

Robert Warren //  
Sue Mayfield



# balance

a 5-session course //  
on rest, work and play //  
for Lent //

 CHURCH HOUSE  
PUBLISHING

Church House Publishing  
Church House  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3NZ

Tel: 020 7898 1451

Fax: 020 7898 1449

ISBN 0 7151 4079 5

Published 2005 by  
Church House Publishing

Copyright © Sue Mayfield  
and Robert Warren 2005

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or stored or transmitted by any means or in any form, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system without written permission which should be sought from the Copyright Administrator, Church House Publishing, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ.  
Email: [copyright@c-of-e.org.uk](mailto:copyright@c-of-e.org.uk).

Cover design by Andy Stonehouse

Printed by Creative Print and  
Design Group, Ebbw Vale, Wales

# Contents

Acknowledgements		vi
Introduction		1
Session 1	Time to Pause/Beforehand	14
	Time to Pause/The Session	19
Session 2	Time to Celebrate/Beforehand	25
	Time to Celebrate/The Session	29
Session 3	Time to Rest/Beforehand	38
	Time to Rest/The Session	41
Session 4	Time to Play/Beforehand	48
	Time to Play/The Session	52
Session 5	Time to Liberate/Beforehand	58
	Time to Liberate/The Session	62
Bibliography and Further Resources		69

# Acknowledgements

The authors and publisher gratefully acknowledge permission to reproduce copyright material in this book. Every effort has been made to trace and contact copyright holders. If there are any inadvertent omissions we apologize to those concerned and will ensure that a suitable acknowledgement is made in all future editions.

Special thanks are due to Gordon Mursell, Bishop of Stafford, for kindly allowing the authors to use unpublished material from his research notes.

Extracts from the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, Anglicized Edition (NRSV): copyright © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and used by permission. All rights reserved.

Extracts from the Contemporary English Version of the Bible (CEV): copyright © American Bible Society 1991, 1995.

Extract from *God of Surprises* by Gerard Hughes, copyright © 1985. Used by permission of Darton, Longman & Todd.

## >> Introduction

*Life Balance* is an opportunity to examine our patterns of rest, work and play, and to look afresh at our values and life principles in the light of the Bible's teaching about the Sabbath.

### >>What is Sabbath?

A large pot had been in the possession of a family for more time than they could remember. It had served a number of purposes during that time and was currently being used as an umbrella stand in the hall. When a TV Road Show was in the area doing valuations, one of the children persuaded the parents – just for a bit of fun – to take the pot along. It proved to be a very rare vase, worth a small fortune.

The Sabbath is rather like that. We all have it, it has been around for ages, we have put it to all sorts of uses, but most of us have only the haziest idea what it was meant for. And we do not realize what a treasure it is!

- > **Sabbath is a gift** more than a demand. It is the gift of a break from the routines of life and a means of refreshing us. For Jews, celebrating Sabbath from sunset to sunset, Sabbath begins with the gifts of food and sleep. For Christians, celebrating Sabbath on the *first* day of the week, Sabbath is not so much the gift of rest at the end of a hard week's work, as a reminder (at the start of a new week) that the whole of life is sustained by God's grace and generosity.
- > **Sabbath is a door** opening up a new dimension – taking us beyond the necessary, the urgent and the everyday. Sabbath is not so much a day for *not* doing things (despite misconceptions reinforced by both Pharisees and Victorians!) but rather a day for *doing* the really important things: giving and receiving rather than buying and selling; enjoying the goodness and reality of God's presence and the beauty of his world. Sabbath is about entering into the fullness of life Christ promised here on earth as a foretaste of the richness of heavenly life.

- > **Sabbath is an attitude** not just a day. Sabbath invites us to take its principles of resting, thanksgiving, justice and generosity into the whole of life – reducing the stress and rush and enlarging our vision.
- > **Sabbath is a surprise!** The story of Creation in the opening verses of Genesis has a fascinating twist at the end. For seven days God creates spaces, habitats and living creatures. On the last day God rests, and makes holy, Sabbath time. This has striking relevance for us in a society that has been described as ‘cash rich, time poor’. We talk of ‘finding time’, ‘spending time’, ‘catching up’, ‘chasing our tails’. What we do not talk about is receiving time as gift or valuing it as holy.

## >>Why study Sabbath during Lent?

Lent and Sabbath (be it Sabbath days or longer ‘Sabbatical’ periods) are seasons of stopping. Both are opportunities to pause, to find new rhythms, to create space and to clear some of the clutter in our overcrowded and lopsided lives.

Both Lent and Sabbath are about:

- > **Time:** taking ‘time out’, making special ‘holy’ time to refocus mind and spirit and refresh the whole of life.
- > **Spiritual disciplines:** Sabbath is one of the most neglected spiritual disciplines. We may practise prayer, fasting, giving and service but forget to practise Sabbath – even though it is one of the Ten Commandments.
- > **Good news:** understanding Sabbath is a wonderful antidote to our frantic and fragmented culture. Sabbath can be an oasis in the desert of activity and a pole star in the dark night of the soul.
- > **Sharing:** Though solitude is an important part of Lent and Sabbath, our experience of both is enhanced by community. We are called not just to share Sabbath but also to *give* Sabbath to others.

It is our hope and prayer that *Life Balance* will help us – as we work, rest and play – to:

- > discover the beauty of Sabbath principles in our daily lives;
- > build Sabbath time into the crazy pressures of shift patterns, complicated family structures and our 24/7 consumer culture;
- > find patterns for living that liberate rather than legislate.

---

In an age that has lost its soul, Sabbath keeping offers the possibility of gaining it back. In an age desperately searching for meaning, Sabbath keeping offers a new hope . . . The delight of the Sabbath and its resting, embracing and feasting give new energy and meaning to life as its climax and focal point.

*Marva J. Dawn, Keeping the Sabbath Wholly, p. 50*

---

## >>What does the course consist of?

The course consists of **five sessions** for group study, each designed to last about **90 minutes**.

- > **Session 1** looks at the concept of Sabbath as a whole and invites group members to consider their own rhythms of work, rest and play.
- > **Sessions 2–5** take an in-depth look at Sabbath principles of celebration, rest, play and liberation.
- > **Session 5** also allows time for summary and reflection on the whole course. If you have time, you might want to do this as an extra session rather than doing this as part of session 5.

Each session contains study guidelines, interactive activities and ideas for prayer and meditation. (See pages 7–10 for a fuller description of the features of each session.) There are also ideas for practical action and suggestions for further study.

## >>Who is the course for?

The course is designed for group study and many of the activities involve sharing together. An ideal size for the group would be between 8 and 12 people.

If your group is larger than 8, you might like to divide it into two smaller groups for the *Talk about it* sections of the sessions, allowing each small group to focus in more depth on just a few of the discussion questions and then feed back their responses to the whole group.

**To get the most from the course, we suggest that each group member has a copy of the book.**

## >>Where should we meet?

The best meeting place for a course of this kind is probably someone's home. Alternatively, you could meet in a church hall or other community venue. Wherever you meet, make sure the venue is welcoming, comfortable, warm and easy for everyone to get to. If you are splitting into two groups it is good, where possible, to have these groups in separate rooms, as two groups in the same room tend to distract each other. However, if this isn't an option make sure that each 'huddle' sits close enough to each other to hear, without disturbing the other group(s) in the room.

You may like to provide refreshments before or after the course, in which case be aware that you will need to add on extra time to the recommended 90-minute session.

## >>Who can lead the course?

This material has been designed so that most people, with a little preparation and thought, could lead it. You do not need to be a theological expert or experienced in adult education (although experience does, of course, help).

---

The leader's main task is not to teach or lecture the group, but to enable discussion and exploration by group members by leading them through the material provided.

---

As well as preparing and handling the study material and ensuring that prayer and meditation times go well, the leader should be aware of the dynamics of the group and alive to the joys and struggles of each group member. You might also make the coffee!

Leading a group study can be a big task if attempted by one person on his or her own, so you might like to consider sharing the leadership with someone else.

Remember that growth in the Christian life is not just about accumulating knowledge. There are things to learn here, but, more importantly, group members will be encouraged to reflect upon and to share their own experiences of life and of their learning during the course.

To help you in the task of group leadership, we offer the following 'tips'. You may find the booklet *Leading an Emmaus Group* helpful.

## >> Tips for leaders

### Be prepared

Make sure that you are familiar with the content of each session. You will need to decide beforehand which parts of the material you are going to use and whether you are going to split into smaller groups for some of the activities.

For each session we have provided background information to help with understanding concepts and the Bible passages. Make sure you read this information thoroughly. It is there to help you. It is not designed to be used verbatim in the session: this could very easily kill discussion. The aim of each session is to help group members towards a discovery of the meaning of Sabbath for themselves rather than telling them what to think. Additional background information is available on the web site ([www.chpublishing/lifebalance](http://www.chpublishing/lifebalance)) should you want to go a stage deeper, or feel you need more background information.

If you are responsible for the 'Input' part of the *Encounter* section, prepare what you will say in advance. Try not to say too much or to waffle. Make a few points clearly and well. You might like to practise what you will say so that when it comes to it you won't need to have your nose in your notes!

## Delegate

Don't do everything yourself. Share out tasks with co-leaders or other group members. Not only does this help the leader, but it also gives others the chance to exercise and develop their own gifts of leading and contributing to the group.

You might ask someone to read one of the Bible passages or to lead an opening prayer or the closing meditation. You might delegate the role of welcoming people or making the refreshments. You could invite someone else to be a group 'enabler', if you decide to split into smaller groups.

Make sure you give people plenty of warning and don't land them with difficult tasks at the last minute. Be there to offer support and advice if needed. If you designate someone as a group enabler, give that person the opportunity to look at the material beforehand.

## Be organized

- > Try to arrive at the venue in good time so that you are not doing last minute preparations as people are arriving.
- > Set up the room carefully, arranging the furniture so that there is a good group dynamic, with no one left out and everybody able to see the leader (and flipchart or video if you are using one).
- > Make sure that you have pens, pencils, large sheets of paper, and any craft materials, music or objects ready beforehand. There is a checklist of everything you might need, at the beginning of each session.

## Be imaginative

We know that people learn in different ways: some people like to take in information by reading and reflection in quiet, others learn best through group discussion, others like to respond to visual stimuli (e.g. a piece of art or a centrepiece used as a focal point in worship). Others like to respond through art and craft or through music.

The course provides you with a range of teaching methods and ideas. Suggestions are made – especially in the *Go deep . . .* sections – for creative, multimedia responses to Sabbath principles. We encourage you to be inventive and to draw on your own and the group's creativity, as appropriate.

## Be flexible

We have provided enough material for a session of about 90 minutes but the suggested timings are only rough guides. You may find that you have too much material and need to miss out some of the activities. Feel free to do this. The parts of each session that are optional and could be cut without losing too much are marked with a \*. Generally it is better to do a few activities thoroughly and well than to try to rush through everything and leave people exhausted.

Allow extra time for refreshments before or afterwards if you wish.

## >>How each session works

Material for the course is in two sections for each of the five sessions – *Beforehand* and *The Session*.

Beforehand contains:

- > **Aims** of the session – to help focus your mind in preparation and evaluate sessions after the event.
- > **What you will need** – a checklist of practical materials required to ensure smooth running of the session. (See pages 11–13 for a more comprehensive list of resources.)
- > **Background** to the Bible material – to help you understand Sabbath and its principles. Some groups might like to read this material for themselves either during the sessions or in advance. Alternatively it can be read by the leader or leaders and then summarized in the 'Input' section. *Background* material for Session 1 gives a general overview of Sabbath as an introduction to the whole course. *Background* material for Sessions 2–5 focuses on *Three key words* and a summary – *Cutting across* – of the ways in which Sabbath principles

challenge our values and lifestyle. This section also includes quotations from a variety of sources to stimulate further thought. Remember that there is more material on the web site if you want to use it ([www.chpublishing/lifebalance](http://www.chpublishing/lifebalance)).

The **Session** is structured under the following headings:



Welcome



Action replay



Brainstorm



Do something



Encounter



Talk about it



Get real!



Go deep . . .

Each session follows the same structure, though the *Do something* section comes before *Encounter* in Sessions 1 and 3 and after *Talk about it* in sessions 2, 4 and 5. The sections of the course work in the following ways (please note that timings are only approximate suggestions):

## >>Welcome (5–10 minutes)

The leader welcomes the group and puts people at their ease. This is particularly important in the first session, especially if yours is a new group meeting for the first time. The notes for Session 1 give some suggestions of how to help a new group to gel.



Someone leads the group in prayer and/or the group says the Course Prayer together.

The purpose of this opening prayer is to still people from the busy-ness of the day and the rush of getting to the meeting, and to turn their thoughts to God. Each group will have its own preferences for how it prays. If the group is well established, it may already have a pattern for prayer. Suggestions are given in the session notes but feel free to use whatever is most appropriate for your group.

**Remember:** If you ask another member of the group to lead this part of the session, make sure there is plenty of time for preparation and guidance if needed. Ensure that no one does it under duress or feels 'dropped in it'.

## >>Action replay (10 minutes)

An opportunity for group members to report on what they noticed, thought about, or did in response to the previous session's *Get real!* section.



## >>Brainstorm (5 minutes)

A quick ice-breaker to be done individually, in pairs or as a whole group.



## >>Do something (5–10 minutes)

A hands-on activity for the group to do together.



## >>Encounter (15 minutes)

The group encounters themes of Sabbath via:

- > **Input:** short talk from the leader based on his/her reading of the *Background* information. (This may be cut or omitted altogether if group members prefer to read the *Background* for themselves.)
- > **Reading the Bible passages.**



## >>Talk about it (25–30 minutes)



This is the main group study activity, consisting of questions for discussion, linking the Bible passages with Sabbath themes of pausing, celebration, rest, play and liberation. (Depending on numbers, you may wish to do this as a whole group or to split into two smaller groups and then report back to each other.)

An optional 'Jesus focus' links themes with incidents from Jesus' life.

## >>Get real! (10 minutes)



Each week suggestions will be made for practical ways in which the group can put into practice the insights and values that have been discussed during the session. Projects may be individual tasks or whole group activities.

## >>Go deep . . . (15 minutes)



This section offers an extended meditation to close the session. A number of suggestions are given to enable you to choose something appropriate to your group. Make sure this part is not omitted or rushed. This is a vital time to help the group to:

- > slow down and reflect in silence on what has been the dominant theme for them and on what they feel has spoken to them through the session;
- > grasp the meaning of Sabbath at a deep personal level;
- > identify its application to their lives and to the wider community.

## >>Resources

### Music

We have suggested that you use music to prepare for prayer and during the *Go deep* . . . sections. The following recommendations might be useful:

- > **Taizé** Several CDs available, including *Wait for the Lord* (Gia, 1995);
- > **Instrumental Praise** Series of CDs (Brentwood, 1999);
- > **Arvo Pärt**, *Litany* (ECM, 1996) or *Tabula Rasa* (HMV Classics, EMI, 1997);
- > **Adiemus**, *Songs of Sanctuary* (Venture, 2001);
- > **Smooth Classics** (Classic FM, 2002);
- > **Music from the Late Late Service** – especially the CD *Deep Peace* (available from [www.stickymusic.co.uk](http://www.stickymusic.co.uk)).

A number of other specific pieces of music are suggested at other points in the course:

### Session 2

- > ‘What a Wonderful World’, Louis Armstrong (*Louis Armstrong's All Time Greatest Hits* (MCA, 1994).

### Session 3

- > For the *Do something* activity, choose a relaxing piece of music from an album like *Smooth Classics* (see above).
- > ‘He’s got the whole world in his hands’, Nina Simone from *Nina: The Essential Nina Simone* (Metro, 2000).

### Session 4

- > For *Go deep* . . . use some upbeat jazz from an album such as *Classic Jazz: Jazz Masters* (Time Life Records, 2002) or some salsa music – try *Oxfam Salsa* (World Music Network, 2000).

## Session 5

- > 'Finale' and 'Gloria' from the *African Sanctus* by David Fanshawe (Silva Classics – SILKD 6003).
- > 'The Touching Place', *Common Ground*, St Andrew Press, 1998.
- > 'Travelling the road to freedom' from *A Touching Place*, Iona Community 1986.
- > 'The Freedom Samba', *God in the Flesh*, Sticky Music, 1994.

## Objects

You might like to place objects on a low table or on the floor as a visual focus during the *Welcome* or *Go deep* . . . sections. Suitable objects might be:

- > flowers or a plant
- > pebbles or stones
- > candles
- > twigs or driftwood
- > a cross or crucifix
- > a Bible
- > a carving or figure, for example, of people praying or embracing.

Alternatively, you might like to arrange a collection of objects that reflect the theme of each session, changing each week. The following are suggestions of themed objects you could use:

- > Session 1 – clocks, calendars, diaries, work tools;
- > Session 2 – objects from the natural world, such as flowers, leaves, shells, fruit;
- > Session 3 – pillows, bread, water, slippers, lavender;
- > Session 4 – board games, sports equipment, musical instrument, paints, gardening things;
- > Session 5 – ropes, chains, barbed wire, cross, images of freedom, e.g. birds in flight, butterflies, people leaping, skateboarders.

Ask group members to bring in objects that relate to the session's theme or share out responsibility for assembling the focus between group members.

## Playdough recipe

Mix together to a smooth paste 2 cups plain flour, 2 cups water, 1 cup salt, 2 tablespoons cooking oil, 2 teaspoons cream of tartar, plus food colouring/flavouring. Place mixture in a saucepan and cook gently and very slowly over a low heat, stirring all the time, until the mixture forms a ball. The playdough should keep for a few weeks in an airtight container.

## Images

If you want to use images of Christ as a visual focus try:

- > **The Christ We Share** picture resource collection from CMS/USPG. (One of the cards featured in this pack is 'The Laughing Christ', which would be particularly appropriate for Session 4.)
- > **Icon postcards** – many cathedrals, churches or religious bookshops sell postcard images. Alternatively, try using [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk). Click on 'Images' and then type in 'religious icons'.

If you want images of rest, play, liberation or birds in flight try typing any of these words into [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk) – 'Images' – in the same way.

# >> 1 Time to Pause/ Beforehand

## >> Aim

This session aims to introduce the concept of Sabbath and to examine our rhythms of work, rest and play in the light of Sabbath principles.

## What you will need (make your own selection)

- > candles;
- > music to encourage stillness (see page 11 for suggestions);
- > objects to provide a visual focus (see page 12);
- > flipchart or large sheet of paper and marker pens;
- > A4 paper and pens;
- > songbooks.

## >> Background

Leaders: please see pages 7–8 for tips on how to use this material.



## What is Sabbath?

- > **Stillness** – The word ‘Sabbath’ comes from the Hebrew word *Shabbat*, which means to pause, to cease and to be still. Sabbath is the opportunity to get off the treadmill and reflect on our values and priorities.
- > **Rhythm** – The pattern of resting one day in seven imitates the rhythm of creation in Genesis 1 where God worked creatively for six days and then paused to rest and to enjoy all that had been made.
- > **Receiving** – Sabbath is a gift from God, a work of grace and a reminder that all we have comes from God’s creative love. We do not so much ‘practise’ Sabbath as receive it.
- > **Refreshment** – Sabbath is more than the cessation of work, it is about restoration, creativity and play – things that busy adults all too easily neglect.

- > **Freedom** – Sabbath is about liberation, wholeness and well-being.
- > **Holy** – God himself observes the Sabbath, modelling it for us. He calls it holy and exhorts us to do the same.

---

Sabbath is 'the climax of living . . .', 'a *palace in time* which we build . . .', and 'an opportunity to mend our tattered lives.'

*Heschel, The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man, pp. 14, 18*

---

---

How do you make a day holy? By seeing that it is holy already; and behaving accordingly.

*Joy Davidman, Smoke on the Mountain, p. 56*

---

---

Sabbath keeping is often disparaged as not useful, but we certainly do serve the world better out of the wholeness, order, revived spirits, empowered emotions, healthy bodies, renewed minds, authentic relationships, and nurtured sense of ourselves that Sabbath keeping creates.

*Marva J. Dawn, Keeping the Sabbath Wholly, p. 146*

---

## Sabbath in the Old Testament

- > Sabbath is about sharing in God's enjoyment of creation. Doing no work means going back from the curses of Genesis 3 to the generosity of Chapter 1. Sabbath is a return to Eden.
- > The Ten Commandments give high priority to the Sabbath – it is to be kept, holy and treasured (Exodus 20.8-11).
- > Sabbath is essential to the well-being of society – it is both communal (Deuteronomy 5.12-15) and environmental (Leviticus 25.1-12). Principles of justice and jubilee stem from the one in seven pattern that Sabbath establishes, which benefits all – foreigners, slaves and livestock included.
- > Sabbath keeping is a reminder that all things come from God – that he is the source of life and salvation, that life is a gift.

When Israel wandered in the wilderness, even the provision of manna (Exodus 16.21-30) followed a Sabbath rhythm.

- > Throughout history, Sabbath keeping has been a symbol of identity for the Jewish people (for example, during the Babylonian exile described in the Book of Daniel). In the Jewish tradition, Sabbath is a time for community events and shared feasts – celebrations of Holy Day (now secularized into ‘holiday’).

## Jesus and the Sabbath

- > As a Jew, Jesus observed the Sabbath.
- > However, he challenged the Pharisees’ hollow, hair-splitting observance of the rules of the Sabbath (Matthew 12.1-13; Luke 13.10-17), restoring the person-centredness and well-being that are at the heart of true Sabbath keeping (Isaiah 58.13,14). In Christ’s time there were 1,521 things that you were banned from doing on the Sabbath – including rescuing a drowning man!
- > Jesus saw Sabbath as being for the benefit of humankind, not vice versa (Mark 2.27) and as an opportunity to bless and enrich others (Matthew 12.12).

## Sabbath in the Early Church

- > In the Early Church, Christians celebrated Sunday (the first day of the Jewish week) as the ‘Lord’s Day’ – the day of resurrection. This became (as Sabbath had for the Jews) a symbol of their Christian distinctiveness. The fact that it was the first day of the week and not the last emphasized grace over law – rest was given not earned – and the awareness that *all* of life was energized by God’s love and goodness.
- > Some Jewish Christians probably continued to observe the Sabbath (on Saturday) as well until 321 CE, when Constantine formally declared Sunday a day of rest.

- > For the Early Church the Sabbath had extra meaning – it was a foretaste of the heavenly rest and a symbol of the age to come. Bede writes of ‘. . . the endless sabbath day of paradise where we shall live for ever with the saints’.

## Sabbath in the twenty-first century

In our frantic, fragmented, pluralist society the pattern of a Sabbath rest one day in seven has been eroded and in many cases completely lost. But our overbusy, materialistic, technological culture needs to rediscover the rhythms of work, rest and play more than ever.

For many of us, our pattern of Sabbath keeping will, of necessity, need to be flexible.

It might include:

- > **Sabbath days:** devoting a whole day (ideally one day a week but not necessarily always Sunday) to Sabbath activities of resting, enjoying, receiving, sharing, celebrating.
- > **Sabbath moments:** taking the opportunity to be still, to receive, to appreciate, simply to enjoy. This can be done throughout the day in ‘idle’ moments such as waiting at traffic lights or while doing routine tasks.
- > **Sabbath attitudes:** practising Sabbath moments helps us to develop attitudes of thanksgiving to God, appreciation of others and enjoyment of life, love and everything around us – right now. We ‘press’ Sabbath into the midst of our everyday lives.
- > **Sabbath seasons:** extended resting/stopping/waiting periods, such as holidays, enforced (or chosen) redundancy, sabbaticals and career breaks challenge us to enjoy what *is* – for a season – and not to get frustrated by what *is not*. Responding creatively to such a ‘season’ is a way of practising Sabbath.

However we do it, practising and exploring Sabbath will have a profound effect on our well-being, our spirituality and our approach to life.

## Cutting across

- . . . a time-pressured, workaholic culture;
- . . . materialism and acquisitiveness;
- . . . the idea that non-productive time is time wasted;
- . . . independence and self-sufficiency – being ‘god’ in our own lives;
- . . . a tendency to undervalue relationships and family;
- . . . cynicism and loss of wonder;
- . . . the need to make ourselves feel important by seeming to be busy.

---

Come, let us welcome the Sabbath in joy and peace! Like a bride, radiant and joyous, comes the Sabbath. It brings blessings to our hearts; workday thoughts and cares are put aside. The brightness of the Sabbath light shines forth to tell that the divine spirit of love abides within our home. In that light all our blessings are enriched, all our griefs and trials are softened.

*Prayer from the ‘Kiddush’ ritual for Sabbath eve*

---

For detailed background notes on the Bible passages, go to [www.chpublishing/lifebalance](http://www.chpublishing/lifebalance)

## >> 1 Time to Pause/The Session

### >>Welcome (10 minutes)



#### Introduction

Make sure members of the group know each other's names and are made to feel welcome. If this is a new group meeting for the first time, invite members of the group to introduce themselves. You could divide everyone into pairs, give the pairs five minutes to introduce themselves to each other, then ask individuals to introduce their partner to the rest of the group.

#### Pray

Create a still atmosphere. You might like to light a candle, play some music or encourage people to focus on something that symbolizes Sabbath stillness (see pages 11–12 for suggestions). Alternatively, provide a visual resource such as a cross or image of Christ (see ideas on page 13).

Either pray in your own words, asking God to help you as you begin your course of study, or use the Course Prayer below. One person could read it out or you could say it corporately.

#### Course Prayer

God of eternity, teach us to pause.  
God of creation, teach us to wonder.  
God of Sabbath, teach us to rest.  
God of delight, teach us to play.  
God of the poor, teach us to share in your work of liberation.  
God of love, reconciling us through Christ Jesus,  
fill our lives with your perfect peace. Amen.

### >>\*Brainstorm (5 minutes)



Ask the group: *What word, image or idea comes to mind when you hear the word 'Sabbath'?*

Do this in whatever way suits the temperament of your group. Here are some suggestions:

- > Ask people to shout out answers and write them on a flipchart or large sheet of paper.
- > Ask people to compile lists in twos or threes and then read them out.
- > Ask people to write one idea on a piece of paper and put it in a basket, then give the scraps of paper out again so everyone reads out someone else's contribution.

Try to give spontaneous answers and don't challenge or mock each other's suggestions.

## >>Do something (15 minutes)



Give group members a sheet of paper each and invite them to draw a circle on it to represent an average week in their lives. Now ask them to calculate roughly what proportion of their time is spent in sleeping, eating, working, playing, relaxing, domestic maintenance, prayer and worship and other activities and to divide up their circle in 'pie chart' fashion. Encourage people not to worry unduly about scrupulous accuracy (no calculators, rulers or protractors!) but to see this as an approximate, at-a-glance representation of how they spend their time.

## >>Encounter (20 minutes)



### Input

Using the background information (pages 14–18) give a brief introduction to the concept and practice of Sabbath, focusing especially on the *What is Sabbath?* and *Sabbath in the twenty-first century* sections.

Alternatively, your group might prefer to read some or all of the pages for themselves.

## Read

### Exodus 20.8-11 (NRSV)

<sup>8</sup>Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>For six days you shall labour and do all your work. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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.

### Mark 2.23 – 3.5 (NRSV)

<sup>23</sup>One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

<sup>24</sup>The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' <sup>25</sup>And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? <sup>26</sup>He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' <sup>27</sup>Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'

<sup>1</sup>Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. <sup>2</sup>They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup>And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' <sup>4</sup>Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. <sup>5</sup>He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

## >>Talk about it (25 minutes)



Consider some of or all the following questions:

- > Exodus 20.8-11 commands people to cease from work one day in seven. Why do you think this is important? How is it practical in modern society?
- > What is Jesus' approach to the Sabbath in Mark 2.23 – 3.5?
- > What do you think Jesus meant when he said 'The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath' (v. 27)?
- > What attitudes and values (e.g. stopping, enjoying, playing) do you associate with Sabbath? *Make a list together and keep it for future sessions.*
- > Look at your pie chart. In the light of the two Bible passages, what is your response to your own rhythms and patterns?
- > Why is Sabbath considered 'holy'? What does that teach you about your priorities?

---

### \*Jesus focus

Look at Jesus in Mark 1.32-38. This glimpse of Jesus' ministry shows him

- > engaging with the clamour of people's needs;
- > withdrawing for recuperative rest;
- > making decisive choices in a replenished state.

*What about Jesus' practice do you want to imitate?*

---

## >>Get real! (5 minutes)



Part of the aim of the course is to help group members to live out Sabbath principles in practical ways. The following are suggestions of things the group might like to do in the time before the next session.

- > Think about your own patterns of work, rest and play during the following week. You might want to rethink the way you spend Sunday or your day/time off.

- > If you are using the course during Lent, you might like to choose a Lenten discipline in which you:
  - > give up or cut down on something that currently takes up a lot of your time;
  - > take up something that you feel your life currently lacks such as a new 'play' activity.
- > Start keeping a 'Sabbath notebook' in which you notice moments and situations where you experience 'Sabbath attitudes'. You can do this in written form or as a mental checklist. The next session will begin with an opportunity to share these observations.

## >>Go deep . . . (10 minutes)



Create a still atmosphere. You could light a candle or play some music.

- Choose some of the following activities as appropriate to your group:
- > Sing 'Take my life and let it be' (*Mission Praise: Combined*, 624)
  - > Light some candles and say this prayer that Jewish families say at the start of the Sabbath as they light the 'Kiddush' candles:

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe.  
May the Sabbath-light which illumines our dwelling cause peace and happiness to shine in our home.

Bless us, O God, on this holy Sabbath and cause divine glory to shine upon us.

Enlighten our darkness and guide us and all humanity, thy children, towards truth and eternal light. Amen.

*Quoted by Marva J. Dawn in Keeping the Sabbath Wholly, p. xvii*

## Pray

Use one or more of the following prayers or pray in your own words.

When we are rushing and harassed

**Be still and know that I am God.**

When we are burdened and weary

**Be still and know that I am God.**

When we are bemused and perplexed

**Be still and know that I am God.**

When we feel sore or overlooked

**Be still and know that I am God.**

When we are smug and self-important

**Be still and know that I am God.**

When we think that we ourselves are God

**Be still and know that I am God.**

Timeless God,

help us to be still.

Creator God,

help us respond to your world.

God of comfort,

help us rest in you.

Playful God,

help us take ourselves less seriously.

Holy God,

suffuse us with the fragrance of Sabbath.

Amen.

Sabbath God,

help us to stop,

slow down,

unclench our fists

and receive.

Amen.