



SABBATH WAY OF LIFE

A New Vision for Sabbath

What comes to mind when you hear the word Sabbath? For many who have grown up in the Midwest, Sabbath stirs up the nostalgia of a slow Sunday in a small town community - church services, yard work, Colts football, a day off, and perhaps a set of legalistic rules and laws about what you can't do or where you can't go or what you can't purchase.

Sabbath, however, was never intended to be merely a day of recreation, prohibition, or down time for tired workers. The Sabbath was a 24 hour period of sacred time created and blessed by God to teach us a new way of life characterized by delight. The practice of Sabbath makes space for core human activities like rest, worship, silence, solitude, feasting, play, sex, singing, prayer, laughter, art, and long walks in nature.

Sabbath isn't a luxury for the spiritually elite - it is a necessity for anyone who desires to find the healing and wholeness God intended for his redeemed people in a broken world.

While the relentless pressures and pace of a modern, globalized city like Indianapolis present some unique obstacles to slowing down, the truth is that the war for Sabbath is an ancient one faced by every generation of God's people. It is the battle for the deep delight and joy of living into our identity as God's beloved and liberated children.

Over the next several weeks, we want to invite you to participate in a crazy, countercultural experiment with a Sabbath way of life. Don't worry about getting this practice "right" - the goal is for you to listen to God and discover some rhythms that work for you in this season of life. Our hope is that these weekly practices serve as "training wheels" that you integrate into the larger framework of your life with God and other people.

Community of Practice

Significant and sustainable change requires a community of support. We highly recommend that you work through this guide with your missional community, discipleship group, family, roommates, or co-workers. Ideally, this “community of practice” should gather weekly or bi-weekly at a set time (approximately an hour) with some delicious food or drinks to set the right atmosphere. The goal isn’t to rigidly follow the guide, but rather to stimulate healthy conversations, reflection, experiments, and accountability.

WEEK ONE: SLOWING DOWN FOR DELIGHT

Read this Overview

In a recent health survey, we found that the majority of people in our church community do not regularly practice Sabbath (a 24 hour period of time set aside for delight, rest, feasting, and worship). These findings were unsurprising given the fact that most of us have never learned the values and habits undergirding this ancient way of life.

The goal of this first week is simply to set aside some period of time for delight, rest, feasting, and worship. Begin by asking yourself the question, “What would I do for a 24 hour period of time if the only criteria was to pursue my deepest joy in God?” Be patient with God, yourself, and others - this is going to take time to resist opposing forces and learn to surrender yourself to delight!

Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Choose a prayer phrase to silently repeat that expresses your openness and desire to welcome God’s presence into this moment. Examples could include “Be still and know that I am God” or “Come Holy Spirit.”

If you want a guide for your time of silence considering using this Prayer of Examen:

Holy Spirit we welcome you into our community and we feel your love for us. Guide us as we think about our day today. Help us to remember all the moments both big and small (Pause). Help us to remember moments of kindness and generosity and how to be thankful for them (Pause). Help us to remember moments where we did not listen to your voice. Holy Spirit what should we ask for forgiveness today and what behavior should we turn away from (Pause). Help us to look toward tomorrow with the confidence that you will guide and take care of us. May we see you at work once again.

Close this time with spontaneous prayer or one of the following fixed prayers:

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way!

Psalm 139:23-24

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord; And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

Discuss the Sunday teaching (15-20 minutes)

Either in a large group or smaller groups of 3-4, read Exodus 31:12-18 out loud.

Discuss one or more of the following questions:

1. What resonated with you from Sunday's teaching?
2. Why was the practice of Sabbath so central to God's people throughout history?
3. What dimension of Sabbath (Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting) appeals to you most in this season? Least? Why?
4. What challenges did keeping Sabbath likely present for the Jews? What obstacles are similar and different in our lives today?
5. How is Sabbath different than a day off or vacation?

"Scheme" together for the coming week's practice (15-30 minutes)

Practice: Slowing down for Sabbath rest

- Select a period of time (ideally 24 hours) for rest, praying, and playing this week
- Identify a ritual to start and end your Sabbath (candles, food and drink, music, etc)
- Silence, turn off, and/or hide digital devices (or at least limit to a few check-ins)
- Begin the day by reciting a Psalm or the Lord's Prayer
- Engage in some life-giving activities and relationships (Parents: include your children but also consider coordinating childcare to get some personal time)

- Conclude your day with a Psalm or the Lord's Prayer as well as sharing a meal with family or friends

Payoff: Slowing down for Sabbath isn't just getting a break from work; it is a redefinition of why we work, how we work, and how we create freedom through our work.

Preparation:

Either in a large group or smaller groups of 3-4, scheme together to help one another experiment more deeply with rhythms of Sabbath. Discuss the following:

- What hopes and fears do you have around trying this experiment?
- How can you make this experiment special and delightful?
- What day of the week will you Sabbath?
- What is a realistic goal for you?
- What preparations, considerations, or changes need to occur to make this happen?
- What kinds of activities would be life-giving?
- What "best practices" have others experimented with that could help us?
- Who can you invite to support you in this practice?

Close with Reflective Prayer (5-10 minutes)

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Consider slowly praying the Lord's Prayer together:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

WEEK TWO: GRATITUDE AND PLAY

Read this Overview

In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was a day for people to cease from their usual commercial activities to playfully enjoy God and their neighbors. Gratitude displaced envy, reconciliation healed divisions, communal feasting replaced individualistic hoarding, and the joy of the Lord overwhelmed the grief of living in a broken world.

Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Choose a prayer phrase to silently repeat that expresses your openness and desire to welcome God's presence into this moment. Examples could include "Be still and know that I am God" or "Come Holy Spirit."

If you want a guide for your time of silence considering using this Prayer of Examen:

Holy Spirit we welcome you into our community and we feel your love for us. Guide us as we think about our day today. Help us to remember all the moments both big and small (Pause). Help us to remember moments of kindness and generosity and how to be thankful for them (Pause). Help us to remember moments where we did not listen to your voice. Holy Spirit what should we ask for forgiveness today and what behavior should we turn away from (Pause). Help us to look toward tomorrow with the confidence that you will guide and take care of us. May we see you at work once again.

Close this time with spontaneous prayer or one of the following fixed prayers:

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way!

Psalms 139:23-24

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who

confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord; And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

Debrief last week's practice (10 minutes)

Break up into smaller groups and debrief using these questions:

1. How did it go? What impact did it have on your week?
2. What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
3. What changes need to be made to make this better in the future?
4. What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?

Discuss the Sunday teaching (10-15 minutes)

Read Leviticus 25:1-17 out loud and discuss one or more of the following questions:

1. What resonated with you from Sunday's teaching?
2. What impact does Sabbath have on our relationships & society?
3. How does the idea of limiting productivity for the common good run counter to our dominate Western narratives? Is this kind of thinking even realistic?
4. How might the church imagine new ways to observe the Sabbath ladder?

"Scheme" together for the coming week's practice (15-30 minutes)

Practice: Scheduling intentional time to play and be grateful for God's grace

- Plan to spend your Sabbath doing something playful, fun, and childlike. Ideas could include nature, art, sports, reading fiction, cooking, singing, or playing games with friends. The main point is that you're enjoying life, not trying to get it done.
- Remember some funny or embarrassing stories from your childhood that family and friends may not be aware of and tell them. Make sure to laugh really hard.
- Take some time during the day to write down at least 3 things you're grateful for. Express them to God in a prayer, song, poem, or drawing.
- Pick at least one person a day and tell them why you're grateful for them.

Payoff: Playful gratitude opens our eyes to the joy and freedom of being God's children

Preparation:

Either in a large group or smaller groups of 3-4, scheme together to help one another experiment more deeply with rhythms of silence & solitude. Discuss the following:

- What hopes and fears do you have around trying this experiment?
- What role does play & gratitude have in your apprenticeship to Jesus? Where might God be inviting you to grow?
- What preparations, considerations, or changes need to occur to make this happen?
- What “best practices” have others experimented with that could help us?

Close with Reflective Prayer (5-10 minutes)

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Consider slowly praying the Lord’s Prayer together:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

WEEK THREE: SILENCE & SOLITUDE

Read this Overview

The great philosopher Blaise Pascal once quipped, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” While we often feel the pull to slow down and quiet the deafening roar of our anxious inner world, the pace and pushiness of Western culture has formed us into busy creatures for whom that kind of life seems impossible.

And yet, God invites us to “be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). We frequently see Jesus pulling away from the relentless demands of his ministry to spend unhurried time alone with his Heavenly Father and sometimes his disciples. Silence and solitude are not spiritual luxuries reserved for the introverted among us - they are essential practices for every apprentice of Jesus who desires to bring a transforming presence into their families, networks, and neighborhoods.

Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Choose a prayer phrase to silently repeat that expresses your openness and desire to welcome God’s presence into this moment. Examples could include “Be still and know that I am God” or “Come Holy Spirit.”

If you want a guide for your time of silence considering using this Prayer of Examen:

Holy Spirit we welcome you into our community and we feel your love for us. Guide us as we think about our day today. Help us to remember all the moments both big and small (Pause). Help us to remember moments of kindness and generosity and how to be thankful for them (Pause). Help us to remember moments where we did not listen to your voice. Holy Spirit what should we ask for forgiveness today and what behavior should we turn away from (Pause). Help us to look toward tomorrow with the confidence that you will guide and take care of us. May we see you at work once again.

Close this time with spontaneous prayer or one of the following fixed prayers:

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way!

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord; And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

Debrief last week's practice (10 minutes)

Break up into smaller groups and debrief using these questions:

1. How did it go? What impact did it have on your week?
2. What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
3. What changes need to be made to make this better in the future?
4. What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?

Discuss the Sunday teaching (10-15 minutes)

Read Luke 5:15-16 out loud and discuss one or more of the following questions:

1. What resonated with you from Sunday's teaching?
2. Why do you think Jesus withdrew to lonely places?
3. What barriers to silence & solitude did Jesus likely face? How are those similar or different to your own?
4. What does silence & solitude look like for you in this season of life? What emotions do these practices stir in you (good or bad)?

"Scheme" together for the coming week's practice (15-30 minutes)

Practice: Creating intentional space for silence & solitude

- Identify a specific place and time where you can be alone and silent. Don't limit this to indoors - get out in nature for a meditative walk, run, or bike!

- Turn off or silence digital devices
- Begin with a modest goal - ten to fifteen minutes is a great starting point
- Find a comfortable yet alert physical position
- Begin the time with short breath prayer phrases that express your openness and desire for God - consider phrases like “Speak Lord your servant is listening” or “Come Holy Spirit” or “Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy on me a sinner.”
- Notice and name what thoughts, feelings, and desires rise to the surface. Rather than seeing these as distractions, allow them to pass before you and offer them to God. Write down any insights God might be bringing to your attention.
- Close your time in silence with a prayer of gratitude or pray the Lord’s prayer
- Integrate silence and solitude into the little moments of conversation or waiting throughout the day. Let someone else talk while you listen & pray silently for them. Capture the minutes in between meetings, school carpooling, or ball games to be reminded that God is present with you working out his purposes in your life.
- If your job and family allow for it, take a block of time to practice complete silence in the midst of your normal, everyday routines. Let those closest to you know in advance and return their texts/emails/calls after your time is up.

Payoff: Spending intentional time being silent and alone with God will allow me to be more present in conversations and relationships with others.

Preparation:

Either in a large group or smaller groups of 3-4, scheme together to help one another experiment more deeply with rhythms of silence & solitude. Discuss the following:

- What hopes and fears do you have around trying this experiment?
- How could others around you benefit from your practice of silence & solitude?
- What pockets of time could be captured & redeemed with intentional silence & solitude? What is a realistic goal for you?
- What preparations, considerations, or changes need to occur to make this happen?
- What “best practices” have others experimented with that could help us?

Close with Reflective Prayer (5-10 minutes)

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Consider slowly praying the Lord’s Prayer together:

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WEEK FOUR: RETREAT

Read this Overview

There are seasons in life when we feel foggy, exhausted, fearful, or restless but we can't seem to figure out why. Worse still, the relentless pressure and demands of a busy life offer us no vision for relief anytime soon. How do we break this vicious cycle?

Throughout the history of God's people, retreats have played a critical role in catalyzing deeper levels of rest, awareness, and guidance. Retreats invite us to an extended period of silence and solitude where we can pay attention to God's past, present, and future movements in our lives. As author Emilie Griffin puts it, "A retreat is a generous commitment to our friendship with God." Retreats aren't only for the economic, spiritual, or cultural elite - this rhythm has been effectively adopted by the ordinary working class (singles, parents, business folks, and the like) for centuries as a means for significant transformation.

In Mark 6:30, Jesus called to his disciples: "Come away to a deserted place...and rest awhile." Jesus offers the same invitation right now to our tired, weary, overwhelmed souls. Will you join him?

Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Choose a prayer phrase to silently repeat that expresses your openness and desire to welcome God's presence into this moment. Examples could include "Be still and know that I am God" or "Come Holy Spirit."

If you want a guide for your time of silence considering using this Prayer of Examen:

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Close this time with spontaneous prayer or one of the following fixed prayers:

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way!

Psalm 139:23-24

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord; And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

Debrief last week's practice (10 minutes)

Break up into smaller groups and debrief using these questions:

1. How did it go? What impact did it have on your week?
2. What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
3. What changes need to be made to make this better in the future?
4. What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?

Discuss the Sunday teaching (10-15 minutes)

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18 out loud and discuss one or more of the following questions:

1. What resonated with you from Sunday's teaching?
2. How did God care for Elijah during his time of solitude? What does that say about how God wants to relate to us during seasons of exhaustion?
3. What is Elijah's response to God's invitation? What is the result?
4. What could it look like for you to stand and wait for God's presence through an experience of solitude? Why is that so difficult for most of us?

"Scheme" together for the coming week's practice (15-30 minutes)

Practice: Taking a 24-48 hour retreat for silence & solitude

- Decide if you want to retreat alone or include family and friends
- Choose a reasonable location for your retreat. Some affordable ideas:
 - Retreat centers, camps, or monasteries (email christa@somaindy.com for a list)
 - Lake houses
 - The White River Canal in Downtown Indy
 - State Parks (Eagle Creek & Brown County are close spots)
- Finish work and leave technology at home. If you choose to bring a phone be sure to power it off or limit checking it to a minimum.
- Bring a Bible, pen, and journal.
- Create a flexible plan for your retreat and communicate your intentions to those who need to know (family, friends, boss, direct reports, etc). Here are some suggestions for elements to incorporate:
 - Scripture reading and prayer. Themes and guided resources can be helpful.
 - Naps
 - Physical activity: walking, running, biking, hiking, singing
 - Creating: drawing, painting, writing, nature walks. Be curious & open.
 - Self-Awareness: What thoughts, feelings, and desires are stirring? Name them.
- Execute your retreat. Don't wait for the perfect conditions. Just do it! If you can't do a full day, find a pocket of time for a few hours in the city. The same principles apply to four hours as they do to twenty-four hours.

Payoff: Extended periods of silence & solitude give us the opportunity for deeper awareness, intimacy, and clarity that renews our presence with God & others

Preparation in community:

Either in a large group or smaller groups of 3-4, scheme together to help one another experiment more deeply with rhythms of silence & solitude. Discuss the following:

- What hopes and fears do you have around trying this experiment?
- How could a retreat benefit you and those closest to you in the current season?
- What preparations, considerations, or changes need to occur to make this happen?
- What "best practices" have others experimented with that could help us?

Close with Reflective Prayer (5-10 minutes)

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Consider slowly praying the Lord's Prayer together:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Resources for the Journey

BOOKS

- *Sabbath* by Dan Allender
- *An Invitation to Retreat* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *An Invitation to Silence & Solitude* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *Practices of Love* by Kyle Bennett
- *Wilderness Time* by Emilie Griffin
- *Making All Things New* by Henri Nouwen
- *The Relational Soul* by Rich Plass & Jim Cofield
- *Emotionally Healthy Leader* by Pete Scazzero
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard

ARTICLES

- [Solitude: A Practical Guide](#) by Adele Calhoun
- [Spirituality for Our Time](#) by Phileena Heuertz
- [A Rule of Life for Redemptive Entrepreneurs](#) by Praxis Labs
- [Redeeming Your Time & Energy](#) by Praxis Labs
- [Bring Back the Sabbath](#) by Judith Shulevitz
- [The Key to the Keys to the Kingdom](#) by Dallas Willard

PODCASTS

- [Sabbath](#) by Dan Allender
- [Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership](#) by Ruth Haley Barton
- [Solitude & Community](#) by the Bible Project

VIDEOS

- [Practicing Sabbath Delight](#) by Pete Scazzero
- [Sabbath in a Time of Unrest](#) by Judith Shulevitz
- [Observing the Sabbath](#) by Matthew Sleeth

ONLINE COURSES

- Sabbath Rest by Redeemer Faith & Work (\$5)