

WEEK 4 TEACHING GUIDE

focus

BIG IDEA

Focus on rest.

BIBLE

Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 23:1-6;
Exodus 33:14

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Fast Focus

- We're almost finished with our series *Focus*, so let's kick things off with one final focused competition.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you'll need [an "eye spy" book](#) and a marker for each team. Divide your students into teams and give each team their book and marker. Give teams one minute to find and circle as many items as possible on a page of their choice. At the end of one minute, count each team's objects and declare a winner. If you'd like to play multiple rounds, eliminate half of the teams each round, until only one team remains.*
- If you're competitive, your heart might be pumping after that last competition. Some people consider puzzles like that to be a nice, relaxing way to take a break! But when it's a competition, it's not exactly restful, is it?

QUESTION | What's your favorite way to rest?

- Maybe "eye spy" puzzles are your favorite way to rest, or maybe you prefer a nice nap, Netflix binge, or hike in the woods. **What's your favorite way to rest?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond. Then share your own answer.*

POLL | Stressed or Rested?

- We all have our favorite ways to take a break when we're tired, stressed, or busy. Not everyone rests the same way, but what we all have in common is that we all need rest!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Ask students to stand or raise their hands if they can answer "yes" to the following questions:*
 - **Do you still feel tired even after you've slept?**
 - **Do you feel like you never stop going?** School, work, sports, extra-curricular activities, hanging out with friends, spending time with your family . . .
 - **Do you catch yourself falling asleep at times when you are supposed to be awake?**
 - **Do you ever catch yourself thinking, "I wish I could catch a break"?**
 - **Do you ever feel stressed, angry, sad, or anxious but you aren't sure why?**
 - **Have you recently experienced something really stressful or painful?** Maybe a loss,
- If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, chances are, you might need to rest.

QUESTION | What's stressing you out or keeping you too busy?

- The reason you need rest might be unique to you, or it might be something a lot of people share. There's only one way to find out! **What's stressing you out or keeping you too busy?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond. Then share your own answer.
- Some people say the world has never been more anxious and stressed out than it is today. Whether that's because of technology, overcommitment, our access to so much heavy breaking news, or something else, we could all use a little help learning to rest from the things that are causing us stress.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - **If you could spend a whole day however you wanted, what would you do?**
 - ★ **On a scale of 1-10, how stressed do you think you are right now? On a scale of 1-10, how rested do you think you are right now?**

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

STORY | Talk about a time you were exhausted and needed rest.

- Too often, we sacrifice the rest we need and find ourselves in trouble.
 - Maybe that's because we give priority to other tasks, or we try to please everyone else and lose focus on our needs, or we just don't notice we're tired until it's too late.
 - It's funny how this happens. It doesn't just happen all at once. It seems like exhaustion slowly creeps upon us, then one day we stop to take a breath and realize how tired we are.
- Sometimes we need rest from a situation we got ourselves into (like overcommitting, procrastinating, or failing to manage our time well). But other times, we need rest from a situation beyond our control, like . . .
 - A big loss or disappointment.
 - A busy or stressful time.
 - Other people demanding a lot of things from us.
 - Something difficult or painful that happened to us.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you were exhausted and needed rest. Share what was causing your stress or busyness, why you weren't resting, and how your lack of rest impacted you. How did you feel and act as a result? How did it impact your relationship with others and with God?
- The truth is, when we find ourselves in this kind of exhausted state, it's no good for us, no good for those around us, and no good for our relationship with God.

SCRIPTURE | Mark 6:30-32

- We can't exactly avoid the stressfulness of life, right? There's homework, projects, chores, sports, friends, jobs, family, church, plus everything else we're trying to juggle. It's no wonder we sometimes pull all-nighters to get it all done — or just go to sleep and leave it unfinished.
- Our culture might tell us to keep going, push harder, and do all the things, but Scripture tells us a different story. In the Gospels, Jesus prioritized rest for himself and his disciples, knowing rest would keep them all healthy and prepared for the mission ahead of them.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Mark 6:30-32.

- Jesus and his friends spent the entire day teaching and serving those around them. On this particular day they barely had time to eat. It was one of those non-stop days like I'm sure many of you have had before.
- On this day, there was an endless amount of opportunity to serve, teach, help, and heal. But instead of forcing one more hour or pushing past the tired or hunger pains, Jesus chose to pause.
 - Why? If Jesus, being God, knew that his time and ministry with the disciples was limited, why would he cut things short? Why would he press pause? Why wouldn't he just keep pushing?
 - Maybe it's because Jesus knew he and his followers would need energy for what was next. He knew that, in the not-so-distant future, God would use them to do something miraculous. Together, with the lunch from a kid in the crowd, they would feed over 5,000 people.
- Jesus knew something that we often forget. He knew rest was built into creation just like work was.
 - If you read the story of how God created the world, you'll notice that the seventh day of creation was a day God set aside to simply rest. That's where the idea of "Sabbath" came from — a day of rest that most Jesus-followers now practice on Sundays.
 - Just like God modeled during the creation of the world, Jesus knew humans are built to need rest too. From the very beginning, God placed a priority of rest for all creation. Jesus, being of the same nature, also made rest a priority.
- Because Jesus made resting a priority, he and his disciples were able to do some helpful things. They could . . .
 - **REFLECT:** Reflection was a way they could learn from what they were experiencing. When Jesus pulled the disciples away, it tended to be a learning experience. Rest gives us time to talk to God and to each other.
 - **RECHARGE:** Humans don't have an unlimited supply of energy. Resting gave them an opportunity to eat, nap, and emotionally and physically recover. Rest gives us an ability to regain the energy we lost when we were busy or stressed.
 - **REENGAGE:** To reengage in the work Jesus was inviting them to do, Jesus' disciples needed to rest. Rest gives us an opportunity to stick with things longer and gain a fresh perspective when we're worn out.
- Rest may sometimes seem like an enemy that prevents us from connecting with friends, getting things done, or doing all the things, Jesus shows rest isn't something we should skip.

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 23:1-6

- Don't we all wish there were less things to do, fewer places to be, or a different universe where time ticked a little more slowly? Maybe you've . . .
 - Begged your parents to skip something, or you've overslept and missed an activity, because you were exhausted.
 - Wished someone could just take care of you because you run out of energy to take care of yourself.
 - Acted out of character or made a poor choice because you were at the end of your energy or patience.
- If that's true for you, there's a story in the Bible about a king named David that you might be able to relate to.
 - Before David was the King of Israel, he was a shepherd. He played the harp too. It might not have seemed like a lot but managing a pack of animals might rank up there with being in charge of a preschool. And toting a harp around might have been a challenge too.
 - Anyway, after David's triumph with a slingshot over Goliath, he was suddenly handed a lot more responsibility. Some of it he handled well, and some of it he didn't. As king, he did a lot of good. As king, he did a lot of harm too.

- We don't know if it was a lack of rest that caused some of his biggest failures and mistakes. But I think it's safe to assume, if he'd been taking more time to rest, reflect, and hear from God, he probably wouldn't have made the terrible choices he made.
- If he had been letting God renew him on a regular basis, he might have remembered the words God had said, might have remembered to give some things up, might have remembered to talk to God when he was tempted, and might have remembered the important role of rest.
- Perhaps David did eventually learn that lesson though, because he later wrote this song of worship to God . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 23:1-6.*
- David, in a healthy rested place, remembered God in a word picture that was familiar to him. He remembered the care he once had for his sheep, the guidance he gave them, and their bond of trust in the fields and valleys.
- When David took time to rest and reflect, he was able to see God was always there for him, guiding him toward rest. In the same way David says God led him to a place of rest, God welcomes you to **focus on rest** too.

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ⊛ **When you're stressed or tired, how does it usually impact you and the people around you? What about your relationship with God?**
 - **If you were more focused on practicing rest, how do you think it could help your relationship with God grow?**

OBJECT LESSON | Comfort Objects

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, create a collection of what could be comfort objects, like small blankets, stuffed animals, pillows, or cozy sweatshirts.*
- When you were a kid, did you have a security blanket? Or maybe a favorite stuffed animal? Maybe these days you have a favorite hoodie – something that helps you feel comfortable and safe.
 - Most of us had (or still have) comfort objects like these because we all need to feel safe and secure sometimes.
 - When I think about rest, I think about the feelings these kinds of objects can create: warmth, peace, comfort, safety, and security.
- For some of us, the kind of rest we need is literally just sleep! But for others, the rest we need is deeper than a physical need – it's also a need for peace, comfort, safety, or security.
- So what does it mean for us to let God lead us toward rest? And how does that help our relationship with God grow? Well that might depend on what kind of rest you need.
 - In the Gospels, Jesus prioritized rest for himself and his disciples, knowing rest would keep them healthy and prepared for the mission ahead of them. So in that way, rest is a habit we can practice.
 - But Scripture also tells us God is a shepherd who guides us to a place of rest when we're feeling tired, grieving, or hopeless because of the difficulties life has thrown at us. In that way, rest is a gift we can receive.

- So what kind of rest do you need? Rest from meaningless busyness so you can focus on what God has for you? Rest from what's causing you pain or fear? Whatever it is, God's offering it to you.

STORY | Share the ways you rest.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your teaching time, ask a few volunteers or students to join you in sharing some of the ways you rest and how your rest habits have helped your relationship with God grow. Connect with each person in advance to make sure the stories you're sharing give students a diverse view of what it looks like to rest and how rest helps us grow.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!
 - **How can we tell the difference between times we really need to rest and times we're resting to avoid something we don't want to do?**
 - **In the last week, what are some things that have made you feel stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed?**
 - **When you're feeling stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed, what helps you feel rested again?**

REFLECTION | Rest Time

- When we focus on rest, it means we set aside time on purpose to reflect, recharge, and reengage, just like Jesus, his disciples, and King David demonstrated.
- For you, rest might mean . . .
 - Taking a peaceful walk.
 - Listening to music.
 - Spending time making something just for fun.
 - Cleaning up a space that has felt chaotic.
 - Giving yourself time to decompress.
 - Asking for some quiet time if you live in a loud or busy house.
- When you take time to focus on rest, you give God space to . . .
 - Speak to you more clearly.
 - Give you the comfort, reassurance, or peace you've been craving.
 - Fill your heart, mind, and body with renewed energy and focus.
 - Help you reengage with your mission and purpose.
- But rest doesn't just happen. You have to choose it. You have to focus on making it a priority.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Create a restful atmosphere by darkening the room, play soothing music, and inviting everyone to find a spot in the room to sit quietly for a few moments. Have assorted scrap paper and pens available, but invite students to use the silence to rest in whatever way they'd like. They might read the Bible, journal, walk, draw, daydream, or close their eyes. At the end of your rest time, you might close in prayer, spend time in worship, or take communion together.
- This week, I wonder what one habit might be that could help you rest? It could look like drawing, painting, spending time outside, reading, walking, checking in with a friend about how you're feeling, or just sleeping!
- Whatever kind of rest you need right now, I hope you'll give God the chance to take care of you this week as you **focus on rest.**

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 - ✪ **How do you think you could find the rest you need right now? Do you need to make some changes to your routine, do you need God to intervene, or both?**
 - ✪ **Has God ever helped you rest by giving you peace, comfort, or hope when you really needed it? What happened?**
 - **Read Exodus 33:14. This week, what's one way you plan to focus on rest?**

WEEK 4

DISCUSSION GUIDE

focus

It's not easy to stay focused. Especially these days, when we're connected to a never-ending stream of new notifications, ads, messages, videos, posts, and entertainment, it makes sense if we feel a little distracted sometimes. Maybe you've struggled recently to stay focused on your homework, or on the story your friend was telling you, or on the movie you were watching — but have you ever struggled to stay focused when you were spending time with God? In this four-week series, we're going to get honest about how difficult it can be to stay focused when we're trying to pray, read the Bible, or grow in our faith. Each week, we'll explore passages from Psalms and the Gospels as we challenge ourselves to focus on practicing four spiritual disciplines that can help us grow. Together, we'll try focusing on **what God has said**, on **giving something up**, on **talking to God**, and on **rest**.

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- When you're stressed or tired, how does it usually impact you and the people around you? What about your relationship with God?
- If you were more focused on practicing rest, how do you think it could help your relationship with God grow?
- How can we tell the difference between times we really need to rest and times we're resting to avoid something we don't want to do?
- In the last week, what are some things that have made you feel stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed?
- When you're feeling stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed, what helps you feel rested again?
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DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

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