

ATTENTIVENESS

SABBATH





SESSION 1: THE BASICS: WHAT IS SABBATH?

Main Text:

Matthew 11:28-30

Mark 2:23-3:6

Take Home Exercise:

Create a Sabbath Box

OPENING EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

Spend a moment in prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together, and then lead your group through the below exercise.

Throughout this series, we explore four Sabbath elements—stop, rest, delight, and worship. This week we briefly explore the first element—stop. On Sabbath, we stop from our regular rhythms of work and consumption. We stop from our worrying and wanting, reminding ourselves that God is in control and that He loves and cares for us.

One way, among many, for us to stop is by unplugging from our devices for a period of time. This is a counter-habit to constant connectivity, productivity, and endless scrolling. In disconnecting from technology, we commit to being more present to God and one another.

As a group, take some time to power down your phones and put away any other devices and distractions. We recognize there may be important reasons to leave your phone on, which is okay; feel the freedom to do so. But if possible, power down with your group as a symbolic “micro-practice” of Sabbath. For some, this will seem like a significant challenge. Do this together as a symbolic micro-exercise representing the basics of Sabbath—stopping.

Briefly discuss the following questions together:

When was the last time you unplugged from technology for a period of time? What did you observe about your energy, attention span, and presence to God and others?

What boundaries might you want to set on your technology usage, specifically, as we explore the habit of Sabbath?

OPENING DISCUSSION (15 Minutes)

Together, watch this overview video on week one of Sabbath and discuss the following questions as a group.

We are continuing our year-long focus of practicing “Attentiveness to God.” Today, we are beginning

our journey to cultivate our second habit, the habit of Sabbath. Watch the following video that provides an overview of the first week’s teaching on the basics of Sabbath.

Video #1 - What is the Sabbath?

Reflecting honestly, how tired are you—physically, spiritually, and emotionally? Where might you be experiencing a yearning or ache for rest?

What is your current understanding of Sabbath?

Is Sabbath currently part of your life, or not? What does this look like? If you don’t observe the Sabbath, what do you suppose has kept you from doing so?

What appeals to you about Sabbath? What do you find compelling about Jesus’ invitation to rest?

STUDY TOGETHER (20 Minutes)

Lead the study and discussion below for your group. Feel free to read it in its entirety or put it in your own words.

Invite someone in your group to read aloud Matthew 11:28-30.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

What a beautiful invitation from Jesus! The implication is that to follow Jesus is to learn from him how to find rest for your soul. We must be careful in interpreting the idea of the “soul.” Don’t think of a disembodied ghost-like thing. The New Testament concept of the “soul” comes from the Greek word, **ψυχή = psuché = Pronounced (‘psoo-khay’)**. This is the root word of our English word, psychology. At its core, it means the whole of the individual, both the biological and the spiritual; body, mind, spirit, and will.

But let’s be honest, does this invitation actually reflect your felt experience in following Jesus?

Discuss this question as a group.

Has your discipleship to Jesus led you in the direction of rest for your soul?

Has your apprenticeship to Jesus impacted your daily schedule? Have you ever considered the way Jesus wants to bring rest for your soul?

The practice of Sabbath is an opportunity to take a practice from the way of Jesus to counteract the modern obsession with busyness and hurry that ultimately distorts our soul.

The Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word **שַׁבָּת = Shabbat = Sabbath**, which means “to stop, cease, be done.” Sabbath, at its core, is the weekly practice of stopping. A day set aside for the Lord (different from a day off) to refresh our souls. Note, the refreshment is for our souls, not just our bodies, but our entire being—physical, spiritual, the whole of who we are.

There are likely many questions that arise when we think about Sabbath. Do I really have to Sabbath? What can’t we do on the Sabbath? What can we do on the Sabbath? As we consider these questions, it is important that we start by reminding ourselves of what, or rather whom, the Sabbath is really for. If we do not, we run the risk of viewing Sabbath as a burden, rule, or obligation and can miss out on fully and freely embracing it as a good gift from God.



Invite someone in your group to read Mark 2:23-28.

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 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." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Mark 2:23-28

Notice how Jesus leans into the tension of Sabbath and challenges the Pharisees' strict regulations around its practice. The Pharisees, out of a zeal for obedience, had lost the plot and purpose of Sabbath. They had turned it into a burden to abide by rather than the gift it was. And Jesus' response is really important. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

What does this passage reveal about God's intention for the Sabbath?

Notice that Jesus' response to the Pharisees was two-fold. First, "the Sabbath was made for man..." and second, "...not man for the Sabbath." For the legalism of the Pharisees, they needed to hear the second part of Jesus' teaching. They had been so zealous that their practice of Sabbath, it felt like humans were being forced into Sabbath. The burden and weight of adherence were so high it produced the exact opposite of God's intent for Sabbath, rest for your souls. It was loaded with hundreds of rules and regulations.

The reality is that most of us don't struggle too much with legalism around the Sabbath because the idea of Sabbath is all but forgotten in the modern world. Most of us in the modern world actually need to hear Jesus' specific instruction in the first part of the teaching, "Sabbath was made for man..." We've forgotten that the Sabbath is a gift from God to humanity. A gift that is meant to be enjoyed, embraced, and welcomed. In a modern world that no longer has any imagination of what a Sabbath rhythm could look like, we need to remember that the Sabbath is a gift from God to us.

Which half of Jesus' statement on Sabbath are you most prone to forget or even resist?

How might you, like the Pharisees, struggle to view and embrace Sabbath as a gift from God intended for your flourishing?

PRACTICE THIS TOGETHER (15 Minutes)

Take a look out over this upcoming week and pick a day when you will Sabbath. This can be any day of the week. There is not one set day on which we must observe the Sabbath. It is possible that the day you choose now may change in different seasons or stages of life, and that is okay. One helpful principle, or goal, for identifying a day for Sabbath is the one-in-seven principle. Choose one day out of seven as a day of rest. Many people choose to Sabbath on Sunday, as that is also a day for gathering together in worship as a community, but not everyone will. Pick a day that works best for you and those you may choose to Sabbath with (family, roommates, community group, etc.).

Consider what your Sabbath day will look like for you in your current life stage and season. Remember to start where you are, not where you think you should be. If 24 hours is too challenging, consider starting with 3-4 hours. Start small and think through simple ways you can remind yourself to stop, unplug, and move more slowly through the day.

Remember that the goal is not to do Sabbath perfectly. God will meet you in the time you intentionally offer to him, however little or however much, with love and endless grace. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. It is a gift that he desires for you to embrace and experience with freedom and joy.

Spend some time discussing the following questions as a group:

It is very likely, and to be expected, that beginning a Sabbath practice will be very challenging—this does not come easily. In her book *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, Ruth Haley Barton identifies three types of resistance to embracing Sabbath rest that we might experience: practical, psychological, and spiritual resistance. Read the three statements below. Which of these might you most resonate with right now?

Practical Resistance: “I just don’t know how I can make Sabbath work in my life.”

Psychological Resistance: “I’ve worked hard all my life, and I really don’t know who I am when I’m not working or producing.”

Spiritual Resistance: “I’m so used to depending on myself that I’m not really sure I believe God will provide for me if I take a break for one day.”

What are some unique challenges and opportunities embedded in the season and stage of life you are in right now?

What day/time of the week might be best for you to Sabbath? This might look like starting with 3-4 hours rather than a full 24 hours. Take into consideration your stage/season of life and the people (family, roommates, community group, etc.) you might practice this with.

TAKE HOME EXERCISE—Create a Sabbath Box (5 Minutes)

Read through the below exercise that each individual will do before your next gathering. Work through any questions people may have on what they are to do. Again, it is about practice, not perfection. Give yourselves grace.

When we stop, we receive and embrace God’s gift of rest for us. We do not stop when our work is finished—our work is never finished. The Sabbath is a humbling and freeing reminder that we are not what we do, what we produce, what we have, or what others think of us. We find our identity in the One we are deeply loved by. We stop our striving and work as an act of trust and a reminder that God is in control and that he cares for the very world that he created and called “good.”

Below is an exercise that everyone can try out before the next meeting. Spend a few minutes reading the instructions aloud with the group and discuss any questions that may arise:

Step 1—Pick a time to Sabbath

Select a time that works best for your life stage and weekly schedule. The importance is not the particular day but the rhythm of one day in every seven days. There are three basic options:

1. Sabbath on Sunday; this works best for many since it is also the day of worship.
2. Traditional Sabbath from sundown on Friday night to the same time on Saturday.
3. Midweek Sabbath for those with non-traditional work schedules.

If a 24-hour period is not possible to start, that is okay; select a 3-4 hour block where you can intentionally Sabbath. It may be best to do that after church on Sunday or a weekend night. Use that time to put work and phone, and just stop to Sabbath with the Lord.

Try to cultivate a regular rhythm to your Sabbath as best as possible, meaning work to find a consistent time that will work best. It will always be hard, but that is okay. The goal is practice over perfection.

Step 2—Sabbath Box

This week, you will create a “Sabbath box.” You can do this exercise on your own, though you might also choose to invite others you share life/space with (friends, family, roommates) to join you. A Sabbath box is one of many ways to physically remind yourself to stop and embrace God’s gift of Sabbath rest, surrendering your cares, worries, and unfinished work to the Lord.



At the start of your Sabbath (whether it is 3-4 hours or a full 24 hours), write down on individual strips of paper any unfinished tasks, unresolved conflicts, worries, and concerns that are weighing on you. Place the strips, one at a time, in a box or jar as a physical act of entrusting and releasing these cares to the Lord. Spend some time in prayer after closing the box or jar, and offer this time of Sabbath rest to him.

As you do this exercise or even throughout the day, take some time to reflect on the following verses:

“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:7

As an extra challenge, consider putting your phone, computer, tablet, etc., in the box as a way of unplugging from constant connectivity and social media. This can become a family practice that launches your entire house into Sabbath. Note, however, that this may require some prior planning (i.e., communicating about plans ahead of time, setting an automatic reply on email, and letting people know that you will be unavailable for that time).

Step 3-Sabbath Activities

Over the course of this series, we will continue to build out your practice of Sabbath, but for now, pre-decide some life-giving activities that offer both rest and worship.

A few suggestions for Sabbath activities:

- Light candles
- Eat a Sabbath meal
- Practice gratitude
- Worship with your church community
- Go on a hike
- Have a picnic
- Read, especially scripture
- Take a nap
- Play board games
- Spend time alone with God
- Spend time with family and friends in conversation

This is not a to-do list, but rather ideas to generate rest and worship with God. Consider selecting 1-3 of these activities (or make up your own) that your heart is drawn to and sound appealing to your personality and life stage. Then try them out and see what happens.

A few more tips to remember as you try out Sabbath for the first time this week:

- Remember the heart behind Sabbath; Sabbath is a day of rest by which we practice attentiveness to God and cultivate a spirit of restfulness in all of our lives.

- Remember to start where you are, not where you think you should be. If it's challenging to stop for a whole 24 hours, start with 3-4 hours.
- Consider unplugging from social media/screens during this time.
- Pick a beginning/ending ritual (praying, lighting a candle, a song, reading a Psalm, sharing a meal) for your Sabbath day.

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 Minutes)

Close your time by reading the following Sabbath prayer together. Then take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other's upcoming week.

"May this day bring Sabbath rest to our hearts and homes. May God's image in us be restored, and our imagination in God be re-storied. May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down. May we know the grace to embrace our own finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness. May God's Word feed us and his Spirit lead us into the week and into the life to come." Pete Greig, Lectio 365