

Learning to Rest in a Restless World:

A Guide for Embracing God's Gift of Rest and Limits

INTRODUCTION

For many, the idea of rest can feel like an elusive dream, an impossible burden, or even a self-centered entitlement. Certainly, the pursuit of meaningful rest in the midst of a restless world has its challenges and distortions. That's why the journey into God's counter-cultural wisdom requires prayer, thoughtfulness, practice, and community.

In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus extends this invitation:

Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
(Matthew 11:28–30 ESV)

Jesus offers us a rhythm of work and rest, where we embrace our limits and trust in God's provision, not in our performance. His rest is not about escaping responsibility but about living in the flow of God's grace, trusting that our worth is not found in what we do, but in who we are as His beloved children.

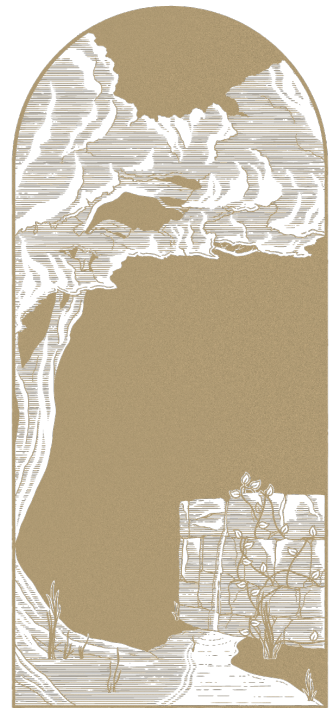
This is the way of life Jesus invites us into—a life that establishes a healthy relationship between work and rest, rooted in our relationship with Him. In a culture full of frenetic activity and passive escapism, Jesus alone offers rest for our souls.

This guide is aimed at two things: **(I)** helping you honestly assess your current reality with respect to healthy rhythms of rest, and **(II)** guiding you into some steps you could take as you learn to receive Jesus' invitation to rest for your soul.

I. SELF ASSESSMENT GUIDE

SELF-ASSESSMENT STATEMENTS

Instructions: On a scale from 1 to 5, how true are the following statements for you? The statements begin on the next page. (1 = not at all true; 2 = rarely true; 3 = sometimes true; 4 = often true; 5 = consistently true) After rating each statement, you'll reflect on the questions that follow.



CURRENT STATE OF RESTEDNESS		RATING
1	I have enough margin in my life to be fully present with the people and responsibilities that matter most to me.	
2	I've never been accused of "trying to do it all" or of biting off more than I could chew.*	
3	I am regularly able to say "no" to requests and opportunities rather than risk overextending myself.*	
4	I regularly get sufficient sleep to sustain my energy for the day.	
5	It's easy for me to distinguish the difference between when to help carry someone else's burden and when to let it go so they can carry their own burden.*	
6	I have a good sense of my emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual capacities, and I intentionally pull back to rest and fill my "gas tank" again.*	
7	Those close to me would say that I am good at balancing family, rest, work, and play in a Biblical way.*	

SABBATH CONVICTION & PRACTICE		RATING
8	<i>Sabbath Conviction:</i> I am convinced that Sabbath rest is a meaningful and biblical instruction that I should honor in my life.	
9	<i>Sabbath Commitment:</i> I regularly take a 24-hour period each week to practice Sabbath.	
10	<i>Day of Preparation:</i> I have organized my schedule to give me adequate time to prepare for Sabbath.	
11	<i>Sabbath Activities:</i> I have evaluated my Sabbath activities and commitments through the filter of the Sabbath vision to stop, rest, delight, worship.	
12	<i>Sabbath Rituals:</i> I have established meaningful sabbath rituals to help me experience Sabbath as a gift from God and an act of worship rather than merely a self-oriented day off.	

REPLENISHING PRACTICES		RATING
15	I know what kinds of activities deplete me, what activities numb me, and what activities restore me.	
14	I recognize and redirect when I'm using comfort activities in a way that leaves me feeling more depleted and/or numbed rather than replenished.	
15	I regularly engage in activities that restore, renew, and replenish my energy and spirit.	

*Some of the above statements are adapted from *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What observations do you have from your self-assessment ratings?
2. What has been something that you have learned or enjoyed about pursuing sabbath in your own life?
3. What tends to get in the way of setting aside a full day for Sabbath each week?
4. Have you interacted with any teachings on the Sabbath that have been challenging to you?

5. Beyond the practice of the Sabbath, what are some regular practices that help you feel rested and restored on a regular basis?
6. What are some of the biggest obstacles that keep you from daily moments of rest?
7. What activities do I turn to for comfort that might not actually provide true rest?
8. How can I shift toward activities that genuinely renew my energy and spirit?

NEXT STEPS:

- What is **one small, practical change** you could make this week to create more margin in your daily routine?
- What is **one commitment** you could make (or adjust) to honor a weekly Sabbath more fully?
- What is **one step** you could take toward engaging in a practice that brings you healthy replenishment?

II. LEARNING TO PRACTICE THE SABBATH

Principle: God has given us the gift of Sabbath to help us rest in His care and delight in the gifts of His creation. Sabbath isn't just an elevated day off or a nice idea for self-optimization. It's a God-ordained transformative rhythm designed to help us resist the forces that distort our humanity, reorienting our lives around God's goodness and wisdom.

Action: Set aside one 24-hour period each week to observe the Sabbath so that you can stop, rest, delight, and worship God as the giver and sustainer of life.

FOUR STEPS TOWARD A HEALTHY SABBATH :

1. **Make a Sabbath commitment:** Choose a consistent day of the week to practice Sabbath.

For Sabbath to become a fruitful and sustainable practice in your life, you must make it a governing weekly priority through which you filter your decisions about your other commitments and activities. This will often mean that you will need to adapt your schedule, your commitments, and your normal rhythms. This can be a powerful and transformational step to help surrender to God's wisdom and trust in God's care and provision.

QUESTIONS:

1. When will you regularly practice Sabbath?
2. What challenges do you anticipate?
3. What steps can you take to address those challenges?
4. Who do you need to discuss this with?

2. **Designate a Day of Preparation:** Organize your schedule to give you adequate time to prepare for Sabbath.

Good rest requires preparation. This is why the people of God have historically designated a 'Day of Preparation' before Sabbath. A Day of Preparation gives you space to get the things done that will allow you to fully embrace God's gift of Sabbath rest.

QUESTIONS:

1. When will you create space to prepare for Sabbath?
2. What challenges do you anticipate?
3. What steps can you take to address those challenges?
4. Who do you need to discuss this with?

3. **Clarify your Sabbath activities:** Get clear about what kinds of activities help you pursue the sabbath principles of *Stop* (stopping your work), *Rest* (engaging in activities that restore your energy), *Delight* (enjoy the good gifts that God has given you), and *Worship* (direct your heart to God with gratitude and trust).

Sabbath is a time to stop your work, rest and restore your soul, delight in God's good gifts, and worship God as the Giver and Sustainer of life. The challenge is that not everyone experiences these realities in the same way. This is why it is important to clarify what kinds of activities help you pursue this vision of Sabbath rest and to filter your decisions about what to do and what not to do on Sabbath through that grid. In addition to clarifying these things for yourself, it's also important to clarify and, at times, negotiate these Sabbath values and expectations with other relevant friends or family members.

QUESTIONS:

1. What activities and commitments do you want to keep, stop, start, or change in order to help you engage in Sabbath in a way that is truly restorative? (*On Sabbath, how do you want to approach things like: shopping, technology, sports, media, various hobbies, fitness, cooking, eating out, social commitments, basic household chores, etc?*)
 2. What challenges do you anticipate?
 3. What steps can you take to address those challenges?
 4. Who do you need to discuss this with?
4. **Establish a sabbath ritual:** Create meaningful sabbath rituals to help you experience Sabbath as a gift from God and an act of worship.

Sabbath is more than a day off. It's an act of worship. Historically, the people of God have established thoughtful rituals that help them mark the beginning and end of Sabbath in ways that help orient their hearts toward God in gratitude and trust. These rituals often include things like the lighting of Sabbath candles, simple liturgical questions, a spoken blessing, a song, a prayer, and/or a meal (see an example Sabbath ritual on the next page).

QUESTIONS:

1. What would you want to include in your sabbath ritual to help you orient your heart to God as the giver of Sabbath rest?
2. What challenges do you anticipate?
3. What steps can you take to address those challenges?
4. Who do you need to discuss this with?

ADDITIONAL SABBATH CONSIDERATIONS:

- How can you engage in Sabbath in a way that helps others have the opportunity to rest?
- How can you engage in Sabbath in ways that help to cultivate rich community?
- Are there others in our church family that you could invite to share in some aspect of your sabbath?
- If you've been practicing Sabbath for a while, what has worked well? What has been challenging? Is there anything you might need to adjust to make this practice more fruitful in your life?

EXAMPLE SABBATH RITUAL

NOTE: This is truly just an example. It's important to shape your ritual around your life stage and personality—there's no one-size-fits-all.

Gather with Family and/or friends (when possible)

- As the evening approaches, gather the family and friends.
- Pour everyone a glass of wine or juice.
- Light two lamps/candles (representing the two commands in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 to “remember” and “observe” the Sabbath).

ASK: “Why do we celebrate Sabbath?”

Response: “Because God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh. So He blessed the seventh day and made it holy.”

[Someone may read or recite Genesis 2:1-3]

ASK: “Why do we light two Sabbath candles?”

Response: “Because of the two times that God commanded us to “remember” and “observe” the Sabbath (in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5).”

[Someone may read or recite Exodus 20:8–11 or Deuteronomy 5:12–15]

ASK: “What do we do on the Sabbath?”

Response: [Someone answers with these four ideas (Stop, Rest, Delight, & Worship), describing them in their own words]

- **Stop**—We cease from all working, all thinking about working, all worrying, and all striving.
- **Rest**—We create space to restore our soul - our whole person. Physically, we sleep. Mentally and emotionally, we calm down, relax, process the week. Spiritually, we cease our striving, and rest in God’s love for us through abiding.
- **Delight**—We enjoy the Giver and the good gifts of His creation. We engage in things that spark joy, wonder, gratitude, and happiness.
- **Worship**—We orient our heart toward grateful praise and adoration of God, and we surrender our life to him, one week at a time.

[Sometimes it’s fun to ask: What is everyone looking forward to or hoping for this Sabbath?]

BLESSINGS: [Pick one or two of these blessings]

I. BLESSING ON THE FAMILY/COMMUNITY:

Numbers 6:24–26: *The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace.*

II. BLESS THE LORD:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has given us the gift of Sabbath rest and commanded us to keep it holy.

III. DOXOLOGY:

*Praise God from Whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly host
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

[Drink the wine and/or juice]

EMBRACING RHYTHMS OF REPLENISHMENT

Principle: God has created us with a meaningful but limited capacity to enjoy and engage life in His world. This requires us to respect our limits and replenish our energy on a regular basis.

Action: Create an intentional plan to embrace your limits and replenish your energy for life.

Practices for Replenishment:

PURSUE HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS:

Sleep is an important part of God's good design for humanity. It helps us to embrace our limits, to surrender to God's protection and rest in His care. Pursuing healthy sleep practices can be both humbling and transformative.

- How much sleep would you like to get on a regular basis?
- What makes this challenging?
- What steps can you take to address those challenges?
- Who could you discuss this with?

REPLENISHING ACTIVITIES:

God created the world for humans to enjoy (Genesis 1:28-31). In the midst of the challenges and responsibilities of life, it's important to pursue a healthy approach to activities that replenish our souls.

- What activities tend to renew and replenish your energy for life? *(For example: getting into nature, cooking a meal, reading for pleasure, taking a nap, unplugging from devices, time with a friend, a hobby, a sport, exercise, etc.)*
- What activities do you engage in during your discretionary time that function more as a numbing escape than something that is truly restorative?
- How could you limit or replace some of those activities with something more restorative?
- What challenges do you anticipate?
- What steps can you take to address those challenges?
- Who could you discuss this with?

MARGIN & LIMITS:

We are created as limited beings, and embracing those limits helps us cultivate a deeper sense of humility before God and a contentment and gratitude for what God has given us. Related to our limits is the idea of margin. As Dr. Richard Swenson teaches, “Margin is the space between your load and your limits.” Without it, we live in constant tension and reactivity. However, when we have created healthy margin in our life, we are able to be more present with God, with others, with ourselves.

Questions for Consideration:

1. How would you describe the amount of margin you have in your life right now? (none, barely any, about right, too much?)
2. If you don't have enough margin in your life, what is leading you to extend beyond your limits? If you have too much margin in your life...
3. Are there any areas in your life where you might need to acknowledge and own your limits?
4. Who would you need to discuss this with?
5. What challenges do you anticipate?
6. What steps can you take to address those challenges?

MORE RESOURCES FOR SABBATH & REST

Series Landing Page:

See sermons, artwork, and related content at [park church.org/rest](https://parkchurch.org/rest). You'll also find content for previous installments of our semiannual *Be With Jesus and Follow His Way of Life* sermon series.

Books:

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*:

A classic exploration of the spiritual significance of Sabbath, showing it as a sanctuary in time and a gift to humanity.

John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Sane in a World of Constant Connection*

A practical and theological guide to slowing down, addressing the cultural forces that drive us toward perpetual busyness, and seeing how Jesus' way invites rest.

AJ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World*

A deep dive into how the Sabbath has been forgotten in modern Christianity, and how it serves as an act of resistance against the cultural idolatry of productivity.

Dan Allender, *Sabbath: The Gift of Time*

A heartfelt exploration of how Sabbath can become a day of delight, offering a chance for restoration and connection with God and others.

Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again*

A practical guide that helps individuals and leaders create sustainable rhythms of work and rest by integrating Sabbath practices into daily life and learning to embrace sabbaticals as a way to restore the soul and renew spiritual vitality.

Podcasts:

Bible Project, 7th Day Rest (14 episodes)

A theological breakdown of Sabbath rest, its roots in creation, and its fulfillment in the life of Jesus, offering a deep biblical foundation for the practice.

Practicing the Way, The Sabbath Practice (4 episodes + 2 interviews)

A practical series that introduces Sabbath as a spiritual discipline and offers concrete steps to begin incorporating it into daily life.

John Mark Comer Teaching Podcast, Sabbath (4 episodes)

John Mark Comer's teaching on the importance of Sabbath in the life of a disciple of Jesus, providing insights into breaking free from hurry and embracing true rest.

Podcasts (continued):

Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership with Ruth Haley Barton, Season 17: Sabbath (11 Episodes)

A series focused on spiritual rhythms for leaders, with Season 17 specifically addressing how Sabbath can restore and sustain Christian leaders.

Videos:

Bible Project, Sabbath

An engaging animated video that explains the biblical understanding of Sabbath rest and its significance in both the Old and New Testaments.

*“You have made us for yourself,
O Lord, and our heart is restless
until it rests in you.”
(St. Augustine)*

