

Sabbath

Reading through the thirty-two descriptive paragraphs on sabbath will give you a sense of what sabbath teaches and of its power to bring order and rest and peace to life. Members of the group will discover that sabbath keeping is cumulative in effect. As understanding grows and experience deepens, decisions about how to keep sabbath will become more life-affecting. Offer opportunities occasionally for members of the group to talk about their sabbath-keeping experiences, but take care not to embarrass, isolate, or call attention to those who have chosen not to emphasize sabbath.

1. God created the world and then declared sabbath time, time set apart for rest. God rested; so we rest and celebrate the grandeur and mystery of creation. If you can, go outside and look around. Take the created world in through all your senses and remember you are a part of it. You belong to God your Creator. Read Psalm 8.

2. Sabbath teaches us that our only real security is in our relationship with God. On sabbath we let go of our efforts to build monuments so that we will be remembered. We laugh at our struggles to be important. We put our trust in God. Read Matthew 6:25-34 or Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.

3. Sabbath offers time for those God brings into our life. Hospitality is an important part of sabbath. It is an honor to share a sabbath meal with a guest. The point is simply to include a lonely or needy person to break bread at your table, someone who cannot pay you back. Share your sabbath this week with someone who needs a welcome.

4. Sabbath helps us be spiritually ready for tomorrow. We take with us into the days ahead, the peace and perspective of sabbath renewal. On sabbath, we lay the past to rest, quietly placing yesterday in the hands of God. Then for a few hours we let go, allowing body, mind, and spirit to be renewed.

5. Sabbath has power to create a way of life in which family experiences tenderness, intimacy, and peace. What could you do to bring joy or good will within your family? Is there someone with whom you need to make contact? Could you pray a family prayer together, praying by name for members of your extended family?

6. Sabbath can take us from alienation and meaninglessness to wholeness, from estrangement to reconciliation. Ask yourself if there is anyone with whom you need to be reconciled. Might you go see that person and make things right? Offer a prayer of repentance and forgiveness.

7. By observing sabbath time, we give up our bondage to time. On this day our anxiety and care can wait. For a few hours we lay aside our work. Try spending the day without wearing a watch. Do something that requires patience or waiting. Listen to a small child read a simple story. Sit in silence for a few minutes.

8. In sabbath we witness to our dependence on God as our Creator and Sustainer. On this day of rest think back across your life. Can you see times and places where God seemed to guide your path, prepare you for future events, carry you through a tough experience, or help you make a life-shaping decision? Give thanks to God.

9. Sabbath is intended as freedom to rest for God, people, animals, and land. The freedom of sabbath calls us to remember who we are and to claim dignity for all God's children. Examine your attitudes. Are you a part of any system that restricts human freedom or denies personal dignity to anyone? Can you contemplate any place where your heart may be hardened against a cry for freedom?

10. On sabbath we practice God's presence as community. The Lord's day. The Lord's house. A special time to take off your shoes. The Lord's day. The Lord's house. A good time to listen. Has God been speaking to you? Have your ears heard a request to serve? What excuses have you used? Sabbath—a time to reflect, to decide, to obey.

11. When we remember sabbath, we are remembering that we are a community created and shaped by a story. Spend some quiet moments thinking back over the long story of salvation and of your own faith story. Recall experiences when freedom was won or faith was generated in you. Remember people and events. Try writing your own psalm of historical praise.

12. Sabbath as a holy time radically changes our view of time so that all other days draw their meaning from sabbath. Sabbath stands at the center of the week; we anticipate it and prepare for it. We hold on to its freedom, its rest, its meaning and direction. What do you need to do to help your sabbath be more meaningful? Do that this week.

13. When we honor the day God set apart for rest and enjoyment, we take the first step in restoring the priorities that will allow us to keep the other commandments. Plan a day of rest, not only for yourself but for your household. Prepare ahead. Ask little of others. Avoid using other people's work, such as in restaurants and service stations. Simplify and enjoy.

14. Sabbath challenges our materialism that contributes to injustice. The attitudes we take toward God's day link directly to our attitudes toward the poor, the hungry, the enemy. Sabbath calls us to refrain from buying and selling, to appreciate our possessions but not be controlled by them. Self-renewal is not the only way to rest. Consider how you might correct an injustice.

15. Sabbath has transforming power. It gives us different eyes for seeing our sisters and our brothers. We look at the relationship between God and all humanity in new ways. Look for the Ruth or Naomi in your congregation. Welcome the stranger.

16. We do not keep sabbath alone. On sabbath we enter holy time as a community. In the sanctuary (Tabernacle) we expect to be washed, to honor the atoning sacrifice, to lift up the incense of prayer, to hear the law of God, and to leave as a light to the nations.

17. Sabbath reminds us of the continuing covenant between God and people made known in a special way in Jesus Christ. As you observe sabbath, recall that Jesus said sabbath was made for people, not people for sabbath.

18. The message of sabbath is that we are valued not for our accomplishments but because God loves us. We in turn value others not for what they produce, not for how efficient they are, but because they are worthy in God's sight.

19. On the day set apart, go apart for a time of prayer. Make a list of concerns and of persons for whom you want to pray. Pray for people you normally overlook and for the needs of the larger community and world. Try writing a prayer of intercession for continuing use.

20. Sabbath brings the perspective of wholeness. Pray for all who take the gospel to a broken world in need of healing. Say a prayer for all who suffer for the gospel. Pray for missionaries who often encounter severe hardships. Pray for new Christians around the world who break from family and cultures, often to be ostracized. Pray for Christians who take a costly stand. Pray for yourself that you might be true to the Christ even if you are rejected.

21. Sabbath gives holiness to our small acts of justice and compassion. Go through your closets. Do you have used clothes in good condition that you could give to someone in need or to a clothing distribution center? Check your pantry shelves. Do you have extra food that you could share? Open your linen closet. Can you give away some towels or bedding? If you have children, have them help you. Use the moment to teach.

22. Sabbath calls us from the values of the culture that surrounds us to the values of the Kingdom. Culture puts self first; Kingdom puts others first.

23. In our ceasing work for one day, we are free to see ourselves in the image of God rather than define ourselves by what we produce and consume. We give up our need to compete, our drive toward efficiency, our striving to achieve. We accept God's gifts of rest, dignity, peace, freedom.

24. Sabbath offers a balanced and hopeful view of life. It does not deny the pain, the sorrow, the sadness. Rather, it breaks into the pain and sadness with a time of joy, fellowship, intimacy, and renewal.

25. Sabbath offers time for spiritual rest and renewal. We are instructed to wait and pray for the Holy Spirit. Are you in a hurry? Do you need spiritual renewal? Meditate on Isaiah 40:28-31. Pray for the indwelling Spirit of Christ in your heart.

Notes

26. On sabbath embrace time and reach out to people. Find someone you can encourage. Be a Barnabas. Write a letter; make a telephone call; visit a person who is leaning toward becoming a Christian but needs encouragement.

27. The Antioch church was fasting when the Holy Spirit convicted them to send missionaries. A fast can be any form of abstinence—from food, from television or radio. On this sabbath consider eating a light meal and spending some time in quiet.

28. Sabbath shapes our attitudes and activities in the coming week. On this sabbath allow yourself simply to *be* rather than to *do*. Let sabbath work its renewing way in you, changing you and changing the days ahead.

29. On this sabbath, simply contemplate how miraculous it is to be turned Godward. Truly we are saved by an amazing grace.

30. Think for a few moments about gods in our society that almost everyone worships. What are their claims? How do they try to control our lives? When we cease work and rest for one day, we achieve freedom in a world in bondage to technology and science.

31. Sabbath is clearly at odds with what the world terms success. I am not in prison, but some are. I am not on trial, but some are. I am not being beaten, but some are. I am not being martyred, but some are. Today I will pray for Christians who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, all over the world.

32. Sabbath declares God is Lord and requires an ordering of priorities and a set of values different from those of the world around us.

Books on Sabbath

Both books discuss the biblical basis for sabbath and describe the values of sabbath keeping for Christians. Suggest them to persons who want to know more about sabbath.

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Caring, Resting, Embracing, Feasting, by Marva J. Dawn (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

Sabbath Time: Understanding and Practice for Contemporary Christians, by Tilden H. Edwards (Harper & Row, 1984).