

Sabbath

Overview:

The Sabbath is a day blessed by God and set aside for rest and worship. For the Jewish people, the Sabbath began Friday evening and continued into Saturday afternoon, but today many followers of Jesus observe the Sabbath on Sunday. There aren't any rules anchoring the Sabbath to a specific day of the week, we each experiment to find what works best with our lives and schedules. When that day arrives, it's helpful to begin and end our Sabbath time with a tradition like lighting candles, pouring wine, or reading a psalm to remember our time of rest and worship is set apart from the rest of the week.

Every Sabbath should be a weekly celebration, almost like a holiday. Holidays properly observed require preparation (Week 2). John's gospel refers to this as the "day of preparation." Before the weekly tradition begins, before the candles are lit or the psalms are read, we go grocery shopping, clean the house, and clear errands from our to-do lists. For many followers of Jesus, powering down phones and computers for an entire day—no social media, no email, no internet—is a life-giving break from a world wrought with digital addiction.

With our day selected, our chores done, our digital feeds silenced, and our traditions established, we enter into a day of rest, worship, and intimacy with God (Week 3). Set aside a healthy window of time to spend in prayer and in the Scriptures, alone and/or as a family. Listen to the Spirit of God. Create an uninterrupted, quiet space to simply *be* with God as you work to tune yourself to his presence throughout the day.

As we settle into a consistent rhythm of rest and worship, we work to cultivate and maintain gratitude for the things that we have (Week 4). By drawing our awareness to the often overlooked gifts all around us—a roof over our heads, food to eat, relationships to enjoy—we draw our focus away from shopping and from conversations about things we don't have.

Even after learning about and experimenting with the best Sabbath rhythms and practices, we realize that it takes time, and that it will inevitably evolve with each season of our lives (Week 5). What works well for a married couple may not accommodate a single person. Families with small kids will have expectations unique to couples who do not.

In each stage of life, our hope is to disrupt the business, the workload, the media overload, and the frenetic pace of life by slowing to a deliberate stop.

A day marked by rest and worship.

End goal: That Sabbath becomes a regular party of the your weekly routine; you set aside one full day a week to rest and worship. And that you thoroughly enjoy this day, learning to delight in God, his creation, and your life in it, calibrating your body and soul to the rhythm of God's Spirit, and then living out of that place all week long.

Podcasts:

Week 1: [The Sabbath by John Mark Comer](#)

Week 4: [Sabbath as Resistance by John Mark Comer](#)

Recommended time:

5 weeks

Recommended resources:

Garden City, by John Mark Comer

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly, by Marva Dawn

The Sabbath, by Abraham Joshua Heschel

Sabbath as Resistance, by Walter Brueggemann

24/6, by Matthew Sleeth

5 week practice:

Week 1: The basics

Week 2: Preparation and digital addiction

Week 3: Intimacy with God

Week 4: Gratitude and contentment

Week 5: Stage of life

Week 1: The basics

Before you meet, listen to this podcast: [The Sabbath by John Mark Comer](#)

Read this overview

Most people don't practice Sabbath, at least on any kind of a regular basis. This means most people are missing out on one of the most life-giving practices of the way of Jesus. Because of this, the goal of week one is to start with the basics: set aside a 24 hour time period to rest and worship, mark a beginning and end time, each with a ritual of your own design, and spend the day in Sabbath delight. It sounds easy, but, like all things, it takes practice. So give it time!

Begin with silence and prayer (5 minutes)

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and *through* each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Debrief last week's practice in small groups (10–15 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about the following debrief questions from last week's practice:

1. Did you listen to the podcast? What did you think?
2. Is sabbath already a part of your life, or no?
3. Does the idea of practicing sabbath sound good, bad, "legalistic," freeing?

Open to the Bible together (10 minutes)

Have somebody read Genesis 2v1–3

Talk about the following questions:

1. Is the idea of a sabbath new to you? Part of your upbringing? Background? Practice?
2. Did you grow up with any kind of a bias *against* the sabbath?
3. Notice that the sabbath takes place in Genesis, long before the "Law." What does that say about God's original intention for a day of rest and worship?
4. God works and rests. What are the implications of that for people made in his image?

Talk about the coming week's practice as a community (10–30 minutes)

Here's the practice for the coming week:

- Mark out a 24 hour time period (or as close as you can) to rest and worship
- Pick a ritual to clearly begin and end your sabbath
 - Ideas to begin:
 - Light two candles (symbolic for the two commands to “remember” and “observe” the sabbath.
 - Pour a glass of wine (or grape juice for the kids, or the straight edge)
 - Read a Psalm or say a liturgy
 - Pray: ask the Holy Spirit bring a spirit of rest over your life and lead and guide you through the next 24 hours
 - Share a meal with your family or friends
 - Go around the table and do “highlight of the week”
 - Ideas to end:
 - Take a prayer walk
 - Read a Psalm
 - Thank God for the last 24 hours
 - Extinguish the candles of sabbath
 - Share a meal
- Spend an entire day in rest and worship: fill your day with activities that are life-giving - eating, drinking, reading the Bible or a good book, making love to your spouse, playing games with your kids, time with family and friends, a walk to the park, napping, prayer, singing, etc.

Discussion questions for the coming week:

1. What day of the week will you Sabbath?
 - a. Ideas:
 - i. Friday night to Saturday afternoon, starting and ending twenty minutes before Sundown. This is the traditional Jewish Sabbath
 - ii. All day Saturday or Sunday.
 - iii. Saturday night through Sunday afternoon, ending with church at Bridgetown.
2. Will your Sabbath start the night before or in the morning? (We recommend the night before)
3. What needs to change in our normal, weekly routine to make sabbath happen?
4. What activities will be restful and worshipful for you?

Close in prayer (10 minutes)

Week 2: Preparation and digital addiction

Read this overview

The writer John called the day before the sabbath the “preparation day” in John 19v31. Jews like John and Jesus would take almost a whole day to get ready for the sabbath, rather than just stumbling into it unprepared and stressed out. So this week we’ll practice preparation. We’ll also be experimenting with limiting (or ideally turning off!) our access to the digital world of smartphone, social media, email, etc. Should make for lively conversation!

Begin with silence and prayer (5 minutes)

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it’s hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Debrief last week’s practice in small groups (10–15 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about the following debrief questions from last week’s practice:

- How did it go?
- Does the rhythm you decided on last week need any adjustment?
- Was it hard to slow the pace of your life down?
- What was the best part?
- What was the hardest part?
- How did it effect the following week?

Open to the Bible together (10 minutes)

Have somebody read Exodus 20v8–10.

Have another person read John 19v31.

Talk about a few of the following questions:

1. What's the difference between a day off and a sabbath, according to Exodus?
2. What does it say about the sabbath that the longest of the Ten Commandments is number four?
3. Why would first century Jews call Fridays “the preparation day”?

Talk about the coming week’s practice as a community (10–15 minutes)

Here's the practice for the coming week:

- Spend time the day before gearing up for the Sabbath
 - Ideas:
 - Go grocery shopping and stock your kitchen with food
 - Pre-make your dinner (soup is an easy one, or enchiladas, or casserole)
 - Clean or pick up your house or apartment
 - Answer all phone messages and return all text messages
 - Plan out a rough schedule for the Sabbath (remember to take it slow and give *plenty* of space)
 - Think of something you can do to make the day stand apart - a special desert, a trip to Blue Star for donuts, a picnic at the park, a spiritual book you love, a friend you want to have coffee with, etc.
- Turn off your phone and computer for the Sabbath (or at least, limit your time)
 - Actually put it away in a box or closet
 - If 24 hours is just too much, or you can't do it for some reason, try turning it "Do not disturb" mode and checking it every four hours
 - Note: for those of you who think this is legalistic or way too hardcore, we simply encourage you to try it for a few weeks, ideally 3–4 as it takes awhile to get over the cravings of digital addiction! If you don't feel a marked increase in peace and joy in your emotional health and spiritual life, then go back to normal.

Discussion questions for the coming week (10–15 minutes)

1. What preparations will you need to make prior to your sabbath?
2. What can you do to make the sabbath special? For you? For your spouse, if married? Kids, if a parent?
3. How will you limit your access to technology in order to enjoy the sabbath?
4. There's a lot of talk about digital addiction lately. Is your phone, social media, email, etc. a form of addiction for you?
5. Do you think you need to turn off your phone for a day a week?
6. What are the positive benefits of going a full day of the week without phone, social media, or email?

Close in prayer (10 minutes)

Week 3: intimacy with God

Read this overview

The Sabbath isn't just a day for rest, it's a day for *worship*. The end goal isn't just to take a nap in a hammock or sleep in or finish that novel, although those are all great things to do on the sabbath. But the ultimate goal is to intentionally pursue intimacy with God in a way that lasts beyond the sabbath, and centers you all week long.

Begin with silence and prayer (5 minutes)

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Debrief last week's practice in small groups (10–15 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about the following debrief questions from last week's practice:

- How did it go?
- What did preparation look like for you?
- Were you able to turn off your phone? What was that like?
- What was the best part?
- What was the hardest part?
- How did it effect the following week?

Open to the Bible together (10 minutes)

Have somebody read Hebrew 4v1 and 9–11

Talk about the following questions:

1. What is the "rest" that Hebrews is talking about? Is it limited to the sabbath, or broader in scope?
2. What does it look like to "make every effort to enter that rest"? Does that sound like a contradiction? If not, why not?

Talk about the coming week's practice as a community (10–15 minutes)

Practice for the coming week:

- Devote the entire day to intimacy with God

- Ideas:
 - Start the sabbath by reading a Psalm and prayer
 - In the morning, set aside a good chunk of time to read Scripture, pray, listen to God, and just *be* with God
 - If you have a family, set aside a time during the day to read and pray as a family (A Bible story with the kids, prayer walk, worship by singing time, etc.)
 - Go on a short, slow prayer walk
 - Try “the Daily Office” (also called “Fixed Hour Prayer,” an ancient Christian practice) - set three times on the sabbath (Say, at night, in the morning, and at the end of the day) to just focus on God. This time can be short - ten minutes. The goal is just to focus on God and tune your soul to his presence, so that the awareness of God stays with you all day long. Here’s a few ways to do the Daily Office:
 - Go on a prayer walk
 - Read a Psalm
 - Read a liturgy
 - Put on a worship song
 - Practice gratitude
 - Pray
 - Speak in tongues
 - Practice just sitting in God’s presence
 - Go somewhere beautiful in nature - a park, vista, etc. and praise God
 - Read a poem
 - However you connect with God, do that!

Discussion questions for the coming week (10–15 minutes)

1. How can you maintain intimacy with God throughout the sabbath?
2. What spiritual disciplines/practices help you connect with God? (Scripture reading, prayer, silence and solitude, celebration, etc.)
3. How might you incorporate the Daily Office into your sabbath rhythm?
4. How can you lead your family (if you have one) into intimacy with God on the sabbath?

Close in prayer (10 minutes)

Week 4: Gratitude and contentment (and a day off shopping)

Before you meet, listen to this podcast: [Sabbath as Resistance by John Mark Comer](#)

Read this overview

In the OT, the Jews were commanded not to buy and sell on the Sabbath. All trade and commerce was shut down for the weekly day of rest and worship. Now, we're no longer "under the law," so we don't have to obey these commands. But they still stand as wisdom, *especially* in our materialistic world that is geared at discontentment (you need *more!*) and entitlement (you *deserve* it!). So this week we'll focus on contentment and gratitude - our acts of discipleship to Jesus. For gratitude, we'll look for creative ways to realize how blessed we are, and express our thanks to God. For contentment, we'll spend an entire day not buying or selling, but rather, deeply enjoying what we already have.

Begin with silence and prayer (5 minutes)

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Debrief last week's practice in small groups (10–15 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about 2–3 of the following debrief questions from last week's practice:

- How did it go?
- What spiritual disciplines did you practice?
- What was the best part?
- What was the hardest part?
- Were you able to connect with God?

Open to the Bible together (10 minutes)

Have somebody read Deuteronomy 5v12–15.

1. What would the command to sabbath have sounded like to ex-slaves?

Have another person read Nehemiah 10v28–31.

1. Notice that Nehemiah is chastising Israel for buying and selling on the Sabbath. Why is that a big deal?

Have another person Isaiah 58v13–14. Lots of reading tonight!

1. Isaiah says the sabbath isn't a day to "do as you please." Isn't that *exactly* what a day off is? What would it look like to "delight" in and "honor" the sabbath like Isaiah says?

Have another person read 1 Timothy 6v6–10

1. You don't need to talk about it. We just thought this passage was so good it was worth reading for this week's practice.

Talk about the coming week's practice as a community (10–15 minutes)

Practice for the coming week:

- Throughout the day, practice gratitude to God and each other.
- Ideas for how to do that:
 - Write down 5 things that you're grateful for.
 - If you have a family or roommates, go around the table and say what you're grateful for.
 - Sing a song, quote a poem, draw a picture - anything creative to express your gratitude.
 - Just spend time in prayer, saying thank you to God.
- Don't buy or sell anything. Yes, this means no shopping!
- This isn't a legalistic rule. And it's aimed more at "things," than say, brunch or a cup of coffee.
- Actively enjoy things that you *have*.
- Don't read/look at/think about/talk about stuff that you *don't* have.
- Savor the simple pleasures: food, drink, a place to live, time with family and friends, etc. Really focus on living in the moment, practicing delight in your life and gratitude to God.

Discussion questions for the coming week (10–15 minutes)

1. What ideas do you have to intentionally incorporate gratitude into your sabbath? Anything worth sharing?
2. What activities *increase* your sense of contentment?
3. What activities *decrease* your sense of contentment?
4. Is buying food or coffee different than buying stuff?
5. What message do we send to the world by not buying or selling one day a week?

Close in prayer (10 minutes)

Week 5: Stage of life

Read this overview

Sabbath looks *very* different based on your stage of life. A single person with roommates has to practice sabbath very differently from, say, a young family with three kids in diapers, or a couple of empty nesters. Some seasons are harder than others to rest in. (You young families, hang in there!) The key is to creatively engage each stage of life and practice sabbath over a lifetime.

Begin with silence and prayer (5 minutes)

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Debrief last week's practice in small groups (10–15 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about 2–3 of the following debrief questions from last week's practice:

- How did it go?
- How did you practice gratitude?
- In what ways did abstaining from buying or selling free you up to enjoy the sabbath?
- What was one simple pleasure that you really enjoyed?

Open to the Bible together (10 minutes)

Have somebody read Mark 2v27.

Talk about the following questions:

1. If some people need to hear "The sabbath was made for man," (usually 21st century urbanites, but not always) and others need to hear "not man for the sabbath" (usually 1st century Jews, but not always), which one are you?
2. After a month of practice, are you starting to see the sabbath as a gift from God to help you thrive? Or does it still feel like a legalistic "rule"?

Talk about the coming week's practice as a community (10–15 minutes)

Ideas for practice for singles:

- Spend time alone.
- Spend time with friends and family. Get coffee, go out to lunch, take a walk, etc.
- Clear your schedule of work and errands.
- Nap.
- Enjoy this season of life where you have ample time to focus on God's presence.
- Spend time in spiritual reading.
- Listen to a podcast or teaching on the Bible.
- Practice gratitude for the season you're in rather than focusing on where you might be in the future.

Ideas for practice for married couples:

- Spend time together catching up.
- Don't fight (there are six *other* days to do that).
- Avoid hard conversations.
- Don't talk about things that aren't restful (i.e., stuff you need to get done in the coming week).
- Talk about your personal and shared discipleship.
- Have sex!
- Nap.
- Read.
- Give each other space to do what is life giving (opposites often attract, and find very different activities restful. Create space for that). Introvert married to an extrovert? Spend the morning reading in the quiet (introvert time), then go out to an early dinner with friends (extrovert). Or something like that.

Ideas for practice for young families:

- Spend time together as a family in celebration of life.
- Have one parent watch the kids for a few hours, while the other goes off to rest or do something life-giving, then swap (i.e., one parent takes a two hour block in the morning, another in the afternoon).
- Take breaks to do the daily office.
- Take your kids to the park or on a fun, restful outing.
- Make your kids nap or have quiet time, even as they get older.
- Have your kids light the candles of sabbath, and ask them what they symbolize (The two commands from the Ten Commandments: remember and observe the sabbath).
- Have your kids drink grape juice when you pour the wine.
- Do highlight of the week with your kids.
- Go to bed early.
- Have a special breakfast set out for the kids to eat first thing, so the parents can sleep in and relax.
- Have a special box of toys that your kids just get to play with on the sabbath.
- Keep those video games off!

- Recognize it's hard to rest with little kids, but this is a season. Do your best. It will pass all too soon.

Ideas for practice for older families or empty nesters:

- Spend time together as a family or couple in celebration of life.
- Share a meal together.
- Do highlight of the week.
- Have a time of prayer and Bible reading as a family.
- Go on a fun, but restful outing to a park, coffeeshop, or restaurant.
- Take naps.
- Read.
- Each family member practice the daily office.

Discussion questions for the coming week (10–15 minutes)

- 1 What are the challenges of sabbath at your stage of life?
- 2 What are the upsides of sabbath at your stage of life?
- 3 What creative ideas do you have for others in your stage of life to sabbath well?

Close in prayer (10 minutes)