

# Time For A Carbon Sabbath

## Bible Study and Plan For Action

**MATERIALS REQUIRED:** Bibles, or sufficient copies of the texts you will be using: Required: Genesis 1:1 - 2:3; Any or all of: Exodus 31: 12-17 • Leviticus 26: 34-36 • Deuteronomy 5:12-15 • Matthew 12:1-8 • Mark 2: 23-28 • Paper • Flipchart • Markers • Pens and Paper • Beeswax candle • Case studies (your choice) from [www.demotorize.org](http://www.demotorize.org)

**OPTIONAL ITEMS (see Step 5 to choose):** Modelling clay • Photocopied pages of a day timer • Pencil crayons • Double-spaced copy of the Genesis text



### Getting Started

This Bible Study examines the Biblical concept of Sabbath on its own, and in the context of modern day energy consumption, posing the question of what “Carbon Sabbath” might mean, and how we might begin to practice it.

Depending on the time of year, location, and participants, consider holding the session outdoors. Encourage participants, where possible, to travel to the session using carbon-free (walking, cycling) or carbon-reducing transportation (public transport, carpooling). Consider moving the location of the meeting place to make this possible.

Each participant will require a Bible, paper, and a pen or pencil, and the group will likely use a blackboard or chart paper. The “words of welcome” below could be used to advertise the session, or read to start the session.

### Step 1 Words of Welcome

*Welcome, thanks for coming. I'm glad that you were able to come today, although you're all a little late. [Pause]*

*That's right, late — it's the 6th day of creation already. Don't worry, though, you weren't invited until now. It's great that you're here; in fact, I might have said, “it is good” if that phrase weren't so over-used! Unfortunately, though, you'll have to excuse us — we're all pretty tired and tomorrow is finally a day of Sabbath for us, for the Earth.*

*That's right! You might think that your life is busy and that you're tired, but the animals ... my goodness, they had a busy night last night and were here all day yesterday. The waters and the sky and the earth, now they're the ones that are really tired — they've been here practically a week! And the light, oh the light. “If only you would turn me off for a little while,” it says. It's just this carbon-fueled world. Working the land in machinery, flying through the dome of heaven all the time, drilling in the seas for oil — what does it take to get a little quiet?*

*Oh you humans always think that Sabbath is about you. The earth has been here far longer — when does it get to settle into retirement or go on a nice Caribbean vacation, maybe take up a little yoga or sit in the church pew?*

*It's time to turn it all off, says the Earth. Maybe if you'd stop using all that carbon we could get a little rest. Sure, you can take a rest too, if you'd like, but please, the fish are crying for ear plugs, the trees are complaining about having to bear all of that fruit — especially after you humans added all that “miracle grow,” and the stars could use a waxing because of all of the smog. Please, they say, give US a break!*

## Step 2 Get to Know Each Other

Ask participants, in pairs or as a group, to introduce themselves and share some of their personal associations with the term “Sabbath.” For example, participants may wish to share personal “Sabbath practices” that take place daily or weekly (or reasoning behind why they don’t take place!), memories of Sabbath as a child, ideas about Sabbath concepts, etc.

## Step 3 Light a Candle

At this time, you may want to light a beeswax candle as a point of focus for your time together. As you light the candle, explain why you are using beeswax:

*These days, most of our churches use paraffin wax candles. These candles are made of petroleum products, pulled from the ground for a one-time use. Beeswax is naturally secreted from the bodies of honeybees, meaning that it is a renewable source of heat and light (for small scale use). It is clean-burning, produces very little smoke, and since it has a much higher melting point than paraffin, will burn longer and more slowly.*



*For centuries, people around the world used this renewable resource for light and medicine. Bees were seen as sacred in many cultures, and beeswax candles are prescribed for use as the Paschal or Easter Candle in the Roman Catholic Church and are commonly used in most Eastern Orthodox churches. As we struggle to see the environmental and human impacts of the oil industry and our use of oil, a switch to beeswax in our houses of worship can be a symbolic reminder of our call to live with reverence and restraint in God’s creation.*

## Step 4 In The Beginning ...

Start with the beginning! Read aloud (once or twice) the first story of creation and the Sabbath on the seventh day (Genesis 1:1 - 2:3).

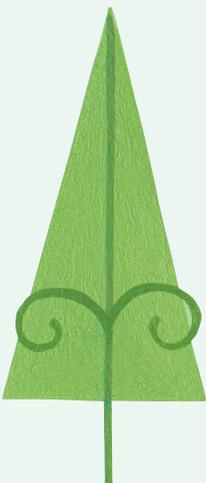
- This is a long passage, so it may help to have different voices read different sections of the story.
- Provide Bibles for those who find it helpful to follow along or copies of the story for those who find it helpful to record thoughts or images.
- Challenge people who would generally prefer to listen to follow the story visually, and those who prefer to follow visually to try listening with their eyes closed.

## Step 5 Going Deeper

Below are suggestions for a number of ways to go into the text a little more deeply. Some involve artistic expression, others are physical in nature, and some require close listening. Choose the **one** that best suits your group's learning style and comfort level. Use it to explore the same text as in Step 4, reading it aloud for a second time:

- 1) As the scripture is read, participants are given a piece of clay to shape as they listen. At the end of each "day" in the story, allow participants to share what they have created with their clay to that point and give explanation (if they are able) for what they created or were thinking about as they shaped the clay. Spend particular time reflecting on what participants create for the seventh day.
- 2) Provide participants with a photocopied page from a daytimer — preferably one with large boxes for each day, divided into hours, with a one or two page spread for each week. With pencil crayons, have participants design, shade, or draw in the boxes for the week. Each day in the daytimer might represent one day of creation, or there might be elements of each day of creation spread throughout the week (e.g., times of light and dark for each day, times to observe the water, air or land, time to be with people, etc.). Discuss what it would mean to live that week as reflected in those boxes, and consider using the designed calendar for the upcoming week, writing in appointments and activities on top of the design.
- 3) Have participants stand a fair distance from one another and read the story, pausing at the end of each day to allow participants to each determine an action/movement and/or sound that they would associate with each day. Read the story through again without pausing, and have participants perform their actions and sounds as it is read.
- 4) Use *lectio divina* to allow participants to seek meaning in the story on their own. In *lectio divina*, the text is read quite slowly, and participants leave the group to meditate on a particular word, image, or phrase that speaks to them. Be sure that that you have space set up with chairs and cushions for those wishing to leave the group space. Be sure to have a variety of areas set up that will be comfortable and accessible to participants and point these out before you begin to read the story. Another option is to allow participants to interrupt the story to ask questions or share thoughts that come to mind.
- 5) Provide copies of the text, double spaced, and allow participants to write in the margins and between the lines the thoughts that come to mind. Challenge participants to imagine their own story of creation that is figuratively "between the lines" of what was recorded in the Bible and write this between the lines on the paper. This story might take the form of a personal commentary from God, an observer watching the events from space, the story from the perspective of "light" who is joined by others, the story of creation post-day seven, etc.

Following this activity, provide time for the group to debrief and discuss their experiences in pairs or as the larger group. Allow time following this for a short break.



## Step 6

### Other Stories of Sabbath

While the story of creation is the first mention of Sabbath in the Bible, it is a concept that recurs. Read aloud these other passages relating to Sabbath.

- Exodus 31: 12-17: Moses and the Sabbath as Covenant
- Leviticus 26: 34-36: Sabbath for the land
- Deuteronomy 5:12-15: Commandment for all humans and livestock to obey the Sabbath
- Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2: 23-28: Jesus addresses the Sabbath

Invite conversation that compares the passages and points out similarities and differences between them. For example, one could examine how different passages present the Sabbath — as an example set by God, a commandment, a sign of covenant, something that has limits and can be disobeyed, etc.

## Step 7

### Looking Closely at Sabbath

It is likely that these passages will elicit different takes on Sabbath than that in the story of Creation story. Here are some questions for you to consider more fully:

- What is the root of Sabbath? Is it a day of inaction, of rest, or is it something more?
- Did God just take a day off because God was tired?
- Is Sabbath a day of refueling so that we can work harder?

## Step 8

### Bringing in The Carbon

Introduce the concept of Carbon Sabbath with a discussion of the various ways that one takes Sabbath. This may reveal a sense that all of life and the Earth need a balance of work and rest and that over-dependence or over-emphasis on any element of life can create an unhealthy imbalance.

In the case of carbon, our reliance is so great that it is difficult to track all of it or even imagine life completely abstaining from it. By-products of this over-consumption impact the economy, the environment, human rights, and conflict. (If this analysis is unfamiliar to participants, review some other resources from KAIROS' *Re-energize* campaign.)

#### TO EXPLORE CARBON SABBATH FURTHER:

Discuss how various “approaches” to promoting Sabbath in these scripture passages relate to how best to promote a Carbon Sabbath — something to be done as it was legislated by God, to be done to bring us closer to God, to be done in a way that emphasizes earthly realities and can have exceptions, etc.

- Draw parallels to situations of Sabbath in the Bible and our present situation with carbon.
- Bring up the concept of carbon calculators (several of which can be found at the “Change Yourself” section of [www.re-energize.org](http://www.re-energize.org)). These online tools help us analyze the extent to which our personal carbon consumption is unsustainable, and often provide suggestions for reduction of carbon consumption, but very few use language of Sabbath to discuss the alternatives. Carbon Sabbath is not merely about finding more sustainable alternatives, but also examining the nature of our addiction and exploring the renewing powers of Sabbath. It might

be easy to quickly move into suggestions for how to reduce one's carbon footprint; be sure to examine also the varied effects of carbon dependence to individuals, society, and the earth.

- Circulate the case studies you've chosen from [www.demotorize.org](http://www.demotorize.org), showing how some people have found spirituality and true renewal in moving away from carbon. Invite participants to discuss and respond to the stories. Can they find a situation that they can identify with?

## Moving into the World

Beforehand, determine the follow up to the session. While a "stand alone" session is possible, it might also be helpful to leave the possibility or plan for additional sessions, where some or all of the participants could gather to share their stories as they attempt to live into some sort of a carbon Sabbath commitment.

As a group, consider leading a congregational carbon Sabbath campaign.

- Consider creating posters or record spoken announcements which use a variety of the Biblical "approaches" to Sabbath to promote a Carbon Sabbath in general, or more specific congregational Carbon Sabbath initiative.
- Consider various time periods (i.e. — one day/week, 40 days of Lent, or another period of time — even permanently) and which specific initiatives you wish to promote in the congregation. For example, if you wish to look at transportation specifically, you may wish to have cycling experts come to provide a workshop or begin a church carpool list.
- Try a carbon Sabbath Sunday service that attempts to use the least possible carbon (in terms of temperature control, transportation, electricity for light, foods imported from afar, bulletins and craft supplies, etc.). While it would be difficult to have no carbon use whatsoever, piloting various 'reduction' initiatives can still be quite helpful. For example, consider using biodegradable plates, recycled paper, reducing the number of bulletins you print (having people share, using PowerPoint or an overhead projector, having a bulletin that can be used for an entire month).
- Examine carbon use in congregational outings and activities, children's activities/programming, Sunday School, the church office, the Board, etc.

## Closing

Close in a time of prayer, offering thanksgiving for times of rest and renewal for individuals and the world. Commit to challenging one another to walking faithfully in these new times and to supporting one another through this time. Allow a few moments for silence and extinguish the candle before departing.

This resource was written and produced in part with the financial assistance of the Canadian International Development Agency.

Written and edited by Sheryl Johnson and Sara Stratton, with input from the KAIROS Education and Animation Program Committee. Illustrations ©Tracy Walker/www.iziart.com. Published by KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives in support of the Re-energize campaign for a just and sustainable energy policy for Canada. Design and Layout by NOMAD Design.

**Re-energize...**  
*time for a carbon sabbath*

For more resources and to take action, visit  
[www.re-energize.org](http://www.re-energize.org) or [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org).  
For more information call 1-877-403-8933 x 241.



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