

FAQ's about Sabbath

Why do I need to keep Sabbath for a whole 24-hour period each week?

God created us in His image for a rhythm of work and rest. When we violate that rhythm, we do violence to our own souls. Moreover, we are not defined by what we do or what we produce. We are defined by God's unconditional love for us in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we don't keep Sabbath to earn God's love. Rather, Sabbath is God's gift to keep us centered and rooted in that amazing reality. It is not an accident that this essential spiritual formation practice is found in the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments.

How do I go about deciding what specific activities are acceptable and unacceptable on the Sabbath?

Reflect on the following questions as you sort out God's pathway for you:

1. What do I need to stop that relates to my work --- paid and unpaid?
2. List the activities that create delight and rest for you?
3. How can you structure your day to cultivate a greater awareness of God in your life and in the world?
4. What might help you see God's goodness and miracles all around you today?
"Whatever we choose to do for Sabbath needs to give us rest and life over time. The challenge is discernment, experimenting to find what works for us and the people we love, what helps us catch our breath and remember who we are as God's beloved." Lynne Baab

Do I have to take my Sabbath on a particular day of the week?

Old Testament and New Testament Jewish people would have celebrated the Sabbath on the Seventh day, which would be Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. In the fourth commandment on Sabbath-keeping, it is to be celebrated on the "seventh" day, many scholars interpret this every seventh day not just day seven. There are Biblical examples of the Sabbath being kept on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2) or at least they gathered in addition to the Sabbath. The heart of Sabbath is that it was to serve us (Mark 2:27), and there are certainly factors in the larger culture that contribute to people taking another Sabbath day instead of Saturday or Sunday. The most important principle is not necessary to take one specific day as Sabbath, but rather one regular day to stop, rest, delight, and contemplate unto the Lord.

Fri night-Sat night or Sat night-Sun night usually work best because in today's culture, the breaks from work usually fall on one of those times. However, if one's break from work does not fall on one of those days, we encourage you to take another 24-hour period off.

Which day is the Sabbath? Sunday or Saturday? I have heard different views.

Paul addresses this very issue in the Jew/Gentile/multicultural church in Romans 14:1-8. He writes: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord..." Col. 2:16-17: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."

I believe some key principles are keeping a rhythm for the same day of the week each week, follow your understanding and conscience of Sabbath, not to judge other believers who are making a sincere effort to honor the Lord with a particular day. I do believe honoring it around the Sunday gathering of worship makes corporate worship, rest and contemplation easily a part of Sabbath Keeping in our culture.

Historical Background: God established the rhythm of six-days-of work, one –day-of-rest pattern, in Genesis 1-2. It has guided Judaism ever since, celebrating Sabbath from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. With the coming of Jesus, the Sabbath took on additional meaning. Not only did it point back to creation, but it anticipated the eternal Sabbath rest and peace we will enjoy once we see Him face to face. While many Jewish Christians continued to celebrate Sabbath on Saturday, because Christ resurrected on the first day of the week, Sunday also became a day for Christians to gather for worship, prayer, and an "agape" meal that included the Lord's Supper. In 321, the Emperor Constantine decreed Sunday instead of Saturday to a day of no work, so it became a part of Roman christian culture and has continued through the protestant reformation. Ultimately, God looks on the heart.

Can I serve at Grace Church as a volunteer? Should I stop?

Yes, you can serve at Grace Church. Except for a very, very few, our work is not at Grace Church. We work as secretaries, teachers, nurses, doctors, accountants, truck drivers, construction workers, moms/dads at home, students, etc. Serving at Grace Church is not our job. Hopefully, there is delight in serving Christ in our Children's Ministry, usher, greeter, cafe, etc. It is also important to remember that showing mercy and compassion was the missing element Jesus brought back into God's original intention of Sabbath- keeping. Treating people, whether children, youth, or adults, like Christ is the heart of what we seek to do at Grace Church.

Do I need a day-off and a Sabbath?

You will need at least a half –day, or several hours, to prepare for Sabbath. Part of the Sabbath experience is the preparation time. What needs to happen before Sabbath starts so you (or your family) can experience true rest on the day itself. A basic list of what needs to get done before Sabbath starts might include getting the errands and chores of life done (e.g. food shopping, laundry, errands, cleaning the house, bringing closure to your work, final phone-calls, paying bills). These things make Sabbath more restful and communicate the order and peace many of us long for. In our culture today, Saturday makes a good day to prepare for Sabbath that can start at dusk Saturday

night, then Sunday night after dusk can be spent in the final preparations for the upcoming week.

Do I spend the Sabbath alone or with other people?

The question to ask is: What do you need for a day of rest? Time with people or time alone? Both? In what proportion? This may change for you depending on the seasons and circumstances of your life.

What do I do about my tendency to perfectionism?

We don't ever get Sabbath "right." Sabbath is a day to let go of perfectionism and let God run the universe. Inconsistencies, bad choices and learning from our mistakes are part of the point. Do your best to stop working, letting God worry about what you're not doing right, taking your focus off yourself so you can rest in Him.

Isn't Jesus our Sabbath-rest? Is this another works-righteousness?

Jesus reinforced the gift of Sabbath amidst all the abuses of His day. He reminds us, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). To keep Sabbath is to exercise one's freedom, to declare oneself to be neither a tool to be "employed" nor a beast to be burdened. Sabbath-keeping is an invitation to rest because God rested. This rest serves as a sign of contemplation and abundance. God's gifts to humanity are so generous that we are able to rest. Our rest indicates that we depend completely on the God who redeemed us from sin, death and evil.

How do I cease from the work of parenting?

You cannot stop changing diapers of course. But you can cease from tidying up, cooking, laundry, and running errands. You can do some things together as a family. You can hire a babysitter so you, and with your spouse, can get time alone. You can take time alone for yourself, leaving parenting to your spouse. Then, you take the children and give equal time to him/her.

What do I do about my children who aren't interested in Sabbath?

The important thing to remember is that this is not a day of deprivation. Sabbath is to be a delight. Rather than simply taking things away, think about things you can add (e.g. special desserts, a movie, a creative family activity – depending on the ages of your children. It doesn't have to be a forced family day. If your children are older, they are going to naturally going to want to connect with their friends. That is okay. You will go through many transitions in keeping Sabbath depending on your children's ages and temperaments. But, whenever possible, remember this is a wonderful opportunity to build rhythm, intentionality and sacred traditions into your family.

What about sports and extracurricular activities your children may be involved in?

There may be some activities you want to eliminate because of the stress involved. But there may be others (e.g. if your child loves soccer) that you do, but you will do it in a different spirit. You may go to the soccer game but you are doing it without multitasking, talking on the phone, reading emails, or reading work-related paperwork at halftime or during time outs. You can focus on enjoying the game, other parents, or the very gift of the human body able to participate in athletics.

How, like Jesus, can we exercise compassion on the Sabbath without turning it into work?

The Jews have longed believed that showing compassion on the Sabbath reflects the glorious abundance of the day. We rest from work in order to turn our hearts toward God, and God is always concerned with human need. When we stop for Sabbath, it may happen that we become more attentive to the problems of the world around us. This ultimately leads us to show more, not less, compassion. Maybe the Good Samaritan was on his Sabbath! Just be careful that it is not a “should.” Rejoice in small acts of caring, allowing them to connect us to our compassionate God.

This material was adapted from a document provided by Peter Scazzero at www.emotionallyhealthy.org.