

Celebrating Sabbath
Lesson One: Sabbath and Celebration
Women's Luncheon

Have this question at the tables and people answer it during lunch: What are your memories and/or associations with Sabbath?

Open with prayer on page 11

Lesson One

PPT The two words that stayed with me after reading this lesson:

- Yes
- Stop

PPT Yes

In the scripture passage from Matthew 12, Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees (the Jewish leaders of the Law) because Jesus allowed his disciples to harvest grain on the Sabbath. Harvesting is work, and as any faithful Jew knows, one does not work on the Sabbath.

PPT 4th Commandment "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work...."

We rest because God rested.

Jesus was also taken to task by healing a man with a shriveled hand in the synagogue. This is work, too. The Pharisees were so upset that they began to look for ways to kill him. This is pretty drastic! But it shows you how important not working on the Sabbath was to the Jews and the keepers of the Law. It was a day to keep holy.

PPT On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

From my talk for the women's retreat last Spring (which I couldn't give because I had Covid) so Craig talked. I have no idea how much of my talk he used to here is some of it:

Sabbath was the first thing in the Bible declared holy. It was actually declared holy at creation. From Genesis: "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested...."

The Hebrew word for "holy" (*qadosh*) means to "set apart." To make Sabbath holy is to set it apart.

What does it mean to keep the Sabbath day holy? How do we set it apart?

This is the cornerstone of Jewish Sabbath observance: "On it you shall not do any work...

Of course, the rabbis had to tease out what is meant by work. They identified 39 categories to be avoided on Sabbath, and then those 39 categories had to be fleshed out as well.

One of my favorite "fleshing out" is from a book called *Mudhouse Sabbath* by Lauren Winner. Lauren grew up Jewish, but met Jesus in college. She loves following Jesus, but misses the practices of her Jewish faith. She says this about not working on the Sabbath day in the Jewish faith:

PPT "It's easy to look at the Jewish Sabbath as a long list of thou shalt nots: Don't turn on lights; don't drive; don't cook; don't carry a pair of scissors anywhere at all (for if you carry them you might be tempted to use them, and cutting is also forbidden on Sabbath); it's okay to carry a stone or a sweater or a scarf, but only inside your own house, not out onto the street and then into the house of another; don't plan for the week ahead; don't write a sonnet or a sestina or a haiku; don't even copy down a recipe; and while you are allowed to sing, you shouldn't play a musical instrument, and of your course you mustn't turn on a radio or a record player.

PPT What this all boils down to (and boiling is another thing you cannot do on Shabbat) is *do not create*. Do not create a casserole or Valentine card or a symphony or a pot of coffee. Do not create anything at all, for one of the things the Sabbath reprises is God's rest after He finished creating."

In other words, when we rest on Sabbath, we are imitating God. We stop creating because God stopped creating. And the Pharisees had taken that to a whole new level with all kinds of “nos.” You shall not. Don’t.

But Jesus was saying “yes” to what can be done on the Sabbath when the Jews had created all kinds of “no”s. The Pharisees had forgotten that the Sabbath was to be greeted with joy.

We are called to celebrate the Sabbath. PPT Our author says, “At its heart, Sabbath is much more like a party in a beautiful place with people we love than it is a list of obligations.” (page 14)

Is Sabbath like that for you?

In Jewish tradition, Sabbath is described as a bride. Sabbath is greeted with joy. Give experience at Shapiros. I always envied this time – Sabbath in the home. The part of the prayer I remember: Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam (Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe).

Our author talked about observing Sabbath with friends in their homes. She said her favorite moment was when they passed around a box of fragrant spices (usually cinnamon and cloves) symbolizing the sweetness of Sabbath. As the ceremony closes, they say to one another, “Have a good week.” Says our author: “it is a way of praying that the Sabbath’s peace and blessing will extend over the week ahead.”

When I stand at the exit doors after worship and greet people, I hear such comments as: “That was a beautiful service.” “I am filled with joy.” “The service touched me.” When I hear these comments, I say, “Carry that joy (or the service or that touch) out with you and let it carry you through the week.”

Sabbath is joy and celebration. It’s “yes.” What can you say “yes” to on the Sabbath that can give you joy? Think on that, and I will ask you again at the end.

PPT Stop

The second word that stayed with me was the word “stop.” Which seems like it is the opposite of “yes.” I think “stop” is the balance to “yes.”

The word “holy” means to set apart. The word “Sabbath” means “ceasing.” On the seventh day, God ceased from creating. If we want to make room for Sabbath, we need to say “no” to some things.

And I am not very good at this.

Our author has a blog and in it she said for this lesson: **PPT** “We must create the capacity to receive” the gift of Sabbath. “Because if our hands aren’t empty, we won’t be able to receive the gift.”

Our author says when she struggles to take time for Sabbath, she hands over to God her unfinished tasks, her unsolved problems, and her unfulfilled hopes. Then she prays, “Well, God – here you go. Take these for a while. I’ll pick them up later, but hold them for me for a while, will you please?”

Then she says God does take them. “Once I have put those things into God’s hands, my own hands are suddenly empty – and I’m finally able to receive the gift of Sabbath.”

PPT What can you say “yes” to on the Sabbath that can give you joy? What can you say “no” to in order to receive the gift of Sabbath?

As you ponder these questions, here is a small response from me:

I say no to committee meetings on Sunday. To me, it is work. I attend committee meetings all week. I gladly say Stop or Cease to them on Sabbath.

I say yes to hospital visits. The Pharisees would have said no, but Jesus would have said yes. It’s meeting people where they are, doing good to others. It becomes a joy to do so.

I am not sure where Sunday football games fit in here! Are they a “yes” or a “stop”?

Give the women time to answer the questions.

Conclusion

As you meet with your groups in the year ahead, think of your time together as a mini-Sabbath. To forget about your busyness, all that you must do, let go of your worries, and transition into your Bible Study Sabbath Time.

Close with prayer on page 18.

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