

SPIRITUAL FORMATION TOOLS · NO. 4

Practicing Sabbath

Exodus 20:8–11 · A day you don't earn, you receive.

For years my day off looked exactly like every other day, just with different tasks on it. Yard work instead of email. Errands instead of meetings. I called it rest. It wasn't.

Sabbath is the commandment we're most likely to skip and least likely to feel guilty about skipping. We'll fast, we'll tithe, we'll show up early to serve — but stopping, actually stopping, feels irresponsible. Like the world might come apart if we're not holding it together for twenty-four hours.

This is the fourth tool in our spiritual formation series at Restoration Church. The first three were about how to pray. This one is about something Jesus himself practiced and the fourth commandment insists on — an actual day, not a slogan. Four movements, one day a week: Stop, Rest, Delight, Worship.

This isn't about legalism or a list of banned activities. It's about receiving a gift most of us have never unwrapped.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God.” — Exodus 20:8–10 (NIV)

HOW TO USE THIS

Pick a day. It doesn't have to be Sunday — for a lot of us in ministry or shift work, it can't be. What matters is that it's the same day most weeks, and that you protect it the way you'd protect any other commitment. Walk through the four movements below, not as a rigid schedule but as a shape for the day.

Start with one day. Don't try to build the perfect Sabbath practice on the first attempt. You're not failing if it's messy. You're practicing something most of our culture has forgotten how to do.

1. Stop — What am I actually ceasing from?

WHY

Sabbath starts with a full stop, not a slower pace. God didn't rest on the seventh day because he was tired — creation wasn't finished until he did. Stopping is the point, not the byproduct. If you're still answering email “just for a minute,” you haven't stopped.

HOW

Name what you're actually going to put down for this day — work, your phone, the to-do list, the urge to be productive. Be specific. “I’m not checking email from sundown to sundown” is a Sabbath. “I’ll try to relax” is not.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, today I’m putting down _____. I trust you to hold what I can’t hold today.”

2. Rest — What does my body and mind actually need?

WHY

Rest isn’t the reward for finishing your work. It’s the reminder that you were never the one holding the world together in the first place. Your body keeps score even when your calendar doesn’t. Real rest is physical, not just an idea you agree with.

HOW

Ask what your body is actually asking for — sleep, quiet, time outside, a slow meal instead of a fast one. Give it that, without guilt and without turning it into another task to optimize.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, what my body and mind actually need today is _____.”

3. Delight — What brings me joy that has no purpose but joy?

WHY

Let’s be honest: a lot of us feel guilty about enjoying things that don’t produce anything. Sabbath pushes back on that. God rested and called it good — not useful, good. Delight for its own sake is part of the design, not a loophole in it.

HOW

Do something today purely because it’s good, not because it’s efficient. A long walk. A meal with people you love. A hobby with no end product. Let yourself enjoy it without justifying it.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, thank you for _____. I don’t need it to be useful. I just need it to be good.”

4. Worship — Where is my attention pointed?

WHY

Every Sabbath is aimed at something. Stopping and resting without worship just turns into another form of self-care — good, but not the same thing Jesus and the commandment are pointing at. This day is meant to reorient your attention back to God, on purpose, not by accident.

HOW

Set aside a specific moment — corporate worship, quiet time with Scripture, prayer with your family — where your attention is deliberately on God rather than on yourself or your rest. Let the whole day bend toward that moment.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, today my attention belongs to you. Here’s what I want to say to you before this day ends:
____.”

This Week's Invitation

1. Choose one day this week and name it your Sabbath, out loud, to yourself or someone else.
2. Walk through Stop, Rest, Delight, and Worship on that day — even imperfectly.
3. Notice what made it hard to stop. Bring that honestly to God next week.

Start there.

A Simple Prayer

God, forgive me for treating rest like something I have to earn. Teach me to stop without guilt, rest without apology, delight without justifying it, and worship without distraction. This day is yours before it's mine. Amen.