

# BreakThru

From Catechism to *Christ*

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF SABBATH

### LEARNING EVENT MAKE-UP

#### A GREAT DAY OFF

Begin by talking about what your idea of a great “day off” would be. Use the list below as a starting point, highlighting or circling things you would include, or add your own to the bottom of the list.

- Reading a good book
- Getting some extra sleep
- Spending time with family
- Walking or hiking – alone or with a friend
- Going shopping
- Watching sports – on TV or at the game
- Eating a meal with friends
- Playing my favorite sport
- Going to the movies or a concert

#### LIVING WELL: KEEPING SABBATH

**Download the Living Well: Keeping Sabbath packet from the parent e-mail. This packet will serve as your guide for this experience.**

#### YEARNING: THE HUNGER FOR THE PRACTICE

Read together “Do You Keep the Sabbath” and “Developing My Sabbath Day” on pages 7.2 and 7.3 in the Living Well packet. Think about how these stories reflect the challenges of keeping Sabbath and how they connect with your own experience.

**Share your reflections in the space below.**



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# REFLECTING: REFLECTION ON THE HUNGER FOR SABBATH

Use the following questions to discuss your experience of Sabbath. This is a storytelling experience, so be sure to give each person time to share his or her story without interruptions or discussion. Write notes about your reflections in the space below each question.

**For the parents: what do you remember from your childhood about Sunday activities?**

**For the student: what does Sunday look like in your household today?**

Take some time to read the following quotes about the meaning of Sabbath, then use the questions below to reflect on your understanding of Sabbath.

*Keeping Sabbath offers us the God-given gift of rest. It allows us time to look at ourselves and at our lives apart from the everyday world. More important, it offers extended time and space to give thanks and praise to God for the many gifts in our lives. (Living Well book)*

*Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is a day when we partake of the wisdom, peace and delight that grow only in the soil of time – time consecrated specifically for play, refreshment and renewal. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest. But the Sabbath has proven its wisdom over the ages. The Sabbath gives us the permission we need to stop, to restore our souls. As part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is already woven into the fabric of our society. Many of us still recall when, not long ago, shops and offices were closed on Sundays. Those quiet Sunday afternoons are embedded in our cultural memory. (Wayne Muller)*

*Sabbath keeping is not about taking a day off but about being recalled to our knowledge of and gratitude for God's activity in creating the world, giving liberty to captives, and overcoming the powers of death. (Dorothy C. Bass)*

*Sabbath is a discipline and practice in which we ask, consider, and answer the questions that will lead us into a complete and joyful life. As such, the Sabbath is a teaching that has the potential to redirect and transform all our existence, bringing it into a more faithful alignment with God's life-building and life-strengthening ways. (Norman Wirzba)*

- **What does Sabbath mean to you? To your family?**
- **How do you mark the Sabbath in your life today? When in your week or year do you experience real Sabbath? Where do you go, what do you do, and who are you with? How do these places, activities, and people contribute to this experience of rest and renewal?**
- **What makes keeping Sabbath so difficult today?**

# EXPLORING: THE CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF KEEPING SABBATH

Keeping Sabbath is central to the Christian faith and it has its roots in the faith of the Jewish people. Begin by prayerfully reading the two primary texts about the command to keep the Sabbath. Open your Bibles and read **Exodus 20:8-11** with its commandment to “remember” the Sabbath that is grounded in the story of creation. Then, read **Deuteronomy 5:12-15** with its commandment to “observe” the Sabbath that sees to it that no one, not even animals, will work without respite.

## **The Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath**

Shabbat – the Jewish Sabbath – is the heart of Judaism. In observant Jewish homes, Shabbat begins each Friday night at sundown as a woman lights the Sabbath candles. Until the following sundown, all activities associated with work or commerce are prohibited.

Read “The Jewish Practice of Keeping Sabbath” on page 7.7 in the Living Well packet.

Continue your exploration by reading the following essay from MyJewishLearning.com.

*The Sabbath (in Hebrew, Shabbat, pronounced shah-BAHT—or in some communities, Shabbos, “SHAH-bis”) may be Judaism’s most distinctive and characteristic practice, as well as one of its most pervasive and long-lasting gifts to Western civilization. A weekly 25 hour observance, from just before sundown each Friday through the completion of nightfall on Saturday, Shabbat is more than just a day off from labor. It is a day of physical and spiritual delights that is meant to illuminate certain key concepts in the traditional Jewish perception of the world.*

*Themes and Theology: Shabbat is portrayed in the Bible as the pinnacle of the creation of the universe, and its observance can be seen as a reminder of the purposefulness of the world and the role of human beings in it. Shabbat also serves as a memorial to God’s act of rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt by setting aside a day for personal autonomy and freedom from the harsh demands of labor. The traditional Shabbat is portrayed in Jewish liturgy, song, and story as a day of joy, a sanctuary from travails, and even a foretaste of the perfected world that will someday be attained.*

*History and Development: Shabbat, like many important facets of Judaism, has its origins in the Torah, where it is most notable as a day of complete cessation of labor. The prophetic tradition portrays it as a day of pleasures as well. The Rabbis spelled out their understanding of forbidden “labor” in a complex series of restrictions on productive activities of many sorts. They also prescribed festive meals and ceremonies for every part of the day. The varieties of Shabbat observances and customs over the ages and around the world illustrate the adaptation of Jews in many societies to new realities and new ideas.*

*At Home: One constant theme in Shabbat observance across time and territory is the centrality of home life with family members and guests. Preparation for Shabbat begins as early as midweek in some households, and its arrival is marked by the spiritual illumination of a candlelighting ceremony. Rabbinic tradition mandates three Shabbat meals, two begun with a special kiddush (“sanctification”) recited over wine. Family meals are occasions for singing, studying, and celebrating together, as well as for consuming distinctive Shabbat foods.*

*In the Community: Shabbat observance in the public sphere is focused on the synagogue, from the lively welcoming service, Kabbalat Shabbat, to the pensive farewell ceremony, Havdalah. The daily round of prayer services is augmented and endowed with a unique atmosphere. Special melodies are used, and the familiar prayers are supplemented with passages in prose and poetry extolling God for the divine gift of the Shabbat and its delights. At the major worship service on Saturday morning, a portion of the Torah is read aloud as part of a year-long cycle, supplemented by a passage from one of the prophetic books (called a haftarah).*

([http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Shabbat\\_The\\_Sabbath.shtml?PRRI](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Shabbat_The_Sabbath.shtml?PRRI))

## Why is Sabbath so important in the Jewish tradition?

## What can we learn from the Jewish observance of Sabbath?

### The Christian Practice of Sabbath

Continue your exploration of Sabbath by reading “Christian Practice of Sabbath” on pages 7.8-7.10 in the Living Well packet.

For further background on the development of the “Christian Sabbath” read the following summary by Robert Kruschwitz.

#### Reflection of the Christian Practice of Sabbath (Robert Kruschwitz)

Jesus’ resurrection on Sunday was the catalyst for “the eighth day” innovation in the early church. The early Christians now were convinced that God’s creative activity extended beyond the seven-day week, and so the first day, Sunday, was also the eighth day of God’s work.

Their dedication of Sunday for gathering and worship grew out of the post-resurrection appearances of the Lord. “These provided not only the proof of the resurrection (for alternative explanations for the empty tomb already were emerging),” David Capes notes, “but also the lively expectation that the risen Jesus would be present with Christians as they gathered.”

The initial resurrection appearances of Jesus took place on “the first day of the week.” On Sunday, first the women, then other men disciples, discovered that Jesus’ tomb was empty (Luke 24:1-12; cf. Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; John 20:1, 11-18). Two disciples journeying to Emmaus from Jerusalem “on that same day” recognized their risen Lord when he broke bread for them to eat. Later that evening the two disciples returned to Jerusalem to share their story only to hear that the Lord had appeared to Simon, too (Luke 24:13-35). That evening, as they celebrated the good news, Jesus appeared before the entire group and commissioned them to preach repentance and forgiveness to all nations (Luke 24:36-49; cf. John 20:19-23). The gospel of John records that because Thomas was not present at this meeting, the Lord appeared at their gathering “a week later” (on Sunday) to remove that disciple’s doubts (20:24-29).

As they gathered in homes and at the Temple (Acts 2:46; 5:42) on “the first day of the week” (e.g., Acts 20:7-12; 1 Corinthians 16:2), the disciples broke bread, prayed, interpreted Scripture, rehearsed the good news, and prepared for ministry. By the end of the first century the designation “the first day of the week,” which reflects a Jewish way of reckoning time, was replaced by a uniquely Christian term, “the Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10). The Didache (c. A.D. 50-150) instructs, “Every Lord’s day, gather together, eat a meal, and give thanks after having first confessed your sins, that your sacrifice may be pure (14.1, Ivan Lewis translation). These Sunday gatherings probably began early among Palestinian Jewish Christians and became common practice throughout the church by the mid-second century.

Paul warned Gentile believers in Colossae not to let others force them to keep the Jewish Sabbath, since it is only a shadow of things to come, while the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). Apparently, he expected Jewish Christians to continue observing the Sabbath regulations, but he did not require the same of Gentiles who entered the church.

Though “growing anti-Judaism in the second century and beyond meant that some distanced themselves from Jews and their practices,” Capes notes that “through the fourth century there is ample evidence that some Christians, even Gentile Christians, continued to observe Sabbath.” The Christian theologian Tertullian, in *On Prayer* (c. 205), wrote as though corporate prayer on the Sabbath were commonplace, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* in the fourth century taught that both Sabbath and Sunday should be kept as festivals to the Lord. “Those Christians who maintained a Sabbath practice took their cue from the Lord of the Sabbath, to whom the substance of the new creation belongs.”

Emperor Constantine decreed in A.D. 321 that workers should rest on the venerable day of the Sun. Over the next centuries, Christian believers began resting on Sunday and referring to the Lord’s Day as “the Sabbath,” attaching to the eighth day the significance that is given to the seventh day in the Decalogue.

The story of how Christians came to see Sunday as a day of rest in fulfillment of the Sabbath law is very long and complex. The lesson highlights three ways that Christians through the fourth century related Sabbath to Sunday worship: (1) an early practice of adding Sunday worship to the keeping of Jewish Sabbath on Saturday, (2) a practice of other Christians to worship on Sunday but not observe the Jewish Sabbath, and (3) a later practice of combining Sabbath rest with Christian worship on Sunday. The latter practice became widespread only after Sunday was declared a day for rest from commerce in the Roman Empire.

**What new insights into Sabbath did you discover?**

**Why did Christians adopt a Sabbath practice?**

**How does this Sabbath requirement of no work or commerce honor God and respect human needs?**

**How is keeping Sabbath more than just attending church worship?**

# DEVELOPING A SABBATH PRACTICE

Begin by reading "Celebrating the Sabbath" on pages 7.11-7.12 in the Living Well packet.

## **Saying "No" - What to Exclude**

You can begin shaping your Sabbath practice by deciding what should be excluded from this day and what should be included. There are three categories of things that we do well to exclude from our Sabbath.

**Work:** What constitutes work for us? We must commit ourselves to not doing these things on the Sabbath. We need to identify the challenge and temptations related to our work and establish clear boundaries to protect Sabbath time. How can you say "No" to work on the Sabbath?

**Buying and selling:** If we are out buying, selling and engaging in the world of commerce, it means someone has to work and we are contributing to it. It feeds our consumerism, an aspect of life in our culture that needs rest on the Sabbath. How can you say "No" to buying and selling on the Sabbath?

**Worry:** The Sabbath is an invitation to rest emotionally and mentally from things that cause worry and stress, such as budgets, major decisions, and planning the week ahead. If we observe Sabbath on Sunday, perhaps Sunday evening after dinner is a time when, from a place of rest, we can engage in some of the decision-making that needs to be done. How can you say "No" to worry on the Sabbath?

**Suggestion:** Prepare a "Sabbath box" or "Sabbath basket." Each Saturday evening, put all the things you don't need in order to observe the Sabbath into the box or basket. This might include cell phones, credit cards, pagers, and so on. Put work projects and homework in the box, as well; you can take them out again on Sunday evening.

## **Saying “Yes” – What to Include**

What is to replace all that we are excluding from our Sabbath practice? The simple answer is, whatever delights you and replenishes you. Consider the following three things to include in your Sabbath practice. You may want to refer to the list of “Practices for a Simple Sabbath” at the end of this lesson for ideas on things to include.

**Resting the body.** What are the activities that rest and replenish your body? The invitation of Sabbath time is to replace the time you would normally spend working with activities that you find restorative, such as a walk or other physical exercise, eating your favorite foods, reading, and listening to music. How can you say “Yes” to resting the body on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?

**Replenishing the spirit.** Another invitation of the Sabbath is to pay attention to what replenishes the spirit, and choose only those activities that renew you and bring you joy. Find personal activities that replenish the spirit: silence, reading, dancing, and listening to music. Find activities for the whole family that replenish the spirit: a special meal, recreation, games, sharing stories, gathering with relatives and friends. How can you say “Yes” to replenishing the spirit on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?

**Restoring the soul.** Perhaps the deepest refreshment is the invitation to renew the soul through worship and quiet reflection. This is the part of us that gets most lost during the workweek, which is governed almost completely by the value of productivity. In addition to personal activities, such as silence and prayer, identify rituals or shared activities that create a spirit of reverence for God on this day such as a special meal with a Scripture reading and time to go around the table and talk about where God seemed particularly present with you during the week. Light a candle to mark the Sabbath day. How can you say “Yes” to restoring the soul on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?

## **Sunday Worship**

Use the space below to identify reasons why participating in Sunday worship regularly is an important element of keeping Sabbath.

Read "Sunday Worship" on page 7.15 in the Living Well packet, and then reflect on the following two questions.

**How can you overcome the obstacles to attending church on Sunday?**

**How can you prepare for Sunday worship or extend Sunday worship in your home?**

## **Develop a Sabbath Plan**

Take a few minutes to decide on which Sabbath strategies you will adopt to strengthen your family's practice of Keeping Sabbath. List 2-3 things in the space below:

**If you keep Sabbath, how will the rest of your week need to change?**

**What will you need to prepare beforehand in order to have a restful Sabbath?**

**How might ceasing from work one day a week reshape your life and attitudes on the other six?**



# PRACTICES FOR A SIMPLE SABBATH

- **Light a candle.** Set aside sacred time for a family meal, for prayer or meditation or simply quiet reading. Set a candle before you, offer a simple blessing and let the world fall away.
- **Practice thanksgiving.** Give thanks before meals, upon rising, when going to sleep. During Sabbath, we are less concerned with what is missing and more grateful for what has already been given.
- **Bless your children.** Place your hand gently on their heads and offer your blessing. What do you most wish for them? Self-knowledge, courage, safety, joy? Let them hear your prayers for their happiness.
- **Invite a Sabbath pause.** Choose one common act—touching a doorknob, turning on a faucet or hearing the phone ring. Throughout the day when this occurs, stop and take three silent, mindful breaths. Then go on.
- **Take a walk.** Stroll slowly to nowhere in particular for 30 minutes. Let your senses guide you. Stop and observe deeply whatever attracts you—a tree, a stone, a flower. Breathe.
- **Pamper your body.** Take a guilt-free nap. Take a leisurely bath with music, special scents, candles. Make love with your spouse. Walk barefoot in the grass. The Sabbath is a day of delight.
- **Create a Sabbath box.** Put your to-do list, your keys, your wallet—anything you don't need in Sabbath time—into the box. Or write down a particular worry or concern and drop it in. Just for now, let it go.
- **Turn off the telephone.** Or the computer, the TV, the washer and dryer. Create a period of time when you will not be disturbed or seduced by what our technologies demand of us.
- **Prepare a Sabbath meal—or a Sabbath cup of tea.** Even if you are alone, you can choose foods you love, put flowers on the table, take time to enjoy every dish, give thanks for the bounty of the earth.
- **Seek companionship.** One of the most precious gifts we can offer is to be a place of refuge, a Sabbath for one another. Ask for companionship when you lose your way. Give quiet time and attention to others.
- **Reset your inner compass.** Make a list of the values and principles that guide your life—both those you follow and those you would like to follow. Speak them aloud, alone or with loved ones.
- **Surrender a problem.** The Sabbath reminds us that forces larger than ourselves are at work healing the world. Imagine that these forces already know how to solve your problem. Turn it over to their care.