

Adult Lesson Six

A Day Of Rest?

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
(Exodus 20:8-11, NRSV).



Scholars tell us that the longer a commandment is, the harder it was for the Hebrew people to keep. The length indicates the work of priests and scribes in explaining the original command. If this is correct, the Israelites must have had a particularly hard time with commandment four. Four verses long, it is easily the lengthiest of the commandments, dealing not only with the people, but their children, slaves, and alien residents. It also examines the reason for the Sabbath rest in the creation narratives of Genesis.

If the Hebrew people had a hard time with this commandment, it was no more so then we do today. Setting a full day aside for rest and worshipping God is a foreign concept in our culture. Many see the Sabbath as a day to catch up on work at the office, to do chores around the house, or go grocery shopping. And this doesn't even touch on the second part of the verse which commands that nothing be done that would cause others to work. What does this do to eating out after church? Getting in a round of golf? Catching a late movie? What are we to do with this commandment? Do we ignore it? Explain it away? Or allow it to shape us and how we view our time and our week? It may even force us to realize that God has a claim on all our time.

OBJECTIVES

- Explain the importance of Sabbath keeping.
- Examine our lives to see if we are keeping the Sabbath.
- Consider what it means to keep the Sabbath today.

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:8-11
- Exodus 16:22-27
- Amos 8:4-8
- Mark 2:23-28

WHAT YOU NEED

- Five copies each of Handouts #6.1, #6.2, and #6.3 (or more if your class is larger than 15 people)
- Chalk/chalkboard; marker/dry erase board; or something else to write on
- Pencils/pens

Part 1 - Rest?!? Are you kidding me?

For the opening you will lead the class members in mapping out their schedules for an average Sunday. On the chalkboard write down a timeline, starting when the first person got up and continuing until the last person goes to sleep. The finished product might start something like this.

7:00 Got up, started coffee
7:30 Iron clothes for the family
8:00 Get the kids up
8:15 Make breakfast
8:30 Get the kids ready
9:00 Go to church
12:15 Eat at Chili's
1:00 Mow the yard
1:30 Tee off

Example schedule

When finished, read or have someone read Exodus 20:8-11. Ask **Do you think, according to this schedule, we are resting on the Sabbath?** Give a few minutes for response, then ask **Let's take a closer look at this.** Have the class members mark beside those things that may require other people to work, such as eating out, shopping, and buying groceries.

Part 2 - By design

Ask again **What do you think? Are we keeping this commandment?** Follow this up with **If we aren't, does it even matter?** This is a difficult question, but it gets to the heart of the matter. This will force the class to decide the place of the Ten Commandments in their value systems.

Read the following or put it in your own words. **What is often lost in the Ten Commandments is that they are not just ten rules to keep in mind, but they are the way God created us to live. Scientific studies have proven that the human body and mind operate on a seven-day system with one day needed for rest. Although as people of faith we don't need scientific proof to guide us, it powerfully illustrates that the Sabbath rest, as well as the other commandments, aren't "extras." They are built into creation. When God created us he built spiritual needs and physical needs into our being. Physically, we need a day of rest from work every seven days. Spiritually, we need to have a time of worship and renewal in God. This is the heart of the fourth commandment. If we ignore it, we impair both our physical and spiritual well-being. If we cause others to miss their Sabbath rest, we do the same to them.**

Scientific studies have proven that the human body and mind operate on a seven-day system with one day needed for rest.

Part #3 - When in doubt, read the Bible

Divide the class into three groups. The groups can be as small as two people or as large as five. If you have more than fifteen people in your class, assign some scriptures twice. Distribute Handouts #6.1, #6.2, and #6.3, one to each group. Give the groups eight to ten minutes to read their scriptures and come up with answers. Bring the class back together and have each group read its scripture out loud and then discuss its answer to the question. If they do not make the points listed below, make sure that you mention them.

Group #1, Exodus 16:22-27. **This occurred before the Ten Commandments were given. What does this tell us about the Sabbath?** Answer: This wasn't an arbitrary "worship day" just for the Israelites. God's plan included a Sabbath from the beginning. All people need a Sabbath.

Group #2, Amos 8:4-8. **What is wrong with the understanding of the Sabbath reflected in this passage? Had these people allowed the Ten Commandments to shape who they were?** Answer: The rules of God had become something to be worked around. They were seen as obstacles to keep the people from their true motivation-making money. No, the people weren't shaped by the commandments. They shaped the commandments to meet their ends.

Group #3, Mark 2:23-28. **Why was it okay for Jesus to pick wheat and eat on the Sabbath? What does it mean that, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath?"** Answer: God didn't create people because he had a need for someone to observe his Sabbath. He knows that people need rest from work and to be with him, so he created a time for renewal. He built it into his creation.

Part #4 - Anybody up for pizza?

To end class, explain **This commandment is the longest of the ten. Most scholars believe that the longer commandments reflect areas with which the Hebrew people had problems. We no longer have "slaves," but sometimes we participate in activities that deny other people rest on the Sabbath. What are some of these activities? (Eating out, grocery shopping, going to the mall, going to ballgames.) Are these a problem? (They certainly need to be considered.) From another perspective, does our church offer a time when those that we force to work on Sunday can come and worship? If not, what is our responsibility to them?** This is not a cut-and-dried issue. Let the debate go without necessarily searching for a final answer.

Have the class members re-write this commandment in contemporary language to relate better to our situation today. Remind them to keep in mind these three aspects of the command:

- 1) It is to be kept holy, set aside for God.
- 2) It is to be a cessation of work
- 3) We are to allow everyone else this same privilege of not working and worshiping God.

Group #1

Scripture: Exodus 16:22-27

Discuss the following and be prepared to share your answer and reasons with the class. Read Exodus 16:22-27. This scripture takes place before the Ten Commandments were given. Which was first, the importance to God of keeping the Sabbath or the giving of the Ten Commandments? What does this tell us about keeping the Sabbath?

Group #2

Scripture: Amos 8:4-8

Discuss the following and be prepared to share your answer and reasons with the class. Read Amos 8:4-8. What is wrong with the understanding of the Sabbath reflected in this passage? Does it appear that these people allowed the Ten Commandments to shape who they were?

Group #3

Scripture: Mark 8:22-28

Discuss the following and be prepared to share your answer and reasons with the class. Read Mark 8:22-28. Why was it okay for Jesus to pick grain and eat on the Sabbath? What does it mean that "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath?"