# Capitol Hill Baptist Church Stewardship

## Core Seminars Week 8

### God’s Purpose for Rest

PRAYER

#### I. Introduction

Good morning! We just spent the last five weeks in the Stewardship core seminar talking about money. But God’s made us stewards of more than just money; He’s also made us stewards of our time. And this will be the focus of our next two weeks…if the Lord gives us the time! ☺

As with money, stewarding our time can get pretty counter-cultural. In the first class, we talked about the shift in thinking that all Christians need to make. Instead of thinking that all our money is ours and there’s only a portion that we need to “give back” to God, the reality is that *all* our money belongs to God. We’re not the owners; we’re stewards.

Well, the same holds true of our time. We’re so used to thinking about time in the same way we think about money. I’m obligated to use some of my time working because I need to eat. And I’m obligated to spend some of my time in church—because I’m a Christian. But then what’s left over is “me time” and is mine to spend however I want.

Of course, that hardly fits into the stewardship principle that we’ve been discussing. Remember what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:7 – **“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”** Every minute of your life is a trust from God. There’s no such thing as “me time.”

So we’re going to begin this mini-series on time with the concept of rest. And there’s a good reason for it. You see, it’s with rest that the question of “Who owns my time?” really hits home. Every minute we have is a trust from God, a stewardship from him, and this includes our rest. So the purpose of rest isn’t to finally do whatever we want, as if we’re the owner. No, God’s the owner, and we rest for his purposes.

But even as Christians, our sinful nature resists this shift in mindset. For example, we can agree that rest for the Christian isn’t about “me time”—fair enough. But look at that statement on the first page of your handout. What if we were to say that **“The purpose of rest is to recharge us for the real work God gives us”**? Is that true? What’s wrong with this as a purpose statement for rest?

* Rest IS part of the real work God give us
* It’s incomplete—rest does more than recharge us
* It assumes part of our time is separate from our stewardship (ALL of our time is God’s)

Well, I suspect that the role the Bible has for rest in our lives is a lot more complex—and more interesting and satisfying and God-exalting. To get into it, I want us to start by walking through what the Bible says about rest. Then with that foundation in place, we’ll look at the Bible’s purposes for rest. Finally, we’ll finish with an exercise together about stewardship of rest.

**II. The Bible’s Teaching on Rest**

So what does the bible teach us about rest? The Bible first mentions rest right at the beginning in Genesis 2:1-3. God completes his creation, and then we read, **“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”**

So what are we to make of this? Well, one thing to notice is that the seventh day of creation was different than the first six. On the seventh day, God rested. What exactly does that mean? Well, it can’t mean that he ceased involvement with his creation. Jesus says in John 5:17, **“My Father is working until now, and I am working.”** Instead, it seems that God’s stopping from his *creative* work. So rest doesn’t always mean a cessation of all activity. It can sometimes refer to ceasing from doing a specific activity.

But a second thing to notice here is that this rest has no end. The first six days all had an end. So, for example, Genesis 1:31 says, **“And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was *evening* and there was *morning*, the sixth day.”** But no evening’s ever mentioned for the seventh day. It seems that the day of God’s rest is a day without end. So God’s rest is something that’s lasting.

The next major appearance of rest in the Bible is in Exodus. Here God introduces the idea of a Sabbath rest. The Hebrew word (*sabbat*) for “Sabbath” means to stop or to cease. Now, we normally think of a Sabbath rest as something that happens once a week. But the seventh day of the week wasn’t the only Sabbath for Old Testament Israel. For example, Leviticus 16:31 calls the Day of Atonement a **“Sabbath of rest”**. Israel also observed a Sabbath year in Leviticus 25.

But why was the Sabbath important? It’s interesting to note that each time the ten commandments are listed in scripture a different reason for the Sabbath is given. So in Exodus 20, God tells his people to keep the Sabbath because **“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.”** Israel was to keep the Sabbath because God rested in creation. Then in Deuteronomy 5 where the law is given a second time, God says, **“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”** Here, Israel was to keep the Sabbath because it also reminded them that God delivered them from their slavery in Egypt. In fact, in delivering Israel from their slavery, he gave them the Promised Land. The Promised Land was also seen as a kind of rest—a rest from their enemies. Deuteronomy 12:9 says, **“for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you.”** This rest and inheritance being referred to is Canaan.

But here’s the thing with all this: None of these reasons given for resting on the Sabbath is meant to be a ceasing of activity. Instead, they were about stopping one kind of work to engage in another. They were to stop their daily work to worship and enjoy God for who he is and what he’s done. Israel was to rest from their work on the Sabbath, but if they laid around in bed all day, then they didn’t fulfill the observance of the Sabbath. Israel was to gather together on the Sabbath (Lev. 23:3). Psalm 92 was a song to be sung on the Sabbath. It praised and celebrated God as faithful and holy. It remembered his works of creation and deliverance. And God blessed those who observed his Sabbath (Is. 56:2).

So this idea, that rest isn’t cessation but about enjoyment of God, builds as we move through the Bible. There’s something about God’s plan for his people which isn’t just about physical rest from labor, but about entering into *his* rest. Psalm 95 hints at this. Reflecting on the rebellion of Israel in the desert, the Psalmist concludes, **“Therefore I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”**

To further explain this, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95. Hebrews 3 and 4 show that the reason that first generation of Israel didn’t enter the Promised Land was because of their unbelief. And even if they hadentered the Promised Land, that land itself never fully encompassed God’s rest. Hebrews 4:8 says, **“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.” [[1]](#footnote-1)**

The Promised Land wasn’t the ultimate rest God intends to give his people. Neither was the earthly celebration of God on a Sabbath day. No, the rest that God finally intends for his people is the rest of faith! In Matthew 11:28, Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, says, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”** Through faith we rely on Christ’s work instead of our own. This is central to the gospel message. It’s amazing to see how the simple concept of rest is developed through the Bible until it becomes the core of the gospel![[2]](#footnote-2)

And this rest is obtained now and will be fully realized in the future. So Hebrews 4:3 says, **“For we who have believed enter that rest.”** We come to know this rest of security and peace right now through a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But then a few verses later, Hebrews 4:11 says, **“Let us therefore strive to *enter* that rest.”** We work hard today, resting on Christ’s finished work, so that we can enjoy God’s rest in heaven, having perfect harmony with him. As Christians, we’re future heirs of this promised rest, but in the present, we live by faith in light of that rest.

So if we’re still awaiting a future rest, then we’d expect to find this concept of rest in Revelation. And we do! Revelation 14:11 talks about those in eternal torment and says they **“have *no rest*, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”** But then two verses later we see that those who die in the Lord are blessed with rest. **“Blessed indeed,”** says the Spirit, **“that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”**

Okay, so that’s rest from Genesis through Revelation. At this point, you might be thinking that the biblical idea of rest sounds great, but exhausting—we rest from one activity only to engage in another. This is great for Type A personalities, but what about those of us who are Type B?

Well, there’s one more theme in scripture that we need to look at before getting into application. And that’s the theme of physical rest. As we just saw, when we rest, we imitate God, who also rested. In so doing, we participate with God and share a similarity. But the theme of physical rest also involves sleep, and this is different. You see, sleep emphasizes our difference from God. God doesn’t sleep! As the Psalmist says, **“Behold, [God] who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep”** (Psalm 121:4). In contrast, we need sleep. Some of us require a little, others more. Psalm 4:8 says, **“In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”** When we sleep, we make evident our dependence on God. We can sleep well because God is trustworthy. At the end of the day, our security isn’t found in our circumstances. We trust that as we sleep, God will sustain us, and watch over us until we wake again.

So Jesus encourages his followers to get rest. In Mark 6:31 the apostles return from their first ministry journey, and Jesus says, **“‘Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest awhile.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.”** This kind of human physical rest that’s needed to recover is a good and godly thing. God knows our frame and our weakness and mercifully gives us a respite so that we can once again have the energy to engage in his work.

So what are our main takeaways from all of this? I’ll give you three:

First, rest in the Bible is mainly about having a right relationship with God and being reconciled to him. If we persist in unbelief, God’s wrath rests on us in judgment (Ezek. 5:13). But if we live by faith in Jesus, God’s Spirit rests on us in blessing (1 Pet. 4:14). It’d be wrong to think that the Sabbath and God’s rest are mainly about us and our own rest. Instead, they’re pointing to the ultimate rest that we enjoy in heaven, when we finally enter into God’s rest.

Second, rest in the Bible isn’t merely a ceasing of activity but ceasing of one activity so we can do another—enjoying God and his goodness. So, for example, when we enter heaven, we’ll rest from our difficult labor in this fallen world only to move on to joyfully laboring in the presence of God, but without the curse of thorns and thistles. We’re not going to be just sitting on a cloud, as the world pictures it. No, heaven is a place full of activity. We’ll praise God with our words (Rev. 15) and we’ll also praise him with our work. Isaiah 65:21-22 describes heaven as a place where **“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit…for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”**

Third, rest in the Bible shows us more of who God is and who we are. We need physical rest to recover and rejuvenate, even as we sleep. But God never sleeps. While God is independent of all things, all things are dependent on God.

**Questions or comments?**

**III. Purpose of Rest**

Now, as we begin to apply all this to ourselves, we need to remember a couple of truths from earlier in the course that are central to all that we’ve been talking about. First, God owns everything. The time you spent sleeping last night belonged to him. The time you’ll spend playing some silly game on your phone this afternoon belongs to him. And second, we’re his stewards. One day, we’ll give an account to God for all that he’s entrusted us with—and that includes our time. So Ephesians 5:16 tells us to **“[make] the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”**

So in thinking about God’s purpose for rest, how does rest help us make the best use of the time?

1. **Rest helps us recover from our labor**

We rest as a way to recharge. This is where sleep is so helpful. During sleep, our minds process all the information we’ve received during the day, storing up and consolidating memory. Our bodies are restored and rejuvenated as tissue is repaired and muscles grow. As we saw earlier, this is one huge difference between us and God. We need to rest to recover from work; he never does.

1. **Rest shows our dependence on God**

Resting shows that God doesn’t need us to always work. Believe it or not, he can manage things just fine without us. God accomplishes far more by himself than we ever can, and rest glories in that truth. It shows that we trust his wisdom in the constraints he’s given us. Our limitations are actually a gift from God. Limitations keep us from becoming self-reliant. They teach us to look to God for our strength. Isaiah 40:28-31 says, **“[God] does not faint or grow weary…He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.”**

There are many people in this world who rest too easily. But our city is full of people who are exactly the opposite! Many of us resent our need for rest. We try to burn the candle from both ends, and it’s only with great reluctance that we stumble into bed each evening. Well, if you’re like that, I’d encourage you to think differently about rest. Instead of focusing on what rest does to your productivity, you should think more about what your rest says about God. Instead of fighting against your need to rest, enjoy it as a daily reminder that you’re not God. Besides, only God gets his to-do list done every day. It’s important to note that in the Bible, the opposite of rest isn’t work; the opposite of rest is restlessness—worry, anxiety[[3]](#footnote-3)…and ultimately, self-righteousness.

When we begin to joyfully accept the limitations God’s built into us, it shows that we trust him. It doesn’t all depend on me—and praise God for that! And as we collapse into bed at the end of the day, our fatigue can be a good reminder that God doesn’t need us to carry out his plans.[[4]](#footnote-4) He’s not like, *“Thank goodness for Joe! I could never have gotten that done if it wasn’t for him!”* Instead, God takes pleasure in how our work has shown off what he’s done in us by his Spirit. God receives the glory, but he gives us the privilege and joy, as his stewards, to participate in his sovereign purposes.

1. **Rest encourages us to enjoy God**

Rest helps us delight in the goodness of God being God. Friends, that’s what we’re doing right now! On Sundays, we set aside time from our daily work schedule to engage in the work of corporate worship. We remind ourselves of God’s truth and our spirits are encouraged as we meet together in fellowship. But there’s other ways to enjoy God in our rest, as well. Just like using our money to enjoy God’s creation, we can do the same thing with our leisure, our free time.

Let’s go back to a verse we’ve referenced quite a few times through this class. 1 Timothy 4:4 says, **“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.”** Nothing is to be rejected. And 1 Timothy 6:18 goes further and says it’s to be enjoyed—as long as we remember that creation is to be a conduit to the Creator, not the other way around. In our rest, we can delight in the goodness of God’s creation. And as we do, our hearts swell with thanksgiving, and we delight in the goodness of our Creator. That’s how one particular form of rest—our leisure—which we often think as self-serving, can actually be worship. A walk in the woods, or a trip to an art museum, or a fun conversation, or a sporting event can be worship. These can be an opportunity to discover and celebrate the goodness of the God who made them.

1. **Rest helps build relationships with others**

Good stewardship in God’s sight is heavily invested in relationships. Money is inherently relational either by how we use it or who we transact with (Luke 16:9). And, likewise, health is essential to serving others (Phil. 1:24). Well, in the same way, our time is also required for building relationships with others (Heb. 10:24-25). And so one key purpose for rest and leisure is to serve relationships. After all, the Sabbath rest of the Old Testament was a communal activity, not an individual one. And the same will be true for the rest in Heaven. So it’s important to see the enjoyment and strengthening of relationships as one of God’s purposes for rest.

Perhaps you’ve not thought about rest and leisure in this way before, that it can have a God-honoring purpose. No doubt a leisure activity can be sinful, such as getting drunk. But any leisure activity that’s not sinful can have a God-honoring purpose. But that doesn’t mean it’s the best stewardship of our time, however. To evaluate our activity, we need to ask two questions:

1. **Are there areas where this activity is leading me to sin, even if the activity itself isn’t sinful?**

So, for example, think about watching a particular TV show that leaves me feeling discontent. Or taking a long hike that kept me from spending needed time with my kids. Or wasting hours on social media when I should be looking to find a job to support myself. None of these activities are morally bad in themselves, but given the circumstances, they could be a conduit to sin rather than to God.

1. **Is this activity the most God-glorifying way to steward my time?**

As we saw with the parable of the talents in the first week, our job as stewards is to make the most of the opportunities God gives us. That means looking across our money, our time, our energy, our skills, and our relationships and determining what combination of investment will best honor God with our lives. We’re called to give our whole selves to God, not just our money or our time or any other single resource.

So spending $10,000 to go heli-skiing in the Himalayas can be a legitimate activity that can bring glory to God. And it may be the best use of that time and money. But I need to compare it across other ways to invest that time and money before I decide that’s the direction I’m going to take. When I do that, my metric for comparing different options is faithfulness. To what extent am I using the opportunities God’s given me to show off his faithfulness, goodness, and love?

**IV. Conclusion**

Okay, so for the rest of our time this morning, I want us to walk through an example of what stewardship of rest might look like.

Here’s the situation. You have a free Saturday afternoon! What will you do? You could serve as a counselor at the Capitol Hill Pregnancy Center. Or you could go to a Nats game.

***Why might it be good stewardship for you to go to the Nats game?***

* It could help recharge your mind and body after a tiring week
* It could be necessary to build your relationships
* It could bring you great joy to be outside, eating a dog and nachos, and it makes you more mindful of God—in other words, you worship well at the stadium

Okay, so we’ve articulated our stewardship purpose for going to the Nats game. The follow-up question is harder, and it’s this:

***How might going to the Nats game for the stewardship purposes we just articulated look different from how an unbeliever might ordinarily enjoy a baseball game?***

* It might not look different at all on the outside.
* It’s a heart issue. We’re not doing it for selfish reasons or for sinful reasons, like to get drunk or because baseball is your idol.

**Prayer**

1. Note that the author here introduces the idea that this is a “Sabbath rest”—joining the idea of Sabbath with the reference to rest in Psalm 95:11. The OT concept of “Sabbath rest” carries with it an idea of union with God that the author says the rest of Psalm 95 is pointing to. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Philip Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 1977, page 155, “True rest is the enjoyment by the creature [in] perfect harmony with his Creator, and it can therefore only be rest in God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Matthew 6:27 – “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. All throughout scripture, God often glorifies himself by showing that he’s the one saving and delivering. He brought down the walls of Jericho with a blast of trumpets, he routed the 135,000 Midianite soldiers with Gideon’s crew of 300, Jesus feeds the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)