

Discussion 1: Sabbath

How does the author of Genesis conclude each of the seven days of creation (see Gen. 1:5, 1:8, 1:13, 1:19, 1:23, 1:31, and 2:1-3)? Consider the seventh day of creation as an ultimate rest day. What do you think it would be like to always live in that rest with God?

Read Genesis 3:1-7 and 3:21-24 aloud. What were the humans tempted to believe about God and themselves? How did they act on these beliefs, and how did this choice exile them from the place of rest? How do you think lies about God and ourselves prevent us from resting with God today?

God wants to restore humanity to ultimate rest, so he chooses the Israelites to reenact his seventh-day rest so they can share it with others. Of all the ways he invites them to practice rest (e.g., Exodus 20:8-11, Lev. 23:1-3, 25:8-13), which practice are you least familiar with today?

Jesus comes to restore us to God's eternal rest! How does Jesus launch his public ministry? Read Luke 4:14-21, noting that the year of favour refers to the ultimate Jubilee—Israel's super-charged Sabbath (see Lev. 25). What do you observe?

What is one specific way Jesus invites us to receive and practice true rest (e.g., Matthew 11:28-29)?

Discussion 2: Shalom

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the arrival of a future king who would make a covenant of shalom (peace, well-being) with his people. This king would set the world right and heal all that has been harmed. Read Isaiah 9:6-7 aloud together. What specific words or phrases stand out to you as you observe this passage and why?

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the arrival of the Prince of Peace, whose reign would lead to eternal shalom. Jesus' arrival fulfilled Isaiah's words. Read and reflect on Luke 2:9-15 as a group. Why do you think God announced the King's arrival to no-name shepherds? What does this tell you about the nature of God and his Kingdom?

The biblical story shows how humanity often chooses a way of life apart from God and suffers as a result. According to Colossians 1:19-23, what did God want to do to remedy this pain, and how did he accomplish his desire through Jesus?

Jesus offers his peace to all people as a gift. Read Ephesians 2:11-16. How did Jesus make peace between two sharply divided people groups (Jews and Gentiles), and why did he do it (see Ephesians 2:16)?

Now, let's carefully read Ephesians 4:1-3. How can humility, gentleness, patience, and love help maintain the unity Jesus calls his followers to? What happens to unity when one of these virtues is missing?

Discussion 3: JOY

The Israelites choose a path apart from God. As a result, they get exiled from their land and dominated by foreign nations. But the prophet Isaiah knew that sorrow would not have the final word with these people. He looked forward to the day when Yahweh would end pain and corruption to lead them into endless, joyful living. Read Isaiah 49:13 and Isaiah 51:11. What does Isaiah tell us about God's character in these passages? What does Isaiah say will happen to God's people?

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the coming of Israel's redeemer. His prophecies were fulfilled with the arrival of Jesus. Read Luke 2:9-11. Why were the shepherds afraid? What reasons did the angels give for them to rejoice instead?

Joy can persist in the harshest of circumstances because it depends on God and his promises. Read Matthew 5:11-12, Acts 13:50-52, and Hebrews 12:1-3. According to these passages, what specific truths about God can sustain joy even through painful or dire situations?

When we see how Jesus' loving way of life has overcome death itself, joy starts to become strangely reasonable. But this doesn't mean it is wise to ignore or suppress sorrow. Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-10. How did Paul integrate both joy and sorrow?

Take time to discuss any other themes, questions, or key takeaways from what you learned together.

Discussion 4: COMPASSION

In the Bible, God's compassion is consistently shown as both an emotional and active reality. What does God do when he feels compassionate? How does he respond when his people return to him in order to follow him? (See Deuteronomy 4:29-31)

God's ancient people fail to return to his ways and end up in exile. Read Isaiah 49:15-16, where God assures his people of his compassion during a dark chapter in Israel's history. What comes to mind when you consider God's compassion for his people being related to a mother's care for her infant?

God's compassion compels him to rescue his people from their self-destructive ways. Learn how God does this by entering into humanity and all of its suffering (see Isaiah 53). Discuss your observations.

Jesus entered into the suffering of humanity to bring restoration (see Matthew 9:35-36). What are some of the ways Jesus embodies the compassion of God?

Describe the ways followers of Jesus are called to live out the same self-giving compassion of God (see Luke 6:35-36). What is one specific example of how this could be practiced in the life of the Church today?