Healing the Bent-Over Woman

Deep Prep

Luke 13:10-17

The Big Idea: Jesus taught that God gives religious laws for the good of people and all creation, not to increase suffering.

Learning Goal: Learners will study the meaning of the Sabbath commandment, and others, to clarify how they express God's mercy and enable our freedom.

Here are some healing stories are about Jesus' identity as a healer, and some healing stories are about who is healed. In Luke 13 the story is about who is healed, a woman. Jesus' ministry is often about mediating the kingdom of God to those who are demeaned, oppressed, and denied proper status by religious and social restrictions and authorities. This is a recurring theme in Luke especially, and women hover near the top of the list of demeaned and oppressed groups in the first century. In this story, Jesus is honored and his opponents are shamed, but the greatest change comes in the healed woman's status.

The nameless woman in this story had an affliction that left her unable to stand up straight and disabled her for 18 years (Luke 13:11). Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath when she approached him. She did not ask for help. When he saw her he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment" (13:12). Jesus laid his hands on her and the effect was immediate. So was her response. She stood up straight and began praising God. The synagogue leader tried to drown out her praises by policing proper Sabbath observance. He accused Jesus of improper Sabbath observance for healing the woman on this holy day.

Jesus saw this instance as a battle between keeping the Sabbath law's particularities and his "job description" of freeing people from bondage. It was a teachable moment, and Jesus took it to speak to all who were gathered, not just his opponent. He used a common method of rabbinic reasoning—from the lesser to the greater, concluding his flawless logic by saying that concern over suffering takes precedent over obligations related to keeping the Sabbath.

The synagogue ruler was furious. The people were delighted. There is an invitation to rejoice in this story. As in other stories where rejoicing at another's good fortune is invited, the implication is that those who reject the invitation to rejoice will exclude themselves from the kingdom. The sputtering synagogue leader probably saw nothing happening that led him to believe the kingdom of God was near.

Jesus healed a long-term profound ailment for this woman. Although the story is fantastic to read, how much more wonderful it must have been to be there! Just as important as the magnitude of the healing is who Jesus heals, and where, and when. Jesus did not hesitate to heal because of gender, location, or Sabbath rules. The woman, in turn, has her dignity restored. She is a "daughter of Abraham," says Jesus (13:16), and she represents a new status for women in the kingdom of God.
The Bent-Over Woman

It could very well be that the leader of the synagogue had the best of intentions in calling Jesus on this breach of Sabbath law. The Sabbath was a cherished gift God had given the people. Its observance was a holy thing. God's people had a history that remembered never having a day to rest, so now there were rules about remembering and observing and being thankful for the gift of rest. But Jesus reminded the people again and again that God's grace is a gift, a gift for all people. The Sabbath observance in this story is a good example that when crazy legislation and enforcement begin around a gift, something is amiss.

The bent-over woman received twice the gift on that Sabbath when Jesus reached out to her and then took the resulting fallout. She was restored, recreated really. A woman walked out of a synagogue with her head held high, who hadn't done that for 18 years. This is an image of God's grace, love, and power.

Quick Prep

Luke 13:10-17

The Big Idea: Jesus taught that God gives religious laws for the good of people and all creation, not to increase suffering.

Learning Goal: Learners will study the meaning of the Sabbath commandment, and others, to clarify how they express God's mercy and enable our freedom.

- Jesus' ministry is often about mediating the kingdom of God to those who are demeaned, oppressed, and denied proper status by religious and social restrictions and authorities. Women hover near the top of the list of demeaned and oppressed groups in the first century.
- In this story, Jesus is honored and his opponents are shamed, but the greatest change comes in the healed woman's status.
- The nameless woman in this story had an affliction that left her unable to stand up straight and disabled her for 18 years.
- Jesus saw this instance as a battle between keeping the Sabbath law's particularities and his "job description" of freeing people from bondage.
- Jesus did not hesitate to heal because of gender, location, or Sabbath rules.

Adolescent Connection

This story can help youth connect with the concept of "the letter of the law" versus "the spirit of the law." They would probably agree that being told to wear a seat belt because it may save their life is far more meaningful than being told to wear the seat belt because it is the law. Jesus tried to make this difference clear. Learning to understand and accept the difference is a gift of grace and understanding of God's relationship with people. There are times when the letter of the law must be upheld for the good of all people. A red light means stop. There are times when the well-being of the person overrides the letter of the law. This is why ambulances have flashing lights and sirens. When there is a life at stake, the spirit of the law takes over.
Baptismal Connection

In the Rite of Affirmation of Baptism, a five-part question addresses each confirmand’s intent to continue in the covenant God made with them in Holy Baptism. Here We Stand resources help adolescents—with support from parents, leaders, and the entire congregation—prepare to answer this question as they continue in their lifelong faith journey. Today's lesson focuses on the clause "to live among God's faithful people" (Lutheran Book of Worship, page 201; Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 236).

Welcoming

Prepare your large group space by playing upbeat music in the background and by welcoming learners as they arrive. Make a special effort to welcome and thank adult small group leaders for their presence and for being willing to help pass on the faith to the next generation.

• Begin by thanking learners for coming! Remind the group what a privilege you feel it is to serve God by leading confirmation, and what a gift from God you consider all of them to be.
• Ask learners to recall last week's Big Idea if they can. Reward the first person to get it right with a handful of candy or some other small treat to share with their small group. (Be aware of any food allergies in the group.) Ask for a volunteer to capture last week's lesson in their own words; affirm all genuine responses; keep going until you're satisfied everyone has been oriented.
• Project this week's Big Idea on the screen or write it in HUGE block letters on your presentation board or overhead slide. Invite learners to recite it with you aloud. Repeat it two or three times.

Skit: Sunday Afternoons

Ask or assign a small group to perform the skit. In a pinch, grab enough volunteers from the audience to form an impromptu 'readers' theater" troupe.

CHARACTERS: Daniel (nonchalant), Luke (patient), Lana (well intentioned)

PROPS: chairs or couch, video-game controllers (optional; can be mimed)

The scene opens with Daniel and Lana sitting with game controllers in hand as they play a video game.

DANIEL: I loooove Sunday afternoons.

LANA: I loooove getting the high score on your game.

DANIEL: Argh! Okay, let's play again.
LANA: Do you think that after losing 28 times you're finally going to win one?

DANIEL: Hey. I don't need any smack talk. I'm trying to concentrate.

(Luke walks onstage.)

LANA: Hey, Luke, what's up? Why are you walking around? You shouldn't be working; it's Sunday.

LUKE: Well, a tree just fell onto my house and crushed my living room.

DANIEL: Oh, bummer for you. Hey, do you think you guys could whisper if you're going to keep talking? I'm trying to concentrate here.

LUKE: What? Daniel, my living room was just crushed by a tree!

LANA: Yeah, well (points to her watch), it is Sunday. You know, the day of rest? We're pretty busy resting here. Hey, maybe you could make yourself some hot chocolate if you need to feel better.

LUKE: Hot chocolate? Are you serious? (Overenunciating.) Mm-yyy livvv-iiing rrooommmm waaa-ssss...


LUKE: Look, never mind. I just came over here to see if you guys could help me get the tree off of my house because my mom is pinned underneath one of the branches.

DANIEL: Oh, bummer. Look! The game started!

LANA: (Shrugs.) You could make her some hot chocolate and bring it to her.

DANIEL: Nope, he shouldn't do that, that's work. It is Sunday; you're not supposed to work on Sunday. Just get the hot chocolate for yourself.

(Luke leaves, shaking his head.)

DANIEL: (Calls after Luke.) Oh! And bring some back for me too! I'm trying not to work today.

Quiz Show

Use the questions below with either option for the quiz show. Set up the show as described with each option.

Experts

Divide the group into two teams and let each team choose one "expert." Place two chairs near the
front of the room and have each group line up, from youngest to oldest, behind a chair. Have the team "expert" sit on the floor in front of the chair. The two students standing at the front of the lines behind the chairs will be asked a question. The first person to tap the chair gets to answer the question or pass the question to the team expert; however, the expert can only be used two times during the game. If the person standing answers the question correctly, the team gets two points; if the team expert answers the question correctly, the team gets one point. If the answer is incorrect, the question goes to the first person on the other team (the same answering and scoring process applies). After each question, the people at the front of the lines move to the back and the game continues with the next question. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins a prize of your choice.

**Squishy Ball Questions**

Have all stand in a circle and throw a squishy ball randomly from person to person. When you blow a whistle or clap your hands, the person with the ball gets a chance to answer a question. If the question is answered correctly, the student gets to sit down. If the question is answered incorrectly, the person stays in the game and that question can be used again later in the game. Play until time is up or all questions are answered. Everyone is a winner in this game for having fun and learning something.

Determine whether you want to first do a quick read of the Bible story (Luke 13:10-17) to the group or just launch into the game.

1. What did Jesus call the bent-over woman?
   a. Hey, you!
   b. Woman.
   c. Daughter of Abraham.
   d. B and C. (Correct.)

2. Where was Jesus teaching when the bent-over woman appeared?
   a. Jerusalem.
   b. Bethlehem.
   c. Synagogue. (Correct.)
   d. Someone's home.

3. True or false: The woman touched Jesus' robe so she would get healed. *(False. Jesus called her over and laid his hands on the woman to heal her ailment.)*

4. Why was the synagogue leader angry at Jesus?
   a. Jesus was teaching in his place.
   b. Jesus touched an unclean woman.
   c. Jesus spoke out loud during worship.
   d. Jesus did work on the Sabbath day. (Correct.)

5. Fill in the blank: Jesus called the synagogue leader a _________. *(Hypocrite.)*

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6. True or false: The woman Jesus healed was possessed by a spirit. (True.)

7. What reason did Jesus give for the woman's illness?
   a. Satan. (Correct.)
   b. An evil spirit.
   c. Birth defect.
   d. Food poisoning.

8. Fill in the blank: The crowd _______ because of all that Jesus was doing. (Rejoiced.)

9. Why did Jesus heal the suffering woman?
   a. To make himself look good in front of the crowds.
   b. To relieve her suffering. (Correct.)
   c. To make the synagogue leader angry.
   d. To break the law and get away with it.

10. True or false: The woman cursed Jesus for healing her on the Sabbath day. (False. She praised God.)

**Presenter's Interruptions**

Keep this menu of short theme-related bits at the ready for those moments when you feel you're losing your audience.

- Before class, write on the board or chart paper five to 10 categories, such as "Things to forgive," "People in the Bible," "Books of the Bible," "Rules at home," "Rules at school," "People I know," and so forth. Write each letter of the alphabet on a slip of paper and place the slips in a bag or hat. Periodically during class, have a student draw a letter out of the bag and give everyone 45 seconds to write down something from each category that begins with the letter that was drawn. Have volunteers share answers with the group.

- In groups of three to five students, look for items in and around the building that represent God's goodness. Each groups writes its items on a piece of paper. Share items with the class, and talk about the concrete ways in which we can see God's love.

**Opening Prayer**

As students arrive, give each one an index card and ask him or her to write a short prayer asking God to heal someone he or she knows is suffering, and then put the card in a basket. When ready, gather in the sanctuary, turn off the lights, and light the candles. (Before lighting candles, check your local fire codes and your congregation's fire policies regarding the use of open flames.) Stand around the altar and pass out the cards so everyone has one. With soft music playing the background, ask someone to read Luke 4:14-19. Then randomly read the prayers on the cards until everyone who wishes to has had a turn. When finished, say, "Amen," together.
My Faith Story

Jesus encouraged the crowd to think about the spirit of the Sabbath law rather than the letter of the law with regard to religious laws and human suffering. He wanted people to put the welfare of human beings and creatures ahead of strict ritual observance of the law. Share with the class your experiences, past and present, of observing the Sabbath or other holy days. Consider the following questions: What do you do to observe the Sabbath? Do any "religious" laws give you guidance in your daily life? How do you strive to care for God's creation? Is there a religious ritual you follow each day?

Guest Speaker

The synagogue leader was angry because Jesus redefined the purpose of the Sabbath day laws. Jesus declared that Sabbath laws were for the good of God's people and creation, not for blind observance and increased suffering. Invite a lawyer or police officer to talk with the class about specific laws that relate to teenagers and how those laws serve to protect teens and enable freedom.

OR

Another interesting option for a guest speaker is to ask a rabbi to discuss current Sabbath laws and practices and their meaning for Jewish life and worship.

Cartoon Connection: Help that Helps

_The Funny Shape of Faith_, page 294

I'm sure this woman has been hearing it all her life. "You have a bent frame." "Hey—what's wrong with your back?" "Why can't you stand up?" I bet she was teased mercilessly when she was a kid. But after eighteen years, she had probably gotten used to it. And then one Sabbath, she came to the temple, and out of nowhere, without being asked to, Jesus healed her. Imagine her surprise—imagine her gratitude. And then imagine her indignation, as the leader of the temple tells Jesus he shouldn't have done it because it's the Sabbath! Jesus showed us that loving and caring for one another is the ultimate commandment. Healing the sick, tending to the poor, bringing justice to the oppressed—this is the work of God. Work that needs to be done every day.

With your young people, brainstorm techniques that rejuvenate them when they are tired, run down, or overwhelmed. Ask them to create a plan for taking an hour out of a day this week for a Sabbath rest—a time of rejuvenation and renewal. Encourage them to follow Jesus by spending the following hour, newly refreshed, in the service of others.

Handbook Connection

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Have students open *The Lutheran Handbook* to pages 173-174, "The Five Weirdest Laws in the Old Testament." Ask five people to each take one of the points, look up the Bible reference, and read it aloud. What is the main purpose behind the law? (Hint: Read other laws in the same section of the Bible.) Read and discuss the points in the handbook.

The indignant synagogue leader in Luke 13:10-17 was concerned that Jesus was breaking a Sabbath law. Jesus reminded the leader and the crowds about the importance of the "spirit of the law." Sometimes youth are unappreciative of laws and their implementation. Ask students their thoughts about "weird" laws today. What do they think the larger purpose behind those laws might be? As with the laws mentioned in the handbook, most laws today are established to protect and serve the community and individuals, even if they do seem a weird.

Turn to page 98-100, "Three Essential Personal Spiritual Rituals." Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the rituals to read and discuss. Ask members of the group to talk about their devotional and prayer habits, and whether or not their families observe any of these rituals. Have the small group discuss how students might begin to incorporate the rituals into their daily lives? Ask each group to write a prayer/devotion that relates to the section of the article it has been assigned.

When assembled again as a large group, share the prayers that were written. Jesus healed the bent-over woman on the Sabbath day because she was suffering, not because he wanted to irritate the Pharisees. The Sabbath day is intended as a day of rest and worship, not a day to enforce religious rules. Encourage students to take "sabbath time" each day of the week in prayer and devotional time to rest, refocus, and spend some time with God.

**Bible Connection: Remember the Sabbath Day**

• Invite all students to open their Bibles to Luke 13:10-17. Ask for volunteers to act out the story while someone reads it aloud. The bent-over woman was a "nobody" in the crowd until Jesus chose to "break" the Sabbath law to give her the gift of healing. Jesus’ concern was the overall well-being of the woman, not the letter-perfect enforcement of a religious law.

• Ask students to open their Bibles to Matthew 5:17-20, read the verses, and underline three key words: law, fulfill, and righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees, like many people today, were concerned with enforcing the smallest letter of the law. Jesus made it clear that his purpose was not to get rid of the law. But he reminds us that righteousness is not found in the tiniest letter of the law, but rather in its fulfillment, which is Jesus. With regard to the law, encourage youth to ask, "What would Jesus do?"

• Read aloud Exodus 20:8-11 and Leviticus 23:3. Discuss any similarities and differences between the two variations on the same law. What is special about the Sabbath law? Why was the synagogue leader so angry with Jesus? Encourage students to think about the Sabbath day in our society. Is it generally observed? What does a typical Sunday look like for youth today?

• Read Leviticus 25:1-7. The Sabbath was given by God not only for people, but also for the land. Care for the land is one of God's primary concerns. Invite students to write three ways they can care for God's creation. Share answers and create a list of things the congregation is doing (or could be doing) to encourage proper stewardship of the land.
More Bible Connections

• Have all open their Bibles to Mark 7:1-8, 18-20, and read the verses together. By the first century, religious laws had become so distorted that here Jesus refers to one as "human tradition." Name some traditions we have in church (lighting candles, dressing up, singing, standing/sitting, and so on). Are they necessary for proper worship? Jesus reminds us that proper worship comes from our hearts out of our lips. Traditions can enhance worship, but they are not meant to be worship.

• Ask for three volunteers to read Exodus 20:2-3, and 4-7, and 8-11. These are the commandments that deal with our relationship to God, and they are first. The religious laws we observe come from God as a gift and the first three (according to Luther's enumeration) remind us of this wonderful and gracious God we worship. Keeping God first helps us to have a proper perspective on all our other relationships.

• Have someone read Psalm 119:33-40 to the group. Give all students index cards and ask them to write verse 34 on their cards. This psalm reminds us of the goodness of God's laws. The law is to be kept in our hearts and is for our own righteousness. Observance of God's law helps us to connect with God, giving us a greater understanding of God's ways and God's will for us.

Object Lesson: The Truth Will Set You Free

Bring a pair of handcuffs and a WWJD bracelet to class. (If you don't have handcuffs, you could substitute a piece of string, tying both wrists together). Ask for two volunteers, and put the handcuffs on one and the bracelet on the other. Ask the volunteers to do something simple but requiring both hands, such as opening a jar, tying a pair of shoes, or crawling across the room. This activity should be much more difficult for the person in handcuffs. Now ask each person to remove his or her bracelet. Again, the person with the handcuffs will have much more difficulty. Unlock and remove the handcuffs.

Remind students that when our hands are tied together by a strict adherence to the letter of the law, it may be difficult to function. But when we operate under the spirit of the law, we are much freer. Having flexibility under the law doesn't mean that we can do whatever we want whenever we want. We have flexibility to love and serve others, and to live in community, even with people who are not exactly like us. We even have the freedom to take off the bracelet, to reject Christ. But we also know that it is through Christ that we become truly free from the power of sin, suffering, and evil.

Science Connection: What Does It Really Weigh?

In advance of this lesson, assemble the following items and read through this experiment.

One or more accurate weight or balance scales
Several pieces of different types of paper (such as thin cardboard or poster board, copy paper, tissue paper)
Old telephone and screwdriver
Pitcher, package of powdered drink mix, sugar, water, spoon

What does something really weigh? Do you know how much you really weigh? The stories in the Bible about the laws have some weight—the people in the stories and those who have heard the stories through the years have had to "weigh" the words and circumstances of each situation to see how the law applied to them.

You may want to set these experiments up as stations around the room for greater student participation. Put one scale with each set of items and have student pairs or small groups follow the instructions at each experiment.

Paper
Weigh and record the weight of each type of paper, then tear the paper into small pieces. Reweigh the torn pieces of paper. Are they the same or different? Is the mass conserved?

Old telephone
Weigh and record the weight of the telephone. Take the phone apart and weigh the components. Is the weight the same or different? What does this tell you about mass?

Powdered drink mix
Read and record the ingredients and amounts. What does the package of drink mix weigh (see package)? Now mix the drink mix with the ingredients. Stir well. What does it weigh now? Let everyone predict, then weigh and compare.

Video/DVD: Expectations and Standards

Option 1: First Daughter

Provide the movie First Daughter (2004, PG).

Start cue: (Chapter 12, 00:39:29) Samantha, wearing a gray hat and maroon "Redmond" sweatshirt, walks down the street with James. She says, "We'll take it slow. What is your major?"
End cue: (Chapter 13, 00:42:44) Samantha and James share movie snacks. She tries his chocolate and popcorn combo and says, "It's disgusting. I love it."

As the president's daughter, Samantha has always been in the public eye. But now as a young adult on her own in college, she longs for a normal life. Today the paparazzi invade her dorm, and her friend James helps her escape. When he "breaks the rules," she experiences life in a new way.

• How does James "break the rules" that have hindered and limited Samantha's life? How does his "outside the box" thinking affect Samantha?
• Do you agree that "sometimes you gotta break the rules"? When did Jesus keep the rules? When did he break them?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

Option 2: The Fighting Temptations


Start cue: (Chapter 17, 1:43) Onstage at the contest, the emcees introduce "The Blind Boys of Alabama"
End cue: "God rest his soul."

Darrin's aunt's dying wish was for him to return from his jet-setting life in New York to lead her church's choir in an all-state contest. His presence and inclusion of "sinners," like unwed mother Lilly, raised many an objection from self-righteous Paulina. As they're about to go onstage, Paulina invokes the letter of the law to oust Darrin and Lilly.

• What is the "spirit" of God's law?
• What is the difference between living in the spirit of the law and living by the letter of the law?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

Option 3: Stealth

Provide the movie Stealth (2005, PG-13).

End cue: "It will take us right to the border."

Lieutenants Gannon and Wade are ace pilots in an elite flying squadron, along with "EDI," a self-piloting stealth plane. When Wade crashes behind enemy lines, Gannon receives orders from his commander to forego a rescue mission and leave her there.

• How was Jesus' interaction with the bent-over woman like a rescue mission?
• What fears, expectations, and standards prevent us from daring to reach out beyond the fringes to the people some would call outcasts?

NOTE: Consult Christian Video Licensing International at Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (1.800.462.8855 or www.mplc.com) for its umbrella licensing program covering the use of videos/DVDs or video/DVD clips in any public gathering.

Music: Stepping outside the Rules

Option 1: "Broken"
Provide the song "Broken" by Jack Johnson (from Sing-Alongs and Lullabies for the Film Curious George, UMVD, 2006).

In yet another miraculous story, Jesus heals the woman who had been living her life bent over for 18 years. He does this boldly, right in sight of the synagogue leaders who condemn him for going against Sabbath law. "Broken" is a song that could have been written from the point of view of the bent-over woman. She had lived her life for so long in this state that she accepted it; but when Jesus healed her and she could walk straight and tall, she immediately praised God and celebrated her renewed life.

• How do you think the woman felt when she first realized she was healed?
• How do you think the synagogue leaders felt when they saw Jesus heal someone in front of them—much less a woman?
• Why do we have laws and rules? In what life situations are laws and rules more important than just about anything else?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

Option 2: "Bless the Broken Road"

Provide the song "Bless the Broken Road" by Rascal Flatts (from Feels Like Today, Lyric Street Records Inc., 2004).

In our lives, we can often be like the bent-over woman; we can feel broken and in pain. Jesus has the power to heal us, just as he healed the woman in this week's story. Rascal Flatts sings of how life is a journey, and sometimes the road can feel broken. The lyrics also speak of how events, people, and God's blessings can lead to knowing and living in love.

• Are there times and situations in your life when you feel broken? If so, when and where?
• What people and events have influenced your faith journey?
• How do you see God's blessings in your life?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

Option 3: "Tomorrow"

Provide the song "Tomorrow" by U2 (from October, Universal-Island Records, Ltd., 1981).

Listen to the song and ask students to think about the story of Jesus healing the woman on the Sabbath. The ruler of the synagogue essentially says, "Come back tomorrow," but Jesus is more concerned with helping those in need right now.

• How do you keep the Sabbath holy?
• Are there circumstances when it is okay to break the rules?
• Can you think of a time when you needed to step outside the rules to help someone in need? Has someone ever done that for you?
Learning in Motion

Make 10 paper airplanes, each with a different name. The names should represent different areas of life, such as "School," "Home," "Family," "Church," "Friends," and "Job." Give each student a pencil and ask all to get out of their seats. Begin flying the airplanes around the room. Tell the students to grab a plane, open it up, quickly write a short "law" that relates to the heading on the paper, refold it, and fly it again. The laws can be real or created on the spot. When everyone has finished, read the laws to the class and discuss the power of God's law to give us freedom.

Closing Questions

Consider starting the Closing Time with a "Stump the Presenter!" moment in which learners may ask you questions that have come up during their small group discussions, but for which they want further explanation. This gives the small group leaders an "honorable out" when they get into sticky theological territory, and it's a great way to start out your final minutes together.

If there are no "Stump the Presenter!" questions, tickle learners with one or more of the following questions to connect Small Group Time with the larger conversation:

• What are some ways that Christians celebrate the Sabbath day?
• What laws does our society have in place to protect God's creation?
• Imagine you are the pastor and a homeless person interrupts your sermon, wanting assistance. What would you do?

Closing Ritual

Using construction paper, glue, and markers, have learners each create a card to take home that contains one of the index cards used during the opening prayer. Encourage the students to draw and write symbols and words on the card that will encourage the recipient to pray during the week for the concern on the enclosed card. While making the cards, engage in a general conversation about suffering and the power of prayer. When finished, have students trade cards with another person and take it home to use during daily devotions.

Closing Blessing

Before anyone leaves to go home, make sure each learner receives the following blessing from the small group leader, or from you! (Or, if you like, consider writing your own blessing, based on your teaching time.) Have leaders trace the cross on each learner's forehead as they say the blessing.
May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5-6).
Small Group Leader Sheet: Healing the Bent-Over Woman

Instructions

Make sure each learner has a Learner Sheet for use during your discussion. At the end of the lesson they can take the Learner Take-Home Sheet to use with their household at dinner or bedtime.

Be sure to start on a positive note. Welcome each learner by name. Let them know you're glad they're here! If anyone is absent, mention you'll be praying for that person together. Small Group Time is for give-and-take discussion. Your main job is to draw learners out and get them talking about the theme. Ask open-ended questions that will provoke responses. Once the conversation begins, intervene only to bring it back on track or to stimulate more talk.

Quick Prep

Luke 13:10-17

The Big Idea: Jesus taught that God gives religious laws for the good of people and all creation, not to increase suffering.

Learning Goal: Learners will study the meaning of the Sabbath commandment, and others, to clarify how they express God's mercy and enable our freedom.

• Jesus' ministry is often about mediating the kingdom of God to those who are demeaned, oppressed, and denied proper status by religious and social restrictions and authorities. Women hover near the top of the list of demeaned and oppressed groups in the first century.

• In this story, Jesus is honored and his opponents are shamed, but the greatest change comes in the healed woman's status.

• The nameless woman in this story had an affliction that left her unable to stand up straight and disabled her for 18 years.

• Jesus saw this instance as a battle between keeping the Sabbath law's particularities and his "job description" of freeing people from bondage.

• Jesus did not hesitate to heal because of gender, location, or Sabbath rules.

Prayer Time

Go around the group and have each learner share the best and worst thing from his or her week. Remind learners to pay special attention to (for example) the person on their right, as they will be praying for that person in a moment (alternate prayer partners from week to week). When the group has finished, prayer partners can pray for each other.

Key Words
SABBATH is the day, Sunday for Christians, set aside for rest and worshiping God.

LAW is the collection of rules that help faithful people live in relationship with God.

FREEDOM is God's grace to live in the spirit of God's law; also, it is the ability to live without suffering.

MERCY is the gift of God's compassionate forgiveness.

Discussion Time

Use the following questions to kick off a conversation about the theme:

• What laws do we observe in our country? (Youth will likely name most common laws, such as traffic laws, criminal laws, school attendance, age requirements for voting, drinking, and so forth.) How do these laws benefit our society? (Encourage youth to think about community and relationships between people and creatures.) What are the consequences for breaking the law? Are there opportunities for mercy in our laws? (Discuss second chances, community service instead of jail, parole for good behavior, right to an attorney and a fair trial, and so forth.)

• How do you observe the Sabbath day? (Answers might include church, family dinner, nap, and so forth.) Is there a time during the week that you can set aside for rest and devotions? What is one additional concrete thing you can do on Sunday to make it a holy day? Write your answer on an index card and take it home with you. (Accept all sincere answers.)

• Give each group member some modeling clay and ask them to create a symbol that helps them to remember either God's love and concern for humanity or God's concern for creation. (These do not need to be religious symbols. Use your imagination!)

• What kinds of suffering do you see in your community, state/province, or the world? (Ask youth to consider individual and communal suffering.) What might you include in a short prayer for that situation? Use the prayer during a devotion time.

Big Fun Idea

Before a fun night of bowling, meet at someone's home for a cereal party. Everyone brings her or his favorite cereal or breakfast food to share. Ask each person to bring a small container of milk too. (Before serving any food, always check with caregivers for learners who have food allergies. Provide an alternative if necessary.)

Big Serving Idea

Create a service based on the theme of "Sabbath." Include music, Bible lessons, and prayers. Lead this service on a prearranged Sunday. Include a "creation fair" for young children. Use tables to create booths where children can pet a snake, examine seashells, have animal faces painted on them, and so forth. Give each child a gift bag that contains items from creation.
Funny Shape of Faith Small Group Devotions: Healing the Bent-Over Woman

Have a volunteer read the devotion that corresponds with this cartoon: "Help that Helps," The Funny Shape of Faith: Devotions for the Rest of Us (Augsburg Fortress, 2007), p. 295. Then use the following questions to spark group discussion.

Does God's law call us to measure our behavior, or that of others?

How do human rules get in the way of people helping each other in God's name? How do rules help?

Which is easier, to memorize the law or to live it? In what ways does God provide hope and healing through your congregation?
Learner Sheet: Healing the Bent-Over Woman

Luke 13:10-17

The Big Idea: Jesus taught that God gives religious laws for the good of people and all creation, not to increase suffering.

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Prayer Time

*Remember your partner's prayer needs—record them here.*

Discussion Time

• What laws do we observe in our country? How do these laws benefit our society? What are the consequences for breaking the law? Are there opportunities for mercy in our laws?

• How do you observe the Sabbath day? Is there a time during the week that you can set aside for rest and devotions? What is one additional concrete thing you can do on Sunday to make it a holy day? Write your answer on an index card and take it home with you.

• Use modeling clay to create a symbol that helps you to remember either God's love and concern for humanity or God's concern for creation. These do not need to be religious symbols. Use your imagination!

• What kinds of suffering do you see in your community, state/province, or the world? What might you include in a short prayer for that situation? Use such a prayer during a devotion time.
Learner Take-Home Sheet: Healing the Bent-Over Woman

Luke 13:10-17

*Take this sheet home and keep it someplace near the dinner table, like on the fridge. At least three times next week at dinner, use Prayer Time and one other family activity to make your confirmation learning come alive!*

**Prayer Time**

Read Luke 13:10-17 and talk about Jesus' power to free you from suffering. Then say the following prayer:

_Thank you, God, for the gift of our family. Be with us in our good times and in our struggles. Help us be conscious of the love we have for each other, especially now as we reflect on the freedom that your love has given us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen_

**Key Words**

Keep a family white board someplace near the dinner table, and write these words on it. Try writing a family definition for each one during the week.

SABBATH

LAW

FREEDOM

MERCY

**Talk Time**

- What does our family do to observe the Sabbath day? Is this day a day of rest and worship for us? Is there something else we can do to make the Sabbath day holy?

- Who do we know at church or in our community who is suffering? Is there some way our family can help free them from suffering? (Suggestions: send a card, serve a meal, offer to clean, babysit children.)

- _Parents_: Tell your children about a time when you broke the rules. What were the consequences? What did you learn from the experience? As an adult, how do you feel about rules?

- _Children_: Ask your parents about any household rule you think is weird or unnecessary. Why does your family have this rule? How do the members of the family benefit from this rule?

**Web Time**
Look up a reputable Web site that gives information about the Jewish Sabbath. What does a typical Jewish Sabbath day look like? How does it compare with a typical Christian Sabbath (Sunday)? Is there a Jewish Sabbath practice you would like to adopt for your family's Sabbath day observance?

Ritual Time

Write one morning prayer and one evening prayer that your family can say together throughout the week. Write new prayers each Sunday. Make a colorful list of three things your family can do each week to care for God's creation. Put the list in a prominent place to remind you what you want to do.
Video (High Resolution): Hope and Healing

Media file: HealingtheBentOverWoman.mov

God's law can be misinterpreted as a set of "thou shalt nots" designed to make life no fun. However, the exact opposite is true. The motive behind God's Commandments is love! People criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath because they misunderstood the law's true intent. But Jesus lived in the "spirit of the law" rather than by the "letter of the law" every day of the week, and he demonstrated love, hope, and healing in all he did.

Take another look at the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20). What are the benefits of living according to God's law? Brainstorm five positive ways to follow each Commandment according to the "spirit of the Law." How does faith help us live out the Commandments in life-giving ways, like Jesus when he healed on the Sabbath?
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It isn't far
Follow the voice you feel in your heart
You will hear it calling your name
You know the way
You've been there before

In this parable, it should come as no surprise that Jesus chose to heal this woman, rather than following legalistic dogma. He did not let a rule dictate or constrain his compassion. Sometimes decisions like this one aren't so easy to make. They require weighing the "small" good against the greater good. This song talks about listening to that voice inside you telling you to do what's right. Play the song and ask the following questions.

• What should you consider when trying to decide between a "small good" and the "greater good"?
• What are some examples of times when a small act of helpfulness that feels right might go against the rules?
• Have you ever had to make this type of decision? What did you do? Were there consequences?

Note: You can purchase the CD featuring this song from the Augsburg Fortress online store (www.augsburgfortress.org).
PPT® Presentation (versions 2002 and later)

This presentation includes a video file and an audio file. All three (the presentation, the video, and the audio) will download at once as a ZIP archive. Unzipping the archive will produce a single folder containing all three files. **For the presentation to work properly, the files must all be in the same folder**; therefore, we recommend you not remove them from the folder produced when you unzip the archive, but rather move the entire folder as a single unit.

*Media file: HealingtheBentOverWoman.zip*
Cartoon

*Media file: HealingtheBentOverWoman.tif*

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