

PRACTICE GUIDE

JOURNEYING IN THE WILDERNESS

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SABBATH

“God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen 2:3 NIV).



As I write this, it is a snow day in Minneapolis. It is February 20, and today's seven inches made this the snowiest February on record. On our fifth snow day this season, Minnesotans are being forced to let go of control. After recalibrating our day, we loosen our ties to external demands, reorient our mindset, and enjoy being home. In other words, snow days are unplanned Sabbaths.

The first chapter of Genesis describes God separating light from darkness, partitioning sea from land, placing stars in the sky, and scattering animals across continents. God's creativity and handiwork are evident, but Genesis also notes God rested. In fact, “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen 2:3 NIV). As people created in God's image, we join God in co-creating and resting.

My natural inclination is to keep going, and resting is hard. But a few years ago, that changed. I connected with Hayim Herring, a Jewish rabbi, for a work project. As we began, Hayim shared his Sabbath-keeping practice. From sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday, he was not accessible. As a Christian, I was curious about his practice and wondered how he did it in

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today's world. He explained that his practice included a Shabbat meal, attending synagogue, spending time in prayer, reading the Torah, and abstaining from many "worldly" luxuries, including automobiles and technology. During the project, my curiosity turned to admiration as I discovered the discipline and joy this sacred practice held for him and his wife. At the end of our project, my husband and I were invited to share a Shabbat meal with them. It was a sacred evening with great food, wonderful hospitality, Hebrew prayers, and unforgettable fellowship. Working alongside Hayim made me rethink my Sabbath-keeping practice.

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Sabbath is a time for rest or ceasing from work. The Ten Commandments make Sabbath part of life's rhythm. Exodus highlights how Sabbath is built into the order of the creation, and Deuteronomy focuses on demonstrating "our obedience to the One who created us and redeems us." (*The Sabbath Experiment*, 12) God's creative and redemptive love is part of Sabbath-keeping. We remember how God created us and observe what God desires for our life. Christian Sabbath is not as regulated as Jewish Sabbath, but it is a discipline. *Guidelines make Sabbath-keeping a thoughtful and intentional practice.* Theologian and professor Rob Muthiah, in *The Sabbath Experiment*, offers seven guidelines for Sabbath-keeping: prepare, begin with a meal, embrace rest, worship in a local church, opt-out of buying and selling, put aside mediated devices, and end with a meal. Guidelines provide the skeleton for the practice, but cannot cultivate its spirit. **Sabbath is a gift to humankind, a day to remember God and our relationships, a time to slow down in a fast-paced world, and the chance to be in God's creation. It is part of how we were designed, and it is a gift from God.** Remember, it is "God who in Sabbath rest receives our worship and offers us the most abundant life possible, a life rooted in God's creation, a life redeemed and transformed by the saving work of Christ, and a life filled with the Spirit who leads us forward into God's preferred future. It is a future we taste each week when we enter Sabbath time." (9-10)



Christians can learn from our Jewish brothers and sisters about the countercultural nature of Sabbath-keeping. At our Shabbat meal, I asked Hayim's wife what this practice was like for her as a lawyer. She responded, "When we lived in New York, it was easier. Everyone at my firm was Jewish. But when we moved to Minnesota, I knew it would be harder. When I took this position, I told my colleagues and clients that you have me 24/6, but from Friday evening to Saturday evening, I'm not working." Her witness inspired me.

A few years ago, I invited students in a leadership course to engage in a Sabbath experiment. For four weeks, they practiced weekly Sabbath-keeping using the guidelines offered above. At the end of the course, I was surprised at their responses as they reflected on the experience. Almost everyone thanked me and shared how meaningful it was, but few felt they could continue it after the course. They did it as an assignment but without incentive, it was too hard to continue.

We are created to work and rest. Tending both is part of living abundantly. *What do you need to cease from doing?* Sabbath-keeping is a spiritual practice that celebrates life and reconciles us to God and each other. As we engage in Sabbath practices, we steward our lives and witness to God's alternative way of living. Experiment with Sabbath and find one or two others to join you.

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