

Sabbath in the 21st Century



Guide



ROOTED
in Holy Habits

*Part of Gold Hill's 'Take a Step' discipleship pathway.
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In the story of creation at the start of the Bible, the mighty Creator God stops after all is done and rests and declares the seventh day of the week holy and a day of rest (Genesis 2:2-3). When God gives the Ten Commandments, space is given for this same principle: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh is a sabbath to the LORD your God.” (Exodus 20:8-10). There were other similar laws given about different kinds of rest every seven years and every seven lots of seven years. Failure to observe that is partly why the people of God were carried off into exile.

Clearly this concept matters to God! But in the 21st Century where our pace of life is so fast, is this still relevant? Yes, perhaps even more so! The principle is still vital. We are made to work, yes. But we are also made to rest. In fact, in the Bible we are taught to work from a place of rest. Burnout, overworking and constant busyness are not God’s way. This guide will hopefully help you to consider how you might approach this today.

How you approach Sabbath is just one part of a healthy approach to life with God. There are plenty of other ways, and you can find advice and resources for lots of it at www.goldhill.org/disciple.

Two Things to Avoid

Before getting practical, it’s important to have the right heart about this. In the life of Jesus, we see two vital things to take hold of:

1. Avoid...not doing it

Jesus observed the Sabbath. He said ‘The Sabbath was made for man’ (Mark 2:27), meaning it is a good thing given by God to serve us, for our own good. Ignoring Sabbath is ignoring God, and it won’t be good for you!

2. Avoid...being legalistic

Jesus was criticised, though, for *how* He observed the Sabbath. He was a lot less strict about certain things than many around Him. Mark 2:27 ends, ‘not man for the Sabbath’. Sabbath is a gift to serve us. We mustn’t turn it into a taskmaster leading to constraining rules, guilt or judging others.

Whatever Sabbath looks like for you, avoid the two extremes of setting strict rules and of lazily ignoring it altogether.

Make a Plan

The biggest reason Sabbath isn’t very prominent for lots of Christians today is simply this: we have never made a plan for it. That can change! Consider these two questions to make your plan:

1. When will your Sabbath be?

Sunday is not necessarily the right time for Sabbath. Sabbath is about rest, stopping what you normally do and seeking God. Will it be a particular day of the week, a certain evening where you adopt a different rhythm, on a Saturday morning or afternoon, during a weekday day-off? Consider what would most make sense for your life.

2. Who needs to be part of this?

If you plan time each week, others are going to need to know and either join you or give you space. If you live with family, can you do this together? Who needs to know? Tell them and ask them to support you in it.

(Part of a bigger rhythm)

Weekly rhythm is the starting point, but God also called His people to an annual rhythm (and beyond!). Could you schedule in an annual retreat or a plan for your year to ensure regular longer space for rest and realignment?

What to do?

Having some time is great, but what do you do to make this time a 'Sabbath' instead of just a chunk of time that is a lot like every other time?

What *WON'T* you do?

Sabbath is about rest, so whatever 'work' is for you needs to stop. For some that will mean no physical labour or exercise, but for others who work sat still, getting out in the garden, going for a walk or taking time to cook *is* a rest from work. What will you do with devices and technology to really switch off from the things that normally occupy you? If it feels like working to you, don't do it! Set yourself some limits here so you can stop guilt-free.

What *WILL* you do?

Stopping things is fine, but what will you do? Rest is part of it, but pursuit of God is another. Does it mean time praying (alone or together), time with God in nature, reading a book or listening to a podcast, or getting into the Bible for a bit? Does it mean time to be creative (writing, cooking, painting, dancing)? Does it mean being still and quiet, or active and loud? We all have different ways of connecting most fully with God and His word. Don't copy someone else, and decide what your Sabbath practices will be.

Don't get stuck

It doesn't take long for things to become stale or become 'rules'. Regularly review things. Are there things you need to stop or start?

Hopefully this has been helpful to you. The next step is to make that plan and start to act on it. Rest well!



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