

"THE LORD OF THE SABBATH"

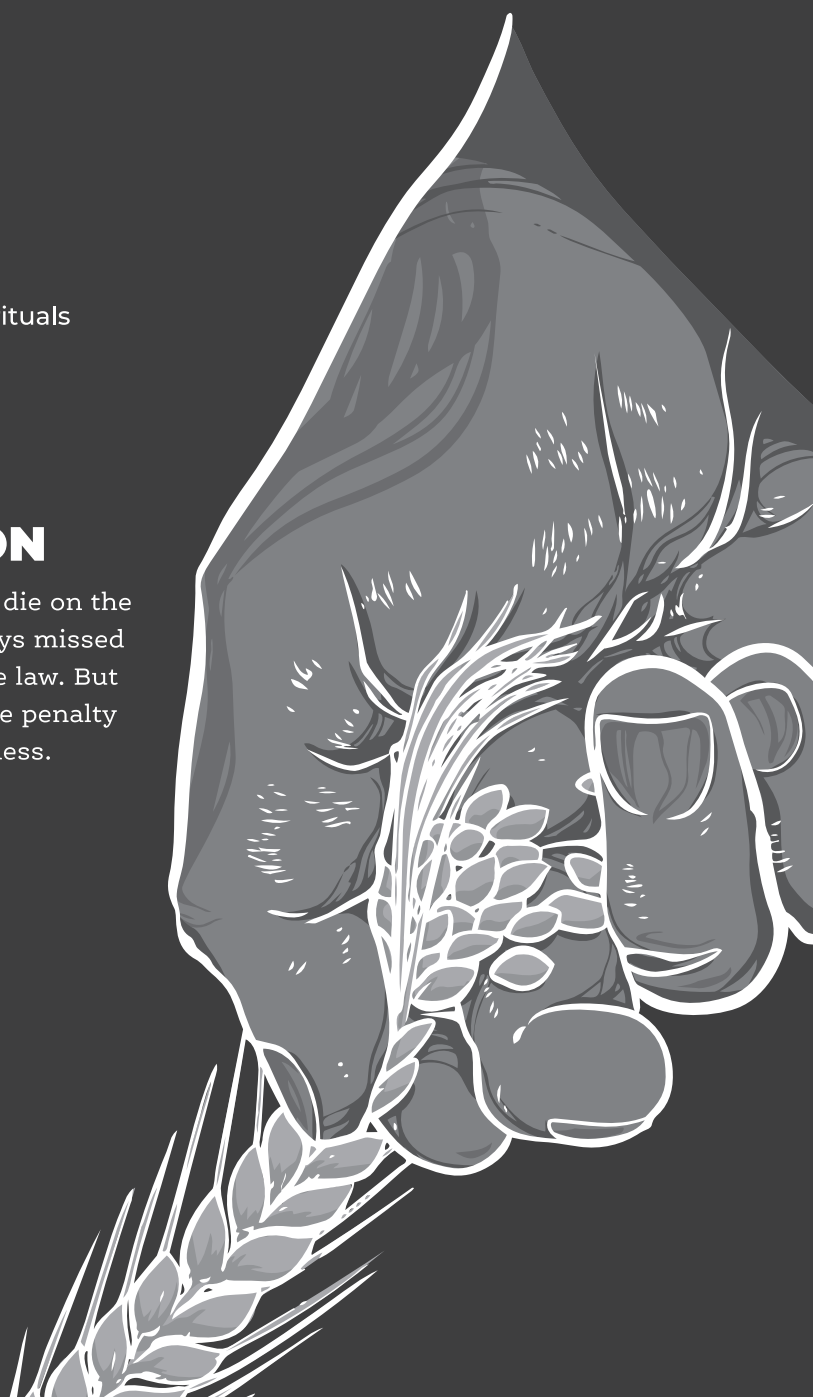
MAIN POINT.

God desires mercy and goodness over rituals and laws.



CHRIST CONNECTION

God's mercy allowed His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for humanity's sin. We have always missed the mark of God's holy standards of the law. But through Christ, we are rescued from the penalty of death because of His love and goodness.



COMPASSIONATE AUTHORITY

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Matthew 12

MERCY IS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE

MATTHEW 12:1-8

1 At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." 3 He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry: 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence—which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests? 5 Or haven't you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

LOVING OTHERS FULFILLS GOD'S LAW

MATTHEW 12:9-14

9 Moving on from there, he entered their synagogue. 10 There he saw a man who had a shriveled hand, and in order to accuse him they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" 11 He replied to them, "Who among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't take hold of it and lift it out? 12 A person is worth far more than a sheep; so it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath." 13 Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out, and it was restored, as good as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, how they might kill him.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

God desires mercy and goodness over rituals and laws.

Leaders: God values your love and devotion above your works. Let that truth give you rest.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

MERCY IS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE

MATTHEW 12:3-6

“Jesus regularly highlighted a pharisaical neglect of Scripture as opposed to their conformity to tradition. In defense of his disciples’ behavior, Jesus cited the example of David in 1 Samuel 21:1-9, when he fled from Saul to the city of Nob, where the tabernacle was kept at the time. There David and his men ate the consecrated bread that was set apart for the priests to eat after it had been brought to the Lord as an offering (Lev. 24:8-9). Jesus was not citing a specific Old Testament quote in 12:5, but he was making a general observation. Throughout the Old Testament law, the Lord prescribed work for the priests on the Sabbath to facilitate the worship of others (Num. 28:9-10), and yet the priests were never declared guilty for such practices. Jesus argued that—based on those two examples and based on the fact that he himself, the architect of the temple and the one for whose worship the temple existed—he was ‘greater than the temple’ (12:6).”⁶

MATTHEW 12:7

“Here Jesus used the quote to correct their misconception regarding the priority of mercy (the true spirit of the Sabbath law) over the letter of the law. God’s command to observe the Sabbath is an expression of mercy, recognizing the limits of the human makeup, and requiring us to care for the bodies and minds he has entrusted to us. The Pharisees had actually demeaned the Sabbath by robbing it of its ‘rest’ and weighting it with overwhelming religious requirements. This is what Jesus meant in Mark 2:27 when he said, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’ So mercy is wrapped up in the heart of the Sabbath law.”⁷

LOVING OTHERS FULFILLS GOD’S LAW

MATTHEW 12:9-14

“The fury of the Pharisees as they plotted to ‘destroy him’ was their own unintentional acknowledgment of Jesus’s complete moral victory over them. He contended for the value of a man and for the lawfulness of doing ‘good’ (*kalos* means what is proper) at any time, while they contended for the observance of a day. In effect, Jesus placed the love commandment above the Sabbath. Unable to meet him even on their own ground, they resorted to external force, the persecutor’s unwitting confession of defeat.”⁸



CONTEXT

As Jesus taught and performed miracles, He repeatedly encountered conflict with the Jewish religious leaders of the day—scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. The Pharisees had burdened Israel with traditions and rules, but Jesus intended to bring rest (Matt. 11:28-30). Matthew 12 begins with accusations against Jesus and His disciples for violating the Sabbath. In the Old Testament, God gave the law to Israel to reveal sin and highlight the need for a Savior. The law was never intended to save Israel but rather pointed to the time when the “offspring” (Gen. 3:15) would come (Gal. 2:16; 3:19-26). The fourth commandment is to keep the Sabbath day holy, or set apart, meaning that Israel would work six days and rest one (Ex. 20:8-11). God gave the Sabbath so that Israel might rest and remember the creation account and the origin story of Israel—so that the people could reflect on God’s faithfulness. Over the years, the Pharisees added very detailed rules for how to keep the Sabbath, most of which went much further than what God commanded. This distortion of the Sabbath meant that Jesus had to help Israel understand that the true intention of the Sabbath was to bring rest, not burden, just as He invited the crowd to find in Him (Matt. 11:28-30).

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

God Is Merciful

Mercy refers to God’s compassion and is often expressed in God’s withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God’s mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

LEADERS' PRAYER

**HEAVENLY FATHER, MAY OUR STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE DEPTH OF YOUR
MERCY THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF YOUR SON. HOLY SPIRIT, OPEN OUR
STUDENTS' EYES AND EARS AS THEY ENCOUNTER YOUR MERCY IN YOUR WORD.
HELP US WALK IN OBEDIENCE IN LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES.**



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

The Pharisees created bizarre Sabbath rules, such as forbidding spitting on the ground (it could disturb soil, considered “plowing”), banning women from looking into a mirror (they might pull out a gray hair, considered “work”), and prohibiting wearing shoes with nails (an unnecessary burden).⁹

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

TO FOLLOW OR NOT

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **ARE YOU NATURALLY A RULE-FOLLOWER? WHY OR WHY NOT?**
- **WHEN A LINE OR BOUNDARY IS DEFINED, HOW QUICKLY DO YOU GO TO THE EDGE WITHOUT TECHNICALLY BREAKING IT? WHY?**
- **WHICH OF YOUR PARENTS' OR GUARDIANS' RULES DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND THE REASON BEHIND THEM?**

Some environments have more rules than others, like school or airport security. Rules can feel like a burden or an inconvenience. We often choose which ones we're willing to follow and which ones to ignore. When it comes to following Jesus, His commands aren't a burden. They lead to meaningful life!

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Does our culture celebrate getting revenge or showing mercy? The world is slow to praise mercy and quick to reward harsh online comments, stories of revenge, and people getting what they deserve. This mentality can shape how we respond to offense, but this is not the way of the gospel. We've all made mistakes; we've all sinned and fallen short of God's standard (Rom. 3:23). But in the face of all our failures, God shows us mercy—forgiveness instead of the punishment we deserve. The core of the gospel message is that sinners are not given what they deserve (death) but are given what they could never earn (salvation; Eph. 2:4-5). When you believe in this gospel, you're no longer conformed to culture but transformed in your mind (Rom. 12:2). The more we dwell on the mercy that has been given to us through Jesus Christ, the more we grow in our ability to show mercy to others. Mercy transforms our minds and hearts so that we carry mercy to others in an effort to reveal Jesus to the world.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

God desires mercy and goodness over rituals and laws.

MERCY IS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE

READ MATTHEW 12:1-8

HOW DO YOU REST? WHAT MATTERED MOST ABOUT SABBATH TO PHARISEES?

Some of us rest by sleeping in, taking time off work, or going for a walk. **Resting the way God commands is intentional—obediently pausing to depend on God and to reflect on His faithfulness.** The Pharisees accused the disciples of working on the Sabbath for picking grain to eat! Their interpretation of God's law clouded their vision; rules and traditions mattered more than human needs. The Pharisees strictly enforced rules, burdening the people with standards they could never keep. **They believed keeping these rules proved their righteousness, but Jesus reminded them that the Sabbath was a gift of rest, not a burdensome test.**



READ HOSEA 6:6. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS THAT GOD DESIRES “FAITHFUL LOVE” (OR MERCY), NOT SACRIFICE?

The Pharisees believed sacrifices and rule-following made them righteous, or made their hearts right with God. But they had it backwards; they failed to see that religious practice without mercy misses God's heart. What God desires most is justice, love, and humility (Mic. 6:6-8); He wants not sacrifice, but obedience (1 Sam. 15:22) and service (Deut. 10:12-13). Jesus perfectly revealed God's heart and rightly interpreted the law. **Good works must flow from a surrendered heart. We can't keep the law; religious duty can't save us and means nothing unless we have a relationship with Jesus.**



WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN BY CLAIMING HE IS “LORD OF THE SABBATH”? SHOULD CHRISTIANS OBSERVE THE SABBATH TODAY?

When Jesus corrected the Pharisees, He didn't challenge the Sabbath itself but how the people had interpreted it. Jesus, the Son of Man, is the “Lord of the Sabbath,” which means He has the authority to define the Sabbath. **As the Son of Man, Jesus established that He was God's Son—that He is God! He has authority over all things, including the Sabbath. Jesus reminded them that the Sabbath was a gift of mercy, not a burden.** If we come to the Bible as the Pharisees did and try to find life and rest in the words, we are crushed by rules and burdens (John 5:39), but if we come to Jesus, the Word of God (John 1:1), we find eternal life and permanent rest in Him (Matt. 11:28-30). He kept the law when we couldn't. The Sabbath was a good gift for God's people because it pointed them to their Creator. But Jesus reminded the Pharisees, and us today, that the Sabbath was made for people and not the other way around (Mark 2:27-28). **God's command to rest applies to us because He designed us with the need to rest (Mark 6:31), and as we do, we should remember who God is—our Creator who gives us life and rest in Jesus.**

LOVING OTHERS FULFILLS GOD'S LAW

READ MATTHEW 12:9-14



WHAT POINT DID JESUS MAKE IN THE EXAMPLE OF A SHEEP FALLING INTO A PIT ON THE SABBATH?

Jesus cut through the Pharisees' ongoing debate concerning how much one could help others before breaking the Sabbath and pointed to what He desires most: showing mercy by doing what is good. **Jesus reframed the Sabbath as a day for doing good instead of a day for avoiding work.** Imagine walking down a road and hearing a dog yelping for help. Would you help? The Pharisees' answer to this question wasn't so easy because of their misunderstanding of the Sabbath. **Jesus elevated the meaning of the Sabbath by showing that God's heart is always to help those in need.** Jesus made the same point in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). When we do good to others, we fulfill the law (Matt. 12:12). Jesus wasn't breaking the law because God said mercy is better than sacrifice or empty rule-following (Hos. 6:6).

WHY DID THE PHARISEES PLOT JESUS'S DEATH?

The Pharisees cared more about rules than helping those in need. Jesus responded to the man with a paralyzed hand by reaching out and healing him, resulting in the Pharisees plotting His death! The Pharisees loved to debate interpretations of the law and legal cases, but they wouldn't kill someone over a difference of opinion only. **They clearly understood that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah by referring to Himself as the "Son of Man," a Messianic term. He claimed the authority to forgive sins!** During Roman occupation, the Jews were unable to condemn someone to death (John 18:31), so they had to carefully plot out Jesus's destruction.



WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO LOVE OTHERS THE WAY JESUS DID? HOW ARE WE SOMETIMES MORE LIKE PHARISEES?

Jesus met combative, argumentative people, but instead of retaliating, He repaid evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21). Jesus loved the man with a withered hand by healing him, and He loved the Pharisees by speaking truth. **We often struggle to love others. Like the Pharisees, we're blind to those who need help, more eager to win arguments or to point out sin.** Jesus loves by showing compassion to those in need. He calls us to love others by sacrificially serving them (John 15:12-13). Our natural desire can be to lash out in anger at enemies, block them, or gossip about them; God says we must love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). The law reminds us of God's mercy, which fuels our desire to love others.

WRAP-UP



HOW CAN YOU SHOW MERCY TO SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE WHO DOESN'T DESERVE IT?

Is anyone too evil, too sinful, or too difficult to receive God's mercy and love? We don't see evidence for this in the Gospels. In Jesus's many rebukes to the scribes and Pharisees, He taught them the way of God's kingdom—that God is willing to save anyone. Jesus knew one of the twelve disciples, Judas, would eventually betray Him, but He still showed Judas mercy and washed his feet (John 13). Jesus revealed the grace and mercy of God perfectly (Heb. 1:3), and He invites us to follow His steps—to love one another. Is there someone you actively avoid? Anyone you're paying back with evil for the evil they did to you? Anyone you feel is too sinful to hear the gospel? **Because of sin, getting revenge feels natural, but when we follow Jesus, we are new creations. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be like Jesus and choose to show mercy in the face of evil.** God doesn't give us what we deserve (Rom. 6:23), so may we be quick to show mercy to others in the same way God has shown us mercy.