



YOUTH STUDY

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LEADER'S GUIDE
Session 3

Sabbath Keeping for Busy Teens: A Youth Lenten Study

Sabbath helps us remember where we are from and where we are going

Introduction to the Session

Entering the Promised Land

In the early church, Lent was a season during which new converts prepared for their official entry into the Christian community (which would take place on Easter Sunday as they were baptized into membership). It was also a time when those formerly estranged from the church repented and sought to reconnect. Much of what happened in this time was remembering how God had been at work in the past in order to more clearly discern how God's Spirit was at work in the present. This pause, or Sabbath, led to renewed vision about where God would lead the community of believers in the future. The same was true in the days of the Exodus.

Eventually, the people of Israel made their way through the wilderness and came to the Jordan River, ready to enter—at long last—the promised land. But it had been a long time since Sinai. And so Moses stopped at the Jordan (in the book of Deuteronomy) and gave Israel instruction for the new land, instruction that lasts for thirty chapters! Moses spoke for so long because he wanted to be sure that Israel understood that the old, desert covenant still pertained to the agricultural territory they were about to enter. Moses regarded the land

Session at a Glance

ARRIVING

- Where we come from

GATHERING

- Share our stories

OPENING

- Summarize previous week's session
- Share the goal of the session
- Opening prayer

EXPLORING

- "That they may rest like you"
- Case study: leaving home

RESPONDING

- Share case study responses

CLOSING

- Closing prayer

of Canaan, a very fertile place, as an enormous temptation to Israel.

The new land offered so many blessings that Israel would begin to think they could manage on their own. The new land would make them prosperous, and Moses knew that prosperity breeds amnesia. He warned Israel about amnesia: “Take care that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (6:12).

The Israelites might forget where they came from, the circumstance under which they had departed, and how they had gotten away. They might forget that they had lived in a system of unbearable coercion wherein they had to meet impossible production schedules of more bricks. Moses anticipated that if they were not alert, they would end up right back in another system of coercion. Because the land was fertile, it would make Israel safe and happy. And if Israel could increase what it produced, it would be safer and happier. Israel might come to think that the goal of its life was to acquire and acquire and acquire. And in order to acquire, Israel would need to compete with the neighbor. The system could turn one’s neighbor into a competitor. The land had the power to destroy the fabric of the covenantal neighborhood.

That They May Rest Just Like You

To this end, Moses articulates the commandments. They are the same as the Sinai recital in Exodus 20, with only slight variation. In Deuteronomy 5:12–14 there is one noteworthy change. As in Exodus 20, all are to rest: sons and daughters, slaves, oxen, donkeys, livestock, immigrants. But a phrase is added: “can rest *just like you*” (CEB). Sabbath is the great day of equality, when all are equally at rest. Not all are equal in production. Some have greater access to consumer goods. Such a system, of course, creates haves and have-nots, significant and insignificant, rich and poor, people with access and people denied access.

But Sabbath breaks that gradation caused by coercion. On the Sabbath:

- You do not have to do more.
- You do not have to sell more.
- You do not have to control more.
- You do not have to know more.
- You do not have to be involved in ten different extracurricular activities.

- You do not have to be younger or more beautiful.
- You do not have to score more.

Because this one day breaks the pattern of coercion, all are *just like you*, equal—of equal worth, equal value, equal access, and equal rest.

Moses in Deuteronomy says:

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day. (5:15)

Moses is very big on remembering, because he knows that forgetting is a huge temptation in an affluent environment. Sabbath is the break, regular and public, that permits us to remember. Sabbath is the opportunity to recall Egypt and the pharaoh and then to remember God and the exodus. Those who remember and keep Sabbath find that they are less driven, less coerced, less frantic to meet deadlines—free to be rather than to do.

The Pause That Transforms

Moses, in Deuteronomy, imagines that Sabbath is not only a festival day but also a new social reality that is carried back into days one through six. People who keep Sabbath live all seven days differently. Sabbath is not simply a pause. It is an occasion for reimagining all social life away from coercion and competition, replacing those things with compassionate solidarity. Such solidarity is possible only when the cycle of greed is broken. Sabbath is not simply the pause that refreshes; it is the pause that transforms. Whereas Israelites are always tempted to greed, Sabbath is an invitation to receptivity, an acknowledgment that what is needed is given and need not be seized.

Goal for the Session

Participants will explore how practicing Sabbath helps us remember where we have come from in order to discern where we are being called to go.

Preparing for the Session

- Read through this Leader’s Guide and determine how to best lead the session given the needs of your group. See the “Teaching Alternative” section at the end for additional ideas.
- Pray for all group members.

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- newsprint
- markers
- pens and paper for each participant
- copies of the Participant Handout

Teaching Tip

The Arriving activity in this session asks participants to recall stories from their family history. You may have individuals in your group who, for various reasons, may have limited or no knowledge of this sort. Be sensitive to the fact that this could be an upsetting subject for some, and be sure to offer the alternative question (in the Participant Handout) as an option for this activity.

Arriving (5 minutes)

1. Where We Come From

As participants arrive, distribute copies of the Participant Handout and point them to the Arriving activity writing prompts:

- Write down notes on any family stories you know about where earlier generations came from and how they got to where they ended up.
- Think of any group you are a part of (church, athletic team, club, music, friend/peer group) and write down some notes on any stories you know about the history of this group.

Gathering (5 minutes)

2. Share Our Stories

Once most of your group has arrived, ask for volunteers to share some of the responses they wrote during the Arriving activity. Ask the group to observe any similarities among these stories or any that are particularly unique.

Opening (10 minutes)

3. Summarize the Previous Week's Session

For those who were not present the previous week, ask for a few volunteers to share what was discussed in session 2. Some key points to highlight include:

- The season of Lent is not just about the individual.

- In Lent, God calls us to serve our neighbors and strengthen our identity as a community of faith, the body of Christ.
- Pharaoh's leadership divided the community, and God's Sabbath commandment united it.

4. Share the Goal of the Session

Drawing on material provided in the introduction to the session, share with the group:

- In the early church, Lent was a season during which new converts prepared for their official entry into the Christian community and those formerly estranged from the church repented and sought to reconnect.
- Much of what happened in this time was remembering how God had been at work in the past in order to more clearly discern how God's Spirit was at work in the present.
- When the ancient Israelites finally made their way through the wilderness and were about to enter the promised land, Moses stopped and gave them a long list of instructions. He reminded them of where they came from, because he was afraid that once they were in a land of prosperity, they would forget the struggles they went through to get there.
- Sabbath became an important practice in the life of the community when everyone stopped and remembered where they had come from and how they were called to honor all people in the community.

Explain that in today's session, the group will look specifically at how Sabbath calls us to remember where we have come from in order to help us discern where we are being called to go.

5. Opening Prayer

Open your group in prayer, either with your own words or with the following:

Eternal God,
you have been with us throughout all generations,
uplifting our ancestors in their struggles
and offering hope when all seemed hopeless.
Help us to remember all the ways you have been
at work in the past
so that we might better understand how you are
present among us now.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Exploring (20 minutes)

6. “That They May Rest Like You”

Have participants form partners or smaller groups for this activity. Each small group or set of partners will need two Bibles. Have them compare the following two passages:

- Exodus 20:8–10
- Deuteronomy 5:12–15

Ask them to discuss the following:

- What difference do you see between these two passages?
- Why did Moses make a point to tell Israel to remember their past before heading into the promised land?
- Why did Moses add the phrase, “can rest just like you”?

Ask participants to recall if they have ever made a momentous transition in their lives (changing schools, moving to a new home, adjusting to a change in their family situation). How does remembering where we have come from strengthen us when we are faced with transition and challenge?

7. Case Study: Leaving Home

Distribute the Participant Handout if you have not already done so, and ask participants to read the section titled “Case Study: Leaving Home.” After they have had some time to read the case study, have them return to their partners or small groups, where they will write the character Aaron a letter of advice and encouragement as he transitions to his new college environment. Their letters should include elements of remembering and practicing Sabbath as demonstrated by Moses in Deuteronomy 5.

Responding (5 minutes)

8. Share Case Study Responses

Ask for volunteers to read their letters of encouragement to Aaron. Note how the themes from Deuteronomy appear in each of the letters shared.

Closing (5 minutes)

9. Closing Prayer

Have the group close by praying together the prayer printed in their Participant Handout.

Teaching Alternative

If there is a written history of your congregation available, consider copying a few pages of it and distributing the information to your group to read and discuss. How does remembering an individual congregation’s story help us remember who God is calling us to be now? How does it help us practice Sabbath in a religious culture that is often consumer driven?

Key Scriptures

Exodus 20:8–10
Deuteronomy 5:12–15

For More Information

Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

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