

HOW TO SABBATH

A City of Light Resource

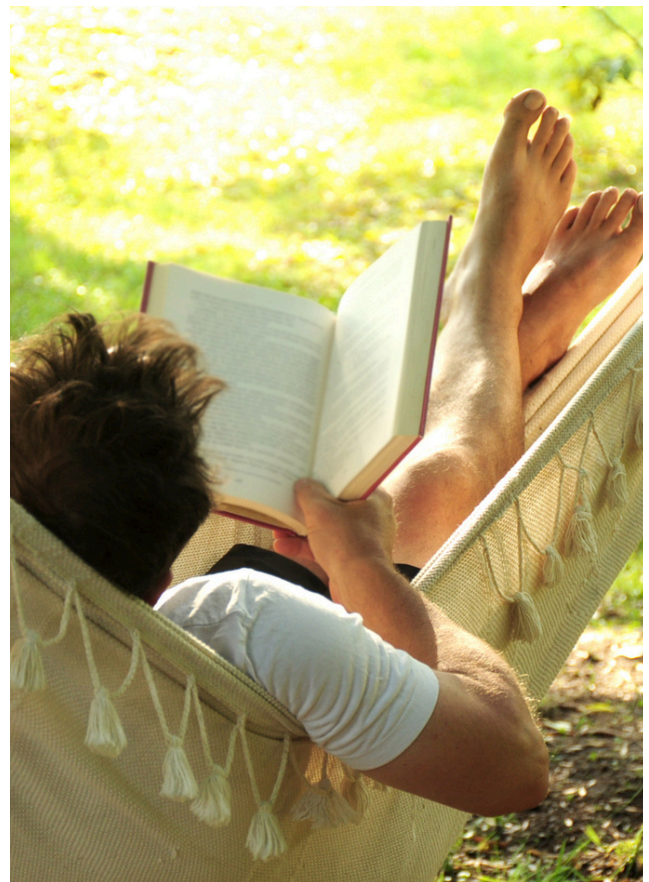
More info at cityoflightaurora.org

In a crucible season in my family's life, God used the sabbath to teach us to trust in him. Here are a few things that we've found helpful as we seek to keep the Sabbath.—Fr. Trevor McMaken

Sabbath keeping is not a regulation, it's an invitation. Jesus teaches that the sabbath is created for people, not vice-versa (Mark 2:27). It is a gift to us from God. On the Sabbath, Jesus invites us into his rest, into his house, into his presence, into his family to take part in his eternal celebration ([Deuteronomy 12:7](#)). The discipline of Sabbath is about daring to receive this gift from God.

Our culture has a difficult time balancing work and rest and we vacillate between extremes.

On one side is work-o-holism fueled by selfish ambition, greed, or by placing our identity in what we produce or the position we hold. On the other side is laziness, addictions that steal our energy, obsessive use of media and amusement, or perfectionism that keeps us from beginning or finishing.



Jesus invites us into his kingdom work as partners (1 Corinthians 3:9), following his calling on our lives and using the gifts he has given to serve others (1 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:10).

But in order to enter into God's work (*Misero Dei*), we have to first enter into God's rest (*Requiescat Dei*). What if people who don't know how to rest with God aren't much help in the work of God? (Matthew 11:28-29, Hebrews 4:9-11). Here are three steps to beginning a practice of entering God's rest through Sabbath-keeping. Read [Genesis 2:1-3](#) and [Exodus 20:8-11](#).

1. Hallow

To hallow means to set apart and make holy. Heschel calls the Sabbath a "palace in time," because like a temple, hallowing time creates a space in which to meet God. Just like the Old Testament cycle of feasts and fasts, there is a cycle of Sabbaths. You may on occasion have to postpone a Sabbath, but don't cancel it.

- When are you going to take your Sabbath? (morning-evening? evening-evening?)
- When are you going to take your monthly prayer days?
- When are you going to take your holiday (your longer, annual sabbath)?

Example: Friday night until Saturday night, all day Saturday, Sunday at noon until Monday at noon, etc.

2. Cease

We accept the Lord's invitation to spend a day with him by saying "no" to other things—even good things—so that we can say "yes" to God. Sometimes we need to stop doing things for God so we can be with God.

- What aren't you going to do on the Sabbath?
- What will you need to do before your Sabbath so that you can truly cease?

Example: No work, no email, no screens, no chores. Need to pick up groceries for meal, need to pay bills, need to make sure work responsibilities are covered, etc.

3. Celebrate

Celebration is central to humans and every culture humans have created. Theologian Harvey Cox writes, "Man is by his very nature a creature who not only works and thinks but who sings, dances, prays, tells stories, and celebrates." Humans are *homo festivos*. We are both individually and collectively celebrants.

The celebration of what God has created and what he will and is more wonderfully restoring is at the heart of Sabbath-keeping. It is about 1.) sharing in a meal 2.) as the family of God 3.) in celebration of his creation and re-creation. How can you incorporate these three elements in your celebration of the Sabbath?



- How will you feast on the Lord?
- How will you feast on the good things he's made that energize you?
- What will you eat?
- Who will you feast with?
- How can you incorporate creation, either by being in nature or creativity?

Example: Prayer time, scripture, date night, family dinner or brunch, meal with friends, walk or jog outside, sports with others, time at a forest preserve, museum or something to spark your imagination, writing or crafting, etc.

The Discipline of Incompleteness

Keeping the Sabbath means learning to leave things undone, to be unproductive, to “waste time”, to forget usefulness and let generosity reign (*Matthew 26:7*). Entering into the wasteful world of divine rest requires trust in God and his ability to care for the world.

Rabbi Heschel asks, “Is it possible for a human being to do all his work in six days? Does not our work always remain incomplete?” The practice of Sabbath trusts that it is God who has completed his work of creation and redemption, that it is God who saves (*Deuteronomy 5:15*).

“Sabbath keeping is a publicly enacted sign of our trust that God keeps the world, therefore we do not have to. God welcomes our labors, but our contributions to the world have their limits.” (Willimon)

Additional Resources

Dawn, Marva J., “Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting.” Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989.

Foster, Richard. “Celebration” from “The Celebration of the Disciplines: the Path to Spiritual Growth.” New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua, “The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man.” New York: Meridian, 1952.

Peterson, Eugene, “Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places.” Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Peterson, Eugene, “Living the Resurrection: the Risen Christ in Everyday Places.” Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2004.

Pieper, Josef. “In Tune With the World: A Theology of Festivity.” New York: Helen and Kurt Wolff, 1963.

Pieper, Josef. “Leisure: The Basis of Culture.” New York: Pantheon Books, 1964.