

Day 2

Slowing Down



Individual Reflection

Our lives are constantly changing, and because of this, knowing what season we are in can be difficult. If we don't know what season we are in, how are we supposed to move through them? How are we supposed to grow? How are we supposed to experience peace when we don't even know where we are?

In stark contrast to the world around us, God is completely unchanging. This quality of God is called immutability. What does it mean for us that God is unchanging? Because God is consistent, He is a safe place for our hearts to reside. He will never be ripped out of our hands or our hearts, He is ours and we are His, forever. Even though God is unchanging, our relationship with him grows and changes throughout time. While it is easy to misunderstand this as meaning that God changes too, it is really us changing and learning about new ways to interact and connect with God. We may not know what season we are in, but we can rest in knowing that God is who He says He is and will always be who He says He is. We can trust his promises. The unexpected nature of the seasons of life are not caused by God's character, but He does use them to bring us closer to Him.

One of the things I do when I am feeling very overwhelmed by the weight of this world and I find myself doubting the unchanging nature of God, is sit down alone and listen to worship music. A favorite of mine recently is "Spirit Lead Me" by Michael Ketterer and Influence Music. This song tells the story of a person learning to trust God with everything and to be led by the Spirit towards the things that God is calling them towards. In the chorus of the song, the singer says, "If you say to jump, I'm diving in" but follows that up with "If you say be still, then I will wait." What I love about this line is that it reminds us that saying yes to God doesn't only mean saying yes when he asks us to move and to go out and change the world, but that it also means saying yes when he commands us to be still, when he commands us to sit in the uncertainty and to trust HIM.

The bridge of this song is always incredibly impactful to me. Here are the lyrics:

When all hope is gone, and your word is all I've got
I have to believe you still bring water from the rock
To satisfy my thirst, to love me at my worst
And even when I don't remember, you remind me of my worth.
I don't trust my ways, I'm trading in my thoughts
I lay down everything, 'cause you're all that I want.
I've landed on my knees, this is the cup you have for me
And even when it don't make sense, I'm gonna let Your Spirit lead.

When the world is changing faster than we can keep up with, God is STILL bringing water from the rocks, God is still loving us, God is still reminding us that He is all we need. Reflect on this

verse for a while, notice sticks out to you. Ask yourself if you really believe the things this song is saying. See what God has to say to you through these lyrics.

Seasons change, the world changes, but God doesn't. May we find hope in the promise of Isaiah 40:8 - "The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Closing Prayer (from Billy Graham's "The Unchanging God"):

*Almighty God, to know You are unchanging gives me peace in a frighteningly changing world.
Amen.*

Small Group Discussion

Discussion questions prior to the activity:

- What do you think Sabbath is?
- What does it mean to rest?
- Why might it be important?
- When was the last time you felt at peace?

Activity Ideas:

- Try a guided meditation. This is a good one:
<https://insighttimer.com/emilyherzlin/guided-meditations/shabbat-meditation-2>
- Allow students to have a certain amount of time to go on a nature walk by themselves around the worksite or church yard. Emphasize silence and listening.
- Ask each student to lay on their backs in the grass, with eyes closed, to listen to nature's noises.

Discussion questions for after the activity:

- How do you feel now?
- Was the stillness and silence uncomfortable? How did you work through the discomfort?
- How might you apply sabbath to your daily or weekly life?

Worship Outline

Supplies Needed

- Music playing device/speaker
- Response Materials
 - Stations #1-6 Instruction Sheets
 - Templates
 - Tree Coloring Pages
 - Pens and Markers

Gathering

Dear God, We confess our need for you again, to help us get out of this cycle of busy. Give us the strength we need to say no to the temptation of trying to do it all. Help us to use your wisdom in every decision, allowing you to work out the details, instead of trying to do things all on our own. Forgive us, Lord, for not trusting you enough, for truly, that's the root of our constant striving. Help us to remember that all things are possible with you, and you are able to do in just a moment, what would take us years to work out on our own. Thank you that you are powerful in our weakness, and you are faithful, even when we struggle. We love you and we ask for your Spirit to refresh us today. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 42

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"
These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the
Mighty One

with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.
Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.
My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from
Mount Mizar.
Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.
By day the Lord directs his love,

at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.
I say to God my Rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?"
My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"
Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

Suggested Music

Nothing I Hold Onto <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Fryb0Uqo4s>

Take a Moment <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJT-UQsgs60>

Message

Watch here: https://youtu.be/yxF_fq68Ox8

Sneak peak: In a culture that is always going going going and focused on productivity, it can be difficult to imagine the need for slowing down. This is especially evident after a worldwide pandemic and months of quarantine. We've complained about not being able to *do* anything. We think we *need* to constantly be going. We wish for the days when we can be active again, when the world is running as normal with all the conveniences we were used to.

We might all be feeling drained after isolation and uncertainty. We might be feeling far from God or doubting that He's even working in this situation. That's a relatable feeling, even for psalmists back in Biblical times.

Response: Stations

This time is a balance of instruction and symbolic explanation. This is also an opportunity to gain new perspectives and understanding as 5 different people from all over the country have written unique stations. Stations are meant to be done individually so people can move throughout them at their own pace.

1. Definition and Introduction to Sabbath
2. Our Lives Change. God Doesn't.
3. Why People Don't Sabbath
4. Practicing Gratitude
5. Practicing Mindfulness
6. God rests

Benediction

Hear these words from the 11th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." During times of unrest and stress, it can be easy to forget to take time to rest and spend time with God. Let this verse from Matthew encourage you to go to the Lord for rest and shelter from the uncertainty and the harshness of the world.

Station #1

The Importance of Sabbath

Personally, I always found the word and idea of Sabbath, intimidating. My knowledge of the word Sabbath was limited to the definition I always heard which was, "Sunday observed among Christians as a day of rest and worship."

Every time I heard this definition, I always thought that my Sunday had to be a perfect representation of what Sabbath was considered to be. It felt like such an insurmountable task. A task I couldn't do anything about because I thought that I didn't have the ability to devote my whole day to the Lord by following this definition.

However, I read Mark 2:23-28 and it changed my whole perspective on Sabbath and how it truly should work within our lives.

Mark 2:23-28

A Discussion about the Sabbath

²³ One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples began breaking off heads of grain to eat. ²⁴ But the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look, why are they breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?"

²⁵ Jesus said to them, "Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ²⁶ He went into the house of God (during the days when Abiathar was a high priest) and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. He also gave some to his companions."

²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!"

Verse 27 is what stuck out to me when I read this for the first time and is the verse that changed my whole perspective of Sabbath and how I practice it in my life.

Mark 2:27 "Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath."

This showed me that I didn't have to have a "perfect" Sabbath or meet the requirements imposed on it by the definition. This verse showed me that Sabbath is a time for yourself and God. This time and interaction can come in many forms, but if it brings you peace, rest, and closer to God, it is a Sabbath. It is personal.

In addition to this, Sabbath does not even have to be on all of Sunday either. It is not locked into those 24 hours at the end of the week, you can Sabbath at any time of the week. I tend to Sabbath for 30 minutes a day by doing something I love. Whether that be gardening, watching clouds, playing guitar, listening to music, going for a drive, the list goes on.

The important thing is that I am with God during these times. I am doing things that bring rest to my soul, and I am growing closer to God. This is the importance of the Sabbath.

It is well for your soul.

Station #2

What Happens When We Don't Sabbath

"Church will still be here next week"

"My friends wanted to hangout"

"I have too much homework"

"I don't feel well"

"I'll just do it tomorrow"

"I'm tired"

"I had practice"

How many reasons can you come up with for why you don't spend time with God? It's easy to find that time during youth group, on your mission trip, and other times when it is built into your schedule. Sometimes it can seem overwhelming to have an entire day of rest, or to even plan hours to spend with God.

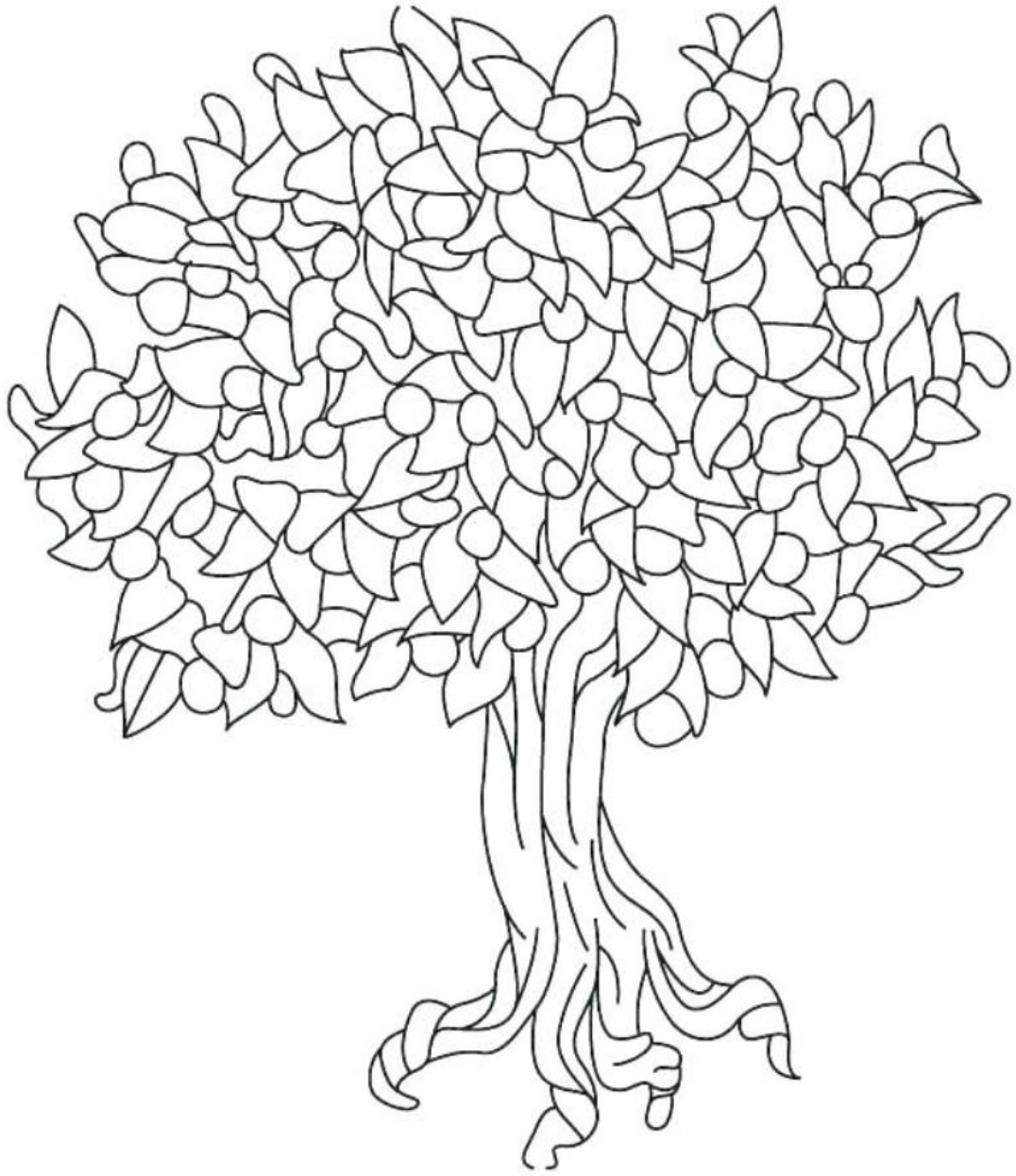
However, what happens when you don't continuously build your relationship with God all year round? Well, what happens when you don't talk to your friends regularly? The relationship weakens and eventually might disappear. The same thing can happen when your relationship with God becomes stagnant.

When we think about the term "sabbath" it can be quite intimidating. Taking an entire day to rest and do nothing but be in the Lord's presence? Who really has that kind of time with our busy schedules? Sabbath doesn't have to be an entire day completely dedicated to spending time with God. Honoring the sabbath can be as simple as a conversation with God on your way to school, taking 15 minutes to read a devotional book or scripture, or even talking to a friend about God's presence in your life. Consistency and quality are key when building your relationship with God.

When we are consistently spending time with God and resting in Him, we bear more fruit in our lives. John 15:5 says: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

This encourages us to be steadfast in our relationship with God, because in Him we can be fruitful in our life pursuits. Without God's consistency in our lives daily tasks become harder and harder to accomplish. It's important to be as constant for God as he is for us.

A coloring page of a tree has been provided. This tree is a symbol of your relationship with God. When you sabbath, color in a leaf or piece of fruit on the tree as a symbol of your growth with God. Forming new habits can be difficult, but the hope is that when you look at your tree, it can be a reminder of the fruitfulness awaiting you when your relationship with God is nourished on a regular basis. Consider today the first leaf on your tree.



Station #3 Practicing Gratitude

Supplies:

- Pens
- Branches
- Vase
- Construction Paper Cut Out Leaves
- Hole Punch
- String (optional)
- Station Instructions Print-Outs



Setup:

1. Cut out leaves using the leaf template attached
2. Punch a hole in each leaf and loop string through it to hang
3. Place branches in a vase
4. Scatter the leaves, pens, and instructions around the station

Adaptations:

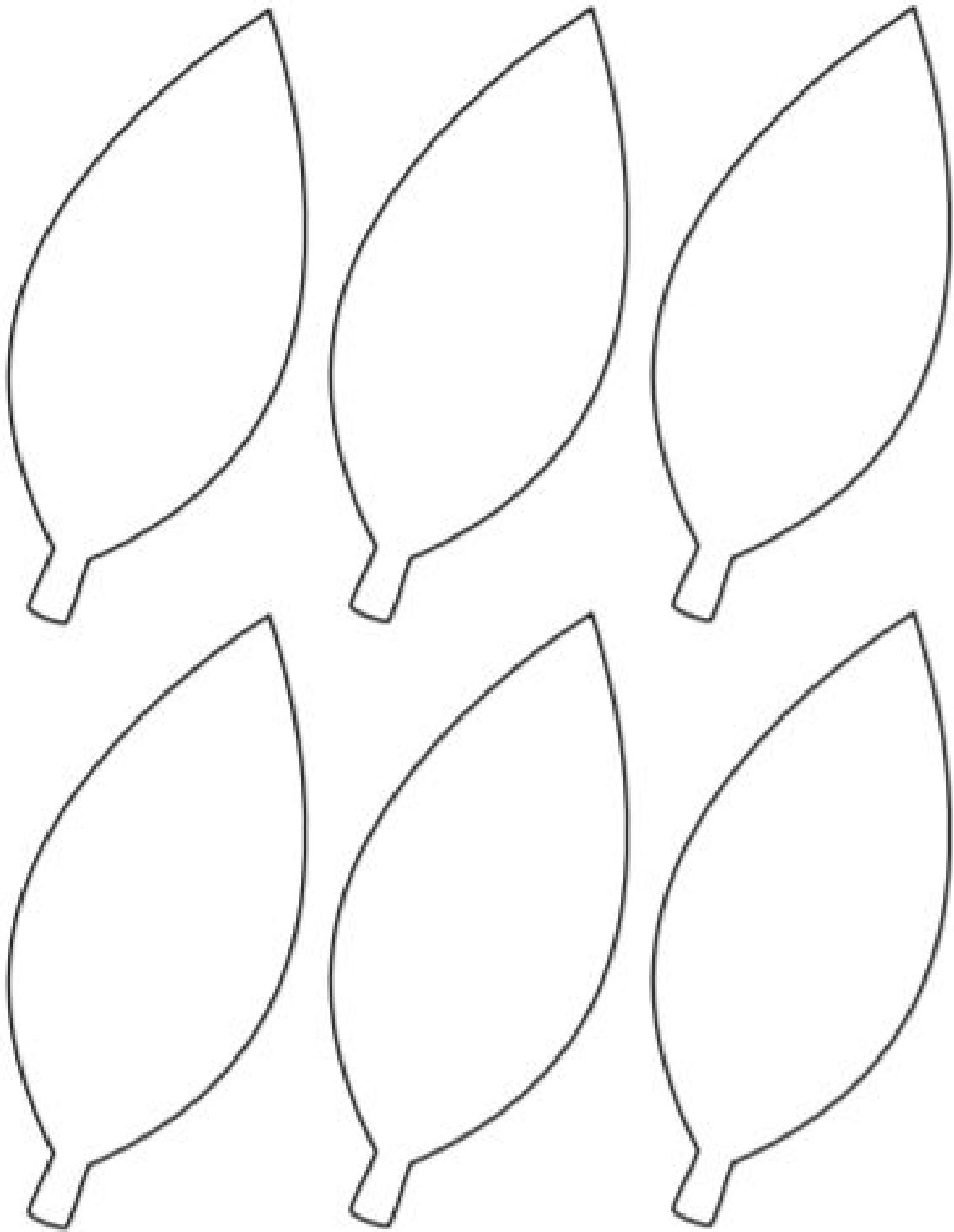
The purpose of this station is to build community through a display of thankfulness as well as practicing thinking through gratitude daily. Depending on the needs or resources of your church, feel free to adapt this station into a "Gratitude Wall" just using Post-It Notes and a blank wall. Students could also create gratitude jars or journals to transform this activity into a daily practice.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

Colossians 3:15

Sit for a moment and reflect on your day. Be still. Breathe. Reflect: What are you grateful for? What was good?

Whenever you're ready, take a leaf. Write at least one thing that you are thankful for on a leaf. Tie it to a branch to display the variety of things we're grateful for as a community. Some may be small things, some may be broad things. As you leave the worship space and go home, try to look for and appreciate the good things in every day. Make it a daily practice to think through gratitude.

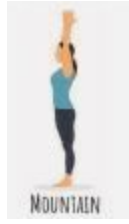
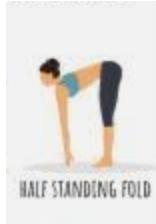





Station #4 Practicing Mindfulness

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

The Bible tells us that rest is necessary and that we can find rest in the Lord. Sabbath is a way we can find rest in the Lord, and Sabbath can look different for everyone. One way to Sabbath can be through meditation. So, take the next few minutes to practice a meditation Sabbath. Go through each of the yoga poses below and while taking deep breaths, repeat the breath prayer underneath the pose at least three times.

 <p style="text-align: center;">MOUNTAIN</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">HALF STANDING FOLD</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">DOWNWARD FACING DOG</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">CHILD</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">EASY SEAT</p>
<p>Be present with me, Lord</p>	<p>God, let me be rooted in you</p>	<p>Jesus, help me love others as you did</p>	<p>Teacher, provide me wisdom</p>	<p>Lord, allow me to find rest in you</p>

Station #5

Practicing Appreciation

“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy”
Exodus 20:8

Sabbath can be any holy act with God. One way to spend time with God is to appreciate His creation. Go on a walk or hike every evening to see the beautiful sunset. Sunsets are a great way to view God's glory and see everything He has done for this world. Spend a few minutes in silence and just admire the nature around you and the awesome world God has created. When going on this journey every night, end the evening with a breath prayer to close out your sabbath. A breath prayer is a quick prayer that captures everything you want to say in a few words. Try this one: “God, you are glorious, and I am here to praise you.”



Station #6

Even God Rests

As humans, it is easy for us to convince ourselves that resting is bad, unholy, lazy, sinful, etc. However, we can. Find truth in knowing that even God and Jesus both took time to rest both after their work had been completed AND while there was still work to be done. They both recognized the necessity in taking time to rest. Read on for a few examples of times that Jesus and God rested.

Mark 4:35-40 tells us that one day, Jesus and his disciples left a crowd that they had been interacting with and got in a boat. While they were on the boat, a giant storm hit. The disciples were freaking out and Jesus was simply sleeping through it. The disciples woke him up and accused him of not caring if they drowned! Immediately Jesus stood up, calmed the storm, and asked the disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" What I love about this story is that even though there was still work to be done, still people to heal and to preach to, Jesus rested. We know how loving Jesus is and how much he desires to bring love and light into this world, but even so, he rested! We learn from this story that we are allowed to rest even when the work is not done.

Matthew 26:36-39 tells us that one day, very soon before Jesus was arrested and eventually crucified, he went out to a garden called Gethsemane and cried out to God. Before he went off to pray, he said to his disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." In this moment of vulnerability with God, Jesus rested and prayed to God, and asked him to save him from crucifixion. Jesus, who knows of all God's plans and is the most holy person to ever walk the planet, still asked God to be relieved from his fears. While ultimately, Jesus did come to declare that it was the father's will that should happen and not his, he felt free to show his whole heart to God, and to invite God to meet him where he was. We learn from this story that we are allowed to rest even when that means bringing negative feelings to God.

Genesis 2:2-3 says "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." Genesis 1 tells the story of God creating the world. Day after day, he went to work creating the stars and the sky and all of the living things. After he was done with it all, he entered into a period of rest. Sometimes, it sounds weird for us to think of God resting. I mean, He is God, right? However, the truth is that God does rest. He is constantly inviting you to join Him in his rest, for it a holy place that offers peace and comfort.

Response: Near this station, there are "Sabbath Permission Slips." Take one for yourself, write your name and the date and hold onto it as a reminder that God is constantly allowing you to rest and inviting you to join Him in his rest. Before all the work is done, before you become okay with everything that is happening around you, rest.

Sabbath Permission Form

Name: _____

Date: _____

Activities include: Reading, walking, napping, celebrating, praying, exercising, etc.

Permission granted by: God and Jesus

Jesus Rested..... God Rested..... And so can YOU.

Keep this slip as a reminder that both Jesus and God rested, and that they are calling you to enter into that rest with them. Find peace and comfort in the arms of our Lord as you rest with Him.

Sabbath Permission Form

Name: _____

Date: _____

Activities include: Reading, walking, napping, celebrating, praying, exercising, etc.

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Jesus Rested..... God Rested..... And so can YOU.