

Discipleship Series
50+ Class – All Saints Presbyterian Church
Fall 2020 – November 15, 2020

Week 10: Cultivating Spiritual Maturity

—Disciplines to Abide in Christ & Stay Fresh, Particularly Thru “Sabbath-Keeping”—

1. Ten Spiritual Disciplines of All Saints Church – ways to stay fresh and abide in Christ

Taken from All Saints' Website ...

A. Word & Prayer

To be a Christian is to be in an on-going dialogue with the God of the Universe. God speaks, we speak. Scripture is the way God speaks to us, and prayer is how we respond to him. In the words of Eugene Peterson, "God speaks to us; our answers are our prayers." Being told just to "read Scripture and pray" is a little bit like being told by the doctor to exercise—half the battle is just getting started. So All Saints has put together a few simple ways to start incorporating this first practice in your daily life.

B. Small Groups

The Christian journey isn't walked alone, but in community with other Christians. We're not called to love, serve, know people in general, but specific and particular ones. It's in community that we mature and develop as Christ-followers with family, friends, and small groups. This community should most naturally be tied to one's local church community.

C. Study

The Christian life is complex. Scripture is complex. We need to learn from others. Christian theology is a wonderful resource, friend, and guide. Study occurs both in individual and group settings.

D. Spiritual Direction

A spiritual director is a coach, guide, friend. It's someone that's probably a little bit further along on the journey who can help lead through all the twists and turns. It's someone that you intentionally meet with every 6-8 weeks for prayer, direction, support. It's someone who listens, cares, questions, and counsels. It's someone you trust and respect and are willing to follow. It doesn't have to or need to be a clergy member. Often, the best directors are not clergy.

E. Sabbath

We're reminded every night that we are finite creatures in desperate need of rest. We're reminded more fully of that every week. But in a technological world, rest is especially hard to come by. We can work late into the night; e-mail, texts and calls seldom stop and our work hours are varied and blurred. But we still need to have rhythms, patterns, and habits where we put aside our work and rest so that we might be recreated and re-energized. The ancient Christian practice of Sabbath is a much-needed one today.

F. Retreat

This is a little longer version to the daily and weekly rest. It's a little longer version of daily reading and prayer. It's an extended and intensified time to listen, learn, pray, be silent, be alone and/or with others, and enjoy God's amazing grace.

G. Tithing & Sacrificial Giving

The apostle Paul asks the rhetorical question: What do you have, that you have not received? (1 Corinthians 4:7). The answer is nothing. Everything we have in life we have received as a gift. But, in our pride, we often think that the things we have attained in life have come from our own

strength, wisdom, and ingenuity. They haven't. They're all a gift. Even and especially our financial standing. Tithing or sacrificial giving is a tangible reminder that we're not ultimately to live self-directed lives, but God and other-directed ones. Sacrificial giving is a discipline to make us more generous, joyful, caring, and gracious people. The paradox of Christianity is that we are more blessed, satisfied, and fulfilled when we give, rather than when we receive. It was true of our Savior and it's true of us. The goal of sacrificial giving is to display the generosity of Jesus to us more fully in our giving to others.

H. **Fasting & Moderation**

We were not made for excess or over-indulgence in anything (other than God!), but to enjoy all things in moderation. One of the ancient practices of the church is to abstain from food (but also other things) for a season, so that we might more fully hunger for God. Learning how to deny ourselves is hard, but learning to say no and to live moderately is vital for those called to "take up our cross" and follow Jesus.

I. **Hospitality**

We were made for friendship, relationship, and community. True community isn't only receiving from others, but also giving to others. Hospitality is an ancient practice of loving neighbors, strangers, and friends in real and tangible ways. It's a way of opening up our lives to others and to God through them. It's a way of embodying the grace that we've received--God's lavish, loving, warm welcome.

J. **Service**

Just as Christ came not to be served, but to serve, so we also should seek to serve others in real and practical ways. Christian service isn't ultimately about a to-do list, but an attitude, stance, posture. The apostle Paul opened most of his letters with these words, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ." The Greek word he used was that of the lowest servant. This meant that for Paul, everybody was above him--children, slaves, barbarians. He was ready and eager to serve because he knew he had been served by Christ. Paul's posture is much-needed today as we seek to become more like Jesus, the true servant of all.

2. **Sabbath-Keeping – the spiritual discipline that's hard to receive and few seem to want**

A. **Key Scriptures**

Exodus 20:8-11 (NIV)—(Spoken by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai) "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (NIV)—(Spoken by Moses to Israel (the new generation) before going into the Promised Land.) "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ 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.

Isaiah 30:15 (NIV)—This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.

Psalm 46:10 (NIV)—"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Psalm 23:1-3 (NIV)—The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Psalm 127:1-2 (NIV)—Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. ² In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat-- for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Psalm 143:8-10 (NIV)—Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. ⁹ Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you. ¹⁰ Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)—Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Isaiah 58:12-14 (NIV)—Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. ¹³ "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, ¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)—"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Mark 2:23-28 (NIV)—One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." ²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Mark 6:31 (NIV)—Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Hebrews 4:6-11 (NIV)—It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. ⁷ Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

B. The Sabbath – Defined

"Biblical Sabbath is a twenty-four-hour block of time in which we stop work, enjoy rest, practice delight, and contemplate God. ...The apostle Paul considered one day for Sabbath as good as another (Romans 14). So the particular day of the week doesn't matter. What matters is to set aside a twenty-four-hour period and protect it. ... The fact that Sabbath happens weekly means that it has a rhythm, one that stands in stark contrast to the typical rhythm of the world around us...."

—Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team and the World* (2015), p. 144–145.

“It’s a small yet ample chunk of space, a narrow yet full segment of time. In it, you can lie down and rest. From it, you can rise up and go—stronger, lighter, ready to work again with vigor and a clear mind. It is room enough, time enough, in which to relinquish all encumbrances, to act as though their existence has nothing whatsoever to do with your own. It is an invitation, at one and the same time, to empty yourself and fill yourself.”

— Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (2006), p. xv.

“[W]hen I use the word Sabbath, I mean two things. I mean a day... I want to convince you, in part, that setting apart an entire day, one out of seven, for feasting and resting and worship and play is a gift and not a burden, and neglecting the gift too long will make your soul, like soil never left fallow, hard and dry and spent. ... But when I say Sabbath, I also mean an attitude. It is a perspective, an orientation. I mean a Sabbath heart, not just a Sabbath day. A Sabbath heart is restful even in the midst of unrest and upheaval. It is attentive to the presence of God and others even in the welter of much coming and going, rising and falling. It is still and knows God even when mountains fall into the sea. You will never enter the Sabbath day without a Sabbath heart.” *Id.* at 4.

“Maybe that’s what God requires most from us: our attention. Indeed, this is the essence of a Sabbath heart: paying attention. It is being fully present, wholly awake, in each moment.... True attentiveness burns away the layers of indifference and ... distraction—all those attitudes that blend our days into a monochrome sameness—and reveals what’s hidden beneath....” *Id.* at 50.

“Sabbath is God’s gift of repetitive and regular rest. It is given for our delight and communion with God. Time for *being* in the midst of a life of *doing* particularly characterizes the sabbath.”

—Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (2015), p. 40.

“If busyness can become a kind of violence, we do not have to stretch our perception very far to see that Sabbath time—effortless, nourishing rest—can invite a healing for this violence. When we consecrate a time to listen to the still, small voices, we remember the root of inner wisdom that makes work fruitful. We remember from where we are most deeply nourished and see more clearly the shape and texture of the people and things before us. ... Without rest, we respond from a survival mode, where everything we meet assumes a terrifying prominence... So, when we are moving faster and faster, every encounter, every detail inflates in importance, everything seems more urgent than it really is, and we react with sloppy desperation.”

— Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (1999), p.5.

“Sabbath time can be a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities, and accomplishments. Sabbath is a way of being in time where we remember who we are, remember what we know, and taste the gifts of spirit and eternity. ... Like a path through the forest, Sabbath, creates a marker for ourselves so, if we are lost, we can find our way back to our center. ‘Remember the Sabbath’ means ‘Remember that everything you have received is a blessing. Remember to delight in your life, in the fruits of your+ labor. Remember to stop and offer thanks for the wonder of it. Remember, as if we would forget. Indeed, the assumption is that we will forget. And history has proven that, given enough time, we will.’” *Id.* at 6.

“We, too, must have a period in which we live fallow, and restore our souls. In Sabbath time we remember to celebrate what is beautiful and sacred... It is a time to let our work, our lands, our animals lie fallow, to be nourished and refreshed. Within this sanctuary, we become available to the insights and blessings of deep mindfulness that arises only in stillness and time... In a complex and unstable world, if we do not rest, if we do not surrender into some kind of Sabbath, how can we find our way, how can we hear the voices that tell us the right thing to do?” *Id.* at 7.

“Sabbath time is time off the wheel, time when we take our hand from the plow and let God and the earth care for things, while we drink, if only for a few moments, from the fountain of rest and delight. ... Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is not just a day off when we catch up on television or errands. It is the presence of something that arises when we concentrate, a period of time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing, or true. It is time consecrated with our attention, our mindfulness, honoring those quiet forces of grace or spirit that sustain and heal us.” *Id.* at 8.

“Uncluttered time and space to distance ourselves from the frenzy of our own activities so we can see what God has been and is doing. ...Quieting the internal noise so we can hear the still small voice of the Lord...”

— Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*

“Sabbath-keeping is the primary discipline that helps us to live within the limits of our humanity and to honor God as our Creator. It is the kingpin of a life lived in sync—with the rhythms that God himself built into our world—and yet it is the discipline that seems hardest for us to practice. Sabbath-keeping honors the body’s need for rest, the spirit’s need for replenishment, and the soul’s need to delight itself in God for God’s own sake. It begins with the willingness to acknowledge the limits of our humanness and then taking steps to live more graciously within the order of things.... Sabbath-keeping is a way of ordering one’s whole life to honor the rhythm of things—work and rest, fruitfulness and dormancy, giving and receiving, being and doing, activism and surrender. The day itself is set apart, devoted completely to rest, worship and delighting in God and his good gifts, but the rest of the week must be lived in such a way as to make Sabbath possible.” — Ruth Haley Barton, *CT Pastors Magazine*, 7/27/16

“To be a Christian was, and is, to reorient one’s entire life and death around Jesus Christ. Sabbath is an orientation as well—an all-encompassing turning toward the Creator God that changes everything about our lives. Sabbath is that kind of complete reorientation of our lives toward the hope and redemption of Christ’s work. Sabbath baptizes our week into the grace and mercy of God.” Swoboda, p. 9.

“The Sabbath is an act of obedience to God to give up, for one day, carrying the burdens of the world and simply letting things be the way they are. When we enter the Sabbath, we become humbled by the fact that God cares far more for the broken world than we do. His lordship and care for the world do not cease when we choose to take a day to rest. We cannot help the world the way we are supposed to without moments of respite and holy indifference, when we turn our attention and compassion to the living God.” *Id.* at 59.

Four Foundational Characteristics of Sabbath Keeping

- **Stop:** “Sabbath is first and foremost a day when we cease all work—paid and unpaid. On the Sabbath we embrace our limits. We let go of the illusion that we are indispensable to the running of the world.”
- **Rest:** “Once we stop, we accept God’s invitation to rest. God rested after his work of creation.”
- **Delight:** “...God invites us to join in the celebration, to enjoy and delight in his creation and all the gifts he offers us.”
- **Contemplation:** “Pondering the love of God is the central focus of our Sabbaths. What makes a Sabbath a biblical Sabbath is that it is ‘holy to the Lord.’ We are not taking time off from God; we are drawing closer to him.” Scazzero, p. 147-149.

C. Sabbath Keeping is a Spiritual Discipline

“Sabbath-keeping is like any discipline of the Christian tradition. A discipline is any repeated and intentional action that God uses to change our hearts and minds. Disciplines are critical to the Christian life. And there are many disciplines in the Christian tradition, such as prayer, Scripture reading, churchgoing, and confession. Disciplines are external actions undertaken with the vision that God can

use them to reform our internal affections. We must once again envision the Sabbath not in terms of a day that 'just happens' but in terms of a discipline that transforms us inside. Sabbath is a proactive, intentional discipline, not an add-on that we get to when time makes space for it." Swoboda, p. 175.

"That is what a discipline is—it is something we do consistently that changes our hearts and minds over time. This is reflected in Paul's admonition to 'clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 13:14). What does it mean to put on Jesus Christ? ...None of us are born into the world with the character of Jesus Christ. Character comes over time as we follow Christ. Disciplines are a way to 'clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.' A discipline is putting on some attribute of Jesus in hopes that it changes the very makeup of our hearts and minds. ... Sabbath is a discipline we put on. When we practice the Sabbath, it may feel a bit like we are putting on someone else's clothing. And indeed we are. Sabbath is foreign clothing—nay, heavenly clothing—and it may not fit for a while. But the hope is that, in doing it over a long period of time, it brings about real and substantive changes to our hearts, minds, and attitudes. In short, with a discipline, we dress for the character and virtue we want, not the character and virtue we have. Repetition has tremendous value for the formation of our hearts." *Id.* at 176.

Sabbath as a core spiritual formation discipline: "Almost every spiritual discipline has value, but some practices constitute the core of maturing in Christ. These practices don't save us, but they are indispensable for growth.... Instead of thinking of the Sabbath as an imposition, we need to embrace it as an essential delivery mechanism for God's love." Scazzero, p. 155-165.

D. Jesus' Approach to the Sabbath

Matthew 12:1-8 (NIV)—At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. ² When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." ³ He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. ⁵ Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? ⁶ I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. ⁷ If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Matthew 12:10-12 (NIV)—And a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" ¹¹ He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Mark 3:1-6 (NIV)—Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. ² Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. ³ Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." ⁴ Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. ⁵ He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. ⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

John 7:21-24 (NIV)—Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. ²² Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. ²³ Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? ²⁴ Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

E. Helpful, Key Words & Phrases on Sabbath Keeping

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sabbath as Orientation ● Sabbath as Celebration ● Sabbath as Disruption ● Sabbath as a Gift ● Sabbath as Invitation ● Sabbath as Listening ● Sabbath as Paying Attention ● Sabbath as Protection for us ● Sabbath as Provision, for living a resilient life ● Sabbath as Renunciation ● Sabbath as Remembrance ● Sabbath Components: rest, communion, separation, restoration, contemplation ● “Follow it for your benefit; neglect it at your peril” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We follow the God who rested ● Jesus needed rest & so do we ● The soul’s at rest when it’s with God ● It’s a spiritual discipline ● “...oasis of openness to the Holy One.” ● Sabbath gifts: rest, reflection, review, renewal, refocus, redirection, relationship... ● “Do it! It’s a game-changer...” ● “The essence of a Sabbath heart is paying attention...’ ● “...the opportunity to be tethered to him.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sabbath mentality ● God-centered rest ● Sabbath-keeping as Lifestyle ● “The way of being fruitful was precisely abiding...” ● It’s about “four things: ceasing, resting, embracing and feasting” ● It’s profoundly life giving ● It may not be easy, but it is worth it. ● “A successful life has become a violent enterprise...” ● “Everything is more dangerous at high speed.” ● Embarrassingly difficult ● Surprisingly life-giving ● Life giving
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F. Many Christians don’t practice Sabbath rhythms because their pastors don’t preach it

“Sabbath is that ancient idea and practice of intentional rest that has long been discarded by much of the church and our world. Sabbath is not new. Sabbath is just new to us. Historically, Christians have kept some form or another of the Sabbath for some two thousand years. But it has largely been forgotten by the church, which has uncritically mimicked the rhythms of the industrial and success-obsessed West. The result? Our road-weary, exhausted churches have largely failed to integrate Sabbath into their lives as vital elements of Christian discipleship. It is not as though we do not love God—we love God deeply. We just do not know how to sit with God anymore. We have come to know Jesus only as the Lord of the harvest, forgetting he is the Lord of the Sabbath as well. Sabbath forgetfulness is driven, so often, in the name of doing stuff for God rather than being with God. We are too busy working for him. This is only made more difficult by the fact that the Western church is increasingly experiencing displacement and marginalization in a post-Christian, secular society.... Because we pastors rarely practice Sabbath, we rarely preach the Sabbath. And because we do not preach the Sabbath, our congregations are not challenged to take it seriously themselves. The result of our Sabbath amnesia is that we have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history.”

Swoboda, p. 5.

G. To Start Habits and Rhythms—start slow, experience benefit, then allow it to grow

“...how do we start? The truth is, every river starts somewhere. Be it a small tributary, it must begin somewhere. Every river begins with a drop of water. Remember that we are not interested in mere reflection on the Sabbath. One must be willing to start to do it in order to experience its joys. As Augustine said, a picture of food does not nourish. Only eating food nourishes. We do the Sabbath before we understand the Sabbath, before it makes sense. We should remember that in the Old Testament we are invited to ‘do’ before we ‘hear.’ ... Second, it is helpful in our Sabbath journeys to imitate someone who has been walking down the Sabbath path longer than we have. We often need to follow someone who knows how to do it... This is why Paul, on so many occasions, speaks of ‘imitating’ his faith... there are just so many elements of faith that cannot be ironed out in a Google search. We need a relationship in order to do it.... Third, what day should one keep a Sabbath? This is a very

practical and important question... Lamentably, the issue of which day one Sabbaths often becomes a question about rules and laws. And this question is anything but new... It most certainly would be ideal for everyone to Sabbath on the same day together, but this is not a realistic possibility for everyone." *Id.* at 197-198.

"But the Sabbath is one of those things that we must enter into in obedience and the results of which will come down the road. We do not Sabbath in the same way that we start an exercise program; we Sabbath because the living God has invited us to. Indeed, the things of God are often found to be very difficult. The Sabbath is disruptive. It may seem unnatural. But would God ask us to do something that was impossible?"

Id. at 51.

"Godly rest, particularly in a 24/7 world, is never accidental and can only come when we have gone out of our way to prepare for it. We should take Jesus seriously: if we want to build a tower, we must be willing to count the cost (Lk 14:28). Discipleship requires preparation. So does Sabbath-keeping." *Id.* at 85.

"Practically, how can you begin if you find yourself in a challenging situation? Do this: begin with half-day Sabbath. Just half a day. Turn your phone off. Make some pancakes. Go on a walk. Pray. Pull out your journal. Read a psalm out loud. God will meet you, and as you enter into the Sabbath rest that God eternally beckons you into, you will find that your heart is being slowly transformed. You may just find yourself hooked. God will provide in some way.... In a decade of Sabbath-keeping, I have never met someone who used to Sabbath. Nor have I met someone who wished they had kept fewer Sabbaths. Once you start, you probably won't stop. It is profoundly life giving. ... Change is hard. Do not expect Sabbath to come easily overnight. But the act of trying to do it is the most important thing... The lesson: you cannot love something you do not personally know. The Sabbath cannot be loved as an idea: it must be loved in the doing.... Sabbath is not an education issue; it is an obedience issue. The results of the Sabbath affect so many people and places. We can be aware of this, and yet the thing that matters is not whether we have that knowledge in our heads. What is important is that we take action, that we practice it, that we try it, that we give it a shot. ... I love the old African proverb 'Truth is but a rumor until it lives in our bones.' We must start to try truth—we must do it. How do we start keeping a Sabbath? Start here and now. The problem is not the need for more education and more information. We need to begin to try it out—to experience it. We change as we do what God invites us into. I did not begin caring for God's creation because I read Genesis 1 or heard a lecture on the topic. I began caring for creation because I hiked in the woods...."

Id. at 115-116.

Suggestions to Start the Habit of Sabbath Keeping

Read up on Sabbath. Identify a twenty-four-hour block of time. Make a list of what brings you delight. Prepare in advance. Define your protective "container" and then experiment. Find support.

Scazzero, p. 165-170.

H. Different Views of Sabbath Keeping within the Body of Christ

- 1) The Lord's Day—Sunday, for most of us
- 2) Any day—rest from work on whichever day you choose
- 3) Unnecessary—because Christ has fulfilled the Sabbath law, commands and practices
- 4) Strict Sabbatarian—focus on the Law and Sabbath-keeping practices like the Puritans
- 5) Spiritual Discipline—we engage in it, and through it God's grace brings us joy and rest

I. Busyness—a Challenge to Sabbath-Keeping

"[H]ostility toward the Sabbath has flowed in the church's and world's blood for a long time. ...Others

have rejected it lock, stock, and barrel, relegating it to the status of relic—antiquated, arcane, unworthy of contemporary consideration, an idea from our ‘dusty pawnshop of doctrinal beliefs.’ Others dismiss it as an idealistic, if not impossible, practice. ‘Who has time to Sabbath, anyway?’ they ask. ‘I’ll sleep when I die. I mean, if the devil never rests, why should I?’ but these hollow notions are based on human reason rather than God’s good word. A Sabbath proves an awkward fit in our fast-paced, work-drunk, production-obsessed world. Yet whatever skepticism we harbor toward Sabbath, such disdain is not shared by the Bible, Jesus, or much of church history. God’s story has fundamentally been a story about a simple gift of a day of rest.” Swoboda, p. x-xi.

“As God invites us to Sabbath, we will be tempted to think that Sabbath cannot ‘work’ for us. ‘I don’t have time to take a whole day to rest,’ people have expressed to me for years. Biblically, however, this is not the case. The biblical story tells us that to rest one day a week is to be truly human, and to not rest is to be inhuman. Humans were made to rest.” *Id.* at 11.

“‘Prosperity,’ stresses Walter Brueggemann, ‘breeds amnesia.’ That is, those who have everything they want are often the ones most happy to overlook the importance of the Sabbath. When the bank account is full, abundant food sits in the fridge, business is booming, GDP is up, and everyone seems happy, we are tempted to keep our lives going the way they have been. Things are going well. “Why would we need to change?” *Id.* at 87.

“The first order of things is that we are creatures and God is the creator. God is the only one who is infinite; I, on the other hand, must learn to live within the physical limits of time and space and the human limits of strength and energy. There are limits to my relational, emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities as well. I am not God. God is the only one who can be all things to all people. God is the only one who can be two places at once. God is the one who never sleeps. I am not. This is pretty basic stuff but many of us live as though we don’t know it.” — Ruth Haley Barton, *CT Pastors Magazine*, July 27, 2016

“Before the Enlightenment, the Sabbath day was almost universally respected and honored in Christian societies and countries. The day served the purpose of bringing people together around worship. Today, the Sabbath has largely been replaced by activities centered on consumerism, sports, or recreation.”
Swoboda, p. 92.

“To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence.’ Violence. A violence within... ..Though we live in a 24/7 world, we were never created to function in one. We were created to work in one span of time and be off and rest in another.” — Stephen W. Smith, *Inside Job: Doing the Work Within the Work* (2015), p. 109 (quoting Thomas Merton)

J. General Principles Related to Sabbath-Keeping

- 1) Sabbath-keeping and Sabbath rhythms are not about the Law and are not derived for us from the Law. Nor are Christians obligated to keep them under the Law. Sabbath-keeping and Sabbath practices are spiritual disciplines. We practice Sabbath-keeping as a spiritual discipline, and the fruits of these disciplines are spiritual growth and movement toward becoming Christlike, movement toward spiritual maturity.
- 2) Sabbath-keeping is a gift...not a duty...like a Christmas package under the tree with my name on it. If I don’t open the package, I will miss the gift and the gracious heart that has given it to me.
- 3) It is easier for “retired people” or “people in ministry” with more flexible schedules, to experience Sabbath-keeping as a whole day, a 24-hour commitment. No doubt, people living in the “real world,” or people with young families and jobs, have a harder time making room in their busy schedules for a 24-hour Sabbath. God does not have a stopwatch in hand, demanding of us a 24-hour commitment.

God grants us the grace and freedom to set a schedule that is sustainable.

- 4) We are not in competition with others to see who is the winner in keeping Sabbath habits and practices. You are only in competition with yourself. Each of us needs to develop the plan and the schedule that allows rest and some extended time with the Lord on a regular basis. If it is a 24-hour block or a few hours each week, Sabbath habits will allow you to rest and to be with Jesus. Various authors have expressed this in different ways: “Keeping company with Jesus” (Adele Ahlberg Calhoun); “Making space for God” (Henri Nouwen); “Apprentices of Jesus” (Dallas Willard); “Staidness in the Divine Center” (Richard Foster); “The with-God life” (Richard Foster). No matter what stage of life we are in, no matter how busy we are, we are each responsible to schedule our lives around rest and regular, weekly, extended times with Jesus.
- 5) Several survey respondents defined their Sabbath commitment as Saturday afternoon to Sunday afternoon or Sunday afternoon to Monday afternoon. Some of their comments: “Rebuild, renew former practice of observing Sabbath from 1:00pm on Sunday – 3:00pm on Monday.” “[T]hey have encouraged us to follow their example of Saturday afternoon to Sunday afternoon.” For these people, splitting Sabbath over two half-days seems helpful.
- 6) Many pastors and church leaders don’t practice Sabbath-keeping themselves, and therefore they don’t preach it or teach it. We rarely teach or encourage a spiritual discipline we don’t practice. In my many years of church, I can’t remember one time when Sabbath-keeping was spoken about from the pulpit.
- 7) If I had to summarize Sabbath-keeping in one word, it might be *orientation*. The Sabbath is about orienting my life to His, seeking God’s guidance and direction, seeking God’s orientation on who I am and where He wants me to go.
- 8) What are appropriate and inappropriate activities during my Sabbath-keeping? I feel free to go out to eat at a restaurant, but I try to eliminate other commercial activity during Sabbath. I feel a need to eliminate electronics during extended times with the Lord on Monday mornings.
- 9) The biblical language regarding the Sabbath is that *we ‘enter’ it*. Sabbath, as a gift, is something that we receive and not something we make up for ourselves. Sabbath is a day where God has gone in advance to prepare for us. The book of Hebrews stresses, “Make every effort to enter that rest” (Heb 4:11). Our task, like Moses’, is to enter what God has already prepared for us. We enter into (we receive) the gift of Sabbath; we don’t work hard to “make it happen.” We enter the “Promised Land.”
- 10) We all have certain patterns of sin in our lives. It’s helpful to reflect, to enumerate, and to repent of these sin patterns during each of our times of sabbath rest. This rhythm of reflection and repentance allows us to experience renewal and freedom from these besetting sins. We tend to want to manage our sin instead of embracing and repenting of it. We need to face our sin, to name our sin, and to repent and deal with our sin. To do this as a part of our sabbath rhythm is a very healthy spiritual discipline.

K. A Final Challenge—see and experience all of the Christian life as a gift, including Sabbath

Nehemiah 8:13-17 (NIV)—On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law. ¹⁴ They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month ¹⁵ and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths”—as it is written. ¹⁶ So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own

roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷ The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not **celebrated** it like this. And their **joy** was very **great**.

L. Additional Reference Materials

1. Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (2007)
2. Michael Mangis, *Signature Sins: Taming Our Wayward Hearts* (2008)