

A Guide to begin the practice of Sabbath

Adapted from John Mark Comer's, "How to Un-hurry Workbook"

Sabbath is a 24-hour time period of restful worship, by which we cultivate a restful spirit in all of our life. A good way to think about Sabbath is through the lens of four translations of the Hebrew word *shabbat*:

1. **Stop**—we cease from all working, all thinking about working, all worrying and all wanting.
2. **Rest**—we rest our soul, meaning, our whole person. Physical: we sleep. Mental and emotional: we calm down, relax, process the week. Spiritual: we cease our striving, and rest in God's love for us through abiding.
3. **Delight**—we pamper our soul with activities that spark joy, wonder, gratitude, and happiness, such as eating good food, walking in nature, spending time with family or friends, listening to music, playing games, making love to our spouse, or just having fun before God.
4. **Worship**—we index our heart toward grateful praise and adoration of God, and we surrender our life to him, one week at a time.

Before you begin, a few things to note:

1. These four exercises are designed to build on each other. Don't try them all at once, especially if you're new to Sabbath. Over the course of a month, ease yourself into the rhythm of Sabbath.
2. You can't "succeed" or "fail" at this practice. The goal is simply to show up. Resist the urge to say, "I'm bad at this," or, "This isn't for me," or, "I don't like this." Be patient with the practice, and with yourself.
3. Of all the practices of Jesus, Sabbath is by far one of the most counter-cultural. It touches so many of the tender vulnerabilities of our soul; it's also a form of spiritual warfare, a kind of assault on hell's hold over our over busy soul. It's very hard for the enemy to tempt well rested, healthy, happy people. At first, it may feel like you're swimming upstream, or even fighting spiritual realities. That's normal, just keep at it until you feel a shift in the current, and it's moving you toward rest and no longer away from it.

Exercise #1: The Basics

Overview

This exercise is exactly what it sounds like, the basics. If it's too elementary for your stage, skip to the next exercise.

1. Mark out a 24-hour time period (or as close as you can) to rest and worship.

- There are three common variations of this Practice:
 - The traditional Sabbath: from sundown Friday night to the same time Saturday late afternoon. This works well for people who are especially busy on Sundays with church activities or other events.
 - The Lord's Day Sabbath: from waking on Sunday morning (or ideally upon going to bed Saturday night) through Sunday evening. This works best for most people, as Sunday is the calmest day in most cities, and it's likely you already set aside time to worship with your community, so it's less invasive and builds on a practice you already have in your weekly routine.
 - The midweek Sabbath: any day during the week. This works best for people with odd or sporadic work schedules and have a midweek day off.
- I recommend you begin in the evening—with dinner or just before bed, but there's no "right way." But a celebratory meal can really start your Sabbath off with the right intention. You can also invite friends or family to join you, or cook the same meal each week, to transition your mind from work to rest.
- If at all possible, establish a regular rhythm of Sabbath on the same day each week.

2. Pick a ritual to clearly begin and end your Sabbath.

- Much of the Sabbath is about rhythms and rituals that set aside the day as "holy." Beginning and ending with a marked moment will help you settle into rest, and help you reenter the week with a restful spirit.
- 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). Pray a blessing over the drink and give thanks.
 - If you have a family, this is where, traditionally, the parent speaks a blessing over the children and family. 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 to 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.
 - If you begin in the 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, passing around sweet-smelling spices to savor the day, and ending with prayers of gratitude.

3. Spend an entire day in the four aspects of Sabbath: stopping, resting, delighting, and worshipping.

- Fill your day with activities that are life-giving for your soul. Begin to distinguish between recreation and restoration. Begin to transition from entertainment, TV, social media, shopping, and going “out,” to activities that deeply connect you to Jesus and his rest.
- 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 to your spouse.
 - Reading.
 - Spending time alone with God.
 - Spending time with family and friends.
 - Gratitude.

Note:

This is not a “to do” list: there are no “to do’s” on Sabbath! No ought’s or should’s. This is just a list of activities many people find restful and restorative. Again, there is no “right way.” Adapt your Sabbath practice to your personality, preferences, stage of life, and however it is you connect with God: time in nature, walking your dog to the park, playing frisbee golf with your kids, getting lost in a good novel, etc. Just take the day to pamper your soul in God’s presence.

If “how” to do this is unclear to you, don’t feel bad, you’re not alone. Spend a few minutes thinking and praying over these simple questions:

- *What about my regular routine would I need to stop to experience the Sabbath?*
- *What is restful for me?*
- *What brings me an easy delight?*
- *What is a worshipful way I connect to God?*

Exercise #2: The Preparation Day

Overview

The New Testament writers called the day before the Sabbath (Friday, in first century Jewish culture), the “preparation day,” because Sabbath is a practice, a discipline, and it takes preparation and planning to disconnect from the hurry of the world for an entire day. The day immediately before Sabbath is vital to its success.

1. Make a plan.

- A few days before your Sabbath, sit down and think of what needs to be done before your Sabbath – errands, email, grocery shopping, bills, etc.
- You list makers, write up a “to do before Sabbath” list.

2. Do the hard work of preparation.

- The day(s) before your Sabbath, carry out your plan.
- Here’s a list of common things we need to do before we can rest and worship for a full 24-hours:
 - Go grocery shopping and stock our kitchen with (delicious) foods.
 - Pre-make dinner or any labor-intensive meals. Soups, salads, or enchiladas are all great options for Sabbath dinner.
 - Clean your house or apartment.
 - Answer all time-sensitive texts, voice mails, and emails.
 - For those in jobs that require time-sensitive communication, consider an auto-reply so people know you’ll get back them soon.
 - Plan out a rough schedule for your Sabbath. Don’t over plan. Take it slow. Give plenty of time to relax at an unhurried pace.
 - If you want to meet up with a friend on the Sabbath, set a time and place.
 - Think of something you can do to make the day special – a special food or desert, a book you read only on the Sabbath, a park you love to visit or friend you deeply enjoy spending time with.
- Don’t let stress ruin the start of your Sabbath. All these details can spike our anxiety. Don’t worry about the “perfect Sabbath,” just get what you can done in your allotted time, and then relax into the goodness of what is, without letting it get drowned out by what could be.

3. Spend an entire day in rest and worship.

Exercise #3: Digital Detox

Overview

Digital addiction is real! For many, the idea of turning off all your devices for a full day sounds terrifying. Some people even label it irresponsible or lazy. But there are so many benefits to a weekly digital detox, not the least of which is an increased capacity to encounter God and one another in rest.

1. Make a plan.

- I recommend you turn your devices entirely off for a full day. But you may decide to simply limit your time, or avoid all social media, but still call your mom or FaceTime a friend in another city. If so, I still recommend you put your devices away for the unallotted times.
- Many people choose to set 2-3 times a day to check their phone in case of emergency. Use wisdom and start where you are.
- Just remember, there is an addiction in most of us to our phones, so we can't just wing it and hope for the best. And we should expect some "withdrawals" in the first few weeks of detox.

2. Make any social plans ahead of time.

- Include this in your preparation day. Schedule times for coffee, brunch, or your picnic at the park with family or friends, so you can stay offline as much as you want.

3. Put your devices away.

- Whether you completely power off all devices, or just choose to limit your time, either way, put them away—in a box, drawer, or closet. Out of sight, out of mind.

4. Spend an entire day in rest and worship.

Note: If you think this is legalistic or far too impractical, I simply encourage you to try it for a few weeks. Ideally, try it for a full month, as it takes a while to get over the dopamine addiction we have to technology. If after a month, you don't feel a marked increase in love and joy and peace in your emotional health and spiritual life, feel free to try something else.

Exercise #4: Cultivating Intimacy with the Daily Office

Overview

The Sabbath is a day for rest and worship; it's not simply a day to relax and sleep, but also to connect with God. The aim of this final exercise is to cultivate intimacy with God through a variety of practices, but specifically through what ancient followers of Jesus called the "daily office," a simple practice of pausing at set times throughout the day to set your heart on God in prayer. Traditionally, there are three offices: morning, noon, and night.

1. Begin your Sabbath morning in awareness.

- Immediately upon waking, do something to set your heart upon the goodness of your life in God.
- Here's a few recommendations:
 - Read a Psalm (like Psalm 23, 37, or 92) or favorite Scripture.
 - Give thanks. Be specific, leisurely, and genuine.
 - Step outside and (depending on where you live), breathe in fresh air, listen to the birds, plant your feet on the ground, and appreciate the goodness of God and your life in his world.
 - Praise God. You can do this with or without music, alone or with a community, simply set your attention and adoration on God and his goodness.

2. At some point in the day, spend leisurely time reading Scripture, and listening to God's voice over your life.

- Think of Sabbath like a mini-retreat day once a week. See the previous exercise on retreat for ideas.
- Depending on how tired you are, you might want to save this exercise for the latter half of your day, after your soul has had time to catch up to your body and come to peace.

3. Practice the daily office 2-3 times throughout the day.

- After your morning time, pause a few more times to come back to the moment, and savor the goodness of your life in God.
- Here's a few recommendations for how to do this:
 - Take a prayer walk.
 - Read a psalm, poem, or liturgy.
 - Do some spiritual reading, something devotional that warms your heart to God's goodness.
 - Put on a worship song.
 - Practice breathing prayer, listening prayer, or any other kind of contemplative prayer that comes easily for you.
 - List your gratitude's out to God in prayer.
 - Think about how you connect with God, and just do that.

4. End your Sabbath in awareness.

- Find a ritual or tradition that you love and engenders grateful worship of God in your heart. End your Sabbath in thankfulness to God.