



# SABBATH KEEPING

## sab•bath

/ˈsəbəTH/

*noun*

1. a day of religious observance and abstinence from work, kept by Jewish people from Friday evening to Saturday evening, and by most Christians on Sunday.

We have been created with an innate need for a regular time of rest and sabbath keeping. Unfortunately, because of today's fast pace, we are becoming a people who are losing the ability to rest. So why is sabbath so challenging to incorporate into our lives? Our drive for success and the advancement of technology has sped up our productivity level to the point that we strive beyond rational boundaries. We were not created to be in perpetual motion mentally and physically- the rest of body, mind, and soul have fallen by the wayside. When we do not rest, we lose our way. When we engage with others in conversation, the question, "How are you doing?" is often met with the response "I'm so busy." If we are honest, there is a small degree of pride in the response. It seems the busier we are, the more important we appear to others.

The shades of legalism that have tainted the idea of sabbath keeping over the centuries also complicate this rhythm of rest. Some schools of thought were so restrictive that the winsome rest and rejuvenation of sabbath were lost. Jesus admonished the Pharisees by stating, *"The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath."* Mark 2:27 (NLT)

## Why don't we Sabbath?

You may be thinking the idea of taking time for sabbath is out of the question because of one of the following mindsets. If you do not see yours represented, fill in your own.

- I feel guilty when I am not being productive.
- I must fit in with the pace of those around me.
- I have too much on my plate to stop.
- I don't want to appear lazy.
- I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I took time off.
- Staying busy is my way of avoidance.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## The History of Sabbath

We are introduced to the rhythm of sabbath in Genesis; *"So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day, God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation."* (vs.2-3, NLT). God himself modeled the rhythm of rest. It is important to note that the day God chose to rest is the first time he designates something holy.

The practice of sabbath keeping is again highlighted in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:8, *"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."* (NLT) When God is directing us to set aside a day explicitly for him, we may conclude this is an outdated commandment for today's pace of life and its demands, but the commandment is still relevant today because the truth never changes, and neither does our need for rest. The incorporation of sabbath does not have to be a hopeless situation. God foresaw your need for rest and peace, and he has enacted a plan. It is not a process that needs to be complicated or overwhelming. You need to take it one step at a time and incorporate sabbath keeping in bite-sized pieces. May your motivation be that God deeply desires to have fellowship with you. No matter what day or how much time you choose to give him, God is pleased with and will honor the intentions of your heart



## Baby Steps

You may be asking yourself, “where do I begin?”. The answer is, “right where you are.” Thinking that sabbath keeping is a hard-and-fast rule of Sunday is not necessarily the place to begin. Give yourself grace, and remember it takes practice. There will be trial and error until you find the right rhythm for you. Also, keep in mind that, as your stage in life changes, so may your practice of sabbath keeping.

- Begin by taking a look at your schedule. Is there a pattern to your weekly schedule? Maybe you need to begin by just looking at next week. In the next seven days, where is there a portion of time? This could be anything from an hour to an entire day.
- Protect the time that you schedule for sabbath. Place a sabbath appointment on your calendar. Treat it just as you would a doctor’s appointment or a business meeting. When asked if you are available during your scheduled sabbath time, you can truthfully respond that you have a meeting schedule.
- Remember that this is an offering to God and, as a residual, it is an offering to your family, friends, and ministry.

*“Beginning is always the hardest part. Whatever time you choose to Sabbath, wipe the minutes clean of work. No answering emails, starting new projects, or ordering groceries online; no reorganizing drawers or polishing shoes. What brings you joy and peace and closer to the heart of God? Your answer will help to define what rest looks like for you. Rhythms, unlike routines, bring intention toward our choices and order back from chaos. A life of intention ultimately leads to deep satisfaction.” Shelly Miller*

## Sabbath consists of...

(Excerpts from the article What you should do on the **Sabbath**, Rick Warren)

- Rest your body. If you don’t take time off, your body will make you take time off. Your back will go out. You’ll get a headache. You’ll get the flu. God didn’t design our bodies to go without rest. That’s why sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do on your Sabbath is take a nap!
- Recharge your emotions. Everyone does this differently. For some, recharging happens through quietness. Others rejuvenate through recreation. Still, others reener-



gize through relationships. Discover what it takes to recharge your emotions and make it a regular part of your Sabbath.

- **Refocus your spirit.** You need to worship on your Sabbath. Take time to focus on God instead of all your problems. Worship puts everything else in perspective. It shrinks your problems. It reminds you that God is still on his throne, and he'll help you through whatever you're facing. Suddenly the problem you've stressed over all week long won't be nearly as big anymore.

## Practically Speaking

To uncomplicate this sabbath journey, keep thinking of this rhythm consisting of three important ingredients – worship, rest, and delight.

**Worship** – If Sunday is your sabbath time, then the morning church service offers you a time of worship. If your family situation allows you to be in silence until you get to church, this can help you prepare your spirit for what God wants to say to you. This can be a buffering time to detoxify your soul from the noise of the world and allow it to surface to hear God's message.

You may need to choose another day and time for sabbath worship. Whatever day it is, linger over devotional reading. Find online personal retreat ideas to stimulate your time with God.

The Spiritual Life Development Department (USA East) provides a DIY Personal Retreat resource to help your sabbath worship. [sld.saconnects.org/diyretreat](http://sld.saconnects.org/diyretreat)

**Rest** -Our bodies are God's greatest creation – care for it. This may take the form of a nap or reading a good book (no self-help or academic reading...something recreational).

You may need to simply sit and listen to your body. What is it saying? Where have you overworked it? Have you taken advantage of it? Sit in God's presence and ask what physical changes you need to take to make this gift from God what he has designed it to be.

**Delight** -Take a hike, watch a movie, bake, invite friends over for a sabbath meal, engage

in your favorite hobby. What do you enjoy doing? What have you always wanted to attempt to do? God wants you to delight in the life he has given you. This is a time to allow creative juices to flow, rejuvenate your spirit and body.

## **Sabbath is not a solo act**

Remember, God has created us for community. We have significant people in our lives – family, friends – they are gifts from God. Sabbath-keeping can include time with them. It will not only renew and rejuvenate relationships but also restore them.

## **Sabbath Prompts**

(Excerpts from Rhythms of **Rest**, by Shelly Miller)

1. How do preconceived ideas about sabbath block a rhythm of rest in your life?
2. This week, write down some of the false messages you've heard about Sabbath and surrender them to Jesus. Meditate on Matthew 11:28-30; journal how God is replacing misguided perspectives with truth.
3. Preparation is one of the keys for a rich Sabbath experience. Think of some practical ways you can prepare during the week to make rest a reality.
4. Take time this week to do something just for yourself. Visit somewhere new, walk another path, meet a friend for a chat, do something that isn't about obtaining a preferred outcome—Journal what you learn from the experience.
5. What are some small ways you can begin to trust God with your time this week? Share with an accountability partner.

## **A Rhythm of Rest – You're Invited**

*"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."* Matthew 11:29 (MSG)

## **Books for further discovery:**

- **Rhythm of Rest**, Shelly Miller
- **Invitation to Retreat**, Ruth Haley Barton
- **Sabbath**, Wayne Muller
- **Keeping the Sabbath Wholly**, Marva J. Dawn



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