

DEUTERONOMY

HPUMC BIBLE READING PLAN

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 6

CONVERSATION STARTER

If you had a year to spend resting and doing whatever your heart desired, how would you spend your time?

RELEASE AND RESTORATION

Deuteronomy 15:1-18

The number seven holds great significance throughout the biblical storyline as the number of completeness and fullness. God commands Israel to stop (*Shabbat*) every seventh day, reflecting on the rest He took after creating the world. This weekly pause reminds Israel of their dependence on God and the hope of a future New Eden where His people will once again live in peace and abundance.

In Deuteronomy 15, Moses introduces a new rhythm based on this seventh-day rest: the Sabbath Year. Every seventh year, Israelites were to cancel all debts. No matter how large, it was to be forgiven! God instructs the Israelites, “Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart... There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore **I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.**”

Additionally, the Sabbath Year meant the release of bondservants, those who had sold themselves into service due to economic hardship. Unlike the race-based slavery we may think of, these Israelites were working off debts by serving a richer master. During the Sabbath Year, they were not only set free but sent off with resources—flocks, grain, wine, etc.—to give them a chance to thrive independently.

The land itself was also given rest during the Sabbath Year. For an entire year, the Israelites were not to sow or harvest but let the land lie, trusting God to provide the food they needed. This was a radical act of surrender! Just like their ancestors who were

sustained by manna in the wilderness, Israel would only have God to thank for their food that year.

This Sabbath Year was a tangible way to experience a foretaste of the freedom and restoration they would one day enjoy, and centuries later, Jesus proclaims that the time for God's Ultimate Rest has come. He steps into a synagogue on the Sabbath and reads from Isaiah 61:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor

This is Jesus' declaration that He is the Messiah, the one who will bring the Ultimate Rest of God. It was time for the freedom and release of God to arrive, not just for the economically poor but for those who were poor spiritually, physically, and emotionally.

Jesus embodied God's vision for justice, mercy, and restoration. He came to free people from all kinds of captivity—sin, shame, marginalization—and offer them the abundance of God's Kingdom. Today, we are called to follow in His footsteps. Together as a group, reflect on how we, as disciples of Jesus, can be agents of release, mercy, and restoration.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. What do these laws about the Sabbath Year teach you about the character of God?
3. How can we practice trusting God's provision, especially in seasons of uncertainty?
4. How has your relationship with God brought liberation and restoration to your life?
5. A weekly 24-hour Sabbath might not be attainable for all of us right now, but in our fast-paced culture, how can we find true rest to remember our dependence on God and the hope we have for our future in the New Eden?

6. How do you see the people around you reflecting God's generosity and forgiveness? How can we embed these values even more deeply into our community?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

In October, we are focusing on cultivating a life with God where **joy** can grow within us. Throughout this month, we invite you to join us in praying this simple prayer, from Romans 15:13, each day:

*God of hope,
Fill me with all joy and peace as I trust in you,
so that I may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

Before you pray, spend a few moments in silence to quiet your mind. As you pray, think about what these words mean for you. In what areas of your life do you need God's joy, peace, and hope?