

Dear Group Leaders and Hosts,

Welcome to week two of our fall series on "rest." Leading a group takes some energy and planning; that is why it is called "leading":-) If you come in without some ideas to direct your group, then the conversations will wander and the time you share won't be as valuable. So spend a few minutes planning out your meeting time and while you are at it take a few minutes to pray for your members. And I will pray for you when I send this out.

Here is an exercise you can use this week in smaller subgroups. It is called the "prayer of examen" and I came across it in The Rest of God by Mark Buchanan. Share with each other in two's or three's the answer to these two questions: "Where did I feel most alive, most hopeful, most in the presence of God?" "Where did I feel most dread, most despairing, farthest from God?" You can frame it with "this week" although the questions are posed to be asked of oneself at the end of each day. I also think "When" might be added to "Where" in asking the questions: "When did I feel most alive..."

You could have the subgroups finish that exercise by praying for each other based on their conversation/interactions. Then regather your group and turn to this week's message/teaching.

I followed up Pastor Shtem's message on the "Rest of God" from Genesis 1:2-2:3 with a message on "God's Rest for Us" from Exodus 20:8-11. This is the fourth commandment in the 10 commandments, the command to "remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." We are commanded to work six days and not to work on the seventh based on the actions of God in creation. God rested on the seventh day, blessed it and made it holy. The command is to "remember." What does God want us to remember? Let me suggest two things:

First, we are to remember or remind ourselves that we, as God's image bearers, are to follow God's pattern established in creation. We are to imitate God! God rested because he was finished and pleased; we may not understand how it all holds together but we can also stop and rest in what God has created, being confident that God's creation is good and God's commands are trustworthy. God is inviting us to trust him; in fact the entire goal of God's creation enterprise is summed up in that very idea and finds practical expression in the Sabbath rest. We are so confident in God that we can stop our work and simply delight ourselves in our God whose own stopping signified that this creation is good and pleasing.

We are also to remember or remind ourselves that God placed himself in his creation on the seventh day. We are not left alone to try to make God's ideas work. It is not up to us to keep the world from devolving back into chaos; we haven't inherited a mess that we need to make right. God is enthroned over his creation and is actively guiding it toward God's desired goal. If God is in charge, worry should be impossible! But worry we will without our Sabbath rest. It is to banish fear and anxiety. The prophet Isaiah says "You (God) will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you" (Isaiah 26:3). It strikes me that Romans 8:18-39 is a perfect Sabbath reflection summed up in verse 31-32: "If God is for us, who can be

against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Through Jesus we are reminded that there is no power that God cannot overcome; even death itself is no match for God. So God's invitation to rest is to remember these things and to allow them to guide us not only on the Sabbath but on everyday of the week.

In conclusion, rest is found a relationship with God based on trust. We are his image bearers, called to imitate him as a declaration of our trust in his creation and redemption. Rest is not the absence of problems - even God has problems! - but in the presence of Almighty God.

I never explained the change of the day of rest in Christianity from Saturday to Sunday, from the 7th day to the 1st day of the week. This would be a good discussion topic. Why did the Christians rest on the first day rather than the seventh? What do you think? I don't think the answer is explicit in Scripture but the most likely explanation is of course the resurrection. Jesus was raised on the first day of the week, signaling new creation, the consummation or fulfillment of the creation story. The early Christians might also have moved days as a way to distinguish themselves from Judaism since there was antagonism between the two.

Make sure you have time to discuss Sabbath practices. Whether it is a Saturday or Sunday isn't the main concern. What is the main concern is that one out of every seven days we stop and we remember. We give God our attention and praise. We let go of our problems and the world's woes and we rest in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But how? How is that practically worked out in one's life? What habit or practices or disciplines mark out, could mark out, or should mark out the Sabbath? Share actual practices or hoped for ideas that will encourage us to enter God's rest.

Blessings,
P Dan