

Renew Your Life

Session 8

Readings: Chapter 8 and Conclusion

Welcome & Opening Question (10 minutes)

Introduce yourself and share your responses to this question:

- If you had an extra day this week, how would you spend it?

Group Prayer Practice (5 minutes)

Spend a few minutes in silence as a group. Sit in a comfortable position and imagine yourself being held by God. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Gently set aside or release any distracting thoughts during this time. The leader will guide you with these prompts.

- As you think about the past day or week, what did you experience that was life-giving?
- As you think about the past day or week, what has been energy depleting for you?
- Silently, release the past day or week over to God in prayer.
- Imagine yourself held in the expansive energies of God's love. Take a minute to breathe deeply of God's presence and peace. Amen.

Scripture Text (2-3 minutes)

Mark 1:32-40

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

Reading Recap (5 minutes)

The rhythm of work and rest is written into God's order of creation (Genesis 2:1-3). In ancient Israel, a day was set aside to honor the God who gave life and the ability to work and produce, a day to participate in God's life by stopping, like God did on the seventh day, and enjoying the fruits of work. The sabbath invites us to trust that God will provide, that the world does not depend on constant work to continue and that our ultimate worth does not come through achievements but through God's grace and love. To live a sabbath life we must struggle with the tension of living in a culture that puts its trust in busyness as a badge

of honor rather than restoration as a building block for our humanity; puts its confidence in our ability to produce rather than God's desire to provide for us; pins its hopes on striving for achievement of greatness rather than soaking in God's affirmation of grace.

Questions for Discussion & Individual Reflection (35 minutes)

Start with these questions, adding in other questions to supplement. Questions are also available in the Renew Your Life book, starting on page 141.

- What concepts in the readings and sermon were life-giving for you?
- What concepts or stories were difficult or challenging for you to think about or integrate into your life?

The Energy of Rest

1. Renewing rest takes different forms for each person. When have you experienced the renewing power of rest? What did you notice about your body, mind and spirit following this time?
2. An occasional vacation is not enough to renew our lives, what renewing, restful activities or practices can you put in place on a daily, weekly, or seasonal basis?
3. Renewal is a life-long process, not a one-time event. What have you learned about yourself that can be helpful when you are depleted? What cues let you know that you need a time of renewal?

Update during COVID-19

Rest – Finding a New Rhythm

God's rhythm for life moved from active engagement to disengagement. Both were critical for a whole life. What has the time of physical distancing and other new patterns taught you about your rhythm of life? Are there new, more helpful patterns that have emerged? What have you decided not to do that you formerly did? How can taking a time of rest bring the wellspring of God's energy?

Questions during COVID-19

1. For some, the pandemic has brought more open, unstructured time. For others, it has brought added stress and responsibilities. What has it been like for you and how has it changed your ability to enjoy sabbath time? What do you long for now?
2. Pastor Kai discusses observing sabbath as a kind of "giving up control." How do you surrender control in an especially stressful time?
3. Sabbath is generally "unproductive" by our typical standards. Is it easy or difficult for you to accept "unproductive" time? What helps you to be ok with being "unproductive?"

4. What obstacles get in the way of creating a sabbath rhythm on a daily or weekly basis? Has this been easier or more difficult in this pandemic time? What have you discovered?
5. For some, this has been a time of being much more alone, while for others it has been a time of extreme togetherness. How do your most recent experiences impact your view of solitude today? How has solitude been renewing for you?
6. How have you been able to connect and renew relationships that refresh your soul, in this time of distancing and, at times, extreme separation?

Closing Question & Faith Practice (5 minutes)

Explore how the chapter theme can make a difference in your life by considering this question & trying this faith practice:

- What do you want to remember from this *Renew Your Life* series? In addition to the book and sermons, is there something said in the group that you would like to hold on to and remember?
- Use this breath prayer in the coming week to remind you of God's gift of sabbath rest.

Inhale: Spirit of God

Exhale: Renew Me

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

God, this is a time of challenges beyond what we could have imagined. We each face our own, unique circumstances, and together we share in a time of unforeseen changes, loss, uncertainty, pain, brokenness, fear and disruption.

Yet, God, we know that your steadfast love never ends and your presence never leaves us. We continue to see you in ordinary and extraordinary moments. We thank you for creation's renewal and beauty, for actions of kindness and love and for the blessings of daily life. We are especially grateful for those who are doing self-sacrificing work on behalf of others, the community and the world. Most of all, we thank you for your peace, love and grace.

Guide us to know how to be your blessing in the world today. Open our hearts and imaginations to see how we can create healthy and abundant life for others. Sustain us, comfort us, guide us and enliven us to be your presence in the world. Amen.