

# Practicing the Way: Sabbath

## Week 1: The Invitation to Less

- Begin in Prayer (5 Minutes)
- Read: *Genesis 1:1-2:3; Exodus 16:4-5, 21-30; Exodus 20:8-11 (see also, Deuteronomy 5:12-15); Mark 2:27-28*
- Leader Overview:

*Note: Messages can be (re)watched shortly after Sunday gatherings on our YouTube [Page](#)*

Welcome to 2023! The holidays are over and a brand new year has begun. And, for just about all of us, the turning of another page on the calendar is accompanied by a sense of anticipation. Maybe this year will be different. Maybe it will be...better? Maybe *we* will be better. So we set goals and make plans. We dream and schedule. We tweak, fix, and change. And why not? But chances are that if you are like most Americans, your visions of a new and better you in 2023 almost certainly involve doing *more*—making more sales, putting in more effort, making more money (which likely means more work), picking up a new hobby (which will take up more time), spending more time with your family, doing more good, being more involved in church, etc. That all sounds great. There's just one little problem. Most of us were redlining our lives, relationships, and schedules before we even got to 2023. Despite the promises latent in a new year, the unsettling fact is that we simply don't have the time, energy, or available attention to level up.

That's why we want to begin the year with a different question and a counterintuitive approach. What if the thing God is inviting us into this year is not *more* but *less*? What if we stopped trying to see how much we could pack into a week and instead lived out of the overflow of margin? What if instead of normalizing (and even lionizing) stress and anxiety—much of it the result of being too hurried and too busy—we lived within our limits and honored our humanity? If it sounds nice, but impossible; attractive, but unrealistic, that's fine. All we are asking for at this stage is an open mind as we spend the next several weeks talking about the often neglected and easily misunderstood practice from the way of Jesus known as Sabbath.

Our word 'Sabbath' comes from the Hebrew '*Shabbat*,' meaning to cease, stop, or rest. As a practice, Sabbath refers to a 24-hour period of time every week when we do four things: Stop, Rest, Delight, and Worship. Over the next four weeks of this series, we will take up each of those four rhythms of Sabbath as we consider the practice together. Before we get there, though, we simply want to lay a foundation. And, as with any good foundation, the best place to begin is the beginning. On page 1 of the Bible, God creates the heavens and the earth in six days. Then, in Genesis 2:3, we are told that God blesses the seventh day and makes it holy (NOTE: A day is the first thing made

holy in the Bible). Why did He do that? Because the seventh day was when he rested (*Shabbat*) from all the work of creation. Did you catch that? God *rested*. God—the creator and sustainer of the universe, the one who never sleeps nor slumbers, the one who does not grow tired or weary, the one who never needs a break, never comes up short, never burns the candle at both ends, never gets too busy, never has too much on His plate—rested. If we knew nothing else about the practice of Sabbath, perhaps that would be enough. God worked for six days, and then He rested on the seventh. But that is not all we know. We also know that God gave this ‘6+1’ pattern of life to His image bearers as a *gift* (see, for example, the selected passages above).

But, unfortunately, the gift has not always been well-received or properly understood. Even in Jesus’ day, the nature and purpose of the Sabbath was a huge point of controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders. As a result of the debates in their day, Sabbath in our day has often been viewed as legalistic and repressive, if considered at all. But it need not be this way. So, as we embark into a new year, committed, now as ever, to practicing the way of Jesus together, let’s consider the gift of Sabbath, and all the ways it might bless and transform our lives if only we would receive it.

- **Questions for Discussion (20-30 Minutes)**

1. What grabbed your attention/heart/mind from the weekend talk or leader’s summary?
2. Are you a ‘New Year’s Resolutions’ kind of person? If so, have you made any for 2023?
3. On Sunday, we said that the practice of Sabbath is a gift. What, if anything, comes to your mind when you hear the word “Sabbath”? Do you now or have you ever practiced any kind of Sabbath (If not, do you know anyone who does)?
4. What objections, obstacles, doubts, or challenges come to your mind when you think about the idea of setting aside a 24-hour period every single week to simply stop, rest, delight, and worship?
5. What, if any, opportunities, gifts, and blessings do you sense may lay ahead if you chose to at least entertain the practice of Sabbath in your life and/or the life of your family?

- **This Week’s Practices**

For this series, we are going to talk about four movements, or themes, of practicing Sabbath: Stop, Rest, Delight, and Worship. But before we can get where we want to go, we need to first figure out where we are. With that in mind, our team feels that we owe you honesty. The practice of Sabbath is foreign to most of us. And, even if we choose to adopt it, it will take a lot of time to work out the kinks and create healthy rhythms.

Practicing Sabbath is not something you just decide to do on a whim. It requires effort, intentionality, and a lot of trial and error.

So, the simple practice for this week is one that Jesus issues to all His disciples: count the cost. Spend some time reflecting on what a typical week in your life looks like right now, with no changes made. How busy are you? How stressed are you? Do you even sense that you want/need a practice like this? And, finally, what kinds of changes would you need to make in order to start moving in the direction of this practice? Consider writing down any thoughts, emotions, or possible points of tension that you anticipate will need to be addressed and resolved at some point in the near future. If you live with others (family, roommates, etc.), invite them into the conversation.

- Close in Prayer (5-10 Minutes)