath box

Say: "Sabbath isn't just stopping work—it's remembering who God is and who we are."

Close with a short prayer for rest, trust, and freedom from striving.

PRAYER

Prayer Requests of Group Members (be sure to share these with the group and check in on relevant requests)

-
-
-
-
-
-

Those we are Asking God to Save

Friends -

Family -

Co-workers -

Others -

Close in prayer, Thank God for His finished work that enables us to walk with Him in rest. Pray that we would be intentional about not only drawing boundaries for rest, but that we would live in a state of rest.