

FORMED BY SABBATH



the way of rest in a world of hurry



Passion Creek
CHURCH

INVITATION TO SABBATH

For most people, setting an entire day aside to do nothing sounds anything but restful. Most of us would rather spend what limited free time we do have getting things done around the house and knocking things off of our to-do lists. To designate a day specifically for the purpose of not doing work seems like poor time management at best and anxiety-inducing at worst.

But when Sabbath is described in the Bible, it's meant to be freeing. God observes the first Sabbath after creating the entire universe. Genesis 2 tells us that he takes a whole day off just to enjoy what he created. Later in the Bible, after the Israelites are freed from slavery in Egypt, God tells them to keep the Sabbath as a way to remember that they're no longer slaves — they no longer have to work for their salvation because God has saved them. For a nomadic group of former slaves, a day off every week to stop work was a gift. Later in the Gospels, when Jesus is questioned about how he and his disciples practice the Sabbath, he corrects the faulty, rigid thinking of the day by asserting that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

Keeping the Sabbath is a gift for us today as well. Like God himself, we keep the Sabbath to stop our work and enjoy creation. Like the Israelites, we keep the Sabbath to remind ourselves that we don't have to work for our salvation. And like Jesus and his disciples, we keep the Sabbath as a gift meant to lead us into true rest.

The Sabbath isn't just a day without work; it's a day of delight. It's a day of celebration, a day of joy, a day of peace, a day of fellowship, and a day of gratitude.

By accepting the Sabbath as a gift, we're accepting so much more than just a day off of work or a time to go to church. We're accepting an invitation to stop finding our entire worth and value in our work. We're accepting an invitation to find true rest, to use Jesus' own words. We're accepting an invitation to delight in the goodness and provision of God rather than focus on what we don't have. And we're accepting an invitation to regularly reorient our lives around the God who sustains us.

Although it's a gift, the Sabbath is also a day that requires intentionality. We have to actually receive it. The commandment God gives to the Israelites is not just to remember the Sabbath, but to keep it. This means fighting against the temptation to work more, do more, and buy more will require some effort on our part. To that end, this guide is designed to give you ideas and practices to implement in your own Sabbath rhythm. Try them out, keep the ones that are helpful, and ignore the ones that aren't. The goal is less about doing Sabbath "right," and more about creating space for God to form you into a person of true rest.

HOW TO PRACTICE SABBATH

1. Pick a consistent day and time. Set aside a full 24-hour period you can commit to regularly. If a full day isn't an option for you, start with what you can commit to. The key is to pick a day and time you can consistently keep so it becomes a regular part of your weekly rhythm.

2. Prepare for the Sabbath ahead of time. The goal of Sabbath is to reorient yourself around God's goodness and provision. Commit to putting your phone and computer away for the day, and try to get all of your work done ahead of time so you aren't thinking about it during your Sabbath.

3. Begin with a communal Sabbath meal. By beginning your Sabbath with an intentional rhythm, you're setting it apart as a special day of rest and reorientation. And by sharing a meal with close friends and family, you're practicing Sabbath the way it was designed — in community. During the meal, consider the following template to structure your time:

- **Use the Sabbath box.** Have everyone put their phones in the box. You might also have everyone write down worries, cares, anxieties, and unfinished tasks on scraps of paper and place those in the box. This is simply a tangible way to remove things that might distract you from Sabbath and cast your cares on the Lord (Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:6-7).

- **Light the Sabbath candle.** A candle is a symbolic representation and reminder of God's presence. As you light it, have someone read one of the prayers or Psalms from this guide, or choose another Psalm or spontaneous prayer asking God to bless your time together.

- **Share the Sabbath meal.** As you eat with each other, have people share what they're grateful for, what they're looking forward to, and what God is doing in their lives.

4. Stop, rest, delight, and worship. During your Sabbath, try implementing some of the practices on the following pages into your day. Be intentional with this time, and try to avoid activities that are draining, depleting, and incongruent with the spirit of Sabbath rest.

5. Reflect on your Sabbath. At the end of your Sabbath, spend some time reflecting on what God did. You could end with another communal meal, reflect together with friends and family, or reflect on your own. The goal is to end your Sabbath with a sense of peace and renewal by reflecting what you have learned or experienced. Use this experience to nourish and sustain you throughout the week.

STOP

The very first time the word Sabbath is used in the Bible, it's used as a verb. After God creates the world and everything in it, Genesis 2 tells us God *shabat*. Literally, God stopped. He had completed his work and took an entire day just to slow down and enjoy it.

In its most basic definition, the Sabbath is a day to stop.

We take a break from our regular rhythm of vocational work, and we do other things. We detach ourselves from our performance. We engage in leisure and pleasure. We foster gratitude for what we have, and we take the time to develop a deeper awareness of God's presence.

But the lingering items on our to-do lists, the upcoming business meeting to prepare for, and the work left undone this week all pull our attention away from God's provision and back toward our rhythm of work and performance. To fight against the pull of work left undone, we practice stopping. We cease all work and simply let things be as they are. With open hands, we say to God, "not my will, but your will be done."

Stopping ultimately turns our attention from things left undone and towards what God has done. To make a regular practice of stopping is to quietly rebel against the lies, both internal and external, that we don't have enough, we can't do enough, and we won't become enough.

Practicing a weekly Sabbath is to live counterculturally.

It's to participate in the ancient resistance against a culture that pressures us to work, produce, and make something of ourselves. Stopping reminds us we are dispensable, and the world doesn't need us to keep spinning.

Like the Israelites, we take a day to stop and remind ourselves our work doesn't determine our worth, and our salvation comes from God alone.

PRACTICES FOR STOPPING

- **Prepare ahead of time** to make sure all of your work is complete by the time you start your Sabbath. For example, if you Sabbath on Saturday, take care of what needs to be done over the weekend on Friday.

- **Create an intentional space** in your home to put all of your work materials. If you have a home office or workspace, keep your computer and work items there so you're able to differentiate your work life from your home life.

- **Begin your Sabbath with a time of silence and prayer.**

Consider spending a few moments using the prayers on the next page, or block out regular moments during your Sabbath to stop and meditate on a passage of scripture.

- **Do slow things** that take up time, but that you enjoy. Sleep in, take a long walk, read a good book, practice that craft or hobby, or just take a nap.

PRAYERS FOR STOPPING

Be still, and know that I am God.

- Psalm 46:10

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

- Psalm 130:5-6

O God, early in the morning I cry to you.

Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you;

I cannot do this alone.

In me there is darkness, but with you there is light;

I am lonely, but you do not leave me;

I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;

I am restless, but with you there is peace.

In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;

I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me...

Restore me to liberty and enable me to live now

that I may answer before you and before men.

Lord whatever this day may bring,

Your name be praised.

Amen.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906-1945

REST

In our day and age, rest is hard to come by. With our free time, we do things we think will give us rest, but actually drain our energy even more. How many of us have come back from a week-long vacation still needing a couple of days to recover from that very vacation?

Ironically, to truly get rest on the Sabbath requires some effort. And while physical rest is a vital part of Sabbath, we must begin with our internal rest. The Sabbath is not just an invitation to rest from work, but also to rest from the internal noise our work creates within us. We quiet the inner voice that criticizes us, tempts us, and feeds our anxiety by refusing to feed it.

The practice of rest is a practice of letting go of control. When we Sabbath, we yield ourselves fully to God. We cast our cares and worries on him, and we let him take care of us rather than trying to heal ourselves. For just 24 hours, we rebel against the modern adage that “doing something is better than doing nothing.” We starve our fleshly desire to accomplish more and create space for God to slowly form us into people of true rest.

Sabbath rest is just a taste of what’s to come. In Colossians 2:17, Paul reminds us that the Sabbath we practice today points us to the Sabbath rest we will ultimately experience in eternity.

When we Sabbath, we rest knowing all of our current worries, cares, and anxieties will one day be taken care of. Sabbath is an opportunity to defiantly reorient ourselves around God and his faithfulness, despite the chaos and disorder that might be happening in our lives.

Sabbath reminds us that, though we live this life as exiles, one day God will call us back home.

PRACTICES FOR RESTING

• **Before your Sabbath**, take a moment to write out the things you've left undone, the things you're anxious about, and the things coming up in the week ahead. Pray through these things, offering them to God, and then put them away for the rest of your Sabbath as a tangible way to cast your cares on the Lord (Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7).

• **Find things to do that give you true rest.** If you work with your hands during the week, find something to do to exercise your mind. If you work with your mind during the week, find something to do to exercise your physical body.

• **Take some time to journal** about your current emotional and mental state. Consider processing the following questions:

- Where in my body do I feel restless?
- Do I currently feel happy, sad, angry, scared, or confused about anything?
- What disappointments are keeping me from finding rest?
- What anxieties, worries, and attachments is God inviting me to yield to him?

PRAYERS FOR RESTING

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

- Matthew 11:28-30

Rest in God alone, my soul, for my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I will not be shaken. My salvation and glory depend on God, my strong rock. My refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before him. God is our refuge. Selah.

- Psalm 62:5-8

Let us pray that Jesus may reign over us
and that our land may be at peace.

That our bodies may be free from the assaults of fleshly desires.

When these have ceased, we shall be able to rest,
beneath our vines, our fig-trees and our olives.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit will shelter us as we rest,
our peace of mind and body once recovered.

Glory to God the eternal, age after age.

Amen.

- Origen, 184–253 AD

REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS

Horizontal lines for writing reflections.

DELIGHT

The Sabbath is a form of resistance. Not just resistance against work and performance, but also resistance against the pull and sway of materialism. On Sabbath, we quietly rebel against the lie that we won't be happy or rested unless we have more.

Few of us recognize the influence our materialism has over us, especially as Americans. Most of our economy is built on our increasing consumption, and embedded into the foundation of American values is the freedom to pursue anything that will make us happy. The result of this cultural pressure is increased anxiety, depression, declining physical health, and a perpetual cycle of restlessness. To break this cycle, we practice Sabbath.

The Sabbath isn't just a practice of getting rest; it's also a practice of delight. When God Sabbaths in Genesis 2 after creation, he doesn't just stop to take a day off. Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel argues that on this seventh day, God institutes a day of rest by creating space for delight. The Hebrew word *menuha*, meaning rest, is better translated as delight. In other words, when God Sabbath-ed, he delighted and celebrated his own creation.

Christian psychologist and author Dan Allender argues that the Sabbath is an invitation for us to answer the question, "What would I do for a twenty-four-hour period of time if the only

criteria was to pursue my deepest joy?"

To fight against materialism, we cultivate joy. We practice delight. We Sabbath to make ourselves aware of all of God's blessings in our lives, and delight in them. We delight in our families, our homes, our friends, our hobbies, our favorite foods, favorite movies, favorite places, and favorite activities.

We delight in the gift of life, and ultimately, we slowly learn to delight in God himself.

PRACTICES FOR DELIGHTING

• **Create a list** of things you enjoy to prepare for the Sabbath:

- Go for ice cream with your kids, friends, or family.
- Do that project or craft you've been wanting to try.
- Watch a movie you love.
- Go to your favorite restaurant by yourself, or with close friends or family.
- Participate in your favorite self-care activity.
- Spend time catching up with friends that bring you joy and energy.
- Go on hikes, take walks in nature, and find ways to enjoy God's physical creation.

• **Pick a few things from your list and go do them!** As you do, try to focus your attention to God in prayer, just for a moment, to thank him for these gifts and blessings.

• **Make the commitment not to purchase** any new items you don't absolutely need that day. Use Sabbath as a way to cultivate contentment for the things you already have.

PRAYERS FOR DELIGHTING

The Lord is my shepherd; I have what I need.
He lets me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside quiet waters.
He renews my life;
he leads me along the right paths for his name's sake.
Even when I go through the darkest valley,
I fear no danger, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord as long as I live.

- Psalm 23

O Lord, who has mercy upon all, take away from me my sins,
and mercifully kindle in me the fire of Your Holy Spirit.
Take away from me the heart of stone,
and give me a heart of flesh,
a heart to love and adore You,
a heart to delight in You,
to follow and to enjoy You,
for Christ's sake.

- St. Ambrose of Milan, 337–397 AD

REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS

WORSHIP

Traditionally in America, the Sabbath is synonymous with Sunday; it's a weekend day off of work where you go to church. To many of us, this is the extent of what it means to worship. Worship on the Sabbath, then, isn't joyful or freeing. It's legalistic and feels more like drudgery than delight.

But the Bible paints an entirely different picture of worship.

In Romans 12:1, Paul reminds us true worship isn't just about going to church and singing songs.

True worship is the refocusing our minds, hearts, and bodies towards God in adoration. Worship isn't just an act; it's a state of being. We worship when we sing songs and hymns, but also when we find ourselves thinking of God throughout the day, when we turn our focus away from the things of this world and towards God, and even when we love and serve one another (James 1:26-27).

Without worship, the Sabbath just becomes a day of self-care and self-focus.

When we worship God on the Sabbath, we anchor the day in the character and nature of God himself. God is a being worth worshipping, because of his faithful love to us.

Worship is how we respond to beauty, and we recognize beauty when we slow down and look for it.

Where stopping turns our focus from work, worship turns our focus to the work God has done on our behalf.

Where rest silences our inner noise, worship fills our inner selves with the voice of God.

And where delight reorients us to the gifts of creation, worship reorients us back toward the gift of our Creator.

PRACTICES FOR WORSHIP

• **Consider practicing fixed-hour prayer.** Set a time in the morning, at noon, and in the evening to reorient yourself toward God in prayer. Pray through a Psalm, like Psalm 23, 37, or 105, and pray spontaneously about what's on your heart. Or slowly pray through the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13.

• **Have a time of intentional worship with friends or family, or by yourself.** Reflect on God's blessings in your life, and talk back to him about what you're grateful for.

• **Find other things that stir your affections for God,** and make them a regular feature of your Sabbath:

- Prayer walk your neighborhood or local park.
- Write, sing, or make art that reflects your worship toward God.
- Find ways to serve others in your community, church, or neighborhood.

PRAYERS FOR WORSHIP

Hallelujah! My soul, praise the Lord. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing to my God as long as I live. Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who cannot save. When his breath leaves him, he returns to the ground; on that day his plans die. Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He remains faithful forever, executing justice for the exploited and giving food to the hungry. The Lord frees prisoners. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord raises up those who are oppressed. The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord protects resident aliens and helps the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The Lord reigns forever; Zion, your God reigns for all generations. Hallelujah!

- Psalm 146

Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised;
great is Your power, and of Your wisdom there is no end.
And man, being a part of Your creation, desires to praise You,
man, who bears about with him his mortality,
the witness of his sin, even the witness that You resist the proud,
— yet man, this part of Your creation, desires to praise You.
You move us to delight in praising You;
for You have formed us for Yourself,
and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You.

- St. Augustine of Hippo, 354-430 AD

RECOMMENDED READING

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly

by Marva J. Dawn

Sabbath

by Dan Allender

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

by John Mark Comer

Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest

by Ruth Haley Barton

An Unhurried Life

by Alan Fadling

“I’ll show you
how to take
a real rest.”

- Jesus