

# Discover Bible Studies

## #16: The Secret to Heavenly Rest

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Just a few years ago some were predicting we would soon have more leisure time than we'd know what to do with. There were good reasons for those confident predictions. In the cities of the world computers were crunching through month-long tasks in fractions of a second. And robots had begun to handle the gruelling jobs of heavy industry.

But after the computers have been whirring and the automation automating, we're more out of breath than ever. People are running out of time these days. Above all, families are running out of time. Husbands and wives find it hard to schedule "quality time" with the kids, much less with each other.

One study in a small community showed that the average time per day that fathers spent alone with their very young sons was-37 seconds! Families are out of time and out of touch.

### 1. THE REMEDY FOR HIGH-TENSION LIVING

Jesus understands the problems of families under stress and He wants us to understand that spiritual rest is part of the quality of life:

*"COME TO ME, all you who are weary and burdened, and I WILL GIVE YOU REST. . . . LEARN FROM ME, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find REST FOR YOUR SOULS." Matthew 11:28, 29. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

The Bible suggests we experience this kind of rest in two ways: coming to Christ on both a daily and a weekly basis.

### 2. A DAILY LINK WITH JESUS

Crowds constantly clamoured for Jesus' attention. And yet Christ communicated a peaceful, tranquil spirit to everyone around Him. How? He invested time each day communing with His heavenly Father. He depended on His Father continually for resources to meet life's challenges (John 6:57).

If we are to live the serene, steady life that He did, we must continually depend on Jesus-let His Word and Spirit fill us and shape us. The best way to counter the forces burning us out as individuals and tearing us apart as families is to invest quality time with Christ. He tells us:

*"REMAIN IN ME, and I will remain in you. . . . APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING." -John 15:4, 5.*

One of the greatest needs of our time is for people to tap the spiritual resources available through forming a day-by-day relationship with Jesus. One very important point that needs to be emphasized about our relationship with Christ is His finished work on the cross. True rest, real security, can only exist because of the great accomplishment Jesus referred to when He cried out as He was dying: "It is finished" (John 19:30). In other words, His work of redeeming us was completed.

*"But now he [Christ] has appeared ONCE FOR ALL . . . TO DO AWAY WITH SIN by the sacrifice of himself." -Hebrews 9:26.*

When Jesus died, He did "away with sin." That's why it's said that the believer who has confessed his or her sins can "rest" in the finished work of Christ. We're accepted.

Guilt lies behind much of the frantic pace of our lives today. But Jesus solved the guilt problem once and for all at the cross. Jesus' cry, "It is finished," sealed His promise of "I will give you rest" as an established fact. Christ completed the work of redeeming us at Calvary (Titus 2:14), then He rested in the tomb over the Sabbath, and rose from the grave Sunday morning as the Victor over sin and death. The Christian can have no greater assurance than to rest in the finished work of Christ.

*"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart IN FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH . . . Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL." -Hebrews 10:22, 23.*

Because He "who promised is faithful," we can enter into the salvation-rest Jesus has promised. The stability, peace, and rest we experience in Jesus every day is a result not of anything we do, but of what He did at the cross.

We can rest in Christ because our salvation is assured. That assurance motivates us to spend time with Christ each day, feeding on His Word and breathing in the atmosphere of heaven through prayer. A rendezvous with Jesus helps us turn a stressed-out lifestyle into a peaceful and purposeful life.

### **3. A WEEKLY LINK WITH JESUS**

After Christ created the world in six days (Colossians 1:16-17), He provided Sabbath-rest. It is a weekly opportunity for us to cultivate our connection with Him.

*"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning-the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he RESTED from all his work. And God BLESSED the seventh day and*

*MADE IT HOLY, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." - Genesis 1:31-2:3.*

As their Creator, Jesus "rested" on the first Sabbath with Adam and Eve, and He "blessed" the Sabbath day and "made it holy." God established a seven-day weekly cycle, not for His own benefit, but for Adam and Eve and for us today. Because He cared so much for the people He had made, He planned that every seventh day throughout their lives should be dedicated to seeking His presence. Each Sabbath, as He called it, was to be a day of both physical rest and spiritual refreshment. The entrance of sin into our world only made the need for Sabbath rest more acute.

The same Saviour who promised Adam and Eve "rest," about two thousand years later gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Jesus chose to place the Sabbath-rest commandment at the very heart of the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment reads:

*"REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY BY KEEPING IT HOLY. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he RESTED on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD BLESSED the Sabbath day and MADE IT HOLY." - Exodus 20:8-11.*

God established the Sabbath as a day to "remember" the Lord who "made the heavens and the earth." Sabbath-rest each week links us with the Creator who blessed this day and set it apart.

When Jesus lived on earth, He took advantage of every opportunity to sustain His union with the Father. He benefited from Sabbath-rest by worshiping on Sabbath, as Luke tells us:

*"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and ON THE SABBATH DAY he went into the synagogue, AS WAS HIS CUSTOM." -Luke 4:16.*

If the divine-human Jesus needed to rest in His Father's presence on the Sabbath day, we human beings certainly need it more. When Jesus swept aside the legal restrictions the Jews had placed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-12), He pointed out that God had made it to benefit people:

*"He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'" -Mark 2:27, 28.*

Jesus highlighted the importance of the Sabbath even in His death. He died on Friday, "the

Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin" (Luke 23:54). At that moment He declared, "It is finished," that is, His work of coming to this world and dying as substitute for the human race was complete (John 19:30; 4:34; 5:30). Then to celebrate His finished mission, Jesus rested in the tomb over the Sabbath.

Just as Christ completed His work of creation on the sixth day and then rested on the seventh day, so through dying on the cross He completed His work of redemption on the sixth day, and then rested on the seventh.

On Sunday morning Jesus came out from the tomb, a victorious Saviour (Luke 24:1-7). He had already asked His disciples to maintain the Sabbath encounter with Him after His resurrection. Speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place nearly forty years after His death, He charged them:

*"Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath." -Matthew 24:20.*

Our Saviour wanted His disciples and their converts to continue the practices He had taught them (John 15:15, 16). He wanted them to experience both salvation-rest and Sabbath-rest. They did not disappoint Him. The disciples continued to observe the Sabbath after Christ's death (see Luke 23:54-56; Acts 13:14; 16:13; 17:2; 18:1-4).

The beloved apostle John kept up his weekly link with Christ on the Sabbath day. In his later years he wrote, "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit" (Revelation 1:10). According to Jesus, "the Lord's Day" is the Sabbath, "for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8).

On the Sabbath we celebrate the Lord's two greatest accomplishments on our behalf: creating us and saving us. This Sabbath experience will continue in heaven:

*"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,' declares the LORD . . . 'from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the LORD." Isaiah 66:22, 23.*

#### **4. THE BENEFITS OF SABBATH-REST**

People today are trampling over each other in their frantic life. Individuals are burning out. Families are falling apart under the strain. But God presents the Sabbath as a much better way to live the good life.

Let's look at some of the specific benefits of Sabbath-rest:

(1) The Sabbath is a memorial of creation, and by keeping it holy, we erect a memorial to our Creator. Its sacred hours offer a wonderful opportunity to get in touch with our roots in God's created world. When was the last time you or your family took time to really soak in the quiet beauty of a forest path or rocky stream? The Sabbath gives us time to spend with Jesus and catch glimpses of the wonders He has made for us.

(2) On Sabbath we experience the joy of worship and fellowship with other Christians. There's a benefit from praising God with others as a group of worshipers. The Sabbath gives us that special time of coming together as a church body to recharge our spiritual batteries.

(3) The Sabbath provides occasions to perform thoughtful acts of kindness. Has a neighbour been sick during the week when you had no time to visit? When a friend needed a sympathetic ear after her husband's death, did the pressure of daily living deprive her of your loving attention? Jesus advised: "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12).

(4) The Sabbath is a day to strengthen family ties. When Christ commanded, "On [the Sabbath] you shall not do any work" (Exodus 20:10). He couldn't have given a better prescription to workaholic dads and stressed-out moms. The Sabbath is a giant STOP sign for families. Stop letting the most urgent things crowd out the most important things. The Sabbath is one day when we can replace pressure with prayer, labour with laughter, and busy schedules with quiet reflection. Sabbath-rest provides the entire family with time to link up with Christ and tap into His spiritual energy.

(5) The Sabbath is a time when Jesus comes especially near. Every relationship needs quality time, and our relationship with Christ is no exception. Devoting a whole day to Christ each week is a great way to keep our friendship with Him fresh and exciting. The Sabbath gives us extra time for Bible study and prayer, extra time to simply be alone with Christ in a quiet place and listen.

Jesus "blessed the seventh day and made it holy" with the promise of His presence (Genesis 2:3). You can understand why it is important to observe Saturday, the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath, because it is the day Christ set apart at creation to communicate with us in a special way.

When Jesus created the Sabbath it almost seems that He had our generation in mind. It's exactly what we need in our stress-filled environment: a day that is truly a complete break from everything else. A day to worship God, get in touch with creation again, and concentrate on relationships instead of things.

## 5. A FORETASTE OF HEAVENLY REST

We can sum up the benefits of linking up with Jesus through a daily and a weekly encounter in one word—rest. The word "Sabbath" comes from a Hebrew word that means rest, so it's not surprising that the Scripture calls the seventh day "a Sabbath of rest" (Leviticus 23:3).

*"[God] has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' . . . THERE REMAINS, THEN, A SABBATH-REST FOR THE*

*PEOPLE OF GOD; . . . Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest." -Hebrews 4:4-11.*

Experiencing "Sabbath-rest" gives us a weekly foretaste of the joy we will experience in the perfect rest of heaven. This rest isn't just inactivity, it refers to the sense of security, peace and well-being that lie at the root of the truly abundant life. This kind of spiritual rest can be appreciated only through experience. The testimony of those who have experienced salvation-rest and Sabbath-rest is universal: "If you enter into the rest of Jesus through a daily and weekly connection with Him, you will discover the greatest joy in life."

Would you like to thank Jesus for His gift of rest? Would you like to thank Him for the promise of salvation-rest each day to meet the challenges of life, and for the promise of Sabbath-rest each week to cement your relationship with Him? If you have never done so, would you like to accept the salvation He offers? Would you like to tell Him you desire to keep His Sabbath each week? Would you like to say, "Yes Lord! I desire to find delight in the day you have established." Why not make that commitment right now?

[You may be wondering: Who changed the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week? When was the change made? Did God authorize the change? These questions will be answered in Guide 21.]

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