



Creating Your Own Sabbath

"To keep sabbath means to let go of the treasured illusions of my indispensability."

Margory Thompson

What is a sabbath?

Sabbath is God's gift of repetitive and regular rest. It is given for our delight and community with God. Time for being in the midst of a life of doing.

What does scripture say about the sabbath?

Hebrews 4:1, 9-11 - Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Mark 2:27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Exodus 20:8-11 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Sabbath is...

The only spiritual practice which is a command

The only Commandment which is explained in detail.



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Traditionally there are twelve activities that mark sabbath practice:

- Lighting the candles
- Blessing the children
- Eating a meal
- Singing
- Worshipping with your Community
- Walking
- Napping
- Making love (if you're married)
- Reading
- Spending time alone with God
- Spending time with family and friends
- Gratitude

Here are a few ideas of how to begin the sabbath from both ancient tradition and modern practice:

- Light two candles (symbolic for the two commands in Exodus and Deuteronomy to "remember" and "observe" the Sabbath). Invite the Spirit of Jesus to come and give your home light, joy, love, peace, and rest.
- Pour a glass of wine (or grape juice for the kids or the straight edge). Pray a blessing over the drink and give thanks.
- If you have a family, this is where, traditionally, the father speaks a blessing over the children and the mother. If you're with roommates or friends, this can be a wonderful time to bless each other, with prayers like: May you be happy and full of joy. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May you find rest for your soul. Etc.
- Read a Psalm, sing a song, quote a poem, or pray a liturgy to center on God.
- Pray: ask the Holy Spirit bring a spirit of rest over your life and lead and guide you through the next 24 hours.
- If you begin at night, share a meal with your family or friends.



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- If you begin on a Sunday morning, go to church and worship.

Here are a few ideas to end your Sabbath:

- Take a slow, leisurely prayer walk around your neighborhood, nearby park, or nature reserve.
- Read a psalm.
- Share a meal with family and friends.
- Spend some time alone or with your family and friends in prayers of gratitude.
- Traditionally, the Sabbath ends by sitting on the floor, lighting a special Havdalah candle, and sharing 1) the best part of your Sabbath, and 2) what you are looking forward to in the week ahead, and 3) ending with prayers of gratitude.¹

Preparing for and ending the Sabbath

1. Plan a twenty-four-hour sabbath you can enter with anticipation. The night before your sabbath, remind your body how long it has to luxuriate and rest in God. Consider the things that would nourish you: worship, music, a nap, making love, walking, reading, playing with children, afternoon tea. Plan them spaciously into the day.
2. Gather your family together to discuss how to arrange your sabbath for refreshment, renewal, and relationships. Ask “how do you intentionally leave the school and work- week behind? Let everyone tell one thing they love to do. Share what makes taking a sabbath difficult for you. If getting to church is a hurried process that brings distress to the family, spend some time talking together about how to take the pressure off “getting out the door on time.” Should you consider going to church at another time? Would the family enjoy having Dad fix breakfast? Would they rather just drink juice and share a family brunch? What can be done the night before to make it easier to get going in the morning? How can you approach sabbaths in ways that do not force, rush, or demand?

¹ <https://practicintheway.org/rest/part-one>



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3. Begin your Sabbath gently on the previous evening. Light a candle. Invite the presence of Christ to guide you through your sabbath. While lighting the candles, say, "Bless you, O LORD our God and King, who hast sanctified us by your commandments and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights." Eat with friends and family. Go to bed early, speaking peace to one another. Pray for Christ to give you deep, refreshing sleep. Rest in his arms. Commit your dreams to the Lord.
4. Prepare a sabbath box or basket. Choose a basket or cover a grocery-size box with gift paper. Each Saturday evening, gather as a family to put all the things you don't need to take with you into Sunday. Drop cell phones, credit cards and gadgets into the box. Put work projects and homework in the box. Tell one another what you are looking forward to as you enter sabbath. Pray together to receive the gift of sabbath.
5. The night before your sabbath day, enter into sleep as a spiritual act of worship. Consciously let go of your compulsion to be indispensable. Drop all that brings you anxiety into the arms of your heavenly Father. Lay your head on the pillow imagining that you are putting your head into the lap of God. Commit your body and dreams to him. Relax in God and rest.
6. Awake gently to your sabbath day. If it is possible, don't set an alarm. Let your body wake naturally. As you come to consciousness, take several deep breaths and open your body wide to God for the new day. Stretch out and feel the full length of yourself. Thank God that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Thank him for the gift of the day before you. Is God speaking to you in any way? Listen and respond. Get up slowly and attend to your desire to encounter God today.

Then the Sabbath prayers can continue in whatever manner the Spirit moves. It is especially valuable to pray for the Church, for pastors, staff, leaders, worship team, and anyone else assisting in the local church. Pray for Christians all over the world as they worship, and for the unity of the global Church. You might also pray for the activities of your Sabbath day—that they might be restful and that you might cease from all work, worry, anxiety, productivity, needing to be God,



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striving to create your own future, and so forth. Pray also that your Sabbath might be a time of embracing people and Christian values, of feasting and intimacy, laughter and delight.

7. At the close of your Sabbath day begin with a lighting of the candles and the kindling prayer. The Havdalah or farewell prayers include thanking God for all the gifts of the special day—the worship, relationships, fun activities, special foods, and other special things that you have enjoyed during the day. The prayer closes with an expression of longing for the next Sabbath day to come and yearning for the day when Christ will come to take us to his perfect Sabbath rest. This ceremony, like the Sabbath welcoming, ends with the words: “Bless you, O LORD our God and King, that you have commanded us to observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What difficulties or compulsions make it hard for you to stop?
2. How does taking a sabbath enhance your enjoyment of worship of God?
3. What makes a sabbath day nourishing and replenishing to you?
4. What happens to you when you go without regular rhythms that allow you to rest in God?²

² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL, 2015, p.43-45.

Dawn, Marva J.. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (p. 212-215). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.



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Mini-Sabbaths

Mini-Sabbaths are short breaks for the purpose of aligning your spirit and providing overall perspective to your work and life.

A mini-sabbath can be as simple as taking a scheduled 5-minute break to go listen to your favorite worship song undistracted. Instead of eating lunch at your desk, you take your lunch to a park and sit outside praying while you eat. Or set your watch to chime every hour and when you hear the beep, take a deep breath, and say the sinner's prayer or quote Psalms 46:10. The point is to pull yourself out of the current moment or day in order to focus on Christ and calm your heart.

You can be so consumed with the day, a problem, or an issue you do not even realize how much stress it may be causing you. By taking a deep breath, indulging in a quiet lunch, or stealing away for 5 minutes you are adding perspective back into your day. With the realization that no problem in front of you is bigger than the God above you.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of Sabbath is not simply to rejuvenate yourself in order to do more production, nor is it the pursuit of pleasure. The purpose of Sabbath is to enjoy your God, life in general, what you have accomplished in the world through his help, and the freedom you have in the gospel—the freedom from slavery to any material object or human expectation. The Sabbath is a sign of the hope that we have in the world to come.³

³ Copyright © 2007 by Timothy Keller, © 2011 by Redeemer City to City. This article is adapted from a leadership training session at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in 2007.