



YOUTH STUDY

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LEADER'S GUIDE
Session 5

Sabbath Keeping for Busy Teens: A Youth Lenten Study

Sabbath keeping resists multitasking

Introduction to the Session

Multitasking in Ancient Israel

Today's youth, as well as their parents and teachers, exist in a culture of multitasking. However, regardless of how productivity and the achievement of "more" may be applauded in our society, studies show that, in fact, "we humans aren't as good as we think we are at doing several things at once."¹ While we may equate doing multiple things at once with achieving and acquiring more, the restfulness of Sabbath suffers when we divide ourselves during what is supposed to be a faithful act of worship. The Lenten season offers us the opportunity to be honest about where our energy, attention, and focus are. We are called to repent of our own failure to fully place our hearts and minds in the act of worship and prayer and consider how we might renew our faith in our Sabbath practices going forward. There are two passages, from the prophet Isaiah that expose the multitasking taking place on the Sabbath.

Isaiah 1:12–17

In this prophetic oracle, we learn that YHWH is disappointed in and exhausted with Israel's worship. Worship practices (offerings, incense, assemblies, prayers, and Sabbath) are cut off from the well-being

Session at a Glance

ARRIVING

- Multitasking challenges

GATHERING

- Reflect on multitasking challenges

OPENING

- Summarize previous week's session
- Share the goal of the session
- Opening prayer

EXPLORING

- Multitasking and Sabbath
- Case study: Princeton Good Samaritan study

RESPONDING

- Reflect on our own multitasking

CLOSING

- Closing prayer

of the neighborhood and the protection of the vulnerable. Worshipers in Israel may have gone through the motions of the Sabbath, but they did not stop the practices of anxiety, coercion, and exploitation that real work stoppage would entail. Their desire to produce and gain more had such momentum that it carried right into and through the Sabbath. The great festival of rest had become simply another venue for restlessness.

Isaiah 58:1–7

In this much later text, the prophet reflects on a dispute about correct worship. On the one hand, there is ritual fasting among those who “delight” to draw near to God (v. 2). But while going through the motions of worship, fast, and humbleness (v. 3), in fact the Israelite worshipers practice exploitative economics and oppress their workers. While Sabbath is not explicitly mentioned, it is clear that the worship under consideration did not allow for sabbatical work stoppage. There is no justice for or generosity toward workers in this practice. This worship contradicts neighborliness and provides a cover of legitimacy for exploitation.

On the other hand, the poem proposes an authentic “fast” that includes justice toward the oppressed, bread for the hungry, housing for the poor, clothing for the naked—that is, genuine, neighborly covenantal support. This worship is congruent with the Deuteronomic commands concerning the vulnerable in society. Worship that does not lead to neighborly compassion and justice cannot be faithful worship of YHWH.

Jesus and Multitasking

In our current society, in one author’s opinion, the most unwelcome form of multitasking is with the cell phone, which is sometimes used while at dinner with a guest or while driving. Then there is taking notes during a church service... not notes on the sermon, but a grocery list or an accounting of calls to return or deals to make. Multitasking is the drive to be more than we are, to control more than we do, to extend our power and our effectiveness. Such practice yields a divided self, with full attention given to nothing.

Jesus offers an ominous characterization of “multitasking”: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt. 6:24).

To serve God and wealth at the same time is impossible. It is like keeping Sabbath and at the same time planning for commerce. It is like praising Jesus while preying on the poor. Such multitasking with a divided heart means that there is no real work stoppage, no interruption in the frantic attempt to get ahead. Doing tasks of acquisitiveness while trying to communicate humanly is the true mark of the “turn to commodity.” We all become commodities to one another, to be bought and sold and traded and cheated. The Sabbath command is an urgent summons to break the pattern of the divided heart before it is too late. No wonder Jesus followed Matthew 6:24 with verse 25, which warns us not to be anxious!

Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the idea that multitasking keeps us from observing true Sabbath.

Preparing for the Session

- Read through this Leader’s Guide and determine how to best lead the session given the needs of your group. See the “Teaching Alternative” section at the end for additional ideas.
- Pray for all group members.

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- newsprint
- markers
- pens and paper for each participant
- copies of the Participant Handout
- copies of “Resource Sheet: Instructions for Multitasking Activities”

Teaching Tip

Be sure to spread out the various instructions for the multitasking activities in the Arriving section throughout your space so that participants have plenty of room to complete some of the more active challenges. Consider whether anyone in your group has difficulty with mobility. If so, most of these activities can be adapted to be performed in a seated position.

Arriving (10 minutes)

1. Multitasking Challenges

As participants arrive, place the instructions for the various multitasking challenges (see the resource sheet

for this session) throughout your meeting space. Have them walk around the room and try to complete each of the activities described.

Gathering (5 minutes)

2. Reflect on Multitasking Challenges

Once most of your group has arrived and has had a chance to attempt each of the multitasking challenges, gather together as a large group and reflect on the following questions:

- Which one of the challenges did you find to be most difficult?
- What are some of the feelings you experience when you are trying to do more than one thing at a time?
- How would this activity have felt different if you were just trying to do one thing at a time?
- What are some other situations in your life where you feel as if you are often multitasking?

Opening (10 minutes)

3. Summarize the Previous Week's Session

For those who were not present the previous week, ask for a few volunteers to share what was discussed in session 4. Some key points to highlight include:

- After the exodus, it did not take very long for Israel to try to give order to its life and establish boundaries of membership, to determine who was in and who was not.
- While the book of Leviticus provides guidelines for every phase of life to be sure that membership in Israel consists only in those who sustain intentional purity, the book of Deuteronomy places emphasis on justice and is concerned with the vulnerable who need protection from the community: the poor, widows, orphans, and immigrants.
- In Isaiah, we see a move toward *inclusiveness* against ancient *exclusivism*.
- The conditions of admission clearly do not concern race, ethnicity, or any sort of standard of perfect purity. There is only one specific requirement spelled out: keep Sabbath!

4. Share the Goal of the Session

Drawing on material provided in the introduction to the session, share with the group:

- While we may equate doing multiple things at once with achieving and acquiring more, the restfulness of Sabbath suffers when we divide ourselves during what is supposed to be a faithful act of worship.
- Worshipers in ancient Israel may have gone through the motions of the Sabbath, but because they did not stop work practices that abused their vulnerable workers, God became angry.
- Jesus also warned his followers against “serving two masters” (God and wealth) at the same time. Multitasking with a divided heart meant no real work stoppage, no interruption in the frantic attempt to get ahead.

Explain that in today's session, the group will explore the idea that multitasking keeps us from observing true Sabbath.

5. Opening Prayer

Open your group in prayer, either with your own words or with the following:

God of Sabbath,
on the seventh day you rested
and gave the gift of rest to all you created.
Yet through our busy schedules, demands,
and desire to do more,
we have taken that rest away from those who
need it most.
Help us to turn our hearts wholly to you
and find true Sabbath for all.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Exploring (20 minutes)

6. Multitasking and Sabbath

Ask participants to take out their phones. If they do not have a phone, simply give them a piece of paper and pen. Instruct everyone in the group to text a friend (if they have a phone) or write down a list of everything they know they have to do this week.

As they begin their texting/listing, ask them to continue as they listen to you read the following passage aloud:

“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:24–33)

When you are finished reading, ask participants to stop texting/listing and repeat back to you what they heard in the Scripture passage.

Next, ask participants to put down their phone or pen, close their eyes, be still, and listen again to the same passage. After you have read Matthew 6:24–33 again, ask participants to repeat back to you what they heard in the Scripture passage this time. As a group, discuss the following:

- How well do you think you heard this passage while you were texting/listing?
- How well did you hear the passage when you had your phones/pens away and your eyes closed?
- Which of these felt more like an act of worship? Why?
- Think about the passage itself: How does it encourage us to stop multitasking in order to connect more deeply with God?

7. Case Study: Princeton Good Samaritan Study

In the Participant Handout is a summary of a study done at Princeton in the 1970s. In this study, seminary

students were asked to walk from one side of campus to another while preparing a speech on the parable of the Good Samaritan. Some were told that they were late, while others were told that they had plenty of time to get to their destination. On the way, an actor pretending to be in distress was placed in their path. Those in a hurry were less likely to stop. Those not in a hurry were more likely to stop. Ask participants to take a few moments to read the full summary of the study. Once they have finished reading, discuss the following questions:

- What is most striking to you about this study?
- How could you see this same situation playing out in your own life?
- Have a volunteer read Isaiah 1:12–17 and Isaiah 58:1–7 aloud to the group.
- Why does multitasking anger God in these passages?
- How does multitasking affect our ability to love our God and our neighbors?

Responding (5 minutes)

8. Reflect on Our Own Multitasking

On their Participant Handouts, ask youth to identify and write down one aspect of multitasking in their own lives they would like to work on avoiding in the week ahead. In the Participant Handout they will be asked to describe how they will accomplish this goal and who they will ask for help.

Closing (5 minutes)

9. Closing Prayer

Have the group close by praying together the prayer printed in their Participant Handout.

Teaching Alternative

To take the experience of deep listening to Scripture a step further, repeat the first Exploring activity (Multitasking and Sabbath) by reading Matthew 6:24–33 using the process of *lectio divina*. Simple steps to this practice can be:

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide the reading/hearing of the Scripture.
2. Read the passage slowly and clearly.
3. Offer a moment of silent meditation to listen for God, and then read the passage again.

4. Pray to God that you will be open to hear what God is calling you to do, and then read the passage again.
5. Contemplate what God wants you to put into practice based on this Scripture.

Key Scriptures

Isaiah 1:12–17; 58:1–7
Matthew 6:24–33

For More Information

Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

To read the complete summary of the Princeton Good Samaritan Study, go to <https://sparq.stanford.edu/solutions/take-time-be-good-samaritan>.

Note

1. Jon Hamilton, “Think You’re Multitasking? Think Again,” National Public Radio, Oct. 2, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=95256794>.

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Resource Sheet: Instructions for Multitasking Activities

Make a copy of this sheet, cut out each of these instructions, and post them each in a different area of your meeting space:

1. On a sheet of paper, write out the Pledge of Allegiance while you count aloud to 100 by 2s (2, 4, 6, 8, etc.).
2. Find a partner and, with your right hand, engage in a thumb war. With your left hand, simultaneously play "Rock, Paper, Scissors."
3. On a sheet of paper, write out a list of odd numbers from 1–100. As you are doing this, with your free hand make a circle motion in the air. At the same time, with your left foot (if you are right handed) or your right foot (if you are left handed), draw a triangle on the floor.