



Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Theme: Time for God (the Sabbath)

Bible Readings: Deuteronomy 5:12-15  
& Mark 2:23 – 3:6

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## PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

How do you feel your group has progressed this year? You might like to ask the group to feedback their thoughts and feelings about their own learning, how the group works, or about the *Good Soil* material.

At this time of year, you might like to start thinking about when you are going to meet over the summer months. If your group is taking a break, make sure everyone has the dates for when you will return.

## PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

In this session, we will be thinking about the Sabbath Day, which is an important idea to many religions, based upon God's commandments. For the Jewish people, the Sabbath is traditionally Saturday, and for Christians it is Sunday. You can read about the origin of the Sabbath in **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**, as part of the retelling of the Ten Commandments. Before the session, reflect on the following:

*What does the Sabbath mean to you? Do you keep a Sabbath day as holy or special?*

*If you do, when do you keep it? What do you do to make the day special? How does it make you feel?*

## STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Creator God,  
You have made us with love,  
not to be constantly working,  
but to find our rest in you and to delight in your creation.  
As we reflect on your word together,  
may we be blessed in knowing your presence with us.  
As we read your commandments and think about Jesus,  
may he inspire us to a life of refreshment and joy,  
even in the toil and troubles we face.  
Come, be with us, by your Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

## FINDING OUR ROOTS

**In small groups of 2-3 people, discuss:**

*What was the Sabbath like when you were a child? How has it changed in your lifetime?*

*In your opinion, what is better now, or what has been regrettably lost?*

*What is your favourite 'Sunday tradition?' What makes it feel like a special day for you?*

*Have you any experience of the Sabbath in other faiths? (e.g. Judaism on a Saturday, Islam on a Friday.)  
Do you know what they do, or how they feel about it?*

If you're part of larger group, the leader might ask for ideas to be shared with everybody. Only share if you feel comfortable.

## READING THE SCRIPTURES

**Read together the Bible passage: Deuteronomy 5: 12-15**

**Background Information:** Deuteronomy is the fifth book in the Bible, the last of the books of Moses (or the Torah). Deuteronomy means 'Second Law'. It gives the second telling of the Ten Commandments and the end of the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel before the Promised Land. Chapter 5 gives those commandments, very similar to the first giving of the Law in Exodus 20. One of the interesting differences is in this commandment about the Sabbath. In **Exodus 20:8-11**, the *reason* given for the Sabbath is because God rested on the seventh day of creation. In Deuteronomy, the focus is on the Israelites' recent history as slaves. They are now *free* to observe and enjoy a Sabbath! The Sabbath can be understood therefore as something built into creation, and gift from God for his liberated people.

**Read together the Bible passages: Mark 2, verses 23-28, and Mark 3, verses 1-6.**

**Background Information:** Mark's Gospel gives two stories of Jesus causing controversy over the subject of the Sabbath. The Sabbath law was a hotly-disputed topic among Jewish teachers. Over the years, new rules were developed to help the people understand what they should do to observe the Sabbath in every circumstance. In many ways, keeping the Sabbath had become a burden.

In the first story (**Mark 2:23-28**), we see Jesus and his friends enjoying some Sabbath-time in the countryside, plucking grain from the wayside to eat as they go. This was objected to, as plucking grain was classified as 'work'. Jesus responds by reminding them of a story from the life of David when he was a fugitive, on the run from King Saul (see **1 Samuel 21**, although the name of the priest is different). In that story, even though the bread was holy, the human need to alleviate hunger came first. Human life and basic needs are more important. The Sabbath was meant to be a blessing, not a constraint.

In the second story (**Mark 3:1-6**), Jesus indicates that the work of healing is more important than observing the Sabbath laws. His opponents seem more interested that he has apparently broken a rule than marvelling at the wonderful miracle before their eyes, or celebrating with the healed man.

## DIGGING DEEPER

Some professions need to work on a Sunday, for essential work and care. Others choose to work to enable others to enjoy time off (pubs, restaurants, tourism), and rely on the trade. Sunday is also now another shopping day, but this means shop workers have to work. *Is it right to force people to work on a Sabbath day? What would you be prepared to do without, to enable others to have the day off?*

*Is it right to impose a Sabbath on everyone, or does that miss the point of it being a gift from God?*

There is a strong call in the Commandment for a day without any work, remembering that the people were once slaves, but now are free. *What are the benefits of taking a weekly day off? What would this look like for you? What 'work' would you still have to do, and what actually could be left for another day?*

*Do you find it easy to rest, or do other demands make it actually very difficult? Does God understand the constraints of our lives? How important is worship, and the 'God' aspect of the Sabbath?*

There is something in the two Gospel stories about understanding the purpose of the Sabbath, and not being tied down to rigid rules. *How can we get the balance right in our own lives, and understand the important principles of God's design, and the blessings God wants to give us through the Sabbath?*

## ACTIVITY – to think about at home

Spending time with God, time with loved ones, or even just time to relax, can often involve being 'intentional' about it. *How much thought or effort do you put into making your Sabbath special? What could you do to retrieve a bit of holy rest? We suggest you write down how you would like to spend your next Sabbath day, and plan what needs to be done beforehand, to make sure it is set apart.*

## PRAYING TOGETHER

Pray together for those in your group who are facing challenges, ill-health, or worried about others. Pray for those who have hard or busy lives, that they may find some rest to be refreshed by God.