**SABBATH AND REST**

*“Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work. . . .”* (Exodus 20:9-10)

1. *SABBATH* Part 1 opens with a montage of different commentators addressing the sense of fatigue and exhaustion that permeate much of contemporary American culture. Norman Wirzba notes that historians sometimes refer to the period of American history after World War II as “the great acceleration.” Adventist pastor Randy Roberts describes contemporary American culture as “profoundly burned out.” Author Judith Shulevitz notes the recent “unplugging” movement in response to technology driven busyness. And writer J. Dana Trent reminds us of the limitations of time as “our only nonrenewable resource.”

Do you share this sense that contemporary American culture is breeding burnout and exhaustion? If so, in what ways have you experienced it? What do you ascribe this to, both on the individual and societal levels?

Are you aware of the unplugging movement that Judith Shulevitz references? You may wish to visit our partners at the Unplug Collaborative (<https://www.unplugcollaborative.org/>) to learn about how they are encouraging people to explore the benefits of occasional Sabbaths from technology.

1. Commentators in the film, including those mentioned above, see Sabbath practice as a possible antidote to the pervasive burnout in our culture. Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue describes Sabbath, or Shabbat, as “a revolutionary concept” that “changed human history. For the first time it introduced the concept of mandated rest.”

If you have a regular Sabbath practice, does it include time for rest? To what extent is rest part of how you think about and observe the Sabbath? Is Sabbath rest emphasized in your religious tradition, or not? Finally, do you think Sabbath rest should be codified in some way, so that it is part of every Sabbath observers’ routine?

1. Imam Khalid Latif of the Islamic Center at New York University, says many of the students with whom he engages express this sentiment: “I wish I just had more time in which I just pause to breathe. To think about what it was that I was actually chasing after.”

Author J. Dana Trent expresses a similar idea when she says that the recent pandemic was “in many ways . . . an invitation to examine our lives and to review and reflect on whether or not we were actually living before the pandemic. Were we living an authentic life or where we just crazy busy running from one thing to the next to the next to the next, taking our time and our health and our gatherings and our Sabbath practices all for granted?”

Do you share the feeling that you don’t have time to reflect deeply on your life and what you are doing with it? Does or could Sabbath offer you time to do that? How important might such time for reflection be in Sabbath observance? Should more religious denominations and traditions offer and encourage time for personal reflection as a central part of Sabbath observance?

1. In *SABBATH*, Part 2, Rabbi Manis Friedman asserts that“the essential word for *Shabbat* is not *rest*. It's a poor definition, a poor translation. The real word is *contentment*. If you're really experiencing *Shabbos*, you're experiencing a true contentment.”

Do you associate Sabbath with contentment, as does Rabbi Friedman? In what ways, might Sabbath and the theologies and practices around it promote contentment? In your mind, what characteristics of Sabbath make for a sense of contentment?

1. In Part 1, we meet Reverend Jeffrey Johnson, senior pastor of the multi-campus Eastern Star Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. As he drives between church campuses, Pastor Johnson makes a surprising revelation: “I never had a right understanding of the Sabbath ever,” he admits. “I never thought much about it. I never applied it to my life. All of that came to me recently, and I've been pastoring 34 years.”

Were you surprised by Pastor Johnson’s revelation? Why, according to what is shared in the film, had he not stopped to think about certain aspects of Sabbath?

In the film, we also follow Pastor Johnson and his wife as they take a six-month sabbatical---the first he had taken in his 34-year career. During the sabbatical, Pastor Johnson also encouraged his church staff to rest by transitioning to a four-day work week in his absence.

In what ways would you say Pastor Johnson exemplies how leaders – both religious and secular – can model practices of Sabbath rest for their communities? How did Johnson come to his own understanding that he needed to better incorporate Sabbath rest into his life - going so far as to take his first sabbatical?

1. In *SABBATH*, Part 1, we also meet Joseph Tomas McKellar, a community organizer and Executive Director of PICO, California, the largest multi-racial faith-based community organizing network in the state. A Latino Catholic, McKellar points to Pope Francis’ teaching about the Sabbath to the effect that, “if you have the right to work, you also have the right to rest.”

McKellar says he’s concerned, as is Pope Francis, “about the things that get in the way of people's ability to practice Sabbath, because more and more, our economy is designed to keep people in a constant state of work just in order to survive.”

This is especially true of immigrants, who are often disproportionately represented in industries that require overtime and weekend work, and who must often work more than one job to make ends meet.

Can you identify economic structures in our society that keep people from being able to a observe a Sabbath day of rest? How do you think this issue could be addressed? How is this inequality in access to Sabbath observance related to other inequalities in our society?

1. In this segment of *SABBATH*, we are also introduced to Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church (La Placita) in downtown Los Angeles and the largely immigrant community that it serves. Noting that La Placita is a place of refuge for many people, some of whom have been forced by political or economic circumstances to leave their native countries, Tomas McKellar says the church “continues to be . . . a place of migration, a place of refuge and rest, a place of community.”

McKellar adds that Latino Catholics identify with the story of the Exodus, in which the ancient Israelites wandered in the desert after their release from captivity in Egypt.

In what ways might Sabbath-keeping and Sabbath rest offer “refuge” for people whose lives have been disrupted – like those of the ancient Israelites - by political, economic, or social circumstances? How might a weekly Sabbath day of rest and a place of community such as La Placita become part of a process of restoration for people whose lives have been upended? If you are part of a faith community, does your community offer hospitality or services for immigrants or displaced persons, similar to the programs at La Placita?

1. In *SABBATH,* sociologist Tricia Bruce notes that the development of new technologies, such as the Internet, has enabled Americans to work more efficiently and, often, with more flexibility. However, such developments have also led to a blurring of the line between work and leisure, so that many Americans work more, or they take their work with them wherever they go.

Does this correspond with your own experience? Do you feel that technology has contributed to a blurring of the lines between work and leisure in your own life? In what ways?

1. Bruce argues that this “blurring effect” often translates into Americans working all the time and not taking or demarcating formal periods of rest.

Is this true for you? Do you have established boundaries around “work time” and “leisure time,” or “non-work time”? If not, how would you go about establishing such boundaries? Do you think you need them?

1. Bruce also identifies negative effects of overwork or working too much on our social relationships. Parents can feel that they are neglecting their children, spouses and partners can feel that they don’t spend enough time together, and opportunities for building relationships of all kinds can be lost when work takes over other parts of our lives.

Have you experienced times when your work negatively impacted your social relationships or simply limited your ability to engage in them? If so, how did you deal with these situations? What could you do to create better balance between your work life and your social relationships?

1. Following on Abraham Joshua Heschel’s famous image of Sabbath as “a cathedral in time,” Bruce asserts that it is important for postmodern Americans to approach Sabbath rest as an otherworldly, perhaps magical time---a time full of possibility. This is especially true, Bruce argues, as the boundary between work and leisure becomes ever more blurred, and time is flattened---all time looking much the same.

Do you typically think of Sabbath as a “magical” time, full of possibility? If not, how would your life or routines change if you began to think of it that way? In your experience, does time seem largely flattened, with little to distinguish one day or week from another? How would thinking of Sabbath as “otherworldly” time change that?

1. Another thing Bruce points out is how Americans tend to correlate their work with their identity and sense of self. “We have a culture that valorizes work in ways that tie it very closely to our identity,” Bruce says. What we do, what we earn, and our status in the workforce may all contribute to how we see ourselves and how others see us. Yet, Bruce says, these things are often beyond our individual control.

Do you agree with Bruce that there is a danger in closely aligning our identity and sense of self to our jobs? Do you believe American culture encourages this way of thinking about oneself and others? What are some of the problems with closely identifying one’s sense of self and of self-worth with one’s job? How can we avoid this way of thinking? Is it even possible in our culture?

1. Consider this statement made in the film by Adventist theologian Richard Rice: “Sabbath has ethical implications. Work should not be what defines us as human beings.”

In what ways could regular Sabbath observance change how we think about ourselves and who we are? Could regular Sabbath observance help us redefine who we are and our reason for being in a more positive or expansive way?

**SABBATH AND THE HOLY**

*“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”* (Exodus 20:8)

1. At the beginning of Parts 1 and 2 of *SABBATH*, various commentators recite the fourth commandment (of the wellknown Ten Commandments), which declares that the people of Israel are to “remember the Sabbath and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Rabbis Ammiel Hirsch, in Part 1, and Manis Friedman, in Part 2, remind viewers that, for Jews, Sabbath-keeping “is not an option” (in Friedman’s words), but a commandment.

Whether or not you are Jewish, have you ever reflected on the idea of Sabbath-keeping as something people are commanded to do? How does that impact your thinking about what Sabbath is and what it means?

If the concept of Sabbath is new to you, how does thinking about it as a kind of responsibility influence your perspective on it? Does this encourage you toward seriously keeping Sabbath as a day of rest, community, and perhaps worship, or does it discourage you from these practices?

1. Do you already observe a weekly Sabbath? If so, what practices do you associate with it? How observant would you say you are? What impact do these Sabbath practices have on your life? (A little? A lot? What, specifically?)
2. If you do not currently have a Sabbath practice, does the film encourage you to do so? If so, which specific ideas, persons, or segments in the film are most inspiring to you? Why?
3. Traditionally, the concept of Sabbath has been most closely associated with Judaism and Christianity. Do you see Sabbath as primarily a religious concept, or do its practices and ideologies extend beyond religious boundaries? If you believe they do, in what ways?
4. In the film, Episcopal theologian Judy Fentress-Williams suggests that, in her experience, Christians “don’t . . . take the Sabbath seriously enough.”

If you are a Christian, do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? If you do agree, what are some things that Christians could do – individually and corporately - to take the Sabbath more seriously?

1. In Part 1, Elisa Nevarez, a member of the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, or La Placita, in Los Angeles, tells viewers that Catholics are required to attend a weekly mass: “Coming to Mass on Sunday is something mandatory if you're a Catholic,” she says. “Your parents teach you this. On Sunday, you go to church.”

Many traditions have requirements or social and cultural codes that encourage regular attendance at religious services. Some people see this as restrictive, including some who grew up in these traditions. What do you think about such codes? Do you tend to think of religious practice as an obligation, an opportunity, or something else?

1. As the film points out, there are aspects of Sabbath-keeping that have deep resonance in secular settings and for people who do not consider themselves religious. An example of this is the “Blue Laws” still in effect in Bergen County, New Jersey.

How do you feel about the “secularization” of Sabbath practices? Does this take away from the religious foundations of these practices, or does it illustrate their universality? At what point does the incorporation of traditional Sabbath practices into secular settings become a kind of appropriation? Or does it?

1. Jewish theologian and rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously described the Sabbath as “a cathedral in time.” Several commentators in the film pick up on this idea, referring to the Sabbath as “a different order of time” when weekday cares and concerns are put aside and the focus is on something beyond ourselves.

Is this how you think about or experience Sabbath? Do you tend to think about it as a period of time or a set of activities (going to church, synagogue, a sports match, etc.?) What does it mean to think about Sabbath as “a different order of time”? How might that way of thinking about it change or influence what you do during it?

1. For many Jews and Christians, Sabbath is first and foremost a time of worship and ritual. For Jews, especially, rituals help to define *Shabbat* (Sabbath) and to interpret its meaning. Jews light candles at sundown on Friday to welcome in the Sabbath, enjoy a shared meal, and attend worship on Saturday morning. Rituals help to reinforce a sense of community and of the holy.

What role do rituals play in your Sabbath observance? Do you feel – as several commentators in the film do – that rituals help transport you to “a different order of time,” to set the Sabbath apart from other days?

1. Jewish theologian Michael Fishbane describes Sabbath as a time set apart, when the routines of ordinary life no longer apply. “I don't go to work. I have to dress differently. I have to walk differently. I have to speak differently,” Fishbane says. “The rabbis emphasize that those are aspects of Sabbath behavior. It's a resting from constructive changes in the world. At the same time, it’s allowing a space for spiritual consciousness to unfold.”

If you are part of a Sabbath tradition, is Fishbane’s description of Sabbath behavior familiar to you? Is your Sabbath practice “set apart” by rituals of dress or behavior? If so, do you find these differences liberating or a kind of added responsibility?

What does Fishbane mean by “allowing space for spiritual consciousness to unfold”? Do you feel that Sabbath rituals - and the differences between those rituals and the routines of the week – help to create space for spiritual reflection?

1. In Part 2 of the film, religion scholar Susannah Heschel, daughter of renowned Jewish theologian and social activist Abraham Joshua Heschel, describes how her family practiced Sabbath in the Orthodox tradition---almost as a time out from the mundane routines and busyness of ordinary life:

*We didn't use electricity, and we didn't cook. We didn't use the phone. Certainly didn't listen to the radio or television. We didn't go to the store, of course, or use the money. It's hard for me to actually identify what it was that we didn't do because it was so much a part of the natural rhythm.*

If you are unfamiliar with Orthodox Judaism, do you find these Sabbath practices surprising? Do they seem unduly harsh or drastic to you? Can you imagine how these practices might help restructure a sense of time and break the hold of routine within the 24-hour Sabbath period? What difference might such dramatic changes in routine and such sacrifices make in how one viewed and approached the Sabbath?

1. Susannah Heschel also describes what her family did not talk about on Sabbath. This included anything that could be divisive or that could create tension and separation among those observing the day together. “On Shabbat, we didn't talk about politics,” Heschel says,

*We didn't talk about things that were divisive, were depressing, horrifying. We didn't talk about the atrocities in Vietnam. We didn't talk about the Holocaust. Those were not compatible with the atmosphere of Shabbat.*

Given the current divisions within American civic life---lamentable as they may be---do you think Sabbath could be a time for conversations that unite us across our differences? If Sabbath were a time when people intentionally avoided “hot-button” issues and volatile conversations, could that create space for us to listen to each other and help heal some of our divisions? Or just be a way of avoiding them?

1. Several film commentators remark on Sabbath as a time of awe, wonder, and beauty, themes highlighted in Heschel’s seminal book *The Sabbath* from 1951. In the film, Rabbi Manis Friedman puts it this way: **“**It’s like the whole week is hectic and then all of a sudden you light the Shabbos candles and you're in a different world.” Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue suggests that

*Religion is supposed to inject in people a sense of awe, a sense of marvel, a sense of wonder, a sense of sanctity. All of those concepts, we try and bring them out on Shabbat.*

Would you use words like “wonder” and “awe” to describe your own experience of Sabbath? If not---or if you do not regularly keep a Sabbath---where do you experience wonder and awe in the world? Why might Sabbath be a time when people are more open to experiencing and/or recognizing things like wonder, awe, and beauty?

What might you do to have a deeper sense of wonder, awe, and beauty in your own Sabbath-keeping? Can you point to specific times when you have experienced these things---perhaps in a worship service or outdoors in nature?

1. A shared Sabbath meal has been central to Jewish observance of *Shabbat*, and even to Christians in many traditions. In Part One of the film, we see Jewish cantor Daniel Singer and his family welcome the arrival of *Shabbat* on Friday evening with the lighting of candles and the enjoyment of a meal together. Later, we see an Adventist church community enjoy a meal together after their Saturday service. And many viewers will be familiar with the Christian tradition of a shared lunch after the Sunday morning worship service.

Christian theologian Norman Wirzba, featured in *SABBATH*, asks,

*Does it not honor God when we make a good meal and then when we share that meal with others? Because every meal is a declaration of love to the people at the table, or at least it could be. So we invite people to the table and we say, “I've made this food for you as an expression of my love for you.”*

How important to you is a shared meal as a part of Sabbath observance? Is this something that you regularly participate in? What values do you think a regular shared meal conveys? Why might a shared meal be important to the meaning and general observance of Sabbath? Finally, if you are someone who regularly observes Sabbath but does not participate in a shared meal, do the examples in the film encourage you to organize or become involved in such?

You may wish to visit the website of one of our partners, **OneTable (onetable.org)**, a non-profit in the Jewish tradition that works to empower young adults to find, share, and enjoy Friday Shabbat dinners.

1. In the segment on the Trappist monks of Saint Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, Brother Simeon Leiva-Merikakis describes the monks’ whole way of life as “sabbatical.” “We come here so that we can keep Sabbath better together,” Brother Simeon says. As explained in the segment, that life centers on the pillars of prayer, work, and reading – what the monks refer to as “ora et labora” (pray and work). When the monks are called to prayer – which is seven times a day – all work stops.

While the monks’ devotion is admirable, it’s not for everyone or even for most of us. However, their reversal of the usual ordering of time---focusing on Sabbath rather than the time outside of it---may have something to teach us. What do you take away from the monks’ practices and way of life? Does their re-ordering of the usual priorities---in this case, prayer over work---resonate with you in any way?

If we can’t live a Sabbath life all the time, as the monks do, how might we incorporate more of that life into our own? What, for you, would some first steps look like?

1. In Part 2, we meet Imam Khalid Latif, Executive Director of the Islamic Center at New York University, who tells us about the Friday *Jummah* prayers in Islam, which have some meaningful correspondences to the Jewish *Shabbat* and the Christian Sabbath. Latif says that, when the call is made for Friday *Jummah* prayer, the *Quran* commands Muslims to “hasten to answer that call, leaving behind even your work.”

The call to prayer and worship over work is strikingly similar to that expressed by the monks of St. Joseph’s Abbey. Moreover, Latif explains that the Friday call to prayer in Islam is a communal call, the word *Jummah* itself being derived from an Arabic root meaning “gathering,” or bringing people together.

How do you feel about being called to pray or to meditate at specific times of day, as with the brothers of St. Joseph’s in the Benedictine monastic tradition or with the Friday *Jummah* prayers in Islam? Does regularity of this Sabbath/*Jummah* practice reinforce its importance and adherence to it? What does it say, again, about how we organize our lives and how we structure our time?

Finally, of what importance is the fact that these prayers are communal, bringing a body of adherents together to engage in the practice?

1. In many traditions, Sabbath is also associated with acts of service. We see examples of this in Part 2, where students associated with Life Adventist Church in Berkeley, California serve meals to unhoused people in a local park on their Sabbath day (Saturday). One student volunteer describes the Sabbath as “a day that we take apart from the usual worries of the week. Where we tend to focus really on ourselves [in the week], during Sabbath, we should remove that and focus on other people. . . . “

Are acts of service an important part of your Sabbath observance, if you have one? How do they fit into your Sabbath ideology? Should service be part of Sabbath observance, or does it conflict with the idea of a day of rest?

1. In the segment devoted to the Hasidim (Orthodox Jews in the Hasidic tradition) in Part 2, Rabbi Manis Friedman also speaks of Sabbath, or *Shabbos*, as a time to redirect thoughts from oneself to other things. “The essence of Shabbos is for six days of the week, I worry about what needs to be taken care of,” Friedman says.

*I have to survive. I have to exist. I have to improve my existence. But for 24 hours of Shabbos, my existence is not important. It's not a concern. Now you focus on why you're alive, not how you're alive. So the essential word for Shabbat is not rest. It's a poor definition, a poor translation. The real word is contentment. If you're really experiencing Shabbos, you're experiencing a true contentment.*

Is contentment something you associate with the Sabbath experience? In what ways, if at all, is the idea of Sabbath “contentment” related to taking a time out from focusing on one’s own needs and concerns?

**SABBATH AND COMMUNITY**

For many Jews and Christians, Sabbath or Shabbat is the primary day of the week when they come together as a community. For the observant, Sabbath and community can almost seem synonymous.

1. In the film, author and journalist Judith Shulevitz argues that, in order for Sabbath observance to work, everyone has to do it. Otherwise, in a highly competitive capitalist society, Sabbath observance could seem like a detriment: Those who rest on Sabbath fall behind those who don’t.

Shulevitz puts it this way, in speaking of the contemporary “unplugging” movement: “. . . we have to do this at the same time, because if we don’t, we’re never going to be able to relax. Because we don’t trust that our co-worker is unplugging, too.”

Do you agree with this concern? In order for Sabbath to be truly effective, must everyone in a community (or a society) need to participate in it? If so, how could that be accomplished? Is it even possible on a small scale?

1. Religious historian Thomas Kidd reminds viewers that the communal practice of Sabbath is part of our nation’s founding narrative. The Puritans left England to find a place where they would be free to practice their religion as they wished, including observing a strict Sabbath. In the New World, they imposed that strict observance on others.

Do you think the Puritans were successful in their attempts at a communal Sabbath? How do you feel about legislating Sabbath observance as the Puritans did? Does it make a difference to you, as it clearly did to the Puritans, that Sabbath observance is mandated in the Ten Commandments given to the people of Israel? (You can find two complete versions of these commandments in the Hebrew scriptures, in Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21.)

1. In the film, several commentators talk about the “Blue Laws” that legislated the closing of shops and businesses on Sundays. In one segment of the film, we meet community leaders in Bergen County, New Jersey, who talk about why the citizens of their county have chosen to retain the secular “Blue Law” laws that keep shops closed on Sunday.

Does this seem old-fashioned to you? Or is some sort of legislation necessary to ensure that everyone enjoys a day of rest each week? Should this be a communal decision or simply an individual one? Can so-called “Blue Laws” really be separated from their origins in religious observance, or do they represent the intrusion of religious belief into public life?

1. Both Judith Shulevitz and Thomas Kidd reference a famous case involving Sunday closing laws that came before the United States Supreme Court in 1961. In that case, “McGowan versus Maryland,” the court found that, despite their religious origins, Sunday closing laws are not unconstitutional if they serve a secular purpose, such as providing the citizens of a community with an opportunity for rest.

Do you agree with the court’s decision? What factors do you think have to be weighed in supporting Sunday closing laws? Are these laws a violation of the constitutional guarantee of the separation of church and state (as the defendants in the above case argued)?

1. Most Puritans saw Sabbath observance as a religious and moral obligation, as have observant Jews throughout history. Do you see it as such? Does your tradition, if you have one, approach Sabbath observance as a religious or moral obligation? On what grounds? What are the consequences of not observing the Sabbath?
2. Religiously observant Jews and Seventh-day Adventists are among groups that observe 24-hour Sabbath periods on a weekly basis. How important do you think a weekly Sabbath observance is? Is regularity a key to effective Sabbath observance, in your opinion? How realistic is that or would that be for you? For your family?
3. Both theologian Judy Fentress-Williams and historian Thomas Kidd note that, during the time of slavery in the United States, Sabbath gatherings (whether on Sundays or Saturday nights) were among the only times that enslaved people were able to come together as a community and express their full humanity. How do these historical truths affect the way you think about Sabbath and what it means, what it has meant, or what it could mean in the future? How might honoring Sabbath also be a way of honoring the full humanity of all people, especially the historically marginalized?
4. Given the religious and cultural diversity of twenty-first century America, in which Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and people of other faiths live side by side, does Sunday or Saturday Sabbath observance become problematic, even if it is secular in nature?
5. At the Islamic Center of New York University, Imam Khalid Latif describes the Friday *Jummah* prayer gathering as a time when more superficial distinctions between people --- distinctions made and reinforced during the secular work week ---are removed. “The Day of *Jummah* is an opportunity now for people to traditionally leave everything that they have, their workplaces that are quite often segmented, the marketplace that is very much divided on social class, aspects of society that are heavily stratified,” Latif says, “and you walk into a place. Nobody is given a specific designation because of their level of affluence, the amount of wealth that they have.”

Whatever your faith tradition, do you experience communal worship as a time when everyday identities and stereotypes are removed, and a community gathers together on equal terms? If yes, how can this vision be applied to everyday life in the larger world, where distinctions between persons are often reinforced? What does this say about the different ways (and the different perspectives with which) people may approach religious community and their identity within it?

1. Were you surprised by the role that largely secular labor unions played in the establishment of Sunday closing laws in the early twentieth century? What reasons did the unions have for joining with religious groups in advocating for Sunday labor laws? Do you feel that this was an effective coalition? Could it (or should it) be reproduced today to advocate for workers’ rights?
2. Sociologist Tricia Bruce says that an over-focus on work and busyness, things often valorized in our culture today, can make us less responsive to the needs of others and to participation in community. This was the finding of Princeton Theological Seminary’s famous “Good Samaritan Project” (1973), highlighted in Part Two of *SABBATH*.

Do you find this to be true in your own life---that the busier you are and the more your life centers on work, the less responsive and engaged you may be to and with others? Do you sometimes see this in colleagues, friends, or family members? What is the result of this behavior? If you experience this in your own life, as many of us do, what changes could you make to be more responsive to and engaged with others?

1. Bruce also argues that religious congregations and houses of worship are among the few places in today’s society where people can gather in physical community to take time out from the busyness of everyday life. Even apart from their role in worship, congregations embody many of the values of Sabbath.

Does this match your own experience? Have you been involved in congregational life now or in the past? Is the sort of community that Bruce ascribes to religious congregations available outside of them? Or is this sort of community defined by its religious expressions?

1. In Part Two, Bruce suggests that, by contrast, religious communities can also be exclusionary, bringing together people who already share similar backgrounds, perspectives, socio-economic status, and other things. “[W]e are filtering our experience of reality and of each other. And we are essentially building communities that look like mirrors,” she says. This idea is reminiscent of the famous statement variously attributed to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Howard Thurman, and others who suggested that eleven o’clock on Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in American life.

Is this your experience of religious community, if you have been involved in one? Is unconscious segregation and social grouping endemic to American religious life? Or have you found religious community to be a place where people of different backgrounds and perspectives do come together to meet, share, worship, and celebrate the richness of diversity? Or have you experienced both? If so, which experience was the most meaningful or fulfilling?

**SABBATH AND JUSTICE**

In the Bible, God mandates Sabbath rest for all people, as well as for the earth and the creatures in it. Sabbath-keeping and the freedom to keep it are matters of justice in Biblical tradition and also today.

*If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath,  
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;*

*. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .   
If you honour it, not going your own ways,  
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;  
then you shall take delight in the Lord. . . .*  Isaiah 58:13-14

1. In the film, historian Thomas Kidd notes that “the profit impulse is often one of the enemies of a strict Sabbath observance,” noting especially the role that this impulse has played in American history.

Do you agree with Kidd that “the profit impulse” has been the “enemy” of Sabbath thinking or Sabbath keeping in our nation’s history? If so, in what ways has it been an “enemy” of Sabbath? Can you list several? If you don’t agree with Kidd’s observation, why not?

1. Sociologist Tricia Bruce asserts that, in American history, there have been structural and systemic challenges to Sabbath keeping. One challenge has to do with the demands corporations sometimes place upon their workers. Another is the necessity for workers to earn a living wage, so that they have the ability to enjoy a day of rest.

Have you faced either of these challenges in your own work life? If so, when? What responsibility do you think employers have to their employees in terms of Sabbath? No work on Sundays, or something more comprehensive?

1. Theologian Judy Fentress-Williams reminds viewers that, historically in America, Sabbath practice did not extend to everyone. This was especially true for enslaved persons, who sometimes were not allowed an opportunity for Sabbath rest. Ironically, their forced labor provided the economic means for enslavers to enjoy Sabbath themselves.

How do you feel about America’s mixed record on Sabbath-keeping and the right to enjoy Sabbath? Does the fact that some people were (and are) not able or allowed to enjoy Sabbath affect the way that you think about it or practice it? Do such truths invalidate Sabbath for you or make you want to consider ways that everyone might have the right to enjoy it? How might that be accomplished?

1. In the segment on Our Lady Queen of Angels (La Placita) Church in Los Angeles, community activist Joseph Tomas McKellar suggests that, regarding Sabbath, “the question for us as a society [isn’t] what should we do to solve all of the inequalities, injustices, in the world around us, but who do we need to become?”

What do you think McKellar means by this? What is it we individually and as a society need to become so that the promises of true Sabbath community are fulfilled?

1. Fentress-Williams suggests that “over time, church for Black people became everything. . . . In worship or in church on Sunday, African-Americans had dignity.” She describes how, especially during the era of Jim Crow, church on Sunday was the place where African-Americans could take off their uniforms and workday identities and assume authority in the worshipping community. “People who had to make their way through the world with their heads down and their shoulders hunched over got to sit up straight,” she says.

How does this image of Sabbath worship contrast with that described in Question 3? What kinds of Sabbath values does this image (Question 5) convey? What would it take to translate these values into the workday week? Is this experience of human dignity only available in the Black Church or in a single-race setting?

1. Sociologist Tricia Bruce notes that in American history, work has often been viewed as a kind of “religious practice”: God favors those who work, and success in one’s work is a sign of God’s favor. Bruce points out the challenges inherent in this way of thinking: We work harder and harder and longer and longer to gain God’s favor. Of course, this approach fits very well into the dynamics of capitalism, as Bruce observes.

Have you ever thought about your work as a kind of religious practice? Have you ever approached it with a kind of religious zeal or intensity? Do you think that God favors hard work? What’s wrong with treating work as a kind of religion?

1. In Part 2, we meet the community behind Abundance Farm in Northampton, Massachusetts, a Jewish-led creative farming project serving the food insecure. Here we learn about Sabbath practices regarding the earth, specifically, the year of *schmita* (the Sabbath of Sabbaths), when, in accord with Jewish law, the land is allowed to rest. Rabbi David Seidenberg, a consultant with Abundance Farm, explains that in a *schmita* year (every seventh year in a seven-year cycle), “anyone can go into anyone’s field, rich or poor. It doesn’t matter where you come from. Jewish, not Jewish. You go into anyone’s field and take whatever you want, because nobody owns anything.”

Do you find this idea surprising? Does the idea of mandated rest for the land make sense to you? What about equal and open access to its fruits, regardless of who labored to grow them? How, in your mind, does this relate to the historical American emphases on self-reliance and individualism? On ownership of property?

1. In the same segment, Rabbi David Seidenberg points out that Jewish (halakhic) law not only mandates the sharing of agricultural bounty during the *shmita* year, but also the cancellation of debts owed. As the film’s narration suggests, this is one of the most challenging of Sabbath teachings. Some viewers may remember high-profile public debates about international debt relief in the early 2000s.

How do you feel about mandated debt relief at specific intervals of time? Is debt relief a good idea, or does it actually fight against principles of justice and accountability? If Sabbath is, in part, a time of giving back and of restoration, how might debt relief fit into that? For debt relief to work, would everybody have to participate in it? Or should it be a voluntary Sabbath practice that everyone is encouraged to consider?

1. Both Rabbi David Seidenberg and Rabbi Jacob Fine (Director of Abundance Farm) emphasize the radical equality of *schmita* under Jewish halakhic law. “If we can’t hoard food, then we’re entirely dependent on how we interact with each other and what we share and creating equality between people,” Seidenberg says. Fine describes *schmita* as “really a blueprint for society . . . a vision for civilization” that involves the building of “a sharing economy.”

Do you feel that there is a connection between the sharing of goods and equality between persons? To what extent do you think of Sabbath as a time of sharing or giving? Is dependence on others or on one another something you associate with Sabbath? If not, how does associating these ideas – sharing, equality, giving, and dependence – impact your perspective on what Sabbath is and what it means?

**SABBATH AND CREATION**

*God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.* (Genesis 2:3)

1. Both Bishop Robert Barron and author Dana Trent speak of Sabbath as a time of creation and re-creation. According to the Book of Genesis in the Jewish scriptures, God rested on the seventh day after creating the universe and everything in it (Genesis 2:2-3). According to the Christian gospels, Jesus performed miraculous healings on the Sabbath and was sometimes criticized for doing so. Bishop Barron describes Jesus as “the agent of God, renewing [God’s] creation,” when Jesus heals on the Sabbath.

Do you think of the Sabbath as, in some way, the culmination of a week of work? As the respite that comes after hard labor, as imaged in the Book of Genesis?

How, in your experience, is Sabbath connected to ideas of creation and restoration? Is it connected in any way?

Do you think of Sabbath as a time of healing---physically, spiritually, or emotionally? If you already have some type of Sabbath practice, how might it change if you were to think of Sabbath as a time of creation and restoration for yourself, your community, the world?

1. In Part 1, we meet Daniel Singer, cantor of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in Manhattan. He describes the traditional blessing that occurs at the end of the Friday evening service at the beginning of the ritual Sabbath in Judaism. Singer says that “the blessing over the bread is a reminder of our connection to the earth. . . . [of] the drawing forth of bread from the earth.” Singer goes on to describe the web of connections between human beings and the rest of creation that is emphasized in Sabbath ritual:

“Shabbat is not only for us, it’s for our planet,” Singer says. “It’s for us to heal the world, heal ourselves. It’s about smells, the smell of Shabbat. There’s light on Shabbat with the candles, there’s tastes with the wine, with the challah. The sustenance it brings us. And it reminds us of our connection to one another and to the earth.”

Do you typically think of the Sabbath as a time for reflecting on the gifts of creation and of our connections with it? Or in your experience, is Sabbath more often focused exclusively on human being and human nature? How would our approach to Sabbath change if we thought of it, as Jewish tradition often does, in terms of the act and gifts of creation depicted in Genesis 1-2:3?

1. Theologian Norman Wirzba reminds viewers of the tenuousness of our relationship to the earth and to the sources of life itself, explaining that, ultimately, food itself “is a gift” that sustains us.

*So we live in an industrial food system. Food just appears. We have no idea of its coming to be. We have no appreciation for its fragility, for its vulnerability. But agricultural people have known from the beginning, you can’t ever take food for granted. Right? With the shopping experience you don’t have a moral obligation to what you purchase. It’s mine. But when you’re in a garden, when you’re on a farm, when you’re a hunter or a gatherer, you know that you live by receiving life rather than grasping and purchasing life. At the end of the day food is a gift.*

How would you describe your relationship to the food you eat, the land from which it is grown, and the labor that produced it? Do you think of food as a “gift,” rather than simply a commodity to be bought and sold? How does thinking about food as a gift relate back to Sabbath? Does thinking of food in this way reinforce the idea of Sabbath itself as a gift, a time of rest from labor?

1. In Part 1 of *SABBATH*, we meet Princeton Theological Seminary Professor Nathan Stucky and his students, who run the “Farminary,” a 21-acre farm dedicated to regenerative agriculture. At the *Farminary*, students’ theological training is informed by an intimate engagement with the land. Reflecting on the connection between humanity and the rest of creation, Stucky says that

*One of the things . . . we have been painfully slow to recognize is that our exhaustion and the exhaustion of the broader creation are two sides of the same coin. The creation is exhausted because we don’t know how to stop. There’s not a single instance that I can find anywhere in Scripture where God gives Sabbath to an individual. It’s always to the community. It’s to the whole of creation. It’s to the gathering of God’s people. Sabbath in all its fullness is an exercise of a community.*

To what extent do you think humanity bears responsibility for the “exhaustion” of the world? Do you agree with Stucky that Sabbath-keeping is not (and should not be) an individualistic thing, but a communal practice? What about the idea that Sabbath was a gift intended for all of creation, not just humanity alone? Does that idea surprise you?

Do you tend to think of human nature and external nature as part of one “community”? How might that perspective change the ways we treat the earth and our fellow creatures?

5. As noted elsewhere in this guide, in *SABBATH*, Part 2, we meet the community behind Abundance Farm in Northampton, Massachusetts, a Jewish-led creative farming project serving the community, especially the food insecure. Here we learn about Sabbath practices regarding the earth, specifically, the year of *schmita* (the Sabbath of Sabbaths), when, in accord with Jewish law, the land is allowed to rest. Rabbi David Seidenberg, a consultant with Abundance Farm, explains that in a *schmita* year (every seventh year in a seven-year cycle), “anyone can go into anyone’s field, rich or poor. It doesn’t matter where you come from, Jewish, not Jewish. You go into anyone’s field and take whatever you want, because nobody owns anything.”

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**SABBATH AND HEALTH**

Can Sabbath be good for your health? Many religious and nonreligious people see Sabbath practices as intimately connected with health and wellbeing.

1. Early in Part 1, we meet Sigve Tonstad, an author and specialist in internal medicine at the Loma Linda University School of Medicine in California. Tonstad describes the toll that constant stress, of the kind many people experience every day, places on the body. Among the effects are physical disorders such as gastroesophageal reflux and heartburn and psychological effects that include mood disorders and depression. “These are markers of a stressed-out society,” Tonstad asserts, describing the huge expenditures on medicines to treat such illnesses. “We might have to look for some other reset, some other remedy,” Tonstad considers, “and maybe the Sabbath could be that remedy.”

Have you experienced negative health outcomes as a result of stress? On a scale of one to five, how present is stress in your daily life?

After watching the film, do you feel that a regular Sabbath practice could help you with the problem of stress? If so, what are some of the practices you could take up? What are some things we could do as a society to deal with the problem of stress?

1. As noted elsewhere in this guide, some religious traditions associate Sabbath with health and healing. According to the Christian gospels, Jesus performed miraculous healings on the Sabbath and was sometimes criticized for doing so. Roman Catholic Bishop Robert Barron describes Jesus as “the agent of God, renewing [God’s] creation,” when Jesus heals on the Sabbath. Many of the practices of the Seventh-day Adventists, featured in this film, center on health and wellbeing.

Do you think of Sabbath as a time of healing---physically, spiritually, or emotionally? In what ways might it be so?

If you already have some type of Sabbath practice, how might it change if you were to think of Sabbath in terms of health and wellbeing, in addition to other things? What steps could you take to ensure that your Sabbath practice included a focus on health and wellbeing?

1. In *SABBATH* Part 1, we meet Reverend Michael Mickens, pastor of South Jackson Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jackson, Mississippi. He and his congregation are opening a health clinic to serve neighbors without access to regular health care, and the church is announcing the opening on their Sabbath day, which is Saturday. Rev. Mickens explains the timing of their event:

*So many of Jesus's miracles were performed on the Sabbath. And so we find that healing and health ministry on the Sabbath are beautifully aligned because they essentially reflect the healing ministry of Jesus.*

South Jackson Church’s health ministry, which includes an annual health fair, is reflective of the Seventh-day Adventists’ larger focus on health and wellbeing, not just for oneself, but also for others. Referring to his church’s health outreach in Jackson, Reverend Mickens says that “when we keep the Sabbath the way that God intended, we will be practicing truth and love. . . . our Sabbath worship experience will go from being a special day of worship just for us to a Sabbath for the city.”

Do you see healthcare as a part of Sabbath practice? Do you believe churches, synagogues, and religious institutions should be involved in addressing America’s growing healthcare needs? If so, what is the best way for congregations and houses of worship to engage their communities around healthcare? If you are part of a religious community, is your community involved in any form of health outreach?

1. Studies have found that Adventists, such as those profiled in *SABBATH*, are among the healthiest and longest-lived of all Americans. Their theology has a strong focus on wellness; most Adventists are vegetarians who avoid alcohol and caffeine and view the human body as the temple of God. While the Adventists may be a special case, many churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship today offer classes in wellbeing, yoga, meditation, nutrition, and other subjects designed to care for the body as well as the soul.

In general, do you feel that religious communities today give sufficient attention to the care of the body, or is it largely an afterthought? In what ways might a regular Sabbath practice address the needs of the body? Do you think of Sabbath as a day mostly devoted to the care of the spirit as distinct from the care of the body? Is there a balance to be found in an approach to Sabbath that cares equally for body and soul?