

STEP OF ASHER

WEEK 8

ASHER - אֲשֶׁר

“Happiness”

THE WEAKNESS WE ARE STRENGTHENING

Many Christians are exhausted and overwhelmed with life. They feel empty, like they never get a break, and they are not experiencing regular states of peace and joy. This lesson will help them learn to release their time to God, trusting Him, and enter into joy.

FOCUS

Beginning a regular Sabbath practice.

KEY VERSE

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

(Hebrews 4:9-11)

KEY POINTS

- Joy does not come from money or possessions.
- Obedience to God’s Word and being close to His heart is the true path to joy.
- To observe the SABBATH is a command. It is not to annoy us but to free us up from all the cares of this world.
- Observing the Sabbath is STILL one of the Ten Commandments.
- By God’s design our bodies/minds still need a day of rest.
- We should be asking how we can best honor God’s intent on the Sabbath for rest and relationships.

The Step of Asher is about moving the Christian into a state of greater joy and peace, stronger relationships, and a deeper walk with God through regular and committed Sabbath practice.

ICE BREAKER

What would be your dream vacation? Where would you go? How long would you stay?

GROUP DISCUSSION

The EIGHTH Step in the Path 2 Strength is the **STEP OF ASHER**.

The name Asher means “happiness,” so in this lesson, we are going to begin talking about moving into joy.

1.) *What would you say is the difference between happiness and joy?*

2.) *Most of us know that joy is named as part of the Fruit of the Spirit, but what about happiness? Deep down in your heart of hearts, do you feel God wants you to be happy?*

When asked if God wants them to be happy, a lot of Christians will tepidly answer “yes.” Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, this is often only a head belief. It’s something we believe intellectually because we think it is what we are supposed to say or believe, but we aren’t necessarily convinced of it in our heart. We often have a lot of suspicion about whether or not God really wants us to be “happy.”

Now, some Christians *do* passionately believe God wants them to be happy, but the rest of their beliefs aren’t so biblical. Many are really worshipping a version of a fertility God instead of the God of the Bible. They believe “an abundant life” means God wants them to just increase their faith so He can give them health, wealth and/or other blessings.

Yet, God knows that joy does not come from possessions. *It comes from healthy spiritual living, from an intimate relationship with Him, and through loving relationships with others.*

Therefore, if we truly believe He wants to bless us with joy/happiness, we should seek greater obedience to His Word. If we trust in His heart for us, then we should also trust that His teachings, when followed, are what will actually lead us to joy.

Naturally, when a Christian is living in joy, they continue to feel a happiness even in the face of challenges. Joy is a deeper level of happiness that overcomes the world. So, pursuing joy should be a strong desire for us!

We don't have to look far to see the results of going the other way. Those politicians who grasp and hold onto power, do they seem to be happy and at peace? Or do they often seem embittered and short of temper?

A-list Hollywood stars achieve success, riches, fame, and adoration, yet behind the scenes, their personal lives are too often revealed to be empty and full of brokenness. Fake relationships, divorces, suicides, and addictions to alcohol and drugs are tragically abundant. Hollywood is not known as a place of sincerity, joy or peace.

It may surprise you, but in the business world, if one spends time with many of the top CEOs, one will not generally find sage leaders in possession of supreme wisdom for life, but men and women who sense a fragility and emptiness in their personal and spiritual lives. Many live in fear of illness and death because they don't have real answers to the most basic spiritual questions.

Whether we look to the political realm, to professional sports, to the entertainment industry, or the heads of large corporations, we don't find content people who have mastered life.

3.) READ the following passages:

John 10:10 – *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”*

Galatians 5:22-23 – *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, **JOY**, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”*

Joy cannot be found in riches, fame, or success.

4.) READ Psalm 119:9-16

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

Obedience to God's Word and being close to His heart are the true path to joy.

And when it comes to experiencing an abundant life, God gives us a specific instruction designed to increase our happiness... It's in Exodus 20, and we call it the Fourth Commandment:

5.) READ Exodus 20:8-11

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. **For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.***

The command to observe the Sabbath was not given to be an annoyance to us. It was given to free us up from all the cares of this world for an entire day every week!

Doesn't that actually sound nice?

What if God was trying to mandate a mini-vacation for us every week but we've been resisting it?

6.) *What do you feel are some of the reasons people don't observe the Sabbath well?*

7.) *What do you feel could be some of the benefits to observing the Sabbath regularly?*

The Sabbath has many benefits for us.

The Sabbath gives our bodies rest. God did not design our bodies to work 24/7. Our need for sleep **every night** is clear, indisputable evidence God designed our bodies to have cycles of work and rest. Through the 4th Commandment, He is telling us that our bodies need a full day of rest once per week as well.

The Sabbath gives our minds rest. A healthy Sabbath is when we not only rest from physical labor, but we turn off all of our "work problems" mentally. We decide that all our anxieties and concerns can wait until the work week begins again. *It is a time to not even think about work or what we have to get done.*

Nothing has to get done on the Sabbath, so we can mentally rest.

The Sabbath is a title of our time. It is a declaration to God that He is the owner of our time. He is King and we follow His command about how best to use our time. The Sabbath is His, it is holy (meaning "set apart") for His special purposes.

To not observe a Sabbath, is to refuse to acknowledge Him as *Lord of Our Calendar*. Through this choice, we are either saying we wish to remain the gods of our own calendar, or at a minimum we are saying we don't trust Him with our calendar.

NOTE: It is not so important *which* day of the week one celebrates the Sabbath as much as just making sure we have a regular one that interrupts our calendar. (For confirmation of this principle, see Romans 14:5). For most Christians, Sunday makes the most sense because of church services, etc. However, hospitals and certain other emergency services have to have employees work on Sundays, so some Christians may need to choose another day. Pastors themselves often choose a different day because they work all day every Sunday.

However, whatever day we honor as our Sabbath, we should not move it around from week to week at our convenience. **The Sabbath should be fixed for us and interrupt our calendar.** This is part of what it means to make God the *Lord of our Calendar*.

For those who might argue that the Sabbath is a part of the Old Testament Law which we are no longer under ... we should recall the previous lessons where we've learned that those redeemed by Christ are simply no longer under the *penalty of death* for violating the Sabbath.

Our bodies' physical requirements have not changed. We still need a Sabbath day of rest every week *by His design*, and it still remains one of the Ten Commandments.

Christians typically don't question any of the other Ten Commandments as necessary for obedience to God. Yet, for some reason the Sabbath Day is frequently singled out as no longer relevant.

The reason for this is probably the multiple conflicts Jesus had with the Pharisees over healing on the Sabbath, but He initiated these conflicts not to abolish the Sabbath, but simply to show us that the Sabbath was created for our blessing, not to be interpreted so legalistically as to become a curse.

The Sabbath gives us time for Worship! This mental and physical break from our work and busyness has a purpose of setting aside time for us to spend with God and worship Him. It is necessary for the continual growth of our relationship with Him.

The Sabbath gives us time to focus on relationships. Our work weeks are so filled with crazy levels of busyness, from work, to school, to sports, to every social obligation under the sun, the Sabbath provides a perfect break to slow down and really focus on time with family and friends.

The ideal Sabbath observance is one where it is kept on the same day every week, and the Christian fully rests from all work, all school studies, and *anything else that might help advance their life forward.*

Things to rest from would typically include most yard work, children's sports activities, and even most shopping. These are all usually "have-to" activities that keep us busy and away from true rest.

8.) *What aspect of the Sabbath observance would be the most challenging for you?*

9.) *Would observing the Sabbath in the way God intended increase or decrease your happiness and how?*

In general, rather than trying to think of activities that could be "approved" or "excused" for the Sabbath (this is a legalistic approach), we should simply be asking how we can best honor God's intent on the Sabbath for rest and relationships.

