



# Sabbath & Solitude

## Sabbath

The practice of the Sabbath has been ingrained in the schedule of human rhythms since the beginning of time (Gen. 2:2-3). Since the beginning, God dedicated a day set apart for us to rest. While some people view this as a command and others view it as something that does not need to be used anymore because it is in the Old Testament, we believe that although it is not commanded, it serves as a beneficial practice in the rhythms of people and families to this day.

John Mark Comer, in his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, wrote this on the Sabbath, “The word *Sabbath* comes to us from the Hebrew word *Shabbat*. The word literally means “to stop.” The Sabbath is simply a day to stop: stop working, stop wanting, stop worrying, just stop.”<sup>1</sup>

For most of us today, this is the opposite of how we live our lives. In a world of sports tournaments, work schedules, church activities, and so on and so on, it feels like we are in a constant cycle of busyness.

But Jesus offers an alternative life.

In Mark 2, we see Jesus walking with his disciples through fields of grain. After facing pressure from the Pharisees for what his disciples were doing, Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath is not meant to be a burden but rather a beautiful picture of stopping and resting in the presence of God during the gift that he has given to humankind.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry. John Mark Comer.

The Sabbath is not the same as a day off of work. On your day off, you get groceries (which is anything but restful), pay the bills, and do laundry and dishes. Do you get the point? The Sabbath is meant to be a dedicated period of time of rest and worship.

Practicing Sabbath can look many different ways in today's day and age. We encourage you to look at your family rhythms and schedules. It is better to start where you currently are rather than where you want to be. Some people practice Sabbath on Saturdays as a full-day ordeal, whether it is 12 or 24 hours long. For parents with young children, it may work best to practice the sabbath on Sundays from the time you wake up to the end of dinner time. Whatever day, time, and duration you choose, remember to start where you currently are.

We want to equip you with a few helpful tips for Sabbathing, but remember, start where you are, not where you want to be. These tips are just tools to help you get started. To begin, choose a day and time. Whether it be Sunday or Saturday for 5 hours or 24 hours, decide what works best for you (and your family). Next, schedule out what that day will look like. Make sure your groceries and meals are ready beforehand so you don't have to buy anything during that time. If you work with your hands, then find something to do with your mind (read a book, journal, etc.). Likewise, if you work with your mind, then find something to do with your hands (workout, take a walk, etc.). During this time, turn on some worship music and turn off your phones and TVs. Use this time to be fully present with those you live with.

Remember that this is not about adding something to your already busy life but rather removing things that take you away from the rest that God offers to you.

We hope this is helpful and useful for you as you begin your time in the practice of the Sabbath.

# Solitude

Jesus would regularly slip away into the *eremos*, a Greek word that can be translated as "the desert," "the deserted place," "the solitary place," or even "the quiet place." There, he would pray; he would open to his Father and draw on the Holy Spirit for strength, wisdom, direction, and joy. Then, he would come back to the world of people to love and serve.

In her book, *Invitation to Silence & Solitude*, Ruth Haley Barton affirms that "In silence, we create space for God's activity, rather than filling every minute with our own." Practice it for yourself: Try to settle into a comfortable position and take a few deep breaths. Take inventory of your thoughts and emotions. Meditate on the goodness of God. Rest in Jesus.

Whether you take 4 hours out in the beautiful mountains or it is 30 minutes before the kids wake up. Silence and Solitude is an intentional time when you sit alone with God in the silence of the day. Whatever you choose, it is important to look at the example that Jesus gave us during his time here on earth as we strive to become more like him.

John Mark Comer gives a few helpful insights before practicing a time of solitude.

## 01 Start small

Start where you are, not where you "should" be. It's counterintuitive, but the smaller the start, the better chance you have of really sticking to it and growing over time.

## 02 Think subtraction, not addition

Please do not "add" solitude into your already overbusy, overfull life. You are likely already stressed and tired. Instead, think: What can I cut out of my daily schedule? How can I slow my life down? Where can I find a little breathing room to rest and pray? Formation is about less, not more. About slowing down and simplifying your life around what matters most: life with Jesus.

## 03 You get out what you put in

The more fully you give yourself to this Practice, the more life-changing it will be. The more you just dabble with it and the more shortcuts you take, the less transformation you will experience.

## 04 Remember the J-curve

Experts on learning tell us that whenever we set out to master a new skill, it tends to follow a J-shaped curve; we tend to get worse before we get better. You may enjoy a quiet morning before work or a lazy Sunday afternoon, but when you go into solitude, you may feel itchy, anxious, or emotional. That's okay. Expect it to be a bit awkward at first; it will get easier in time. Just stay with the Practice.

## 05 There is no formation without repetition

Spiritual formation is slow, deep, cumulative work that happens over years, not weeks.

Here is a detailed schedule for how you could spend four hours in a time of Silence and Solitude. Feel free to adapt this to a length of time that best suits your current stage of life.

- 40 minutes: Prepare your mind and heart, take a walk, or do whatever will help you set aside concerns over tasks and responsibilities.
- 1 hour: Read and meditate on Scripture, taking time to stop and reflect when God seems to be speaking to you through the text.
  - Recommended passages to read/meditate
    - Psalm 18
    - Psalm 23
    - Psalm 40
    - Psalm 42
    - Psalm 104
    - Psalm 130
    - Psalm 139
- 20 minutes: Write down responses to what you have read. Speak to God about them.
- 30 minutes: Take a walk, reflecting on the morning.
- 30 minutes: Set goals that emerge from the day's reflection.
- 30 minutes: Write down these goals and other thoughts in a journal.
- 30 minutes: Pray and thank God for your time together, and ask if there is anything else he wants to say. Prepare to enter back into the flow of life.

We pray that these practices will equip you as a disciple of Jesus who reaches up, in, and out.

If you have any questions, email [csides@biltmorechurch.com](mailto:csides@biltmorechurch.com)