

**Connect Group Notes**

**April / May 2024**

Welcome to Sabbath as part of our ‘Practicing the Way’ series which we are preaching through on Sundays through to Pentecost (Sun 19 May). Sabbath is an opportunity to gain “rest for your souls”.. a full day to stop, rest, delight and worship.

We don’t ‘Sabbath’ because it’s good for us, but because we are apprentices of Jesus, our Rabbi and Lord. Jesus sabbathed.. in fact many gospel stories took place on the Sabbath, especially stories of healing and deliverance. It’s meant to be that – a day of healing and freedom.

All the practices work best in community… we can help and encourage one another in following ‘the Way’. The notes are based on the three specific aspects of Sabbath… Stop, Rest and Delight…

Enjoy!

**Week Beginning 21 April Practicing the Way: Sabbath – STOP**

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

**WORSHIP**

Spend a few moments getting your focus on God himself. Use a Psalm (23, 37 or 92) or some musical worship...

**READ**

Genesis 2:1-3 / Exodus 20:8-11

**DISCUSS**

Use the video as the basis for your discussion… it will stop at the relevant points for you to discuss together… using You Tube link below…

[**https://youtu.be/VgyiA7RT-r0?si=0\_r6aDOyZimhPsSa**](https://youtu.be/VgyiA7RT-r0?si=0_r6aDOyZimhPsSa)

Section one Discussion Questions..

* What’s your current understanding of the Sabbath?
* Is the Sabbath a part of your life currently or not?
* What thoughts or feelings do you have going into the Sabbath practice?

Then John Mark Comer will give some teaching into what it means to stop. Then as you pause the video you can discuss the following questions:

* What stuck out to you from that teaching? Was there a Scripture or thought that especially resonated with you?
* Is Sabbath a part of your current life rhythm or not?
* What are the obstacles that get in the way of your practicing Sabbath? Either practically or emotionally?

**EXERCISE**

After this you will hear a short testimony followed by some practices that will help you enter into the spirit of Sabbath. This is not a ‘to do list’ but more like 12 best practices… discuss these as a group. What are the practices you are drawn to?

There’s an encouragement to..

* **Read** – a recommended book by Dan Allender called ‘Sabbath’
* **Podcast** – there’s plenty on the ‘Practicing the Way’ App
* **Exercise** – sleep 8 to 9 hours every night for an entire week!

Spend the end in a time of Reflection using Psalm 139..

*‘Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

*See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting’*

**Week Beginning 5 May Practicing the Way: Sabbath – REST**

The idea of rest sounds wonderful, but in reality, rest is a radical, countercultural act of resistance to the powers and principalities of a world at war with God and his kingdom of peace.

**WORSHIP (an idea?!)**

For this you will need a large bowl of water, paper squares of 9cm x 9cm, pens and the bible…

Our minds are often so busy and distracted. We need to be still. On the paper square, list all the things that are on your mind – a complete ‘brain dump’. Cover the paper with writing. Then fold the corners sharply into the centre and place the resulting (smaller) paper square to float on the water. As the paper flaps open, allow your concerns to rise to God and commit them to his care. Read Psalm 23…

**READ**

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 / Matthew 11:25-30

**DISCUSS**

Look at You Tube video -[**https://youtu.be/d7Rzi06IJec?si=SzIFUzD3BdGmvy-B**](https://youtu.be/d7Rzi06IJec?si=SzIFUzD3BdGmvy-B)

As you begin the You Tube video you will be introduced briefly before sharing how your practice of ‘Sabbath’ went over the past 2 weeks.. there will be 3 initial questions..

* Where did you feel resistance?
* Where did you feel delight?
* Where did you most experience God’s nearness?

Then enjoy John Mark Comer as he teaches on this more deeply. There will be lots to discuss off this teaching but here are a few questions (shown on the video) to guide you..

* Where are you most tired? Physically? Mentally? Emotionally? Spiritually? What is the greatest drain on your energies?
* What is the strongest force of resistance in your life (external or internal) that attempts to keep you from Sabbath rest?
* What are the hardest things for you t say no to on the Sabbath?

**EXERCISE**

There is then a short testimony which is very helpful as well as practical.

* Prepare for the Day… in the NT, the day before the Sabbath is called the ‘preparation day’. This is not a full day but a few hours to prep. Sabbath will not just happen; it’s too countercultural. We need to avoid Egypt’s call!

… talk about the list if things suggested on the video.

* Prepare for external resistance… again think of maybe 2 or 3 cultural forces that need resisting and saying no to.
* Prepare for internal resistance – the following is a journalling exercise for you to do during your upcoming Sabbath… find a distraction-free place (easier said than done) to breathe and come to rest in God… the ask 2 questions…

… **What am I feeling today?** Here are a list of feeling words to help..

**Happy Sad Angry Scared Confused**

Admired Alienated Abused Afraid Ambivalent

Alive Ashamed Aggravated Alarmed Awkward

Appreciated Burdened Agitated Anxious Baffled

Assured Condemned Anguished Appalled Bewildered

Cheerful Crushed Annoyed Apprehensive Bothered

Confident Defeated Betrayed Awed Constricted

Content Dejected Cheated Concerned Directionless

Delighted Demoralized Coerced Defensive Disorganised

Determined Depressed Controlled Desperate Distracted

Ecstatic Deserted Deceived Doubtful Doubtful

Elated Despised Disgusted Fearful Flustered

Encouraged Devastated Dismayed Frantic Foggy

Energized Disappointed Displeased Full of Dread Hesitant

Enthusiastic Discarded Dominated Guarded Immobilized

Excited Discouraged Enraged Horrified Misunderstood

Exuberant Disgraced Exasperated Impatient Perplexed

Flattered Disheartened Exploited Insecure Puzzled

Fortunate Disillusioned Frustrated Intimidated Stagnant

Fulfilled Dismal Fuming Nervous Surprised

… **What attachment is *under* that feeling?**

An attachment is an emotional state of clinging to something we believe we need to be safe and happy. This might be feeling anxiety over a relational conflict with your extended family because you are attached to their approval or opinion.

* Feel the Feeling
* Offer that feeling to God in prayer and release it back to him
* Finally, wait for God to speak to you.

Finish by giving the Holy Spirit space to meet with the group…

**Week Beginning 19 May Practicing the Way: Sabbath – DELIGHT**

Tim Keller has written this… *“Because the world is full of ugly things, we need the Sabbath to feed our soul with beauty”*

Jesus wants us to experience joy (John 10:10). Sorrow is inevitable in life, but joy is not. In the Way of Jesus, joy is a gift, but one that must be chosen and cultivated, day after day, as an act of apprenticeship to our joyful God. The Sabbath is designed by God as a day to give yourself fully to delight in God’s world, in your life in it, and ultimately in God himself.

**WORSHIP**

What are the things that give you joy? Share briefly these and then spend some time delighting in God in worship together.

**READ**

Exodus 16:23-30

**DISCUSS**

Look again at the You Tube video attached below..

[**https://youtu.be/1dB8CsZWnWE?si=w\_BtbLEl\_\_0Uccg2**](https://youtu.be/1dB8CsZWnWE?si=w_BtbLEl__0Uccg2)

Here are a few questions as you reflect back to last week and ‘rest’…

* Where did you feel resistance?
* Where did you feel delight?
* Where did you most experience God’s nearness?

Again listen to some input from John Mark Comer and then there will plenty to reflect on together. These questions should help…

* Does joy come naturally to you? Or is it more of a struggle for your personality?
* What do you think of Marva J. Dawn’s claim that we “don’t know how to feast because we don’t know how to fast”? In what ways would the rest of your week need to change to set apart the Sabbath as a special day of delight?
* Are you in a season of joy or sorrow or both? What does Sabbath-keeping feel like for you at this moment in your life?

Listen to the testimony and then …

**EXERCISE**

Two very simple and fun exercises for you..

* **Plan a Sabbath Feast!** What do you think of the recommended sabbath ritual:Light two candles / Read a Psalm / Bless the kids and one another / Pray / Feast / Share highlights of the week / Share what you’re grateful for…
* **Pleasure Stacking!** Again comment and also the ‘Sabbath Box’ idea which is brilliant… ENJOY and DELIGHT in God!