



The Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Experiences of Sabbath

We live in a society that is always on. There is no off switch. Our lives are so busy—caring for a family, working, studying, participating in activities, attending meetings, shopping, spending time online, and the list goes on. But we long for rest from our work and busy lives. We search for a way to replenish our spirit in a 24/7 world. We hunger for Sabbath.

The *Practice of Keeping Sabbath* includes eleven activities that can be utilized in a variety of settings and combined into a variety of program models including the following:

- Intergenerational programs
- Family-centered programs
- Families at home activities (print or digital)
- Children’s programming: classes, vacation Bible school, parent-child, grandparent-child
- Adolescent programming: classes, youth gatherings, and retreats
- Adult programming: independent, small groups, retreats, and large gathering settings
- Social media posts on Facebook and Instagram using the activities
- Online playlists of Keeping Sabbath experiences for different age groups published on a website
- Newsletters
- A “Guide to Keeping Sabbath” booklet (digital and print)
- And much more

Keeping Sabbath Activities

There are eleven activities that include a teaching plan and the activity. All of the activities are also included on a separate MS Word document so that you can create handouts for sessions, a digital or print booklet, online playlists and activities, social media posts, and more.

Activity 1: A Great Day Off

Activity 2: Do You Keep the Sabbath?

Activity 3: The Meaning of Sabbath

Activity 4: Biblical Roots of Sabbath

Activity 5: Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Activity 6: Christian Practice of Keeping Sabbath

- Activity 7: Celebrating the Sabbath
- Activity 8: Developing a Sabbath Practice
- Activity 9: Making a Sabbath Box
- Activity 10: Participating in Sunday Worship
- Activity 11: Living the Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Children Activities

There are four children’s activities that can be used in a children’s program and family activities.

1. Keeping Sabbath in My Family
2. Jesus Keeps Sabbath
3. Why Keep Sabbath
4. Try It!—Keeping Sabbath

A Learning Process for Christian Practices

The dynamic of forming people of all ages in a Christian practice incorporates four movements, which become the template for designing Christian practices learning programs.

Movement 1. Reflecting on Our Lives

The first movement, *Reflecting*, taps into a basic area of human need that can find meaning and purpose in a Christian practice. Reflecting gives people an opportunity to become aware of how they experience a basic human need and hunger for the Christian practice in their own life. Reflecting also provides space for people to become aware of how they already engage in this practice, and the things that distort or hinder the practice.

Oftentimes this first movement begins with real-life stories (presentations, print, audio, and/or video) of people who seek meaning and purpose for their lives through a particular practice. This helps spark people’s reflection and storytelling.

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

The second movement, *Exploring*, grounds the Christian practice in the Bible by describing how the biblical story deepens our understanding of the Christian practice and connects to people’s human needs and hungers. We present the wisdom of the Christian tradition on a particular Christian practice, describing what people today, and throughout history, actually do when they are engaged well in a particular practice—how people or communities live the practice with exceptional grace and skill. By connecting the Christian practice to human needs and hungers, people can identify how and why a practice is important to living a meaningful life.

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

The third movement, *Experiencing*, immerses people in the actual practice—opportunities to experience activities that lead them into the Christian practice. This immersion can take place in programs, within the life of the Christian community (such as worship and ministry activities), and/or out in the community (serving people, providing hospitality, etc.). The key is that people actually experience the practice.

Movement 4. Living the Practice

The fourth movement, *Living*, includes reflecting on the experience of the practice activities (Movement 3); showing people how to make the Christian practice a part of everyday life; and providing people with a variety of tools and activities to integrate the Christian practice into their daily life—at home, at work, at school, and in the world.

The Practice of Keeping the Sabbath Learning Process

To illustrate how these four elements are incorporated into the learning process here is an example for the Practice of Keeping Sabbath. (The Keeping Sabbath reproducible activities are available for free on the Lifelong Faith website.)

- Activity 1: A Great Day Off
- Activity 2: Do You Keep the Sabbath?
- Activity 3: The Meaning of Sabbath
- Activity 4: Biblical Roots of Sabbath
- Activity 5: Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath
- Activity 6: Christian Practice of Keeping Sabbath
- Activity 7: Celebrating the Sabbath
- Activity 8: Developing a Sabbath Practice
- Activity 9: Making a Sabbath Box
- Activity 10: Participating in Sunday Worship
- Activity 11: Living the Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Movement 1. Reflecting on Life Experience

Activities

- Activity 1: A Great Day Off
- Activity 2: Do You Keep the Sabbath?

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

Activities

- Activity 3: The Meaning of Sabbath
- Activity 4: Biblical Roots of Sabbath
- Activity 5: Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath
- Activity 6: Christian Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

There is a flow to the eleven activities as you move from understanding Sabbath to developing a Sabbath practice for your life and/or household. In designing a program try to reflect the flow of the eleven activities using a *guided experience* approach.

Guide all of the participants in small groups or family/household groups through the eleven activities with a mix of presentation and direct experience. You can also include in the design a celebration of Shabbat (see Activity #5).

Activities

- Activity 7: Celebrating the Sabbath
- Activity 8: Developing a Sabbath Practice
- Activity 9: Making a Sabbath Box
- Activity 10: Participating in Sunday Worship

Movement 4. Living the Practice

Activities

- Activity 11: Living the Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Program Designs

The Christian practices learning process and activities can be used in a variety of program designs:

- Intergenerational programs
- Family-centered programs
- Families at home activities (print or digital)
- Children's programming: classes, vacation Bible school, parent-child, grandparent-child
- Adolescent programming: classes, youth gatherings, and retreats
- Adult programming: independent, small groups, retreats, and large gathering settings
- Online playlists of Keeping the Sabbath experiences for different age groups published on a website

There is a flow to the eleven activities as you move from understanding Sabbath to developing a Sabbath practice for your life and/or household. In designing a program try to reflect the flow of the ten activities using a *guided experience* approach. Guide all of the participants in small groups or family/household groups through the eleven activities with a mix of presentation and direct experience. You can also include in the design a celebration of Shabbat (see Activity #5).

Example: A Four Session Mini-Course or Small Group Program

The activities can be designed into a 4-week mini-course or small group program of 60-90 minutes per session for children, youth, adults, and/or parents. Each activity plan is approximately 10-15 minutes in length. Create a “Guide to Keeping Sabbath” (print, digital) to accompany the program. All of the Activities can be published on a website and designed onto a playlist for each session. Here’s an example of a 4-week program:

Session 1

- Activity 1: A Great Day Off
- Activity 2: Do You Keep the Sabbath?
- Activity 3: The Meaning of Sabbath

Session 2

- Activity 4: Biblical Roots of Sabbath
- Activity 5: Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath
- Activity 6: Christian Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Session 3

- Activity 7: Celebrating the Sabbath
- Activity 8: Developing a Sabbath Practice
- Activity 9: Making a Sabbath Box (or in Session 4)

Session 4

- Activity 10: Participating in Sunday Worship
- Activity 11: Living the Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Demonstration:

Consider including the celebration of Shabbat in the program. Include this after Activity 5 in Session 2, and move Activity 6 to Session 3. For more information go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/category/celebrate/shabbat> for information and guidance. Go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-blessings> for Shabbat prayers.

Example: Retreat or Extended Time Program

The activities can be combined into an extended day program or retreat experience with a blend of whole group activities and small group experience centers.

Opening Prayer

Part One

- Activity 1: A Great Day Off
- Activity 2: Do You Keep the Sabbath?
- Activity 3: The Meaning of Sabbath

Break

Part Two

- Activity 4: Biblical Roots of Sabbath
- Activity 5: Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath
- Activity 6: Christian Practice of Keeping Sabbath
- Activity 7: Celebrating the Sabbath

Break

Part Three

- Activity 8: Developing a Sabbath Practice
- Activity 9: Making a Sabbath Box
- Activity 10: Participating in Sunday Worship
- Activity 11: Living the Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Closing Prayer

Demonstration:

Consider including the celebration of Shabbat in the program. For more information go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/category/celebrate/shabbat> for information and guidance.

Go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-blessings> for Shabbat prayers.

Example: An Intergenerational or Family Learning Program

The activities can be combined into one 2-hour intergenerational or family program using only selected activities or into two, 2-hour programs that includes all of the activities and a demonstration with a meal. Here is the two-session design:

Session One

- Gathering and Opening Prayer Experience
- Activity 1: A Great Day Off
- Activity 2: Do You Keep the Sabbath?
- Activity 3: The Meaning of Sabbath
- Activity 4: Biblical Roots of Sabbath
- Activity 5: Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Demonstration:

Consider closing with the celebration of Shabbat. For more information see: Consider celebrating a Shabbat service with the group. Go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/category/celebrate/shabbat> for information and guidance. Go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-blessings> for Shabbat prayers.

Session Two

- Activity 6: Christian Practice of Keeping Sabbath
- Activity 7: Celebrating the Sabbath
- Activity 8: Developing a Sabbath Practice
- Activity 9: Making a Sabbath Box
- Activity 10: Participating in Sunday Worship
- Activity 11: Living the Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Keeping the Sabbath Resources

Online

Faith Practices Project: Sabbath (Christian Reformed Church NA) – variety of resources on Sabbath. Access at: <https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/sabbath>

Essential Practices: Sabbath (Presbyterian Church USA): Access at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/essential-practices-sabbath/>

The Activities in this resource can be designed into online playlists of Keeping Sabbath experiences for different age groups published on a website and in digital newsletters. For examples of playlists go to the Michigan Conference of the UMC: <https://michiganumc.org/playlists>.

Books

Allender, Dan B. *Sabbath*. Thomas Nelson, 2010.

Bass, Dorothy. *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*. Fortress Press, 2019.

Muller, Wayne. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Lives*. Bantam Books, 1999.

Wirzba, Norman. *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*. Brazos Press, 2006.

Articles

Bazan, Jessie. “7 Ways to Refresh Your Sabbath.” U.S. Catholic Magazine, May 2019.

Access at: <https://uscatholic.org/articles/201904/7-ways-to-refresh-your-sabbath>

Keller, Tim. “Six Ways to Practice Sabbath.” Redeemer Report.

Access at: https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/six_ways_to_practice_sabbath

Rainer, Melanie. “Spiritual Practices for Kids: Sabbath.” Minno Life, December 18, 2020

Access at: <https://www.gominno.com/blog/spiritual-practices-for-kids-sabbath>

Takano, Missy. “Keeping the Sabbath: Is it Still Relevant to Christians Today?” Bible Project.

Access at: <https://bibleproject.com/blog/keeping-the-sabbath-is-it-still-relevant-to-christians-today>

Video Sources

There are numerous videos available on YouTube and within the resources of each Christian denomination for all of the Christian Practices. It is beyond the scope of this resource to recommend videos. Using YouTube to search for available videos will produce a number of excellent resources. Here are several sources of religious video programs to consult:

- Amplify Media: <https://my.amplifymedia.com/amplify/home>
- Ascension Presents (Ascension Press): [YouTube Channel](#)
- BibleProject (<https://bibleproject.com>) and The Bible Project TV (<https://bibleproject.com/stream>)
- BustedHalo: <https://bustedhalo.com/category/video> and [BustedHalo YouTube Channel](#).
- Catholic Central: <https://www.catholiccentral.com>
- Church Knows Church: Things We Can Do: <https://chuckknowschurch.com> and [ChuckKnowsChurch YouTube Channel](#)
- Formed: <https://formed.org> (Catholic video resource)
- Minno Kids: <https://visit.gominno.com> and [YouTube Channel](#)
- ODB Films: <https://odbfilms.com> and [Video Catechism \(VCAT\)](#)
- Paraclete Press: <https://paracletepress.com/products/paraclete-video-streaming-4>
- Right Now Media: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org>
- Saddleback Kids Videos: [YouTube Channel](#)
- The Skit Guys: <https://skitguys.com> and [The Skit Guys on YouTube](#)
- Thirty Seconds or Less: <http://thirtysecondsorless.net> and #30SecondBible
- Work of the People: <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com>
- Worship House Media: <https://www.worshiphousemedia.com>
- Worship House Kids: <https://www.worshiphousekids.com>

Activity 1. A Great Day Off

Plan

1. Ask individuals and families/households to complete the “A Great Day Off” Activity.
2. Then have participants share with their group what their idea of a great “day-off” would be.

Activity

My idea of a great “day off” would be...

- Reading a good book
- Getting some extra sleep
- Spending time with family
- Walking or hiking—alone or with someone I like
- Going shopping
- Watching sports—on TV or at the game
- Eating a meal with friends
- Playing my favorite sport
- Going to the movies or a concert
- Add your own ideas

Activity 2. Do You Keep the Sabbath?

Plan

1. Introduce this activity:

We live in a society that is always on. There is no off switch. Our lives are so busy—caring for a family, working, studying, participating in activities, attending meetings, shopping, spending time online, and the list goes on. But we long for rest from our work and busy lives. We search for a way to replenish our spirit in a 24/7 world. We hunger for Sabbath.

2. Read (or have people individually read) the story from Terry Pluto, a sportswriter, from his book *Faith and You*.
3. Have the participants discuss the Reflection questions.

Activity

“A Sabbath Story” by Terry Pluto (from *Faith and You*)

I plead guilty.

I know that one day a week is supposed to be a day of rest, a day of worship, a day of getting closer to God and family. I know all of that is a great idea. I know I should do it.

I don't.

I get to church nearly every Sunday, “home and road,” as we say in the sports business, which means whether I'm at home or traveling. But I often leave church to hustle to a game. That's true at least twenty times a year, and there are only fifty-two Sundays.

I bet I write my newspaper column at least thirty Sundays each year. For sportswriters, the weekend usually is the heart of the workweek. It would be super if the work I did on Sundays was service to others. Sometimes that's the case when I speak in prison, at a church, or at the city's mission. Or it can be when I take an elderly person to a service. But most often on Sundays I'm working at my job.

I know that one of the Ten Commandments is to keep holy the Lord's Day.

I know that Moses said in Exodus 16:23, “The Lord has commanded that tomorrow is a holy day of rest, dedicated to him.”

I know that some faiths have lots of rules about what you can and can't do on the Sabbath.

I know that Jesus went to the synagogue regularly.

I know that I need a Sabbath rest. I know that I seldom take it.

I can give all the excuses. We live in a 24/7 world where nearly every business is open every day. Some are open every day and night. Sunday “blue laws” and other restrictions on trade and activities have gone the way of the hula hoop and the black-and-white TV. There are times when most of us simply must work on the Sabbath to keep our jobs.

I’m not talking about the exceptions when we simply must work. I’m talking about how I regularly break the rule about resting on the Sabbath.

Guess when I’m writing this article? You got it—Sunday night!

Reflection

- ◆ What’s your Sabbath story? What does a typical Sabbath day (or Sunday) look like for you?

Activity 3. The Meaning of Sabbath

Plan

1. Invite people to share their responses to the two questions in small groups or family/household groupings.

- ◆ What do you remember from childhood about Sunday activities?
- ◆ What does Sunday look like in your household today?

2. Share with the group the meaning of Sabbath using the essay in the Activity, and/or one or both of the following videos

Chuck Knows Church – Sabbath (Chuck Knows Church). What is the meaning of "keeping the Sabbath? Is it merely a day of religious observance and abstinence from work? Chuck helps us to understand this interesting word. YouTube: <https://youtu.be/UStfnYnT-QU>

Sabbath (The Bible Project)

What is the Sabbath? Explore the biblical concepts of seventh day rest and Sabbath and see how modern Christians can adopt this important practice.

Website & YouTube: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/Sabbath-video/>

3. Conclude with these quotes:

Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is a day when we partake of the wisdom, peace and delight that grow only in the soil of time—time consecrated specifically for play, refreshment and renewal. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest. But the Sabbath has proven its wisdom over the ages. The Sabbath gives us the permission we need to stop, to restore our souls. As part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is already woven into the fabric of our society. Many of us still recall when, not long ago, shops and offices were closed on Sundays. Those quiet Sunday afternoons are embedded in our cultural memory. (Wayne Muller)

Sabbath keeping is not about taking a day off but about being recalled to our knowledge of and gratitude for God's activity in creating the world, giving liberty to captives, and overcoming the powers of death. (Dorothy C. Bass)

Sabbath is a discipline and practice in which we ask, consider, and answer the questions that will lead us into a complete and joyful life. As such, the Sabbath is a teaching that has the potential to redirect and transform all our existence, bringing it into more faithful alignment with God's life-building and life-strengthening ways. (Norman Wirzba)

4. Use the following questions to guide people in sharing their understanding of Sabbath.

- ◆ What does Sabbath mean to you? to your family?
- ◆ How do you mark the Sabbath in your life today? When in your week or year do you experience real Sabbath? Where do you go, what do you do, and who are you with? How do these places, activities, and people contribute to this experience of rest and renewal?
- ◆ What makes keeping Sabbath so difficult today?

Activity

Reflection

- ◆ What do you remember from childhood about Sunday activities?
- ◆ What does Sunday look like in your household today?

The Meaning of Sabbath

Keeping Sabbath offers us the God-given gift of rest. It allows us time to look at ourselves and at our lives apart from the everyday world. More important, it offers extended time and space to give thanks and praise to God for the many gifts in our lives.

To function as whole and holy people, there must be a balance between work and rest in our lives. In his book *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, Josef Peiper writes: “Culture depends for its very existence on leisure, and leisure, in its turn, is not possible unless it has a durable and consequently living link...with divine worship.” Peiper further writes:

Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a mental and spiritual attitude—it is not simply the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, a weekend or a vacation. It is, in the first place, an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul, and as such utterly contrary to the ideal of “worker” in each and every one of the three aspects under which it was analyzed: work as activity, as toil, as a social function.

Leisure can be either active—such as recreational sports, games, exercise, or other such pastimes—or passive—reading, watching a movie, daydreaming. In its very essence, leisure is a state of restoration, where the mind and soul are freed from utilitarian ties, from a need to justify one’s activity. Too, intention comes into play with the types of leisure activity we choose. There are times when watching TV offers us rest, a brief time to not think, perhaps enjoying a laugh or learning about something new. But if we are slumped in front of the set for hours on end, mindlessly watching with no real engagement with what we are doing, this is destructive to a spirit of restoration and renewal. During Sabbath, we switch to “God time,” *kairos*, rather than *chronos*, manmade and regulated time. *Kairos* is quality time, the appointed time for God’s work; *chronos* measures the quantity and movement of our day-to-day world.

The difference between the Sabbath and all other days is not to be noticed in the physical structure of things, in their spatial dimension. Things do not change on that day. There is only a difference in the dimension of time, in the relation of the universe to God. The Sabbath preceded creation and the Sabbath completed creation; it is all of the spirit that the world can bear. (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

Yet Sabbath is more than simply resting from our work. According to Norman Wirzba, “Sabbath is a discipline and practice in which we ask, consider, and answer the questions that will lead us into a complete and joyful life. As such, the Sabbath is a teaching that has the potential to redirect and transform all our existence, bringing it into more faithful alignment with God’s life-building and life-strengthening ways.”

Christians have traditionally observed Sunday as the Sabbath day. And while it is good to set aside one day each week for worship and rest, the practice of keeping Sabbath should be an evolving practice for us, extending into the rhythm and flow of daily life.

The custom of the “weekend” has become more widespread, a weekly period of respite, spent perhaps far from home and often involving participation in cultural, political or sporting activities which are usually held on free days. This social and cultural phenomenon is by no means without its positive aspects if, while respecting true values, it can contribute to people’s development and to the advancement of the life of society as a whole....Unfortunately, when Sunday loses its fundamental meaning and becomes merely part of a “weekend,” it can happen that people stay locked within a horizon so limited that they can no longer see “the heavens.” (John Paul II, *Dies Domini*)

Adopting a Sabbath attitude keeps us balanced throughout every facet of our lives. It allows us to see the work that we do as part of the big picture of our lives, to know that we are more than the job we do, more than our roles as husband, mother, friend, colleague, or confidant; we are God’s blessed creatures, part and parcel of the evolving story of creation.

Reflection

- ◆ What does Sabbath mean to you? To your family?
- ◆ Do you regularly observe a day of rest? Do you do this on Sunday, or does your life necessitate setting aside another day of the week for rest?
- ◆ What activities are most restful to you? Which of these do you wish you had more time for?
- ◆ What is your definition of leisure? Do you see it as an active and essential part of your life?

Activity 4. The Biblical Roots of Keeping Sabbath

Plan

Share with the participants the biblical roots of keeping Sabbath using the essay in the Activity.

Activity

Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. You have six days in which to do your work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work—neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, sky, the seas, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8–11)

We are invited to participate in the creative work of God by stepping outside the routine of our daily work. God’s immanent and transcendent being is available to us throughout the created world, and the observance of Sabbath allows us the space to open ourselves to discovering God’s presence more fully in our lives. In his book, *The Family Cloister*, David Robinson writes: “The Sabbath invites us not only to enjoy leisure and recreation. The Sabbath is a weekly invitation to be re-created by our Creator, to have our whole selves refreshed and renewed by God.”

But there is also an aspect of liberation in observing Sabbath. “The God who rests on the seventh day, rejoicing in his creation, is the same God who reveals his glory in liberating his children from Pharaoh’s oppression” (John Paul II). We see this illustrated in a passage from Deuteronomy:

Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy, as I, the Lord your God, have commanded you. You have six days in which to do your work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work—neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. Your slaves must rest just as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and that I, the Lord your God, rescued you by my great power and strength. That is why I command you to observe the Sabbath. (Deuteronomy 5:12–15)

By the very nature of our humanity, we are bound to the demands of the material world. We are confronted by our imperfection and know that sin and evil are a very real part of our existence in both an individual and communal way. Rabbi Irwin Kula writes in his book *Yearnings*, “We are free only when we break loose from the physical, emotional, intellectual, and cultural forces that drive us without our even knowing it.” The practice of keeping Sabbath liberates us from this bondage.

Activity 5. The Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Plan

Shabbat—the Jewish Sabbath—is the heart of Judaism. In observant Jewish homes, Shabbat begins each Friday night at sundown as a woman lights the Sabbath candles. Until the following sundown, all activities associated with work or commerce are prohibited. Present the Jewish practice of keeping Sabbath using one or more of the following activities:

1. Introduce the Jewish Sabbath by show the Sabbath video clip with the “Sabbath Prayer” song from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Go to Fiddler on the Roof video clips on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZbXA4lyCtqodn6fVIVD6iTrAHwkBwKCH> and find the Sabbath clip.
2. Present the Jewish practice of keeping Sabbath using the essay in the Activity. You can also use a video presentation. Here are two possibilities:

What is Shabbat? Intro to the Jewish Sabbath (BimBam)

What is Shabbat? Shabbat (the Jewish Shabbat) is a weekly 25-hour observance that begins just before sundown each Friday and ends at nightfall on Saturday. Shabbat is a dedicated time each week to stop working and focus more on the pleasures of life.

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/vjmjZWHXKFY>

Sabbath (The Bible Project)

What is the Sabbath? Explore the biblical concepts of seventh day rest and Sabbath and see how modern Christians can adopt this important practice.

Website & YouTube: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/Sabbath-video/>

3. Present an overview of the Jewish Sabbath using essay in the Activity. You can supplement this with information (below) from the My Jewish Learning website. For more resources go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/category/celebrate/shabbat>.

The Sabbath (in Hebrew, Shabbat, pronounced shah-BAHT—or in some communities, Shabbos, “SHAH-bis”) may be Judaism’s most distinctive and characteristic practice, as well as one of its most pervasive and long-lasting gifts to Western civilization. A weekly 25 hour observance, from just before sundown each Friday through the completion of nightfall on Saturday, Shabbat is more than just a day off from labor. It is a day of physical and spiritual delights that is meant to illuminate certain key concepts in the traditional Jewish perception of the world.

Themes and Theology: Shabbat is portrayed in the Bible as the pinnacle of the creation of the universe, and its observance can be seen as a reminder of the purposefulness of the world and

the role of human beings in it. Shabbat also serves as a memorial to God's act of rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt by setting aside a day for personal autonomy and freedom from the harsh demands of labor. The traditional Shabbat is portrayed in Jewish liturgy, song, and story as a day of joy, a sanctuary from travails, and even a foretaste of the perfected world that will someday be attained.

History and Development: Shabbat, like many important facets of Judaism, has its origins in the Torah, where it is most notable as a day of complete cessation of labor. The prophetic tradition portrays it as a day of pleasures as well. The Rabbis spelled out their understanding of forbidden "labor" in a complex series of restrictions on productive activities of many sorts. They also prescribed festive meals and ceremonies for every part of the day. The varieties of Shabbat observances and customs over the ages and around the world illustrate the adaptation of Jews in many societies to new realities and new ideas.

At Home: One constant theme in Shabbat observance across time and territory is the centrality of home life with family members and guests. Preparation for Shabbat begins as early as mid-week in some households, and its arrival is marked by the spiritual illumination of a candle-lighting ceremony. Rabbinic tradition mandates three Shabbat meals, two begun with a special kiddush ("sanctification") recited over wine. Family meals are occasions for singing, studying, and celebrating together, as well as for consuming distinctive Shabbat foods.

In the Community: Shabbat observance in the public sphere is focused on the synagogue, from the lively welcoming service, Kabbalat Shabbat, to the pensive farewell ceremony, Havdalah. The daily round of prayer services is augmented and endowed with a unique atmosphere. Special melodies are used, and the familiar prayers are supplemented with passages in prose and poetry extolling God for the divine gift of the Shabbat and its delights. At the major worship service on Saturday morning, a portion of the Torah is read aloud as part of a year-long cycle, supplemented by a passage from one of the prophetic books (called a haftarah).

4. Conclude by inviting the participants to discuss the following questions:

- ◆ Why is Sabbath so important in the Jewish tradition?
- ◆ What can we learn from the Jewish observance of Sabbath?

Experience Option: Celebrate a Shabbat Service

Consider celebrating a Shabbat service with the group. Go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/category/celebrate/shabbat> for information and guidance. Go to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-blessings> for Shabbat prayers.

Activity

The word “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew verb *shavat*, which means, “to cease.” Thus, for the Hebrew people, the Sabbath was a day of ceasing from work. Even today Orthodox and Conservative Jews refrain from all non-essential activity during their Sabbath, called *Shabbat* or *Shabbos*, which begins at sundown on Friday and lasts until sundown on Saturday. Shabbat is a day of celebration as well as prayer, and many Jews attend synagogue services on Friday night or Saturday morning. Although most Shabbat laws are restrictive, there are also joyful practices that encourage a spirit of celebration. These include:

- ◆ preparing for the upcoming Shabbat by bathing, having a haircut, and cleaning and beautifying the home (with flowers, for example)
- ◆ eating three festive meals: Friday night dinner, Shabbat lunch, and a third meal, eaten late Saturday afternoon
- ◆ visiting with family and friends
- ◆ singing special songs for the Shabbat meal
- ◆ reading, studying, and discussing Torah
- ◆ wearing festive clothing and refraining from unpleasant conversation, including talk about money or business matters
- ◆ engaging in marital relations.

Restricted activities are taken from a list of thirty-nine activities prohibited by the Talmud, such as sowing, plowing, reaping, kneading, baking, sewing, writing, building, demolishing, lighting a fire, and transporting objects. Orthodox and some Conservative branches of Judaism rule that it is prohibited to turn electric devices on or off, as this action is analogous to lighting a fire and extinguishing a fire. Also prohibited is the use of automobiles on Shabbat as a violation against transporting objects, among other regulations.

Generally speaking, adherents of Reform Judaism and Reconstructionist Judaism believe that it is up to the individual Jew to determine whether to follow prohibitions on Shabbat or not. For example, some Jews might find writing or other activities (such as cooking) for leisure and social purposes to be an enjoyable activity that enhances Shabbat and its holiness, and therefore encourage such practices. Many Reform Jews believe that what constitutes “work” is different for each person; thus, only what the person considers work is forbidden.

Reflection

- ◆ Why is Sabbath so important in the Jewish tradition?
- ◆ What can we learn from the Jewish observance of Sabbath?

Activity 6. The Christian Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Plan

1. Present an overview of the Christian practice of Sabbath using the essay in the Activity. Include the short description below of how Sunday as the Sabbath developed over centuries:

The story of how Christians came to see Sunday as a day of rest in fulfillment of the Sabbath law is very long and complex. The lesson highlights three ways that Christians through the fourth century related Sabbath to Sunday worship: (1) an early practice of adding Sunday worship to the keeping of Jewish Sabbath on Saturday, (2) a practice of other Christians to worship on Sunday but not observe the Jewish Sabbath, and (3) a later practice of combining Sabbath rest with Christian worship on Sunday. The latter practice became widespread only after Sunday was declared a day for rest from commerce in the Roman Empire.

2. Invite the participants to discuss the following questions in small groups and/or family/household groupings.
 - ◆ What new insights into Sabbath did you discover through the last several Activities?
 - ◆ Why did Christians adopt a Sabbath practice?
 - ◆ How does this Sabbath requirement of no work or commerce honor God and respect human needs?
 - ◆ How is keeping Sabbath more than just attending church worship?

Activity

For Christians, Sunday, the day when Jesus was raised from the dead, has been the traditional day for keeping Sabbath since the formation of the church.

The early Christians were convinced that God’s creative activity extended beyond the seven-day week, and so the first day, Sunday, was also the eighth day of God’s work. Their dedication of Sunday for gathering and worship grew out of the post-resurrection appearances of the Lord....As they gathered in homes and at the Temple on the “first day of the week,” the disciples broke bread, prayed, interpreted Scripture, rehearsed the good news, and prepared for ministry. By the end of the first century the designation “the first day of the week,” which reflects a Jewish way of reckoning time, was replaced by a uniquely Christian term, “the Lord’s Day.” (Robert Kruschwitz)

In 321 AD, the emperor Constantine declared Sunday to be a day of rest throughout the empire. This practice was motivated as much out of concern for productivity as for religious reasons. The declaration read, in part: “On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture

may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits because it often happens that another day is not suitable for grain-sowing or vine planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost.”

During the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, Sunday continued to be observed as a religious and commercial holiday throughout Christianized Europe. (As noted earlier, Jews observe Sabbath on Saturday; the Muslim Sabbath is observed on Friday.) Even with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the 1700s, Sabbath observance was a key part of the culture in both Europe and the developing United States.

Today, many of us have lost any sense of Sunday being a day set apart, a day of rest, celebration, and worship. Laws that once regulated what could and could not be done on Sunday have been, for the most part, repealed.

Until quite recently, it was easier in traditionally Christian countries to keep Sunday holy because it was an almost universal practice and because, even in the organization of civil society, Sunday rest was considered a fixed part of the work schedule. Today, however, even in those countries which give legal sanction to the festive character of Sunday, changes in socioeconomic conditions have often led to profound modifications of social behavior and hence of the character of Sunday. (John Paul II, *Dies Domini*)

Despite the trends of declining importance, Sabbath still holds a place of importance for many people that moves them to set time aside to mark this day in a special way, especially by attending a religious service and/or spending time with family.

“I think people really would like to keep a Sabbath, although they may not call it a Sabbath,” said John Fisher of McLean, Va., a retired math teacher and management consultant who belongs to a “Sabbath keepers” group at his church. “They would like to have some private time, some rest, and they’re afraid to do it” because they fear losing productivity. “I think people are looking for permission to stop and think and reflect.” Fisher and his wife light a candle at sundown each Saturday to mark a period of reflection that ends Sunday evening, “just to remind us of God’s presence and of peacefulness,” he said. After a quiet dinner together, they go for a walk, do crossword puzzles, or read—mundane practices that Fisher says help rejuvenate him for the busy week ahead. (Beliefnet.com)

Reflection

- ◆ What new insights into Sabbath did you discover through the activities and presentations?
- ◆ Why did Christians adopt a Sabbath practice?
- ◆ How does this Sabbath requirement of no work or commerce honor God and respect human needs?
- ◆ How is keeping Sabbath more than just attending church worship?

Activity 7. Celebrating the Sabbath

Plan

1. Present the information and stories from the essay in the Activity.
2. Consider inviting Invite several individuals and families/households in your church who have developed a Sabbath practice to share their stories with the group. These are intended to be 3-5 minute presentations to inspire people to develop their Sabbath practice.
3. Conclude with the closing paragraph from the essay in the Activity (“Adopting a Sabbath attitude...”)

Activity

What was it like in your family when you were growing up? You may remember Sundays as a time for going to church, eating a relaxing family dinner, and visiting with relatives or friends. Perhaps your household held a stricter observance, with long church services, no time for play, and prayer or Scripture reading. Maybe Sunday in your family was spent just like any other day of the week, with no special rituals or practices.

For every hundred people, there are probably a hundred ways to “keep holy the Lord’s day” and heal the self-battered by the week’s demands. One friend cherishes a Sunday morning ritual of donuts, milk, and the *New York Times*. Another cooks a huge dinner; a third takes a long walk outdoors. Each person knows from experience what restores energy and peace after a hectic week. In this activity they find...a restorative ritual that in all its essentials echoes the anointing of the sick. Sometimes, too, the ritual resonates with dying: we look back over the week’s losses, great and small. Perhaps we say goodbye to unrealistic expectations: I’ll never be president, pope, or a CEO. The house isn’t immaculate, and the bank account isn’t overflowing. We give up our delusions of greatness and ease more happily into who we are: limited but loved. (Kathy Coffey, *Immersed in the Sacred*)

Blaine and Sarah McCormick have been developing a very focused and intentional Sabbath practice for some time now. They write:

Our family observes Sabbath from approximately 6 PM Saturday to 6 PM Sunday. This timing mirrors the Jewish Shabbat, which begins at sundown on Friday, but we have moved the holy time forward to the first day of the week to encompass our Christian beliefs. Our family begins Sabbath time on Saturday evening with a ritual. We light a Sabbath candle for each of our three children as Mom welcomes the Sabbath with a blessing: “May the light of the Sabbath candles drive out from us the spirit of anger and the spirit of fear and the spirit of pride. Send your

blessing that we may walk in the ways of your Word and your Light. Enter our hearts this night, O Lord.” (Blaine and Sarah McCormick, *Sabbath: Christian Reflection*)

Then Blaine and Sarah bless each child by reading a favorite Scripture passage, reflecting with them on the previous week, and offering a prayer. They might pass around a pleasant or pungent spice to remind them how their lives are to be a “a pleasant aroma” to God, or share a taste of bread strips dipped in honey as they remember how God’s words are “sweeter than honey.” They then share a prayer or story before blowing out their Sabbath candles.

For one family, Sunday is often a day for extended cooking. After attending liturgy, they take the time to make a large dinner, and sometimes a few other dishes to keep for the week. Sunday afternoon offers the space and time to cook in a leisurely fashion, as opposed to the more rushed preparations during the week. Usually, they will invite nearby relatives over for dinner in the evening, perhaps followed by a movie.

Of course, cooking and/or entertaining others are not necessarily enjoyable activities for everyone. In your house, Sunday may be the time for a meal eaten out, or for sandwiches and juice boxes.

It may be necessary to adjust our lifestyles in order to accommodate a commitment to keeping Sabbath. If you have children, you might ask whether activities that require Sunday engagement are done for the sake of rest and enjoyment—active leisure—or for some other reason. And if you work on Sunday, you will need to be intentional about setting aside time and space on another day of the week for Sabbath practice. This might mean a day during the week devoted to a personal Sabbath or a Friday afternoon and evening for a family Sabbath. Find the right time and practices that work that will help you live your commitment to keeping the Sabbath.

Sabbath practice is the focus and culmination of a life that is daily and practically devoted to honoring God...and to sharing in God’s own creative delight. We do not wait for one specified day of the week to offer our thanksgiving and praise, even if one day is set apart to shed a critical and corrective light on all our other days. The goal is rather to arrange our schedules and direct our choices so that they manifest at all times a deep appreciation for the diverse and costly ways of God’s grace. (Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*)

Adopting a Sabbath attitude throughout our week can support and nurture all our efforts. It urges us to respect ourselves and others, live in gratitude for the gifts we have been given, and develop a lifestyle that is conducive to our wellbeing. We are created in the image and likeness of God, and a Sabbath mindset forges that image into our everyday life, governing our actions and our choices. It helps us stay open to the possibility of God entering into the marrow of our lives, in countless, intricate ways.

Activity 8. Developing a Sabbath Practice

Guide people through the three parts of developing a Sabbath practice:

1. Preparing to Develop a Sabbath Practice
2. Saying “No”: What to Exclude
3. Saying “Yes”: What to Include

Part 1. Preparation

Plan

1. Introduce “developing a Sabbath practice” using the essay in the Activity.
2. Invite the participants to complete the Reflection questions and share their responses in small groups or family/household groupings.

Activity

Sabbath keeping is not about taking a day off but about being recalled to our knowledge of and gratitude for God’s activity in creating the world, giving liberty to captives, and overcoming the powers of death. (Dorothy C. Bass)

Sabbath is a discipline and practice in which we ask, consider, and answer the questions that will lead us into a complete and joyful life. As such, the Sabbath is a teaching that has the potential to redirect and transform all our existence, bringing it into more faithful alignment with God’s life-building and life-strengthening ways. (Norman Wirzba)

Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is a day when we partake of the wisdom, peace and delight that grow only in the soil of time—time consecrated specifically for play, refreshment and renewal. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest. But the Sabbath has proven its wisdom over the ages. The Sabbath gives us the permission we need to stop, to restore our souls. As part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is already woven into the fabric of our society. Many of us still recall when, not long ago, shops and offices were closed on Sundays. Those quiet Sunday afternoons are embedded in our cultural memory. (Wayne Muller)

Sabbath is God’s way of saying, “Stop. Notice your limits. Don’t burn out.” It is a day God gives us to remember who and what work is for as well as what matters most. Sunday generously hands us hours to look into the eyes of those we love. We have time for loving and being loved. (Adele Ahlberg Calhoun)

You don't have to change your whole life—yet. Plan for one Sabbath at home to start. Put the date on the calendar and pray that God will help you to honor this Sabbath and keep it holy.

Consider what preparations and planning are necessary for making sure that you set aside all types of work and worry on this day. Gather your family or household together to discuss how to arrange your Sabbath for refreshment, renewal, and relationships. Select one or more of the following questions for reflection.

Reflection

- ◆ How do you mark the Sabbath in your home today? In what ways are your practices like those in your home while growing up? In what ways is it different?
- ◆ In your home and in your life, what are the obstacles standing in the way of taking at least one day of rest each week?
- ◆ What, if anything, would you like to change in the way you celebrate Sabbath?
- ◆ Do you see Sunday as the best day for keeping Sabbath? Or do you need to keep Sabbath on a different day of the week?
- ◆ What can you learn from the Jewish observance of Sabbath?

Part 2. Saying “No”: What to Exclude

Plan

1. Guide the participants through the process of Saying “No” by discerning what they need to exclude from their Sabbath. Give examples of the three categories: work, buying and selling, and worry. Allow time for participants in groups and/or family/household groupings to complete the three questions for themselves.
2. Have people use the Activity to record their responses.
3. Invite participants in small groups or family/household groupings to share several of the things they need to exclude from their Sabbath practice.

Activity

You can begin shaping your Sabbath practice by deciding what should be excluded from this day and what should be included. There are three categories of things that we do well to exclude from our Sabbath. (The following ideas were developed from *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton.)

Work: What constitutes work for us? We must commit ourselves to not doing these things on the Sabbath. We need to identify the challenge and temptations related to our work and establish clear boundaries to protect Sabbath time.

◆ *How can you say “No” to work on the Sabbath?*

Buying and selling: If we are out buying, selling and engaging in the world of commerce, it means someone has to work and we are contributing to it. It feeds our consumerism, an aspect of life in our culture that needs rest on the Sabbath.

◆ *How can you say “No” to buying and selling on the Sabbath?*

Worry: The Sabbath is an invitation to rest emotionally and mentally from things that cause worry and stress, such as budgets, major decisions, and planning the week ahead. If we observe Sabbath on Sunday, perhaps Sunday evening after dinner is a time when, from a place of rest, we can engage in some of the decision-making that needs to be done.

◆ *How can you say “No” to worry on the Sabbath?*

Part 3. Saying “Yes”: What to Include

Plan

1. Review the “Practices for a Simple Sabbath” with the group. This is a separate page at the end Activity 8.
2. Guide the participants through the process of Saying “Yes” by discerning what they need to include in their Sabbath. Give examples of the three categories: resting the body, replenishing the spirit, and restoring the soul. Review the “Practices for a Simple Sabbath.” Allow time for participants in small groups and/or family/household groupings to complete the three questions for themselves.
3. Have people use the Activity to record their responses. Remind them to check the “Practices for a Simple Sabbath for ideas.”
4. Invite participants in small groups or family/household groupings to share several of the things they need to include in their Sabbath practice.

Activity

What is to replace all that we are excluding from our Sabbath practice? The simple answer is, whatever delights you and replenishes you. Consider the following three things to include in your Sabbath practice. (The following ideas were developed from *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton.)

Resting the body. What are the activities that rest and replenish your body? The invitation of Sabbath time is to replace the time you would normally spend working with activities that you find

restorative, such as a walk or other physical exercise, eating your favorite foods, reading, and listening to music.

- ◆ *How can you say “Yes” to resting the body on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?*

Replenishing the spirit. Another invitation of the Sabbath is to pay attention to what replenishes the spirit, and choose only those activities that renew you and bring you joy. Find personal activities that replenish the spirit: silence, reading, dancing, and listening to music. Find activities for the whole family that replenish the spirit: a special meal, recreation, games, sharing stories, gathering with relatives and friends.

- ◆ *How can you say “Yes” to replenishing the spirit on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?*

Restoring the soul. Perhaps the deepest refreshment is the invitation to renew the soul through worship and quiet reflection. This is the part of us that gets most lost during the workweek, which is governed almost completely by the value of productivity. In addition to personal activities, such as silence and prayer, identify rituals or shared activities that create a spirit of reverence for God on this day such as a special meal with a Scripture reading and time to go around the table and talk about where God seemed particularly present with you during the week. Light a candle to mark the Sabbath day.

- ◆ *How can you say “Yes” to restoring the soul on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?*

Part 4. Conclusion

Have the participants review their plans for Sabbath practice and reflect on the following questions:

- ◆ Do our activities allow us rest in body, mind, and spirit?
- ◆ Do our activities nurture our spiritual life in some way?
- ◆ Do our activities give us time away from the temporal activities of our lives?

Practices for a Simple Sabbath

- ◆ *Light a candle.* Set aside sacred time for a family meal, for prayer or meditation or simply quiet reading. Set a candle before you, offer a simple blessing and let the world fall away.
- ◆ *Practice thanksgiving.* Give thanks before meals, upon rising, when going to sleep. During Sabbath, we are less concerned with what is missing and more grateful for what has already been given.
- ◆ *Bless your children.* Place your hand gently on their heads and offer your blessing. What do you most wish for them? Self-knowledge, courage, safety, joy? Let them hear your prayers for their happiness.
- ◆ *Invite a Sabbath pause.* Choose one common act—touching a doorknob, turning on a faucet or hearing the phone ring. Throughout the day when this occurs, stop and take three silent, mindful breaths. Then go on.
- ◆ *Take a walk.* Stroll slowly to nowhere in particular for 30 minutes. Let your senses guide you. Stop and observe deeply whatever attracts you -- a tree, a stone, a flower. Breathe.
- ◆ *Pamper your body.* Take a guilt-free nap. Take a leisurely bath with music, special scents, candles. Make love with your spouse. Walk barefoot in the grass. The Sabbath is a day of delight.
- ◆ *Create a Sabbath box.* Put your to-do list, your keys, your cell phone, your wallet—anything you don't need in Sabbath time—into the box. Write down a particular worry or concern and drop it in. Just for now, let it go.
- ◆ *Turn off the cell phone.* Or the computer, the TV, the washer and dryer. Create a period of time when you will not be disturbed or seduced by what our technologies demand of us.
- ◆ *Prepare a Sabbath meal—or a Sabbath cup of tea.* Even if you are alone, you can choose foods you love, put flowers on the table, take time to enjoy every dish, give thanks for the bounty of the earth.
- ◆ *Seek companionship.* One of the most precious gifts we can offer is to be a place of refuge, a Sabbath for one another. Ask for companionship when you lose your way. Give quiet time and attention to others.
- ◆ *Reset your inner compass.* Make a list of the values and principles that guide your life -- both those you follow and those you would like to follow. Speak them aloud, alone or with loved ones.
- ◆ *Surrender a problem.* The Sabbath reminds us that forces larger than ourselves are at work healing the world. Imagine that these forces already know how to solve your problem. Turn it over to their care.

Activity 10. Making a Sabbath Box

Plan

1. Make sure everyone has the supplies for creating a Sabbath Box:
 - ◆ A shoebox or box for each individual or family/household
 - ◆ Small slips of paper, perhaps an 8½ x 11 sheet cut into eight pieces
 - ◆ Meditation candle (and lighter) for each family/household and small group
2. Introduce the idea of the Sabbath Box with the Scripture reading from Luke 12 and the reflection by Wayne Muller in the Activity
3. Guide people (in groups or families/households) through the Sabbath Box experience:
 - ◆ Have each group light a meditation candle.
 - ◆ Read Isaiah 58:9b-14.
 - ◆ Pray together.
 - ◆ Reflect using the three questions.
 - ◆ Create the Sabbath box.
 - ◆ Closing with the reflection.

Activity

(Jesus) said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? (Luke 12:22-26)

In his book *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* Wayne Muller writes, “A Sabbath box holds items Jews can’t use on Sabbath . . . anything that cannot be taken into sacred space.” Muller writes,

My friends Zalman and Eve faithfully keep the Sabbath. While I was visiting them last spring, they told me that in some families it is customary to make a Sabbath box to hold all the equipment you do not need on the Sabbath – pens, car keys, wallets, etc. “On Friday,” they explained, “someone stands at the door with the Shabbos box and as people enter the house for the evening meal, they put anything they know should not be taken into sacred space. Then, stripped of all our tools and machines, we can truly pray, *God, there is nothing I can do about these concerns, so I know it is in your hands.*

When you set aside time for Sabbath – whether it is an hour, a morning, or a day – put in the box those things you do not want to use – a tablet, phone, or something symbolic can serve as a physical reminder of what we leave behind when we enter sacred rest.

You can also use the Sabbath box to hold all the things you feel you have left undone. Perhaps write on a small piece of paper a word or phrase that signifies a particular worry or concern you would like to leave behind for the time being. Then light a candle, alone or with family and friends. Let each of you speak about those things that are left to do, and as the candle burns, allow the cares to melt away. Do not be anxious about tomorrow, said Jesus. The worries of today are sufficient for today. Whatever remains to be done, for now, let it be. It will not get done tonight. In Sabbath time we take our hand off the plow, and allow God and the earth to care for what is needed. Let it be. Then, at the end of your Sabbath time, be aware of how you open the box, and how you respond to what you receive back into your life.

Making a Sabbath Box

Light a meditation candle.

Read Isaiah 58:9b-14.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;

then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Pray together.

O Holy Spirit, guide us now and help us name concerns and worries we need to discard to celebrate Sabbath in wholesome, holy ways. Help us discern what responsibilities we need to put away for Sabbath, how to divest ourselves of burdens and open up space for your powerful, enlightening work. Amen.

Reflect

◆ What dominates my Sabbath time, activity, thought?

- ◆ What blocks my concentration on, and celebration of, God?
- ◆ In what ways am I sidelined by “shoulds” and “oughts,” by my own striving, or by the demands of others?
- ◆ What can I eliminate from Sabbath time so that I can focus only on God, and open myself to God’s love, power, and joy?

Create a Sabbath box.

A Sabbath box is a place to put the things that you carry around, and deliberately “let go” of their uses. Place the items in the box, close the lid, and be done with them until it’s time to deliberately pick them up again. Remove anything that distracts them from Sabbath, such as a watch, cell phone, etc., and put the items into the box. You can also write on small slips of paper anything you want to leave behind, so it doesn’t distract you during Sabbath. Put the papers in the box.

After all have had a chance to contribute something to their Sabbath box, ask if any of them want to share what they discarded temporarily. Be prepared to share something yourself.

On the Sabbath morning or moment (whatever time you set aside for Sabbath) make a regular practice of divestment and refocusing so that you (or your family/household) can begin the Sabbath — focusing on God and receiving God’s blessings.

Closing Reflection

If you watch your step on the Sabbath and don’t use my holy day for personal advantage, if you treat the Sabbath as a day of joy, God’s holy day as a celebration, if you honor it by refusing ‘business as usual,’ making money, running here and there—then you’ll be free to enjoy God!

Isaiah 58:14 from *The Message*)

Activity 10. Participating in Sunday Worship

Plan

1. Ask the participants time in small groups and/or family/household groupings to develop 5 reasons why participating in Sunday worship regularly is an important element of keeping Sabbath. Then invite people to share their reasons with the whole group.
2. Using the information in the Activity and the input from the groups, summarize the importance of Sunday worship for Keeping Sabbath.
3. Invite small groups and family/household groupings to reflect on the following two questions about Sunday worship:
 - ◆ How can you overcome the obstacles to attending church on Sunday?
 - ◆ How can you prepare for Sunday worship or extend Sunday worship in your home?

Activity

Worship is an important part of keeping Sabbath. It allows us to acknowledge the gracious gifts of God while celebrating our role as participants in the divine process. Being part of a faith community and regularly worshipping together is an essential part of our Christian faith. In *Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson writes: “We delude ourselves if we imagine we can live the spiritual life in total isolation from Christian community, for it is impossible to be Christian in solitary splendor. To be Christian is to be joined to the Body of Christ....Life in the church teaches us that we are made for communion not only with God but with one another in Christ.”

Going to church on Sunday allows us the opportunity to worship as a community. We stand with others who believe what we do as we take time to pray together, listen to Scripture, and be renewed through our celebration of the Lord’s Supper. In communal worship we remember that we are not alone, that as part of the Christian community we share a commitment to following the model of Jesus Christ through the gospels and liturgy.

Sunday can be a time for private prayer and devotion, a practice that can extend our Sabbath to every day of the week. Reading Scripture can help us focus on the week ahead, whether we re-read the readings for the day, look ahead to the readings for the following Sunday, or simply reflect on selected passages that speak to us.

You might want to spend time quietly reflecting on the Scripture readings; perhaps you might talk about the readings with your family or a group of friends. Some questions to consider are: What was Jesus trying to teach through this gospel? What did it mean to each of us? Is there something we could do during the week to keep the theme of the gospel in our minds and hearts?

Singing hymns or listening to liturgical music is another form of prayer that can enhance our Sabbath keeping. However you keep Sabbath, make sure that you take time to acknowledge God's loving and generous presence guiding the actions and activities of our daily life.

Reflection

- ◆ How can you overcome the obstacles to attending church on Sunday?
- ◆ How can you prepare for Sunday worship or extend Sunday worship in your home?

Activity 11. Living the Practice of Keeping Sabbath

Plan

1. Give the individual participants and families/households several minutes to decide on which Sabbath strategies they will adopt to strengthen their practice of Keeping Sabbath.
2. Then ask the participants to “script” their Sabbath practice for a month complete with activities (or lack of activities). After they have completed their “script” ask them to reflect on the following question:
 - ◆ If you keep Sabbath, how will the rest of your week need to change?
 - ◆ What will you need to prepare beforehand in order to have a restful Sabbath?
 - ◆ How might ceasing from work one day a week reshape your life and attitudes on the other six?
3. After they have created their plan for the month, invite each household to share their plans in small groups.
4. Review *A Month of Sundays* and invite people to use this as a way to reflect on their “new” practice of Sabbath. Weekly, they can review their experience and seek ways to strengthen their Sabbath practice.

A Month of Sundays: Developing a Sabbath Practice

God of all creation,
you breathed us into this world and called us by name to be yours.
Guide our days.
Let our work reflect your glory and promote the good of all humankind.
Show us the goodness of keeping Sabbath,
that we may be whole in body, mind, and spirit.
Help us to know the patterns and rhythms of our lives,
and bring peace to the places of chaos in life.
Let us live in your love forever.
Amen.

Exclude: Work, Buying and Selling, Worry
Include: Resting the Body, Replenishing the Spirit, Restoring the Soul

First Sunday – Reflection

Take time at the end of the day to record your individual and/or family activities for the day.

- ◆ Which activities fit in the “exclude” category?
- ◆ Which fit in the “include” category?

Resolve:

- ◆ to attend Sunday worship for the next three Sundays
- ◆ to eliminate one activity from your “exclude” list for next Sunday
- ◆ to add one activity from the “include” list for next Sunday

Second Sunday – Reflection

- ◆ What activities remain in the “exclude” category?
- ◆ How did the changes in your activities enhance your well-being?
- ◆ What activity from the “include” list will you add for next Sunday?
- ◆ How will these choices help you adopt a Sabbath attitude that helps keep your life in balance?

Third Sunday – Reflection

- ◆ What remains to be excluded?
- ◆ What activity will you add or enhance to complete the “include” list next week?

Fourth Sunday – Reflection

- ◆ Have your changes allowed for rest and renewal of body, mind, spirit?
- ◆ How has your spiritual life grown?
- ◆ How have your changes brought you to a new understanding of Sabbath?
- ◆ What changes will you resolve to make a permanent part of your life?

Keeping Sabbath in My Family

The word "Sabbath" comes from the Hebrew verb *shavat*, which literally means "to cease" or to stop. For the Hebrew people, the Sabbath was a day of ceasing from work. Taking Sabbath time on a weekly basis is a time for rest or activities that keep our mind, hearts, and bodies happy and healthy. Taking time to rest is also a time for us to remember all of God's blessings: all that we have and all that we do has been created and given to us by God.

How does Sabbath fit into your weekly schedule in your home? Circle the 8 activities you spend the most time doing. How many are Sabbath activities? The activities marked with an "S" are really good Sabbath activities!

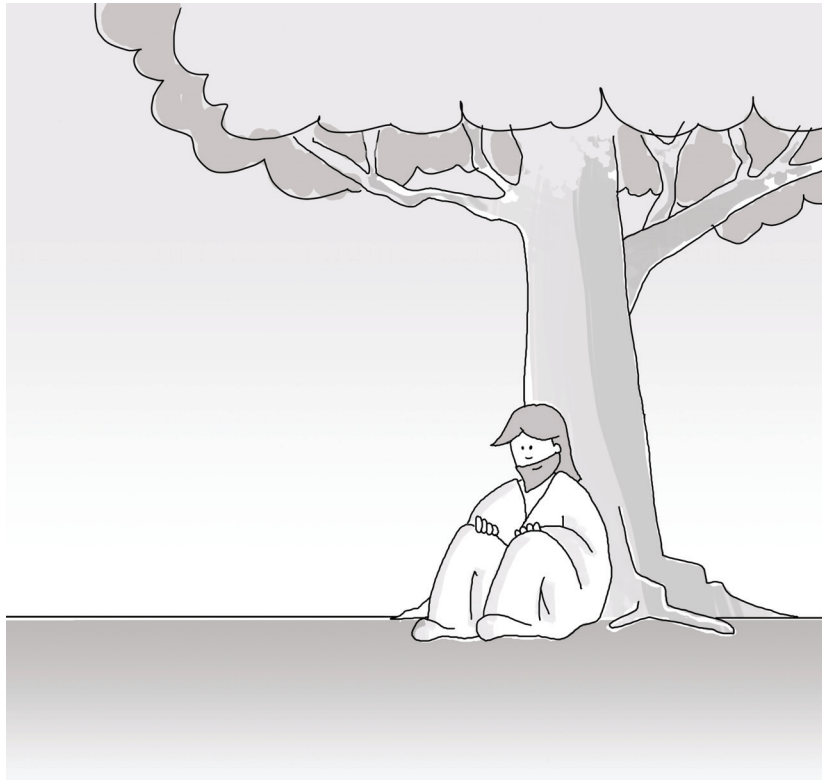
- eating (S)
- sleeping (S)
- going to school or work
- participating in church activities (S)
- participating in organized sports
- participating in clubs like Scouting
- doing household chores like dishes, cleaning the house, and yard work
- serving others like visiting an elderly neighbor (S)
- doing fun activities as family (S)
- using the computer and internet
- exercise like walking and riding a bike (S)
- hanging out with friends (S)
- spending time with family (S)
- watching TV
- playing video games
- reading a book (S)
- praying
- reading the Bible (S)
- doing an arts and crafts project like drawing or creating something (S)
- watching a movie (S)



Jesus Keeps Sabbath

Jesus had a deep respect for Sabbath, and took time to stay renewed and fresh as he served God's people. Read each passage below, and circle Jesus' Sabbath activity.

- ① Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. (Luke 4:16-17)
- ② Then Jesus went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, where he taught the people on the Sabbath. They were all amazed at the way he taught, because he spoke with authority. (Luke 4:31-32)
- ③ But the news about Jesus spread all the more widely, and crowds of people came to hear him and be healed from their diseases. But he would go away to lonely places, where he prayed. (Luke 5:15-16)
- ④ One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say this: "Father: May your holy name be honored; may your Kingdom come..." (Luke 11:1-2)
- ⑤ One Sabbath Jesus went to eat a meal at the home of one of the leading Pharisees; and people were watching Jesus closely. (Luke 14:1)
- ⑥ Jesus spent those days teaching in the Temple, and when evening came, he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives. (Luke 21:37)
- ⑦ On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue. Many people were there; and when they heard him, they were all amazed. "Where did he get all this?" they asked. "What wisdom is this that has been given him? How does he perform miracles? (Matthew:6:2)



(Answers in order: 1) read the scriptures, 2) taught the people, 3) he prayed, 4) Jesus was praying, 5) went to eat a meal, 6) teaching in the temple, and 7) began to teach in the synagogue)

Why Keep Sabbath?

Here's a list of the reasons of why Sabbath is important. In each reason there is one scrambled word that you will need to unscramble to make sense of the reason. Happy unscrambling!

1. Sabbath gives us time to TEACRREE _____ our minds and bodies.
2. Sabbath helps us to spend EMIT _____ with those we love.
3. Sabbath creates space in our lives for God's presence to be DREMEMBERR _____.
4. Sabbath gives us CAPES _____ to think about our lives.
5. Sabbath gives us important YLPA _____ time to make sure joy is part of our lives.
6. Sabbath invites us to DANEXPA _____ our minds through reading and good conversation.
7. Sabbath challenges us to build a healthy WOLF _____ of work and play into our week.
8. Buying and selling are important activities to FERLAIN _____ from on the Sabbath.
9. Use Sabbath time to let go of SERROWI _____ and to trust anew in God.
10. Sabbath is a blessing—rest your mind, refresh your spirit, and renew your LATERIONSPIHS _____ with those important to you.



(Answers: 1) recreate, 2) time, 3) remembered, 4) space, 5) play, 6) expand, 7) flow, 8) refrain, 9) worries, and 10) relationships)

Try It! — Keeping Sabbath

Here are ways that can help you and your family celebrate Sabbath. Choose the ones that you like and talk with your family about making them happen this week!

- ___ 1. Attending church with my family
- ___ 2. Spending some time alone reading a book
- ___ 3. Cooking a nice meal to share with others
- ___ 4. Going for a walk or bike ride
- ___ 5. Watching a funny movie
- ___ 6. Doing fun activities as a family like playing a board game or a group video game
- ___ 7. Taking a nap
- ___ 8. Reading the Bible or praying
- ___ 9. Writing some letters or cards to friends and family
- ___ 10. Talking with a family member or friend
- ___ 11. Serving others like visiting someone in nursing home or collecting food
- ___ 12. Visiting a museum or going to a movie
- ___ 13. Your Idea: _____

