



—Sandi Hester

Sabbath



Prayers for Entering Sacred Time

Preparing to Welcome Sabbath

1. Ideally, your time of Sabbath begins at sunset. That could be on Saturday or on any other day, but starting in the evening means you get to enjoy a 24-hour deep breath. However, there's flexibility! For example, if you have young children, you might begin and end Sabbath time at supper. Or, it could be that your Sabbath pause happens at 11:30 on a Sunday morning and lasts for just a few hours.
2. Have 2 candles and matches nearby. On one candle you might want to write "observe," and on the other, "remember."
3. Create a space for a "Sabbath Altar." It doesn't need to be anything elaborate. It can be a small table, or a box or a basket—something into which you can place objects that you set aside for the day. Be sure to have at hand some pens or pencils and some slips of paper, too.
4. Plan to end your Sabbath rest at the end of day by using the evening liturgy available online. For that experience you're encouraged to have some scented oil available. Or have some oil and something that offers up a pleasant aroma, such as a cup of spices, or a cinnamon stick, or freshly ground coffee, or incense. For more details see the liturgy on the Highland website.
5. Please read the text in **bold** print.
* NOTE: This ritual may be done with a group or alone. It may also be done with or without the accompanying recording. In the latter case, feel free to sing different songs (or none at all), and to assign different readings to different participants.



Sabbath: Come Back to Life

We need to stop, to rest. We are made that way. If we don't stop and rest, eventually we break down. We dis-integrate. We end up as diminished human beings. That is why we are commanded to remember and observe Sabbath. God's command to experience a Sabbath rest is not to please God; it is God's gift to us.

Sabbath, like other Christian practices, reminds us **who** we are and **whose** we are. Whether it's 24 hours or 2 hours, the purpose of Sabbath is to "carry no burdens on this day"; it's about *rest*.

R: to relax;

E: to enjoy or explore;

S: to see (or maybe sleep);

T: to take new insights and awareness into the rest of your days.

It is time set aside (aka sacred time) for community, renewal, celebration, reflection, creativity, and gratitude. By honoring time spent in *being*, rather than *doing*, we move into a way of facing the world and our lives with eyes open and spirits ready. Indeed, we take time to let all the stress and struggle and worry and responsibility slip from our shoulders, and when we need to pick up those things again later, they are carried more lightly because of this decision to stop.

To practice Sabbath is to practice mindfulness.

Try to spend these hours aware of what you are feeling, seeing, hearing.

To practice Sabbath is to practice ceasing.

As much as possible, do nothing from obligation (e.g., chores, work, returning emails, etc.). Instead notice the tension that exists within you as you try to resist such compulsions. Offer that tension to God as a prayer.

To practice Sabbath is to practice abiding.

These hours are meant for you to simply *be* not to *do*. This is extremely difficult—we tend to feel worthy of the time if we are being *productive*. That is not your goal today. Your goal is to simply exist in the grace of God.

Sabbath reconnects us with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the world.

We become more fully alive human beings in the image of the Resurrected Son.



WELCOME

The ease of the Father who takes leisurely evening strolls,
the companionship of the Son whose yoke gives rest,
the comfort of the Spirit who breathes new life in dead and weary bones,
and the company of the saints
 who have found eternal life and joy in the rhythms of sacred time
be with you all.

CALL TO SABBATH ~ *O Gracious Light*

O Gracious Light, also known as the Phos Hilaron, is one of the oldest known Christian hymns, dating back to the 3rd or 4th century.

O gracious light,
Pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven!
O gracious light:
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun
And our eyes behold the vesper light,
We sing your praises, O God:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

O gracious light!
You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O gracious light,
O Son of God, O Giver of Life,
And to be glorified in all the worlds!
O gracious light!

—*Liturgical Folk*

THE GREETING PRAYER

Adapted from a prayer of a young Ghanaian Christian, taken from I Lie on My Mat and Pray: Prayers by Young Africans.

Enter the shelter of God's Presence by praying the following words.

**The long week has worn out my body.
I give thanks that I was able to work hard for a good cause—
 and that I earned some money.
Thanks, Lord,
 that I could use my voice, my shoulders, my arms, my head, my hands.
Lord, I am tired, I am ready to rest.
Hallelujah for this day!**

REMEMBERING THE SABBATH (1 Kings 8:56; Isaiah 30:15; Mark 2:27)

Adapted from "Prayer to Welcome Sabbath," Common Prayer, by Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove & Enuma Okoro, p. 554.

Blessed be God, who gives us the Sabbath and leads us to the waters of stillness.

The Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has this solemn counsel:

"In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

So welcome the day, receive the gift.

Remember the Sabbath and keep it.

It is made for you: your freedom, your joy, your healing.

Bless God, Creator, Son and Holy Spirit,
who restores our soul and commands us to rest.

Lord of Creation,

when you rest in us, so we also rest in you;

when you do your work in us, so we also do our work in you.

As we remember you, so also re-member us,

**that we might be the whole and holy bearers of your image,
as we were originally created and blessed to be.**

In the light of Your holy Sabbath each day is holy;

in the overflowing of Sabbath joy, each moment is sacred.

So as we rest, (re)create in us a new rhythm of life composed

of hours that sustain rather than stress,

of days that deliver rather than destroy,

of time that tickles rather than tackles.

WORD OF GOD, WORD OF LIFE ~ *Remember* (read by Jennifer Rempel)

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. —Exodus 20:8-11

Take a moment to light the "Remember" candle.

Creator God,

on the seventh day you rested and were refreshed.

Please help us now to enter into the rest of your Sabbath,

that we may cease from our work

and delight in your care over our lives

both now and forever,

Amen.

OBSERVING THE SABBATH (*Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:28-29*)

Adapted from "Prayer to Welcome Sabbath," Common Prayer, by Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove & Enuma Okoro, p. 554 and Liturgical Version of Article 16, "Work, Rest, and the Lord's Day," Canadian Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith.

Blessed be God, High King above all kings,
whose ancient paths are where the good way lies, and deliver us into Sabbath.
The Lord God, the Redeemer of Israel, has this solemn counsel:
"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
So welcome the day, receive the gift.
Remember the Sabbath and keep it.
It is made for you: your freedom, your joy, your healing.
Bless God, Creator, Son and Holy Spirit,
who restores our soul and commands us to rest.

**Lord of Liberation,
by the rhythm of your truth, set us free
from the bondage and baggage that break us,
from the Pharaohs and fellows who fail us,
from the plans and pursuits that prey upon us.
To our packed-full planners, we bid, "Peace!"
To our over-caffeinated consciences, we say, "Cease!"
To our suffocating selves, Lord, grant release,
and raise us up in the rhythm of your new life.
As we observe Sabbath, may we observe more fully and clearly
You, our world, ourselves, and others.**

WORD OF GOD, WORD OF LIFE ~ *Observe* (read by Jennifer Rempel)

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day. —Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Take a moment to light the "Observe" candle.

Lord of Resurrection, our Sabbath:

You thought it a good thing to pause, reflect, enjoy what You had done.

Help us to do the same.

Help us to rest, thankful for our daily bread.

Help us to rest, enjoying a sweet foretaste of eternal peace.

Help us to rest, relying on your goodness, and not on our own activity.

Help us to slow down so that we can be still and know that You are God.

Amen.

RELEASING BURDENS, EMBRACING GIFTS

We are not human doings; we are human beings. We are valued because we are created as image-bearers of God. Sabbath is a time to “get back to basics”: to stop, to rest, to be still and know God, ourselves, others, and our world in deeper and better ways.

Pause your playback device, and take a few moments to consider this question:

What can I stop doing—what can I say “no” to—this Sabbath?

Have each person place in the “Sabbath Altar” the things that they don’t need.

This might include cell phones or keys, work projects and homework, or a to-do list. Or write down a particular worry or concern or obligation or decision that needs to be made, and drop that piece of paper in. Just for now, let those things go.



Having opened your hands to release some burdens,
keep your empty hands open to receive and embrace the life-giving gifts of Sabbath.
After all, Sabbath is a time set aside for play—for recreation—
activities that leave us re-created as God’s image bearers .

Pause your playback device, and consider this question:

How can I say “Yes” to resting my body and restoring my soul on the Sabbath?

It might include silence, or playing the guitar;

it might involve a nap or going for a walk with a friend.

Maybe it’s playing a game with the kids, or eating your favorite food.

If mowing the lawn brings you joy, have at it.

Have each person write down on a piece of paper what it is they want to welcome in their lives this day, and place it in the “Sabbath Altar.”



ABIDING

Adapted from the Kenyan Eucharistic Rite from the Anglican Church of Kenya)

Now that you've set aside some things so that you might receive new graces, settle in to abide in Sabbath by praying these words:

**All our problems we send to the cross of Christ.
All our difficulties we send to the cross of Christ.
All the works of evil we send to the cross of Christ.
All our hopes we set on the risen Christ.**

**God of creation and deliverance,
Christ with us in life and death,
Spirit of love, forgiveness and hope,
we meet you here,
and you meet us here,
as we rest together in sacred time.
By your grace, allow us to enter your Sabbath rest
as your Sabbath rest enters into us.
Amen.**

SINGING ~ *In the Morning*

In the evening
When the day is almost done,
And we watch the setting sun,
In the evening
As we put our work to rest,
Noting all that you have blessed,

I look to You in the evening
And give You thanks for this day;
I look to You in the evening
And give You thanks for this day.

—Steve Bell

You may keep your Sabbath candles lit throughout the day.



RESOURCES

A SAMPLING OF SCRIPTURES RELATED TO SABBATH

Genesis 2:2-3, Isaiah 28:12; 30:15, Exodus 20:8-10; 31:14; 33:14, Jeremiah 6:16, Deuteronomy 5:14, Ezekiel 34:15, 1 Kings 8:56, Matthew 11:28-29, 1 Chronicles 23:25, Mark 2:27, Psalm 116:7; 127:2, Hebrews 4:9-11

ONLINE RESOURCES WORTH A LOOK

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2020/05/a-whole-day.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2016/09/work-rest-repeat-aka-trust-training.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2016/10/work-rest-repeat-aka-belonging-training.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-move-to-freedom.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2014/02/24-hour-deep-breath-or-why-is-sabbath.html>

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2012/06/rest-expected-and-elusive.html>

<https://www.lakenokomispc.org/uploads/2/9/8/7/29872037/2015juneptkeepingthesabbath.pdf>

<https://www.lakenokomispc.org/horizons-2016-article.html>

<https://faithandleadership.com/kara-k-root-stop-rest-come-back-real-life-reason-sabbath>

<https://faithandleadership.com/minneapolis-congregation-finds-new-life-through-ancient-practice-keeping-sabbath>

<https://www.lakenokomispc.org/uploads/2/9/8/7/29872037/sabbath- gift of rest.pdf>

NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*

Justo L. Gonzalez, *A Brief History of Sunday: From the New Testament to the New Creation*

Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*