



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Articles:

- 📖 Sabbath, a "Little Jubilee"
(*Sabbath*, pp. 9-16)
- 📖 Imagine a Sabbath Economy
(*Sabbath*, pp. 31-35)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:
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Christian Reflection

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Sabbath as Delight in Creation

When we keep the sabbath, we are not fleeing from the anxious character of our world. Rather, we are sharing God's delight in creation, which always causes us to ask, "Are we promoting the enjoyment and flourishing of the creation around us?"

Prayer

Lord of the Sabbath, it is hard for us to stop working, and harder still to stop worshipping work. We confess that our busy-ness often substitutes for our holiness.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to be still enough to know you. Help us to understand that your sabbath is the seam between the world of work and the work of worship. Help us to know that the sabbath is what keeps us from unraveling, that it knits up the harried and makes them holy, that it even helps to heal creation from the crash.

All: In this quiet, peaceful time, we honor you, we rest in you, we long to know you as maker and mender. Through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.

Scripture Readings: Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11

Reflection

"Sabbath sings a quiet song in echo of God's peace," begins Terry York's new hymn (*Sabbath*, p. 43), for sabbath invites us to share in God's rest on the seventh day of creation. But what does God's rest signify, and how do we participate in it?

- ▶ *God's rest indicates God's sovereign rule over creation.* The watery chaos (Genesis 1:1-2) has been subdued, and the world is restful and whole. "God rests at the end of creation because God is able to rest," says Richard Lowery. "God's benevolent rule in the universe is unchallenged. Sabbath celebrates God's complete, just, and compassionate rule in the world." We share in God's rest when we live in the confidence that *shalom*, or justice and peace, is fundamental in the world.
- ▶ *God's rest reflects the divine pleasure in a creation finely made.* God takes delight in the entire creation, even in parts that are of little or no interest to us, such as the calving of deer and frolicking of sea monsters (Job 39:1; 40:15). Humbly we realize "that creation is not primarily for us," Norman Wirzba points out. "It exists for God, and is the occasion for God's care, pleasure, and delight. It is a sabbath creation in which all the members of creation, including humanity, achieve their true end as they approximate God's own tranquility and joy." We share in God's rest when we affirm all creation, limit our consumption, and tune our habits to rejoice in and care for those aspects of creation of which we are not a part.

Just as divine rest crowns and colors all of God's creative activity, so our participation in God's rest should extend through all of our activities. Think of sabbath rest "as the peaceful and joyous flourishing of creation," Wirzba suggests, "and stop thinking of it primarily as the cessation of or temporary reprieve



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from our otherwise acceptable striving." Our weekly sabbath observance then will become a "prism through which all our thought and action receive their focus and direction."

To live daily in God's rest, confident in God's *shalom* and respecting the creation, we must believe that God is willing and able to provide enough for a good life. This truth is taught when God gives sustaining manna to the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16). The manna could not be hoarded; God commands each to collect only as much as each needs to eat. "Need is defined individually, not collectively," Lowery notes. "God fills the basket of every single person, regardless of strength and ability. God's reliable, providential care is limited only by the actual needs of each individual." Hoarding manna is a rejection of God's economy where everyone gets enough for a good life. "Greedy consumption is unfaith, rooted in the blasphemous fear that God is not the liberator of slaves, the loving creator who desires abundant life for all."

Study Questions:

1. "This [sabbath-grounded] vision of wealth and well-being universally shared ... is unlike the world most people know today," writes Lowery. "It calls us to examine the way we live, to make decisions that promote dignity, freedom, well-being, and life-giving power for all God's people" (*Sabbath*, pp. 15-16). What are some ways in which your daily work can promote this sabbath vision?
2. How do you respond to Lowery's view: "Renewing the world begins in families and communities, with sabbath disciplines of delight. Having fun with friends and family honors God. Gratefully enjoying the gifts of life is proper worship" (*Sabbath*, p. 16)?
3. Do you agree with Wirzba that an action as simple as eating a meal can reflect or distort God's rest (*Sabbath*, pp. 32-33)? How might you apply his insight to other daily activities?

Departing Hymn: "O Day of Rest and Gladness" (verses 1, 5, and 6)

O day of rest and gladness, O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness, most beautiful, most bright:
on Thee, the high and lowly, through ages joined in tune,
sing holy, holy, holy, to the great God Triune.

Today on weary nations the heavenly manna falls;
to holy convocations the silver trumpet calls,
where Gospel light is glowing with pure and radiant beams,
and living water flowing, with soul refreshing streams.

New graces ever gaining from this our day of rest,
we reach the rest remaining to spirits of the blessed.
To Holy Ghost be praises, to Father, and to Son;
the church her voice upraises to Thee, blessed Three in One.

Christopher Wordsworth (1862)

Suggested Tune: ST. THEODULPH

Sabbath as Delight in Creation

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Discuss Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11	Reflection (all sections)
Question 1 or 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

(Note: This study guide covers the second half of Richard Lowery's article, "Sabbath, a Little 'Jubilee'." The first half is discussed in the previous study guide, "Sabbath as Liberation.")

Teaching goals

1. To understand two meanings of God's rest on the seventh day of creation.
2. To reflect on how we might participate daily in God's rest by welcoming God's *shalom* and sharing the divine delight in the creation.
3. To recognize how, in the manna story, sabbath rest is opposed to greedy consumption and lack of faith in God's abundant provision.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Sabbath (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting. Locate the hymn tune ST. THEODULPH in your hymnbook or print copies of this public domain tune from the Web site www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Poem

Read the lines from the poem by Wendell Berry quoted on pp. 87-88 of *Sabbath*. The poem begins: "There are two healings: nature's, /and ours and nature's."

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Close this time of prayer by reading responsively the prayer of confession in the lesson. The leader begins, and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Arrange for two members to read aloud Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The lesson begins by focusing on two distinct meanings of God's rest: it signifies (1) that God's rule of justice and peace is unchallenged ultimately, and (2) that God values and takes pleasure in all of the creation. It encourages us to "live daily in God's rest," by allowing our weekly sabbath observance to become a "prism through which all our thought and action receive their daily focus."

- ▶ *God's rest indicates God's sovereign rule over creation.* You might enrich this section of the lesson by discussing the meaning of *bara'*, a Hebrew word that can mean both "to create" and "to be fat." This word, used in the Old Testament to describe only God's creative activity, suggests that God created the world for health and flourishing (see the section "Delight in Creation," *Sabbath*, pp. 13-14). Encourage members to think of concrete ways in which they can live in confidence that *shalom*

is fundamental to the world. How would this confidence enable us to truly rest from our striving? Does this confidence mean that we can use the world in any manner that we want? Or, does it put limits upon our desires and reshape them?

- ▶ *God's rest reflects the divine pleasure in a creation finely made.* Encourage members to mention specific ways in which we can respect, or even share God's pleasure in the created world. Norman Wirzba's article, "Imagine a Sabbath Economy," suggests several contexts in which we can ask the question, "Are we promoting the enjoyment and flourishing of the creation around us?"

The final portion of the lesson discusses the story of God providing manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16). This is another biblical account of the origin of sabbath. If time permits, ask a member to read the entire chapter in Exodus. How does the prohibition against hoarding in this story apply to our use of the resources that God has provided to us?

Study Questions

1. Members may mention, as instances of their "daily work," employment, childrearing, homemaking, volunteer positions, or church assignments. In each of these spheres, they can think of ways in which they promote (or distort) the dignity and well-being of other people. If members want to continue this line of thought, they may evaluate their collective actions as church members, participants in a neighborhood group or community, or as voting citizens.
2. This question begins a discussion that will be the focus of the lessons titled "Changing Sunday Practices" and "Bowling on the Sabbath." Do members agree that properly "enjoying the gifts" of friendship and family is a way of honoring God? When do friendship and family become barriers in the Christian life?
3. Wirzba suggests that we should be concerned with how our food is produced, prepared, and provided to us. We bear some responsibility if these processes are wasteful or disrespectful of God's creation, because we have choices about where and what we eat. Members might want to criticize his analysis. Or, they might want to apply his insight by thinking of their other daily activities that depend upon the actions of many other people or companies. Do we also bear some responsibility when these activities are wasteful or disrespectful of God's creation?

Departing Hymn

Distribute copies of the tune ST. THEODULPH. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.