
Sabbath

in an Age of Fear, Anxiety, and Conflict

United Presbyterian Church — Albany, Oregon



The Sabbath is a day for the sake of life.
—Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

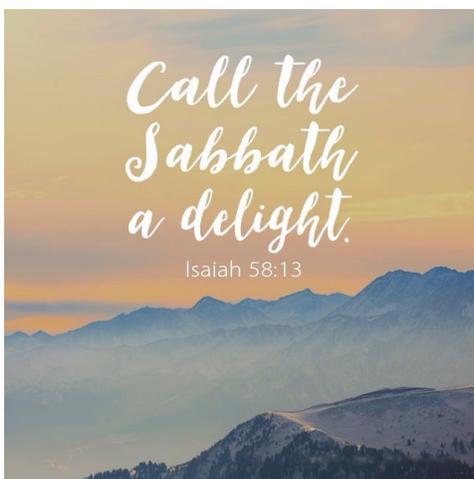
“Sabbath observance invites us to stop. It invites us to rest. It asks us to notice that while we rest, the world continues without our help. It invites us to delight in the world’s beauty and abundance.”
—Wendell Berry

Dear Friends,

I’ve had a nagging hunch for quite some time that something is missing. I believe humans across the lines of faith have lost sight of something essential and central. The thing that is missing and we’ve lost sight of is *sabbath*. I’ve noticed how focused we are on meeting God in the future that we can’t see where God is showing up right next to us. The gift of sabbath, though, is that it helps us recognize God showing up right next to us.

Life for the typical American can be described as “busy.” In our culture of constant busyness, most of us feel like we’re never caught up. The lines between home and work have blurred as we stay tethered to our mobile devices and computers. Many people use weekends to catch up on errands and chores that don’t get done during the week. Faith leaders from a variety of traditions have taken note, urging followers to once again seek that oft-forgotten commandment from God to take a weekly Sabbath. God foresaw the depleted state humans are capable of reaching and established the Sabbath—a “sanctuary in time”—a place of communion with God.

Many Americans balk at the idea of setting aside a whole day for worship, rest, and time with those who matter most to them. Yet we crave more time to spend on what matters most—unrushed time to rest, reconnect with friends and loved ones, and deepen our relationship with God. One way to define spirituality is getting so tired and fed up with yourself that you go on to something better, which is following Jesus. I wholeheartedly believe that if all the world experienced Sabbath, stress-related ailments would be far less prevalent, God would be better known, and a life of following Jesus would be deepened.



“If you don’t take a Sabbath, something is wrong. You’re doing too much; you’re being too much in charge. You’ve got to quit, one day a week, and just watch what God is doing when you’re not doing anything.”
—Eugene Peterson

“Sabbath becomes a decisive, concrete, visible way of opting for and aligning with the God of rest.”
—Walter Brueggeman

It’s a new year — are you willing to do something BOLD?

It’s simple but not easy. I would like to invite you into a rediscovery and exploration of sabbath. Sometimes, we need permission to start doing something, to keep doing something, or to stop doing something. We have been granted sabbath as a gift from God to surprise us, challenge us, correct us, and stretch us. The world is yearning for sabbath. So how do we do this?

Crafting a Sabbath Plan

Step 1:

Be open and willing to change how you see, what you do, and how you do it. Be open to starting a sabbath practice *whenever* you can, *wherever* you can, *however* you can, and with *whatever* you can.

Step 2:

Commit to a Sabbath study group (Friday’s at 10am, Sunday’s at 8:30am, and perhaps another time TBD) to trace the rich history of sabbath and explore how this ancient practice can help restore balance to our lives.

Step 3:

Commit to practicing sabbath by embracing your need for rest, worship, and community. Invest in weekly and seasonal worship opportunities, join a small group/dinner group, and consider doing any of the practices suggested in the list of *Ideas for Rest, Worship, and Community* (pages 5-6).

I wonder what a congregation looks like that embodies the bedrock of our God given identity of sabbath, seeing it as reorienting our lives and ministry. I hope and pray we will be able to answer that as we embark on this journey together. *Cease work, rest our bodies and minds, embrace God, and feast on God’s goodness* – this is the sabbath rhythm God has established and continually invites us to live into.

“Sabbath reminds us that we are loved for who we are, not for what we can produce... Sabbath does not exist for what it gives us, nor for how it helps us, but for the way it equips us to live out our truest identity. We are not human doings, but human beings.”

—David Lomas



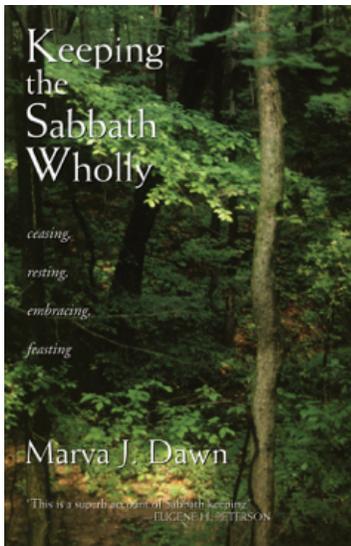
“Sabbath is that uncluttered time and space in which we can distance ourselves from our own activities enough to see what God is doing.”
—Eugene Peterson

Winter/Spring Sabbath Study

Friday’s at 10:00 a.m. in the Youth Room (205/206) – *Begins January 19th*

~OR~

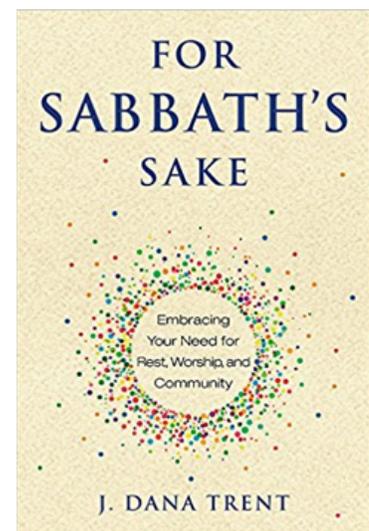
Sunday’s at 8:30 a.m. in the Pastor’s Study – *Begins January 21st*



Do you long to rest and spend quality time with friends and family? Are you looking for a stronger connection with God? Most of the things we need to be most fully alive do not come in busyness. They grow in rest – sabbath. Time is our only nonrenewable resource. Our culture tells us that slowing down is lazy, useless, and wasteful. We’ve been taught to believe that all the stuff that we make, do, and buy will save us. But God knows better, and wants us to know better too.

The time is ripe for Christianity to revisit the very heart of sabbath practice in order to create a more meaningful weekly observance of *who* we are and *whose* we are. The discipline of Sabbath-keeping is not a legalistic duty but a way to freedom, delight, and joy. There is a four-part pattern for keeping the Sabbath: (1) *ceasing*—not only from work but also from productivity, anxiety, worry, possessiveness, and so on; (2) *resting*—of the body as well as the mind, emotions, and spirit—a wholistic rest; (3) *embracing*—deliberately taking hold of Christian values, of our calling in life, of the wholeness God offers us; (4) *feasting*—celebrating God and his goodness in individual and corporate worship as well as feasting with beauty, music, food, affection, and social interaction.

Come explore and rediscover the gift of sabbath; a gift, invitation, and commandment God spends more time developing than any other. These book studies invite us to experience the wholeness and joy that come from observing God’s order for life—a rhythm of working six days and setting apart one day for rest, worship, celebration, play, and relationships.



“Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is not just a day off, when we catch up on television or errands. It is the presence of something that arises when we consecrate a period of time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing, or true. It is time consecrated with our attention, our mindfulness, honoring those quiet forces of grace or spirit that sustain and heal us.” —Wayne Muller

Ideas for Rest, Worship, and Community

From *For Sabbath's Sake: Embracing Your Need for Rest, Worship, and Community* by J. Dana Trent

Creator God, you have given me the weekly gift of sabbath. Help me to step out of this chaotic world and into sacred space and time. May I keep my intention of rest, worship, and community—seeking always to listen for your voice and to number my days rightly. Amen.

Rest

- Put your phone away.
- Take a nap.
- Lie down in your yard, on your porch, or in a park. Watch the clouds. Then, close your eyes and listen. Offer a prayer of gratitude.
- Make a list of things for which you are grateful.
- Write God a letter.
- Sit in your favorite chair, and ask God to join you in that space. Do a puzzle, crossword, or color. Remember that God is with you.
- Take a mindful walk; notice the textures and sounds around you.
- Take a sick day.
- Read in bed. Allow yourself to doze off.
- Got to an afternoon matinee by yourself.
- Visit DoNothingFor2Minutes.com
- Keep a sabbath jar. Write down your sabbath ideas and activities on slips of paper. Fold and place them in the jar to retrieve when you need to jump-start your practice.
- Set a timer for five minutes, and practice deep breathing for that amount of time.
- Sit in a room by yourself for fifteen minutes—no phone, no books. Be silent. Pray. When you become restless, use the alphabet to name the people, circumstances, and blessings for which you're thankful (think big *and* small).
- Do something creative: weave, knit, paint, write, scrapbook, draw, make music, or color.
- Practice some form of movement: dance, stretching, or yoga.
- Try fasting from information: no social media, Internet, TV, radio, or newspaper for one morning, one hour, one afternoon, or one day.
- Invest in a meditation sandbox, mini waterfall, or prayer beads. Use these tangible instruments to center yourself in God's presence.
- Be silent in nature. Listen for God.
- Take a long bath.
- Spend an entire day in your pajamas.
- Sit by, gaze at, swim in, or play in water (a baby pool, in-ground pool, creek, pond, lake, river, ocean, inlet, bay, or waterway).
- Do laundry mindfully. Give God thanks for each article of clothing, for water, for electricity, and form modern machinery.
- Take a drive in the country with the windows down and the radio up. Sing your heart out!
- Walk a path, trail, or labyrinth. Let the Spirit speak to you in ways that don't require words.

Worship

- Attend a worship service—one you are familiar with or one you've never been to.
- Focus on your devotional intention toward God during a worship service; offer yourself grace if/when your mind wanders.
- During a worship service, give God thanks, praise, and adoration. Confess the spaces where you need spiritual mending and ask God to intercede—especially in matters beyond your control. Pray that you will be refueled and infused with the Spirit for the week ahead.
- Volunteer with your community's children's worship programs (Sunday morning Godly Play). See worship through the eyes of a child.
- Sing your favorite hymns at church or at home.
- Listen to devotional music in the car during your commute.
- Attend a Taizé or contemplative worship and prayer service.
- Learn to play (or revisit) an instrument; offer your music in praise to God.
- Worship outside.
- Observe the church's liturgical rhythm (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time).
- Try a different form of prayer (contemplative, centering, *Lectio divina*, meditative, extemporaneous, or using a prayer book).
- Make a space at home where you can offer prayers of thanksgiving, confession, and intercession to God.

Community

- Share a meal with someone you know well.
- Share a meal with someone you don't know well.
- Introduce yourself to one person every day. Repeat his or her name when you learn it and smile.
- Pray for everyone you encounter—those standing in line next to you, workers at a cash register, drivers in traffic. Everyone you see needs prayer.
- Plan a family night, and keep it simple. Eat pizza and play a game. Talk; laugh; have fun.
- Meet someone at a local park. Take a walk together and catch up with your phones.
- Be intentional about playing with your own children or someone else's. Give little ones your full, undivided attention.
- Start a container garden with your family or neighbors. Give God thanks for the bounty of the fruit it yields, and share your harvest abundantly.
- Pay attention to community opportunities listed in your local newspaper. How can you use your time to make your community better for all who live there?
- Be mindful of privilege. If you do not have to work weekends, try to limit your shopping and eating out on the sabbath. Consider the power of your wallet. How might you help others have a day off too?
- Donate what you might have spent on the sabbath for meals or shopping to your church's discretionary fund or a charity of your choice.
- Establish a monthly small-group gathering centered on a theme: prayer, games, art, food, music, books, or nature.
- Meet a friend (or take a group of children, friends, or family) at a local museum. Marvel at the creative gift God has given us.
- Try an outdoor activity with a small group: biking, hiking, kayaking, canoeing, or swimming.
- Prepare a meal for someone. Don't rush. Pray over and savor each step—and, later, each bite.