

Spiritual Rhythms

REST

“God eventually has to command the Sabbath. Does that strike you as odd? It’s like commanding ice cream or live music or beach days. You would think we’d all be chomping at the bit to practice the Sabbath. But apparently there something about the human condition that makes us want to hurry our way through life as fast as we possibly can, to rebel against the limitation of time itself. Due to our immaturity, dysfunction, and addiction, God has to command his people to do something deeply life giving—rest.”¹ —John Mark Comer

Are you weary? Many of us live at a pace of life that is crushing; not only emotionally and physically, but most importantly spiritually. The concept of Sabbath was introduced as God rested from creation work (Genesis 2:2–3), expanded as God gave Israelites the law (Exodus 20:8–11), and reinforced with God’s establishment of a Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). Jesus also described himself as “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28) and broadened his followers understanding of this Jewish practice. Jesus did not “religiously follow” Sabbath rules, but rather taught the value of resting in his presence, even while work (in his case, healing the sick) continued.

Our generation is in far greater need of a weekly Sabbath than previous generations due to the pace of life and an over-abundance of information, available at every turn, louder than the Spirit’s whisper. We need to allow our souls to catch up with our lives; to slow down enough to delight in God. With this week’s practice, our goal is to encourage you to engage in a weekly Sabbath that you might live with a greater awareness of God’s presence, and to cease striving (stop working, wanting, and worrying) so you can experience genuine renewal and authentic worship. As our friends at The Bible Project say, “Take a whole day to live as if [God’s] rest (completeness) has already come.” God is good, and remains in control, even when we cease striving for a time.

SCRIPTURE BASIS

Read and reflect on Exodus 20:8–11.

- The text begins with the word “remember.” Why do you think God’s people (including us!) need to be reminded to rest?
- Why do you think the writer uses the phrase “keeping it holy”? What makes stopping work every seventh day a holy practice?
- How would you respond to someone who suggests these commandments were for the Israelites, so they don’t apply to us today?

Read and reflect on Matthew 11:25–30.

- Based on this text, how might the practice of Sabbath-keeping help us encounter God?
- What do you know about the purpose of a “yoke”? How does this apply to our walk with Jesus?²

¹ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*, (Waterbrook, 2019), 159.

² If you need help with this, visit faithgateway.com/blogs/christian-books/yoke-rest-jesus

- Jesus gives three directives in this text: “Come to me...”, “Take my yoke upon you...”, and “Learn from me.” Which of these three seems most important to you today? How can you respond to that directive?

RESPONSE

- What words or phrases in today’s texts stood out to you? What is God calling your attention to?
- How does our relationship with Jesus change our understanding of the Israelites’ “law-keeping” of the Sabbath?
- What are some of life’s realities that make you weary? How can you turn them over to Jesus?

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

A.W. Tozer was an Alliance pastor who served churches in various locations including Chicago, and later in life, Toronto. He wrote and published more than twelve books, the most well-known of which is *The Pursuit of God* (1948). He notes that this pursuit begins with God. Without God’s creation of us in his image, without God’s desire and design for relationship with us, we would not have any hope of realizing this relationship with God. Our thankful response to God’s own desire cannot be accomplished within our own power, but as Tozer notes “the moment the spirit has quickened us to life in regeneration our whole being senses its kinship to God...” In our thanksgiving, we are called to a “stripping down of everything” as we seek only “simplicity in Christ.” Tozer knew this “deeper life” and as we seek this simplicity in Christ, we can better acknowledge God’s sovereignty and practice Sabbath rest.³

PRACTICE

Choose one or more of these four exercises this week to practice Sabbath rest.⁴

- **Silence & Solitude**—Consider Tozer again: “*Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God’s presence envelops you. Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it. Give yourself to God and then be what and who you are without regard to what others think.*”⁵ For this practice, choose a specific time and place where you are unlikely to be disturbed. Turn off your phone notifications and/or place your phone in a different area of your home or office. Sit quietly or take a walk alone outside. Pay attention to what God calls to mind. Talk to God about what you notice. If you are new to this practice, you may appreciate having a timer set for a specific length of time. If you already practice these disciplines, consider a full day away in silence at a retreat center.
- **Sabbath**—The practice of a full 24-hour day set apart for God is both biblical and historically practiced. Be intentional about a day of no work, no errands, no e-mails, no meetings. Unless it brings you joy in co-creating with God, no cooking or gardening! Spend time with worship, music, art, and people you love. If you are new to this practice, set aside four sabbath hours this week with a goal to add more next week.
- **Simplicity**—Often, life stress is intensified by owning too much “stuff.” This is magnified during the holiday seasons when we add material gifts to our closets and homes. But Jesus said, “life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). Let go of some possessions this week as an intentional way to simplify your home and subsequently, make mental space for more focus on Jesus and his kingdom.

³ Quotes from Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, pages 6–9

⁴ Some of these are adapted from John Mark Comer’s online resource “How to Unhurry,” johnmarkcomer.com/blog/unhurry

⁵ A.W. Tozer, *Tozer on Christian Leadership: A 366-day devotional*. (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 2001), pages 128–129

- **Slowing**—This week, simply choose to wait with patience. Pray for the person ahead of you at the stoplight. Engage in conversation with the grocery cashier. Go the speed limit all week. Talk with God about what you learn from these slowing experiences.

PRAYER FOCUS

Use these prayer prompts to deepen your practice of Sabbath rest:

- **CCC:** God, give us capacity to recognize our need for rest. Help us to eliminate activities and programs that keep us “busy” but fail to focus our hearts on you. Draw us into community with those who will deepen our faith-walk and love us like you do. Guide our leaders to set good examples in their own Sabbath-keeping and encourage one another to center every activity and every thought in Jesus.
- **Omaha:** Creator God, thank you for giving us homes and neighborhoods in which to live. Help us to recognize our neighbors as being made in your image, and help us to live simple, unhurried lives in their presence so they are drawn to want to know what’s different about us—drawn to want to know *you*. Give us ready answers for those who are seeking you, and the willingness to respond.
- **C&MA⁶:** Almighty God, we focus on your holiness this day. We recognize that only you are sovereign, and we are not. When we release control to you, we gain the peace to fully embrace the practice of Sabbath rest. Take away our worry and give us full assurance that your holy character will be enough for us, for all we need, for all we will become.

RESOURCES

Books and websites that support this week’s practice:

- The Bible Project, “Sabbath”, [youtube.com/watch?v=PFTLvKB3JLM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFTLvKB3JLM)
- John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*, (Waterbrook, 2019). See also Comer’s web resources at johnmarkcomer.com/blog/unhurry.
- Richard J Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World*, (Harper One, 2005)
- A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, (Anecko Press, 2015, updated edition)
- Dan Allender, *Sabbath: The Ancient Practices*, (Thomas Nelson, 2010)
- Wayne Mueller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*, (Bantam, 2000)
- Joshua Becker, becomingminimalist.com
- Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Silence and Solitude: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence*, (IVP books, 2010)
- Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart in Daily Practice: Experiments in Spiritual Transformation*, (NavPress, 2006)
- Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 30:15, Jeremiah 17:7–8, Hebrews 3–4, John 15

⁶ To sign up for a Christian & Missionary Alliance forty-day prayer resource, visit cmalliance.org/40days.