The Sabbath: Mark 2:23–3:6 Leader's Guide

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Overview for the leader

Big idea: The Sabbath began as God's gift of rest at creation, became a sign of the covenant under the law, and is fulfilled in Christ — so today it is a rhythm of rest, worship, mercy, and hope, not a burden of rules.

This session adds Mark 3:1–6 to last week's passage and traces the Sabbath through the whole Bible. It is a topical study with many passages, so have readers ready and keep each section moving.

Session flow

1. Welcome and opening prayer
2. Recap and opening question
3. Sabbath at creation
4. Sabbath under the law
5. Sabbath in the prophets
6. Jesus and the Sabbath
7. Sabbath in the new covenant
8. The Lord's Day and today's practice
9. Application: rest, worship, mercy, hope
10. Closing and prayer

Before you lead

- Bookmark every passage ahead of time; there are over a dozen.
- Assign readers in advance so the group isn't waiting on page-turning.
- Choose a few discussion questions per section rather than all of them.
- Section 7 is the heart of the application. If time runs short, shorten sections 2–3 rather than skipping it.
- Print or share the weekly challenge so men can take it home.

Opening

Welcome the group and open in prayer.

Recap — the three Fs of Mark 2 so far:

- **Forgiveness** — the paralyzed man (2:1–12)
- **Fulfillment** — Jesus as physician, bridegroom, and new wine (2:13–22)
- **Freedom** — the Lord of the Sabbath (2:23–28)

Today: We add Mark 3:1–6 and spend the session on the Sabbath. Explain that last week's discussion raised good questions about it, so the group will trace what Scripture says from beginning to end.

Read aloud: Mark 2:23–3:6.

Opening question: When you hear the word *Sabbath*, what comes to mind first — rest, law, freedom, or something else? Why?

1. Sabbath at creation

Read: Genesis 2:2–3

Teaching points

- Point out the key word *rested*. Ask how other translations render it.
- God rested not because He was tired, but because He delighted in His work and set the seventh day apart as holy.
- God lays out a creation rhythm we were made for: work, then rest.
- The Hebrew *shabath* means "to cease." The creation Sabbath is not about law but about human flourishing and God's pattern.

Discussion questions

1. How is God's rest different from just taking a day off?
2. Why did God set apart the seventh day and make it holy?
3. What purpose do you think God had for the Sabbath? *(Leader: to delight in the work we have done, and in the work God has done for us.)*

2. Sabbath under the law

Read: Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15

Teaching points

- The two versions of the commandment give different reasons:

Passage	Command	Grounded in
Exodus 20:8–11	*Remember* the Sabbath	**Creation** — imitating God's rest
Deuteronomy 5:12–15	*Observe* the Sabbath	**Redemption** — remembering deliverance from slavery in Egypt

- The Sabbath was also a covenant sign between God and Israel forever (Exodus 31:16–17). It had now become law.
- Israel's Sabbath set them apart from surrounding nations and reminded them that life is sustained by God, not by endless work.

Discussion questions

1. Why do you think God tied the Sabbath to both creation and redemption? *(Leader: the answer the group should land on is trust.)*
2. How might keeping the Sabbath have been an act of trust for Israel in their time?

3. Sabbath in the prophets

Read: Isaiah 58:13–14

- True Sabbath was never about ritual alone, but about delight in God and justice.
- As beautiful as this picture is, Israel could not sustain it. They desecrated the Sabbath and faced the penalty.

Discussion questions

1. What does it mean to "call the Sabbath a delight"?
2. What do we do today to delight in God?

Read: Ezekiel 20:10–13

- Breaking the Sabbath symbolized rebellion and self-reliance.
- It was a serious issue to the Jews. Recall from the 1 Timothy study the strange rules that grew up around it:
  - No spitting, because it could count as plowing.

    - No mirrors, because plucking a gray hair would count as harvesting.
    - If a deer wanders into your house, you may not close the door, because that counts as trapping.
- The same is true today: refusing to be with God is the real rebellion.

4. Jesus and the Sabbath

Read: Mark 2:23–28 and Matthew 12:9–14 (the parallel to Mark 3:1–6)

Teaching points

- The Sabbath had been broken — and along comes Jesus.
- Jesus redefines it: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."
- By feeding and healing on the Sabbath, He shows that mercy outranks sacrifice and that He is Lord of the Sabbath.
- That authority comes from sharing in the Father's ongoing work — another signal of His divine identity.
- In the Old Testament we were told to draw near to God; here we are told to draw near to Jesus.
- The Sabbath now points to delight in God by resting in Christ (Matthew 11:28–30).

Discussion questions

1. What does "the Sabbath was made for man" mean to you?
2. What does it mean that Jesus is *Lord of the Sabbath*?
3. How did Jesus free people from Sabbath legalism while still honoring its purpose?

5. The Sabbath in the new covenant

Read: Colossians 2:16–17

- The Sabbath is no longer a law with a penalty; it is up to each of us to connect with Jesus.
- Paul calls the Sabbath a shadow — but the reality is found in Christ. The shadow points to the light.

Read: Hebrews 4:9–11

- Hebrews points to the true Sabbath rest: entering God's rest through faith in Jesus, both now and in eternity.

- This is real hope for us — a time to reflect on what is coming and promised.
- The New Testament does not command Sabbath-keeping as law. It points us to freedom through its fulfillment in Christ, and that freedom is hope.
- Romans 14:5–6 gives freedom: some honor one day, others treat every day alike. The point is to live unto the Lord.

Discussion question

1. How does Hebrews 4 connect salvation with Sabbath rest?

6. The Lord's Day and today's practice

Ask first: If the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ, why do people still celebrate it?

Read: Acts 20:7 and Revelation 1:10

- Early believers gathered on the first day of the week to remember the resurrection.
- Sunday is not the "new law," but many Christians see it as a natural day of rest, worship, and renewal.
- The Sabbath principle remains: God calls us to rhythms of rest, worship, mercy, and hope.

Discussion questions

1. In a culture of busyness, how can we practice a Sabbath rhythm without slipping into legalism?
2. How do weekly gatherings give us a taste of the eternal Sabbath?

7. Application: living the fulfilled Sabbath

Think of the Sabbath not as one rule but as a fourfold rhythm:

Rhythm	What it means	Anchor verse
Rest	Stop striving; trust that God sustains	Psalm 46:10
Worship	Turn joyfully to God	Isaiah 58:13–14
Mercy	Extend God's love to others, as Jesus did	Matthew 12:12
Hope	Remember the eternal rest ahead	Hebrews 4:9

Rest: ceasing from striving

"Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

- Rest means trusting that God is God and we are not.
- It is a discipline of humility — laying down our attempts to control outcomes.
- Rest mirrors salvation itself: not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:9).

Practices

- **Weekly rest time** — even if not Saturday or Sunday, stop normal work and focus on God.
- **Digital Sabbath** — turn off devices for a set time.
- **Physical rest** — sleep, walk, enjoy creation (the Genesis 2 rhythm).
- **Surrender prayer** — "Lord, the world runs by Your hand, not mine."

Heart question: Where are you most tempted to believe everything depends on you? How would stopping expose your trust in God?

Worship: delight in God's presence

"If you call the Sabbath a delight… then you will find your joy in the Lord." (Isaiah 58:13–14)

- Sabbath rest isn't just stopping work; it redirects our energy toward God.
- Weekly worship is a foretaste of eternity, when every moment will be worship (Revelation 21–22).

Practices

- **Weekly gathering** — make corporate worship a non-negotiable rhythm.
- **Personal worship** — sing, journal, or read Scripture unhurried.
- **Family worship** — read a psalm, share testimonies, or pray together.
- **Enjoy beauty** — music, creation, cooking and sharing a meal as acts of worship.

Heart question: Do you treat worship as duty or delight? How could you reframe Sunday as a celebration of grace?

Mercy: doing good as Jesus did

"It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:12)

- True Sabbath is not self-indulgence but love in action.
- Jesus modeled this by healing and showing compassion on the Sabbath.

- Rest and mercy belong together: our rest refreshes us to bless others.

Practices

- **Acts of kindness** — visit someone lonely, encourage a believer, serve a meal.
- **Hospitality** — invite others into your home.
- **Generosity** — give your time and attention away freely.
- **Encouragement** — send letters or texts that lift others up.

Heart question: Who in your circle could experience God's mercy if you used part of your Sabbath for compassion?

Hope: looking forward to eternal rest

"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9)

- Every Sabbath practice is a rehearsal for heaven's eternal rest.
- The Sabbath trains our hearts to long for the world made new.

Practices

- **Read Revelation 21–22 regularly** — anchor your hope in the promised rest.
- **Anticipate eternity** — unhurried worship, stories of God's faithfulness.
- **Gratitude** — reflect on foretastes of rest God has already given.
- **Break anxiety cycles** — each Sabbath reminds us this world is not our final home.

Heart question: When life feels overwhelming, how can practicing the Sabbath remind you that your ultimate rest is still to come?

Bringing the four together

Discussion questions

1. Which of the four do you personally neglect most? Why?
2. How do cultural pressures — workaholism, consumerism, entertainment-driven leisure — distort true Sabbath?
3. What rhythms could your family or this group adopt to practice Sabbath as delight, not duty?
4. How can we model healthy Sabbath rhythms to unbelievers enslaved to endless productivity?

Weekly challenge

- [ ] Choose one **Rest** practice to live out this week
- [ ] Choose one **Worship** practice
- [ ] Choose one **Mercy** practice
- [ ] Choose one **Hope** practice
- [ ] Journal: How did it feel to stop striving? Did it stir greater trust in Christ?

Closing

Rest is godly. It's time to stop running on empty. Refresh regularly with our Savior, and remember that the Sabbath is a gift, not a burden.

Remind the group of the weekly challenge, then close in prayer.