

Trellis: Sabbath Practice

Sabbath is a gift. It has the power to transform your week, every week. Because it's a gift, we may assume that the practice of Sabbath is easy. It's not. It's counterintuitive and radically countercultural. If a Trellis is our structure for a healthy vine, then Sabbath keeping is like a fine wine that comes from that vine. It's costly, it requires intentionality and expertise, each one is unique, and it only gets better with age.

The 8 P's of Sabbath

1. Prepare (the other 6 days)

- **Expel legalism.** Perfect is the enemy of good. Your first day practicing Sabbath will not be the most fulfilling. You'll likely struggle to adjust. Eventually it will feel like stepping into heaven itself... but initially it'll feel more like being dropped into a foreign country. It's disorienting to step off of the hedonic treadmill, away from the tyranny of time, and into Sabbath rest. It's more likely to get worse before it gets better. Manage expectations and embrace incrementalism. You'll build Sabbath rhythms your entire life, and only experience the fullness of it in the New Earth. Deep breath, everybody... let's do this one step at a time!
- **Plan.** Through prayer, imagination, and discussion with your Trellis Community, you'll set some goals for beginning your Sabbath journey. Each will require some planning. Clear your schedule. A day of delight without work means knocking out chores early, and planning meals ahead of time (especially if, for you, Sabbath joy doesn't involve cooking!). It will require working through those work emails ahead of time, and then finding a way to keep work demands at bay. If you're going to take a Sabbath hike, plan the trip in advance. If you're planning to spend the day without your phone (recommended!), imagine what that will take, and plan accordingly. Etc.
- **Walk with Jesus.** Sabbath is often thought of as a sullen day of prayer, reflection, reading and silence. Not really. It is, first and foremost, a day of

delight. Certainly your day will include some of those things (perhaps all of them, because they can all be delightful!)... but only as an overflow, not as a Sabbath duty. Don't fall for the idea that it's a day for catching up on spiritual practices. By contrast, it's a day of celebrating the beauty that has been made clear by the previous 6 days of walking with Jesus.

- This is especially true for the practice of silence. If days 1-6 are devoid of silence and reflection, then the peace of Sabbath will be bombarded by the need for reflection and stillness that's been piling up all week. If we don't hold space to grieve or to vent or to process during days 1-6, our Sabbaths will become the release valve for that, and will be overtaken by whatever unaddressed emotions the week has brought. We prepare for Sabbath by walking with Jesus the other six days.

2. Pretend

Menuha is the Hebrew word for rest, but it is better translated as joyous repose, tranquility, or delight. To the biblical mind *Menuha* is the same as happiness and stillness, as peace and harmony. It is the state in which there is no strife and no fighting, no fear and no distrust. [Sabbath] is the queen of all days, the day in which division, destitution, and death are put aside to celebrate our union with God, the abundance of his love, and the wild hope of the coming kingdom. It is a day of holy fiction, a day when the promise of God is fulfilled on a stage where we write the script and take the roles we most want to act for his glory.”

Dan Allender, *Sabbath*

- Sabbath rest isn't just leisure, it's delight! Imagine that the Kingdom of God has come in full, and you're currently residing in the New Earth. God has renewed all things! Sabbath is supposed to be a foretaste of that coming reality. For one day a week we pretend we're already in that truth, and live into its joy.
- What might a day on the New Earth include? What would it exclude? That's our target. What would it look like for you to take incremental steps in that direction? With a lifetime of growth available to us, let's see how far we can get to bringing a glimpse of the Kingdom here. Incrementally, of course!

3. Play

We are far more practiced and comfortable with work than play. We are far better at handling difficulties than joy. When faced with a problem, we can jump into it or avoid it; we can use our skills or resources to manage it. But what do we do with joy? We can only receive it and allow it to shimmer, settle, and then in due season, depart.

The Sabbath is our play day—not as a break from the routine of work, but as a feast that celebrates the abundance of God’s creative love to give glory for no other reason other than Love himself loves to create and give away glory.

Dan Allender, *Sabbath*

- Sabbath is for play! People tend to grow up and forget how to play. We must re-learn! A hobby, a sport, a creative outlet of some kind is part and parcel to Sabbath keeping. Asceticism has detached us from the simple fact that life with Jesus is joyous, and fun and very, very good. Sometimes it’s silly. Not every Sabbath will feature games or jokes, and laughing until it hurts... but the very best ones will.
- Consider what you enjoy the most. What hobby do you get lost in? Which activities lead to the most joy? Which friends make you comfortable enough to laugh hysterically when the moment hits? Seek these out, and look to incorporate them into your Sabbath rhythms.

4. Perceive

It is not enough to ask, what beauty will you enter this day of Sabbath delight? Instead, we must ask, what beauty will you explore and get lost in during this day of celebration? What beauty will open your eyes to the questions God wants you to ponder in order to increase your awe and gratitude? The Sabbath is the day to experiment with beauty that teases your hunger to know more glory.

Dan Allender, *Sabbath*

- Sabbath is a day to get lost in beauty, especially the beauty of God’s creation. It’s a day for awe, to be stunned by creation.

Psalm 19:1–4 (NLT): 1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. 2 Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. 3 They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. 4 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world.

- Note vss. 3-4. Creation is silent, but it must be heard! Sabbath is a day for listening to the glory of God being declared by his good creation.
- Sabbath is a day to enjoy the art you most appreciate. Whether it's poetry or painting or music or anything in between, the joy and peace of Sabbath leaves us better able to appreciate beauty, and that leads us into praise.

5. Praise

- The above direction will inevitably lead us here. If we spend the week walking with Jesus, and then enter Sabbath prepared to delight in the God's coming kingdom reign, to play in his given creation, and to perceive his transcendent beauty all around us, we will most certainly enter into praise.
- In a sense, all of Sabbath is praise. It's a celebration of what is good, and the goodness that is coming. An afternoon nap, a great meal, or a long walk can all be pure praise. That said, it's good to set aside time on our Sabbath for focused celebration of all that God has done. This can happen in any form we see in scripture: gathered worship with your church, song, silence, dance, shouting, writing, stating, etc.

In good times, we begin to think that all we have results from our own cleverness and ingenuity. No one ever found the Lord on the day they won the lottery. Faith is more likely to blossom on the day we lose our job. In my experience, Sabbath encourages thankfulness without the wake-up call of illness, loss, or ruin. It allows me to see miracles. It increases my sense of wonder. During the workweek, I sometimes struggle with my faith. Where is God? But on the Sabbath, I feel the Lord's presence. My cup runneth over; my batteries are charged. Sabbath reminds me that God is the source of my life. When we go 24/7, we get to thinking that our well-being results from our own efforts. God gets taken out of the equation. We lose track of who made the universe.

We begin thinking that the world can't run without us.

Matthew Sleeth, 24/6

- **Superabundance.** Belden Lane tells the story of a few desert Bedouin leaders who were brought to visit Paris. They saw the Eiffel Tower and massive buildings. They were polite, but wholly unimpressed. But when they were taken to see a waterfall in the countryside they were utterly amazed. They stood transfixed, insisting that they must stay until the surging flood was complete, assuming this was only a fleeting spectacle and would surely stop any second. They couldn't fathom the superabundance of an inexhaustible overflow of water... one that had been surging endlessly for thousands of years. Sabbath, if nothing else, is a day to perceive, as best we can, the superabundance of God's grace and to respond with awe-struck praise.

6. Pause

- In Greek Mythology, Cronos is the Titan of time. This is where we get words like 'chronic' and 'chronological.' Cronos was the god of the clock, the inevitable and unalterable march of time that yields to no one. He ruled ruthlessly and mercilessly and destroyed any threats to his power. This mirrors the reign of terror that our clocks have over us, governing every hour. Sabbath is a rebellion against the reign of Cronos.
- Kairos was the Greek god of sacred time, or of quality time. Time not measured, but savored. Time that we don't run from lest we be destroyed, but time we enter into and enjoy. If we lose track of time under Cronos we will be eaten (by the way, Cronos ate his own children!). If we lose track of time under Kairos, we enter a flow state and reap incredible benefits. Under Kairos, time is not an enemy but a friend. Sabbath is a rebellion against Cronos, and an appreciation of Kairos... where holding still is rewarded. Where rest is the goal.
- Kairos is Kingdom time—the time of a New Heaven and a New Earth. As we grow in our Sabbath rhythms we'll find ourselves better able to lose track of time, to enter flow states of worship, delight, appreciation and creativity. We escape from quantity time and savor quality time.
- As you prepare for Sabbath, consider what activities or practices will help you find *Selah* (a sacred pause). This will take much trial and error and won't be fully realized until the kingdom comes, so be kind to yourself and patient with the process... but remain diligent. Kairos isn't a myth, it's Sabbath!

7. Partner

- Sabbath keeping is typically seen as a solitary practice. This is wrong. A Sabbath day may include times of solitude, some might be spent entirely in solitude... but Sabbath is deeply communal. Remember, we're pretending that the Kingdom has come and we are living in the fullness of reality—and the coming Kingdom is not one of isolation.
- Your Trellis Community will be your support in Sabbath keeping. Encourage one another. Imagine together what an ideal Sabbath might include. Share your experiences of Sabbath with one another... the wins and losses. As you set incremental goals toward more fulfilling Sabbath rhythms, hold one another accountable and encourage one another when it doesn't go well.
- Central to many Sabbaths will be a celebratory feast with friends. We all have different circumstances, but this is an ideal worth pursuing. A communal meal is one of the clearest pictures we're given of God's coming kingdom and the renewal of all things

Isaiah 25:6–9 (NLT):

6 In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven's Armies will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world. It will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat. 7 There he will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. 8 He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears. He will remove forever all insults and mockery against his land and people. The Lord has spoken! 9 In that day the people will proclaim, "This is our God! We trusted in him, and he saved us! This is the Lord, in whom we trusted. Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!"

8. Proclaim (Freedom / Justice / Equality)

- Justice and equality are essential elements of Sabbath joy. Sabbath keeping is the 4th commandment. Most commonly we read the Ten Commandments from Exodus. However, the list is repeated in Deuteronomy, and this time Sabbath is unmistakably placed in the context of freedom for the enslaved, justice for the oppressed, and equality for all.

Deuteronomy 5:12–15 (NLT):

12 “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. 13 You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 14 but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. 15 Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the Lord your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the Lord your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.

- The command is not simply to keep a day of rest and delight, but to insure that it is offered to everyone in your family, all you may employ, and even livestock. The Sabbath is supposed to be available to all, and we are given the responsibility to pursue that ideal. The rationale for this is embedded within Israel’s history of being enslaved themselves.
- If Sabbath is a foretaste of the coming kingdom (see #2), then there is no place for oppression, or injustice. When God renews all things there will be equality, and we’re commissioned to bring that into our current reality wherever possible.
- The Sabbath values are reinforced in the ideas of the Sabbath year, and the year of Jubilee:

Leviticus 25:8–10 (NLT): The Year of Jubilee

8 “In addition, you must count off seven Sabbath years, seven sets of seven years, adding up to forty-nine years in all. 9 Then on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year, blow the ram’s horn loud and long throughout the land. 10 Set this year apart as holy, a time to proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live there. It will be a jubilee year for you, when each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors and return to your own clan.

- As an extension of Sabbath values, the Lord decreed the Year of Jubilee. A time of forced equality and granted freedom... when the social and economic ground was once again made level, as it is as the foot of the cross, and as it will be in God’s coming Kingdom.

- Isaiah carries the theme further, again directly connecting Sabbath keeping with doing justice:

Isaiah 56:1–2 (NLT): Blessings for All Nations

This is what the Lord says: “Be just and fair to all. Do what is right and good, for I am coming soon to rescue you and to display my righteousness among you. 2 Blessed are all those who are careful to do this. Blessed are those who honor my Sabbath days of rest and keep themselves from doing wrong.”

- As noted earlier, we prepare for Sabbath by walking with Jesus the other 6 days. We also prepare for Sabbath by loving our neighbor the other 6 days—by being people who refuse to look away when we see injustice, and who work to proclaim freedom for the oppressed.
- If Sabbath is a day to delight in our superabundance (see #5), then it must also be a day to be steeled in our resolve to share that superabundance with anyone in need.
- If Sabbath is a day to pretend we’re living in the fullness of the coming Kingdom (see #2), then surely it is a day to celebrate the diversity and equality of that coming kingdom and a day to offer mercy, healing and hospitality. Jesus did (see Luke 14:1-6).
- Consider with your Trellis Community how you can love your neighbor well on days 1-6, and then how you can make your Sabbath a jubilee—where the justice and equality and unity of the coming Kingdom might be glimpsed as part of your Sabbath delight.