

Ideas for practicing Sabbath

Recognizing our particular personalities and unique circumstances, we know our patterns of keeping the Sabbath will differ. To encourage a healthy mix of worship, rest, delight, and contemplation, we offer a few ideas for developing your intentional Sabbath rhythm.

1. Set out your 24 hour time period

Simply put, if you don't set it out ahead of time, it won't happen.

- decide which 24-hour period will best align with your current situation. Many people will choose Sunday to be that day, in keeping with the church's long practice of Sabbath on the first day of the week. Is it realistic for Sunday to be my Sabbath? Because of work schedules or other commitments, you might choose a full day on another day of the week. The key is setting in place within the rhythm of your week a full 24-hour Sabbath time. As much as you are able, establish your Sabbath on the same day every week.

- decide when you will begin your Sabbath. The traditional Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown the evening of Sabbath until late afternoon/early evening of Sabbath. It's beautiful embodied experience of the purpose of Sabbath, because the first thing you do, then, is sleep.

2. Prepare for your Sabbath:

The Sabbath time is called 'holy,' which translated means special, consecrated, or set apart. The Sabbath is to be different from the other six days. So take time to consider what will make your Sabbath specially set apart, and then make any needed preparations. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- do your grocery shopping the day before so you can avoid shopping
- prepare your dinner ahead of time (prepare a pot of soup or a casserole you can pop in the oven)
- clean up your house, room or apartment (most people find it easier to rest without the visual reminder of the need to clean up)
- handle any work or school commitments beforehand (e.g. return text messages or emails, complete any school assignments)

- it can be helpful to put together a rough schedule for your Sabbath - what will you do? When? Where? But avoid any over-scheduling, if that is your tendency. Remember, its a day of rest so give yourself plenty of space and time.
- Think about how to make the day special and stand apart from the rest of the week: pull out the fine china dishes for dinner, enjoy a special dessert, a picnic at the park, a spiritual book you love, etc.

3) Find a repeated activity or ritual to clearly begin and end your Sabbath

Much of the Sabbath practice is about repeated rhythms and bodily rituals (we're training our bodies, establishing a way of life, a *habitus*). Beginning and ending with a clearly marked moment will signal to your body and mind the invitation into rest, and later help you reenter the week with a restful spirit. Here are a few ideas of how to begin and end your sabbath day:

- Light two candles (these are traditional symbols 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.
- Try using this prayer from the New Zealand prayer book to start your Sabbath: "What has been done has been done. What has not been done has not been done; let it be."
- Pour a glass of wine (or grape juice for the kids). Pray a blessing over the drink and give thanks.
- If you are part of a family, 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. The book ***Every Moment Holy*** has a number of beautiful table liturgies that you might use.
- if you begin at night, share a meal with your family or friends.
- you can end the Sabbath by lighting a candle and sharing what you are looking forward to in the week ahead, and ending with prayers of gratitude.

3. Spend the entire day praying and playing, in rest, worship and delight.

Remember, Sabbath is a "get-to" not a "have-to" gift. So fill your day with activities that are life-giving.

Make sure worship is a central part of your Sabbath practice. But surround the worship centerpiece with other activities that help you connect with God, others and creation (walk outside, play games, enjoy a good novel, stare out the window, spend time in nature, enjoy a meal with family or friends, laugh, express gratitude, take a nap).

Check out these links for many more Sabbath ideas:

- <https://noblethoughtsdotblog.wordpress.com/2019/03/15/50-things-to-do-on-a-sabbath/>

- <https://noblethoughtsdotblog.wordpress.com/tag/sabbath/>

4) Consider a digital sabbath

Sabbath is a time to stop, cease and say no to all the demands of the usual week, including the demands of our phones and computers. If not cease all screens, at least consider limiting your time on these devices.

The Sabbath was a reminder from God for Israel that they were no longer slaves. Cutting the digital tether is a way to remind ourselves we are not beholden and enslaved to our devices. Sabbath is the permission to put away your devices for a time.

Yes, that can be hard to do, so here are a few ideas:

- engage in activities that don't require a phone, screen or internet
- turn your phone to "do not disturb" mode
- power down your phone and put it away for the day
- if you can't do a full day, decide on a window of time you will spend with your phone put away.
- our devices and screens can be used for sabbath purposes, usually ones that connect us to other people. So feel free to call family or zoom with friends but realize the temptation to sneak in a quick social media scroll or email check will be big (so plan how you might avoid it)

5) Cultivate intimacy with God

This day is a reminder of what all of life is meant to be - life in communion with God. So incorporate activities where you centre your heart, your being on communion with God (this will most likely differ depending on your personality and life stage):

- start your Sabbath with a time of silence and quiet, simply listening to God and growing a listening heart.
- make worship with your church community a centrepiece and priority for the day
- take time to review the past week, asking yourself: "where did I see God this week?"
- set aside time in the day to read a healthy portion of Scripture, immersing yourself in the story of God.
- take time during the day to pray, by yourself or with those closest to you
- practice gratitude by making a list of things for which you are grateful.