

Russell Kelfer

When God Says “No”

#1370-B

**Series: Possessing the Land:
The Process of Mentoring**



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

When God Says “No”

Having grandchildren is like beginning life all over again. You recall memories of the past and think to yourself, “I think I’ve been here and done that”. You also, however, tend to enjoy them in a way you never did your own children, because:

- a- You get to love ‘em and leave ‘em.
- b- You usually have a choice as to when you have ‘em .
- c- You don’t have to always be the one to say “no”.

God, however, doesn’t have that luxury. Each succeeding generation of believers become His children, and thus He must feed them with the milk of the word and He is the one who must guide them and love them and tell them “no”. Spiritually, each new babe in Christ is just that, and God becomes accountable for them as though they were the first. So if you are a grandparent and the role of parenting this new generation becomes yours for a season, fret not. God understands. And God is adequate to the task. That, of course, is an understatement. Whenever you use “God” and “adequate” in the same sentence it is an understatement. And if you have to be the one to say “no” and it hurts you to do it, remember you are in very good company. God was the first and He will back you up if you are saying so in harmony with His commands. He first said “no” to Adam and Eve when they looked longingly at the one thing God said they couldn’t have.

Sometimes God says “no” to His children to punish them. Sometimes He says it to protect them. Sometimes He says it because He is reinforcing a lesson He has already taught them; a lesson they seem to have forgotten, and to ignore His prior discipline would be to negate His very word.

One of the most difficult illustrations of God saying “no” comes in the passage we are studying in this lesson. The children of Israel, remember are being taught a history lesson by the greatest professor of Hebrew history ever to live except for Jesus. The teacher’s name was Moses, and he was addressing the whole

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nation just prior to their excursion into the land of promise. In our last study, we saw God’s people preparing for war, and we heard the specific instructions of the Commander-in-Chief as He told the people through His spokesman what to expect and what to do.

They were first of all to not “meddle” with the nations that were descendants of their relatives. They were not called to agitate or try to take anything from those who belonged to God. They were even to pay for the food or water they needed as they passed through their land.

Enemy territory, however, was a different matter. In that case, they were to contend for the land in battle. The strange truth that kept being repeated, however, was that though they were to be in the midst of the battle, *it would be God who would be responsible for the victory*. In fact, God was telling them that the outcome had already been determined, *and they would triumph over the enemy if they listened carefully and just followed orders*.

We take up reading there. As chapter three opens, Og, the King of Bashan, occupies the next parcel of real estate that God has now promised to Israel. Listen to the problem and to God’s solution:

Then we turned, and went up the way to Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei.

And the LORD said unto me, Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; and thou shalt do unto him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon.

So the LORD our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people: and we smote him until none was left to him remaining. (Deuteronomy 3:1-3)

Round two. A rerun, if you will. God was going to do exactly what He had already done. Don’t ever tire of the cycle of God’s deliverance and don’t ever minimize the victories. Satan would like us to get so accustomed to being blessed by God that the blessings become expected and when they seem to cease, instead of praising God for what He has done, we tend to chide God for letting us down.

That is what God was guarding against here. He told them to go back out and watch Him do to Og what He did to Sihon.

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Same song, second verse. Remember: God did not give them all of the land they journeyed through. Sometimes, they were to acknowledge this land did not belong to them, but at other times they were to listen to God’s instructions and take everything He was giving them. So Moses called the congregation together and gave them their marching orders.

THE ROLES AND THE RULES

Their marching orders had some rules and those rules defined their roles. The men were charged with going into battle to watch God work. The women were forbidden from going into the battle, but were to remain behind to care for the children and to wait for the men to return. Both were tough tasks, but both carried with them divine instructions and thus guaranteed them divine grace if they obeyed. Verses 18-20 tell it like is:

And I commanded you at that time, saying, The LORD your God hath given you this land to possess it: ye shall pass over armed before your brethren the children of Israel, all that are meet for the war.

But your wives, and your little ones, and your cattle, (for I know that ye have much cattle,) shall abide in your cities which I have given you;

Until the LORD have given rest unto your brethren, as well as unto you, and until they also possess the land which the Lord your God hath given them beyond Jordan: and then shall ye return every man unto his possession, which I have given you. (Deuteronomy 3:18-20)

Note that everyone who was qualified was drafted. That phrase “meet for the war” literally means “all young men who are able”. One translator uses the phrase “all able-bodied men”. That pretty well says it. Anyone who was not physically handicapped and was young enough to go and old enough to fight was considered to be in the reserves. I don’t think God ran ads in the Israeli Gazette with pictures of a unit of troops lounging by the sea of Galilee while the text read: “See the world and enjoy the sights: Join God’s Army”. No, I think God simply said “Okay, gang, we’re in a war. Everyone who can is the infantry. Let’s get a move on.”

As we mentioned, there was one limitation and it was a crucial one. The women and children were to remain behind. The fighting of the war was to be the task of all able-bodied men. The task of the wives was just as critical, but not as dangerous. They were to

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man the home front while the men were guarding the front lines. God added “I know you have much cattle”.

As a good Texan, I can't help but be impressed that God was aware of how many cattle they had. They had a bunch. Don't ever think for one minute that God is not aware of all of your resources. “The cattle on a thousand hills” belong to God. Therefore, it makes sense that God knows where every cow is and who owns it. The people are His, what they own belongs to Him, and He, therefore, keeps good inventory records. He doesn't need a computer, either. God keeps a good account.

THERE WILL BE REST

Once again, God makes this incredible promise:

But your wives, and your little ones, and your cattle, (for I know that ye have much cattle,) shall abide in your cities which I have given you;

Until the LORD have given rest unto your brethren, as well as unto you, and until they also possess the land which the Lord your God hath given them beyond Jordan: and then shall ye return every man unto his possession, which I have given you. (Deuteronomy 3:18,19)

Possessing the land would bring about something called “rest”. Rest is defined in your concordance as “to settle down and be quiet, to remain in a state of repose or quietness”. It was nationally a state of peace; the absence of war and hostility. It was personally an inner state of peace; a quiet repose in the arms of God that transcended human understanding. The one was a visible picture of the other. Jesus described the rest that awaited the Christian this way:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

(Matthew 11:28-30)

The Greek word used for “rest” in this passage is a word that means “the cessation of anything that produces turmoil and the resulting quietness of heart that remains”. Jesus is saying that this thing called “rest” is designed for those who have been in the battle; those who are laboring and loaded down with cares. The

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thing God wants them to have is a gift. It is something God gives; not something we earn. We get it by grace, having taken the yoke or the harness or the mentality of Christ Himself, which is a yoke that binds the soul to a spirit of humility and lowliness, rather than releasing it to exalt itself. It is an easy or “well-fitted” yoke.

It isn't hard at all to wear, in fact it chafes far less than the yoke of pride. It is easy to wear because you aren't doing the pulling; God is. When you enter into that kind of yoking relationship where He pulls and you follow, there comes into your life an amazing thing called “rest”. Moses was saying that God had promised His children a season of warfare, followed by an oasis of this thing called “rest”. It means that the battles of life are to be endured, but they will be followed by a season of rest. It required obedience, and because of that, their parents missed it totally. Read Psalm 95:

Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work.

Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways:

Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest. (Psalm 95:8-11)

The writer of Hebrews referred to this passage as he defined the rest of God. He wrote:

Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice,

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.

So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) (Hebrews 3:7-11)

That rest was not given to that generation. It was, however, promised to their children, if they would obey. Look at what

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happened when they, indeed, completed the course God had laid out for them:

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein.

And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand.

There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

(Joshua 21:43-45)

Does that passage not cause your heart to enter into quiet rest? Every foe was vanquished. Every enemy defeated. Every square inch of land possessed. Then, (and only then) did God give them rest. But it had to happen. Why? *Because there has never failed one word of that which God has promised. All came to pass. And it always will.*

Look at Jesus in the wilderness. Bitter spiritual warfare. What followed after the last attack was met with the word of God? *An angel came and ministered unto Him.* That's what happened. When God's people obey and follow Him into the conflict for the purpose of claiming the victory, God delights in giving them rest. Look at some of the Biblical promises that relate to the rest of God:

Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. (I Chronicles 22:9)

Is not the LORD your God with you? and hath he not given you rest on every side? for he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people. (I Chronicles 22:18)

For David said, The LORD God of Israel hath given rest unto his people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem for ever:

(I Chronicles 23:25)

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. (Psalm 37:7)

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And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. (Isaiah 11:10)

The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17)

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, (II Thessalonians 1:7)

The writer of Hebrews then defines and describes the inner rest of God this way:

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

(Hebrews 4:1)

For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

And in this *place* again, If they shall enter into my rest.

(Hebrews 4:3-5)

For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:8-11)

The rest of God is available to the child of God who ceases trying to please God through his own good works and learns to rest even as God rested on the seventh day. It is a calling so noble, so incredible, so desirable that we are to literally labor to enter into that place where labor ceases. Spiritual warfare is a prelude to entering into rest. It is so often God’s way of stripping the believer of his self-motivation and his self-determination until there is nothing left but to crawl up into God’s everlasting arms and “rest”.

When you get there, you know it. You tried to “do things for God” but it didn’t work. Finally, as the bombs fell, you reached

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that point where you knew you couldn't fight it any longer and you couldn't win. So you came weary and heavy laden to the King and He said, “So happy you have come. Crawl up into my arms, now, and rest”. Suddenly, the panic passed, the storms ceased, the raging rivers turned to quiet streams. God was in control and you were...at rest.

Praise God, He is giving us a tangible illustration in Deuteronomy of the awesome explanation He was to give in Hebrews. If you have never entered into Sabbath rest, it is not too late. You, too, can cease laboring in your own strength and come to the One who even now is reaching out with outstretched arms beckoning to you and to me that we might come in our weariness and come bringing our self-imposed burdens and lay them at His feet. He can take those burdens from us. He can relieve us of the weariness that weighs us down. He calls to us.

“Cast all your cares upon Him. He careth for you.”

(1 Peter 5:7)

I WILL FINISH WHAT I STARTED

The passage goes on:

Until the LORD have given rest unto your brethren, as well as unto you, and *until* they also possess the land which the LORD your God hath given them beyond Jordan: and *then* shall ye return every man unto his possession, which I have given you.

And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest. (Deuteronomy 3:20,21)

God doesn't tease His children. He doesn't lead them up blind alleys or onto dead-end streets. He promised them rest. He would give it. He promised them that they would return to their homes and their families. They did. Then He told Moses to see that Joshua and all the others needed to know that what He had done to Sihon and Og, He would do again and again until all the land was taken. This was not a tempting display of pre-nuclear power that would lead them right up to the gate, but not through it. It was a living demonstration that “*what God had promised He was able also to perform.*” (Romans 4:21).

God is in the finishing business. He never puts one coat on

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and forgets to complete the masterpiece. But before He can put on the second and third coats, He often must do some sandpapering to prepare the surface to receive an even higher gloss. That is why God’s promise to us in Philippians 1 is so incredibly encouraging:

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:
(Philippians 1:6)

God plans to finish what He started in your life and in mine. We may look rough around the edges now, but by the time we reach the heavenly mansion where we will become trophies of His work of grace, we will, like Him, shine like the sun, for we shall see Him as He is. Don’t question the path God is taking you over. He sees the end from the beginning. He knows what you need to be a finished product. And He will not stop until the Master’s touch upon you, be it a gentle polishing of your spirit or the heavy hand of abrasion that’s needed to remove the marks of sin, has run its course. *He will not stop until He it is done.* You may scream and complain at the intensity of the pain as His hand presses upon you. Still He will continue. He will perform the good work He began in you. He has chosen to, for He has chosen you to be a trophy of His grace, a trophy so transparently beautiful that when men look at you, they do not glorify you, but rather say, *“What a master craftsman to produce such beauty.”* And as they see you and glorify your Father, you will bow down before His throne in awe and in joy.

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Which brings us to the final thought of this study. The passage continues:

Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you.

And I besought the LORD at that time, saying,

O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?

I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.

But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee;

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Speak no more unto me of this matter.

Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.

(Deuteronomy 3:22-28)

Moses was the meekest man in all the earth. He was one of the most obedient men who ever followed the Lord his God. He was a man after God’s own heart. He was, however, human. And on one hot and steamy day in the desert of Zin, he was tested once again by that rebellious crew of self-centered followers he had inherited as a people. He had been there before. People out in the sweltering sun, needing only a cup of water to satiate their seemingly impossible thirst. On that occasion, God allowed Moses to take his rod and hit a rock. The stone burst open, water flowed, their thirst was satisfied, and God was exalted (Exodus 17:6).

This time, however, the anger of the people and their obvious ungrateful spirit got the best of him. God tells us the story in Numbers, chapter 20:

Then came the children of Israel, *even* the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.

And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!

And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?

And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it *is* no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither *is* there any water to drink.

And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they

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fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.

And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?

And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts *also*.

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.

This **is** the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.

(Numbers 20:1-13)

You, I trust, remember it well. He was to speak to the rock this time, for truly *“That Rock was Christ”*. And the Rock could not be smitten but once for the sins of the world. He implied that he had a part in the process by saying, *“Must we fetch you water out of this rock?”* And he not only smote the rock, he smote it twice. God’s answer:

Because ye believed Me not, to set Me apart in the eyes of the people, ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.

(Numbers 20:12b)

God still loved Moses. He was still God’s man of the hour. He continued to lead His people. He became the elder statesman of the nation. But he could not lead them into the land. God had spoken. It seemed like a harsh sentence, but remember, Moses was not chosen by God because of his good works. Moses was chosen by grace. He tried in his own energy to free God’s people and failed. God in His mercy let him become a nobody that nobody knew and then lifted him off a mountainside and used

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him to perform miracle after miracle.

God, however, did not owe Moses anything. Everything Moses had, God had given him. And don't get the idea that if you earn enough Brownie points serving God that you can get by with blasphemy. Moses was allowed to continue to lead and to serve. But the sentence was not set aside. It could not be without denying God's word. So here as we see the grand finale of this old man's life, we see him leaning on his staff, looking out across the valley at the land he had dreamed of; the land God had promised through him to give to Israel. He was begging God to reconsider and revoke His word.

“Get a good look at it, Moses,” God answered. “You can see it with your eyes, but your feet will never touch the richness of its soil, and you will not partake of that luscious fruit it bears so readily. My word must stand or it ceases to be infallible and immutable. I love you, Moses, *but you cannot go.*”

The most loving Father ever to bear the name “Father” has just told His favorite child “no”. Because He did not love him? God forbid. He told him “no” because His word depended on it. And were He to change His word, it would forever be less than what it is. There was one Son God loved even more. He, too, was told “no”. It was in a beautiful garden called “Gethsemane” and this Son cried out: *“Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, thy will be done.”* It wasn't possible for God to take away that cup without erasing from His word the multitudes of passages concerning Messiah's death, burial and resurrection. So The Father told the Son, “No”. And the Son, *“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:2)

God has, no doubt, on more than one occasion, said “no” to you. There have, I am sure, been times when your cries of pain or cries of grief or cries of weariness have been met with silence; only to realize that in the quiet moment of that silence, your heart could hear the voice of God say;

“No, my child, I cannot grant you that request. It would violate My word to do so, or it would not be best for you. I love you too much to say “yes”, my child. A good parent knows when to say “no”. This is one of those times.

Maybe like Moses you thought about it and continued to

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plead: *“But Father, I’ve been faithful in so many things. Can’t you bend the law just this once?”* And the Master replied, though not in audible voice, “Child, just once is all it takes. To break My word once is to render it powerless. No, my child, I cannot give you what you ask. I can, however, give you all my love. The two are not incompatible. In fact, the very act of saying “no” is My greatest act of love of all.”

There may be something you are praying for even now and God knows that *if He gave you what you want, it would send leanness into your soul* (Psalm 106:15). So amidst your cries, you still hear Him whisper “no”. There may be someone you are praying for even now, and yet they, with hardened heart, will not say “yes” to Christ. You want Him to violate the free will of man that gave you your salvation and force Himself upon that one. He will not. His love is too great to break His word.

Maybe, like Moses, you violated the picture of God’s grace in marriage or in some other way, and God has caused you to suffer some great pain in the process. He has forgiven you, if you have asked Him. Forgiveness erases the stain of sin, but it does not remove the process of sowing and reaping. You are cleansed and renewed, but when you dare Him to make the consequences go away as though it had never happened, He may have to lovingly, gently say “no”, just as He did with Moses.

No man ever served God more faithfully than Moses. No man ever led God’s people more meekly than Moses. But even Moses, when he challenged God to break His word, had to hear him say, “no”. Be careful, beloved, when you say *“God did not answer my prayer”*. “No” is a valid answer. That’s why prayer is a request, not a demand. It isn’t because God *cannot do what you ask*. *He is omnipotent*. It isn’t because He doesn’t love you enough. *He is perfect love*. It is rather that He loves you *so much* that He will not let you be the recipient of that which violates His nature just to give you what you wanted.

So you cry, and the heavens are silent. Praise God. For in the midst of that silence, *if you listen carefully*, you will hear His gentle voice say, “no”. Praise Him when you do. It may well be the most beautiful answered prayer you ever hear.

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For Further Study and Application

1- Why do you think God was so specific about the roles of women and children in the midst of the warfare they encountered entering the land? What percentage of the male population do you think was eligible for the draft?

2- What significance do you place in the fact that God knew how many cattle they had? Can you make personal application?

3- How would you describe the “rest” of God for someone. Do you live in such a way as to demonstrate it? Do you know of someone whose heart always seems to be at rest, even amidst times of great warfare? Why do you think warfare often precedes the rest of God?

4- Read Matthew 11:28,29. What were the prerequisites for receiving the rest of God in verse 28? Can it be earned? What does God use to describe the yoke of His character in verse 29? How could His burden be light?

5- What promise concerning the rest of God had Moses given to the previous generation in Psalm 95:8-11? How did that differ from what He gave their children in Joshua 21:43-45?

6- Read the verses on the bottom of page 8 and page 9 of your lesson. What characteristics of God’s rest do you find in those passages?

7- Has God ever said “no” to you? What was your response? Why do you think He said “no” to Moses? Had God trained up someone to take his place? Who?

8- The next time you do not hear an answer from God, thank Him that His answer may well be “no”. Thank Him that a loving father demonstrates his love in its greater measure when he has to say “no”.

9- Memorize Hebrews 4:9,10.

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