Day 1 – Sabbath: Restoring Community

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Isaiah 58:6-14
The Sabbath is a time of rest, a time of slowing and stopping to reorient ourselves towards both the God who created us and gave us life, and the proper expression of that life given to us. We abuse the Sabbath and break it if we see it as simply a day for our pleasure, our own delight, an expression of ourselves and our desires. If we delight in keeping God’s Sabbath, if we take joy in honouring the day of rest and the God who ordained it, then God will reveal himself, give himself, to us; he will give us true delight in himself and in his creation.

Honouring the Sabbath is not just about worshiping God (though it is most definitely about that) but also about caring for those on the bottom rung of society’s ladder. The Sabbath commandment recorded in Deuteronomy makes it very clear that the purpose of the Sabbath was to grant a day of rest to those at the bottom of society. If we orient ourselves towards God and his purposes for us then we also orient ourselves towards those he cares for.

Today’s passage connects talk of relieving the burdens of the poor and hungry and oppressed to a picture of restoration and rebuilding, of the flourishing of the people and the land and the recreation of community. Honouring the Sabbath allows us to care for others and to contribute to the rebuilding and restoration of community.

Question to Consider
How does your Sabbath journey aid the poor and oppressed in our world?

Prayer
Lord God, may I never see the Sabbath as only for my own benefit, but always as a chance to benefit others, a chance to care for, stand with and advocate for the poor and oppressed. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 2 – Not By Our Efforts

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 2 Corinthians 5:17
We all know we fall short. We all experience those moments – all too often – of wishing we were better, of longing to be more like Christ, and so more like the person God always wanted us to be, the person he longs for us to be. But we often think it is our job to transform ourselves into this new person. We put so much of our effort into trying to recreate and reinvent ourselves that we forget that it is not something that is within our power to accomplish.

New creation has nothing to do with our attempts to get things right or begin again. This is not a change on the same level as a new year’s resolution, or turning over a new leaf, or trying to get our act together and do better, or to perform to our potential. This new creation is an act of God.

More than that it is a gift from God, but a gift that comes with a challenge: having received the gift of new creation from God we are challenged to live a new life. But in order for this to happen, we need to be in Christ. We need to live in his strength, empowered by his Spirit, transformed by his Spirit. New creation involves forgiveness, but it also involves change. We will be changed; indeed we must be changed. New creation means just that: we are made new, we are regenerated and transformed, not by our own efforts, but by the Spirit of God working in us.

Questions to Consider
How is your life a new creation in God? How have you changed since walking with God?

Prayer
Heavenly Father, thank you for new life - such a wonderful undeserved gift. Thank you for the renewal you offer us through your Spirit. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 3 – An Open Invitation

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – John 7:37-39
The invitation that Jesus offers here is to all of us, anyone at all. It is not limited by our definitions of ourselves or others’ definitions of us. Class, nationality, race, occupation, wealth, political affiliation – none of these limit Jesus’ invitation to come to him and drink. But the invitation is also narrow in that people must recognise that they are in need. Thirst is not something that is automatically quenched. Thirst must be acknowledged and acted upon. One must recognise and admit that one is lacking something, that one is thirsty, before one can look to slake that thirst.

And so it is most appropriate that Jesus says this during the Feast of Tabernacles, the occasion when Israel celebrated God’s miraculous provision of water for them in the wilderness. God provided water for his people in the desert; and now he has provided water for them again, this time in the person of Jesus, who calls people to himself to satisfy their thirst. To come to him to drink was to place faith in him, to trust and rely on him. And for the person who does this, a river of living water was promised. Life and abundance would flow out from Jesus to those who turned to him and placed their trust in him. All this would come through the presence of the Spirit in the life of those following Jesus. But first we must stop, acknowledge our need, and place our life in his hands. And then the refreshing, reenergising water will flow.

Questions to Consider
How do we recognise we are thirsty? How does the Sabbath help us both recognise and satisfy this thirst?

Prayer
Almighty God, help me know and accept when I am thirsty, when I am in need of you and your refreshing water of life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Romans 8:1-11
Each day we must choose to centre our lives on God. It isn’t necessarily something that happens automatically with every thought and every action; we still have our own will and we can still choose to go our own way. But the more we allow ourselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, the more we let God put his imprint on us, the more we will find ourselves wanting to follow where God leads, choosing to act as he would have us act. The mind controlled by the Spirit experiences life and peace. Where would we be without the Spirit of God? We would find ourselves in Paul’s other category of people: those living according to the sinful nature, doing their own thing, ignoring God, destroying themselves.

But we are called to freedom, the freedom to walk in the Spirit, the freedom to open ourselves to God’s transforming, renewing, recreative power, to come to God and be refreshed, renewed and remade in the image of his son. Only if we do this will we be remodelled and conformed to the likeness of Christ. The Sabbath is a God-given space set aside as a reminder of this, a space and time to reorient ourselves and our lives in the direction of the one who gives us rest and reminds us of the reality of his love and his will for the world. Whatever the rest of our lives may contain – the good, the bad, the fast, the slow – the Sabbath is always there as a holy, restful place to reaffirm our walk with the Spirit.

Questions to Consider
How do we ensure we walk daily under the power of the Spirit? What are the rhythms that help you do this and that help you help others do this?

Prayer
Loving Lord, thank you for the freedom and joy that comes from walking with you each day. Thank you for loving and caring for us so much. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 5 – Sabbath as Hint of What is to Come

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Romans 8:12-27
Creation groans. People suffer. We look around and we see that things are not right, not as they could be, not as they should be. We see enough to know the shape and outline of what could be, and what ultimately will be in the fullness of God’s kingdom, but we experience it only in flashes and sparks and brief moments of light breaking through the darkness, or moments when God’s Spirit breaks through our defences or shines through our lives. Creation is broken. We are broken. And yet God works in us and reveals himself in us in order to renew creation and to hint at what new creation will look like.

This new creation is slowly being revealed in us, those who have offered ourselves unconditionally to him, and follow his Son in all we do. There will come a day when all things are made new, when the glory of God is fully present and revealed to all, when his creation is restored and renewed for all to see and experience and enjoy.

The renewal that the Sabbath reveals is a taste of that final, ultimate restoration. The peace, rest and reconnection with God that He offers us on that day (though not just on that day) gives us a hint of the ultimate peace, rest and eternal connection with God that the fulfilment of the coming kingdom will reveal.

Question to Consider
How does your experience of the Sabbath reveal the coming of the kingdom and God’s love for the world and everyone in it?

Prayer
Heavenly Father, thank you for the kingdom that is coming, thank you for the glory and beauty that you are forever in the process of revealing to us – and through us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)