

How to have a Sabbath

What?

The Sabbath is a day blessed by God and set aside for rest and worship. One of the most important practices of Jesus was finding rest and making time for Sabbath. The human condition is prone to restlessness and our digital age and consumerist culture only exacerbates the problem. We must model the restfulness of Jesus, which is more than just a day, but is a spirit we live by all week long.

Why?

“Sabbath is that uncluttered time and space in which we can distance ourselves from our own activities enough to see what God is doing.”

—Eugene Peterson

Bible reference:

“Come to me, all who are weary and I will give them rest.” -Jesus

A quick introduction to Sabbath

We live in a cultural moment of restlessness. The unsatisfied desires of our human condition are exacerbated by the barrage of digital marketing from a consumption- oriented, consumer-driven economy. But rest doesn’t come from buying a product; it comes from Sabbath. A word that literally means stopping. The Sabbath is an entire day set aside to stop - stop working, stop wanting, stop worrying, etc.—and to simply rest in God’s presence.

Most followers of Jesus no longer practice Sabbath. This means many of us are missing out on one of the most life-giving practices of the way of Jesus, and arguably, one of the most important for the culture today.

Since this Practice is brand new for many of us, the goal 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; and spend the day in Sabbath rest. It sounds easy, but, like all good things, it takes practice. So be patient with yourself, with this Practice, and with God. Let yourself settle into the “rest for your soul” that Jesus has to offer.

Do it: How to have a Sabbath

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

Decide in advance if you want to begin in the evening—with a dinner or just before bed—or in the morning. We recommend starting in the evening, but there's no "right way."

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:

- 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). 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 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 preserve.
 - 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 ending with prayers of gratitude.

3. Spend an entire day in rest and worship.

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.

Adapt your day to your personality, preference, 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.

Sample schedule of what our (The Poteet Family) Sabbath looks like:

- The Sabbath Scramble - Prep the house Friday afternoon. Clean, do dishes, prep dinner and meals for Saturday. This is done before the start of Sabbath.
- Put phones and computers away. As much as possible, stay away from work and digital devices.
- Begin Sabbath by lighting a sabbath candle (our daughter loves to be the one to light it).
- Have a family dinner. Talk about our week and what we hope God does during our Sabbath rest.
- Put our son to bed, grab a glass of wine (Jennie) and a bottle of root beer (Josh) and watch a movie, read or talk in the sunroom or on the deck outside.
- Time with Jesus in the morning with a good cup of coffee.
- Family Breakfast on Saturday morning.
- Whatever looks like rest or worship for the day.
- Have worship playing throughout the house all day (sometimes we have random dance parties with our kids to worship music).
- Take walks around our neighborhood.
- Play board games as a family.
- Draw, color or paint.
- Take a nap (we have little kids so we have to take turns).
- Build something with wood.
- Eat delicious food we prepped the day before or ordered from a favorite restaurant.
- Workout or go for a run (for some working out is restful and energizing, for others this would be the last thing to include on a Sabbath).
- Gather with a few family or friends to break our sabbath with dinner and board games. (Share about our Sabbath during dinner, share things we are thankful for).

4. Think through what could be helpful to spend time doing the day or so before your Sabbath. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Go grocery shopping and stock your kitchen with food.
- Pre-make your dinner (soup, enchiladas, or some kind of casserole are great options).
- Clean or pick up your house or apartment.
- Answer all phone messages and return all text messages (maybe even get your inbox to zero!).
- Plan out a rough schedule for your Sabbath. (This could even include setting up when and where you want to meet up with your friend for coffee or to go on a walk.) Remember, of course, to take it slow and give yourself plenty of space.
- Think of something you can do to make the day stand apart: a special dessert, a trip to a local donut or coffee shop, a picnic at the park, a spiritual book you love, a friend with whom you want to have coffee, etc.
- Pro-tip for parents – Set aside “sabbath toys.” These are special toys or games that your kids only have during Sabbath.

5. Consider turning off your phone and computer for your Sabbath

There are so many benefits to this, the least of which is that you are actually able to stay present to yourself and God when you aren't tethered to a device. The Sabbath was instilled by God for the people of Israel as a way to remind them that they are no longer slaves. Some people turn off their phones and laptops to remind themselves that they are not slaves to their devices. In reality, it can be easier said than done; we don't realize how tethered to devices we really are until we try to put them away for a bit. Here are some helpful ideas for how to make this happen:

- Actually put your phone and computer away in a box or closet after turning them off.
- Resist the temptation to allow your kids to make television their entire Sabbath.
- If 24 hours is just too much, or you aren't able to do it for some reason, try turning your phone on "Do Not Disturb" mode and only checking it every four hours.

Books on Sabbath

- "Garden City" - John Mark Comer
- "Ruthless Elimination of Hurry" – John Mark Comer
- "The Emotionally Healthy Leader" – Pete Scazzero