

Entering and Remaining in **God's Place of Rest!**

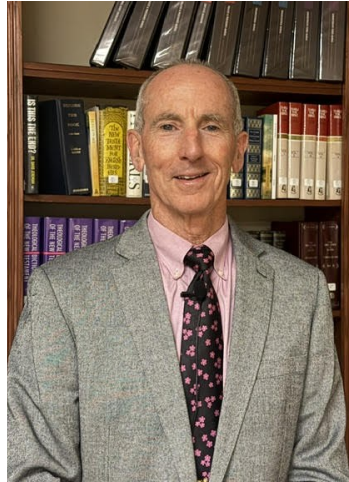


Let us, therefore, make every effort
to enter that rest ...
Hebrews 4:11

**The 2026 Theme of the Year at
Vistoso Community Church**

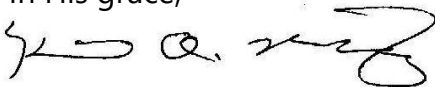
Foreword

Expository preaching requires great attention to detail as we go verse by verse through the text of Scripture. I love to do so and I am blessed by your interest week in and week out. However, I am sensitive to the fact, that in doing so, we can lose sight of the big picture. That is why each year, I introduce a theme for the year—a fundamental of the faith that we dare not let slip away during the pursuit of detail.



This year's theme is part of what it means to walk by faith; specifically, to enter the place of *rest* that God has prepared for every child who belongs to Him! I believe the refresher is going to be a great blessing for us all!

In His grace,



Kevin Redig, pastor-teacher

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NIV (1984 edition), NKJV (1982 edition) or the online Berean Study Bible (BSB)

Vistoso Community Church
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Introduction

Our Theme of the Year for 2026 is:

Entering and Remaining in God's Place of Rest!

Allow me to immediately turn to the Scriptural basis for our theme, and to do so from two different translations:

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. Hebrews 4:11(1984 NIV)

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. Hebrews 4:11 (KJV)

Let's make some observations regarding these scriptures:

- We are clearly being asked to make a concerted effort to do something—*enter that rest!* The Greek grammar of the verse supports this observation. The verb is active in voice, meaning this is something we are meant to do. Further, the verb carries the idea of doing something diligently and with effort.
- For most of us, after reading this verse, we can't help but ask, "*What (or where) is this place of rest?*" It is clearly something well understood by the writer and presumably his audience. So we will have to work to catch up. We won't have any difficulty, for the idea of *rest* is sprinkled liberally elsewhere in the Scriptures.
- The stakes would seem to be very high as a failure to *rest* leads to a falling away into either disobedience or unbelief—or perhaps it's both. The meanings of *disobedience* and *unbelief* are obviously not the same, but in terms of our spiritual walk they are actually very closely related. We are going to more deeply understand the applicability of both words before we finish.

- One further thing for you to consider at this early stage in our study: Surely, after striving to enter, and with the stakes so high once we do enter this place of rest, we are meant to remain there!

Before we turn our full attention to what we will soon call the *rest of faith*, let's talk about faith in general. Of all the things we could have considered as this year's theme, how did one aspect of the believer's walk of faith get selected? The answer to that question is straightforward. I am not sure there is anything more axiomatic in Scripture than God's desire for His people to walk by faith. The Jewish people are told in Habakkuk 2:4:

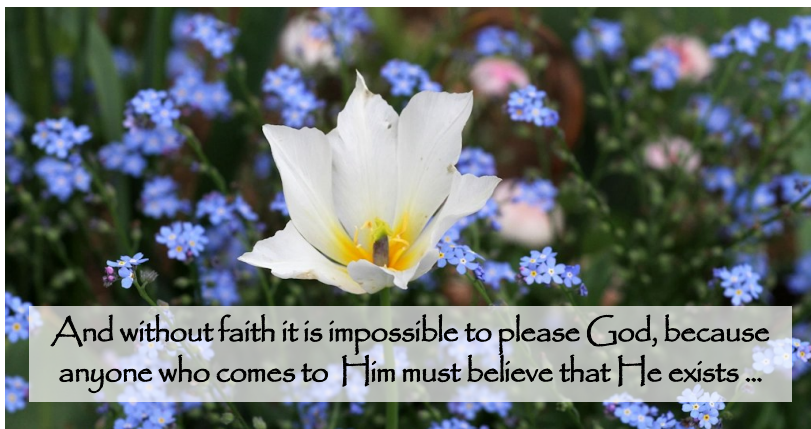
"... My righteous one will walk by faith"

That very verse is quoted three times in the New Testament. Further, the writer of Hebrews tells us:

... without faith it is impossible to please God ...

Hebrews 11:6

After looking at all manner of success and failure in the Bible, I think it very reasonable to say, "There is no spiritual victory, worthy walk, or successful warfare for the Christian apart from the exercise of faith on the part of the child of God!"



Defining Rest

Our first step in developing a working definition of *rest* is to look at context, then we need to apply what we find.

Scriptural Context

If we take a quick look at the text of Hebrews 3:12 down to Hebrews 4:11, we will see that the subject of both faith and *rest* are threads throughout.

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Hebrews 3:12

For we are all partners with Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at the beginning.

Hebrews 3:14

So we see that they could not enter in [to God's place of rest] because of unbelief.

Hebrews 3:19

... a promise remains of entering His rest ...

Hebrews 4:1

For we who have believed do enter that rest ...

Hebrews 4:3

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

Hebrews 4:9

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11

Just this short sampling of verses should help immensely, for already we can see that the term *rest* is being used as a figure of speech—a metaphor. Further, it would seem that it is being used to describe a condition of the soul where there is no anxiety, worry, fear, turmoil, or anger because of steadfastly trusting in God and His Word.

To be clear, faith in the Word is always a matter of faith in the written Word as well as the *Living Word* who stands behind it!

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are all “Yes” in Christ. And so through Him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. II Corinthians 1:20

Cause and Effect Relationship

The above sampling of Scripture also helps us to see the establishment of a cause and effect relationship:

- Entering God’s *rest* is descriptive of exercising faith—that’s the cause! From within the *rest of faith*, obedience is the natural outcome—that’s the effect!
- Failing to *rest* is to turn away in unbelief, a cause that leads to the very undesirable effect of disobedience!

The application is direct: If you or I are not trusting, we are not in God’s place of *rest*. Unbelief prevents *rest*! If we are caught up in disobedience, it is because we are not *resting* and prevented from doing so by unbelief! Obedience never comes from unbelief. It would seem success or failure in the Christian Life is very much connected to whether or not we have entered God’s place of *rest*!



Trust and obey!

The Definition of Rest

I have studied this for many years, and delight in trying to distill the truths of God's Word into a concise definition. Consider the following with me:

God's place of "rest" refers to a condition of the soul and spirit whereby every other human response is subordinated to trusting the Lord—the Living Word and the written Word.

Let's understand exactly what this definition means:

- It means that we trust instead of doubting, giving into fear, worrying, or choosing self in place of the will of God.
- It means the moment we are not trusting, we have turned from God in unbelief. And, to be absolutely clear:

For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Romans 14:23

- It means that entering the *rest* of faith is good—to remain in God's *rest* is better! And, we remain by settling every controversy of life in favor of trusting God and His Word!

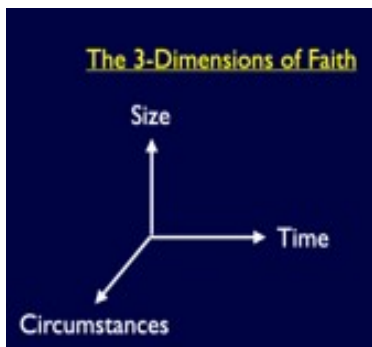
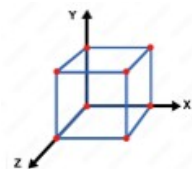
I trust already you can see the power of the metaphor. At any time during our Christian walk we can ask ourselves a very simple diagnostic question: "*Am I in God's place of rest?*" If the answer is "Yes!"—stay there! If the answer is "No," then there is sin to confess and labor to be undertaken! What exactly that labor might be is the subject of much of what follows in this book.

I am going to have much more to say on what it means to "*settle every controversy*"; but for now, I simply want to

point out that we have identified a crucial part of our day-to-day existence as Christians! Specifically, will we subordinate the circumstances of life to faith in our God and His promises to us?

Three Dimensions of Faith

Now that we have a working definition of God's place of *rest*, I would like to develop a few other concepts before we begin to draw things together. The graphic at right is how you show a three-dimensional object, like a cube, on a two-dimensional medium, like a sheet of paper.



Allow me to use the same kind of representation to show you the three dimensions of faith—size, time, and circumstances!

Size Is Not the Issue

The first point to be made is something that will surprise you. When it comes to entering God's place of *rest*, what matters is how we deal with time and circumstances. Contrary to what you may have been taught, we don't need to worry about the *size* of our faith. Jesus told us why:

"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Matthew 17:20

When it comes to the size of our faith as believers, all that really matters is whether we have it or not! Let me reinforce that statement with a quote by a man of uncommon faith:

*God is not looking for men (or women) of great faith,
He is looking for common people to trust His great
faithfulness.* James Hudson Taylor

Perhaps you can already see why God does not put a premium on the size of our faith! He wants us to be enamored with His faithfulness and not ours. Second, if the size of our faith was what mattered, it wouldn't be long until one Christian would be boasting before others about his or her great faithfulness. No! Great is **His** faithfulness!

What about further Scriptural support for this idea? Aside from the above passage stating that we need faith no larger than a mustard seed—search out all of the times Jesus said, “You of little faith”. (Here are a few examples: Matthew 8:26, 14:31, 16:8) Here is what you will find: Jesus is not chastising the size of their faith—in many cases they had no faith at all. Rather, He is chastising their failure to have faith in terms of new circumstances or regarding their perseverance in the faith.

Consider the man of Mark 9:14-29. This man has a demon-possessed son, and he comes before Jesus not even sure that Jesus can help. Jesus addresses that issue first. At which point the man, now with a mustard seed sized portion of faith, blurts out a prescient comment:

“I do believe; help my unbelief!”

Mark 9:24

For here is precisely the crux of the matter for this man. He is saying: "I believe in this moment, but I am going to need help believing tomorrow and the next day and the next. I believe that you can help my son, but I need help believing in the other varied circumstances of life!"

Any theology that says ongoing faith in the life of the believer is automatic is a *silly* theology because it ignores the daily challenges faced by every child of God! The biggest challenge you and I have on a daily basis is to labor to enter God's place of *rest*—a place where we are trusting Him in every circumstance and from moment to moment. This is anything but automatic, for it is the *labor* of the Christian Life! This is both my experience, and thus sayeth the Word of God!

This Example Is Positive

While we are pondering this, here is an example from the positive side. Consider David's declaration to Saul:

"Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth ... Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them ... The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me ..."

I Samuel 17:34-37

David is willing to take on the Philistine champion Goliath. His reason for doing so is a marvelous example of what it looks like to remain in God's place of *rest*. Follow along with David's pattern of thinking: God rescued me in this time and circumstance (lion), this time and circumstance (bear), so He will most certainly deliver me in this time and circumstance (Goliath).



What is it that made the following true?

"...I have found David son of Jesse, a man after My own heart ..." Acts 13:22

Let me suggest that God called David "a man after My own heart" not because of the size of David's faith. Instead, it was his ability to trust God in every circum-

stance and moment-by-moment!

Rest Requires Faith to Triumph Over Sight

As always, faith has as its objects the truths and promises of the *written Word* as well as its guarantor—the *Living Word*! In contrast, sight is that which has its source in the world—either through our senses or our imagination! Note that last part! We are *walking by sight* when the worries or fears that live only in our minds, govern our behavior! Count on it: *Sight* will constantly seek to *disturb* our *rest*!

In short, we are meant to live by the truths and promises of God's Word taking precedence over sight, sound, and imagination. This must become a settled conviction in our thinking.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

II Corinthians 4:18

The Faith/Sight Conflict

The things of this world come and go, but the Word of God endures forever! Let me give you some examples where you can clearly see the faith/sight conflict.

“Come,” [Jesus] said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out ...

Matthew 14:29-30

... Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled.

Matthew 26:56

In the first scripture, Peter clearly responded in faith for he got out of the boat and walked upon the surface of the water! What happened? I gave you the answer above—sight disturbed *rest*! Peter heard the howl of the wind and saw the size of the waves, and his mind chose fear over faith. Do you see it? That is, he made the choice to walk by sight rather than faith.



You can see the same thing with the disciples in the second scripture. The arrest of Jesus, the angry crowd, and their fertile imaginations caused them all to *run by sight* rather than *walk by faith*.

Is all of this understandable? Of course it is! Is it spiritual? No! We are meant to labor to enter God's place of *rest*, and the only way to do so is to subordinate every human response to trusting the Lord.

This is going to come up in our lives all the time—difficult news within the family, a bad diagnosis, and a hundred and one other things.

Points of Application

A few points of applications may be helpful in understanding the Faith/Sight conflict.

First, some scriptural background.

- What stimulates sight? **The World!**
Do not love the world or anything in the world ...
The world and its desires pass away ... I John 2:15,17
- What stimulates faith? **The Word of God!**
Consequently, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Romans 10:17
- The one we feed the most is going to influence the response of the soul!

Second, a crucial question.

Can entering God's place of rest really prevent spiritual failure? This is a crucial question! The answer is going to be shockingly clear, and should galvanize each of us to *labor to enter* that which God has so graciously provided.

Adam and Eve. To begin, let's go all the way back to the Garden and consider Adam and Eve's interaction with the serpent. As a reminder, to enter *God's rest* requires:

A condition of soul where human response is in submission to the requirement to trust God; in every circumstance; as a function of time; and in compliance to the Word rather than world (sight)!

Genesis 3 review. Here is a brief review of the text of Genesis 3:

Now the serpent was more crafty ... He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" Genesis 3:1

Satan is raising the question: "This is a new place and time, does God's prohibition still apply?"

"You will not surely die," ... "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ..." Genesis 3:4-5

First, Satan directly contradicts the Word of God. This world will always lie to you! Then he sows an image into her imagination—*you will be like God!*

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom ... Genesis 3:6

Right here we have the worst possible outcome. Eve turned away from the Word of God into unbelief, and is fully committed to walking by sight over faith. The outcome of unbelief is inevitable—disobedience. This leads to a disaster for every member of the human race!

The greatest cataclysm ever to befall the human race could have been avoided by nothing more than Adam and Eve responding to a new set of circumstances from a position of *faith rest!* All Adam and Eve needed to do was to settle this, and every controversy to follow, in favor of trusting God and His Word!

Spiritual failures always seem to follow the same pattern—turning away in unbelief followed by disobedience.

Summary. Read our working definition again, and think it through carefully. This idea of entering and remaining in God's place of *rest* is powerful, isn't it?

God's place of "rest" refers to a condition of the soul and spirit whereby every other human response is subordinated to trusting the Lord— the Living Word and the written Word.

That means we trust instead of: doubting, giving in to fear, worrying, or choosing self in place of the will of God. The moment we are not trusting, we have turned from God in unbelief. To be absolutely clear, consider Romans 14:23:

... whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

To enter the *rest* of faith is good—to remain is better! We remain by settling every controversy of life in favor of trusting God and His Word!



Settling Every Controversy

Before continuing, I would like to develop further what it means to *settle every controversy*. This short little phrase highlights what it means to walk by faith day in and day out and moment by moment.

Constant challenges. Life is one new challenge (controversy) after another! Every single controversy carries the potential to *nudge* us out of the place of *rest* in which we belong. By *controversy*, I simply mean a test of whether we will walk by faith or by sight. Stated another way, controversy is the conflict between the things of this world and/or our imaginations or acting in keeping with God's Word. As an important addendum, how we face controversy is also a test of whether we will trust God's timetable or demand ours!



This is a daily challenge and there are no exceptions for any Christian! It starts like this, right within the consciousness of our soul:

*Oh no! What do I do now? This is taking too long!
That's terrible! Why isn't God doing something?*

Of course, your daily challenges will add many more to the list. Will we respond to those thoughts by trusting or turning? Having the struggle is not the issue! Rather, it is how we ultimately settle the *controversy* that matters!

Trusting in the face of every circumstance may seem like too much to handle on your own. You are not alone!

The fruit of the Spirit is ... faithfulness, Galatians 5:22

Consider just one aspect of the Spirit's ministry in the life of the believer—that of faithfulness. It should be clear that this is something God is going to produce in our lives as we trust Him to do so.

Now let me ask a question: *What is the difference between faith and faithfulness?* Allow me to suggest that faith is trust expressed in a moment of time; while faithfulness is trust perpetuated over the course of time. Do you see how this is meant to work? We settle the controversy with a response of trust, and then turn to the Holy Spirit to perpetuate that trust moment by moment.

We are not up to the task to steadfastly trust—but He is! So you see, we are not alone. We have a member of the Trinity who will come alongside and produce faithfulness in our lives as we trust Him to do so!

Let's prove the above by looking at some examples. I think the Scriptures provide a wealth of illustrations.

God's People Against the Philistines

As the first illustration of what it means to rest in the Lord in the midst of controversy, we will discuss a well-known situation during the time of King Saul.

The Situation

The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them. I Samuel 17:3

**Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel ...
"Choose a man and have him come down to me ... This day I defy the ranks of Israel!"** I Samuel 17:8,10

Now this scenario was certainly a personal challenge for every single Israeli soldier. Every soldier was going to settle this *controversy* one way or the other. Let's look to see how many entered the *place of rest* God had in mind for them. Let's see how many trusted God to deal with this giant apart from their fear, worry, and doubt!

On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified. I Samuel 17:11

When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear. I Samuel 17:24

King Saul and every soldier had the same response—fear! Why? Goliath was a mighty warrior over nine feet tall. So, were the Israelites walking by faith in their Almighty God or by sight with a nine-foot giant the only thing they could see? The answer is obvious, is it not? Let me be clear, there was no *rest* for this army! They didn't even try to enter, and God was not honored.

A New Player

The situation changes when a new *player* arrives on the scene—young David. (I know you are likely familiar with this narrative. If you are not, you will benefit by reading through all of I Samuel 17.) What is going on in David's soul is something quite different from the situation with Saul and his army! David answers Goliath's challenge:



David by Bernini, Galleria Borghese. Rome

"...Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" ... "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" ... "I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty ... for the battle is the Lord's" ... David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.

I Samuel 17:26,
37, 45, 47-48

David had settled the *Goliath-controversy* by putting his trust in the Lord. Let me suggest that, at the point he charges Goliath, he is at perfect *rest*. You see, the place of *rest* God has prepared for us is not a comfortable recliner but a condition of the soul!

Some Points of Application

Let's summarize with some points of application.

First, we have a king, an entire army, and one teenage shepherd to evaluate. Who put their faith in the nature and character of their God? *It was just one teenage shepherd.* Who subordinated every human response to pendent trust in God and His Word? *Only David!* Note he did so while charging a giant. What we do from a place of rest works itself out in many different ways!

Second, what does this illustration underscore for us? Ponder these two verses for a moment.

Therefore, since a promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be afraid that any of us be found to have fallen short of it.

Hebrews 4:1

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11

Along with every circumstance in life, is a promise of God's *rest*. Any of Saul's soldiers could have entered it—although none did. The result was spiritually pitiful. The one thing we should fear is following their example! Instead, every challenge is a call to *labor*, to settle each new controversy in favor of putting our faith in God and the truths and promises of His Word!

Third, is there anything we can add to our understanding from this first illustration? Settling the controversy regarding belief/unbelief always comes first. David didn't charge the giant and then believe! Rather, he settled the *Goliath controversy* first as a matter of faith and then charged the giant. Belief is always meant to precede obedience!

Let's review once again our definition of what is meant by the *rest* of God.

God's place of "rest" refers to a condition of the soul and spirit whereby every other human response is subordinated to trusting the Lord—the Living Word and the written Word.

- That means we trust instead of: doubting, giving in to fear, worrying, or choosing self in place of the will of God.
- That also means that the moment we are not trusting, we have turned from God in unbelief. And, to be absolutely clear:

... for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Romans 14:23

- To enter the *rest* of faith is good—to remain is better! We remain by settling every controversy of life in favor of trusting God and His Word!



HEBREWS 4:11 KJV

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Different Time and Place— Same Issue

In providing this second illustration, I am hoping we will improve our ability to recognize the failure of unbelief so that we might avoid it in our own lives!

The Situation

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai ... Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Exodus 19:1-2

Those who have been miraculously brought out of Egypt are now camped before Mt. Sinai. They are going to be there for close to a year. During this time God is going to give them the Mosaic Law, which includes a moral code, guidelines for worship, and social standards.

It is also during this time they build the Tabernacle and all its associated accoutrements.



So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.”

Exodus 19:7-8

Points of Application

Before we continue with the rest of the story, let's pause for some points of application.

- Both Biblically, and in my experience, promises of *undying obedience* aren't worth a hill of beans! And, we are going to see that is true in this case as well.
- Instead, I have observed that obedience naturally flows from humility, dependent trust in the truths and promises of God's Word, and a Spirit-filled walk. In short, dependent trust precedes long-term obedience, while unbelief precedes disobedience!

So let's watch carefully the faith of the Israelites as an indicator of whether or not they will obey what God is communicating to them.

The Rest of the Illustration

The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone..." [Moses] said to the Elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them." ...Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Exodus 24:12-18

Would this seem to present any kind of problem for the people? Apparently, it did!

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses ... we don't know what has happened to him."

Exodus 32:1

Do you see it? The Israelites have become a people who are waking by sight! They spent 400 years in Egypt, surely they could trust for 40 days. They have seen the mighty hand of God in the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, surely there is no reason to doubt Him now! Allow me to remind you of the words of Hudson Taylor:

*God is not looking for men (or women) of great faith,
He is looking for common people to trust His great
faithfulness.* Hudson Taylor

Disobedience Follows Unbelief

If what I have been teaching you is correct, now that we have seen unbelief on the part of the people, disobedience is sure to follow:

So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed to him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf ... "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry. Exodus 32:3-6

Note how the people went through the motions of worship: offering burnt offerings and presenting fellowship offerings. Do you think those pleased the Lord in the least? Here is the answer to that question:

Moses saw that the people were running wild ... "Whoever is for the Lord come to me." ... that day about three thousand of the people died.

Exodus 32:25-28

And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

Exodus 32:35



Analysis of the Example

In order to understand what happened in this example, let's do some analysis.

- *How many of the Israelites who promised to be obedient actually entered that place of rest that God has in mind for His children?*

None that we know of, not the first High Priest or anyone else we can identify! No wonder God needs to lay out the case so thoroughly in the Book of Hebrews!

- *What came first, and what followed?*

Unbelief came first! Things were taking too long and they had doubts about the status of their leader Moses.

Disobedience followed unbelief in the form of idolatry and pagan revelry!

- *What caused the people to turn in unbelief?*

Allow me to suggest that it was the usual culprits: failure to trust in a new circumstance and as a function of time (Moses's extended time up on the mountain). They turned to a walk by sight rather than by faith. They most certainly failed to subordinate the *controversy* before them to steadfastly trusting in the Lord and His revealed will!

The Two Options

The two options before us, faith or sight, are going to be clear illustration after illustration. Spurgeon sums it up this way:

... he who seldom reads the Word—he who seldom looks up to heaven for a fresh influence from on high—he will be the man whose heart will become dry and barren; but he who calls in secret on his God—who spends much time in holy retirement—who delights to meditate on the words of the Most High—whose soul is given up to Christ—such a man must have an overflowing heart; and as his heart is, such will his life be.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

I hope you caught the phrase *holy retirement*! Let me suggest a *holy retirement* is one in which we spend extra time in the Word of God, that we might settle every controversy in favor of trusting our great God, that we might daily *retire* to that place of *rest* He has prepared for us!

A More Expansive Example

For our third example, we shift to a more expansive example, one that is the backdrop for our *Theme* verse:

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11

Our Example Starts with Systemic Failure!

Jacob's extended family of 70 are delivered from famine by means of safe haven in Egypt. (Genesis 50:20) A little over 400 years later they are over two million strong, but their lives have changed drastically!

... the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them. ... So they put slave masters over them to oppress them ... the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter ...

Exodus 1:9-14



But as always, the plans and purposes of God stand! It was time for Him to continue the fulfillment of promises to Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. And He did so by choosing an emissary to lead them—Moses!

Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

Exodus 4:29-31

The People Believed

Did you notice they *believed* and *bowed down* in worship! Think about what that means. In short order, Moses led the people out of Egypt.

Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord's divisions left Egypt.

Exodus 12:40-41

After a dramatic final separation from Egypt, we find the fledgling nation on the *Promised Land* side of the Red Sea, rejoicing!



... when the Israelites saw the great power of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him ...

Exodus 14:31

Another pretty clear statement of the Israelites' relationship to the Lord, wouldn't you agree? Then look at their song after coming through the Red Sea:

"I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song ... Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

Exodus 15:1-2, 11

Here we have a people who have been physically and spiritually redeemed by their God, a God who manifests His power and grace over and over again. Yet almost none of those delivered from bondage are able to mature to the point of trusting in their Deliverer and thereby entering the *place of rest* God has for them! Of course, at this point we know that to enter God's *rest* requires the subordination of every human response to a steadfast trust in God. This is not a failure to *get saved* on the part of the Israelites, but a failure to spiritually mature over time.

Now, I hope you are thinking to yourself, "*Pastor, how can you make such a blanket statement about two million people?*" Good question—and here is the proof:

- The people panic at the Red Sea! (Exodus 14)
(Perhaps this is understandable, but see if they grow out of it after seeing the miraculous intervention of God in parting the sea.)
- The people face a no-water situation at Marah, and the grumbling associated with unbelief continues. (Exodus 15) God miraculously delivers!

- The people face a shortage of food, and the grumbling associated with unbelief intensifies further. (Exodus 16) God provides supernaturally!
- The people face a second no-water situation. Apparently learning nothing, they are ready to stone Moses. (Exodus 17)

Now to be sure, no food and no water are serious problems for a body of two million people and their livestock—in the desert! But do we have an unserious God? Is He unaware and without compassion? Is He not all-powerful? He is and He is demonstrating it over and over again!

- Then you are already familiar with the situation at Mt. Sinai. A quick summary of their unbelief: This is taking too long! Let's choose new gods—of our own making! (Exodus 32) The Lord judges.
- The people complain about the difficulty of the journey and the *boring* food. (Numbers 11) The Lord provides quail—and judgment!

Let me ask, how do you think the people are going to do when they face even bigger challenges? What kind of track record do they have? Are you seeing any progress?

So we come to the moment of truth in Numbers 13 and 14! The people learn the Promised Land is exactly as described, that it is flowing with milk and honey! But they are shocked and dismayed over a completely irrelevant detail when viewed in light of being sponsored by the Creator of all things who reached in with His own right arm to redeem them from Egypt, deliver at the Red Sea, and provide daily food and water for two million people!

The irrelevant detail is that some people in the Land are taller than average. In unbelief, the people complain bitterly and plan to set aside God's leader in order to return to Egypt!

We will develop this further later, but mark it in your thinking for now: The Promised Land is God's place of rest for His chosen people and this particular group is not going to enter! Why not? Unbelief!

The Outcome

The Children of Israel are leaving a legacy of unbelief, contempt for the One who delivered them, and disobedience! Here is the kind of legacy you and I do not want to leave behind!



Then they believed His promises and sang His praise. But they soon forgot what He had done ...

Psalm 106:12-13

The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in Me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?"

Numbers 14:11

What was the result of this abject failure?

Moses pleads for God's forgiveness, and God answers Moses as well as dispensing judgment:

"I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw My glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten times—not one of them will ever see the Land I promised ... No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it ... My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the Land ..."

Numbers 14:20-24

Why did Caleb, and Joshua as well, eventually enter the Land? Because they trusted, rather than turning away in unbelief!

The Promised Land as a Physical Analog of a Spiritual Truth

Consider the nation of Israel—formerly slaves—now moving into a land that is their very own. The Scriptures tell us exactly how that occurred. The Lord holds back the Jordan River, tears down the walls of Jericho, and provides military victory in order for the Israelites to *enter a Land flowing with milk and honey*. Moses prophesies:

... a land with large flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant ...

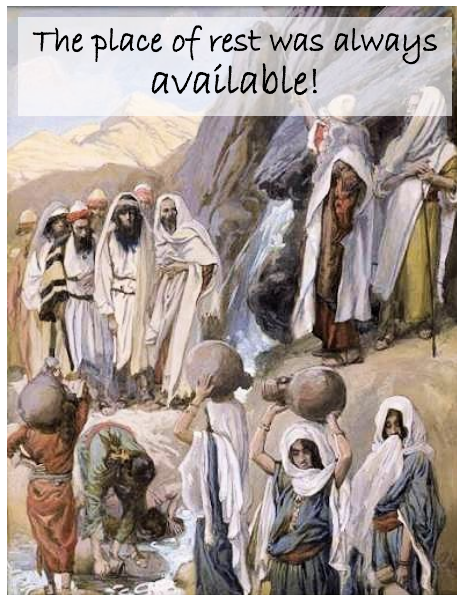
Deuteronomy 6:10-11

With the above in mind, can you see why this would be a place of *rest* in contrast to the *ruthless labor* and *bitterness of life* the people had known in Egypt?

As we trace the history of the Exodus generation, what becomes clear is that the consequence for persistent unbelief, which is in effect showing contempt for God, was losing them entry to the place of *rest* that God had prepared for His people. Instead they died in a wilderness of their own making!

The reality for the Israelites of the Exodus generation was one of physical location. But there is a spiritual parallel—a spiritual parallel the writer of Hebrews wants us to firmly grasp!

The fact that the Exodus generation could not enter the promised land was a tragedy of their own making because over and over again they chose unbelief. The place of rest was available all along! Their unbelief kept an entire generation from entering the land. This is something for us to be very concerned about because this lesson does indeed apply to us as well!



A Point of Application

As a *Point of Application*, can we answer the question:

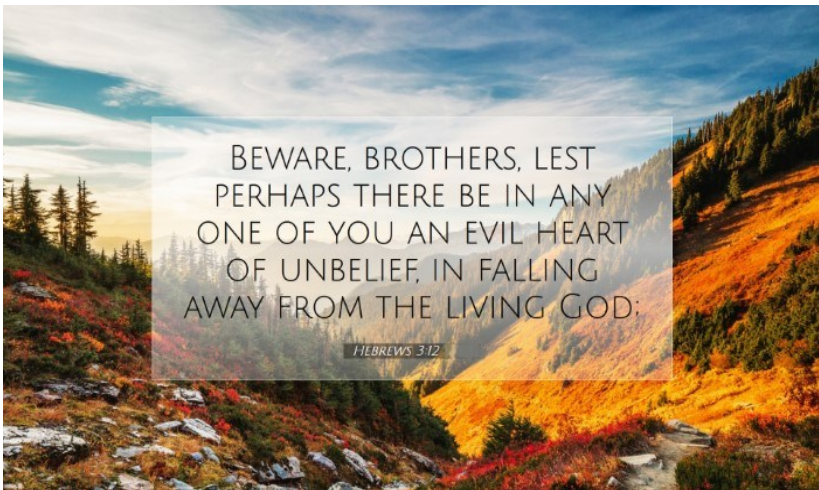
How do God's people end up in the wilderness?

If we trace it all the way back, the cause is unbelief!

The options are clear: Dependent trust in God and His Word or turning away in unbelief! Once disobedience to the will of God is evident, it is a dead giveaway that turning in unbelief has already occurred!

Here is one of the major points to which I have been drawing us:

*As Church-age saints, I believe we face the same choice as the Exodus generation Israelites. Our choice is to enter the rest of faith and experience the Abundant Life that Jesus came to bring **or** to not enter and live in a gray and barren spiritual wilderness of unbelief while we wait for heaven! Each of us is going to choose!*



A Point of Theological Understanding

We need to pause and address an aspect of theology over which there is much debate and, therefore, not surprisingly much confusion among God's people.

There has been a long argument within Christianity regarding how best to understand God's ongoing call to *walk by faith*. There is no argument about whether or not God wants faith on the part of His people. There is, however, controversy regarding what a lack of faith indicates. There are many theological voices that claim a lack of faith in the life of the Christian, which is typically labeled as a failure to persevere in the faith, is proof that the individual is not really a Christian at all and not saved from hell to heaven!

If this is true, the Exodus generation—those who died in the desert—were not saved. This leaves us with only two saved individuals, despite a clear Scriptural declaration that all believed in Christ. (I Corinthians 10:2-5) Not even Moses is saved under this theology, for God clearly chastised him for his failure to trust. I think you should have a problem with this! Nonetheless, this is widely taught.

If you have been sitting under my teaching ministry for any period of time, then you know that I present faith in the person and work of Christ as the sole issue for a lost person to address. Faith alone in Christ alone leads to eternal life, apart from any works on the part of the lost individual. However, for the newly-saved individual, faith is one of many issues related to the Christian Life, albeit it is a key aspect!

Allow me to remind you of the three aspects (or phases) of our salvation. Once an individual is eternally justified before God as the result of faith in Christ (Phase 1), the call on his life is now one of progressive sanctification (Phase 2). That means setting apart one's life unto the Lord in terms of purity, priority, exclusivity, and service—with the outcome intended to be conformity to the image and likeness of our Savior!



Of course, a key aspect of this sanctification is the call to dependent trust:

Therefore, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in Him ... Colossians 2:6

This brings us back to our subject: A failure to ever believe is the basis of eternal condemnation! Whereas a failure to believe as Christians leads to something else entirely—living life in a spiritual wilderness of their own making! I am not trying to excuse a failure to persevere in the faith, I am desperately trying to teach us how to avoid it—because it is possible!

We Have Such a Long-Standing Call to Faith!

Here is the *attention-grabbing* truth we have learned:

The redeemed of the Lord died in a physical wilderness of their own choosing because they never learned to trust their Savior! Perish the thought this would ever happen to us!

Am I sure those who died in the desert were redeemed? What sayeth the Word of God?

They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them ...

I Corinthians 10:2-5

It should be clear that the *Promised Land* is not a type of a heaven yet to come, but it is a type of a place of rest that is available right now!

Likewise, the Church-age saint, who has been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and has an eternal inheritance on reserve in heaven is not in danger of eternal damnation! But, unfortunately, Church-age saints can live out their lives in a grey and alien land of unbelief, a spiritual wilderness of their own choosing, if they do not learn to enter the *rest* of faith. This *rest* is a place of subordinating every human response to trusting God and the truths and promises of His Word!

God has called us into relationship with Him through a single response of faith—faith in the person and work of His Son. We use words to describe the outcome of this act of faith like redeemed, born-again, new creation, reconciled, and child of God.

For those who choose to come in faith, God has called us to enter into an ongoing relationship of dependent trust—every moment and every circumstance. We describe this kind of relationship with words like abide, walk, partake, victory, and mature son or daughter.

There is so much at stake with respect to whether or not we enter the place of *rest* God has prepared for us, things like:

- The *Abundant Life* Jesus came to bring.
- Blessings we do not work for or deserve.
- Grace in exchange for grace.
- Accessing the spiritual blessings on reserve for us in the heavenlies.
- The potential to do all things through Christ who strengthens us.
- A God who will richly supply all our needs in Christ Jesus!

You might not like being faced with this truth. But, if this is a correct understanding of God's call to live a certain kind of *faith-rest* life, then I would be a poor shepherd under the authority of the *Great Shepherd* if I didn't proclaim it as absolutely clearly as I can!

Hebrews—Guidance for the Church!

Rooted in the Old Testament, Hebrews 3 and 4 become compelling guidance for the Church! Our review of the trials and travails of the Exodus generation have perfectly

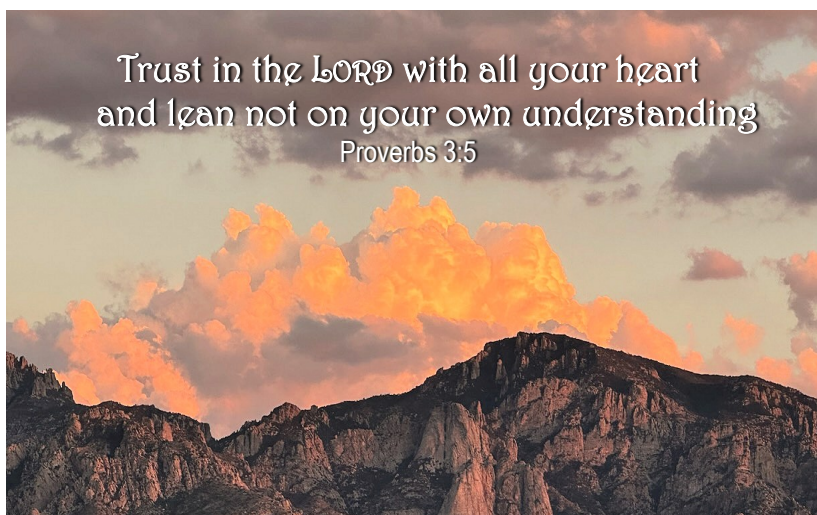
prepared us for the New Testament application that is contained throughout the Book of Hebrews. For our purposes, we will limit ourselves to Chapters 3 and 4.

The Exodus generation were God's chosen people—delivered by Him both physically and spiritually. But, as we have seen, they didn't mature as they should have. Their walk of faith did not develop despite God's continual revelation to them. The Christians to whom the Book of Hebrews is addressed were struggling with exactly the same problem.

Look at how skillfully God's Word addresses their need:

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus ... Hebrews 3:1

This is the right object of our faith—the Person of Jesus and His revelation to us!



Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

**"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
In the day of trial in the wilderness,
Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,
And saw My works forty years.
Therefore, I was angry with that generation,
And said, 'They always go astray in their hearts,
And they have not known My ways.'
So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall never enter My rest.'"** Hebrews 3:7-11

Can you see the warning?

The writer of Hebrews is telling the Church: Don't be like the Exodus generation. Don't turn in unbelief! The same thing that happened to them can happen to you!

**Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God ...
For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end ...
"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."** Hebrews 3:12-15

What a powerful and concise warning: Don't turn in unbelief; hold firm in faith that you might be a partaker with Christ, and steer clear of the alternative of living out your days in a spiritual wilderness of your own making!

Now the Scripture is going to walk us through a series of questions and answers:

For who, having heard, rebelled?

Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?

Now with whom was He angry forty years?

**Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell
in the wilderness?**

**And to whom did He swear that they would not enter
His rest, but to those who did not obey?**

**So we see that they could not enter in because of
unbelief.**

Hebrews 3:16-19

Unbelief is sin, and the sin of unbelief is what kept the Israelites out of the *Promised Land*! We must let that sink in and allow it to garner our attention. Note how skillfully the writer of Hebrews makes this applicable to all of us!

**Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest,
let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of
it.**

Hebrews 4:1

For us, this is not a physical land, but a place of spiritual abundance!

For we who have believed do enter that rest ...

Hebrews 4:3



There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

Hebrews 4:9

For the Church, there remains a place of *rest* that God has prepared for His people. Now it is not a land, but a quality of life the Scriptures call the *Abundant Life*!

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11

A lack of faith on the part of the Children of Israel kept them out of the Promised Land, and it will do the same thing for us. Unbelief compromises *rest* and leads to disobedience. So, once again, I bring you back to the understanding we have so carefully developed:

God's place of "rest" refers to a condition of the soul and spirit whereby every other human response is subordinated to trusting the Lord—the Living Word and the written Word.

That means we trust instead of: doubting, giving in to fear, worrying, or choosing self in place of the will of God.

The moment we are not trusting, we have turned from God in unbelief. And, to be absolutely clear:

For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Romans 14:23

To enter the rest of faith is good—to remain is better! And, we remain by settling every controversy of life in favor of trusting God and His Word!

Conclusion

We have accomplished much! What remains is to give our full attention to Hebrews 4:11 and the remainder of Hebrews Chapter 4. We'll take up an investigation of the word translated *labor* in our next booklet in this series.

May the Lord use what we have covered to your spiritual blessing and His glory!

What God in His sovereignty may yet do on a world-scale I do not claim to know; but what He will do for the plain man or woman who seeks His face I believe I do know and can tell others. Let any man turn to God in earnest, let him begin to exercise himself unto godliness, let him seek to develop his powers of spiritual receptivity by trust and obedience and humility, and the results will exceed anything he may have hoped in his leaner and weaker days.

Tozer



VISTOSO



Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

1200 E. Rancho Vistoso Blvd., Oro Valley, AZ 85755

Phone: 520-825-0652 ☎ web: www.vistoso.org