

Sabbath for Rookies

THE FIRST DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE FIRST PEOPLE WAS A SABBATH

I am very much a newbie when it comes to Sabbath, this is by no means a definitive description of the whys and ways of keeping Sabbath – even so I pray my comments will be a blessing to you and your families. It is quite possible you will take a few weeks, or months to find a rhythm of observing Sabbath that genuinely restores and recreates you. Learn this phrase and remind yourself of it often.

“if something is worthy doing, it’s worth doing poorly while I learn to do it well”

Important scriptures regarding Sabbath in the Old Testament:

Exodus 20:8-10, Exodus 31:12-17, Exodus 34:21, Deuteronomy 5:12-15, Isaiah 58:13-14.

Should Christians keep Sabbath?

1. Jesus kept Sabbath
2. Jesus challenged the way Scribes and Pharisees did Sabbath, not the practice of Sabbath itself
3. When Jesus was on trial in front of the Sanhedrin, he was not charged with the offence of Sabbath breaking – an offence punishable by death – an easy way to deal with the problem that was Jesus of Nazareth. The legal experts could obviously find no evidence that Jesus neglected Sabbath.
4. Where God commands His people to keep Sabbath in Exodus 20 and 31, and in Deuteronomy 5 both Jews and non-Jews are to rest – and in Mark’s account of these Sabbath conflicts Jesus says Sabbath was made for humankind so it is for all, not just for the people of Israel
5. Exodus 34:21 tells us we are to keep Sabbath even at our busiest times of year
6. Sabbath keeping is the fourth commandment – definitely, Old Testament law. We keep the other 9 commandments, or at least try to – 5, 9 & 10 can be hard – but we still attempt to obey them. What makes Sabbath keeping different?

Forces that make it hard to do Sabbath

External forces

- Non-urgent but ‘good’ causes
- news and social media
- sports commitments, kid’s events, work dos
- caring for dependents
- church service commitments eg. worship or children’s ministry.

Suggestion: make a list of the things that must be done. Consider what ‘work’ is involved in order to do each task. Can some of this work be done before or after Sabbath – e.g. getting all the gear for the game sorted before the Sabbath, preparing food for your children but leaving the dishes till after Sabbath ends

Internal forces

- poor time management
- approval seeking that makes it hard to stop ‘working’
- not good at setting boundaries
- you struggle with the feeling of disappointment meaning you fear missing out on things

- a martyr complex – *“everything will go to pieces if I don’t do this...”*
- a saviour complex – *“I’m the only one who can do this...”*

Suggestion: seek out a counsellor or wise mentor to help you address unhelpful internal forces (you and your family will reap the benefits across the whole week 😊)

General Observations

- Sabbath sustains us through the whole week – the day itself restores us, the memory of the Sabbath just gone delights us, the planning and anticipation of our next Sabbath re-invigorates and carries us through the rest of our working week.
- Sabbath is about re-creation and restoration – it is not primarily for resting. Don’t expect Sabbath to sustain you if you are not also getting good sleep throughout the week.
- Sabbath is not about stopping everything, it is about stopping those things we do under obligation, those things we do which drain us.
- Therefore, Sabbath activities do not have to be low energy. One of the key motifs of Sabbath is “Delight” On the seventh day God delighted in His creation. If you delight in tramping, or a game of knock-up soccer with mates – then these might be appropriate Sabbath activities for you.
- Sabbath is also about Gods creativity – spending time admiring God’s creation, spending time creating something yourself are wonderful Sabbath activities.
- Sabbath is a time to spend with friends and family – giving thanks for each other, blessing each other, delighting over good food. Fasting and dieting is *not allowed* on Sabbath
- Sabbath is a time when married couples are encouraged to delight in the gift of sexual intimacy with each other 😊
- Sabbath is a time to fellowship with God – that is why Jews go to synagogue on Saturdays, and Christians go to church on Sundays – our worship gatherings are designed to be times where we come together to worship, fellowship and feast with God.
- Habits that Sabbath keepers have found useful here are reading good Christian books that invite reflection, journaling, setting time aside for silence, reflecting on things you are grateful for.
- Plan your Sabbath. On Wednesday, decide what you want to do and work out what needs preparing ahead of time. For example - If you are having friends over for a Sabbath meal – what work will that entail – grocery shopping, setting the scene etc. and plan when you will do that. Unless you absolutely delight in the work of cooking try and prepare as much of the food as possible before your Sabbath.
- It can be helpful to start Sabbath with a simple ceremony – light a candle, arrange some fresh flowers (visually these can help everyone remember this is sacred time), speak a prayer of blessing.

- There are arguments over which day we should observe Sabbath – personally I think Jesus would treat this argument the way we see him challenging the Pharisees and Scribes of his day – the most important thing is that we put aside work and make a regular time for recreation and restoration. Because Sunday is a workday for me my Sabbath commences once I leave church after the evening service. I have a pastor friend who starts their Sabbath at 2pm on a Sunday after the morning service and fellowship lunch has ended. At different stages of life, some people find they need a Sabbath that lasts more than 24 hours.
- Some of you may remember Sabbath habits from your childhood like – no playing games, no laughing too loud, no playing musical instruments. As you begin this new season of Sabbath keeping, invite the Holy Spirit to help you discern God’s will for this time, and to help you not get bound up by rules and regulations – no matter how well intentioned.
- Find a way to help yourself be accountable for keeping Sabbath – your home group perhaps, your mentor or spiritual director if you have one.
- Finally, one thing I have found especially helpful: Jews observe Sabbath from sundown to sundown - rather than choosing a day that runs from waking to sleeping, start and finish your Sabbath part way through a day. This takes a lot of pressure off me because I know that if something comes up during my Sabbath day, I can attend to it in the evening once Sabbath has finished – e.g. getting ready for school/work

What about Families?

For families with young children or dependent elders Sabbath can require significant creativity – here are some suggestions for families with younger children

- If your children are old enough invite them into the planning phase. Roster each person on to plan a family focused Sabbath activity that will be a blessing to all – it helps our kids to think of what will make others happy
- If Sunday is to be your Sabbath – get everyone to lay out their church clothes and equipment the day before. As a family lay out breakfast items after dinner the night before – this helps build anticipation and excitement
- Choose special Sabbath foods that the family only has on this special day - e.g. milo, a special breakfast cereal, bacon depending on your budget and family food preferences
- Go treasure hunting – looking for God’s fingerprints outside*
- At mealtimes celebrate God’s fingerprints on the people you are with
- If your children are very young – parents/carers – negotiate ‘time out’ for each other, Mum might be on duty whilst Dad rests early afternoon, and then you swap.
- Focus on the delightful parts of being a parent on this day, organize the ‘work’ of parenting to occur before and after Sabbath as much as possible.
- Some parents try hard not to correct or discipline their children on Sabbath focusing instead on praising and encouraging them – if your wee one misbehaves try *“Junior, this behaviour is not okay – after dinner (or whenever your Sabbath ends) we will talk about this”* then make sure to follow that up
- Once Sabbath has finished, spend a few minutes reflecting on the day just gone – what restored and refreshed you and is worth repeating? What was hard work and needs some tweaking, or discarding next time?

Professor Lynne Baab has some very practical articles on Sabbath (and other spiritual practices) here: <http://www.lynnabaab.com/articles>

***Sabbath treasure hunts:**

1. Take the family outside and look for God's fingerprints on the things you see – the way plants and insects are designed, the majesty of a grand view, the animals you see. Before you head out – invite the Holy Spirit to point things out to you. If you have small children with you, help them to see God's fingerprints.

2. over a meal look for God's fingerprints on the people you are with. Think of the things you like and admire about the people in front of you. Ask the Holy Spirit how this person reflects God's character. And then share that with your loved one / friend – eg. "Sam, I love the way you encourage our children to try new things. It reminds me of the ways God has encouraged me to try new things. Thank you for witnessing God to me"

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