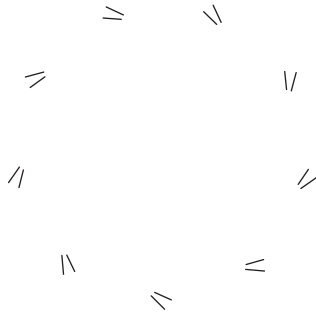


A Four-Session Companion  
Guide to Help You Stop, Rest,  
Delight, and Worship



# The Sabbath Practice

From John Mark Comer  
and *Practicing the Way*



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Help You Stop, Rest, Delight, and Worship**



WaterBrook

**John Mark Comer and Practicing the Way**

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# Welcome

Welcome to the Sabbath Practice. We are so happy to have you along for this four-session journey into what Jesus called “rest for your souls.”\* Few things are as desperately needed today as the recovery of the ancient practice of Sabbath—a full day every week set aside to stop, rest, delight, and worship.

Following this Practice has the potential to be a before/after moment in your spiritual journey, but it will not be easy. Sabbath is radical and countercultural; yet at the same time, its raw power to open us up to transformation cannot be overemphasized.

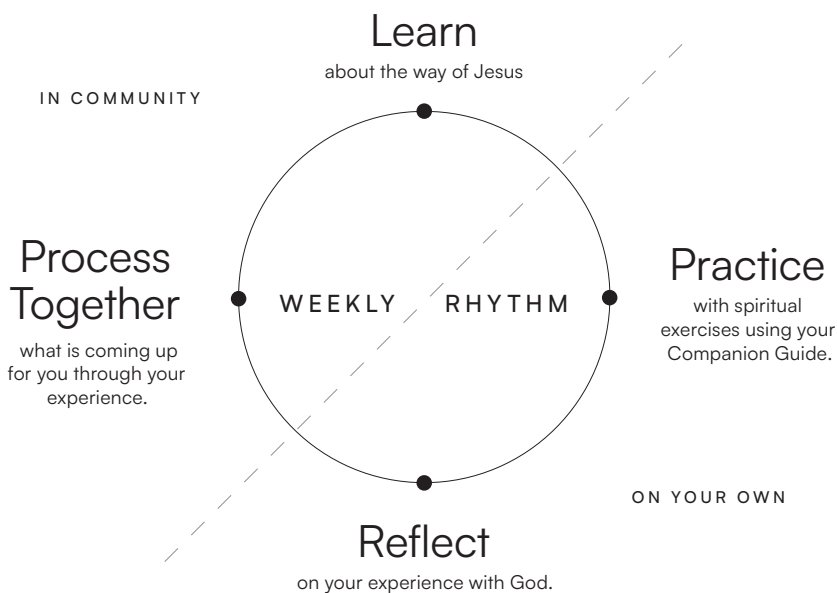
Are you ready? This Practice will be difficult, counterintuitive, and awkward to master, but it will also feel restful and deeply right. Over time it will help you become at ease in your own body.

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\* Matthew 11v29.

As with all the Practices, we don't sabbath because it's good for us (though it is), but because we are apprentices of Jesus, our Rabbi and Lord. To follow after Jesus is to adopt his overall lifestyle as our own and arrange our daily lives around his presence and peace, or what the ancients called "following the Way." And Jesus sabbathed. In fact, many Jesus stories in the Gospels take place on the Sabbath, especially the stories of healing and deliverance. One likely reason is that *the Sabbath is a day for healing and freedom*. It's a day where the kingdom to come *has* come and we get to enter a whole new dimension of time and space.

So as you give yourself to this Sabbath Practice, remember all of this is an attempt to give ourselves more deeply to Jesus himself and let him do what no Practice or teaching or book or podcast or technique can possibly do—give rest to our souls.



## How to use the Companion Guide

- 01 **Learn:** Gather together as a community for an interactive experience of learning about the Way of Jesus through teaching, storytelling, and discussion. Bring your Guide to the session and follow along.
- 02 **Practice:** On your own, before the next session, go and “put it into practice,” as Jesus himself said.\* We will provide weekly spiritual disciplines and spiritual exercises, as well as recommended resources to go deeper.
- 03 **Reflect:** Reflection is key to spiritual formation. After your practice and before the next session, set aside 10–15 minutes

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\* Philippians 4v9.

to reflect on your experience. Reflection questions are included in this Guide at the end of each session.

- 04 **Process together:** When you come back together, begin by sharing your reflections with your group. This moment is crucial, because we need each other to process our lives before God and make sense of our stories. If you are meeting in a larger group, you will need to break into smaller subgroups for this conversation so everyone has a chance to share.

## 01 Start small

Start where you are, not where you “should” be. If a full 24 hours is too much, start with a half day; if that’s too much, start with a few hours.

## 02 Think subtraction, not addition

Please do not “add” Sabbath into your already overbusy, overfull life.

Think: *What can I cut out?* A weekend sports event? A house project?

Weekend emails? Formation is about less, not more.

## 03 You get out what you put in

If you merely dabble with this Practice or take shortcuts in order to do the bare minimum, you shouldn’t expect it to be particularly transformative. However, the more fully you give yourself to this Practice, the more life-changing it will be. This Practice leads to a fuller, deeper life only if you commit to it.

## 04 Remember the J curve

Experts on learning tell us that whenever we set out to master a new skill, our ability tends to follow a J-shaped curve: We usually get worse before we get better. If you currently enjoy your Sunday routine or day off, don’t be surprised if your first few Sabbaths are awkward and difficult. Just stay with the Practice; you will come around.

## 05 There is no formation without repetition

Spiritual formation is slow, deep, cumulative work that takes years, not weeks. The goal of this four-session experience is just to get you started on a journey of a lifetime. Upon completion of this Practice, you will have a map for the journey ahead and hopefully some possible companions for the Way. But what you do next is up to you.

# Before You Begin

## A note about the Reach Exercises

We recognize that we're all at different stages of discipleship and seasons of life. To that end, we've added a Reach Exercise to each of the four sessions. In it you'll find extra exercises designed for those of you who have both the desire and the capacity to maximize your Sabbath experience. Additionally, we have suggested weekly reading and podcast episodes to enhance all four sessions. Enjoy!

## A note about the recommended reading

Reading a book alongside the Practice can greatly enhance your understanding and enjoyment of Sabbath. And on the Sabbath, we actually have time to read! You may love to read, or you may not. For that reason, it's recommended but not required.

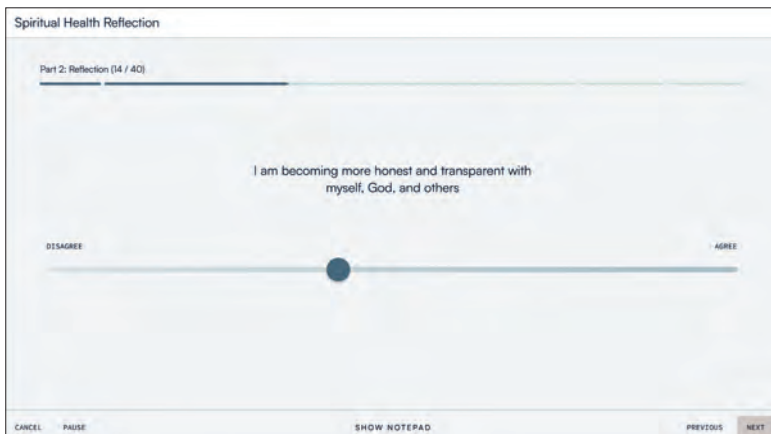
Our companion book for the Sabbath Practice is *Sabbath* by Dr. Dan Allender, who is a psychologist, author, and founder of the Allender Center in Seattle, Washington.

## The Spiritual Health Reflection

One final note: Before you begin Session 01, please set aside 20–30 minutes and take the Spiritual Health Reflection. This is a self-assessment we developed in partnership with pastors and leading experts in spiritual formation. It's designed to help you reflect on the health of your soul in order to better name Jesus' invitations to you as you follow the Way.

You can come back to the Spiritual Health Reflection as often as you'd like (we recommend one to two times a year) to chart your growth and continue to move forward on your spiritual journey.

To access the Spiritual Health Reflection, visit [practicingtheway.org/reflection](http://practicingtheway.org/reflection) and create an account. Answer the prompt questions slowly and prayerfully.



Spiritual Health Reflection

Part 2: Reflection (14 / 40)

I am becoming more honest and transparent with myself, God, and others

DISAGREE  AGREE

CANCEL PAUSE SHOW NOTEPAD PREVIOUS NEXT

# Stop

SESSION 01

# Overview

In Session 01 we explore the first movement of Sabbath and the most literal meaning of the Hebrew verb *shabbat*—“to stop.” To sabbath is, at its most basic, to *stop*, to *cease*, to *be done*.

Peruse any popular magazine and pay close attention to the advertisements—a couple lounging in bed and reading the paper, a woman and her dog napping on the couch, a group of friends on the beach for a picnic. They are all images of stopping. Marketing departments the world over know that you crave a life with Sabbath, or what Marva Dawn called a “Sabbath spirituality”—a life with moments of peace, ease, calm.\* And they are offering to sell you Sabbath. The irony is you don’t need to buy anything to sabbath; you just need to stop.

In the Genesis story, the Creator God himself rested on the seventh day, and in doing so he built a rhythm into the fabric of creation. For six days we work and labor and wrestle with the earth, but on the seventh day, we stop. We breathe. We come to rest.

When we live in alignment with this ancient, primal rhythm, as Jesus did, we find what Jesus called “rest for your souls.”\*\* But when we fight or chafe against or attempt to outsmart this innate bodily cadence, we fracture our souls’ wholeness into a million pieces. Exhaustion, confusion, alienation from God and others, harm to the earth and the poor, and even spiritual death are all the toxic waste of a life without Sabbath.

In Session 01, we experiment with Sabbath as a day to stop.

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\* Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), xiii.

\*\* Matthew 11v29.

# Practice

## SESSION 01: STOP

### 01 Pick a time to sabbath, and give it a try

There are three basic options:

- 01 The Christian Sabbath on Sunday, which is best for most of us since it's also our day of worship
- 02 The traditional Sabbath from sundown on Friday night to the same time on Saturday
- 03 The midweek Sabbath for those with nontraditional work schedules

In biblical theology, the day begins at sundown, not sunrise as in the modern mindset. By the end of the week, many of us are too exhausted to really enjoy our Sabbath. For that reason, we recommend you begin at night, if at all possible. Start with a Sabbath meal with your community (more on that in Session 03), or simply light a candle and say a short prayer before you fall asleep.

If an entire day is too much for you, that's fine. Start where you are. We recommend you set aside a three- or four-hour time period, either after church on Sunday or on a weekend night, turn off your phone, and just *stop*.

If at all possible, get into a rhythm with Sabbath on the same day each week. Your body will "memorize" the day, begin to anticipate it in the days before, and live off its energy and joy in the days after.

## 02 Pick beginning and ending rituals

In a traditional Sabbath ceremony, called the *Kiddush*, you begin by lighting candles, praying, and eating a Sabbath meal with your family and community. And you end by praying and sharing the highlight of your Sabbath.

You can do exactly that, you can let Sunday worship with your church mark the start, or you can get creative—start with a picnic, bonfire, or hot bath. Let your creativity guide you.

Feel free to use the companion volume *Sabbath Meditations* from *Practicing the Way*.

### 03 Pick one to three Sabbath activities to enter into the spirit of Sabbath

If you read the wider Sabbath literature, some of which is as old as the New Testament itself, you discover there are 12 common activities that fill up a traditional Sabbath.

- 01 Lighting the candles
- 02 Blessing the children
- 03 Eating a Sabbath meal
- 04 Expressing gratitude
- 05 Singing
- 06 Worshipping with your church
- 07 Walking
- 08 Napping
- 09 Making love to your spouse
- 10 Reading, especially Scripture
- 11 Spending time alone with God
- 12 Spending time with family and friends in conversation and celebration

This is not a to-do list, but more like 12 best practices that you are invited to grow into over time as your heart desires.

For Session 01, pick one to three that your heart is drawn to and sound appealing to your personality and stage of life. And just see what happens.

# Reach Exercise

## SESSION 01: STOP

We all learn differently. Some of us prefer reading, others listening, and others doing. If you'd like to go deeper, choose what resonates with you and give it a try! Even if you don't try a Reach Exercise, remember to journal in the Sabbath Reflection section on pages 36–37 before your next session as a group.

### Reading

Read the introduction and Chapter 01 of *Sabbath* by Dan Allender (pp. 1–32).

### Podcast

Listen to Episode 01 of the Sabbath series from the *Rule of Life* podcast by Practicing the Way.

### Exercise: Sleep

Sleep a full eight to nine hours every night for an entire week. Leading research from doctors and neuroscientists like Dr. Matthew Walker in his book *Why We Sleep* has documented a growing body of evidence that dramatically highlights the crucial role of sleep in our overall health and well-being. Contrary to popular opinion, the overwhelming majority of people need a full seven to nine hours of sleep every night. Mental illness, anxiety, depression, ADHD, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, and even cancer have all been tied to insufficient sleep. For many of us, the first step toward becoming a person of love in Christ is learning to sleep a full eight hours every night.

See additional tips starting on page 30.