

Sabbath: The Gift of Rest

Lesson One

1. In 40 words or less what are the first thoughts that comes to mind when you hear the word Sabbath?
2. Define Sabbath:
3. Define Remember:
4. Define Holy:

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Lesson Two - An Invitation to Relax in Abundance

Objective: Examine the beautifully constructed account of God's creation of the world.

Scripture Reference: Genesis 1:1-2:3

Six days a week we wrestle the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. (Abraham Herschel)

1. In Genesis 1:2 how is the earth described?
2. Study the description of the six days of creation (1:3-31). What is the role of God's voice?
3. What patterns are repeated in the descriptions of each of the six days?
4. What aspects of the sixth day (vv. 24-31) were "very good" in contrast to the other five days?

5. In the description of the six days, what words and phrases communicate abundance?

6. Compare 1:2 and 2:1, the “before and after” descriptions of creation. In what ways do the words of 2:1 contribute to our understanding of the abundance and order of creation?

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Lesson Three - An Invitation to Relax in Abundance Part 2

Objective: Examine the beautifully constructed account of God's creation of the world.

Scripture Reference: Genesis 1:1-2:3

1. In what ways do the abundance and order of the creation speak to you of God's character?

2. Note the repetition of the words *work* and *rest* in 2:2-3. Richard Lowery writes, "In a delightful twist, 'rest' is a verb in this passage and 'work' is a noun." What does this tell you about the nature of this rest?

3. What are some of the possible reasons God rested after creating the world?

4. In 2:3 we also find the key words *blessed* and *holy*. What do the words *blessed* and *holy* mean to you?

5. What activities in your life tend to narrow your ability to see God's abundance and order in your life? What would it look like to stop one or more of these activities on the Sabbath?

6. What activities help you notice the abundance that God has given you? Which of these activities can you imagine incorporating into a Sabbath observance?

Life Application: Psalm 104 parallels the creation story in a beautiful way. The same themes of order and abundance are present, and God is portrayed as the One who cares for and sustains creation. Read Psalm 104 twice, slowly. The first time, absorb the details and descriptions in the psalm, noticing what the psalmist is saying about the ways God works in the creation. The second time you read the psalm, use the words as your prayer of adoration of the Creator. Spend some time thinking about the ways you could rest in God's order and abundance on the Sabbath.

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Lesson Four - Choosing to Stop Working

Objective: Look at the earliest Sabbath observance by God's people, right after the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt.

Scripture Reference: Exodus 16:1-30

Celebration of our special time together with God recharges us and fills us with energy to meet the demands of the coming week— much like a short break from or work. You know how it happens—you're hard at work but so tired that your productivity starts to slide backward. So you get up from your desk, maybe chat with a neighbor down the hall, get a drink from the water cooler, and stretch your legs. When you return to your work, you catch your second wind and go right on. The Sabbath is the jewel of the week. Spending the set-apart time hours of the Sabbath with God gives us our second wind. (Celeste Perrino Walker)

1. In verses 1-12, what do you learn about the grumbling of the Israelites?
2. In what kinds of situations are you tempted to grumble?
3. What does God promise in response to the Israelites' grumbling (vv. 4,5 and 11-12)?

4. Describe the outcome of God's promises (vv.13-21)
5. What are the specific instructions about gathering manna on the seventh day (vv.5, 22-26)?
6. What miraculous properties of manna made these instructions possible?
7. Describe any times when you have obeyed God and then found that small miracles followed?

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Lesson Five - Choosing to Stop Working Part 2

Objective: Examine the earliest Sabbath observance by God's people, right after the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt.

Scripture Reference: Exodus 16:1-30

1. What are some of the thoughts and feelings that might have motivated the people to try to gather manna on the seventh day (vv.27-30)?
2. What was God's response to their action?
3. What does this story teach us about God?
4. Read vss. 22-30. What principle do you think God is teaching the sons of Israel?

5. In what settings and in the midst of what activities do you find it hard to remember God is your provider? Take a few moments to reflect. What would it look like to stop some of those activities on the Sabbath?

6. What helps you remember that God is your provider? What might it look like to incorporate some of those activities into a Sabbath observance?

Life Application: Three Old Testament verses help us understand God's gift of rest, quieted stillness that we receive on the Sabbath; Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 30:15; and Jeremiah 6:16. Read these verses and look for the promises or blessings connected with slowing down. Spend some time praying or journaling about the obstacles in your life to receiving these promises or blessings.

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Lesson Six - Finding Refreshment in God's Creation

Objective: Survey the giving of the Ten Commandments

Scripture Reference: Exodus 20: 1-21

“Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is not just a day off, when we catch up on television or errands. It is the presence of something that arises when we consecrate a period of time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, arising, or true. It is time consecrated with our attention, our mindfulness, honoring those quiet forms of grace of spirit that sustain and heal us.” (Wayne Muller)

1. Verses 2-17 list the Ten Commandments. What areas of everyday life are covered in these commands?
2. Verses 18-21 describe the peoples response and Moses' encouragement not to be fearful. Imagine that you are there. What are you thinking and feeling?

3. Focus on verses 8-11. Verse 8 commands that we remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. What kinds of practices help you to experience holiness?

4. Verse 10 tells us that work and labor are forbidden on the Sabbath. What similar and different meanings do the two words ——*work* and *labor*—— communicate to you? What emotions do you feel when you hear the words *work* and *labor*?

5. Do a little research. What were some activities that Israelites were forbidden to do on the Sabbath? What could they do on the Sabbath?

6. Are there any activities or actions that Jews today forbidden to do on the Sabbath?

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Lesson Seven- Finding Refreshment in God's Creation Part 2

Objective: Survey the giving of the Ten Commandments

Scripture Reference: Exodus 20: 1-21

1. Exodus 35:3 forbids lighting a fire on the Sabbath. Consider what it takes to build a fire and the kinds of work that depend on having a fire lit. In your life, what kinds of activities are work?

2. In verse 10 look at the list of who is commanded to stop working. Whose inclusion in this list do you find surprising, and what, if anything, does that tell you about who or what God values/honors?

3. When we fail to practice the Sabbath, would you say that we are disregarding one of God's commandments? Why or why not?

4. God's model of resting at creation is the basis for the Sabbath command (v.11). What helps you remember that God is our Creator?

5. When you experience God as Creator, in what ways are you refreshed?

6. On the Sabbath what is one thing you might stop doing in order to remember that God is Creator?

7. What is one thing you might do to experience God as Creator?

8. Christians affirm that we have been freed from slavery to sin and death (Galatians 4:3-8). Compare and contrast Exodus 20:1-21 with Deuteronomy 5: 12-15.

9. According to what you have read in Exodus and Deuteronomy what's the rationale for keeping Sabbath?

10. Does the Sabbath command in Deuteronomy help in your understanding of the Sabbath? Explain your thought.

11. In Genesis 2:1-3 God establishes the Sabbath in His creation ordinance. What did He do concerning the Sabbath in Exodus 20?

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Lesson Eight- Discovering Sabbath Delight

Objective: Examine two examples of spiritual disciplines: Fasting and Sabbath keeping

Scripture Reference: Isaiah 58

If our worship is authentic, it will reveal God's mercy. This awareness qualifies our actions on Sunday. It leads us to reflect the mercy that led Jesus to heal on the Sabbath, and early Christians and the church thereafter to speak of 'works of mercy' on Sunday as appropriate activities. (Tilden Edwards)

1. What is the nature of the “rebellion” and “sins” of the people described in verses 1-5?
2. What key words and phrases describe this rebellion and sin?
3. In verses 6-10, what does God desire to be the characteristics of the fast he chooses?

4. What visual images are used in verses 8, 11 and 12? In what ways do these images speak to you personally?

5. Summarize all the statements in verses 9, 10 and 13 that begin with “if.” Which of them are hardest for you to imagine doing?

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Lesson Nine - Discovering Sabbath Delight Part 2

Objective: Examine two examples of spiritual disciplines: Fasting and Sabbath keeping

Scripture Reference: Isaiah 58

1. Verse 14 expresses three promises that result from keeping the Sabbath with honor. Imagine those promises had been written today. What might they say?

2. Fasting and Sabbath keeping are two examples of spiritual disciplines. Based on the instructions in this passage (vs.14) about these two practices, what are some of God's priorities for us when we exercise spiritual disciplines?

3. Can you see possible connections between the practice of justice in your daily life and delight on the Sabbath day? Explain your response.

4. In what ways and in what settings are you most tempted to “do as you please”(vv.3,13) or “go you own way” (v.13) while seeming to engage in a spiritual discipline or practice?

5. What activities that encourage you to “do as you please” or “go your own way” might you stop on the Sabbath?

6. In what settings do you most experience delight in God?

7. What activities might you stop doing or start doing on the Sabbath in order to “call the Sabbath a delight” and “honorable” (v. 13)?

LIFE APPLICATION: Read Amos 5:21-24 and 8:4-8, the most succinct parallels with Isaiah 58. (You may also enjoy reading Amos 2:6-8; 4:1-5; and 6:1-8). Spend some time praying and journaling about the connections between justice in everyday life and the spiritual disciplines or practices we engage in.

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Lesson Ten - A Gift for Us

Objective: Discover what Jesus says is the purpose of the Sabbath

Scripture Reference: Mark 2:23-28

*The Pharisees see Sabbath observance as a sign of cultural distinctiveness and cultic purity.
Jesus sees Sabbath as a sign of justice for the vulnerable poor. (Richard Lowery)*

1. Use your imagination to try to picture the setting of this story. Who is present and where are they?
2. Summarize Jesus' response to the Pharisees' question (vv.25-26).
3. Read 1 Samuel 21:1-6, the incident Jesus refers to in verses 25 and 26 of Mark 2. What are the similarities and differences between this incident involving David and Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees in Mark 2:23-28?

4. How do you respond to the idea that human hunger and need are more important in some situations than obeying the rules? What do you think should be the limits around breaking rules to meet human needs?

5. Consider Jesus' statement in Mark 2:27. In a culture where rigid Sabbath rules were the norm, in what ways would this be a radical statement?

6. Imagine that God has created a day just for you, to nurture intimacy between you and God and to enable you to be your best self, the person you were created to be. What would that day look like?

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Lesson Eleven - A Gift for Us Part 2

Objective: Discover what Jesus says is the purpose of the Sabbath

Scripture Reference: Mark 2:23-28

1. Jesus says He is Lord of the Sabbath. How might His disciples have responded to that statement? How might have the Pharisees responded?
2. In what ways does Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, seem to be redefining the meaning of the day?
3. Consider what it means in everyday life that Jesus is Lord. What connections can you see between allowing Jesus to be Lord and receiving the Sabbath as a gift from God?

4. What activities help you honor Jesus as Lord? Which of these activities could you do on the Sabbath?

5. What activities feel like a gift from God?

6. How could you incorporate one or more of these into your Sabbath observance?

Life Application: Psalm 139 focuses on the fact that God knows us inside and out. Read Psalm 139:1-18 two times slowly, the first time to absorb the contents of the psalm. The second time, pray the words of the psalm as you read them, using the words as a way to praise God for his intimate knowledge of you. Consider ways you might rest on the Sabbath, enjoying the fact that God knows you and gives you good things in your life based on His knowledge of you.

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Lesson Twelve - We Are Valuable

Objective: Discover The Value God Places on People

Scripture Reference: Matthew 12: 9-14

Jesus made it a point to act against the prevailing tradition by healing on the Sabbath. He did it deliberately, not in defiance of the very real obligations of the Sabbath commandment but in order to restore the day to what God intended it to be. The people He healed were chronically ill, in bondage to Satan physically and spiritually. By offering them physical and spiritual liberation, He made the Sabbath a time to celebrate and experience the blessing of His redemptive ministry. His message to us, then and now, is that we are saved, free people! (Celest Perrino Walker)

1. Why would the Pharisees ask a question about the Sabbath in order to trap Jesus?
2. What do we know about the man with the shriveled hand?
3. Imagine you were a bystander watching this incident. What do you think you would notice most clearly about the Pharisees?

4. Study the story in verses 11-12. What is the difference between planned and unplanned work of the Sabbath?

5. What are the similarities and differences between the sheep story and the healing of the man's hand?

6. What do you think doing good on the Sabbath might look like in our lives?

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Lesson Thirteen - We Are Valuable Part 2

Objective: Discover The Value God Places on People

Scripture Reference: Matthew 12: 9-14

1. Jesus asserts that people are much more valuable than sheep (v. 12). How is it possible to affirm the value of humans in God's eyes without demeaning the value of sheep and other creatures God created?
2. Why do you think the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus after this incident.
3. Based on this passage, what can you say about the purpose of the Sabbath?

4. Jesus affirmed how valuable people are. What activities make it hard for you to remember how valuable you are in God's eyes?

5. What would it look like to stop doing one or more of those activities on the Sabbath?

6. What activities help you remember how valuable and precious you are in God's eyes? Perhaps you have been experimenting with new activities on the Sabbath. In what ways do they help you remember you are valuable and precious to God?

7. In both Matthew and Mark, the story from this lesson follows immediately after the story from lessons 10 and 11 (Matthew 12:1-14 and Mark 2: 23-3:6). In both gospels, the verses before and after these Sabbath incidents can add to our understanding of God's gift of the Sabbath to us. Read the two Sabbath stories in their context. What additional perspectives on the Sabbath do you gain (Matthew 11:25–12:21 and Mark 2:23 — 3: 6)?

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Lesson Fourteen - Freed From Bondage

Objective: Discuss What it Means to Be Free In Christ

Scripture Reference: Luke 13: 10-17

When we keep a Sabbath holy, we are practicing, for a day, the freedom that God intends for all people. We are practicing life outside the frantic pace set by financial markets and round-the-clock shopping and entertainment venues. We are practicing independence from the forces of injustice. We are trying on a new way of life as we begin to allow our weeks to be changed in response to God's promises. (Dorothy Bass)

1. Imagine you are the woman who is bent over. What might have been some of the challenges you faced in your daily life over the past eighteen years? What might be some of your emotions before, during and after Jesus healed you?
2. Why do you think the synagogue rulers were indignant about this healing?
3. Consider the synagogue rulers' words in verse 14. Do you think they really would have preferred that Jesus heal on weekdays? Why or why not?

4. What is the main point of the comparison with giving water to an ox or donkey on the Sabbath?

5. Why is being set free an appropriate action for the Sabbath day?

6. When you think of being set free from that which binds you, what comes to your mind?

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Lesson Fifteen - Freed From Bondage Part 2

Objective: Discuss What it Means to Be Free In Christ

Scripture Reference: Luke 13: 10-17

1. Reread verse 16. What do you think is the role of Satan in creating bondage? What forms does that bondage take in our world today?
2. In what ways do you see Jesus' authority in this incident?
3. What were the responses of the people who were present?

4. If you had been present, how do you think you would have responded? Explain your response.

5. What could you stop doing on the Sabbath to express your freedom from bondage?

6. What activities might you do on the Sabbath that express freedom?

Life Application: The letter of Paul to the Galatians addresses the human tendency to try to achieve righteousness—to earn God’s love—by obeying rules. We have been freed in Jesus Christ, and we can rest in God’s unconditional love for us. Read Galatians 3:1-14 (you may also want to read Galatians 5:1-26). Spend some time reflecting on any tendencies you have of trying to earn God’s love through what you do. Imagine what it would be like to experience a Sabbath day where you rest in the reality that nothing you do can change God’s amazing love for you.

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Lesson Sixteen - The Gift of Grace

Objective: Examine What Christ Has Done For Us

Scripture Reference: Ephesians 2: 1-10

The Sabbath expresses the heart of the good news, that God in Christ reveals an infinite love for us that does not depend on our works. It depends simply on our willingness for it.... What better way to reveal God's love beyond our works than to stop our usual works and discover that love is not withdrawn but strongly visible for us? Not only is this a witness for ourselves but also for others as they see us intentionally celebrating an identity and love that is not dependent on our worthy productions. (Tilden Edwards)

1. In verses 1-3, what are the characteristics of people before they meet Christ?
2. What are the aspects of the way of life without Christ that make us dead?
3. In your heart of hearts, do you believe your life would be meaningless without God? Why or why not?

4. What do the words *mercy* and *grace* mean to you?

5. Verses 6 and 7 use rich language to describe the results of being made alive with Christ. Which words do you need to hear today, and why?

6. In verses 8 and 9, what is the contrast between faith and works?

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Lesson Seventeen - The Gift of Grace Part 2

Objective: Examine What Christ Has Done For Us

Scripture Reference: Ephesians 2: 1-10

1. In what ways do you find yourself falling into the belief that you can earn God's approval?
2. Since we were created for good works (v.10), what makes it possible for these good works to flow from God's grace rather than being a way to earn God's love?
3. In your life, what are the settings and situations where you find it easiest to believe you are loved unconditionally by God? What settings and situations where it is hard to believe God loves you?

4. The Sabbath is a day to rest in God's grace. How might this affect your practice of Sabbath?

5. If you have experimented with various forms of Sabbath keeping during this study, or if you already have a Sabbath practice, in what ways have your Sabbath practices enabled you to experience God's grace?

6. Look back over these lessons on the Sabbath and consider what you might like to do or not do on the Sabbath. If possible, make a commitment to try a new practice for three to six months before reevaluating.

Life Application: Psalm 103 expresses God's love and care for us and describes God's role as our redeemer. Read Psalm 103 twice slowly. The first time, observe all the ways God cares for us. The second time, pray the words of the psalm, praising God for His amazing love and grace. Spend some time praying or journaling about the connection between the Sabbath and grace.

Group Project Questions

1. Does God **require** Christians to observe the Sabbath? Explain your position.
(February 13th 2022)
2. What's the difference between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.
(March 13th 2022)
3. Using the 5W's and H acronym explain Saturday Sabbath keeping for certain denominations and Jews and Sunday Sabbath for Christians.
(April 10th 2022)
4. Using the 5W's and H acronym, discuss the names of the days of the week.
(May 15th 2022)