

FURTHER STUDY GUIDE

Legalism or Life | Mark 2:23-3:6

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mark 2:23–3:6 brings the growing conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders to a head. At issue is not whether the Law matters, but how it is understood and applied. The Pharisees had developed detailed Sabbath regulations to protect obedience to God’s command to rest (Exodus 20:8–11). Over time, these traditions became rigid and burdensome, often missing the Sabbath’s original purpose—rest, restoration, and trust in God. Jesus does not reject the Sabbath; He reclaims it. By appealing to Scripture, human need, and His own authority as the Son of Man, Jesus exposes a form of legalism that values rule-keeping over compassion and control over life. The passage ends with a chilling irony: those who accuse Jesus of Sabbath violation conspire to destroy Him on the Sabbath.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION

Have you ever followed a rule that technically kept you “right,” but clearly missed the point? What made it frustrating or confusing?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Sabbath Question (2:23–28)

1. Why do the Pharisees object to the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath? What does this reveal about their understanding of obedience?

2. Why does Jesus reference David eating the bread of the Presence (1 Samuel 21)? What principle is He highlighting?

3. What does Jesus mean when He says, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”?

4. How does Jesus’ claim to be “Lord even of the Sabbath” raise the stakes of this confrontation?

The Sabbath Test (3:1–6)

5. Why do the Pharisees watch Jesus so closely in the synagogue? What does this reveal about their hearts?

6. Why does Jesus ask whether it is lawful to do good or evil, to save life or to kill, on the Sabbath?

7. What stands out about Jesus' emotional response—His anger and grief? What does this tell us about God's heart?

8. How is it ironic that the religious leaders plot to destroy Jesus in the name of Sabbath obedience?

PERSONAL DEVOTION

This week, spend time reflecting on Mark 2:23–3:6. As you pray, consider these questions:

- Heart Check: Where might I be tempted to prioritize rules, traditions, or preferences over compassion and life?
- Authority: Do I trust Jesus as Lord, even when His way challenges my assumptions?
- Restoration: How can I practice Sabbath in a way that reflects God's desire to restore and give life, not burden or control?

Close your devotion by thanking Jesus that He does not crush the weary but restores them. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you live out obedience that reflects the heart of God—obedience that leads to life.

QUESTIONS | REFLECTIONS | OBSERVATIONS