

A CONGREGATIONAL EXPLORATION

ON SABBATH

SABBATH

DISCOVERING HOW THIS CORE
TEACHING IN SCRIPTURE CAN HELP US
DISCERN WHAT IS LIFEGIVING IN OUR
INDIVIDUAL LIVES, FAMILIES, AND
COLLECTIVE PRACTICES AT CALVARY

- JAN 13 - WHAT IS SABBATH
- JAN 20 - SCRIPTURE PT. 1
- JAN 27 - SCRIPTURE PT 2
- FEB 03 - SCRIPTURE PT 3
- FEB 10 - SCRIPTURE PT 4
- FEB 17 - THEOLOGY OF SABBATH
- FEB 24 - HOW TO MARK SABBATH
- MAR 02 - A GUIDEPOST TO

DISCERNMENT

AND THE CONVERSATION
CONTINUES AT:
LENTEN SUPPERS &
EASTERTIDE DISCERNMENT

**Churchwide Study of Sabbath
Calvary Baptist Church of Denver
January 2019 – March 2019**

Why This Study at This Time?

For the past few years Pastor Anne has been exploring what it would look like for our congregation to experience a churchwide Sabbath - a chance for all of us to rest and take a collective breath together. This idea, or desire, for a churchwide practice of Sabbath has been pushed for several years due to regular needs and demands of the church, not unlike our, Pastors Anne's and Morgan's, individual practices of Sabbath too. During the summer of 2019 it became clear that there was a feeling of exhaustion in the congregation and that our personal lives were getting more and more busy. We moved forward with prioritizing a study on Sabbath amidst this haziness of life over the course of the summer. We held several listening sessions with small groups to see if our feedback on the need for a Sabbath study such as this was accurate. Following those sessions, we heard responses ranging from "This is a study I need" to "It would be interesting to see this done churchwide" to "I hope there are follow-through elements to implement Sabbath beyond this study." With this information we began to adjust our Sabbath study to reflect Calvary's needs, looking at the church calendar to see when within our natural rhythms of church life this study would fit well. We landed on beginning during Epiphany and ending early in Lent as optimal timing. This timing would allow us to come together during the season of Lent to ask ourselves what keeps us from living into Sabbath practices and how we as a community can support each other in the removal of those roadblocks. During Eastertide, we will then see how we can put into practice all we have come to discern about individual and communal practices of Sabbath. While there will never a "perfect" time to conduct any study, we hope that the timing of this Sabbath study is helpful to the congregation. We look forward to journeying through this Sabbath study with you to see how the practices of Sabbath can be explored anew, both individually and collectively.

How Can I Use This Study?

We have created this Sabbath study in such a way that you are able to work through it on your own, as a family, in a small group, or with your Church school class. Pastors Alice, Anne, and Morgan will hold a discussion group for this study on Tuesdays; it will take place in the Boardroom or via video chat.

When Will the Study Take Place?

We are inviting the congregation to begin the Sabbath study the week of January 13, studying a different session each week for a total of eight weeks. The Sabbath study would end the week of March 2. Here's a quick look at what session would happen during each week:

Week of	Session Number:	Topic
January 13	Session One:	What is Sabbath?

January 20	Session Two:	Sabbath in Scripture Part 1
January 27	Session Three:	Sabbath in Scripture Part 2 (The Jubilee)
February 3	Session Four:	Sabbath in Scripture Part 3 (Teachings of Jesus)
February 10	Session Five:	Sabbath in Scripture Part 4 (Hebrews)
February 17	Session Six:	Your Theology of Sabbath
February 24	Session Seven:	Rituals for Marking Sabbath
March 2	Session Eight:	Sabbath as a Guidepost for Discernment

Following the Study What Happens?

After the eight-week curriculum Sabbath study we will move into churchwide exploration with our Lenten Suppers. During four Lenten Suppers we will discuss and examine what keeps us from practicing Sabbath. A quick look at the discussions for each Lenten Supper is below:

Wednesdays from 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall

- March 11** How do Sundays fit into Sabbath?
- March 18** What fears, frustrations, or healing do we need around Sabbath?
- March 25** What does it mean for church committees/social or small groups to practice Sabbath together?
- April 1** Is Sabbath possible in this day and age, why or why not?

During Eastertide we, as the pastoral staff, will be reaching out to all committees, ministry teams, Church School class, GPS groups, and social groups to walk through a process of annual discernment within your committee, class, or group – asking questions like what has worked well this past year, what would we like to change, how might a Sabbath practice be beneficial for us, what would need to make that Sabbath practice possible, etc.?

Following these discussions, the pastors will meet with class, committee, and group leaders to learn how we can assist with the implementation of Sabbath practices and any other areas of support you might need that came up during this process of discernment.

We will then celebrate this journey of Sabbath exploration on Pentecost, sharing what we learned, what we hope to do around Sabbath practices as a congregation, and how we can support one another in our individual practices of Sabbath.

We hope you all find this study as a tool to help you imagine and wrestle with Sabbath practices. Wherever you are in your understanding or experience of Sabbath we pray this study meets you where you are and helps you move into a new, or renewed, practice of Sabbath. Know that your pastors are praying for Calvary during this Sabbath study and are in this journey alongside you!

Peace and Blessings --
Pastors Anne & Morgan

Session One What is Sabbath?

Supplies needed for this Session – Tablet, phone, or computer to play two videos. Pen for the Reflection Questions.

Opening Reflection: *“Sabbath ceasing means to cease not only from work itself, but also from the need to accomplish and be productive, from the worry and tension that accompany our modern criterion of efficiency, from our efforts to be in control of our lives as if we were God, from our possessiveness and our enculturation, and, finally, from the humdrum and meaninglessness that result when life is pursued without the Lord at the center of it all.”*

—Marva J. Dawn

Understanding Sabbath

One can understand Sabbath in several capacities - textbook definition, theological concepts or scriptural references. The textbook definition of Sabbath is “the day of the week when members of some religious groups do not work”. While this is true for many in our faith tradition it does not get us to a place of understanding Sabbath as a spiritual practice and a path to discernment. During this study we will explore what Sabbath is not and what it is throughout Scripture, within our community, and as a way of living.

So, if the textbook definition does not help us get to a place where Sabbath is practiced, we will begin looking at several theological concepts of Sabbath. We’ll first hear from The Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest, professor, author and theologian here in the States. In her *Works of the People* video “Sabbath as Death” she discusses why we are all here.

Watch the video then continue the session.

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/voj216wkz1tiq3t/Sabbath A Practice In Death.mpg?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/voj216wkz1tiq3t/Sabbath_A_Practice_In_Death.mpg?dl=0)

In this video, you heard Barbara Brown Taylor speak to our culture of “producing” and how counter-cultural it is to have a day each week when our worth is not determined by what we produce. Rather, on the Sabbath we are reminded of our worth in simply being God’s beloved children. If we move from seeing Sabbath as merely a day where we do not work and understand the risks of not producing we can begin to open ourselves to seeing our purpose in the world to be rooted in being made in God’s image and not just what we produce in the world.

With Sabbath practices operating as less as a day without work and more about our belovedness it can be a harder concept to imagine about than we originally thought. Perhaps the closest many of us have come to a practice of Sabbath is taking a vacation. And while Sabbath is not vacation it can be a helpful reference point for what it looks like

to rest and be in a space of breath from work, daily/weekly tasks, and the hustle of schedules. To go on vacation often means we work harder right before departure so we can fully unplug from our responsibilities and be present on vacation. If our closest understanding of Sabbath is vacation then it makes sense that we view it as something we can do once we have time to fit it in our schedule, rather than a regular practice of connecting with our purpose as beloved children of God.

With the dominant cultures in the United States focused on productivity a struggle for many of us is how we live within this society while seeking a spiritual practice of Sabbath. It can become more complex when we realize the practice of taking vacation can be frowned upon in our society yet can often be the only practice of Sabbath one may get to take. This has led to folks navigating Sabbath in new ways because the collective practices of taking the same day off and attending church is not possible in today's product-driven society.

Taking these realities into account we can begin to see that taking a day off each week may not be the practice of Sabbath we all can attain. It means we have the chance to imagine and wrestle with what Sabbath practice(s) help us connect to our identity of God's beloveds. Thus, Sabbath can be a portion of the day, a whole day of the week, a portion of the month, or a time or two a year. When there are complexities to our spiritual practices, we can see them as barriers that hold us back or we can look at practices as a chance to see how the Spirit is moving in this time and in this place, meeting us with new opportunities for spiritual formation.

Throughout Scripture we learn how Sabbath is rooted in communal practices while engaged by individuals. Sabbath was established as a practice of disrupting production in order to care for each other and connect with the Divine. Sabbath, as we learn from Jesus, was made for creation not the other way around. Sabbath was designed for creation to connect with its creator. It is the practice to root us in what God has created us for and revive us to breathe in the breath of God so that we can live out the Gospel in the days to come.

If we build upon the textbook definition and Barbara Brown Taylor's theological understanding and add in the commentary from Marva Dawn, we can begin to explore how Sunday practices of Church School and Worship come together in our understanding of Sabbath. In Marva Dawn's video "Missing the Joy" from *Work of the People* she explores what it means for us to not take rest and how prioritizing Sabbath is a healthy practice for our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing.

Watch the video then continue the session.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/844kglozgow3yge/Missing_The_Joy.mpg?dl=0

Marva Dawn addresses some of the myths we might hold around what it means to take Sabbath. She also brings in a practical lens of what it can mean for the Body of Christ as

the Church. With her video, and the material covered above we invite you to use the empty space below to choose one or two of the questions in the video to **reflect upon**:

- Has church just become frenetic activity on the Sabbath?
- Isn't a day off for "weak" people?
- Isn't "play" just for children?
- What does creativity have to do with salvation? (salvation in Hebrew means "plenty of space")
- Are we finding more rest?
- Are we missing the joy of keeping the Sabbath?

While your understanding of Sabbath may not become clear in this session that's more than fine, it wasn't expected to. Our hope is that we can begin to see that Sabbath is not something we do in order to check off our to-do list and that it is going to look different for many of us. And while Sabbath is not a "one size fits all" practice, we do wish for all of us to be able to glean that Sabbath is designed for us to restore our understanding of our identity as God's beloveds and as a chance for us to replenish our connection with God, self, and others.

In the coming weeks, we will explore how Scripture, theology, and ritual expand our understanding of Sabbath. Within each of these sessions we will discover how Sabbath can be a spiritual practice that allows us to discern God's invitation for our lives as a community of faith.

Closing Prayer: *Blessing in the Chaos* by Jan Richardson

To all that is chaotic
in you,
let there come silence.

Let there be
a calming
of the clamoring,
a stilling
of the voices that
have laid their claim
on you,
that have made their
home in you,

that go with you
even to the
holy places
but will not
let you rest,
will not let you
hear your life
with wholeness
or feel the grace
that fashioned you.

Let what distracts you
cease.
Let what divides you
cease.
Let there come an end
to what diminishes
and demeans,
and let depart
all that keeps you
in its cage.

Let there be
an opening
into the quiet
that lies beneath
the chaos,
where you find
the peace
you did not think
possible
and see what shimmers
within the storm.

Session Two

Sabbath in Scripture: Part One

Supplies needed for this Session: Pen for reflections sections. Bible if you wish to look up the texts in your own bible.

Opening Reflection: *“[We are invited to] experience the wholeness and joy that come from observing God’s order for life—a rhythm of working six days and setting apart one day for rest, worship, festivity, and relationships. Dawn develops a four-part pattern for keeping the Sabbath: (1) ceasing—not only from work but also from productivity, anxiety, worry, possessiveness, and so on; (2) resting— of the body as well as the mind, emotions, and spirit—a wholistic rest; (3) embracing—deliberately taking hold of Christian values, of our calling in life, of the wholeness God offers us; (4) feasting—celebrating God and his goodness in individual and corporate worship as well as feasting with beauty, music, food, affection, and social interaction.”*

- from *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*
by Marva Dawn

Narrative Arc of Sabbath:

We know that the concept and practice of Sabbath comes from Scripture, but do we know the texts, collective stories, and overarching narrative of what Scripture teaches us about Sabbath? Sabbath is a word we can use in church and assume we all know where we get it from in Scripture, but it may not be something we have read about in some time. During this session we will begin our reading and re-readings of what Scripture teaches us about Sabbath.

To begin we will take a look at what we remember from Scripture as it pertains to Sabbath:

What do you recall Scripture expressing or teaching about Sabbath?

What are the stories throughout Scripture that come to mind when thinking of Sabbath?

What are your feelings about Sabbath you recall these stories in Scripture?

Sabbath at Creation

For many a common touchpoint in Scripture when asked about Sabbath is the story of creation, whether that be the creation story of Genesis 1 or Genesis 2. Sabbath is foundational to our creation, in either creation account. As we read Genesis 2:1-3, in various translations, below take notice of what words are used to describe Sabbath and how each translation connects to or expands your understanding of the role of Sabbath for God and creation.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.”

- *New Revised Standard Version*

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”

- *King James Version*

“So the heavens and the earth and everything else were created. By the seventh day God had finished his work, and so he rested. God blessed the seventh day and made it special because on that day he rested from his work.”

- *Contemporary English Version*

“So now you see how the Creator swept into being the spangled heavens, the earth, and all their hosts in six days. On the seventh day—with the canvas of the cosmos completed—God paused from His labor and rested. Thus God blessed day seven and made it special—an open time for pause and restoration, a sacred zone of Sabbath-keeping, because God rested from all the work He had done in creation that day.”

- *The Voice*

Reflective Questions:

What does it mean that God rested after creating the heavens and the earth?

If God rested, what does it mean for us in our productive drive society to find ways to practice Sabbath moments?

What emotions or physical reactions do you have to this story of God resting following the creation of the heavens and the earth?

Sabbath as Commandment

Not only is Sabbath rooted in the very beginnings of creation, it is also one of the Ten Commandments that God gives to the Hebrew people as a covenant for living. As you read these translations of Exodus 20:8-11 think about how “keeping the Sabbath” is as important as not murdering another person or not stealing or not worshipping another god.

“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.”

- *New Revised Standard Version*

“Remember to observe the Sabbath as a holy day. Six days a week are for your daily duties and your regular work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest before the Lord your God. On that day you are to do no work of any kind, nor shall your son, daughter, or slaves—whether men or women—or your cattle or your house guests. For in six days the Lord made the heaven, earth, and sea, and everything in them, and rested the seventh day; so he blessed the Sabbath day and set it aside for rest.”

- *The Living Bible*

“Remember that the Sabbath Day belongs to me. You have six days when you can do your work, but the seventh day of each week belongs to me, your God. No one is to work on that day—not you, your children, your slaves, your animals, or the foreigners who live in your towns. In six days I made the sky, the earth, the oceans, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That’s why I made the Sabbath a special day that belongs to me.”

- *Contemporary English Version*

“You and your family are to remember the Sabbath Day; set it apart, and keep it holy. You have six days to do all your work, but the seventh day is to be different; it is the Sabbath of the Eternal your God. Keep it holy by not doing any work—not you, your sons, your daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, or any outsiders living among you. For the Eternal made the heavens above, the earth below, the seas, and all the creatures in them in six days. Then, on the seventh day, He rested. That is why He blessed the Sabbath Day and made it sacred.”

- *The Voice*

Reflective Questions:

Does the Sabbath operating as a commandment influence how you feel about its importance in your life?

If the commandments indicate how we can live well with one another, what does it mean to you that “keeping the Sabbath” is included?

The Hebrew people had been released from slave labor where they had to overly produce for Pharaoh and once they were free they were given the commandment to observe the Sabbath. How does this context of where the Hebrew people were before they were given the fourth commandment influence your understanding of Sabbath?

Closing Prayer:

A modified quote from *Sabbath as resistance: Saying NO to the CULTURE OF NOW* by Walter Brueggemann

God of Sabbath rest, may we acknowledge that You and Your People are not commodities to be dispatched for endless production and so dispatched, as we used to say, as "hands" in the service of a command economy. Rather we are subjects situated in an economy of neighborliness. And every time we remember the divine rest You took may we remember the neighborliness we are created for. May we find our identity in being Your beloved and in loving our neighbor more than we find it in being a workaholic, anxious about that which we cannot control, or believing the work will fall to pieces if we take a rest from it. And in all that we do let us be replenished in our Sabbath rest found in You.

Amen.

Session Three Sabbath in Scripture: Part two

Supplies Needed for This Session: Pen for reflections sections. Bible if you wish to look up the text in your own bible.

Opening Reflection: *“If there is no Sabbath — no regular and commanded not-working, not-talking — we soon become totally absorbed in what we are doing and saying, and God’s work is either forgotten or marginalized. When we work we are most god-like, which means that it is in our work that it is easier to develop god-pretensions. Un-Sabbathed, our work becomes the entire context in which we define our lives. We lose God-consciousness, God-awareness, sightings of resurrection. We lose the capacity to sing “this is my fathers world” and end up chirping little self-centred ditties about what we are doing and feeling. The Most difficult command to keep, a most difficult practice to cultivate. It is one of the most abused and distorted practices of the Christians life. Many through the centuries have suffered much under oppressive Sabbath regimes. And more than a few of us have been among the oppressors.”*

- Eugene H. Peterson

Keeping Jubilee

We’ve talked about what Sabbath can mean for us as individuals who take a day of rest (or moments of rest in a day, week, month, year), how God rested at creation, and that keeping the Sabbath is one of the commandments. All of which can be complex in and of themselves, yet there is an even larger concept Sabbath that impacted the generations of Hebrew people. It’s the Sabbath concept of Jubilee.

In Leviticus 25 we learn about the year of Jubilee – the year at the end of seven cycles of sabbatical years, focusing on ownership and management of Land. It is not clear if the year of Jubilee takes place during the 49th year or the 50th year. It is a practice of releasing debts, freeing those enslaved, and returning land to its original owners. As you read through this chapter in Leviticus you are invited to explore how jubilee would be observed in the States, within Colorado, and within the faith community.

The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for the LORD: you shall not

sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its Sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property. When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another. When you buy from your neighbor, you shall pay only for the number of years since the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop years. If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price; for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God.

You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. Should you ask, “What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?” I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years. When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating from the old crop; until the ninth year, when its produce comes in, you shall eat the old. The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.

If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. If the person has no one to redeem it, but then prospers and finds sufficient means to do so, the years since its sale shall be computed and the difference shall be refunded to the person to whom it was sold, and the property shall be returned. But if there are not sufficient means to recover it, what was sold shall remain with the purchaser until the year of jubilee; in the jubilee it shall be released, and the property shall be returned.

If anyone sells a dwelling house in a walled city, it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale; the right of redemption shall be one year. If it is not redeemed before a full year has elapsed, a house that is in a walled city shall pass in perpetuity to the purchaser, throughout the generations; it shall not be released in the jubilee. But houses in villages that have no walls around them shall be classed as open country; they may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee. As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites shall forever have the right of redemption of the houses in the cities belonging to them. Such property as may be redeemed from the Levites—houses sold in a city belonging to them—shall be released in the jubilee; because the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the people of Israel. But the open land around their cities may not be sold; for that is their possession for all time.

If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers. They shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold. You shall not rule over them with harshness, but shall fear your God. As for the male and female slaves whom you may have, it is from the nations around you that you may acquire male and female slaves. You may also acquire them from among the aliens residing with you, and from their families that are with you, who have been born in your land; and they may be your property. You may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property. These you may treat as slaves, but as for your fellow Israelites, no one shall rule over the other with harshness.

If resident aliens among you prosper, and if any of your kin fall into difficulty with one of them and sell themselves to an alien, or to a branch of the alien's family, after they have sold themselves they shall have the right of redemption; one of their brothers may redeem them, or their uncle or their uncle's son may redeem them, or anyone of their family who is of their own flesh may redeem them; or if they prosper they may redeem themselves. They shall compute with the purchaser the total from the year when they sold themselves to the alien until the jubilee year; the price of the sale shall be applied to the number of years: the time they

were with the owner shall be rated as the time of a hired laborer. If many years remain, they shall pay for their redemption in proportion to the purchase price; and if few years remain until the jubilee year, they shall compute thus: according to the years involved they shall make payment for their redemption. As a laborer hired by the year they shall be under the alien's authority, who shall not, however, rule with harshness over them in your sight. And if they have not been redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children with them shall go free in the jubilee year. For to me the people of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

- *New Revised Standard Version*

Reflective Questions:

Whether you were familiar with the concept of Jubilee before this session or this was your first time to learn of it, what are your reactions to the practice of Jubilee?

At the beginning of Leviticus 25 we hear about the Sabbath year - this was when Israel would allow the land to rest from planting, plowing, and harvest - what would it look like for us today to practice a year where we did not produce anything but could consume what the earth produced naturally and what we had stored from the previous six years?

Why do you think the rest of land, the forgiving of debts, and returning of land mattered to the way and life of the Israelite people?

What would it mean for your own life if you had land rest, were forgiven your debts, and land was returned to you?

Is the concept of Jubilee something we could practice within our Sabbath practices, if so how might that happen?

Closing Prayer: Prayer by Pastor Morgan

*God of Grace and Mercy,
It is easy for us to dismiss the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee
because we see the barriers before we allow ourselves to see the
possibilities. Help us to dance with the Spirit to open our imaginations to the
possibilities only You can make possible. Give us friends who aid us in
dreaming of what could be and free us from getting stuck in the barriers to
seeing new realities. Release us from the harsh realities of overworked
people and land, the weight of debts, and the generational impacts of
overconsumption. May we see the teachings of the Sabbath year and the
year of Jubilee as Divine invitations to bring the Kin-dom of God here, today.
Amen.*

Session Four Sabbath in Scripture: Part Three

Supplies Needed for This Session: Pen for reflections sections. Bible if you wish to look up the text in your own bible.

Opening Reflection: *“The righteousness that God is looking for is expressed in mercy. Righteous people show kindness and concern for those in serious need. Jesus’ religious opponents had lost sight of this. For them, zeal for Sabbath meant establishing limits and boundaries on one’s actions. Careful observation of these boundaries showed your zeal. Jesus understood that true Sabbath observance was grounded in mercy. It wasn’t merely a matter of boundaries and limitations. It was meant to be a gift. Not only was it a gift that God gave to humanity, it was also a gift that people were to give to one another. Whether its Sabbath or any other practice, we know we have deviated from God’s intention when our observance requires us to withhold kindness toward those in serious need. Jesus understood this. His disciples were hungry. They needed refreshment. So Jesus showed them kindness by encouraging them to eat. The man with the withered hand needed healing. His hand needed to be renewed. So Jesus showed him kindness by healing him.”*

- Ronald D. Peters

Sabbath as a Teaching of Jesus

Jesus teaches us that Sabbath was made for humanity and not that humanity was made for Sabbath. Jesus builds upon the understandings of how Sabbath was shared with the Hebrew people and how it was grounded in relationships. As Sabbath becomes an issue of legality Jesus redirects people to the purpose of Sabbath’s creation. As you read these words from Jesus think through how this teaching about the purpose of Sabbath’s creation impact your practice.

Read the three accounts of this teaching from Jesus from the Synoptic (similar view) Gospels to learn how folks initially reacted to this teaching.

Matthew 12:1-8

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than

the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

-NRSV

Mark 2:23-28

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

-NRSV

Luke 6:1-5

One Sabbath while Jesus was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus answered, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?" Then he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

-NRSV

Reflective Questions:

How is Jesus fulfilling the commandment about observing the Sabbath with this new teaching?

If Sabbath is made for us can Sabbath exist if we do not practice it?

Have Sabbath practices in your own life ever become legalistic, or have others made Sabbath practices a requirement for you to a point it felt as if they were legalistic? How did you remove the legalistic nature or is it something you still find to be true for you in your Sabbath practices?

Sabbath as a Day of Observance

There are variations among differing faith traditions, and denominations within a faith tradition, observe the Sabbath. For example, Jewish Shabbat is from sundown on Friday until the appearance of three stars in the sky on Saturday night. Seventh-day Adventists also observe the Sabbath at that time. For Catholics, Orthodox Christians, many denominations within the Protestant faith, and Latter-Day Saints Sabbath is observed on Sunday. Some Pentecostal traditions will observe the Sabbath upon the new moon. There are also those who observe a Spiritual Sabbath which upholds Sabbath principles but is not observed in community on Saturday or Sunday, rather designated to a chosen day of the week, and some of their Sabbath practices may or may not be with other people.

All of these observances are rooted in Scriptural teachings and when Prophets, Leaders, Jesus, or Disciples obeyed the teachings. For those of us in the Baptist tradition, other than Baptist Adventists, we have traditionally observed Sabbath on Sunday by attending worship. There are not strict observances to not working (physical labor or effort, or employment) within our tradition but each faith community or church is able to guide how Sabbath is observed because of our belief in the local autonomy of each congregation.

As you read three translations of Acts 20: 7-12, think through what it means for you to practice Sabbath as a day of observance. This particular text has been used by various denominations and branches of Christianity to see Sunday as the day of observance.

On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight. There were many lamps in the room upstairs where we were meeting. A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer. Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground three floors below and was picked up dead. But Paul went down, and bending over him took him in his arms, and said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." Then Paul went upstairs, and after he had broken bread and eaten, he continued to converse with them until dawn; then he left. Meanwhile they had taken the boy away alive and were not a little comforted.

- *New Revised Standard Version*

On the first day of the week, we gathered with the local believers to share in the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching to them, and since he was leaving the next day, he kept talking until midnight. The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps. As Paul spoke on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became very drowsy. Finally, he fell sound asleep and dropped three stories to his death below. Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. "Don't worry," he said, "he's alive!" Then they all went back upstairs, shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together. Paul continued talking to them until dawn, and then he left. Meanwhile, the young man was taken home alive and well, and everyone was greatly relieved.

- *New Living Translation*

The Sunday night before our Monday departure, we gathered to celebrate the breaking of bread.

Imagine you are celebrating with them:

We are in an upstairs room, with the gentle light and shadows cast by several lamps. Paul is carrying on an extended dialogue with the believers, taking advantage of every moment since we plan to leave at first light. The conversation stretches on until midnight. A young fellow named Eutychus, seeking some fresh air, moves to an open window. Paul keeps on talking. Eutychus perches in the open window itself. Paul keeps talking. Eutychus drifts off to sleep. Paul continues talking until Eutychus, now overcome by deep sleep, drops out of the window and falls three stories to the ground, where he is found dead. Paul joins us downstairs, bends over, and takes Eutychus in his arms.

Paul: "It's OK. He's alive again."

Then Paul goes back upstairs, celebrates the breaking of bread, and—just as you might guess—keeps on conversing until first light. Then he leaves. (I should add that Eutychus had been taken home long before, his friends more than a little relieved that the boy was alive!)

- *The Voice*

Reflective Questions:

Do you have an understanding of what it means for you to have a day of rest? If so, what does it look like for you and if not, what keeps you from knowing what a day of rest would mean for you?

Would you align more with a Spiritual Sabbath than a specific day of Sabbath observance? What are the gifts to either of these observances?

Why do you believe the day of the week to observe Sabbath matters to different expressions of faith? Does it matter to you in your own practices?

With our Sabbath day of observance being Sunday does it feel like Sundays are Sabbath rest or practices for you? Why or why not?

Closing Prayer: Modified quote from Eugene H. Peterson

*God of Creation, God of Sabbath,
Help us to keep the Sabbath,
So we can begin to see creation not as somewhere
to get away from our ordinary lives,
but a place to frame an attentiveness to our lives.
Amen.*

Session Five Sabbath in Scripture: Part Four

Supplies Needed for This Session: Pen for reflections sections. Bible if you wish to look up the text in your own bible.

Opening Reflection: *Shabbat comes with its own holiness; we enter not simply a day, but an atmosphere. My father cites the Zohar: the Sabbath is the name of God. We are within the Sabbath rather than the Sabbath being within us. For my father, the question is how to perceive that holiness: not how much to observe, but how to observe. Strict adherence to the laws regulating Sabbath observance doesn't suffice; the goal is creating the Sabbath as a foretaste of paradise. The Sabbath is a metaphor for paradise and a testimony to God's presence; in our prayers, we anticipate a messianic era that will be a Sabbath, and each Shabbat prepares us for that experience: "Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath ... one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come." It was on the seventh day that God gave the world a soul, and "[the world's] survival depends upon the holiness of the seventh day." The task, he writes, becomes how to convert time into eternity, how to fill our time with spirit: "Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else.*

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Sabbath as Part of the New Covenant

It is clear from our study thus far that Sabbath is an important part of the covenant of God with God's people in the Old Testament and that it was important in Jesus' ministry as well. To understand how Sabbath remains an important part of God's *new* covenant in Christ during the days of the early church and even still for us today, read Hebrews 4:1-11 in the following translations/paraphrases:

"Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "As in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest," though his works were finished at the foundation of the world.

For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this place it says, "They shall not enter my rest." Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who

formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he sets a certain day—"today"—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day.

So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs."

New Revised Standard Version

For as long, then, as that promise of resting in him pulls us on to God's goal for us, we need to be careful that we're not disqualified. We received the same promises as those people in the wilderness, but the promises didn't do them a bit of good because they didn't receive the promises with faith. If we believe, though, we'll experience that state of resting. But not if we don't have faith. Remember that God said,

Exasperated, I vowed,
"They'll never get where they're going,
never be able to sit down and rest."

God made that vow, even though he'd finished his part before the foundation of the world. Somewhere it's written, "God rested the seventh day, having completed his work," but in this other text he says, "They'll never be able to sit down and rest." So this promise has not yet been fulfilled. Those earlier ones never did get to the place of rest because they were disobedient. God keeps renewing the promise and setting the date as today, just as he did in David's psalm, centuries later than the original invitation:

Today, please listen,
don't turn a deaf ear . . .

And so this is still a live promise. It wasn't canceled at the time of Joshua; otherwise, God wouldn't keep renewing the appointment for "today." The promise of "arrival" and "rest" is still there for God's people. God himself is at rest. And at the end of the journey we'll surely rest with God. So let's keep at it and eventually arrive at the place of rest, not drop out through some sort of disobedience.

The Message

That's why, as long as that promise of entering God's rest remains open to us, we should be careful that none of us seem to fall short ourselves. Those people in the wilderness heard God's good news, just as we have heard it, but the message they heard didn't do them any good since it wasn't combined with faith. We who believe are entering into salvation's rest, as He said,

That is why I swore in anger they would never enter salvation's rest,

even though God's works were finished from the very creation of the world. (For didn't God say that on the seventh day of creation He rested from all His works? And doesn't God say in the psalm that they would never enter into salvation's rest?)

[There is much discussion of "rest" in what we are calling the First Testament of Scripture. God rests on the seventh day after creation. In the Ten Commandments God commands His people to remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy, and do no work. By letting go of daily work, they declared their absolute dependence on God to meet their needs. We do not live by the work of our hands, but by the bread and Word that God supplies.

But a greater rest is yet to come when we will be released from all suffering, and when we will inherit the earth. Jesus embodies this greater rest that still awaits the people of God, a people fashioned through obedience and faith. If some of us fail to enter that rest, it is because we fail to answer the call.]

So if God prepared a place of rest, and those who were given the good news didn't enter because they chose disobedience over faith, then it remains open for us to enter. Once again, God has fixed a day; and that day is "today," as David said so much later when he wrote in the psalm quoted earlier:

Today, if you listen to His voice,
Don't harden your hearts.

Now if Joshua had been able to lead those who followed him into God's rest, would God then have spoken this way? There still remains a place of rest, a true Sabbath, for the people of God because those who enter into salvation's rest lay down their labors in the same way that God entered into a Sabbath rest from His.

So let us move forward to enter this rest, so that none of us fall into the kind of faithless disobedience that prevented them from entering.

The Voice

Reflection on the Scripture

"So then, a Sabbath rest (sabbatismos) still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs."

- Hebrews 4:9-11

Hebrews 4:9 says, "There remains therefore *a rest* for the people of God." The Greek word for *rest* here is *sabbatismos*, and it is the only time this word for *rest* is used in Hebrews 3 and 4; everywhere else the word *rest* is used, it is translated from the Greek word

katapausis. In fact, the word *sabbatismos* (in Hebrews 4:9) is the only New Testament occurrence of this word!

Why does this matter? What's the difference between *katapausis* and *sabbatismos*?

Katapausis refers to a final spiritual rest or repose (aka: death), or metaphorically - "the heavenly blessedness in which God dwells, and of which he has promised to make persevering believers in Christ partakers after the toils and trials of life on earth are ended."

Sabbatismos refers the kind of Sabbath rest we've been talking about in this whole study thusfar, the cessation from work on a weekly basis.

Hebrews is uniting these concepts to remind us that they are inextricably related, and yet distinct. The experience of earthly/present 'Sabbath rest' points to our *future* 'resting' (*katapausis*) reality in which those 'who have believed are entering' (4:3, 11). Physical Sabbath-keeping (*sabbatismos*) on the part of the new covenant believer epitomizes cessation from 'works' and commemorates God's rest at creation (Hebrews 4:4 = Genesis 2:2) and it also manifests faith in the salvation provided by Christ.

Though it points to our final rest with God after a life well-lived, we cannot just say that Sabbath rest will come when we die, or that rest is something that we do not need here on this earth. Present-day Sabbath rest is critical to who we are as a people of faith while we are living on this earth. In Hebrews, we hear Sabbath-keeping affirmed as part of the new covenant of believers. Which means - it still matters for you and me!

The implication of the connection between *katapausis* and *sabbatismos* is that when we practice Sabbath, we are giving visible witness to the world of the salvation we believe that we have in Christ. Nothing else in our spiritual lives demonstrates the salvation of our faith as vividly as Sabbath-keeping. Conversely, when we neglect Sabbath, we are also dismissing the impact and witness of the salvation we believe we have in Christ. Our faith is about what God does for us through love and grace, not what we do to earn God's favor. *Another way to say this is:* To stop the "cycle of producing and production" in our lives for a time when we keep Sabbath is to remind ourselves (and the world) that it is not we who work our way into salvation with Christ, but rather Christ who extends to us salvation by grace and by God's doing.

This Scripture invites us to consider the connection between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant: "Hebrews 4:3-11 affirms that physical 'Sabbath rest' (*sabbatismos*) is the weekly outward manifestation of the inner experience of spiritual rest (*katapausis*) in which the final rest is experienced already 'today' (4:7). Thus 'Sabbath rest' combines in itself creation-commemoration, salvation-experience, and *eschaton* [end-time] anticipation as the community of faith moves forward toward the final consummation of total restoration and rest," (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, pp. 855-856).

Even while the book of Hebrews may be a little heady and theological, what this Scripture does beautifully is weave together three themes of rest—the rest promised to Israel from enemies and oppressors (a communal rest that honors neighbor), the physical rest of the weekly Sabbath (an individual rest that honors self), and the spiritual rest through Christ (an eternal rest that we will experience after death).

Sabbath is important for the same reasons it always has been, and yet it is also important because it speaks to a new reality we have now that Christ has come. We need rest and rejuvenation in this earthly life and that rest gives us a glimpse or a momentary experience of what our eternal rest with God is like. Sabbath is about the “here and now” and the “future and not yet.” The take-away to this theological exploration of Sabbath in Hebrews is that Sabbath-keeping is still necessary for the people of God, the New Testament Church....and, for us! Even more, keeping Sabbath is a powerful and public witness of our faith in Christ and our salvation. It is a concrete action (or inaction) that demonstrates our faith to the world.

Key Source: "There Remains a Sabbath-Rest for the People of God" by the UCG

Reflective Questions:

What thoughts and feelings come up when you think about connecting Sabbath as daily rest to Sabbath as eternal rest?

Why might this connection between Sabbath in the “here and now” and Sabbath in the “eternal future” be meaningful to the early church and/or people today who are also experiencing oppression, discrimination, or subjugation?

Having learned more about Hebrews 4, revisit the opening reflection quote by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:

“The goal is creating the Sabbath as a foretaste of paradise. The Sabbath is a metaphor for paradise and a testimony to God’s presence...It was on the seventh day that God gave the world a soul, and ‘[the world’s] survival depends upon the holiness of the seventh day.’ The task, he writes, becomes how to convert time into eternity, how to fill our time with spirit: ‘Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else.’

The notions of salvation and eternity can often be abstract concepts for us. How do you understand the connection between our everyday understanding of practicing Sabbath and the eternal rest we will one day have with God? What is the significance of having a “foretaste of paradise”?

Do you resonate with the notion that you have a “seed of eternity planted in your soul”? Why or why not?

If you do resonate with the concept, what does it look like for you to nurture that seed of eternity in your soul?

This section explores how practicing Sabbath can be a crucial part of the public witness of our faith. What are the ways that practicing Sabbath communicates the message of God's kin-dom here on earth?

Closing Prayer:

As you prepare to close in prayer, you are invited to take a few deep breaths. Then, imagining your soul as holding a “seed of eternity” that needs nurturing and space for growth, place your hands open (palms facing up) on your lap. Receive these words. Receive God’s Spirit. Receive a moment of renewal.

A Blessing For One Who Is Exhausted by John O’Donohue

When the rhythm of the heart
becomes hectic,
Time takes on the strain until it breaks;
Then all the unattended stress falls in
On the mind like an endless,
increasing weight.

The light in the mind becomes dim.
Things you could take in your stride before
Now become laborsome events of will.

Weariness invades your spirit.
Gravity begins falling inside you,
Dragging down every bone.

The tide you never valued has gone out.
And you are marooned on unsure ground.
Something within you has closed down;
And you cannot push yourself back to life.

You have been forced to enter empty
time.
The desire that drove you has
relinquished.
There is nothing else to do now but rest
And patiently learn to receive the self
You have forsaken in the race of days.

At first your thinking will darken
And sadness take over like listless
weather.

The flow of unwept tears will frighten you.

You have traveled too fast
over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles
you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.
Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of color
That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time
in the world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your
heart
And the joy that dwells far within slow
time.

Concordance on Sabbath in Scripture

To continue studying or for future reference, the texts throughout Scripture that speak of/or reference Sabbath are listed below.

TANAKH (OLD TESTAMENT)

Genesis 1:1-2:4; 8:4. **Exodus** 16:23-30; 20:8-11; 31:12-17; 35:2-3. **Leviticus** 16:31; 19; 23; 24:8; 25:2-6; 26:2, 34-35, 43. **Numbers** 15:32-36; 28-29. **Deuteronomy** 5:12-15. **Second Kings** 4:23; 11:5-9; 16. **Isaiah** 1:13; 56:1-8, 13-14; 66:22-23. **Jeremiah** 17:19-27. **Ezekiel** 20:12-26, 22:8, 23-31; 23:38; 44:24; 45:17; 46:1-12. **Hosea** 2:11. **Amos** 8:5. **Psalms** 92. **Lamentations** 1:7; 2:6. **Nehemiah** 9:14; 10:31-33; 13:15-22. **First Chronicles** 9:32; 23:31. **Second Chronicles** 2:4; 8:12-13; 23:4-8; 31:3; 36:21.

NEW TESTAMENT (Gospels are grouped by story)

Matthew (Mt) - Mark (Mk) – Luke (Lk) – John (Jn)

Mk 1:21-39, Lk 4:31-43; **Mt** 12:1-8, Mk 2:23-28, Lk 6:1-5; **Mt** 12:9-21, Mk 3:1-6, Lk 6:6-11; **Mk** 6:1-6, Lk 4:16-30; **Mt** 27, Mk 15, Lk 23, Jn 19; **Mt** 28, Lk 24, Jn 20.

Matthew 24. **John** 5:9-18; 7:22-23; 9. **Luke** 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 18:9-14.

Acts 1:12; 2; 13:13-45; 15:19-29, 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; 20. **Romans** 14:5-6. **First Corinthians** 11:1; 16:1-2. **Galatians** 4:10-11. **Colossians** 2:9-17. **Hebrews** 4:1-11. **Revelation** 1:10; 20:1-10.

APOCRYPHA

First Esdras 1:58; 5:52. **First Maccabees** 1:39-45; 2:32-41; 9:34-49; 10:34. **Second Maccabees** 5:25-26; 6:6-11; 8:26-28; 12:38-39; 15:1-4. **Judith** 8:6; 10:2.

Session Six What is Your Theology of Sabbath?

Supplies Needed for this Session: A pen for writing your theology.

Opening Reflection: *Use the following video, God's Governance by Lisa Sharon Harper, as your opening reflection.*

https://www.dropbox.com/s/3bhw298mnplr1aw/God%27s_Governance.mpg?dl=0

Lisa Sharon Harper creates a theology of God's governance from Scripture. She gives us a great example of how to begin to distill truths about God and what we believe from the witness of Scripture and personal experience.

What is Theology

Over the past several sessions we have reflected upon a few key moments throughout Scripture that teach us how Sabbath drew God's people into relationship with God and with others. Each of the Scriptures shared reveal something different about Sabbath. Before we move into creating our own theologies of Sabbath, or perhaps reviewing our theology of Sabbath, we wanted to provide you with a chance to look back over the sessions and recall what you have come to understand for yourself around what Sabbath means.

What have you learned from these biblical references to Sabbath?

Has reading these passages sparked new questions about Sabbath for you?

If you could summarize one or two key points about the biblical testimony of Sabbath, what would you say?

As we begin this session, it might be helpful to define theology - the study of the nature of God and religious beliefs. It may seem that theology is reserved for those in the ivory tower or with the title of pastor, but we are all theologians. As Baptists, we are invited to establish our theology on various life experiences and how we understand God connecting to all of creation. There are various lines of theological study – biblical, systematic, practical, public – none of which we will breakdown or examine for the purposes of our study but are noted to show that people have been working out their theology since the dawn of time. Perhaps you have never thought about your theology in a formal way or maybe you have, either way you will be able to explore your theology of Sabbath in this study.

In the next session we will walk through the practical pieces to observing Sabbath. Before we get to that session, we wanted to explore our theology of Sabbath. Not because our theology is more important than the practical rituals or markers of observing Sabbath, but because we can hold ideas about what Sabbath means without seeing how those beliefs align with our practices. Since some of the barriers to how we connect to Sabbath practices are rooted in theology - conscious or unconscious - we are beginning with theology.

If theology is the study of religious beliefs and Sabbath is one of those beliefs, what do you believe about Sabbath? While our lives will reveal that observing Sabbath is not always practical or feasible, we invite you to set those concerns or reasons aside as you reflect on these questions and engage your theology.

- Does it have to be practiced in community in order to be Sabbath?
- Is there a difference between personal or communal Sabbath observance?
- Are there specific acts or behaviors that are required for Sabbath to be observed?
- What is the underlying purpose of Sabbath and if we don't observe that purpose does it matter?
- Are there consequences – positive or negative – to observing or not observing Sabbath?
- Is there an ethic to how you practice Sabbath? Does that match how you believe God to be or what you believe Jesus teaches us about the Good News?
- What is your experience of Sabbath?

- What are your faith tradition's teachings of Sabbath?
- What have you gleaned from Scripture about Sabbath?
- Does observing or practicing Sabbath make sense to your faith journey?
- How does Sabbath create meaning in your relationship with God, self, and others?

Reflective Question

Take some time to write out your initial theology of Sabbath for yourself.

We will return to this invitation after reading a few reflections from others within our faith tradition about what Sabbath means to them.

Sabbath Rest & Renewal

As you think about your own theology of Sabbath, sometimes it is helpful to read thoughts that might inspire or spark your own thinking. Here are some Scriptures and quotes about Sabbath to get your creative and theological juices flowing.

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
 I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
 The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls,
 because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland,
 to give drink to my people, my chosen,
 the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

- Isaiah 43:19-21

"Be still and know that I am God."

- Psalm 46:10

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your

span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

- Matthew 6:25-34

Quotes related to Sabbath

"Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rests in Thee."

—Augustine of Hippo

"To gain control of the world of space is certainly one of our tasks. The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time. There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern."

— Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

"The Sabbath is the most precious present mankind has received from the treasure house of God. All week we think: The spirit is too far away, and we succumb to spiritual absenteeism, or at best we pray: Send us a little of Thy spirit. On the Sabbath the spirit stands and pleads: Accept all excellence from me ..."

— Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

"He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life. He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh day we try to dominate the self."

— Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

“The Sabbath is entirely independent of the month and unrelated to the moon. Its date is not determined by any event in nature, such as the new moon, but by the act of creation. Thus the essence of the Sabbath is completely detached from the world of space. The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.”

— Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

“The savings bank of human existence is the weekly Sabbath.”

—William Garden Blaikie

“Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice ‘out there’ calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice ‘in here’ calling me to be the person I was born to be.”

— Parker Palmer

“Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance.”

— Brené Brown

Reflection on Your Theology of Sabbath:

In hearing these Scriptures and quotes and reflecting upon the questions at the beginning of the chapter think about what you wrote in your theology of Sabbath. Now, would you change anything in your initial theology on Sabbath? Would you tweak a word here or there? Would you rewrite it completely? Wherever you are now we invite you to write your revised theology of Sabbath below:

Closing Prayer:

Quote by Wendell Berry

“There are, it seems, two muses:
the Muse of Inspiration,
who gives us inarticulate visions and desires,
and the Muse of Realization,
who returns again and again to say
"It is yet more difficult than you thought."
This is the muse of form.

It may be then that form serves us best
when it works as an obstruction,
to baffle us and deflect our intended course.

It may be that when we no longer know what to do,
we have come to our real work
and when we no longer know which way to go,
we have begun our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.”

Session Seven

How to Mark Sabbath or Rituals for Practicing Sabbath

Supplies Needed for this Session: Personal/family/work calendars. Pen for reflections and sketching out practical approaches to observing Sabbath.

Opening Reflection: *Rest. Move. Worship. Feast. Cease. Delight. Community. Friends. Family. Animals. Play. Pray. Give. Each of these can be avenues of practicing Sabbath. There are many ways to express the spiritual practice of Sabbath. What we need to continually explore is how we are intentionally practicing Sabbath. For each of us this will include both individual commitments and communal commitments.*

- Pastor Anne

Observing Sabbath:

Throughout the Christian tradition there exist variations of how to observe Sabbath.

- The praying of the hours is where someone prays in community or on their own during the night, at dawn, early morning, mid-morning, midday, mid-afternoon, evening, and night (2am, 5am, 7am, 9am, 12noon, 3pm, 6pm, 8pm). The praying of the hours allows Sabbath moments throughout the day and invites people to navigate the day with intentions.
- Attending worship with a faith community has been marked since the Early Church. Worship allows for communal celebration of God and a place for followers of Jesus's teachings to encourage one another to live out the Gospel. Worship is a time when one can give offerings to God and others, center their focus on doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.
- Having a feast – or Sunday afternoon lunch – with family and friends has been a practice of Sabbath since it was given in the Law of Moses. Breaking bread with others is a chance to share stories, check in on how life is going, laugh, cry, enjoy food, and spend time together. Resting from work has been another key marker of Sabbath.
- In some communities and during previous generations, all businesses were closed on Sunday and no purchasing or selling were done. Often, this was seen as work you were paid to do while work in the yard, the house, or in the community was seen as a way of celebrating Sabbath. While there have been more than the four practices of observing Sabbath noted above these four have been cornerstones in the Christian tradition.

Personal Practices of Sabbath:

Practices that have been meaningful to people throughout the ages can still be meaningful to us today. And, so can new practices. As you think about practices and rituals that will help you observe Sabbath, try to strike a balance between challenging yourself and being realistic about what you can consistently incorporate into your life.

Developing a spiritual practice can look very different from how you set goals in other areas of your life. Usually when we set a goal for something, we are working toward a desired outcome. When we embark upon a spiritual practice, we are grounding ourselves in God's presence and strengthening our ability to be in tune with the Spirit.

This is a cyclical practice, not a linear one. We never "achieve" a spiritual practice, we return to it again and again. It may be cliché, but it is true: spiritual practices are more about the journey than the destination. When we consider the practices to help us all observe Sabbath, we'll begin by reflecting upon how these practices affect us as individuals. Later we'll ask similar reflective questions about our shared communal practice of Sabbath.

Who else is affected by my Sabbath practice(s)? Spouse/partner? Children? Colleagues? How can we communicate how this change will affect all of us?

What needs to shift in my day, week, or year for this practice to be sustainable? What do I need to delegate or let go of?

While Sabbath is something you may wish to have a regular spiritual practice of there are many aspects of life that can keep you from living it out. What are those aspects of life at this time?

What emotions or reactions might come up when you are able to observe the Sabbath practice(s) you've set for yourself and what might you feel when you do not observe them?

When emotions come up that may make you feel like you have “failed” or “not achieved” this practice, remember it is not about a product, it is about continually grounding yourself in God’s presence. Since spiritual practices are not about producing an end goal when we do not practice it for a period of time we can take that missed practice as an invitation to reflect on what led us to miss it. Taking time to see if we need to adjust anything to allow it to happen in the future, and then remind ourselves we are continually invited to come back to the practice next time. In looking back, what can you glean from having missed observing a Sabbath practice?

Exploring How Sabbath Can Look in Your Life

Without worrying about, or hyper-focusing on, how it will work or fit into your life, take some time to brainstorm what practices would be most life-giving for you in helping you observe Sabbath.

If it helps, you can utilize the tables on the following pages to help you think through daily, weekly, monthly, and/or yearly practices of Sabbath.

Perhaps you are able to do a Sabbath practice a few times a year. Use the **yearly table** below to sketch out when those practices might happen, what you would need for those practices, and who you might need support from to experience these practices.

January	February	March	April
May	June	July	August
September	October	November	December

Perhaps you are able to do a Sabbath practice a few times a month. Use the **monthly table** below to sketch out when those practices might happen, what you would need for those practices, and who you might need support from to experience these practices.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Perhaps you are able to do a Sabbath practice once a week or a few times a week. Use the **weekly table** below to sketch out when those practices might happen, what you would need for those practices, and who you might need support from to experience these practices.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

Perhaps you are able to do a Sabbath practice for a moment or maybe a portion of the day. Use the **daily table** below to sketch out when those practices might happen, what you would need for those practices, and who you might need support from to experience these practices.

Morning	
Afternoon	
Evening	

Reflection on Theology as Practice

Return to your theology of Sabbath from the previous session and with the potential practices you have noted in this session, begin to create a covenant of Sabbath that will serve as a method of accountability for these life-giving changes of faith formation. As you write your covenant think about where things align or not align – how do you reconcile those pieces? Who or what might you need to help you keep these practices alive and well in your life? How might this community at Calvary be a source of support in helping you lean into these practices in ways that are life-giving?

Closing Prayer: Quote from Andrew Root

Sabbath is a period of 'trying on' God's promised completion, trying on God's future... Sabbath is the inviting of all creation to be still and imagine the coming of God."

Books to accompany the study

The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath by Mark Buchanan
Rhythms of Rest: Finding the Spirit of Sabbath in a Busy World by Shelly Miller
Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time by MaryAnn McKibbin Dana
24/6: The Power of Unplugging One Day a Week by Tiffany Shlain
Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home by Traci Smith
seven sacred pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day by Macrina Wiederkehr
Sacred Rest: Finding the Sabbath in the Everyday by Cheryl Wunderlich

Session Eight Sabbath as a Guidepost to Discernment

Supplies Needed for this Session: A pen for the reflections.

Opening Reflection: *There is no power for change greater than community discovering what it cares about.*

- Margaret J. Wheatley

Communal Practice of Sabbath as Discernment

Where do we go from here with the wisdom of Sabbath? Over the course of this study we have explored how Sabbath can guide individuals and communities in their connections with the Divine. How do we take this understanding of Sabbath and begin to allow it to guide our practices here at Calvary Baptist Church of Denver and within our personal lives? Throughout this session we will begin to put Sabbath into practice and work together to shape Sabbath practice(s) churchwide, while enhancing our understanding of what Sabbath looks like for ourselves or families.

If we believe that Sabbath is intentional – a practice with a beginning and an end, yet also is ongoing, never a destination to achieve - how do we shape our communal expressions of Sabbath together? As we explore this communal understanding of Sabbath you will be invited to use the prompts below to imagine how Calvary can support and engage in life-giving Sabbath practices throughout our community.

What does a Sabbath practice mean for committees, ministry teams, small groups, etc.?

What are everyday practices and very realistic things we can do to support one another in our Sabbath practices individually and by extension to our communal practice(s)?

Is attending church (for worship, GPS group, service opportunity, social group) a way to practice Sabbath – why or why not?

How do you already experience communal expressions of Sabbath during moments in a day, a week, a month, or a year?

When you think of Calvary supporting each other in our individual and communal practices of Sabbath what comes to mind as methods of accountability?

What would it look like to practice an annual expression of Sabbath for churchwide discernment? By Sabbath as discernment we are meaning, taking practices of Sabbath to help us explore what is working, what could be adjusted, what has completed its purpose or ministry, and what God might be calling us to that we are not doing.

If we had an annual Sabbath practice of discernment how might it help us hone our mission as a church?

How does Sabbath relate to *Open to all. Closed to none.*, if at all?

What Are Next Steps

Over the course of these past eight sessions we have explored our understandings of Sabbath through Scripture, theology, and ritual. We have also looked at what it means for us as a community to have a collective practice of Sabbath. So now that the study has come to a conclusion what do we do?

We invite all of you to join us for a churchwide exploration during our Lenten Suppers. During four Lenten Suppers we will discuss and examine what keeps us from practicing Sabbath. A quick look at the discussions for each Lenten Supper is below:

Wednesdays from 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| March 11 | How do Sundays fit into Sabbath? |
| March 18 | What fears, frustrations, or healing do we need around Sabbath? |
| March 25 | What does it mean for church committees/social or small groups to practice Sabbath together? |
| April 1 | Is Sabbath possible in this day and age, why or why not? |

During Eastertide we as the pastoral staff will be reaching out to all of committees, ministry teams, Church School class, GPS groups, and social groups to walk through a process of annual discernment within your committee, class, or group – what has worked well this past year, what would we like to change, how might a Sabbath practice be beneficial for us, what would need to make that Sabbath practice possible, etc.

Following these discussions, the pastors will meet with class, committee, and group leaders to learn how we can help with the implementation of Sabbath practices and any other areas of support you might need that came up during this process of discernment.

We will then celebrate this journey of Sabbath exploration on Pentecost, sharing what we learned, what we hope to do around Sabbath practices as a congregation, and how we can support one another in our individual practices of Sabbath.

While this study of Sabbath comes to an end, our engagement with what Sabbath means to us as individuals, families, and as a community continues. We hope that this study has allowed you to explore what Sabbath means to you and how it might be lived out within your life. We chose to not provide options or answers to realizing Sabbath to support you see that Sabbath is not a one-size-fits-all kind of practice. Sabbath is something that continues to meet us where we are and help guide us to where we are going, as we are led by the Spirit in this time of life. So wherever you have ended up with your understandings, rituals/practices, and relationship with Sabbath we pray that you are able to find new or renewed meaning for this core biblical teaching in your life.

We look forward to seeing you all on Wednesday, March 11 for our first Lenten Supper.

Closing Prayer -

Quote by Phillip Cary in *Good News for Anxious Christians: Ten Practical Things You Don't Have to Do*

“Every time we turn to Christ in faith it is like a moment of Sabbath, a little foretaste of eternal rest and glory. The gift of that moment lies not in what we do but what we receive. It is the holy time set aside to receive the greatest gift of God ever has to give, which is [God’s self as made known in the beloved Jesus..”

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