

Celebrate Sabbath

MATTHEW 12:1-8

1



GOAL

Youth understand Sabbath, not as a list of things they can and can't do, but rather as a freedom to take a break and celebrate God's compassion, restoration, and justice.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

God of the Sabbath, help me to know when to act and when to be still. Teach me as I teach your other children. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Sabbath is a revolutionary, divine mandate to take a break. Yes, give yourself and everyone and everything else on earth, including animals and plants, a break. Life is about more than *to-do* lists. We are placed on earth to do more than work ourselves to death. We pause in the rhythm of the everyday to connect with God, ourselves, and others. This is a revolutionary practice because, when we honor Sabbath, we are resisting the daily message in our culture that tells us we matter only when we produce and consume. When we stop, even for a day, our refusal to go along causes ripple effects and invites others to remember their divine purpose as well.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Matthew 12:1-8, the Pharisees chastise Jesus and his disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath. Jesus defends his disciples, pointing out that even the Pharisees do things that are technically unlawful on the Sabbath all the time. Jesus redefines and reshapes Sabbath, returning it to God's original intent: a day of feasting and celebration with God. Obviously, being hungry is not appropriate on a day of feasting. He tells the Pharisees that meeting human need through mercy and compassion is more important than adhering to the letter of religious laws regarding Sabbath observance. Jesus emphasizes that he is Lord of the Sabbath with authority to determine faithful ways to honor Sabbath.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Norms around Sabbath vary greatly in our culture, leaving young people to "take it or leave it" when it comes to practicing Sabbath. This session challenges young people to embrace an understanding of Sabbath as a break from their daily activity. It invites them to examine their lives for what they do and do not do to honor Sabbath. They are encouraged to embrace Sabbath as a day set apart to be honored, celebrated, and enjoyed for the gift that it is. Sabbath is a gift from God set aside for rest, restoration, compassion, and connection with oneself, God, and others.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Meditation" (p. 6): Prepare and post newsprint with instructions. Depending on the options you choose:
- "Celebrating Sabbath" (p. 6): Use the *Honor Sabbath* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 2 Set), and gather supplies for one Sabbath Sampler activity.
- "Tracing Sabbath through Scripture" (p. 7): Write indicated Scripture verses on index cards and number the cards 1-14.

GETTING STARTED

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- Prepared newsprint
 - Internet-connected device for playing music

MEDITATION

M QC

Post prepared newsprint with the following instructions written on it.

- Sit quietly and take slow, deep breaths.
- Listen to the sounds of nature.
- Close your eyes and imagine you are in the most peaceful place on earth.
- Think about what you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste.
- Allow yourself to be surrounded in the peace of your imagination.

As young people gather, play the YouTube video “Relaxing Music with Nature Sounds—Waterfall HD” (bit.ly/FMRelaxingMusic, 4:29:57). Invite them to use the instructions on the displayed newsprint to prepare themselves for this session.

WELCOMING SABBATH

QC

Tell participants that for the opening ritual you will say the words of Psalm 46:10 aloud: “Be still, and know that I am God.” Explain that the person to their right will repeat the verse emphasizing the first word. Then the next person will repeat the verse emphasizing the second word, and so on. If there are more than eight people in your group, have the next person emphasize the first word again and continue on in the same manner.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Paper and pens

WHAT IS SABBATH?

A QC

Distribute paper and pens. Have youth fold their paper in half to make a crease. Have them open their papers and write or draw on one half words or pictures to describe things for which they are grateful. On the other half, have them describe hurts or needs in the world that they wish would change.

After completing their work, invite youth to nod yes or no to these two questions:

- ➔ Before gathering today, did you think about being grateful?
- ➔ Did you think about hurts or needs in the world?

Explain that, through drawing and writing, they take time to honor Sabbath. These are opportunities to break out of the ordinary and think about God, themselves, and others; to celebrate their thanksgivings and have compassion for others.

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- Honor Sabbath* infographic poster (Year 2 Set)
 - Supplies for Sabbath Sampler activity

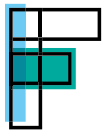
CELEBRATING SABBATH

C CT

Display the *Honor Sabbath* infographic poster. Discuss with youth what they think about when they hear the word *Sabbath*. Have them identify and describe different ways to honor Sabbath shown on the infographic poster.

Discuss as a group:

- ➔ How do these activities support or challenge your understanding of Sabbath?
- ➔ Which Sabbath Sampler on the infographic poster would you like to try?



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

KEEPING SABBATH

C AT

Invite volunteers to read the parts of Narrator, Jesus, and Pharisee. Read Matthew 12:1–8 in parts while others follow in their Bibles. Invite youth to share what the story brings up for them and discuss some of the following questions:

- ➔ Why did Jesus' disciples pluck grain from the fields?
- ➔ What would you have done if you were there and knew the rules about working on Sabbath?
- ➔ What new interpretation of Scripture does Jesus offer? How does it apply to his disciples' actions?
- ➔ What does this story teach us about Sabbath? What does it show us about obedience to God?

Bibles

TRACING SABBATH THROUGH SCRIPTURE

CT C

Explain that, throughout Scripture, there are models, instructions, laws, and advice for God's people regarding Sabbath. Distribute prepared index cards to participants. For smaller groups, give participants more than one card. Have each person read the Scripture on their card and summarize what is said about Sabbath. Participants tell about their assigned Scripture to gain a perspective on ways Sabbath is practiced across the scope of the Bible. Discuss as a group:

- ➔ What consistencies around keeping Sabbath do you find across Scripture?
- ➔ What do you find about keeping Sabbath that surprises you?
- ➔ How do these messages about keeping Sabbath help you understand or practice Sabbath?

Bibles

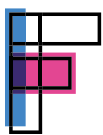
Prepared index cards and pens



On separate index cards, write these Scripture references.

Number index cards 1–14.

- Genesis 2:1–3
- Exodus 20:8–11
- Leviticus 23:1–3
- Numbers 15:32–36
- Numbers 28:9–10
- Nehemiah 13:15–22
- Psalm 23:1–3
- Isaiah 1:10–17
- Isaiah 58:13–14
- Jeremiah 17:21–27
- Ezekiel 20:12–16; 23:38
- Matthew 12:1–8
- Colossians 2:16–17
- Hebrews 4:9–11



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

BLUE LAWS

CT C

Show a video about Blue Laws and their history. Invite participants to talk about what they know about living under Blue Laws. Discuss whether these laws were helpful or a hindrance in observing Sabbath. Use these questions for further discussion:

- ➔ How do a forty-hour work week and limiting activities on Sundays support the practice of Sabbath?
- ➔ Do you think that people need laws and rules to create time and space for protection or rest? Why or why not?
- ➔ How could people honor Sabbath rest, restoration, and opportunities to connect with others without making laws and rules? What would healthy guidance look like?

Internet-connected device



Preview and select one of these videos:

- “Blue Law History” (bit.ly/FMBlueLaw, 2:08)
- “What Is Blue Law?” (bit.ly/FMWhatAreBlueLaws, 1:42)
- “America’s ‘Blue Laws’ Once Involved a Lot More Than Just Alcohol Sales” (bit.ly/FMBlueTexas, 1:48)

- Copies of Resource Page 1
- Pens

THINKING ABOUT SABBATH

CT

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Invite volunteers to read aloud various quotations about living and practicing Sabbath today. Have participants circle quotations that are interesting or hold meaning for them. Engage in group discussion about the quotations participants selected and why they circled them. Use these questions for further discussion:

- ➔ Which quotations reflect your understanding of Sabbath? Which ones challenge you?
- ➔ How does the quotation from Isaiah 30:15 inform your thinking about Sabbath?
- ➔ What are you encouraged to do and to not do to practice Sabbath?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

- Newsprint and markers
- Self-adhesive stickers, two colors

COMMON SABBATH PRACTICES

CT

Invite youth to think about the different Sabbath-focused activities that have been named in this session. Help them brainstorm common Sabbath practices and list these on newsprint.

Distribute self-adhesive stickers so each person has a few of each color. Have youth review the list and place one color of sticker on common Sabbath activities that they engage in. Tell them to place the other colored sticker on Sabbath activities they would like to try. If a number of them put this second sticker on the same activity, make plans to do it.

Save this newsprint for use in session 2.

- Paper and pens
- Newsprint and markers

PRACTICING SABBATH

CT QC

Distribute paper and pens. Direct participants to draw a three-column chart on their paper. Label the columns, “Now Doing,” “Stop Doing,” and “Will Do.” Explain that there are two key questions for celebrating Sabbath:

- ➔ What will you stop doing on the Sabbath? This assumes that you are already doing things, although these may not be common Sabbath activities.
- ➔ What will you do on the Sabbath? This is not to add to your busyness, but to think about new ways to honor Sabbath.

Have participants work independently to list activities in each column: things they currently do, things they will stop doing, things they will do (or would like to do) to honor Sabbath.

As participants work, draw a three-column chart on a sheet on newsprint to match the participants’ chart. Gather the group and invite them to share their lists as they are comfortable. Record activities in the different newsprint columns. Encourage participants to add new ideas to their personal charts. Challenge them to identify at least one activity to stop and one to do to honor Sabbath in the coming week. They will be invited to talk about their experiences in the next session.

JOURNALING

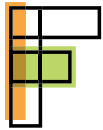


Remind participants that Sabbath is a time to break from the ordinary, to pause and give thanks for God's goodness and, at the same time, identify ways to make the world a better place. If youth completed the "What Is Sabbath?" activity earlier in the session, recall what they are grateful for and a hurt or need in the world.

Distribute copies of Resource Page 2 and pens. On the blank side of their journal paper, have the youth reflect on this session and write their responses to these questions:

- How will you express gratitude for God?
- How can you have compassion and work to change hurt or pain in the world?

For the week ahead, encourage youth to take a Sabbath break each day, either in the morning or before going to sleep, to pause and reflect on one thing for which they are grateful and one injustice that they would change. Encourage them to write these in the columns on their journal paper for the designated day of the week.



FOLLOWING JESUS

CELEBRATING GOD'S SABBATH



Explain that the Hebrew phrase *Shalom Alehem* is a traditional Jewish poem recited upon returning home from worship on the night of the Sabbath. It roughly translates, "Peace be upon you."

In 2018, a flashmob gathered in Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport to mark the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel. The group of young musicians and dancers broke into joyful singing and dancing, welcoming young people traveling to Israel from around the world for a Birthright Israel pilgrimage (*Taglit*). The song is a fitting celebration of God's blessing and Sabbath.

Show the YouTube video "הבאנו שלום עליכם"—Hevenu Shalom Alehem—Jerusalem Academy Flashmob for Taglit at Ben Gurion Airport" (bit.ly/FMHevenu, 3:02). Use these questions for discussion:

- When have you experienced or expressed such joy?
- When have you known Sabbath to include joy like this?
- How is this song fitting for celebrating Sabbath?

PRAYER



Close with this prayer or one of your own:

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise for all you have done.
Help us to remember to take time to enjoy the lives you have given us.
Empower us to make someone else's life easier. Give us wisdom as we try to live more like you intended. Amen.

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- Copies of Resource Page 2
 - Pens

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- Internet-connected device

Thinking about Sabbath

“Our family has created unique Sabbath habits, focusing on activities that bring them joy, like reading and bike rides. We enjoy the freedom of branching out beyond obviously religious behaviors and finding other ways to be spiritually nurtured.”¹

“Our lives are so scheduled. . . . There’s always something that we need to be doing, just to say ‘I’m going to go where my delight takes me’ is a wonderful thing.”²

“When you’re at a [Sabbath] meal, you don’t feel like, ‘Don’t do this. Don’t do that.’ You feel like, ‘Come! Let’s have fun. Let’s talk together.’”³

“It has become more difficult to observe a day of rest because the whole world around is so busy.”⁴

“Most people see [Sabbath] as family time, and that can take all kinds of forms.”⁵

“When my parents met in the 1950s, they were singing in a young adult choir. After rehearsal, they would go to an ice cream shop. Some Mormons [today] would be horrified that they were patronizing a shop on Sunday.”⁶

“We acknowledge that God is with us all the time, not just when we’re doing ‘holy’ activities.”⁷

“Sabbath is deeply important for our spiritual lives. We have to find the space and time to get away and disengage, and remember that we’re not indispensable to the running of the world.”⁸

“I keep hearing people rave about keeping a Sabbath. Honestly, the idea gives me anxiety. One more thing to get done and probably fail.”⁹





“For me, the Sabbath is a gift. My work week is so intense. On Sundays I almost always get out for a long walk in the afternoon. I move my body and see the beauty of God’s creation. It feels so good! What a contrast to the other days of the week.”¹⁰

“What is the Sabbath? A weekly day of rest and worship. A day to cease working and rest in God’s care for us. A day to stop some of the things that occupy our workdays and add in some activities that nurture peace, worship, relationships, celebration, and thankfulness.”¹¹

For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel:
In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.
—Isaiah 30:15

1.–8. Kelsey Dallas, “New Poll Finds Americans Less Likely to Keep Sabbath than in 1978, but Majority Still Say It’s Important to Society,” *Deseret News* (April 27, 2016), [bit.ly/FMAmericanSabbath](https://www.deseretnews.com/story/4311111).

9.–11. Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 11.

Daily Journal	Give Thanks for God's Goodness	Name a Hurt, Need, or Pain in the World for Which You Have Compassion
SUNDAY 		
MONDAY 		
TUESDAY		
WEDNESDAY 		
THURSDAY		
FRIDAY 		
SATURDAY 