



SHARING SCRIPTURE

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Restless and Rebellious

For use: July 4 - 10

Texts: Numbers 11:1-33; Numbers 12:1-13; Numbers 13:27-33; Numbers 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Numbers 14:39-45

The recent spate of protests across the United States evoked comparisons with the protests of the 1960s. Their similarities are noted by psychologist Bert Klandermans and sociologist Jacquelin van Stekelenburg, both of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, who have studied the social psychology of protests dating from the 1950s to today. [1]

They discovered five common motivators in these protests: Grievances—citizens become angry enough to demand change. Efficacy—individuals believe that they can bring about change by their actions. Identity—individuals identify with the group demanding change. Emotions—anger is the most common emotion they identified in these protests. Finally, Social Embeddedness—social networks or political leaders create the means to mobilize.

Underlying all of this is a general sense of restlessness. When Dayami Gomez moved to New York from South Florida, she said, "I became surrounded by [racism and police brutality]." She describes how the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor moved her emotionally. "I became restless," Gomez said. "I didn't know how or what I was going to do, so I just got up, got dressed, and went outside to join my community." Unfortunately, what begins as peaceful protest often devolves into violence and chaos.

Although a sense of restlessness and unease can sometimes lead a person to make positive changes when one becomes dissatisfied with their life's direction, when it's unchecked it becomes divisive and destructive.

There are several examples of this in the story of Israel in the wilderness.

When they became tired of eating manna day in and day out, their memories of the “good old days” eating leeks and onions by the Nile caused them to forget their lives of slavery. This restlessness motivated them to try to return to Egypt. Miriam and Aaron’s restlessness exposed their own racist tendencies when they began gossiping about Moses’ Cushite wife, Zipporah. Eventually, this sense of restlessness throughout the camp ended in a collective disaster when they rebelled against entering the Promised Land. God then banished them to 40 years of restless wandering in the wilderness.

The opposite of restlessness is, well, rest! Jesus promised, “Come to me when you are weary and I will give you rest.” The promise of the Holy Spirit is that we can have, among the other fruits of the Spirit, peace and patience. The rest and peace that God offers is the antidote to a life of restlessness and dissatisfaction.

~Chuck Burkeen

[1] <https://www.insider.com/why-people-protest-according-to-science-2020-6>

For Reflection

Connecting: When was the last time you felt so stirred up about an issue that you didn’t really know what to do? How did you feel about that—helpless? Confused? Frustrated? Were you eventually able to take action in a way that resolved those feelings?

Sharing: What do you see as the main contributing factor to feelings of restlessness?

1. A lack of sleep
2. Misplaced priorities in life
3. Listening to gossip and politically motivated messages
4. Dwelling on personal injuries, both real and imagined
5. Failing to dwell on God and the promises of Scripture
6. Other:

Applying: What is the best way to promote peace in the midst of unrest and rebellion? Reflect on some practical steps that you can take to be a positive influence in the face of such negativity.

Valuing: Can you identify areas of restlessness in your life? If so, are these likely to bring about positive changes for you? Make these issues a matter of prayer during the coming week, that God will calm your restless spirit and replace it with the true fruits of the Spirit.

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