

# Today's Christian Woman

Series

LEADER'S GUIDE

## Looking for Rest

*Is Sunday just another day?*

Sundays looked different years ago. They were the days people went to church, got together with family or friends, and kicked back and relaxed. But as time went on, Sundays started looking like every other day. They became days to catch up on work or to shop. It became business as usual.

Author Lynne Baab shares how her family observes the Sabbath. Having lived in Israel, her family practiced a day of rest and worship as the Israelis do. When her family moved back to the States, they made the decision to continue treating the day as one set apart; a day of replenishment. All of us need rest. This study will ask: Whose idea was it in the first place that we should rest? What does slowing down look like? What challenges will we face?

**Lesson #6**

**Scripture:**

Genesis 2:1-3; 1 Kings 19:3-8; Psalm 23:1-4; 131:2; Luke 5:15-16

**Based on:**

"The Gift of Rest," by Lynne M. Baab, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, September/October 2005



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## PART 1

**Identify the Current Issue**

*Note to leader: Prior to the class, provide for each person the article "The Gift of Rest" from TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine (included at the end of this study).*

People are tired. Everyone is rushing to get somewhere. Even when families go on vacation, it is a standing joke that when they return home they will need a vacation to rest up. With all the latest inventions designed to make our lives easier, we are still an exhausted bunch of people.

There are so many things to teach children. We want them to have values and to be respectful. We want them to develop a good work ethic and a close relationship with God. We want them to have balance in their everyday lives—to work hard but also to learn how to rest. If we are to teach our children about rest, we must show them how.

**Discussion starters:**

- [Q] Share what Sundays were like in your home when you were growing up. Did your parents have a slower pace that day?
- [Q] What would a relaxing Sunday look like to you now?
- [Q] What would be your biggest barrier to implementing a day of rest in your household?
- [Q] Who would fight you the most if you tried to establish a day of rest?
- [Q] A child will argue with a parent about not needing a nap. What arguments do you pose to God about not taking a day of rest?

**Optional Activity.** Describe in detail the most restful day you can imagine. Give an hour-by-hour account of what you are doing, where you are, and who you are with. Make us feel like we are there. Use all of your five senses.

## PART 2

**Discover the Eternal Principles****Teaching point one: Rest is God's idea.**

From the beginning of time, rest was God's idea. Read Genesis 2:1–3. God—who is all-powerful—rested when he finished his work, giving us a pattern to follow. Even the seasons allow time for the earth to be replenished. Rest is God's idea.

We see in Scripture that when men of God were tired, they were encouraged to rest. Read 1 Kings 19:3–8. After a day's journey Elijah was exhausted and depressed; sitting under a Juniper tree, he wanted to die. Yet God knew what Elijah's body required and provided it for



him. Sometimes people don't heed the messages their bodies try to convey. Working too many hours, not receiving proper nourishment, skimping on sleep—eventually our physical bodies protest.

Read Luke 5:15–16. Jesus took care of his physical and emotional needs. His ministry was taxing; people everywhere needed him. Yet he knew when he needed to get off by himself. Often people share how much they have to do and how few hours of sleep they have gotten as if it is something to brag about. In contrast, our Savior took care of his body and his soul. When he needed rest, he got rest.

The longer we know the Lord, the more we are being conformed to the image of God's Son. If we set aside a time for rest, we will look different than others. This difference could draw others to the Lord. After being refreshed, we will have new energy to expend, a better ability to listen to those who share, and vitality where we were getting weary. Everyone will benefit.

- [Q] Share a time when many responsibilities prevented you from getting proper rest. How did it affect you physically, socially, and spiritually?
- [Q] The Bible tells us God is all-powerful. Share why you think he rested on the seventh day.
- [Q] If God thinks resting on the Sabbath is a good idea, why do you think so many Christians ignore this?
- [Q] Do you think it matters if the day of rest is on Sunday? Why or why not?
- [Q] What did Jesus do when he needed to get some rest?
- [Q] Do you think that Jesus ever said no to anyone? Give reasons for your answer.

### Teaching point two: Our bodies need to slow down.

Our bodies are wonderfully designed. Yet because we live in a fallen world, our bodies get tired, weak, and sometimes sick. To make sure we are in optimal health, we need to eat right, drink plenty of water, exercise, and have times of rest. A body that is constantly on the go needs time to replenish.

Slowing down can benefit everyone. Our children quickly pick up our frantic lifestyles, keeping busy every minute. There will always be something that needs to be done. Rest needs to be a priority.

In her article, Lynne Baab points out some of the things her family did as they rested on the Sabbath: "We read, we walked, we talked. My husband sometimes went bird-watching in the field near our apartment. I wrote long letters. We napped. Sometimes we prayed together leisurely. We simply slowed down. We rested in God's love and experienced his grace." Some activities are slower pace, giving time for reflection.

Many other cultures close shop, even on weekdays, for a short rest. On Sundays in these cultures, it is common to see groups of people leisurely walking, taking in the beautiful surroundings. Outdoor cafés are often filled with people just sitting and enjoying each other's company, a slower pace. As American Christians, we need to challenge our society's frantic pace so that our bodies and souls can be refreshed. Read Psalm 131:2.



- [Q] Why do we need to take time to still and quiet our souls? What effect can that have on our minds and bodies?
- [Q] What are some of the negative consequences for our bodies if we do not take time to replenish them?
- [Q] Out of all the things the author does with her family, what appealed to you? What would you never consider doing?
- [Q] Do you think our technological advances help us to rest? Why or why not?

### Teaching point three: Finding time to rest is a challenge, but it's worth the effort.

For some, there may not be the luxury of a whole day to rest. Homes with one parent barely have enough hours in a day to get everything done before the coming week. Instead of a whole day, perhaps part of the day can be used for rest.

Lynn talks about how a mom with young children prepares a box of special activities for them. "During one hour on Sunday afternoon, her children know they're expected to play alone, enjoying the delights in the Sabbath box while their parents get some silent time."

The important thing is to get the rest we need. At times we need to be forced to get rest. Read Psalm 23:1–4. God actually makes us lie down in green pastures. When we study about sheep, we learn that they are not the smartest of creatures. They actually have to be forced to lie down. Our God cares for us as the sheep in his pasture. Lovingly he leads us to the greenest grass. With rod and staff he guides us in the paths he wants us to take, and when we need rest, he makes us lie down.

We can be that loving shepherd to the little lambs he has entrusted to us. We can ensure they get the proper rest they need to live their lives, and to really help them in the area of rest we can model what that looks like. For values are caught, not taught. They need to know that not only can Mom and Dad work hard, but they can rest, too. Children can come to realize that rest is something God provides so we can replenish ourselves.

- [Q] How are we like sheep? Is that encouraging or discouraging to you?
- [Q] What is one of the biggest challenges you face concerning getting enough rest?
- [Q] What things would you include if you were putting together a "Sabbath box"?
- [Q] In the article Lynne points out the definition of "Sabbath." Do you remember what it was? Review that section of the article now. How can you best incorporate this idea into your life schedule?

### Teaching point four: Our day of rest has to be guarded.

We need to have consistency in changes we seek to make. We will be tempted to try it and quickly discard the idea. Any habit takes 6–8 weeks to establish. We owe ourselves at least that much time to try it.



There may be people in our lives who do not understand setting aside time for rest. According to Dr. Henri Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, we need to have boundaries in our lives, though some people will perceive those boundaries as a lack of love. If we are going to live giving, godly lives, we need to take care of ourselves. Protecting our boundaries is actually a way of loving others by taking care of ourselves. Consistency will ensure success.

- [Q] What time of the year do you think would provide the biggest challenge to having a day of rest? What time would be the easiest? Give reasons for your answer.
- [Q] Share with the group what day and time would be best for your family's Sabbath rest. Explain how you might introduce the idea to your family.
- [Q] Share some meal alternatives for your day of rest, which might take pressure off the cook in the family.
- [Q] What other changes do you need to make to establish a habit of rest?
- [Q] What precautions do you need to take to ensure others will respect your commitment to rest? What challenges would you have in this area?

### PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

Resting on the Sabbath is a way to replenish ourselves. Even God rested after creating the world. Our bodies, souls, and emotions need rest. Rest is God's idea, and one he will help us achieve, for when we are rested we can do everything better, even walking with him.

Everywhere we look, we see people who need to know the Lord. We need to take care of ourselves so when we come across someone he or she will notice something different in us. If we can teach our children how to rest, we will have taught them how to be a light in a frantic, hectic world.

Why not start this week? When Sunday, or whatever day you choose as a Sabbath, comes, purpose in your heart that it will be different. Decide now what it will look like. Set aside that day for resting. Be an example in your household of honoring God. Rest, as Jesus did.

- [Q] When you look back on all we've discussed, what do you see as your biggest obstacle to putting something like this into practice? How can you overcome that obstacle?
- [Q] Why do you think it is so easy to get caught up in the busyness of things? In what ways does our society promote this?
- [Q] One of the fruits of the Spirit is peace; do you think it's possible to have peace without having time to rest? Explain your answer.
- [Q] Name some of the biggest benefits to having a day set aside for rest.



—Study prepared by Anne Peterson, poet, speaker and regular contributor to  
*CHRISTIANBIBLESTUDIES.com.*

## Additional Resources

-  ChristianBibleStudies.com
  - Fear Factors in Parenting
  - Parenting Together
  - Mentoring Youngsters Toward Adolescence
  - Responsibility Super Models
  - Replace Whining with Respect
  
-  *Celebrating the Sabbath: Find Rest in a Restless World*, Bruce A. Ray (P. & R. Publishing, 2000; ISBN 0875523941)
  
-  *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*, Norman Wirnsba (Baker, 2006; ISBN 1587431653)
  
-  *Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring the Sabbath*, Mark Buchanan (Thomas Nelson, 2006; ISBN 0849918480)
  
-  *The Sabbath: Entering God's Rest*, Barry Rubin & Steffi Rubin (Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2003; ISBN 188022674X)
  
-  *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest*, Lynne M. Baab (Inter-arsity Press, 2005; ISBN 0830832580)
  
-  *Sabbath Sense: A Spiritual Antidote for the Overworked*, Donna Schaper (Augsburg/Fortress, 2004; ISBN 0806690178)



# Today's Christian Woman

## Series

ARTICLE

### The Gift of Rest

*How to embrace the blessings of the Sabbath.*

By Lynne M. Baab, for the study “Looking for Rest”

When I first started observing the Sabbath 25 years ago, it wasn't by choice. My husband and I lived in Tel Aviv, Israel, at the time, and everything in our neighborhood—stores, movie theaters, and restaurants—closed from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. Even the buses stopped running for 24 hours. Since we didn't own a car, this greatly affected our lives.



At first we struggled to find activities for Friday evenings and Saturdays. But after a few months, we began to enjoy a day with few entertainment options. We read, we walked, we talked. My husband sometimes went bird-watching in the field near our apartment. I wrote long letters. We napped. Sometimes we prayed together leisurely. We simply slowed down. We rested in God's love and experienced his grace.

Our Sabbaths in Israel became God's gift to us individually, and enriched our life as a couple. Through Sabbath-keeping, we experienced the truth that God's love for us isn't based on what we *do*. We yearned to keep growing in our ability to receive that unconditional love once we returned to the U.S.

Back in the States, our family decided to continue observing the Sabbath on Sundays. Our first son had been born in Israel, and our second son was born soon after we returned home. As a young family, we read to our children, took long walks, and went to the zoo and the park after church.

As the years passed and our children grew up, our Sabbaths changed. But two things stayed constant: a slower pace and no work.

### Slow Down

Never did a culture need the Sabbath as ours does today. It pressures us to be productive 24/7. Everything we do has to look good and accomplish something. Nothing encourages us to stop. But the word “Sabbath” literally means stop, pause, cease, desist.



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One young woman recently told me, “I’d like our family to observe the Sabbath. I’ve been reading books about it, talking with my husband and kids, and we’re going to start soon.”

“Great,” I replied. “Tell me about what you plan to do and not do on your Sabbath.”

“I love the idea of starting on Saturday at sunset with a festive meal,” she explained. “I’d like to have special food, blessings for the children, prayers and candles, like Jewish people do. Maybe we could sing some songs. Then the next day, after we go to church, I hope we can read some Bible stories and do some crafts to help the kids center the day around God.”

“What do you plan to *stop* doing on the Sabbath?” I asked.

She looked at me blankly. Slowing down hadn’t figured into her Sabbath observance. She was focused solely on adding new activities.

As women, we can easily bring our culture’s values into our attempts to observe a Sabbath. We so easily forget the core meaning of the Sabbath—stopping and resting—that we end up turning our observance of it into one more thing to achieve.

We certainly want to experience God’s presence on the Sabbath, but we need to experiment with unforced ways to do it. “Simple” is a great word to describe the ideal activities for the Sabbath. As soon as we’re working too hard to achieve anything on the Sabbath, we’ve violated the central idea of the day.

One Jewish tradition bans intercessory prayer on the Sabbath because it’s viewed as too much work. In that tradition, appropriate Sabbath prayers are prayers of thankfulness. On the Sabbath, I spend time focusing on the beauty of the world God made and the good gifts he’s given me in the previous week. I try to rest in thankfulness. While I don’t try to be “hyper-spiritual” all day long, I’ve discovered a little thought discipline goes a long way towards giving me a day that’s restful and rejuvenating.

## Take the Day Off

In the Ten Commandments, the Israelites are commanded to keep the Sabbath day holy, or separate, from the other weekdays. The marker of that holiness is the absence of work. But the Old Testament doesn’t give many specifics about what constitutes work. One of the few clear commands forbids lighting a fire (*Exodus 35:3*). This mandate assured that daughters, wives, and female servants wouldn’t be expected to cook. All the food had to be cooked before the Sabbath began, and the dishes washed afterwards. The Sabbath granted rest to everyone, even the women who labored the other six days of the week.

In our time, what’s the equivalent of “lighting a fire”? What are those actions that send us into work mode?



When we first returned to the U.S. years ago, I was a part-time student and stay-at-home mom. For me, work consisted of studying, housework, and shopping. For my husband, work involved anything from his paid job as well as house repairs and lawn mowing. We simply didn't do any of those tasks on Sundays.

Today, turning on my computer, balancing the checkbook, weeding my garden, and cooking put me into work mode. I know some people find gardening and cooking relaxing; those women have a different list of work activities to avoid on the Sabbath.

One woman who works at a desk job finds her best Sabbath activities involve vigorous exercise outdoors. For many people, being outside on the Sabbath—walking, riding bikes, flying kites, sitting on a park bench—helps them feel closer to God. Sabbath time outside can be a time of reflection and prayer alone, a time of relaxed conversation with a friend, or an exuberant playtime with family members or friends.

Many women also benefit from some silent time on their Sabbath day. One single woman who works in a people-intensive job spends her Sabbath afternoon entirely alone. Then she often meets up with friends at the end of the day for a special meal.

One mom with young children prepares a “Sabbath box” of special activities for her children. During one hour on Sunday afternoon, her children know they're expected to play alone, enjoying the delights in the Sabbath box while their parents get some silent time.

Some of the “work” from which we need a rest is mental. A woman I know tries to avoid worry on the Sabbath. She considers herself a worrier and feels overwhelmed at the thought of trying not to worry every day. One day a week, however, feels manageable. A day free—or at least mostly free—from worry has been a great gift to her.

Similarly, as a person who's disliked my body for as long as I can remember, I attempt to keep my Sabbaths free from obsessing about the way I look. On the Sabbath I don't try on clothes and I don't read novels with slim, beautiful heroines. When I find myself thinking negative thoughts about myself, I try to set them aside for the day.

My husband and I have received many gifts from our commitment to honor the Sabbath: a day to spend with our children—and each other—without needing to get something done. A day free of multitasking. A day free of striving for perfection and productivity. A day to rest in God's goodness. Over the years, these gifts have continued to bless us and grant us glorious freedom in Christ.



## Sabbath Resources

- [\*Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest\*](#) by Lynne M. Baab (InterVarsity)
- [\*Sabbath Time\*](#) by Tilden Edwards (Upper Room)
- [\*Sabbath\*](#) by Wayne Muller (Bantam Books)
- [\*Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time\*](#) by Dorothy Bass (Jossey-Bass)
- [\*Catch Your Breath: God's Invitation to Sabbath Rest\*](#) by Don Postema (CRC Publications)

—L.M.B.

—Lynne M. Baab is an author who lives in Washington. Her most recent book is *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest* (InterVarsity).

"The Gift of Rest" by Lynne M. Baab, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, September/October 2005





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