

"Sabbath is not dependent upon our readiness to stop. We do not stop when we are finished. We do not stop when we complete our phone calls, finish our project, get through this stack of messages, or get out this report that is due tomorrow. We stop because it is time to stop."

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SABBATH

Desire	to set apart one day a week for rest and worship of God
Definition	Sabbath is God's gift of repetitive and regular rest. It is given for our delight and communion with God. Time for <i>being</i> in the midst of a life of <i>doing</i> particularly characterizes the sabbath.
Scripture	<p>"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. . . .</p> <p>There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest." (Hebrews 4:1, 9-11)</p> <p>"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27)</p> <p>"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God." (Exodus 20:8-10)</p>
Practice Includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting aside time for intimacy with God and others you love • resting in God one day per week • practicing restful activities: walks, picnics, a Sunday afternoon nap, a phone visit with someone you love, tea or coffee with a friend, family time, games with your kids, love-making • letting go of things that stress you out for twenty-four hours • letting the difficult conversations happen another day • not developing a to-do list for Sunday • refraining from competition that moves you into a bad place
God-Given Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping company with Jesus through the sabbath • freedom from the addiction to busyness, rush and hurry • acknowledging your human limits and living within them • honoring the way God created you by living a healthy and intentionally rested life • living a weekly rhythm of rest followed by six days of work • delighting in God, family, the seasons, meals and all good gifts of creation • trusting God for all that you're not doing or taking care of on Sunday

SABBATH

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT READS: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Exodus 20:8-10). The Jewish understanding of sabbath embraced a special twenty-four hour rest time that was different from every other day. God’s stop day reminded them that they were no longer slaves that could never stop. They had been freed from Pharaoh’s rule, and the God that ruled them was a restful God—a God who designed all creation for work and rest. Sabbath reminded people that they were finite. They could not constantly be on the go. There were limits to their energy. And to honor these limitations was to honor the infinite God, who himself worked and rested.

Jewish sabbath began in the evening when the family set aside all the to-dos of the work week. As the lamps were lit, everyone settled into the evening calm of *Shabbat*. Candles, prayers, blessings, food—it all represented delight and refreshment in the presence of God and each other. When bedtime came, the family rested in God’s covenant protection. They woke on sabbath morning to a world they didn’t make and a friendship with God they didn’t earn. Over time, this one intentional day for delight and refreshment turned into a sobering legalistic exercise. Enjoying God and others was replaced by scrupulously keeping sabbath rules. The day God had given as a respite from work became simply another kind of work.

Jesus took specific aim at this misunderstanding of the sabbath. As Lord of the sabbath (see Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 6:1-10), he freely interpreted the sabbath command, claiming that God gave it to people as a restorative and recuperative gift. God did not intend for life to be all effort, so he punctuated each week with twenty-four hours of sabbath rest, during which people could remember what life is about and who it is for.

Sadly, everything about us works against slowing down. Our compulsion to produce and not waste time invades the space God gave for us to rest. Children’s athletics, national sporting events, round-the-clock accessibility to work, email and stores also fill up the sabbath day, so we never stop. When you get indignant over how seemingly incompatible sabbath is with the tiring and relentless demands already facing you, consider what your tiredness means. Animals don’t think about how tired they are. And they don’t have a sabbath *they* set aside for

rest. It's humans who recognize the difference between work and rest. The fact that we make distinctions between being tired and rested is an indication that we need to do both. Made in the image of God, we are like God, who on the seventh day "rested" from all his labor.

Sabbath is God's way of saying, "Stop. Notice your limits. Don't burn out." It is a day he gives us to remember who and what work is for as well as what matters most. Sunday generously hands us hours to look into the eyes of those we love. We have time for loving and being loved. Rhythmically, the sabbath reminds us that we belong to the worldwide family of God. We are citizens of another kingdom—a kingdom not ruled by the clock and the tyranny of the urgent. God's sabbath reality calls us to trust that the Creator can manage all that concerns us in this world as we settle into his rest.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What difficulties or compulsions make it hard for you to stop?
2. How does taking a sabbath enhance your enjoyment and 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?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

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 spaciouly 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 on Sunday. • Share what makes Sundays difficult for you. • If getting to church is a hurried time 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?
3. Begin your sabbath gently on Saturday evening. Light a candle. • Invite the presence of Christ to guide you through your sabbath. • 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 Sunday. • 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.

RESOURCES ON SABBATH

Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight by Norman Wirzba

Sabbath by Wayne Muller

Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now by Walter Brueggemann

Sabbath Keeping by Lynne M. Baab

24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life by Matthew Sleeth