



## Rest For Your Soul

### Based on last week's Practice

*Review the Partnership Covenant and ask yourself:*

1. Which of the Partnership Commitments did you observe this week and how did it go?
2. Which ones did you struggle with? Why?

### Overview

We live in a cultural moment of restlessness. The unsatisfied desires of our human condition are exacerbated by the barrage of digital marketing from a consumption-oriented, consumer-driven economy. We have multi-billion dollar, multinational industries hovering over our minds – via our devices – in an attempt to monetize our restlessness. But rest doesn't come from buying a product; it comes from Sabbath. A word that literally means stopping. The Sabbath is an entire day set aside to stop - stop working, stop wanting, stop worrying, etc.—and to simply rest in God's presence.

Most followers of Jesus (at least, in the modern, Western world) no longer practice Sabbath. This means many of us are missing out on one of the most life-giving practices of the way of Jesus, and arguably, one of the most important for our cultural moment.

Since this Practice is brand new for many of us, the goal of Week 1 is to start with the basics: just set aside a 24 hour time period to rest and worship; mark a beginning and end time, each with a ritual of your own design; and spend the day in Sabbath delight. It sounds easy, but, like all good things, it takes practice. So be patient with yourself, with this Practice, and with God. Let yourself settle into the "rest for your soul" that Jesus has on offer.

### Scripture

Matthew 11:28–30, John 15:4–5, John 10:10, Matthew 12:1–14

### Discussion Questions

1. Is the Practice of Sabbath new to you? Was it part of your upbringing? Did you grow up with any kind of negative understanding about it?
2. How does the idea of practicing Sabbath make you feel? Nervous about Sabbath being too legalistic? Skeptical about working this into your schedule? Full of anticipation for rest? Something entirely different?

3. In what ways do you see our culture pushing back against a life of rest?

## Community Practice (tonight!) + Individual Practice (throughout the week)

*Talk through the Practice of Sabbath presented below. Discuss the three variations and ideas and activities for Sabbath. Have each individual or family determine which is best for them and hold each other accountable to commit to Sabbath in the coming week(s).*

### 1. Mark out a 24 hour time period (or as close as you can) to rest and worship

There are three common variations of this Practice:

- 1) **The traditional Sabbath:** from 20 minutes before sundown Friday night to the same time Saturday late afternoon. (This works well for people who are especially busy on Sundays with church activities or other events.)
  - 2) **The Lord's Day Sabbath:** from the Sunday morning (or sometimes Saturday night) gathering, through bedtime on Sunday. (This works best for most people, as Sunday is the calmest day in the city, and we already set aside time to worship as a community.)
  - 3) **The midweek Sabbath:** any day during the week. (This works best for people with odd or sporadic work schedules and who have a midweek day off.)
- Decide in advance if you want to begin in the evening—with dinner or just before bed—or in the morning. We recommend starting in the evening, but there's no "right way."
  - If at all possible, establish a regular rhythm of Sabbath on the same day each week.

### 2. Pick a ritual to clearly begin and end your Sabbath

Much of the Sabbath is about rhythms and rituals that set aside the day as "holy." Beginning and ending with a marked moment will help you settle into rest, and help you reenter the week with a restful spirit.

Here are a few ideas of how to begin the sabbath from both ancient tradition and modern practice:

- Light two candles (symbolic for the two commands in Exodus and Deuteronomy to "remember" and "observe" the Sabbath). Invite the Spirit of Jesus to come and give your home light, joy, love, peace, and rest.
- Take communion by pouring a glass of wine or grape juice. Pray a blessing over the drink or read a passage of scripture and give thanks.
- If you have a family, this is where, traditionally, the father speaks a blessing over the children and the mother. If you're with roommates or friends, this can be a wonderful time to bless each other, with prayers like: May you be happy and full of joy. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May you find rest for your soul. Etc.
- Read a Psalm, sing a song, quote a poem, or pray a liturgy to center on God.
- Pray: ask the Holy Spirit bring a spirit of rest over your life and lead and guide you through the next 24 hours.
- If you begin at night, share a meal with your family or friends.
- If you begin in the morning, go to church and worship.

Here are a few ideas to end your Sabbath:

- Take a slow, leisurely prayer walk around your neighborhood, nearby park, or nature reserve.
- Read a psalm.
- Share a meal with family and friends.
- Spend some time alone or with your family and friends in prayers of gratitude.
- Traditionally, the Sabbath ends by sitting on the floor, lighting a special havdalah candle, and sharing 1) the best part of your Sabbath, and 2) what you are looking forward to in the week ahead, passing around sweet smelling spices to savor the day, and ending with prayers of gratitude.

### 3. Spend an entire day in rest and worship.

Fill your day with activities that are life-giving for your soul. Begin to distinguish between recreation and restoration. Begin to transition from entertainment, TV, social media, shopping, and going “out,” to activities that deeply connect you to Jesus and his rest.

Traditionally there are twelve activities that mark Sabbath practice:

1. Lighting the candles
  2. Blessing the children
  3. Eating a meal
  4. Singing
  5. Worshipping with your Community
  6. Walking
  7. Napping
  8. Making love (if you're married)
  9. Reading
  10. Spending time alone with God
  11. Spending time with family and friends
  12. Gratitude
- This is not a “to do” list: there are no “to do”s on Sabbath! No oughts or shoulds. This is just a list of activities many people find restful and restorative.
  - Adapt your day to your personality, preference, stage of life, and however it is you connect with God: time in nature, walking your dog to the park, playing frisbee golf with your kids, getting lost in a good novel, etc. Just take the day to pamper your soul in God's presence.

### Closing Questions

13. Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week's Practice?
14. What activities do you find most restful? Connect you to God?
15. What do you think has to change in your life for Sabbath to become a part of your practice?