

A photograph of a wooden bridge crossing a river in a lush green forest. A wooden sign on the left side of the bridge reads "GO SLOW". The bridge is made of wooden planks and has a simple wooden railing. The river is calm and reflects the surrounding trees. The forest is dense with green foliage, and sunlight filters through the leaves, creating dappled light on the bridge and the ground.

THE GIFT OF A
Sacred
SUMMER

8 WEEKS OF GROWING CLOSER TO JESUS

INCLUDES: INTERACTIVE PRACTICES, JOURNALING PROMPTS,
AND REFLECTIONS DESIGNED FOR ALL AGES

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THE GIFTS OF A SACRED SUMMER:

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. The Gift of Rest..... | 2 |
| 2. The Gift of Silence..... | 6 |
| 3. The Gift of Nature..... | 11 |
| 4. The Gift of Gratitude..... | 15 |
| 5. The Gift of Justice..... | 20 |
| 6. The Gift of Love..... | 25 |
| 7. The Gift of Play..... | 29 |
| 8. The Gift to Create..... | 33 |
| 9. The Gift of Grief (A bonus week to help us process the pandemic)..... | 36 |

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Rest

A Sacred Summer

STORY

Rest is a commandment. It's in the "big ten". The Creator of the Universe actually chose to stop and rest after creating everything. God invites us to rest. God gives us the invitation and the gift of rest.

I was at a conference that was happening in a worship space that included artwork from that faith community. The pastor invited us to choose a work of art, go stand in front of it, and let God speak to us through that work of art. I'd been drawn to a particular painting all week. The painting was of a white wicker chair on a back porch, surrounded by green ferns. It felt very peaceful and like an invitation to go sit down on that porch and just be. I wasn't good at just being. I was a "Mach 2 hair on fire" kind of person.

I'd been trained well by workaholic parents and bosses to do more, not less. My list of things to do really never ended. But this painting asked me to come and sit down. I walked over and stood in front of it and looked at the title... "REST". I started to weep.

REST! The very thing I had been avoiding. The practice I didn't understand.

As I looked at the chair and thought of sitting down and actually resting, the still small voice of God said, "What if you learn to rest so you can help others learn to rest?"

That was 20 years ago. I'm still learning to open the gift of rest each week. My to-do list still is long, but I've learned that rest is truly holy. It's a gift! God invites us to open this gift. We cannot keep pouring out to others if we have an empty cup. We all need time to refill our cups. We need to rest to love our neighbors, our family, and ourselves. God gave us the gift of rest so we can have the margin to love. Walter Brueggemann says that Sabbath is in the middle of the commandments because without REST we are more likely to steal, kill, dishonor and covet.

How can you open the gift of REST this summer?

*Written by Lilly Lewin.

PRACTICES

Each day of the week, take time to do the 5 or the 15-minute practice.

Plan a time to do the Going Deeper practice sometime during the week.

- **5-minute Practice:** Sit down somewhere peaceful and comfortable or pick a quiet spot to lay down and just rest for 5 whole minutes. Set your timer to help you with this practice. What do you notice? Picture Jesus putting a blanket of peace and love around your shoulders. Each day this week, practice 5 minutes of resting.
- **15-minute Practice:** Plan ahead and consider what helps you rest and relax and connect with yourself and Jesus. Read a book that isn't for work or school, go outside and take a 15-minute walk, get out the crayons and color for fun (only if this brings joy). Or just sit down in your Sabbath Spot and be with Jesus. Notice if you get anxious or nervous because you aren't accomplishing anything. Give these feelings to Jesus to keep for you, or write them down and put them in your Sabbath Box for Jesus to hold. (Directions for a Sabbath Box are in the Experience section).
- **Going Deeper:** Set up a Sabbath/Rest Day. We all need community to help us practice real rest because we forget to do it on our own and if we live with other people, it helps them to be on board too. If you are going to set up a sabbath rest time or an afternoon or a 24-hour sabbath day practice, you need to talk about this with a friend, family, housemates, small group, etc., so you can have the space to practice rest either on your own, or better yet, as a group. When could you have an evening or an afternoon that is all about rest? Put it on the calendar and actually open the gift of rest together.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 11:29-30, Exodus 20:8-11, Genesis 2:1-3

QUESTIONS for Journaling or Discussion

- How does it feel to know that God, the Creator of the entire Universe, chose to rest?
- How did Jesus view the Sabbath? What did Jesus think about all the rules of the Sabbath that had been added by the Pharisees?
- Describe your perfect Sabbath day. Where would you be? What would you be doing? Who would you be with (if anyone)? Draw a picture or write your perfect Sabbath day.
- What things help you rest? Getting outside, turning off technology, a good pillow, or a comfy place to sit? When do you feel relaxed and peaceful? What things do you need to add or subtract from your week to really rest?
- We give children permission to rest! In fact, we want them to take naps! Why do we find it so difficult to rest as we grow up?
- Do you have any negative thoughts about practicing Sabbath? Do you see it as more rules to follow, or can you choose to see Sabbath and rest as a gift to open? Talk to Jesus about any negative feelings you have about rest/Sabbath. Put these in your Sabbath box and let Jesus begin to heal them.
- When you think of the word Sabbath, what do you think of? How do you feel about rest?
- Is the thought of practicing rest easy or hard? Why?

EXPERIENCES

Choose one or several to try.

- **Sabbath Spot:** Create a place in your home or yard that can be your Sabbath Spot, your rest area. If you have room in your yard, put up a tent and make it an oasis... fill it with pillows, blankets and things that help you rest! A comfy chair, a rocking chair, a hammock, a large floor pillow, a bean bag chair are all possibilities you can designate as your Sabbath Spot. Each day this week, practice resting.
- **Create a Sabbath Box:** Select a big enough container to hold items like your cell phone, laptop, or game controller. This box is designated to create space to store away items that might distract you as you choose to disconnect from the world and connect with God. You can purchase a box, decorate an old box, or use a basket with a lid.
- **Permission Granted:** Create your own permission slip. Write on this slip, "You have permission to rest. -Jesus."
- **For Faith Communities and Small Groups:** Host a Sabbath Rest Sunday. Rather than hosting your regular gathering, host a day of rest where the entire community practices Sabbath either on their own or as a community. Consider creating a place of rest with no agenda other than resting in the peace and love of God. Scatter blankets, hammocks and chairs around the church grounds. Encourage people to wear their sweats or PJs, bring a pillow/yoga mat/blanket and listen to instrumental music, have a quiet playlist playing or someone playing guitar. The goal is that everyone just rests for an hour or two.
- **For Families:** Talk about what an actual Sabbath rest day could look like for your family. What would you want to stop? Put away technology for an afternoon or an evening or even a whole day. Have no chores or shopping. Everyone gets time to talk about what REST means to them. What would your REST/SABBATH look like? Perhaps time for naps, reading, a long walk, listening to music together, cooking a meal together. Time together, and time alone for kids old enough to be unsupervised. Talk about what would bring you rest and joy both as a family and as individuals. What things would restore your soul as a family?
- **Read:** Choose a book to read as a family, group, or as an entire church to learn more and take your practice deeper.
 - ***Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom In The Rhythms Of Rest*** by Lynne M. Baab
 - ***Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*** by Wayne Muller
 - ***Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*** by Walter Brueggemann
- **Listen:** Create a playlist of peaceful instrumental music or songs that help you rest to listen to during your time of sabbath rest practice.

PUSHBACK

Maybe you have had a negative experience around the Sabbath Day. Maybe when you hear Rest and Sabbath, all you think about are rules to follow or more things to do.

Maybe you have little kids or have to work two jobs and think, “How can I possibly take time to rest?”

Spend some time with Jesus and talk to him about how you feel about Sabbath and Rest. Jesus loves you just as you are.

Why is it hard for you to stop?

Why do you feel guilty when you aren't busy?

How can you see REST and SABBATH as gifts from Jesus rather than filled with shame or as rules to follow?

PRAYER

Breathe in rest

God is here.

You are here.

Relax.

Breathe deeply in the gift of rest.

Breathe out fear.

Breathe deeply in the gift of rest.

Breathe out busyness.

Breathe in the gift of rest.

Breathe out stress.

Breathe in permission to rest.

Breathe out weariness.

Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest. (Jesus)