

New to the Conversation?

Welcome to Stonecroft *Conversations* — a series of resources designed to inspire conversation around meaningful topics and introduce women to the Bible and Jesus Christ. This conversation focuses on something that many women long for: *Rest*.

If you are picking up a *Conversations* resource for the first time, welcome! We have some helpful tips for you. Someone, perhaps you, will need to guide the discussion. Don't worry; it's easy and we provide "Tips for Guiding the Conversation" on the next page. Don't know much about the Bible? Go to page 33 for some helpful background information on that historic spiritual book. We trust that as you and friends gather to discuss *Rest*, you'll have some thought-provoking, and perhaps life-affecting, dialogue.

We want to hear about it!

Questions?
Contact us at connections@stonecroft.org
or 800.525.8627.

We pray that this conversation makes a difference in your life and the lives of the women who join it!

– Stonecroft

Tips for Guiding the Conversation

Flexibility is key. Use *Rest* in a way that fits the needs of your group. Take as long as you need and skip questions if you want. Do the assignments or not! Make this work for you.

A few more thoughts:

- Pray. As a facilitator, take time to pray for your group and each participant before you get together.
- Ensure that each participant has her own copy of *Rest*. Visit stonecroft.org/store.
- Ask everyone to read together “Intro to the Bible” on page 33 or before your first meeting to gain background on the Bible.
- Facilitation doesn’t mean you have to be an expert. Just ask someone to volunteer to read each paragraph aloud or simply read together silently. Then ask the questions and let conversation fly!
- Recognize that some may want to read and write their responses before you meet. Others may not. Same with the sections called “Reflect and Journal.” These are questions that may help each woman go deeper between group meetings.
- Note that each week’s conversation ends with prayer. You can read this aloud together or simply pray silently in your own words.
- You may wish to extend your meetings by a week to share what each of you has learned and to review the questions following the last section: “Rest Received.” This is a helpful way to reflect on what you’ve experienced over the past few weeks.

For more information on guiding *Conversations*, visit stonecroft.org/conversations to download “Facilitating a Stonecroft Small Group.”

Stonecroft offers a variety of resources, including additional *Conversations*. Go to stonecroft.org/store to learn more.



Conversation 1

Fast and Furious

Start the Conversation

1. What does the word “rest” mean to you? What feels like “unrest”?
2. Discuss the busy lives of women worldwide. What kind of pressures do women face? In what way might women need rest?

Her Story

Laura began her day scrambling to get her kids out the door to school, meet deadlines at work, rush home, make a semblance of a healthy dinner, pay bills, and then repeat the same thing every day. As a single mom, she felt overwhelmed and exhausted, wondering if her life would ever change. She sat down one night and while looking at Facebook, an online article about child laborers caught her eye.

She clicked and read about Lini who was 12 years old when she began working in a factory. It wasn't unusual for Lini to be there since her mother and aunts worked at the factory too. In fact, she and her siblings played games with the fabric scraps and empty spools of thread when they were little. Now that she was older, Lini worked to manufacture t-shirts for a European clothing company that increasingly put pressure on the workers to produce more. It upset her to see her mother crying when the boss abused her verbally, and sometimes physically, but Lini didn't know what to do and didn't want to lose her job. When she went to sleep in their small tin shack at night she felt overwhelmed and exhausted, wondering if her life would ever change. Her long work hours crushed Lini's desire to attend school.

Sitting there in her small but warm home, even in the midst of her tiredness and fears about her kids and life, Laura felt her throat tighten and tears well up in her eyes as she thought about Lini and her family. She knew things like this existed but felt hopeless to make any meaningful change in the world. She thought of her own kids and pushed the thought out of her mind that her oldest daughter was the same age as Lini. There were so many problems in the world and in her life, so much pain and sadness. Falling into bed that night, Laura thought about her childhood, when, after a day of playing outside with friends, she would go to bed happy and tired. Now she just felt alone and too overwhelmed to change her life, let alone the lives of children across the world. All Laura wanted right now... was rest. Rest from her own fast and furious life. And rest from worrying about everyone else's problems.

Do you relate?

1. How did you relate to either Lini's or Laura's story?
2. What can you do to rest? To help other women find rest?

Bible and Background

Don't forget to read "Intro to the Bible" on page 33 to get familiar with terms like "Exodus" and "Old Testament."

From Exodus 20:8-10

Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work ...

The Bible reveals that God set up a day called the Sabbath, a day when humans would rest after six days of work. Today Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday. Jewish people observe it on Saturday. Muslims have a day of prayer on Fridays although they don't call it a Sabbath.

Religions agree: it's good to stop working! Give it a rest!

The Sabbath wasn't just one day of the week either. God told Israel to have a Sabbath every seven years — and to give the land a rest, too.

Leviticus 25:3-4, 6

For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the LORD's Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year. ... But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own during its Sabbath.

Later in this chapter of the Bible's book called Leviticus, God instructed Israel to take an even bigger rest every 50 years — during what's called the Year of Jubilee. The land rested from being planted for two years in the Year of Jubilee — but the poor were able to gather grain that grew on its own during those years.

The Year of Jubilee gave rest to the poor and also to those who owed money. If you were forced by need to sell land to someone, the owner returned the land to you during the Year of Jubilee. And if you were a bondservant — you worked for someone else without salary to pay off a debt — your master automatically released you during the Year of Jubilee. What was the effect of God's 50th year of rest on Israel?

The Year of Jubilee prevented the Israelites from oppression of one another. ... It had a leveling effect on Israel's culture by giving everyone a chance for a new start. It discouraged excessive, permanent accumulations of wealth and the deprivation of an Israelite of his inheritance in the land. Families and tribes were preserved by the return of freed bondservants to their own families. Permanent slavery in Israel was rendered impossible.¹

What did Jesus say about this rest that the Bible calls "Sabbath"? In Mark's biography of Jesus, the religious leaders accused Jesus' friends and followers of breaking the Sabbath, of not resting. They were "... breaking off heads of grain to eat" (Mark 2:23). Seriously? That violated the Sabbath? These leaders created all sorts of picky rules about how to rest. It was a lot of work to remember what you could or couldn't do on the Sabbath. People had to work in order to rest!

So how did Jesus respond to this accusation? He corrected the leaders by saying, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

God created the Sabbath to meet our needs, to give us time to stop, to cease, to rest — rest from work, rest from slavery, rest from debt, rest from poverty, and rest from worry. He even gave rest from trying so hard to follow all the rules — even the rules about how to rest!

I need rest.

When we **rest**, we cease, we stop. God created the Sabbath to give people time to stop, to cease, to rest — rest from work, rest from slavery, rest from debt, rest from poverty, rest from worry.

¹ <http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/hbd/view.cgi?n=6487>

How about you?

1. What surprised you about the Sabbath? Confused you? Encouraged you?
2. The Pharisees gave a lot of rules about how to rest. It took a lot of work to rest well! When do you “rest,” but not really rest?
3. In what areas of your life would you like God to help you stop and rest? How do you think He could help you?

Talk to God

Read this prayer together or pray it silently — then add some of your own thoughts to God.

God,

It surprises me that you care about me getting rest. That you care about giving rest to the land, the poor, the debtors. I could use some rest. I'm not sure what you can do for me, but maybe you can help me to slow down, to set aside time to stop and take it easy. Maybe I can ask someone to give me a break, take the pressure off. Show me what to do. I need your help and I need rest. Thanks.

Amen.