

Sabbath Rest

In this study series about spiritual disciplines, each week of this study will be structured a bit uniquely. The general flow will be to read 1-3 passages about the spiritual discipline, discuss the text and our experience with that spiritual discipline. Then we will spend time practicing it together and sharing how we will commit to practicing it this week.

Review the Last Practice ****Optional****

Leader Note: *As you and your group begin to review last week's Practice, it may be helpful to remind everyone that this is not a place to be hyper critical or judgemental of what was necessarily accomplished. This is to simply notice how it went, what felt hard, and be encouraged hearing from one another.*

Before we jump into tonight's Practice, let's reflect and talk about how this previous week went with setting aside intentional time to read the Scriptures daily.

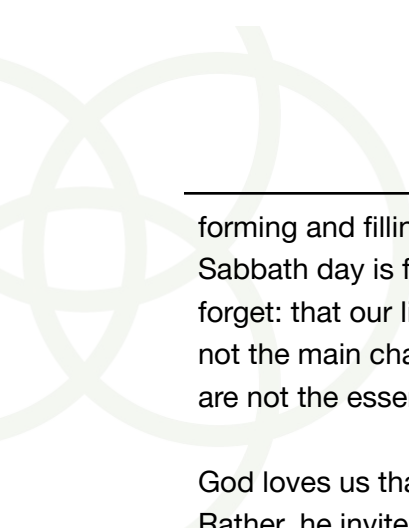
- **What was your daily rhythm of engaging the Practice of Scripture? How has God met you in that daily rhythm?**
- **How do you think this daily Practice impacted your week as a whole?**

Week Overview

In this cultural moment of over-working and under-resting, there is an invitation to us, as Jesus followers, to become awake and fully present to our lives through the practice of Sabbath.

The most literal meaning of the Hebrew verb shabbat (Sabbath) is – “to stop.” To sabbath is, in its most basic sense, to stop, to cease, to be done. So que the most recent ad you have seen trying to get you to book your next vacation on a remote beach or cruise, or the bed, bath and beyond ad for the perfect lounge chair, or bed. We all often look towards a day off, vacations, or the moment we get to crawl into bed because we all crave moments of peace, calm and rest.

In Genesis we are introduced to the Sabbath day at the very beginning of Creation. The Bible opens by describing the state of Creation before God got to work as formless and empty. The first six days — as God filled the earth with plants, animals, and human life — God was



forming and filling the void. Then, the seventh day of Creation is given a name: Sabbath. The Sabbath day is for remembering what the six working days of the week tend to make us forget: that our lives are playing out in the midst of a much larger story, within which we are not the main character. So, at the very least, Sabbath reminds us that we are not God — we are not the essential character to this story

God loves us that much that he has made a way for us to never have to carry such a burden. Rather, he invites us to be co-laborers as his image bearers. The way we quit, stop, take a break for Sabbath sets aside intentional time for us to attune our whole selves to that which is most eternal and true. Sabbath was never intended to be a day of reward, but of worship. True Sabbath rest creates the sort of freedom that satisfies our deepest desires to be with Jesus and give him room to form a new thing in us.

Tonight, we are going to take some time to talk about how Sabbath rest teaches us to plan and order our days with enough margin so that we can notice God in the ordinary and rest in his presence.

Sabbath Rest Discussion

Opening Questions

- What's your current understanding of the Sabbath?
- Is the Sabbath a part of your life currently or not?
- What thoughts and feelings do you have going into this Sabbath practice?
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Deuteronomy 5:12–15 (NIV)

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”

Matthew 11:28–30 (NIV)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Group Discussion Questions

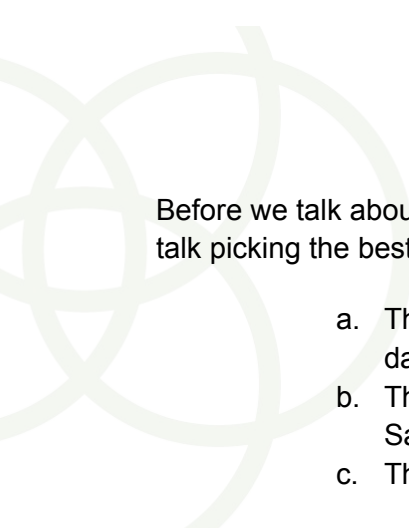
1. What are some insights you noticed about Sabbath-rest in these two passages?
2. What are the obstacles that get in the way of your practicing Sabbath-rest? Either practically or emotionally?
3. Where are you most tired? Physically? Mentally? Emotionally? Spiritually? What is the greatest drain on your energy?
4. What is the strongest force of resistance in your life (external or internal) that attempts to keep you from Sabbath rest?
5. What are the hardest things for you to say no to on the Sabbath?

NOTE: When we think about Sabbath sometimes we think its supposed to be a somber, serious day full of religious duty or other times we think its just a day to chill, relax and sleep. Both of these sides of the spectrum miss the essential truth that Sabbath is designed by God to give yourself fully to delight in God’s world, in your life in it and ultimately in God himself.

6. Does joy come more naturally to you? Or is it more of a struggle for your personality?
7. Are you in a season of joy or sorrow or both? What might taking a step to practice Sabbath-rest look like for you in this season of your life?
8. How do you enjoy God? What practices, disciplines, or activities bring you genuine joy in God?
9. What “false gods” are you tempted to worship, which, while they may be very good things (or not), pull you away from keeping God at the center of your Sabbath-rest?

Application Discussion

A well-planned Sabbath is less like *grabbing* for rest and more like learning to *open* our hands to receive it from God. When we lean solely on our own understanding, we often confuse rest with comfort, where we escape from exhaustion, sleep-deprivation, hurry, and overstimulation. Rest requires more effort and intention than comfort or other indulgences and it produces a much greater return. God gave us such a gift in Sabbath: one day a week to taste what awaits us forever. As we practice Sabbath, we get to figure out what is necessary for planning and preparing so that these 4 elements can exist: **Stop, Rest, Delight, Contemplate.**



Before we talk about how we might be able to work these 4 elements into our Sabbath-rest let's first talk picking the best time for you to practice Sabbath. There are three basic options.

- a. The Christian Sabbath on Sunday, which is best for most of us since it's also our day of worship.
- b. The traditional Sabbath from sundown on Friday night to the same time on Saturday.
- c. The midweek Sabbath for those with nontraditional work schedules.

If an entire day is too much for you, that's fine. Start where you are. We recommend you set aside a three-to-four hour time period, either after church on Sunday or on a weekend night, turn off your phone, and just stop. And if at all possible, get into a rhythm with Sabbath on the same day each week. Your body will "memorize" the day, begin to anticipate it in the days before, and live off its energy and joy in the days after.

Now let's unpack the 4 essential elements of a Sabbath.

1. **Stop.** Stop working, not when things are necessarily finished, or each email has a response, or when that project is done that's due tomorrow. We get to stop simply because it's time to stop.
2. **Rest.** Worship by resting, engaging in activities that help make you more present to your life and to those you love.
3. **Delight.** We don't have to enter Sabbath so seriously that we don't sprinkle in some of our favorite foods, or favorite drink, or favorite hobbies. Be sure to include simple pleasures and things that bring you joy.
4. **Contemplate.** We aim our attention, prayers, and desires on what God has *already* given to us. We contemplate the many ways we see and know God's presence and power in our ordinary lives.

Let's start by hearing from one another how these elements could be part of a 24 hour Sabbath practice.

- What invitation(s) do you sense Jesus offering you in Sabbath?
- What choice or change in perspective would you need to make in order to truly stop working to enter into Sabbath?
- What do you delight in? And how could you include that in your practice of Sabbath?
- What comes to mind when you think about the unique ways you'd need to prepare and plan ahead for Sabbath? Is there a family member or friend you could invite into your practice?
- How would contemplating God's presence and power in your ordinary life shape how you rest?