



Stop

Overview

In Week 1 we explore the first movement of Sabbath and the most literal meaning of the Hebrew verb *shabbat* — “to stop.” To sabbath is, at it’s most basic, to *stop*, to cease, to be done.

Peruse any popular magazine and pay close attention to the advertisements — a couple lounging in bed and reading the paper, a woman and her dog napping on the couch, a group of friends on the beach for a picnic — they are all images of stopping. Marketing departments the world over know that you crave a life with Sabbath, or what Marva Dawn called a “Sabbath spirituality” — a life with moments of peace, ease, calm. And they are offering to sell you Sabbath. The irony is you don’t need to buy anything to sabbath, you just need to stop.

In the Genesis story, the Creator God himself rested on the seventh day, and in doing so he built a rhythm into the fabric of creation. For six days we work and labor and wrestle with the earth, but on the seventh day, we stop. We breathe. We come to rest.

When we live in alignment with this ancient, primal rhythm, as Jesus did, we find what Jesus called “rest for our souls.” But when we fight or chafe against or attempt to outsmart this innate, bodily cadence, we fracture our soul’s wholeness into a million pieces. Exhaustion, confusion, alienation from God and others, harm to the earth and the poor, and even spiritual death are all the toxic waste of a life without Sabbath.

In Week 1, we experiment with Sabbath as a day to stop.

Practice

WEEK 01: STOP

01 Pick a time to sabbath, and give it a try

There are three basic options.

1. The Christian Sabbath on Sunday, which is best for most of us since it's also our day of worship.
2. The traditional Sabbath from sundown on Friday night to the same time on Saturday.
3. The midweek Sabbath for those with non-traditional 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*.

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.

In biblical theology, the day begins at sundown, not sunrise as in the modern mindset. By the end of the week, many of us are too exhausted to really enjoy our Sabbath. For that reason, we recommend you begin at night, if at all possible. Start with a Sabbath meal with your community (more on that in Week 3), or simply light a candle and say a short prayer before you fall asleep.

02 Pick a beginning and ending ritual

In a traditional Sabbath ceremony, called the *Kiddush*, you begin by lighting candles, praying, and eating a Sabbath meal with your family and community. And you end by praying and sharing the highlight of your Sabbath.

You can do exactly that, or you can let Sunday worship with your church mark the start, or you can get creative—start with a picnic, bonfire, or hot bath. Let your creativity guide you.

Feel free to use the companion volume *Sabbath Meditations* from *Practicing the Way*.

03 Pick one to three Sabbath activities to enter into the spirit of Sabbath

If you read the wider Sabbath literature, some of which is as old as the New Testament itself, you discover there are 12 common activities that fill up a traditional Sabbath.

1. Lighting the candles
2. Blessing the children
3. Eating a Sabbath meal
4. Expressing gratitude
5. Singing
6. Worshiping with your church
7. Walking
8. Napping
9. Making love to your spouse
10. Reading, especially Scripture
11. Spending time alone with God
12. Spending time with family and friends in conversation and celebration

This is not a “to-do list,” but more like 12 best practices that you are invited to grow into over time as your heart desires.

For Week 1, pick one to three that your heart is drawn to and sound appealing to your personality and stage of life. And just see what happens.

Reach Exercise

WEEK 01: STOP

Reading

Read the introduction and chapter 1 of *Sabbath* by Dan Allender (pp. 1-32).

Podcast

Listen to episode 1 of the Sabbath series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise

Sleep a full eight to nine hours every night for an entire week. Leading research from doctors and neuroscientists like Dr. Matthew Walker in his book *Why We Sleep* has documented a growing body of evidence that dramatically highlights the crucial role of sleep in our overall health and well being.

Contrary to popular opinion, the overwhelming majority of people need a full seven to nine hours of sleep every night. Mental illness, anxiety, depression, ADHD, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, even cancer have all been tied to insufficient sleep. For many of us, the first step toward becoming a person of love in Christ is learning to sleep a full eight hours every night.

Reach Exercise

WEEK 01: STOP

Here are 13 tips for getting a better night's sleep, from a study by NIH Medline Plus.

01 Stick to a sleep schedule.

Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. As creatures of habit, people have a hard time adjusting to changes in sleep patterns. Sleeping later on weekends won't fully make up for a lack of sleep during the week and will make it harder to wake up early on Monday morning.

02 Exercise is great, but not too late in the day.

Try to exercise at least 30 minutes on most days but not later than two to three hours before your bedtime.

03 Avoid caffeine and nicotine.

Coffee, colas, certain teas, and chocolate contain the stimulant caffeine, and its effects can take as long as eight hours to wear off fully. Therefore, a cup of coffee in the late afternoon can make it hard for you to fall asleep at night. Nicotine is also a stimulant, often causing smokers to sleep only very lightly. In addition, smokers often wake up too early in the morning because of nicotine withdrawal.

04 Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed.

Having a "nightcap" or alcoholic beverage before sleep may help you relax, but heavy use robs you of deep sleep and REM sleep, keeping you in the lighter stages of sleep. Heavy alcohol ingestion also may contribute to impairment in breathing at night. You also tend to wake up in the middle of the night when the effects of the alcohol have worn off.

05 Avoid large meals and beverages late at night.

A light snack is okay, but a large meal can cause indigestion that interferes with sleep. Drinking too many fluids at night can cause frequent awakenings to urinate.

06 If possible, avoid medicines that delay or disrupt your sleep.

Some commonly prescribed heart, blood pressure, or asthma medications, as well as some over-the-counter and herbal remedies for coughs, colds, or allergies, can disrupt sleep patterns. If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to see whether any drugs you're taking might be contributing to your insomnia and ask whether they can be taken at other times during the day or early in the evening.

07 Don't take naps after 3 p.m.

Naps can help make up for lost sleep, but late afternoon naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night.

08 Relax before bed.

Don't overschedule your day so that no time is left for unwinding. A relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to music, should be part of your bedtime ritual.

09 Take a hot bath before bed.

The drop in body temperature after getting out of the bath may help you feel sleepy, and the bath can help you relax and slow down so you're more ready to sleep.

10 Have a good sleeping environment.

Get rid of anything in your bedroom that might distract you from sleep, such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed, or warm temperatures. You sleep better if the temperature in the room is kept on the cool side. A TV, cell phone, or computer in the bedroom can be a distraction and deprive you of needed sleep. Having a comfortable mattress and pillow can help promote a good night's sleep. Individuals who have insomnia often watch the clock. Turn the clock's face out of view so you don't worry about the time while trying to fall asleep.



11 Have the right sunlight exposure.

Daylight is key to regulating daily sleep patterns. Try to get outside in natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes each day. If possible, wake up with the sun or use very bright lights in the morning. Sleep experts recommend that, if you have problems falling asleep, you should get an hour of exposure to morning sunlight and turn down the lights before bedtime.

12 Don't lie in bed awake.

If you find yourself still awake after staying in bed for more than 20 minutes, or if you are starting to feel worried, get up and do some relaxing activity until you feel sleepy. The anxiety of not being able to sleep can make it harder to fall asleep.

13 See a health professional if you continue to have trouble sleeping.

If you consistently find it difficult to fall or stay asleep and/or feel tired or not well rested during the day despite spending enough time in bed at night, you may have a sleep disorder. Your family healthcare provider or a sleep specialist should be able to help you, and it is important to rule out other health or emotional problems that may be disturbing your sleep.

Source: https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/pdf/MLP_Summer2012web.pdf

Sabbath Reflection

WEEK 01: STOP

Reflection is a key component in our spiritual formation.

Millenia ago, King David prayed in Psalm 139:

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

South African professor Trevor Hudson has said, “We don’t change from our experience, we change when we reflect on our experience.”

If you want to get the most out of this Practice, you need to do it and then *reflect* on it.



Sabbath Reflection

WEEK 01: STOP

In between your Sabbath and your next time together with the group for Week 2, take 10 minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 Where did I most experience God's nearness?

Note: Be as specific as possible as you write. Bullet points are fine, but if you write it out in narrative form your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.