

2022–2023 Presbyterian Women/*Horizons* Bible Study

Workshop for Leaders

By Carol M. Bechtel

CELEBRATING SABBATH

Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight

What Is This?

A lesson plan for leaders who introduce this Bible study to any group that plans to use it.

Who Will Find it Helpful and Why?

The Workshop for Leaders is written for Bible study leaders who are preparing to lead study groups, pastors and educators who will encourage and prepare others to lead, and presbyteries introducing the study to their congregations. It provides

- a foundational background for the content of the study,
- a description of the design of the Suggestions for Leaders,
- activities for generating interest and building enthusiasm for the study, and
- highlights of the Companion DVD and ways to use its resources.

What Can You Expect Participants to Learn?

Participants will have an opportunity to

1. examine their assumptions about Sabbath
2. have a brief Sabbath experience
3. explore the scripture passages used in the study
4. explore the Scope and Sequence for helpful information
5. find resources provided to support leaders and participants, and
6. state both helpful preparation and anticipated challenges.

Room Set-up

If you meet in person, the most helpful set-up will be tables with six to eight chairs. Participants at these tables will have their study materials and notebook in front of them; these groups will naturally serve as small groups during activities. If you meet via Zoom or another online meeting platform, adapt the workshop as needed and be prepared to divide participants into groups if you choose to use that feature.

Materials Needed

- A copy of the Bible study for each participant
- One copy per person of the Scope and Sequence from page 7 in the Bible study or on the chart in this workshop
- The slide show presentation that is available to download at presbyterianwomen.org/bible-study/celebrating-sabbath
- An easel pad, newsprint, and a marker (or something similar)
- One pen or pencil per person
- An assortment of colored pencils, markers, and highlighters on the tables—at least one per person (Optional but helpful.)
- Equipment to play the music you choose for the Sabbath Experience.

Workshop Lesson Plan (1½ hours)

Main Idea

Sabbath is not a burden, it is a blessing. Celebrating Sabbath will help us explore ways we can observe sabbath and discover this blessing for ourselves.

Welcome and Introductions

(slide two in the slide show presentation)

Welcome participants, introduce yourself, and thank them for their interest in preparing themselves or other leaders to explore this year's Bible study. Consider the time you have available, your context, and the particular resources you want to highlight, and choose the activities you will use from this workshop. (An accompanying slide show presentation includes a slide for every section of the workshop but feel free to adapt or delete activities for time and the needs of your group.)

Sabbath Word Association

(slide three in the slide show presentation)

Ask participants to jot down two or three words that spring to mind when they hear the phrase: "I say Sabbath, you say _____." Then choose one of the following options as a way to discuss their answers.

Option #1: At tables, invite each person to share one of the words that came to mind and, if they are comfortable enough to do so, give others a brief glimpse into why they chose that word to complete the phrase. Note: If you would like this option to be a longer activity, plan for five minutes per person. If you would like it to be a shorter activity, plan for one minute per person. In either case, make the time limits clear so that people can pace themselves. Consider ringing a small bell when it's time to switch.

Option #2: Take inventory of the words chosen by the group. Write the words on a piece of newsprint that is visible to all. Now that they see the words together, ask the group to note words that were chosen by more than one person, words that stand out to them; words that surprise them; words that challenge them.

Summarize the Sabbath Word Association activity by explaining that we all come to Sabbath from different places. And that is okay. Whatever our feelings are about Sabbath now, we have come by them honestly.

Celebrating Sabbath is a Bible study that will help us explore our sense of Sabbath and maybe even develop a new understanding of it.

A Brief Sabbath Experience

(slide four in the slide show presentation)

Before we move further into the study, set aside any preconceptions you have about what Sabbath is and use this script (or words you develop yourself) to lead the

group in a brief experience of Sabbath.

Explain: Experiencing Sabbath is an important part of this study. Here's what we're going to do together. First, I'll invite you to get comfortable. Then I'll lead us in a brief prayer. Then I'll play some music.

Say: So, get comfortable. If you'd like to, you can stretch out, take deep breaths, and close your eyes.

Say: Pray with me with this lovely prayer by Scottish pastor, David Adam. ["I weave . . ." by David Adam appears in *The Edge of Glory: Prayers in the Celtic Tradition* (London: SPCK, 2011).]

I weave a silence on to my lips.

I weave a silence into my mind.

I weave a silence within my heart . . .

Calm me, O Lord, as you stilled the storm.

Still me, O Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all the tumult within me cease.

Enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

Say: I invite you to stay comfortable and listen to this music.

Play a relaxing piece of music like "Come to Me" by Sandra McCracken (3 minutes, 27 seconds; on her album *Rain for Roots*; available to download on Spotify and iTunes) or another contemplative piece of music of your choice that lasts about 3½ minutes.

When the music ends, bless your time together by saying: In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Say: That's it! Shabbat shalom! At least that's what I hope you felt: Sabbath peace. In Hebrew, Sabbath is Shabbat and the word "shalom" means peace, but it also means health and wholeness. That's what Sabbath is designed to bring: Healing . . . wholeness . . . peace.

Why We Need Shabbat Shalom

(slide five in the slide show presentation)

Explain Why We Need Shabbat Shalom: I don't know about you, but I know that I need healing—the kind of healing that only God's gift of Sabbath can bring. I'm guessing that many of you may be able to relate to this description of "burnout" from WebMD:

Burnout is **a form of exhaustion caused by constantly feeling swamped**. It's a result of excessive and prolonged emotional, physical, and mental stress. In many cases,

burnout is related to one's job. Burnout happens when you're overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to keep up with life's incessant demands.

[webmd.com/mental-health/burnout-symptoms-signs]

Here's the story of a "moment of truth" I had some years ago.

Option #1: Play this video clip of the story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8bXOjp0aYw>

Option #2: Read the story (which follows) to the group:

A decade or so ago, I had to have a series of surgeries. My doctor joked about my joining the "surgery of the year club." I'm fine now, thanks be to God, so don't worry about me! But after a few of these, I noticed something about "surgery day." I'm not proud of it, mind you, but I began to notice myself looking forward to it. To be precise, I was looking forward to that moment when the IV was in (whew!) and the nurse would say, "How about I give you a little something to help you relax?" This was a gift I always accepted. But do you know why? Because that was the moment when I knew that nobody could possibly expect anything from me. Kids? No. Students? No. Boss? Oh, no. Sorry! The IV is in—I'm off the clock! How desperate is that? When the only way to get a break is to have surgery?!

Yea. It was a little alarming. And as I drifted off into la-la land, I remember thinking, "I wonder if God is trying to tell me something about my life?"

I wonder if God is trying to tell a lot of us something about our lives. How many of us go through life with a thousand voices clamoring for our attention. Everybody wants something and they all want it now.

*There has to be a better way. There has to be a better way to live what Mary Oliver calls our "one wild and precious life" [From Mary Oliver's poem, "The Summer Day" from her collection, *House of Light* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).]*

There is a better way. It's called Sabbath. It's the gift that God is waiting to give you. Maybe you know you need it. Maybe you're not so sure. But however you're feeling, I can't wait to explore what it means to "celebrate Sabbath" together. I can't wait to explore what it means to "accept God's gift of rest and delight."

Summary of both story options to read or explain to the group: Maybe you've had a moment like this. Maybe you're having one now! Maybe you know that the pace of your life is killing you, but you just don't know how to stop the speeding train. Well, truth be told, you can't stop it. But God can—and accepting God's gift of Sabbath is the place to start.

What This Study Assumes About Sabbath

(slide six in the slide show presentation)

Explain: in the nine lessons of the Bible study—with passages from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Matthew, Luke, and Acts—we'll consider Sabbath

- As a celebration, not a day of dreary formality
- As God's intent for all of creation (that includes YOU!)
- As one day of the week (perhaps a Sunday—or perhaps the 10 minutes you spend waiting for a train or waiting on hold; yes, if you are intentional about it, you can turn waiting into Sabbath times, too)
- As a time to surrender unhealthy striving and frantic busyness, and instead trust that God will provide
- As a reminder that life is precious and working too much is against God's plans for our precious lives
- As a day devoted to community and justice and creation (and not exclusively about self-care)
- As a reminder to honor the God who honors us by giving us a day each week to reset our pace, our priorities, and our lives.

Interested? Great—then let's explore!

Explore Sabbath

(slide seven in the slide show presentation)

1. What Does the Bible Say About Sabbath?

A lot, as it turns out—but it doesn't say it all in one place. It might be simpler if the Bible had a book called "Sabbath" that included everything we'd ever need to know about that one subject! But that's NOT how the Bible talks about Sabbath, and that may actually be an opportunity. When we seek to discover what the Bible says about Sabbath, we have to work for it a bit. And the fact that we have to dig around in BOTH testaments should tell us something, too. Sabbath is not for Jewish people only; the gift of the Sabbath is for Christians, too!

Distribute the Scope and Sequence handout you have prepared and direct everyone's attention to the slide show. Explain that the Scope and Sequence is a quick overview of the passages in this year's study. I hope it will give you a sense of both the range and the variety of lenses through which we can look at Sabbath. Every lesson is designed to consider Sabbath AND something else. You'll see what I mean.

Invite or assign nine people to read the scripture passages for each lesson.

1. **Review the Nine Lessons and Highlight Bible Passages** using the Scope and Sequence and the slide show that includes the art for each lesson, or use copies of the study book.
(See slide show with artwork for each lesson.)

Lesson One: Sabbath and Celebration

(slide eight in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson one reader to read Matthew 11:28–12:13. This is the beautiful “come to me all you who are weary” passage, followed by two stories of Jesus being criticized for “sabbath breaking.”

Invite group members to think about a time they were criticized or they criticized someone else for sabbath-breaking. Point out the art for this lesson and ask group members to comment on why this particular piece of art might have been chosen to illustrate this lesson.

Lesson Two: Sabbath and Creation

(slide nine in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson two reader to read Genesis 1:1–2:3. God creates and then rests on the seventh day.

Invite group members to turn to the person next to them and talk about which of God's gifts of creation they appreciate the most. Why do they think this art was chosen for this lesson?

Lesson Three: Sabbath and Sunday

(slide ten in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson three reader to read Luke 4:16–22

People who like to solve mysteries will love this lesson because it answers the question, “How did Sabbath get moved from Saturday to Sunday?” Why do they think this art was chosen for this lesson?

Lesson Four: Sabbath and Surrender

(slide eleven in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson four reader to read Exodus 16. This is the story about the manna in the wilderness and the people who didn't trust God to keep them fed.

Invite participants to turn to the people at their tables or to three people nearby and tell the others when it's a challenge for them to trust God to provide. How does it feel to consider trusting God with your needs? How does the art for this lesson illustrate surrender?

Lesson Five: Sabbath and Servitude

(slide twelve in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson five reader to read background passages Genesis 2:15 and Genesis 3:17–19. God gives Adam a job to till and keep the garden of Eden, and work becomes toil after the first sin. Also read the lesson's main passages Exodus 31:12–18, 35:1–29. The first work project after the Red Sea is the building of the Tabernacle. This “good work” includes knowing when to stop—Sabbath!—and contrasts absolutely with the “bad work” the people had been forced to do as slaves in Egypt.

Invite everyone to discuss a memory they have of when they had good work to do. What made their work good? Describe what the woman in this painting might be feeling.

Lesson Six: Sabbath and Hospitality

(slide thirteen in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson six reader to read Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. In these passages the Sabbath commandment is expressed in the two versions of the Ten Commandments.

God's hospitality is love of the stranger. Invite groups to discuss when they last showed God's love by welcoming a stranger. Who are the people they see around the table in this lesson's art?

Lesson Seven: Sabbath and Self-Care

(slide fourteen in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson seven reader to read Luke 13:10–21. Jesus cures a woman on the Sabbath who has been suffering for 18 years.

By this point in the study people in your study groups might be pleased with themselves about how they're celebrating Sabbath. In this lesson though, we learn that

Sabbath is not self-care or self-improvement. Sabbath is showing up. Sabbath is accepting God's invitation even when there's nothing in it for us.

Ask participants to think quietly about times when they have shown up for Sabbath. How have those times honored God? In what ways do you think the woman in the painting might be honoring God?

Lesson Eight: Sabbath and Justice

(slide fifteen in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson eight reader to read Isaiah 58. Isaiah proclaims, "Is not this the fast that I choose—to loose the bonds of injustice . . . to let the oppressed go free. . ." (v. 6). Sabbath and justice share an unbreakable bond. I have tried to summarize that bond with this powerful sentence: Sabbath has a sister, and her name is Justice.

Ask participants to talk with one another about how the image of Justice and Sabbath hand-in-hand might be lived out in their daily lives. How do they see justice in the images in this painting?

Lesson Nine: Sabbath and Community

(slide sixteen in the slide show presentation)

Ask the lesson nine reader to read Acts 2:42–47. After the story of the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost, Luke provides a snapshot of a diverse, committed group of early Christians.

Sabbath is not an individual pursuit. Sabbath is something we celebrate together. Ask participants to share with the group how they see this being lived out in their church communities. How is it being lived out in the painting for this lesson?

Transition: After all these passages from all over the Bible, it's fair to ask: Where's the Story Line Here?

(slide seventeen in the slide show presentation)

Remember that *the story line for this study is our own!* To help us take note of our Sabbath journeys, consider keeping a Sabbath journal so we become aware of our own story.

Here is a journal entry I made at the beginning of my journey with Sabbath:

Since I'm writing the Sabbath study for Horizons, I've decided I should do more than just write about it. I need to make more of an effort to "keep" Sabbath. So,

at sundown on Saturday night, I lit two candles in the middle of my messy kitchen table, said a Sabbath blessing prayer I found on my phone, sang "Shabbat Shalom," and called it good.

One thing I noticed, though, was that I anticipated the coming 24 hours differently. Instead of the usual "chased by a train" feeling, I found I was looking forward to the reprieve. That's significant—and not in a small way . . .

This stanza is from a poem by Wendell Berry:

*I go among the trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like cattle.*

[Wendell Berry, *This Day: Sabbath Poems Collected and New 1979-2013* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2013), p. 7.]

Maybe it's because I grew up on a farm, but I love that image of "my tasks lying in their places where I left them, asleep like cattle." I remember thinking, "Yes! You don't own me today!"

So, from this you can tell that I'm not so much an "expert" on Sabbath, but very much a fellow traveler! But I'm eager to share what I've learned, both through study and practice.

Resources and Support

(slide eighteen in the slide show presentation)

It's not enough just to THINK ABOUT Sabbath! We only learn by doing. How can we help people to experience Sabbath in positive ways?

Additional helps on the Companion DVD: In addition to the nine lessons, the companion DVD includes several resources to support both leaders and participants as they seek to enrich their experience of Sabbath.

Worship and Prayer Resources

(slide nineteen in the slide show presentation)

Prayers begin and end each lesson. The DVD includes additional prayers for individuals, families, and groups who would like to celebrate Sabbath through worship and prayer.

On the DVD there are prayers

- That could be used at the beginning of a Sabbath celebration in a Christian home. The first part of

the prayer is based on the prayer that is used in Jewish homes after the lighting of the two Sabbath candles.

We praise you, O God, Ruler of the universe, for sanctifying us through our Lord, Jesus Christ, and for giving us the gift of Sabbath.

- And for saying goodbye to the Sabbath. It not only gives us the opportunity to give thanks for the Sabbath that is ending, but also invites God's blessing on the work ahead. One of the elements of Jewish leave-taking celebrations includes passing around a container of aromatic spices (cloves, cinnamon, etc.) as a tangible reminder of the sweetness of Sabbath. You might try that yourself with this prayer.

We thank you, O God, for the sweetness and rest of the Sabbath that is ending. May its blessing extend over the work ahead, and may all our work honor you. Even as we long for Sabbath's return, make us also mindful of that eternal Sabbath which you promise us in Jesus Christ—a time in which your whole creation will be healed of pain, pure and joyous as on that first Sabbath.

Music

(slide twenty in the slide show presentation)

The companion DVD includes musical Sabbath Experiences to each lesson. During the experiences I play the harp and lead in prayer.

More Ideas: Something to Bake

(slide twenty-one in the slide show presentation)

The traditional bread for the Sabbath is the braided challah loaf. The DVD includes my favorite recipe for you to try yourself.

Group Session Support

(slide twenty-two in the slide show presentation)

Most importantly, the DVD also includes nine short (15–20 minute) videos introducing each lesson, plus one short video that introduces the study as a whole. Many groups use the video presentations at the beginning of their lessons.

Each of these videos includes

- A short summary of the lesson
- A short “mini-sabbath” with music
- A brief prayer to begin the lesson.

Resources in the Study Book

(slide twenty-three in the slide show presentation)

Refer to the table of contents for exact locations in your edition of the Bible study and point out the featured resources there:

- ✓ Find About the Authors for an introduction to the women who wrote the Bible study and the Suggestions for Leaders: Carol M. Bechtel and Laura Mariko Cheifetz.
- ✓ The art in this PW/*Horizons* Bible study is by various artists and is another way to explore the study. Find About the Art near the front of the study book to learn more about the artists and ways to see more of their art. Thinking about the art leads to good discussions. Flip through the Bible study and find a piece that catches your eye. What is it about that piece of art that intrigues you?
- ✓ Discussion Questions are placed at the end of each lesson. Reflecting on the questions is an excellent way to review the lessons. They walk you through each lesson's content.
- ✓ Suggestions for Leaders follow each lesson and are intended to help leaders present the lessons to their study groups. The format is consistent across lessons: Prepare, Online Options, Gather, Dig Deeper, Respond, and Close.
- ✓ Brief explanations about books and resources the author finds helpful can be found in the annotated bibliography. Maybe there's a book there that you'd like to read to learn more about Sabbath.

Additional resources

(slide twenty-four in the slide show presentation)

- ✓ *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight* is published in English, Spanish, ecumenical, large-print, and audio editions.
- ✓ A Companion DVD includes lesson introductions presented by the author and also includes downloadable resources. Study groups can use the author's introductions to begin their Bible study sessions or use them as lesson supplements. The Companion DVD is also available in a digital downloadable version.
- ✓ This Workshop for Leaders can be used with leaders preparing to introduce the study.

- ✓ The promotional flier and promotional poster can be used to advertise the study. A poster is included with each English and Large Print study book.
- ✓ Use the bulletin cover for a meeting or worship service when you install leaders or for another PW or church event.
- ✓ The charm/pendant features the study's cover art and makes an excellent gift for leaders and others.

Respond and Reflect

(slide twenty-five in the slide show presentation)

If you have twelve people or fewer, ask these questions of the whole group. If more, use small groups of four or five, so more participants have time to respond:

1. What have you discovered that will most help you prepare to lead, or to participate in, this study?

2. What challenges do you imagine you might face?
3. Name one way you will prepare yourself to accept God's gift of Sabbath.

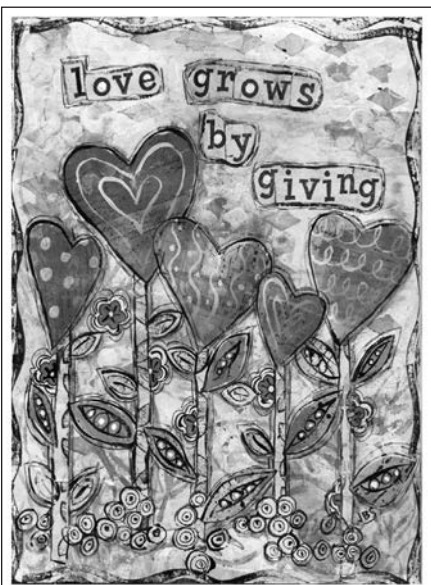
Closing Prayer in Unison

(slide twenty-six in the slide show presentation)

Thank you for coming, for listening, for asking questions.

Pray the prayer on the slide show presentation together:

Thank you, Gracious God, for calling us to study, to community, to Sabbath celebration. We are excited, but we are also weary. We know that you are Lord of the Sabbath, and we know we need to accept your invitation. Show us how to say yes to the Sabbath. Welcome us—as we welcome others—into that holy circle of rest and delight. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Presbyterian Women

What does it mean to support the mission of the church worldwide? For Presbyterian Women, it means that we respond to God's love for us by offering our many gifts to ensure wholeness for all. Standing alongside the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and our ecumenical partners, we bring Christ's love to the world through mission and ministry. From sewing masks, leading a Bible study, and participating in community-building relationships such as the U.S.A. Mission Experience, to offering financial support through the Birthday and Thank Offering programs, we are engaged and passionate in all we do to make this world a better place.

Visit presbyterianwomen.org for more information about how you can use and share your gifts in ministry with Presbyterian Women.

HZN22101

Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God’s Gift of Rest and Delight

| Lesson | Title | Scripture | Key Idea |
|--------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Sabbath and Celebration ¹ | Matthew 11:28–12:13 | As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus invites all of us who are weary to celebrate a Sabbath that is more about “yes” than “no.” |
| 2 | Sabbath and Creation | Genesis 1:1–2:3 | Sabbath celebration is something that God has built into the structure of creation. Receiving that gift is part of what deepens our friendship with God, others, and the rest of creation. |
| 3 | Sabbath and Sunday | Luke 4:16–22 and Acts 16:11–15 | Over the centuries, Christians began to celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday, but we still haven’t come to an agreement on quite what that means. This uncertainty may be an opportunity. |
| 4 | Sabbath and Surrender | Exodus 16 | The “manna” story, with its emphasis on only gathering as much as we need and not gathering on the Sabbath, is a call to trust God to provide for our needs. It is a call to surrender our unhealthy striving for more wealth, more stuff, and more success. It is a call to recognize when it is time to say, “Enough.” |
| 5 | Sabbath and Servitude | Genesis 2:15 and 3:17–19; Exodus 31:12–18, 35:1–29, and 36:1–7 | Work without Sabbath is servitude. |
| 6 | Sabbath and Hospitality | Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15 | There is something in the very nature of Sabbath that demands it be shared. Accepting the gift of the Sabbath also involves a commitment to hospitality. |
| 7 | Sabbath and Self-Care | Luke 13:10–21 | Even though self-care is a crucial part of the Christian journey, it’s important to remember that Sabbath is not primarily about caring for ourselves. Sabbath is first about honoring God. |
| 8 | Sabbath and Justice | Isaiah 58 | Sabbath and justice go hand in hand. Celebrating the Sabbath means living lives of justice all week long. |
| 9 | Sabbath and Community | Acts 2:42–47 | Community is key for sustaining us in our Sabbath journey. |

¹ I want to acknowledge my colleague, Travis West, for the “Sabbath and _____” approach to this study.