

the rest of God

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

January 7, 2018

Discussion Guide

THE REST OF GOD

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- IF YOU HAD FREEDOM AND PERMISSION TO “REST,” WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, TALK ABOUT THE BIBLICAL PRACTICE OF SABBATH.
- READ JEREMIAH 17.19-27 OUT LOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.
- WHAT INSTRUCTIONS DOES GOD GIVE CONCERNING SABBATH? WHAT REASONS DOES HE PROVIDE FOR

KEEPING SABBATH? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY IN THE TEXT AS POSSIBLE.

- WOULD YOU SAY THAT CHRISTIANS REGULARLY HONOR THE PRACTICE OF SABBATH? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- DO YOU FIND IT EASY OR DIFFICULT TO PRACTICE SABBATH? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO GOD’S INSTRUCTIONS AND REASONS REGARDING SABBATH-KEEPING ADDRESS YOUR OWN PRACTICE OF SABBATH-KEEPING?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO PRACTICE SABBATH? DO YOU FEEL THIS PRACTICE WOULD BE PRACTICAL IN YOUR SITUATION? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT MIGHT NEED BE IN PLACE FOR YOU TO PRACTICE SABBATH WITH ANY REGULARITY?
- CONSIDER CLOSING YOUR TIME AS A GROUP IN PRAYER, ASKING GOD TO OPEN YOUR MINDS AND HEARTS TO WHAT HE WISHES TO SAY ABOUT SABBATH-KEEPING.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

God’s 10 Words

THE DECALOGUE (10 COMMANDMENTS) FORMS A CENTRAL PART IN OUTLINING THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE. THE DECALOGUE IS RECORDED TWICE IN SCRIPTURE (EXODUS 20.1-17; DEUTERONOMY 5.6-21). IT IS THE ONLY PORTION OF THE TORAH WHICH WAS SPOKEN DIRECTLY BY GOD TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL (EXODUS 20.1) AND THE ONLY PORTION OF THE TORAH DIRECTLY WRITTEN BY THE HAND OF GOD (EXODUS 31.18). THE INCREDIBLE IMPORTANCE OF THE DECALOGUE TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE IS UNDERScoreD BY THE FACT THAT THIS PORTION OF THE TORAH

is the only portion included in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25.16).

While modern readers often refer to the Decalogue as commandments, they are nowhere called laws or commandments in Scripture. Rather, they are referred to as the words of God to his people. However, it is hard to express their importance in modern terms apart from the concept of Law. Perhaps the easiest way to describe the role of the Decalogue is in terms of the American Constitution. The Constitution provides an overarching framework within which all other laws must fit. In the same way, the Decalogue provides a framework for the Law of Moses. It reminds the Israelites of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of life as well as providing a general trajectory for how one is to relate to God and people on these dimensions.

Unlike modern Western Law, the Decalogue, and the Torah as a whole, are written from a paradigmatic vantage point. Western Law is typically written from the vantage point of providing an exhaustive account of behaviors which are permitted and prohibited. This approach accounts for the many thousands of laws which exist and for the constant adding to the law code because any behavior not found in the code is "permissible" by definition, something referred to as a loophole in the law. Ancient law codes, include the Torah, made no attempt to provide an exhaustive accounting of permitted and prohibited behaviors. Instead, the Decalogue, and the Torah as a whole, outline models of permitted and prohibited behaviors. It was therefore left up to the Israelites to determine the principles undergirding the Law so they might extrapolate to everyday situations. It was in the discovering of these principles that the Israelite not only discovered the basic framework for life but touched upon the basic nature of God's own character, the foundation of the Law itself.

THE TEXT

EXODUS 20.8-11: *LIVE WITH A STOPPING DAY*

The fourth of God's 10 words to the Israelite people outlining the covenant life he desired for them described a day of stopping as part of the weekly rhythm by which one lived. This command begins with the instruction to have a distinct (holy) Sabbath day. In the language of the Old Testament, Sabbath means to stop or cease. This day of stopping was not a day of complete cessation from activity. Such activity as tending a fire, cooking a meal, or the like was necessary in the ancient agrarian world. Instead, the stopping God intended was a cessation from production, a stopping of activity associated with what we might call "work."

In this command, God is clear that he intended this day of stopping to be enjoyed by all within the Israelite society. The Israelites were not allowed to pass the process of production off on slaves, animals, or even foreigners in their midst.

According to God, the reasoning behind honoring a day of stopping lay in how God had created the world. In creation, God had worked/produced for 6 days and then had stopped working so he might enjoy what he had created. God intended that his creation enjoy this same 6-to-1 rhythm of production and stoppage. It is almost as if in his act of creating, God "hard-wired" this rhythm into creation. Therefore, he instructed his people to live by this rhythm.

EXODUS 31.12-13: *GOD'S PEOPLE STOP*

As God moved to conclude his instructions to Moses concerning how he desired his people to live (Exodus 21.1-31.18), he returned to the issue of Sabbath. According to God, the keeping of the Sabbath was to serve as a sign, one which marked off the Israelites as the people of God. In keeping the Sabbath, the Israelites were providing a sign to future generations and other cultures that they had chosen to honor the Lord.

JEREMIAH 17.19-27: *WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOU STOP*

In this passage, Jeremiah records a prophecy which God instructed him to speak to the people of Jerusalem. This prophecy was to be spoken at the gates of Jerusalem, the points through which the people entered the city. The prophecy he was to speak concerned honoring the Sabbath. Jeremiah was to encourage the people to stop carrying loads through the gates on Sabbath days. What seems to be implied is that the Jerusalem market was open on the Sabbath day. Therefore, people from the surrounding environs were carrying their wares into the city to sell them, even on the Sabbath. Thus, this prophecy is less about carrying a load and more about stopping activity associated with production which is the primary purpose of the Sabbath command (Exodus 20.8-11).

Jeremiah notes that previous generations had refused to honor the Sabbath in spite of God's calls to do otherwise, including his calls which involved discipline. However, God calls once more to his people through Jeremiah, encouraging them to honor the rhythm of Sabbath. God provides two reasons for honoring this rhythm. First, if the people of Jerusalem would honor this rhythm, they would find their lives and city made secure. With the growing specter of Babylon on the horizon, the promise of security was important. It implied a good life. Second, and more importantly, God promised the experience of pilgrimage. Jeremiah speaks of kings and princes entering the city on chariots, followed by the people of Jerusalem who are in turn followed by the rest of Israel, a procession winding its way to the Temple itself for worship. This image is important because it speaks not just of a religious awakening among the Jewish people but of a general experience of God not unlike that of a religious festival. Somehow, in the honoring of Sabbath, God promised the people of Judah they would experience his presence in a special way, a way that was unique not unlike during a religious festival. However,

what seems to be promised is an experience with God which is greater than any festival but a new experience of God which becomes a way of life for the people of Judah. However, should the people refuse, God notes he will allow them to experience his wrath.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

Sabbath. When I grew up, Sabbath was Sunday, and it meant that I had to take a nap and you couldn't buy gas, beer, or do anything fun like go to the movies. In the mind of a child, Sabbath day was "Boring Day." Fast-forward four decades and the various "Blue Laws" associated with Sabbath keeping have been repealed, but the idea of Sabbath as a complete stopping of anything fun has stuck around, at least in my mind. When I think Sabbath, I think of a day where I am not allowed to do anything. Honestly, I am not a person who doesn't like to do anything. Every now and again I need a day to veg-out, but if you make me lay on the couch more than a time or two, I am going to go crazy. When you add this way of thinking to the reality that my Sundays are packed with activity, the whole idea of Sabbath-keeping goes out the window, and I am not all that sad about it. Remember, I never really liked sitting around anyway.

There is just one problem with this whole scenario. God commands that we (that includes me!) keep the Sabbath. In fact, there is no wiggle room in what God says. God's people keep the Sabbath or they are not God's people (Exodus 31.12-13). Not a lot of room to bend that to my liking. So how do you keep the Sabbath, if life is such that you can't (or don't want!) to keep it?

I am convinced that this is the question most serious people of God ask themselves at one time or another, but we try to push it to the fringes of our minds so we don't think about it again, at least not for a while. But Sabbath is serious business to God. So, I think we should take some time to figure it out. The first step in this journey for me was when I realized that

the Sabbath wasn't Sunday or even Saturday! Sabbath is nothing other than a stopping day, and that can be any day. This means my Sabbath can be Monday or Friday or any day. That helps a great deal because now I can think of Sabbath-keeping on days I am not working like a madman. This, however, proves harder than it sounds. I happen to work like a madman most days. This is where I find myself needing to take the next step. I know what the step looks like. I just am struggling to take it. To take this step I have to stop working. Sabbath doesn't mean I do nothing. Sabbath is not laying on the couch unless you are into that kind of thing. Sabbath is about stopping from what you or I do to make a living or make living possible. It is stopping from the things we "have" to do. This means we are free to "work" with things we enjoy doing, things which are more life-giving than work. So, if gardening gives you life, and you don't have to do it, do it as Sabbath.

Herein lies the problem for me. I find ways to do what I have to do every day. This problem is exacerbated with technology that leaves email and the Internet at my fingertips, but even if I stay off these, I can find myself shopping and cleaning and the like on my Sabbath day. I hate (I use the word purposefully) cleaning and shopping. Sabbath-keeping, for me, is in putting these down to go for a run or on my bad days a walk with my stick. It is heading into the woods or maybe mowing the lawn. However, I can't seem to give myself permission to do this. I suppose there are a number of reasons, but right up at the top is I feel other things are more pressing, offer more pay out than Sabbath keeping. I am beginning to wonder if this is the case. Certainly, I get things done, but Sabbath isn't about getting things done. I am learning that Sabbath is about getting God. So, as I ponder taking another Sabbath step, the question for me is becoming whether I want God or getting things done.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

Sabbath is a dirty word for some people of God. Sabbath stands for something impossible God demands of us. At least it can feel that way. For many of us, Sabbath is the day God wants us to sleep late and then move to the couch for the rest of the day. It isn't simply that this doesn't seem possible in our fast-paced lives. Many of us would describe this kind of day as the worst day of our lives. Sabbath feels like punishment. This is because we don't understand Sabbath. Sabbath isn't about laying on the couch unless laying on the couch is something you enjoy. Sabbath is about stopping from the things we have to do so we can engage with the life-giving things we want to do, things which are of no benefit to what we need in life. While this can sound more enticing, it also feels just out of reach. Who has time for this? However, when we recognize what Sabbath is about the question might better be phrased "Who doesn't have time for that?" You see, Sabbath is not just about getting a break. It is about creating space in our lives for us to "get God" in a way we cannot otherwise experience him. Thus, the question we should probably associate with Sabbath is "Do we want God?" What do we want? Perhaps this is a question with which we could wrestle this week. What do we want in life? Many of us have never really pondered this question even though we have answered it. Our lives tell the story of what we want, but is this what we really want? This week spend some time pondering what you want most in life. When you come to your answer, take some time to ponder what a life spent in pursuit of this thing might look like. Consider how Sabbath, might or might not be part of this pursuit. Take some time and ponder these things with God, giving him space to speak into your life.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 twitter.com/blake_shipp

©2018 UNION CENTER CHRISTIAN CHURCH