

# DEVELOPING A

# SABBATH PRACTICE

Sabbath time is a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, because it honors the necessary wisdom of dormancy. If certain plant species do not lie dormant during winter, the plant begins to die off. Rest is not just a psychological convenience; it is a spiritual and biological necessity. Perhaps this is why “Remember the Sabbath” is more than simply a lifestyle suggestion. It is a commandment, an ethical precept as serious as prohibitions against killing, stealing and lying.

Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is a day when we partake of the wisdom, peace and delight that grow only in the soil of time—time consecrated specifically for play, refreshment and renewal. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest. But the Sabbath has proven its wisdom over the ages. The Sabbath gives us the permission we need to stop, to restore our souls.

Much of modern life is specifically designed to seduce our attention away from Sabbath rest. The point is not to return to some forced, legalistic Sabbath. Let us, for just one day, cease our desperate striving for more, and instead taste the blessings we have already been given, and give thanks.

# 1. BE INTENTIONAL

Rest is intentional, not accidental. Far too often we see rest as sudden or unexpected treat. But, what we learn in the earliest verses of scripture is that God intentionally made rest. It's part of creation!

In order to practice sabbath in the midst of so much, it's important to be intentional. In other words, plan for your sabbath. Literally pull out the calendar and find a 24 hour period where you can take a rest. Set yourself up for success and choose a day where you can accomplish the overall hope: a day of rest.

# 2. SAY NO

You can begin shaping your Sabbath practice by deciding what should be excluded from this day and what should be included. There are three categories of things that we do well to exclude from our Sabbath.

**WORK:** What constitutes work for us? We must commit ourselves to not doing these things on the Sabbath. We need to identify the challenge and temptations related to our work and establish clear boundaries to protect Sabbath time.

How can you say "No" to work on the Sabbath?

**BUYING AND SELLING:** If we are out buying, selling and engaging in the world of commerce, it means someone has to work and we are contributing to it. It feeds our consumerism, an aspect of life in our culture that needs rest on the Sabbath.

How can you say “No” to buying and selling on the Sabbath?

**WORRY:** The Sabbath is an invitation to rest emotionally and mentally from things that cause worry and stress, such as budgets, major decisions, and planning the week ahead. If we observe Sabbath on Sunday, perhaps Sunday evening after dinner is a time when, from a place of rest, we can engage in some of the decision-making that needs to be done.

How can you say “No” to worry on the Sabbath?

**SUGGESTION:**

Prepare a “Sabbath box” or “Sabbath basket.” Put all the things you don’t need in order to observe the Sabbath into the box or basket. This might include cell phones, credit cards, pagers, and so on. Put work projects and homework in the box, as well; you can take them out again on Sunday evening.

### 3. SAY YES

What is to replace all that we are excluding from our Sabbath practice? The simple answer is, whatever delights you and replenishes you. Consider the following three things to include in your Sabbath practice.

**RESTING THE BODY:** What are the activities that rest and replenish your body? The invitation of Sabbath time is to replace the time you would normally spend working with activities that you find restorative, such as a walk or other physical exercise, eating your favorite foods, reading, and listening to music.

How can you say “Yes” to resting the body on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?

**REPLENISHING THE SPIRIT:** Another invitation of the Sabbath is to pay attention to what replenishes the spirit, and choose only those activities that renew you and bring you joy. Find personal activities that replenish the spirit: silence, reading, dancing, and listening to music. Find activities for the whole family that replenish the spirit: a special meal, recreation, games, sharing stories, gathering with relatives and friends.

How can you say “Yes” to replenishing the spirit on the Sabbath?  
What types of activities can you do?

**RESTORING THE SOUL:** Perhaps the deepest refreshment is the invitation to renew the soul through worship and quiet reflection. This is the part of us that gets most lost during the workweek, which is governed almost completely by the value of productivity. In addition to personal activities, such as silence and prayer, identify rituals or shared activities that create a spirit of reverence for God on this day such as a special meal with a Scripture reading and time to go around the table and talk about where God seemed particularly present with you during the week. Light a candle to mark the Sabbath day.

How can you say “Yes” to restoring the soul on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?

## 4. FOLLOW THROUGH

Easy enough? Don't allow sabbath to be devoured by anything other than the overriding hope: rest. Being intentional is so important and a tremendous aid in helping your Sabbath to be followed through. Set yourself up for success and see it through.

Read Exodus (20:8-11) with its commandment to “remember” the Sabbath that is grounded in the story of creation. Then read Deuteronomy (5:12-15) with its the commandment to “observe” the Sabbath that sees to it that no one, not even animals, will work without respite