

SABBATH LAWS

by Brent Gehman

KEY VERSE:

Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" Luke 6:9

FAITH STORY:

Luke 6:1-11

FAITH FOCUS:

According to Ex. 31:14 and 35:2, doing work on the Sabbath was penalized with death. When the disciples plucked some grain and rubbed it in their hands in order to get the grain out to eat, the Pharisees saw this as work, thus being unlawful. Jesus in return gives them an example of what David did in order to get food to eat. He reminded the Pharisees that the Son of Man is Lord over the Sabbath and not the law. In Mark 2:23 Jesus says "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath." People should not say what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath. "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" Jesus asked them. If we are doing the work of God, then that work is following the Spirit of the Sabbath.

SESSION GOAL:

To challenge students to prioritize the Spirit of the Law over the letter of the Law, and compassion over certain religious obligations.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Identify why the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.
- Identify how human welfare takes precedence at times over rules
- Articulate the reason Jesus healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath.
- Articulate when we can justify our actions as we do the work of God.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 pencils
- 2 copies of the worksheet for each student

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–7 minutes)

Ask students to take off their shoes when they come into the classroom. When you are ready to begin, ask them if they know why you made that request. The answer is: In some homes, especially in certain countries, it is a house rule to take off your shoes. Ask students if any of them have that rule? Discuss: What are the house rules in your home? Make sure each student shares at least one house rule of their home.

CONNECT: (7–10 minutes)

Ask students if and when they break the house rules in their home. *Why do they break them? Because they don't care? Because they think they have a better idea? Can they ever justify breaking the rules? Are there ever good reasons to break the rules?*

Ask students to decide if they are mostly a “rule-breaker” or a “rule-keeper.” Tell the rule-breakers to move to one side of the room, and the rule-keepers to the other side. Allow students to stand in the middle as well if they choose. Discuss where they chose to stand and why.

Ask: *Was Jesus a rule-breaker or a rule-keeper? Ask students to move to either side of the room again based on what they think.*

Say: *Let's look at one story about Jesus and how he responded to some rules.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–15 minutes)

Ask for a volunteer to read the scripture passage, and instruct students to listen for the rules that Jesus and David broke. After the passage has been read, discuss their answers regarding the rules that Jesus and David broke. Then divide the class into groups of 3-4, hand out the worksheets, and ask groups to answer questions 1, 2, and 3. Discuss the answers with the whole class.

Answers to the worksheet questions:

- 1** A day of rest because God rested from creation work on the 7th day. God gave a day of rest to the Israelites.
- 2** Jesus came to fulfill the true spirit of the Law (Matt. 5:17). Jesus, being the incarnation, God in flesh who has authority over the law, helps us understand the intent of the law.
- 3** Jesus wanted to show that people's needs and human welfare can, at times, take precedence over the law.

APPLY: (10 minutes)

Say: *What does this story have to do with our daily lives? Should we obey the laws of today's world to set a good example as Christians, or do we make ripples in the water of society in order to stand up for what we believe? Do we have a right, like Jesus did, to tread into new territories in order to set others free?"*

Ask students to get into their small groups and talk about question 4 on the worksheet. Share answers with the whole class.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to think about question 5 on their own and write their thoughts on the worksheet.

Close the class time with this prayer:

“God, there are a lot of questions that we don’t have the answers to. Help us to be respectful of the laws set before us, but help them not to control us as Christians. Teach us to listen to your voice. Show us how to follow Jesus in his actions to set others free. You are our guide and ruler, not the world. Amen.”

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

The disregard for the sacred traditions of the Sabbath struck a blow at the nerve center of Judaism. Obeying the Sabbath laws was one of the two most vital expressions of the covenant relation with Yahweh. The Pharisees said that people need to obey the Sabbath laws, thus the requirements are made central for this belief. Jesus, on the other hand, says that he is Lord of the Sabbath, and that human welfare and need take precedence over any rule or ceremony. Jesus was not against the Sabbath—he was just against the interpretation the Pharisees had of it, which disregarded the primary worth of human beings. The Pharisees would ask the question “What shall I refrain from doing?;” rather than “What good can I do on the Sabbath?”

The Pharisees were so stuck on what used to be that they were blind to what Jesus was trying to teach them. They became spiritually nearsighted. They peered so narrowly into the books that they never lifted their eyes to the new and exciting teaching of Jesus; they knew everything God had said but forgot to listen to what God was saying. The Pharisees were only able to tell people how to live if the world were the same as a few hundred years ago. But the world never stands still, it is always different, and if we are to hear God’s voice in our problems or needs, we must listen to the Bible and the Living Word. We then use the community of believers to help us discern what the Living Word and the Bible says to us.

Jesus knew the Pharisees’ thoughts—both good and bad—he did not have to wait to hear how the Pharisees would act when he healed the man with the withered hand. He already knew. Jesus didn’t just point out the bad but he also encouraged the good in those around him. He didn’t just see the actions of the past but he knew by God’s grace what they might become.

WORKS CITED:

NRSV Harper Study Bible. Trans. Harold Lindsell. Michigan: Zondervan, 1991.

The Broadman Bible Commentary. Trans. Clifton J. Allen. Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1970.

WORKSHEET

1. What is the Jewish Sabbath? (See Exodus 20:8-11).

2. In Luke 6:5, what did Jesus mean when he said, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath?"

3. In Luke 6:8-10, why did Jesus heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath? What was his reason? Couldn't Jesus have waited one more day to heal this man? (Use your answer to number 2 to help you with this one.)

4. Do you think that human welfare and need take precedence over law? In which cases? For example, do you think it is okay to rob a grocery store if you are starving? What principles do you use to help you decide when you can break the rules?

5. What does this passage say to you? Will today's story change anything in your life? If so, what?