

Practice 01: Sabbath

Information alone does not produce transformation.

To grow, let's put this teaching into practice. Consider what steps the Spirit might be inviting you to take before the next session in response to what you've learned.

01 Pick a time to sabbath, and give it a try

There are three basic options.

- 01 The Christian Sabbath on Sunday, which is best for most of us since it's also our day of worship.
- 02 The traditional Sabbath from sundown on Friday night to the same time on Saturday.
- 03 The midweek Sabbath for those with nontraditional work schedules.

If an entire day is too much for you, that's fine. Start where you are. We recommend you set aside a three-to-four hour time period, either after church on Sunday or on a weekend night, turn off your phone, and just stop.

If at all possible, get into a rhythm with Sabbath on the same day each week. Your body will "memorize" the day, begin to anticipate it in the days before, and live off its energy and joy in the days after.

In biblical theology, the day begins at sundown, not sunrise as in the modern mindset. By the end of the week, many of us are too exhausted to really enjoy our Sabbath. For that reason, we recommend you begin at night, if at all possible. Start with a Sabbath meal with your community or simply light a candle and say a short prayer before you fall asleep.

Circle or write what you feel led to try.

02 Pick a beginning and ending ritual

In a traditional Sabbath ceremony, called the Kiddush, you begin by lighting candles, praying, and eating a Sabbath meal with your family and community. And you end by praying and sharing the highlight of your Sabbath.

You can do exactly that, or you can let Sunday worship with your church mark the start, or you can get creative—start with a picnic, bonfire, or hot bath. Let your creativity guide you.

What ritual would you like to try?

03 Pick one to three Sabbath activities to enter into the spirit of Sabbath

If you read the wider Sabbath literature, some of which is as old as the New Testament itself, you discover there are 12 common activities that fill up a traditional Sabbath.

- 01 Lighting the candles
- 02 Blessing the children
- 03 Eating a Sabbath meal
- 04 Expressing gratitude
- 05 Singing
- 06 Worshiping with your church
- 07 Walking
- 08 Napping
- 09 Making love to your spouse
- 10 Reading, especially Scripture
- 11 Spending time alone with God
- 12 Spending time with family and friends in conversation and celebration

This is not a “to-do list,” but more like 12 best practices that you are invited to grow into over time as your heart desires.

Pick one to three that your heart is drawn to and sound appealing to your personality and stage of life. And just see what happens.

Circle or write what you would like to do.

04 Prepare for the day

In the New Testament, the day before the Sabbath is called “the Preparation Day.” And you really need a few hours, if not a day, to prep. Sabbath will not just happen; it’s too countercultural. If you let the inertia of the day carry you, you will get sucked right back into Egypt’s current.

So this will be easy for some of you and harder for others. Set aside a little time, either the night before or the afternoon leading up to Sabbath, and prepare. Here are a few recommendations:

- Go grocery shopping and stock your pantry and fridge.
- Prep your meals.
- Clean or tidy your home or apartment.
- Run any errands or pay any bills that need to be sorted before you can rest.
- Answer all your texts and emails in order to power off your devices.
- Make plans to meet your family or community on the Sabbath.
- Plan out some fun activities for play and delight.

You can do a little or a lot; it’s all up to you.

Circle or write how you will prepare.

05 Prepare for external resistance

With this simple exercise, pick one to three cultural forces to say no to on the Sabbath.

- Phone
- Social media
- The internet
- TV and entertainment
- Shopping
- Social obligations
- Sports
- Weekend work
- Chores
- Errands
- People

It's your choice; identify a few cultural forces that are anti-rest and resist.

Circle or write what stands out to you.

06 Prepare for internal resistance

The following is a simple journaling exercise for you to do during your upcoming Sabbath. Find a quiet, distraction-free place and time to breathe and come to rest in God. Then follow these prayer prompts:

01 Invite the Holy Spirit to come and illuminate your mind.

02 Then ask these two simple questions:

-What am I feeling today?

-What attachment is under that feeling? (An attachment is an emotional state of clinging to something we believe we need to be happy and safe. For example, you may be feeling anxiety over a relational conflict with your extended family because you are attached to their approval or opinion. Or you may be feeling anger at your coworker because you are attached to certain outcomes in your career.)

03 Feel that feeling.

Even if it's unpleasant, like sadness, boredom, anger, or hurt. Be gently present to it. Breathe the feeling in, and then out. Don't run from it. Let it come to you and roll over you like a wave.

04 Offer your feeling to God in prayer and release it back to him.

You can use words, or not, but just surrender that feeling back to God for him to do with it as he pleases.

05 Finally, wait for God to speak to you.

See if a word or phrase or image or line from Scripture comes to mind as God's word to you. Write it down and go about your day.

07 Plan a Sabbath feast!

Ideally, do this together with the people around you, such as your small group or your family. Whether it's 20 people for a giant cookout in the backyard or just one or two close friends out to dinner, plan out a meal together. Cook or order your favorite foods. Make sure there's dessert. If you drink wine, save your best bottle for this meal.

Don't forget, this is an incredible chance to practice hospitality. If you have a home or apartment, host. If you know how to cook, use your skills. If you know people who don't have community or family, bring them in. Reach across the lines that divide our society—socioeconomics, race, politics, etc. Jesus' dream is for our dining room tables to look as diverse and beautiful as the kingdom of God, where every tribe, tongue, and nation is on display.

You can do this to begin your Sabbath if you start at night, as we do, or to end it, or just after church on Sunday.

Write down a specific plan that would be life-giving for you.

08 Pleasure stacking

Make a list of activities that cause you delight and joy, and plan to do one to three of them during your Sabbath.

Here are a few ideas:

- 01 Make pancakes.
- 02 Open a good bottle of wine.
- 03 Have a dance party.
- 04 Play music.
- 05 Get coffee with your best friend.
- 06 Make love to your spouse.
- 07 Take a walk.
- 08 Nap.
- 09 Eat delicious food.
- 10 Do your nails or favorite self-care activity.
- 11 Go fishing or surfing or swimming.
- 12 Be in nature.
- 13 Watch the sun rise or set.
- 14 Make a fire.
- 15 Read fiction or poetry.
- 16 Sing.
- 17 Go to an art museum.
- 18 Go on a picnic in a beautiful park.
- 19 Play a game.
- 20 Call a friend or family member who lives far away.

Be as creative and thoughtful as you can.

Circle or write what stands out to you.

09 Practice a light and life-giving version of what the ancients called “fixed hour prayer.”

All that means is you pause two to three times during your 24-hour Sabbath to pray. Not prayer as in intercede for God to move in the world. In fact, in Orthodox Judaism, intercessory prayer is forbidden on the Sabbath because it’s a form of work. Prayer in the wider sense is a reorientation of your heart to God in wonder and awe. One understanding of prayer is coming to rest in God’s goodness. Two to three times this Sabbath, rest in God’s goodness.

The most ancient and, for many people, the most helpful way to do this is by praying a psalm, such as Psalm 23, 37, 103, or 105.

You can also do this by listening to worship music or praying with a friend or going on a walk in nature—the options are endless.

The end goal is spend as much of the Sabbath as you possibly can in conscious communion with God, just receiving his love for you and giving back your love for him.

Jot down your plan here.

10 Identify two to three practices by which you enjoy God and do them.

It’s key to discover what the spiritual writer Gary Thomas calls your “spiritual pathway;” the way you are uniquely wired to enjoy God.

For you this could be time alone in stillness, or it could be throwing a raucous party with your community. It could be walking in nature or reading a novel by the fire. It could be an emotional experience, or it could be the intellectual study of theology, philosophy, or quantum physics. It could be a sensory act such as walking, fishing, or bird-watching.

As you discern if an activity is a good fit or not for your Sabbath practice, it can be difficult to know if certain things are appropriate. One simple rubric is to filter every potential activity through the four movements of Sabbath:

01 Stop – Is this ceasing what I do on normal workdays? For example, if you work as a mechanic, but you really enjoy gardening, even though it can be a bit physical, that may be a beautiful Sabbath activity for you. But if you’re a landscaper, it’s likely not the best fit for your Sabbath practice. What two to three practices might the Spirit be inviting you into?

02 Rest – Is this restful? Does it refill my soul with new energy emotionally, intellectually, physically, spirituality? Things like watching TV may give us a welcome break, but we seldom get done and feel new energy for life.

03 Delight – Does this activity bring me deep, visceral joy in God? Do I find myself naturally happy and grateful and connected to God as I do it?

04 Worship – Does this activity connect me more deeply to God and his goodness and beauty? Do I find myself coming alive to the wonder of his nature and spontaneously bursting into praise?

However you enjoy God and whatever the practices you love, do a few of them this coming Sabbath.

The point of both these exercises is to live in what Jesus called “abiding,” not only all Sabbath long, but all week long.

What two to three practices might the Spirit be inviting you into?

Sabbath Reflection

After your Sabbath, take 10 minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

Note: Be as specific as possible as you write. Bullet points are fine, but if you write it out in narrative form your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 Where did I most experience God's nearness?

Continue to share what you are learning about God, Sabbath, and your spiritual journey with a close friend or community member.