

Semicontinuous
1 Sam. 3:1–10
 (11–20)
Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18

Complementary
Deut. 5:12–15
Ps. 81:1–10
2 Cor. 4:5–12
Mark 2:23–3:6

Restoring Sabbath

Goal for the Session Youth will investigate the concept of Sabbath and Jesus’ teaching about liberation and restoration.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 2:23–3:6

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Judith Hoch Wray

Mark 2:23–28 is linked to Mark 3:1–6 by two major themes: (a) what is permissible (or lawful) to do on the Sabbath; and (b) the relationship of humanity (*anthropos*) to the Sabbath. Mark’s account prepares the way for the early Christian community to establish its distinct identity. The account ends with Jesus at the center of the synagogue, having demonstrated his lordship of the Sabbath, standing with the human whose hand is now restored. The accusers leave and, ironically, immediately demonstrate their own desecration of the Sabbath by plotting with the Herodians to kill Jesus.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Wendy Farley

Each element of Jesus’ conflict with the Pharisees has to do with basic observances that characterize not only Jewish but also Christian piety: forgiveness of sins; conventions concerning what, when, and with whom we eat; honoring the Sabbath. These are particular ways in which we sanctify time and space. This conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees contrasts religion that hardens hearts with the gospel that opens hearts to the ubiquitous presence of God and gives birth to compassion and joy.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Don E. Saliers

What was the intention of “Sabbath” in the first place? Here we recall that it was a day of rest directly related to the holiness and the goodness of creation. It also carries the resonance of liberation from captivity and slavery. If Jesus counters the pharisaic objection found in Mark by claiming the Sabbath was made for human beings, not the other way around, then we begin to understand that Jesus is actually calling for liberation and restoration of the meaning of Sabbath. Christ’s authority is greater than any human voice, no matter how pious, no matter how deeply entrenched in religious tradition.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Nibs Stroupe

This passage asks of readers in every age: What are the essential categories of our lives that Jesus threatens? What have we made divine in our lives that should remain mortal and finite? Since the Sabbath is the central focus of conflict in this passage, we should look first at the concept of the Sabbath in our time. As always, there is powerful good news here. At the same time that we are threatened by Jesus, our hearts long for him. Who among us does not want to be freed from our consumer lifestyle that is killing our souls and polluting the earth? This text reminds us that the journey to life goes through the cross, but that the resurrection awaits as well.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:23–3:6

Focus on Your Teaching

Youth live in a world that seems addicted to electronic devices and being busy. Multitasking is seen as admirable, they are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities, get part-time jobs, and be occupied! Not doing anything productive is judged as wasteful. When busyness becomes a chronic condition, inner growth and relationships can suffer. As Christian leaders we can help youth explore an alternative way of living that is life-giving. Learning about Sabbath time can encourage them to create holy spaces for nourishing their souls.

O God, help me to practice the meaning of Sabbath in my own life and to inspire youth to participate in their own Sabbath practices. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- candle, matches
- objects to encourage meditation (see Gathering)
- paper, pens
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: Internet access, computer with presentation software
- option 3: small terra-cotta pots, newspapers, paintbrushes, acrylic paints (gold and other colors), votive candles

For Video Connection

- Internet-connected device

If open flames are not allowed, use a battery-powered candle.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, in the center of your meeting space, arrange a green cloth, candle, Bible, and objects such as a book of prayers, rock, plant, shells, finger labyrinth, inspirational art or nature images, and a CD of meditative music.

Greet youth as they arrive. Distribute paper and pens and ask them to create a pie chart of a typical school day in their lives: the amount of time they spend sleeping, at school or doing homework, in activities, eating, recreation, working, visiting with friends, screen time, and so on. After a few moments, ask:

✠ What do your charts tell you about how you spend your time?

Invite youth to name some of the things they like to do when they are not busy with school, activities, or work. Explain that this week's scripture story is about the time called Sabbath.

Gather around the candle and light it as a sign of Christ's presence with the group. Pray aloud:

O God, thank you for Jesus, whose example and teachings show us the importance of living with holiness and compassion. Amen.

EXPLORING

Explain that this week's focus scripture is from the Gospel of Mark. The events that Mark recounts take place early in Jesus' ministry. Review that after his baptism Jesus began his ministry in Galilee by recruiting the disciples and doing a number of healings.

The first story in the focus passage takes place on the Sabbath. Explain that the word *sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word *shābat*, which means "rest" and refers to the seventh day, when God rested after the work of creation. The Ten Commandments and other commands in the Hebrew Scriptures included rules about what Jewish people could and couldn't do on the Sabbath, and one of those rules was to do no work on that day.



FEASTING on the WORD

CURRICULUM

Restoring Sabbath

To dig deeper, invite volunteers to read aloud the following passages:
 Seventh day:
 Genesis 2:2–3
 Sabbath commandment:
 Exodus 20:8–11
 Deuteronomy 5:12–15

If your group is small, have volunteers read aloud each passage while a couple of volunteers pantomime the action.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Doing Good on the Sabbath) and form two groups. Ask one group to work with Mark 2:23–28 and the other to work with Mark 3:1–6. Tell the groups to decide on a way to dramatize their assigned stories. Give them about five minutes to prepare.

Ask the first group to present its drama to the entire class. Discuss:

- ✧ Jesus defended his disciples' actions by pointing out that King David had also broken the law. Do you think one unlawful act can be justified by another one? Why or why not?
- ✧ What do you think Jesus meant by saying that the Sabbath was meant for the good of the people, not the other way around?

Ask the second group to present its drama. As needed, explain that the “meeting place” was the synagogue, where Jews met to worship and study the Scriptures. Discuss:

- ✧ What does Jesus do on the Sabbath this time?
- ✧ Do you think Jesus was surprised by the Pharisees' reaction? Why or why not?

Notice how Jesus kept pushing out the boundaries of what it meant to honor the Sabbath. Jesus' actions were on a collision course with the Pharisees who were the guardians of the traditions. Ask:

- ✧ By healing someone on the Sabbath day, what do you think Jesus was trying to teach the Pharisees about the Sabbath?
- ✧ How did this healing liberate the man with a crippled hand?

Point out that while Jesus challenges some of the rules about Sabbath, he still affirms that keeping Sabbath time is important. “Jesus is actually calling for liberation and restoration of the meaning of Sabbath” (from “SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?” on p. 1). Ask:

- ✧ How does Jesus liberate the traditional understanding of Sabbath in these two stories?
- ✧ What have you learned from Jesus about Sabbath time?
- ✧ What would Sabbath time look like for you?
- ✧ What are some of the things that prevent people today from keeping Sabbath time?

RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

1. **Spiritual Practices** Invite youth to consider spiritual practices as a way of engaging in Sabbath time. Explain that spiritual practices are intentional activities that can help them to become more peaceful, more compassionate, and more loving as they refresh and ground themselves in God's presence. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Sabbath Time) and review the ideas together. Form pairs and give them time to add ideas to each list. After a few moments, ask pairs to read their ideas to the group. Talk about which ideas youth might already be putting into practice. Discuss:
 - ✧ How could we, as a group, support each other in a commitment to create more Sabbath time in our lives?

EASY
PREP

You can make a substitute for acrylic paints by mixing two parts liquid tempera paint and 1 part white glue.

- Sabbath Time Presentation** Invite youth to create a short slide show illustrating ways that people could create Sabbath spaces in the midst of a time-driven culture. Using the phrase, “The Sabbath was made for humankind . . .” (Mark 2:27) as a title for their presentation, have youth explore the Internet to find images that illustrate ways to rest and restore. Have them add words such as Pray, Rest, Walk, Worship, Listen and some background music. Arrange for youth to show this presentation to the rest of the congregation.
- Sabbath Candles** One of the Jewish practices for the Sabbath is the lighting of candles. Invite youth to make candle holders for their own Sabbath time practices. Give each one a small terra-cotta pot. Cover the work area with newspapers and set out acrylic paints and paintbrushes. Have them paint the inside of their pots with gold paint to reflect the candle light and add designs to the outside of the pots with other colors. Distribute votive candles to place inside the pots. Encourage youth to choose a time each week to light this candle and spend quiet time in prayer as a Sabbath practice.

CLOSING

Gather around the candle and light it, if necessary. Invite youth to spend a few quiet moments looking at the flame. Then ask them to look at the objects around the candle and think about ways they might use objects like these during their own quiet, meditative times.

Read aloud the suggestions on Resource Sheet 2 (Sabbath Time) of ways to observe Sabbath and invite youth to silently choose one or two ideas to practice in the coming weeks. Close by inviting youth to repeat each line of this meditation prayer after you:

Be still and know that I am God . . .
Be still and know that I am . . .
Be still and know . . .
Be still . . .
Be . . .

Extinguish the candle, then say good-bye to each learner by name.

■ ENHANCEMENT

VIDEO CONNECTION

For Jewish people, Shabbat (the Sabbath) is a special treasure from God—a time that brings holiness into their lives. It is a time for ritual and religious observances and offers people an opportunity to take a break from their usual activities to focus on family and faith. Watch the “Shabbat Overview” video together and invite comments from the group. Ask:

- ✂ What did you learn about the importance of Shabbat for Jewish families?
- ✂ If you were making a video on the theme of a Sabbath time for your family, what would you include?

Shabbat Overview:
bit.ly/2A7BSVW

Doing Good on the Sabbath

Mark 2:23–28

23–24 One Sabbath day he was walking through a field of ripe grain. As his disciples made a path, they pulled off heads of grain. The Pharisees told on them to Jesus: “Look, your disciples are breaking Sabbath rules!”

25–28 Jesus said, “Really? Haven’t you ever read what David did when he was hungry, along with those who were with him? How he entered the sanctuary and ate fresh bread off the altar, with the Chief Priest Abiathar right there watching—holy bread that no one but priests were allowed to eat—and handed it out to his companions?” Then Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren’t made to serve the Sabbath. The Son of Man is no lackey to the Sabbath. He’s in charge!”

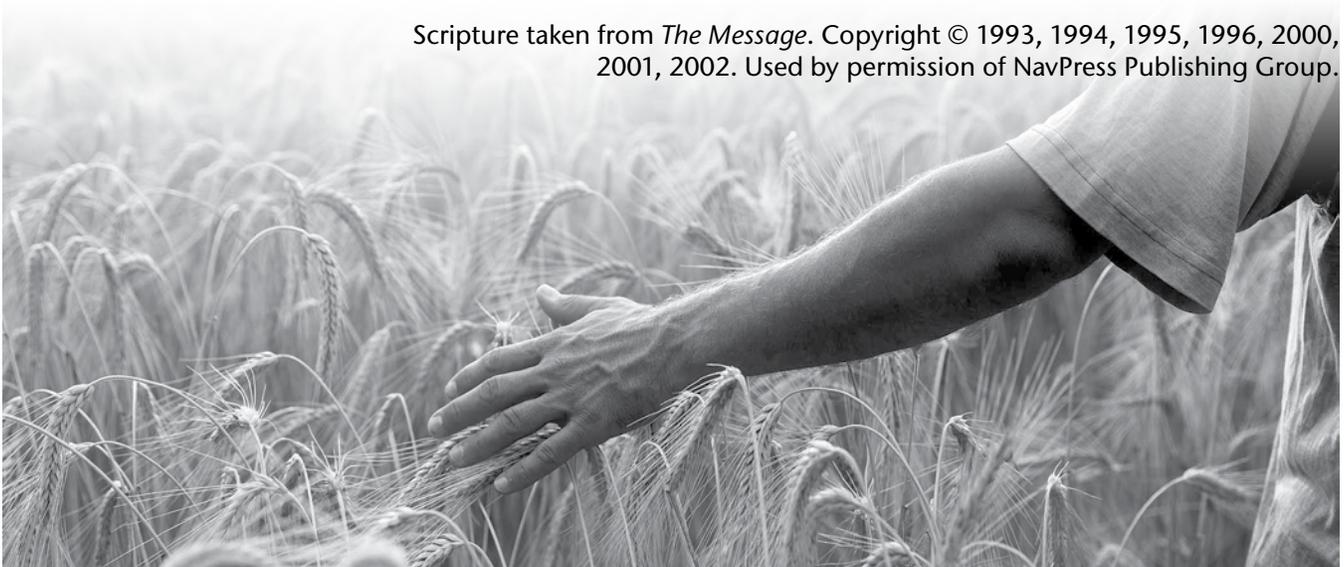
Mark 3:1–6

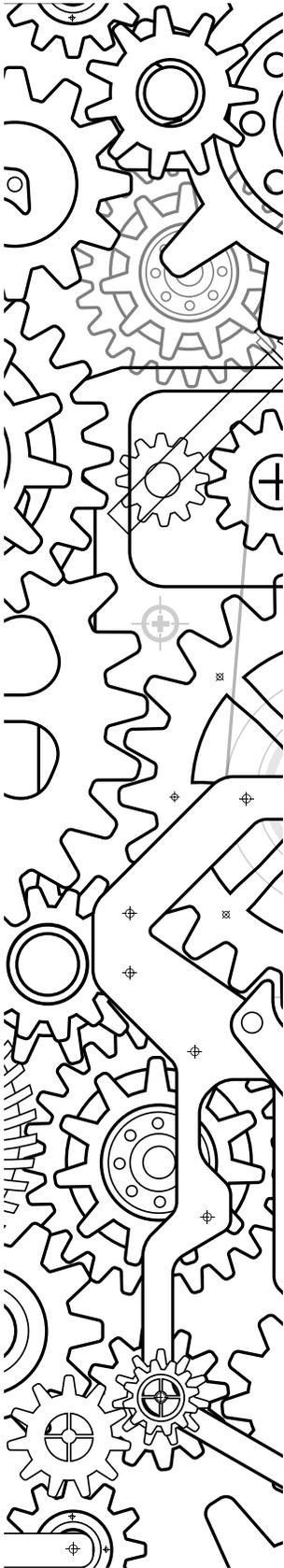
1–3 Then he went back in the meeting place where he found a man with a crippled hand. The Pharisees had their eyes on Jesus to see if he would heal him, hoping to catch him in a Sabbath infraction. He said to the man with the crippled hand, “Stand here where we can see you.”

4 Then he spoke to the people: “What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil? Helping people or leaving them helpless?” No one said a word.

5–6 He looked them in the eye, one after another, angry now, furious at their hard-nosed religion. He said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” He held it out—it was as good as new! The Pharisees got out as fast as they could, sputtering about how they would join forces with Herod’s followers and ruin him.

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Sabbath Time

“The Sabbath is the presence of God in the world, open to the soul of man. God is not in things of space, but in moments of time.”
—Abraham Joshua Heschel (1902–1972), *The Sabbath* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005).

Busy lives can challenge the practices of Sabbath time. Through Sabbath rest, God infuses holiness into our world of time. Here are some things you can do to include more Sabbath rest in your life.

“Time Out” Practices

- Go for a walk.
- Turn off electronic devices for one hour.
- Read a book.
- Take a nap.
- Listen to music that inspires you.
- Talk with a friend or family member about what matters in life.

Prayer Practices

- Light a candle and repeat, “O God, fill me with your Spirit and light.”
- Walk a labyrinth.
- Read poetry.
- Sit quietly in nature.
- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Draw your feelings.
