

STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO
SIX SESSIONS

A FIELD GUIDE FOR THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

REST & WAR.



BEN STUART

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STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS

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Resources



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Rest & War Study Guide

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

GROUP SIZE

This six-session video Bible study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or other small-group gathering. If your gathering is large, you may want to consider splitting everyone into smaller groups of five or six people. This will ensure that everyone has enough time to participate in discussions.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Everyone in your group will need a copy of this study guide, which includes the opening questions to discuss, notes for the video teachings, directions for activities and discussion questions, and personal studies in between sessions. We also encourage you to get a copy of the book *Rest & War*, which will provide further insights into the material you are covering in this study. To aid your study experience, you will be asked to read specific chapters in the book to prepare for the group's next meeting.

FACILITATION

Your group will need to appoint a person to serve as a facilitator. This person will be responsible for starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Facilitators may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting everyone in the group to respond and assuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. If you have been chosen for this role, note that there are additional instructions and resources in the back of this guide to help you lead your group members through the study.

PERSONAL STUDIES

During the week, you can maximize the impact of this course with the personal studies provided. Treat each personal study like a devotional and use them in whatever way works best for your schedule. You could do one section each day for three days of the week or complete them all in one sitting. These personal studies are not intended to be burdensome or time-consuming but to provide a richer experience and continuity in between your group sessions.

INTRODUCTION

“Oh God, we are so stupid.” These were the first words of my friend’s prayer. I don’t remember his next few lines, because my eyes were scanning the snow-covered mountains under our perch high atop Longs Peak. As we sat there, entirely depleted, I wondered, *How long until our friends file a missing person’s report?* I knew for certain there was no way that we could get down that mountain using only our internal resources.

It had started out well. I had joined a team of college students for a summer-long internship in Denver, Colorado. Early on, my friend had invited me to climb this massive fourteen-thousand-foot mountain. We began to train and resolved to summit Longs Peak one month later. At one point as the trail ascended, we both began to struggle for air. Each heave of our bodies required an enormous expenditure of energy.

But this was not the time to stop! We pushed ourselves on and reached a rocky path high above. From there, we followed the route around a corner . . . followed by another . . . until we came to another steep incline. At the sight of it, we both slumped to the ground. We were exhausted, nauseous, and *stuck*. After a few moments of listening to the wind whistle

through the mountain range below, we began our prayer acknowledging our stupidity.

Then it happened. I saw a head pop out from behind a boulder. “Hey, guys!” a voice shouted. “Great day to hike! You guys been to the top yet?” The man stopped and surveyed us. “Wait a second, you’re the college guys who came up here without equipment. We’re in awe of you. You’re crazy!” He then returned to his original question: “You been to the top?”

I told him we had not and were not planning to do so. “You have to go,” he replied. “C’mon guys!” I stood up on my wobbly legs. “We are not doing well,” I whispered. “We are totally exhausted. There is no way we can go any farther.”

His demeanor changed. He set down his pack and produced two pairs of arm-length mittens. “First things first,” he then said. “You are breathing wrong. You are in a new environment. The atmosphere has changed. You have to adapt if you want to survive.”

I often think about this moment as I survey our world today. Shifts in the atmosphere of society have had an impact on our vibrancy and the way we interact with God. We are depleted, exhausted, nauseous, and stuck. We are distraught by the uncertainty and anxiety around us and by the fear, lust, pride, and doubt within us. We don’t know how to manage it—and feel helpless. We need a guide to emerge who will show us how to move forward.

The good news is that we have such a Guide. He looks at us not with eyes of condemnation but with compassion. He has many things to teach us—if we have ears to listen.

What you will find in this study is not a scolding for your struggles nor a motivational speech to try harder. I want to bring you to the Good Shepherd, show you the ancient path that leads to rest for your soul, and equip you to advance toward your God-given destiny.

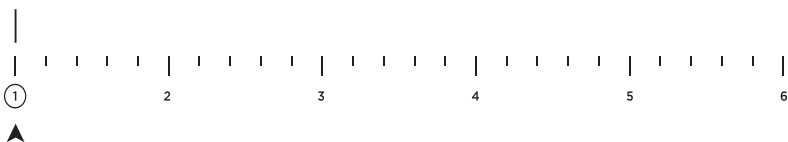
This is a call to battle and to build—to *war* against the Enemy so you can find *rest* for your soul. I'm not talking about fighting skirmishes for your ego or building flimsy kingdoms that fall like a house of cards. I'm talking about expending your maximum energy for the greatest of all causes. I want you to fight the battle of the ages and build a kingdom that will never fade.

The challenge is before you. *Are you ready to accept it?* Let's jump in and begin.

—BEN STUART



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SESSION ONE

FREED TO FIGHT

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

HEBREWS 12:3 ESV

WELCOME

“I’m just glad I made it.”

What? I couldn’t believe what I was hearing.

I was visiting with a mentor who had just transitioned well from leading one successful ministry to leading another. As a young minister, I asked him how it felt to retire after building a thriving ministry. I thought he would talk about how rewarding it was to impact so many lives or share some of the secret strategies of his success. I did not expect him to express gratitude for *survival*.

But then I thought about my own experience. I watched two ministers I knew lose their families and ministries because of infidelity. I observed others plunge into depression after years of maintaining an unsustainable schedule. As I surveyed the wreckage of broken relationships, shattered hearts, and demolished dreams, suddenly my mentor's assessment made much more sense. To succeed, we need to learn how to survive.

Many of us enter into our adult lives with a swell of optimism. We want to use the gifts and abilities we possess to make our mark on the world! But then we encounter difficulties and discouragements all around us. We also discover all manner of insecurities, fears, lusts, and addictions within us. How do we avoid being crushed by the chaos which abounds not only out in the world but also inside of us?

The writer of Hebrews charges us, "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:1–2 ESV).

We do have a race to run that our Maker has marked out for us. A life of meaning awaits us. And this will require that we disentangle ourselves from ways of thinking and living that will derail our God-given purpose. But notice before we wrestle and before we run, we need to watch what Jesus has done on our behalf. Before we begin the fight, we need to understand how we've been fought for.

Ben Sherwood wrote a book years ago on survival called *The Survivor's Club*. He sets out to explain, given the inevitability of adversity, who survives and thrives. Which is the safest seat on an airplane? Where is the best place to have a heart attack? In the book, he includes a chapter on faith, even though he

admits he did not want to do so. He was not interested in the subject but found that God came up so often in stories of survival that he had to address the topic. In preparation for writing, he interviewed the man who had literally written the book on survival, *How to Survive on Land and Sea*, for the Naval Survival Training institute. Ben asked this former marine-drill instructor, “What is the secret to survival?” The man answered without hesitation, “Faith in God. It is a major factor in all survival scenarios.” He felt so strongly about this that he opened his survival manual with the words of Psalm 23: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (verse 4 KJV).¹

Before we engage in learning the strategies and tactics we need to survive and thrive in our spiritual lives, we must first fix our eyes on the God who fought for us. The greatest fighters are those who know they have been fought for. So, before we hack our way through the wilderness, we need to look at the Trailblazer who made a way for us!

SHARE

Before we jump into this session, take a few minutes to introduce yourself to anyone you haven’t met yet in the group. Then, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions:

- How do you respond to the idea that spirituality is a struggle?

— or —

- What does it mean for you to keep your eyes fixed on Christ?

READ

Invite someone to read aloud the following passage. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read and then discuss the questions that follow.

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

I JOHN 3:7-10

What does John say is the reason that Jesus came to earth?

What do you find unsettling in this passage? What questions would you want to ask John?

WATCH

Play the video segment for session one (use the streaming video access provided on the inside front cover). As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Like a soldier dropped behind enemy lines, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8 NASB). The reason we celebrate Christmas is because God wanted something destroyed—the Enemy of our soul.

God has established physical, relational, moral, and spiritual laws by which his world is governed. But the devil wants to overthrow God’s laws and lead us into spiritual anarchy.

God saw humanity disobey him and knew the devastation it would bring. But he told the deceiver, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15 NKJV). Theologians call this the *protoevangelium*, the first gospel, a declaration of the good news of a savior.

Jesus proclaimed, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives . . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18 ESV). He stepped out to do damage against the darkness.

Jesus explained his ministry this way: “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder” (Luke 11:21–22). He came to destroy the “strong one”—the devil—and set us free.

Jesus destroyed the works of the devil not by perpetrating violence, but by taking violence upon himself. He overcame the Enemy’s greatest weapon—our just condemnation for our sin—by becoming human, taking our condemnation for us, and rising victoriously from the grave (see Hebrews 2:14–15).

Jesus has led a triumph, and we are victorious. The aroma of his victory permeates us: “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere” (2 Corinthians 2:14 *ESV*).

You have been liberated and freed to *fight*. Jesus has won the decisive victory. Your sin has been canceled. Your debt has been paid. You are loved by a holy God. Victory is your destiny. Let this truth embolden you to pursue the victory that he has purchased for us all.

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes within your group to discuss the message and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. How does considering Jesus’ mission—“to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8)—change the way you view your relationship with God? How does it change your view of what it means to follow after Christ?

2. How was destroying the works of the devil part of God's plan from the beginning? Why was this necessary in light of Adam and Eve's disobedience?
3. What are the implications for your own struggles when you consider that Jesus has the power to take away the devil's weapons of destruction?
4. When have you experienced this kind of power in your life most recently?
5. How can you celebrate—both individually and communally—the triumph of Jesus' victory over sin and death? How does celebrating this victory empower you to experience freedom in the midst of struggles?

6. What is one area of your life where you would like to experience greater victory?

RESPOND

As you reflect on the group discussion and what you will take away from this session, consider what it means for you to experience victory over the struggles you face most frequently. To facilitate this process, at the end of each session you will find an exercise to help you apply the teaching so you can experience rest and battle more effectively in your life. This exercise is also meant to be a way to help others in your group as you learn and grow together.

In this first session, you have started the process of exploring what it means to reconsider your spiritual battles and embrace the power that Christ has made available to you. Taking inventory of where you are spiritually is a good way to begin. Toward this goal, spend a few minutes answering the following questions in the space provided. Remember, no one will see your responses unless you choose to share them.

What stands out in this session that seems especially true right now in your life? How do you see this truth manifesting itself in your present circumstances?

As you consider what it means to engage in spiritual war to live in the freedom Jesus has won, where do you feel most vulnerable? What are your areas of weakness right now?

Finally, what are your expectations for this group study? How can the group help you grow in your faith and draw closer to God?

Review your answers and ask God to meet you where you are at this time.

PRAY

Conclude your session by sharing any requests you would like the group to lift up in prayer. Thank God for bringing you together for this study so that you can help and encourage one another as you seek to recognize and overcome the Enemy's snares. Ask God to give you clarity, wisdom, and discernment as you proceed into this group study. Trust that your Good Shepherd will guide you to rest and equip you for overcoming trials and temptations.



SESSION ONE

PERSONAL STUDY

This week's group discussion is just the start! We want you to continue digging into these concepts throughout the week ahead. So, we've created this section as a guide for your personal study time to further explore the topics you discussed with your group. Before you begin, review chapters 1 and 2 in *Rest & War*. Note there will be an opportunity at your next group session to share any responses or thoughts that you have.

CONNECT

Check in with your group members during the upcoming week and continue the discussion you had with them at your last gathering. Grab coffee or dinner or reach out by text and share what's going on in your heart. Use the following questions to help guide your conversation.

What are some key words and phrases that have continued to stand out to you from your last group session? Why have those especially resonated with you?

What does it mean in your present season of life that you have been “freed to fight”? What is the greatest battle that you are facing right now?

When have you experienced God’s presence in the midst of your daily battles? How does knowing he is with you make a difference when you encounter unexpected problems?

REFLECT

Take a moment and read Titus 2:11–14:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (ESV).

What stands out to you? Why?

In this passage, Paul explains that the grace of God accomplishes two things. First, it brings salvation. Because of the appearance of God's kindness, rescue from the penalty of sin is now available to all who place their faith in Jesus. No one earns redemption here. The kindness of God makes rescue available to all, no matter what we may have done in life.

But the kindness of God does not just bring rescue; it also trains us! It is the grace of God that teaches us to let go of the destructive ways of living that were once the hallmarks of our previous existence. The kindness of God teaches us to live in an appropriate way as we deal with God, others, and ourselves.

This is important: God does not shame us into life change. He loves us into it. We do not work to earn God's approval. We work because we have it. His love precedes and prompts our life change! Because he redeemed us from destructive ways of living and thinking, we can renounce them. We can fight because he fought for us.

How does knowing that Jesus "gave himself for us to redeem us" reframe how you think about the sin in your life?

Does the knowledge that you are loved by God motivate you to want to renounce destructive ways of thinking and living? Why or why not?

Do you think of God as a gracious teacher and trainer or as a perpetually disappointed father? How might this shift of perspective help you in your fight against sin in your own life?

WORSHIP

One of the Enemy's most common strategies is to cultivate discontent in your heart. It may be triggered from seeing someone else's social media post, a commercial on TV, or a conversation you overhear at work. The devil tries to convince

you that everyone else has what you want—and what you *could* have—if only you are willing to disobey God and go your own way. This struggle is nothing new. In fact, the people of Israel often fell prey to this scheme, thanking God for his provision one day and then looking at their neighbors and complaining against God the next. In the following passage, the prophet Isaiah tried to get the people to see that their deepest longings could *never* be satisfied by earthly pursuits but only by drawing closer to God. Read through the passage and then spend a few minutes answering the questions that follow.

*“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.*

ISAIAH 55:1–2

What have you pursued in your life in hopes that it would provide lasting satisfaction—relationships, money, success, status, possessions? Explain.

What do you long for most right now? How have you been pursuing it?

How would your life be different if you truly believed you have everything you need? How would this belief affect your relationships? Your work? Your service to others?

What do you need to surrender to the Lord right now in order to allow his blessings, peace, and joy to go deeper into your heart?

Take a few minutes to ask God to reveal anything that you have been chasing that is taking your focus off of him. Surrender anything that he brings to mind. Close by spending a few additional minutes in prayer, praising him for providing his true rest and contentment for your soul.

DEEPER

Jesus has not only liberated us from the Enemy but also invited us to join the fight. As C. S. Lewis explained, “Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in his great campaign of sabotage.”² It can feel like we are in a war *because we are in one*. Yet it is a war in which our King has won the decisive victory—and because he has been victorious, we can be too.

I know many people who are so discouraged by their continuous fumbles and failures that they’ve begun to doubt that God has changed their lives. Maybe you feel like that. But what if I told you that your struggles, rather than being a sign of something wrong with you, are actually a sign of something right?

Picture a battlefield in the midst of the heat of a fire-fight. Amid the chaos of bombs detonating and bullets flying, there are two kinds of people on the field. The first looks calm and still, unaffected by the destruction. The second appears agitated, clearly fighting a war within—battling fear, doubt, anxiety, terror—as the war wages without. What makes the two soldiers different? The first person appears peaceful because he is *dead*. The second person is aware of the battle because they are alive. It is the same spiritually.

The spiritually dead do not struggle with sin. Your struggles, far from being a sign of your spiritual death, may be one of your greatest assurances that you are alive. You have not been freed from your struggle against sin. You have been freed to struggle. Now you must learn how to struggle well, for you have a real fight on your hands.

— FROM CHAPTER 2 OF *REST & WAR*

How do you tend to view your “continuous fumbles and failures” in life?

How does it help you to know that your struggles, far from being a sign of your spiritual death, is actually an assurance that you are spiritually alive?

What is one way that you will “struggle well” this week?

For Next Week: Before your group’s next session, read or review chapters 3 and 4 in *Rest & War*. Pay special attention to what each chapter has to say about surveying the battlefield.

NOTES

1. Ben Sherwood, *The Survivor’s Club: The Secrets and Science That Could Save Your Life* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009).
2. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; reprint, New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 45.



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