



Sabbath Meditations

Practicing the Way

Abridged Digital Version
Not for Resale

Sabbath Meditations

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Welcome

The Sabbath is a day like no other. In the Genesis account, we read that God “blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” The word “holy” is *quodosh* in Hebrew, and it means unique, special, or uncommon.

The Sabbath is a day of uncommon goodness. Of what the Hebrews called *shalom*. It is an aftertaste of Eden—a time when all was as it was meant to be. And it is a foretaste of eternity, of the “new heavens and new earth”—a day in which we anticipate and act out our glorious future as the people of God, a new community, sitting around a table to feast with king Jesus, in a world set free from the curse and made new under his good rule.

It is a day set apart.

To **stop**.

To **rest**.

To **delight**.

And to **worship**.

Without fail it is the *best* day of the week; the day we look forward to on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and we remember on

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The anchor of our week and of our entire life with God, and with our community. That's why it's on day seven, not on day three or four. It's not a "break" from our busy lives; it *is* the aim of our lives. On the Sabbath, we practice eternity in time.

It is holy.

But in the Ten Commandments we are commanded to "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."

So, it *is* holy, but we also have to *keep* it holy.

Living in the Sabbathless culture of the West, the temptation is always to profane it, to treat it like just another day, to let it become a secularized day off.

For this reason, the Jews don't talk about "practicing" Sabbath, but "keeping" Sabbath. Keeping it holy, special. An entire day set apart just to rest, delight, and worship God.

May this book of meditations help you enter into the beauty of the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

— John Mark Comer, Founder of Practicing the Way

How To Use This Book

Life is a series of moments, but not all moments are created equal. Some are much, *much* better than others.

In order to keep the Sabbath holy, to keep it from being absorbed by the weekend most Sabbath practitioners find it essential to develop a beginning and ending ritual to mark the passage into and out of the day. What the Hebrews called, “sanctifying the day.”

There is no right way to begin your day of rest and worship. The traditional Sabbath practice begins with a liturgy called the *Kiddush* (a word meaning “sanctification”) and ends with the *Havdalah* (“separation”). Many people find that a light adaptation of these ancient liturgies can be enormously helpful.

To begin, you may want to follow this basic template:

- Put away your phones, devices, wallets, and/or anything that keeps you from Sabbath rest into a “Sabbath box.” You may also want to write out any fears, sorrows, or unfinished tasks on little pieces of paper, and prayerfully put them into the box as a way of setting them aside for the next twenty-four hours.

- Sit down around the table or in a comfortable, beautiful place, ideally with your community or family. You can sabbath alone, but it is best experienced with others.
- Light two candles, symbolic for the two commands to “remember the Sabbath” (in Exodus 20) and “observe the Sabbath” (in Deuteronomy 5), and pray the Kiddush prayer (on page 21 & 22).
- Pour the wine, if you choose.
- Those of you who are fathers, bless your children. Look them in the eye. Put your hand on them. Smile at them. Call up all the love in your heart from the Spirit of God. And speak words of blessings, affirmation, and destiny over them.
- Next, have all those present turn and bless each other. If you don’t know what to say, you can simply speak this blessing: “May you be happy and at peace on this Sabbath.”
- Read a Sabbath Meditation from this book, and/or a Psalm.
- Pray together to enter Sabbath time.
- Raise your glasses in joy and welcome the Sabbath by saying, “*Shabbat Shalom!*” (The Peace of Sabbath!)
- Note: Many find great joy in beginning the Sabbath on Friday or Saturday night and moving straight from this beginning ritual into the Sabbath meal—with feasting,

sharing highlights from the week, practicing gratitude, singing, and dancing.

To end, you may want to follow this basic template:

- Gather together in a comfortable, beautiful place.
- Light two candles.
- Go around the circle and share your highlight of the Sabbath.
- End in a prayer of gratitude for the Sabbath and anticipation for the *next* Sabbath.

May the God of rest fill you with his
peace and presence as you rest in him.

Sabbath is ...

Sabbath is blessed.

Sabbath makes us blessed.

Sabbath is holy.

Sabbath makes us holy.

Sabbath is a command.

Sabbath is a gift.

Sabbath is a law woven into the fabric of creation by the Creator.

Sabbath is an invitation.

Sabbath is a twenty-four unit of time.

Sabbath is practicing eternity in time.

Sabbath is a day.

Sabbath is a way of being.

Sabbath is rhythm.

Sabbath is resistance.

Sabbath means we don't have to hurry because there is nothing we have to do.

Sabbath means that "it is finished."

Sabbath means that we work *from* love, not *for* love.

Sabbath means we can rest because we are no longer slaves.

Sabbath means we must never become slaver drivers.

Sabbath means that we do not need to ask because we lack nothing.

Sabbath means that we do not need to buy because we lack nothing.

Sabbath means that we do not need to want because we lack nothing.

Sabbath means that we do not need to complain because we lack nothing.

Sabbath breaks our addiction to the twin gods of accomplishment and accumulation.

Sabbath says that we are not what we do, what we have, or what others think of us.

Sabbath says we are who we are loved by.

Sabbath must be prepared for.

Sabbath must be sacrificed for.

Sabbath must be remembered.

Sabbath must be observed — guarded, protected, watched over.

Sabbath puts a wall around beauty and goodness.

Sabbath brings maturity and health.

Sabbath brings healing and deliverance.

Sabbath is not a denial of pain, but a determination to move through pain into joy.

Sabbath is embracing our limits and accepting our finitude.

Sabbath shatters the illusion of control.

Sabbath reminds us that the Lord is our shepherd. Someone else is caring for us.

Sabbath says the world will get along just fine without us for a while.

Sabbath says someone else is running the universe, and he is a good king.

Sabbath is for quiet and solitude.

Sabbath is for celebration and community.

Sabbath is a day to delight in the goodness of the world.

Sabbath is a day to delight in goodness of our life in the world.

Sabbath is a day to delight in God.

Sabbath is a day for worship. To orient and reorient all we are back to God.

Sabbath is for God.

Sabbath is a signpost in time.

Sabbath points backward to Eden.

Sabbath points forward to the New Jerusalem.
Sabbath is a taste of heaven on earth.
Sabbath is where God is taking his people to live forever.

— Christian Dawson and John Mark Comer

Meditation -

Prayer for the lighting of candles:

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who hast sanctified us by thy commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights.

May the Sabbath-light which illumines our dwelling cause peace and happiness to shine in our home. Bless us, O God, on this holy Sabbath, and cause thy divine glory to shine upon us. Enlighten our darkness and guide us and all mankind, thy children, toward truth and eternal light. Amen.

— *The Kiddush*

Meditation -

Prayer for the beginning of Sabbath:

Come, let us welcome the Sabbath in joy and peace! Like a bride, radiant and joyous, comes the Sabbath. It brings blessings to our hearts; workday thoughts and cares are put aside. The brightness of the Sabbath light shines forth to tell that the divine spirit of love abides within our home. In that Light all our blessings are enriched, all our griefs and trials are softened.

— *The Kiddush*

Meditation -

Slowly pray this descending prayer out loud together to begin your Sabbath...

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know that I.

Be still and know that.

Be still and know.

Be still and.

Be still.

Be...

Meditation -

A psalm. A song. For the Sabbath day.

It is good to praise the Lord

and make music to your name, O Most High,

proclaiming your love in the morning

and your faithfulness at night,

to the music of the ten-stringed lyre

and the melody of the harp.

For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord;

I sing for joy at what your hands have done.

How great are your works, Lord,

how profound your thoughts!

Senseless people do not know,

fools do not understand,

that though the wicked spring up like grass

and all evildoers flourish,

they will be destroyed forever.

But you, Lord, are forever exalted.

For surely your enemies, Lord,

surely your enemies will perish;

all evildoers will be scattered.

You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox;

fine oils have been poured on me.

My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries;

my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,

they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;

planted in the house of the Lord,

they will flourish in the courts of our God.

*They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green,
proclaiming, "The Lord is upright;
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."*

— Psalm 92 (NIV)

Meditation -

To the abandoned fields
the trees returned and grew.
They stand and grow. Time comes
To them, time goes, the trees
Stand; the only place
They go is where they are.
Those wholly patient ones
Who only stand and wait
For time to come to them,
Who do not go to time,
Stand in eternity.
They stand where they belong.
They do no wrong, and they
Are beautiful. What more
Could we have thought to ask?
Here God and man have rest.

I've gone too far toward time,
And now have come back home...

I stand and wait for light
to open the dark night.
I stand and wait for prayer
to come and find me here.

— *Sabbaths IX* by Wendell Berry

Meditation -

Are you exhausted all the time? Waking up to your alarm clock, day after day? Always in a hurry, late for the next thing, impatient with life? Do you feel haggard? Rarely your best self? Drowning under the tide of options and opportunities? Constantly trying to catch up to the ideal life that is always just out of reach? Come to me. Slow your whole life down.

Let me show you how to shoulder the weight of life with ease, even joy. Other people offer escape aplenty; I offer something more; real, true rest. Soul-level rest. Copy the details of my life, pattern the rhythm of your life after mine, and slowly but surely, I will teach you how to live with more ease and gratitude and joy than you ever thought possible.

— Paraphrase of Matthew 11v28-30 (NIV)

Meditation -

Sleep is the prayer the body prays,
Breathing in unthought faith the Breath
That through our worry-wearied days
Preserves our rest, and is our truth.

— *Sabbath Poems XIII* by Wendell Berry

Meditation -

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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.

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 20v8-11 (NIV)

Meditation -

“[The Sabbath] commandment enjoins quietness of heart, tranquility of mind. This is holiness. Because here is the Spirit of God. This is what a true holiday means, quietness and rest. Unquiet people recoil from the Holy Spirit. They love quarrelling. They love argument. In their restlessness they do not allow the silence of the Lord’s Sabbath to entire their lives. Against such restlessness we are offered a kind of sabbath in the heart. As if God were saying ‘Stop being so restless, quiet the uproar in your minds. Let go of the idle fantasies that fly around in your head.’ God is saying, ‘Be still and know that I am God’ (Ps. 46). But you refuse to be still. You are like the Egyptians tormented by gnats. These tiniest of flies, always restless, flying about aimlessly, swarm at your eyes, giving no rest. They are back as soon as you drive them off. Just like the futile fantasies that swarm in our minds. Keep the commandment. Beware of this plague.”

— St. Augustine

Meditation -

Resisting limits isn't new for the human race. From the very beginning we've had an animosity toward finitude and boundaries. In their rebellion, Adam and Eve wanted to be 'like God.' Invincible. All-sufficient. Autonomous. Limitless...

What if Christians were known as a countercultural community of the well-rested — people who embrace our limits with zest and even joy?

As believers we can relish sleep as not only necessary but as an embodied response to the truth of Scripture: we are finite, weak creatures who are abundantly cared for by our strong and loving Creator.

— *Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Harrison Warren

Meditation -

“The Sabbath is God’s antidote for our hurried, harried pace of life, and gives us the unhurried one-in-seven rhythm woven into the fabric of creation. That seventh day is a space for us to enter into a needed recovery (and perhaps go through the inevitable withdrawals) from the hurry, divineness, and workaholism that plague so many of our lives, families, communities and organizations. On the Sabbath, hurry becomes a vice, the exact opposite of our workaday world’s way of making it a virtue.”

— Alan Fadling

Meditation -

“We are a restless people. Restlessness is the opposite of being restful. Restfulness is one of the most primal cravings humans have. We crave rest to the point where we identify it with heaven: ‘Grant us eternal rest.’ Today, as our lives grow more pressured, as we grow more tired, as we begin to feel burned out, we fantasize more about restfulness. We imagine a peaceful, quiet place: we see ourselves walking by a lake, watching a peaceful sunset, smoking a pipe in a rocker by the fireplace. But even in those images, we make restfulness yet another activity, something we do... then we return to normal life. True restfulness, though, is a form of awareness, a way of being in life. It is living ordinary life with a sense of ease, gratitude, appreciation, peace, and prayer. We are restful when ordinary life is enough.”

— Ronald Rolheiser



Delight

Meditation -

The Sabbath is a day to delight.

In God's world.

In our life *in* God's world.

And in God himself.

Meditation -

*“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the Lord’s holy day honorable,
and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
then you will find your joy in the Lord,
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land
and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

— Isaiah 58v13-14 (NIV)

Meditation -

The sabbath is an invitation to enter delight. The sabbath when experienced as God intended, is the best day of our lives. Without question or thought, it is the best day of the week. It is the day we anticipate on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday—and the day we remember on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Sabbath is the holy time where we feast, play, dance, have sex, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk, and watch creation in its fullness. Few people are willing to enter the sabbath and sanctify it, to make it holy, because a full day of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone a week.

— *The Sabbath* by Dan Allender

Meditation -

“Days pass and the years vanish and we walk sightless among miracles.

God, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing; let there be moments when Your Presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns, unconsumed.

And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness and exclaim in wonder: ‘How filled with awe is this place and we did not know it!’”

— Rabbi Chaim Stern

Meditation -

God has established a created order full of excellent and good things, and it follows naturally that as we give our attention to those things we will be happy. That is God's appointed way to joy. If we think we will have joy only by praying and singing psalms, we will be disillusioned. But if we fill our lives with simple, good things and constantly thank God for them, we will be joyful, that is, full of joy... The decision to set the mind on the higher things of life is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a Discipline. It is not something that falls on our heads. It is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living.

— *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster

Meditation -

“The Sabbath comes every seven days, to remind us of the goodness of our life with God in *all* the seasons of our lives, including the ones that don’t *feel* very good.

Unlike other spiritual disciplines, the timing of Sabbath is set by God himself, not by our own inner spiritual clock that tells us the need of the hour. Sabbath comes at the end of a great week, and at the end of a lousy one. When we finished all our to-do list, and when we’re woefully behind. In summer, and in winter. When all is well, and when our life is falling apart. To remind us it’s okay that we’re not okay.

In those seasons of the dark night, where our prayers are unanswered, our dreams over, when we feel God’s absence more than his presence, *the Sabbath comes*, and with it a sense of peace, of trust in God, *despite* our circumstances, not because of them. Teaching us to delight and even be happy in *all* the seasons of our life. Or as Paul said, to ‘rejoice in the Lord *always*.’”

— John Mark Comer

Meditation -

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."

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

— Mark 2v23-3v6 (NIV)

Meditation -

“To keep the Sabbath is a great act of faith in King Jesus. It is more than agreeing with or liking the gospel as belief and doctrine; it is embodying the gospel in time and space. It is believing, responding to, and living the gospel with our bodies, money, habits, food, emotions, work, possessions, desires, rhythms, relationships, schedules, and time. To keep Sabbath is to announce that we were once dead in sins but now free in grace, once prisoners of hell but now citizens of heaven, once slaves to work but now free to rest, once controlled by the flesh but now led by the Spirit. To keep Sabbath is to use every part of our lives to declare that Jesus is God and Man, Lord and Savior, Restorer and Redeemer, Teacher and King. To keep Sabbath is to actually live into what God has done, is doing, and will do. It is to announce that Jesus did die, is alive, and is coming again, and that we too have died, have been made alive, and will one day be raised to life. To keep Sabbath is to step into resurrection life. To keep Sabbath is to take to heart and lifestyle Jesus’ words, ‘It is finished.’ To keep Sabbath is to live into Jesus’ rest for our souls. Therefore, to keep Sabbath is a great act of faith in King Jesus.”

— Christian Dawson

Meditation -

Ask the world to reveal its quietude—
not the silence of machines when they are still,
but the true quiet by which birdsongs,
trees, bellworts, snails, clouds, storms
become what they are, and nothing else.

— *Sabbaths 2001 III* by Wendell Berry

Meditation -

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest.

— Hebrews 4v9-11 (NIV)

About Practicing the Way

Sabbath Meditations is a resource from Practicing the Way - a simple, beautiful way to integrate formation into your church or small group.

Practicing the Way is a crowd-funded nonprofit. All our resources are completely free thanks to the generosity of The Circle, an online community of monthly givers who partner with us to see the spiritual formation movement integrated into the Western Church.

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