

Spiritual Disciplines Handout: **SABBATH**

- *Spend time throughout the week reading, meditating on, and praying through these scriptures.*
- *Read the attached readings with enough time to really process through the content.*
- *Think through the questions at the very end. Maybe journal through some of the answers.*

2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. **3** Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

[Genesis 2:2-3 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

8 “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 male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. **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.

[Exodus 20:8-11 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

3 “There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord.”

[Leviticus 23:3 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

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 2:27-28 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

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 their works, just as God did from his. **11** Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

[Hebrews 4:8-11 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

John Ortberg, The Life You Always Wanted: Excerpts from Ch. 5:

... Jesus often had much to do, but he never did it in a way that severed the life-giving connection between him and his Father. He never did it in a way that interfered with his ability to give love when love was called for. He observed a regular practice of withdrawing from activity for the sake of solitude and prayer. Jesus was often busy, but never hurried....

Your God is Too Safe by Mark Buchanan: Excerpts from Ch. 10:

WE'RE BUSY PEOPLE. THE MAIN EXPERIENCE OF MEN AND WOMEN and even children in North America is busyness, having far more to do any day, every day, all day, than we can possibly get done. We simultaneously scurry and slog through breathless, breakneck schedules. We flounder in a welter of meetings and errands, demands and delays, expectations and obligations. It's joyless. It's endless. Our leisure itself has become an anxious, rushed, fitful business. Our rest is restless. Maybe we implicitly acknowledged this reality when we stopped calling our time away from work a *holiday* and started calling it a *vacation*. What was once time set apart for Godward and God-filled refreshment, a holy day, became merely an evacuation, a vacating, a vacancy, a vacuity. It's an interval to flee, escape, avoid real life for a while.

... But will a vacation help? Mere vacations are just that, an emptying that often leaves us empty, a reprieve that brings short-term relief but no lasting refreshment. Too often I have returned from vacation only minimally restored. A day or two back into my routine and responsibilities, and I am just as caught up in the endless and wearisome toil that the writer of Ecclesiastes so vividly describes: "I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (2:17).

...What I need are more holidays, more holy days. But, deeper than that, what I really need is a Christlike sense of time and timeliness and timelessness. Christ undertook the most urgent work ever assigned, announcing the kingdom's arrival, restoring and redefining Israel's hope, enacting salvation for the whole world. Along with that, He cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead. He gathered and trained those who, after He was gone, would carry on His work of announcing, building, healing, teaching. And He did it all in a mere three years.

Yet He did it in an attitude of nearly unbroken serenity, almost leisureliness. He never seemed to be watching the clock. He could get tired, but He had no qualms about falling asleep just about anywhere, storm-tossed fish boats, for instance, or having luxurious dinners out. He could be wonderfully responsive to the demands of others—a gruff centurion, a panicked father, a desperate widow—but never got caught up in their anxiety. Just as often, He could without a twinge of guilt walk away from demands and expectations. When the disciples interrupted His prayers because "everyone is looking for you," He responded by saying, "Let's go somewhere else" (Mark 1:37–38).

... There was Jesus—vigorous yet relaxed, clear-eyed yet dream-filled, purposeful yet not driven. He was active, productive, and diligent, but never busy...

Wild Goose Chase by Mark Batterson: Excerpts from Ch. 3

If you want to come out of the cage of routine, change of pace [is key] [in a long race] how you start is not nearly as important as how your finish. And pacing is the key.

...the Sabbath is a weekly reminder that we don't keep the planet in orbit; God does. But you'd never know it by our frenetic efforts to get to the bottom of our to-do lists. You know what you really need? A stop-doing list.

... What do you need to give up? Where do you need to slow down? What changes do you need to make in your life to give God margin to work in?

The Sabbath is one way we let go and let God. It's a healthy change of pace. It creates holy margin in our lives. And it keeps what is sacred from becoming routine...

...pacing yourself for the journey is critical. Yes, there will be moments when it seems next to impossible to keep in step with the long strides of the Spirit. But I think it's even more difficult, especially for those of us with Type-A personalities, to slow down when God wants us to be still.

Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Barton: Excerpts from Ch. 8:

... Sabbath was something I knew about and had read about—and, honestly, it was some of the most stirring writing I had ever read. Writings about the sabbath were the only writings that made me weep—with longing and also with sadness that I had no idea how to make it happen meaningfully in my own life....

... The truth is, sabbath keeping is a discipline that will mess with you, because once you move beyond just thinking about it and actually begin to practice it, the goodness of it will capture you, body, soul and spirit. You will long to wake up to a day that stretches out in front of you with nothing in it but rest and delight. You will long for a simple way to turn your heart toward God in worship without much effort. You will long for a space in time when the pace is slow and family and friends linger with one another, savoring one another's presence because no one has anywhere else to go.

... Sabbath keeping is more than just taking a day of rest; it is a way of ordering one's life around a pattern of working six days and then resting on the seventh. It is a way of arranging our 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, but the rest of the week must be lived in such a way as to make sabbath possible. Paid work needs to be contained to five days of the week. Household chores, shopping and errand-running need to be complete before the sabbath comes, or they must wait. Courageous decisions need to be made about work and athletics, church and community involvement.

As we consider making such changes, it is important to realize that this pattern of giving one-seventh of our time back to God is woven deep into the fabric of Christian tradition... It is a pattern that God himself established as he was doing the work of creation, and it was incorporated into Jewish tradition in such a way as to order the Jews' whole existence as a nation.

... Far beyond mere duty and obligation, they even have special words and metaphors to express an emotion that is almost too deep to be expressed: the love of the sabbath. ...

Of course, we have all heard about or even experienced the extreme of joyless sabbaths filled with dour prohibitions and somber rituals. But this is only a human distortion. The ancient rabbis knew that while sabbath demanded “all of man’s attention, the service and devotion of total love . . . the Sabbath is the most precious present mankind has received from the treasure house of God.” Of the place of sabbath in Jewish tradition, Abraham Heschel writes, “It was as if a whole people were in love with the seventh day.”

... The point of the sabbath is to honor our need for a sane rhythm of work and rest. It is to honor 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 a willingness to acknowledge the limits of our humanness and take steps to live more graciously within the order of things.

And the first order of things is that we are creatures and God is the Creator. God is the only One who is infinite. I am finite, which means that I live within physical limits of time and space and bodily limits of strength and energy. There are limits to my capacities relationally, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. I am not God. God is the One who can be all things to all people. God is the 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. If we dig down a little deeper, we may see that our unwillingness to practice sabbath is really an unwillingness to live within the limits of our humanity, to honor our finiteness. We cling to some sense that we are indispensable and that the world cannot go on without us even for a day. Or we feel that certain tasks and activities are more significant than the delights that God is wanting to share with us. This is a grandiosity that we indulge to our own peril.

There is something deeply spiritual about honoring the limitations of our existence as human beings—physical bodies in a world of time and space. A peace descends upon our lives when we accept what is real rather than always pushing beyond our limits. Something about being gracious and accepting and gentle with ourselves at least once a week enables us to be more gracious and accepting and gentle with others. There is a freedom that comes from being who we are in God and resting in God that eventually enables us to bring something truer to the world than all of our doing. Sabbath keeping helps us to live within our limits, because on the sabbath, in many different ways, we allow ourselves to be the creature in the presence of our Creator. ...

Getting Started

I think Jewish folks had it right: the only way to even begin the first halting steps toward a true sabbath practice is to let yourself fall in love with this day so that you long for it as you would a lover. But to fall in love with it you have to try it.

But this raises many questions for us, both theological and practical. Does it matter what day of the week we practice sabbath? Can I have a floating sabbath, fitting it in wherever I can in a given week? Did Jesus teach sabbath keeping as a practice for New Testament Christians? Does sabbath have to be a full day, or can it just be an afternoon or an evening? Can I shop or mow the lawn on the sabbath? How do I know what I should and should not do on the sabbath?

All of these are valid questions. Some of them lie beyond the scope of this book, but let me offer several principles that, for me, undergird the whole sabbath experience. First, the heart of sabbath is that we cease our work so that we can rest and delight in God and God’s good gifts. Everything we might choose to do or not to do needs to somehow fit into these purposes. Second, it is important to establish a

regular rhythm if at all possible. The human being, body and soul, responds to rhythms and is accustomed to living in rhythms—night and day, three meals a day, the seasons of the year. Part of the restfulness of sabbath is knowing that it is always coming in the same interval, so that we're not making decisions about it every week.

When sabbath is not observed on the same day every week, it means that we go longer than seven days without a sabbath, and that is not optimal. After seven days without rest, we are at risk of becoming dangerously tired.

... The third principle that has become foundational for me as I have lived this discipline is that sabbath keeping is not primarily a private, self-indulgent discipline. It is and always has been a communal discipline, or at least a discipline that people enter into with those closest to them.

... I am different on the sabbath. We all are. We move more slowly. We are more available to each other in terms of our time and also in terms of our attention and spirit. We are much more in touch with the softer, more vulnerable part of ourselves, because we're not pushing so hard.

Since we started our sabbath practice somewhat late in our family's life, it has been quite an adjustment. But once our daughters began to get used to it, I have seen them really enjoy the differences that are present on this day. They seem to love the fact that I'm home all day and that we can talk and take walks and cook their favorite foods. They love the fact that we all take naps and that we can go with the flow. Now they, too, articulate their need for a day to rest and are disappointed when something in their own lives or ours robs us of this important time.

... Do not make sabbath keeping a weighty exercise. Explore it with delight, as though you and God are learning together how to make the day special for both of you. Then, be as intentional about protecting it as you can be, but do not become rigid and legalistic about it, which ruins the spirit of the day. "The sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

A Fullness in Time

I do not know everything there is to know about sabbath; in this discipline as much as any other, I am a beginner. What I do know is there have to be times in your life when you move slow . . . times when you walk rather than run, allowing your body to settle into each step . . . times when you sit and gaze admiringly at loved ones, rather than racing through an agenda . . . times when you receive food and drink with gratitude and humility rather than gulping it down on your way to something "more important."

... There have to be times when you sink into the comforts of home and become human again rather than using home as a hotel or a fast-food restaurant; ... There have to be times when you let yourself feel what you feel, when you let tears come rather than blinking them back because you don't have time to cry. There have to be times to be the creature—softer, more vulnerable and more human—rather than always being tough, defended and in control.

There have to be times to sit with your gratitude for the good gifts in your life that get forgotten in the rush. There have to be times to sit and wait for the fullness of God that replenishes body, mind and soul—if you can even stand to be so full. There has to be time for the fullness of time, or time is meaningless.

The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath by Mark Buchanan: Various Excerpts:

In a culture where busyness is a fetish and stillness is laziness, rest is sloth. But without rest, we miss the rest of God: the rest he invites us to enter more fully so that we might know him more deeply. “Be still, and know that I am God.” Some knowing is never pursued, only received. And for that, you need to be still. Sabbath is both a day and an attitude to nurture such stillness. It is both time on a calendar and a disposition of the heart. It is a day we enter, but just as much a way we see. Sabbath imparts the rest of God—actual physical, mental, spiritual rest, but also the rest of God— the things of God’s nature and presence we miss in our busyness. ...

Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places by Eugene Peterson, Excerpts from Section 1:

**Note: Next week we will read this book’s portion on “Work” which is strong/balanced!*

If there is no Sabbath — no regular and commanded not-working, not-talking — we soon become totally absorbed in what we are doing and saying, and God’s work is either forgotten or marginalized. When we work we are most god-like, which means that it is in our work that it is easiest to develop god-pretensions. Un-sabbathed, our work becomes the entire context in which we define our lives. We lose God-consciousness, God-awareness, sightings of resurrection. We lose the capacity to sing “This is my Father’s world” and end up chirping little self-centered ditties about what we are doing and feeling.

This is a most difficult command to keep, a most difficult practice to cultivate. It is one of the most abused and distorted practices of the Christian life. Many through the centuries have suffered much under oppressive Sabbath regimens....

... But I don’t see any way out of it: if we are going to live appropriately in the creation we must keep the Sabbath. We must stop running around long enough to see what he has done and is doing. We must shut up long enough to hear what he has said and is saying. All our ancestors agree that without silence and stillness there is no spirituality, no God-attentive, God-responsive life.

<p>Questions: SABBATH</p>

1. What sections of the reading stand out most to you? Why?
2. As you finish the readings, take a few moments to listen to your longings regarding the sabbath and rest. Where did you feel a keen desire for the rhythms and practices described here? Where did you feel resistance? Or if you didn’t feel anything, notice that too.
3. Come prepared to discuss at group “What is God saying? & “How are you going to respond?”