



Sabbath: A
Living the Way
Guide





Sabbath is a day (and other times) we set aside for resting and delighting in God's presence and the good things He has given to us.

This guide will teach participants to ...

- Confront our addiction to hurry and busyness
- Slow down and focus mindfully on God and His blessings
- Set aside a day (and other times) for nothing but rest and enjoyment

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
(Matthew 11:28-30)*

Resources you will need ...

LTW Lectio Divina Workshop Guide
Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God*
The Bible, any translation
startlivingtheway.com

Session One | Confronting an Addiction



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. What is something recent that is bringing you joy?
What is something recent that is causing you stress?

1. What is your experience with Sabbath-Keeping (if any)?
2. How do you hope to grow spiritually over the coming weeks?
3. Walk through your expectations re: frequency and preparation for meetings.

Session One | **Confronting an Addiction**

We Are Addicted

Most of us are addicts of a familiar kind. We are addicted to a frenzied way of life. It stresses us out. It depletes us. It leaves us tired. But we keep going back to the adrenaline rush we get when we endlessly multitask and push beyond our limits. Most often, we are unaware of the toll that hurry and busyness are taking until we crash. Sometimes hard. Maybe it was a lethal combination of meetings, kids' sporting events, and daily household chores. Maybe it was an obsession with work—doing and everything it took to climb the ladder. Maybe it was even too many commitments at church. We all—without exception—either have or are cruising for a physical, emotional, and spiritual crash from the frenzy.

The good news is that we don't have to live this way.

Really. For real. There is a richer, slower, and calmer way to live. In this workshop, we will talk about a key practice for ushering in this kind of life. It's called Sabbath. Here's the heart of what this practice is about.

Sabbath is a day (and other times) we set aside for resting and delighting in God's presence and the good things He has given to us.

This simple practice has the power to transport you from hurry and busyness to the rest God has prepared for you. Catch that ... God has already prepared a place of rest for you! But lest we get ahead of ourselves, the first step towards slowing down is facing the reality of our addiction. In other words, we must understand, admit, and repent (we will talk more about repentance in a moment) of our frenzied way of life. Let's start here:

1. How does it make you feel to hear that you're a hurry and busyness addict? Do you agree?
2. Reflect for a moment on the role hurry and busyness occupy in your life. Use the following questions to help you assess:
 - How often are you rushed—mentally, emotionally, and physically—to the next thing? How does this affect you?
 - How many activities fill up your calendar daily, weekly, monthly? Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed?
 - Have you ever experienced a full-on crash because of your speed of living? What was that like? What did you learn about your limits?



Session One | **Confronting an Addiction**

The Tragic Outcome

Imagine you've just awakened from a night's sleep. **What thoughts immediately fill your mind? (Pause to discuss)** Most often, we think about the stressors and responsibilities of the day. Maybe you even check your phone for texts, emails, and DMs. This waking rhythm (common for so many of us) sets the tone for the day—a pattern of living worriedly in a future that has yet to arrive. In fact, while we (obviously) live *physically* in the present moment, *mentally* we never arrive at the “now” over which we so carefully obsess. In other words, we very rarely live mentally in the present moment that God has given to us.

This way of living—worried and hurried about the next thing—is nothing short of tragic.

‘Tragic’ is an awfully strong word. Why *tragic*? Well, because the present moment is when life happens. It's when sunsets grace the horizon. It's when babies smile their first smile. It's when loved ones gather and embrace. It's when forgiveness happens. It's when we hear from the very voice of God. Living our lives at the frenzied pace that our world so often demands is tragic. We then miss out on the richness life itself.

This is the anxious and barren place where our addiction leads.

Hang on, though. As bad as this sounds, God is gracious. God is good. He has offered us a way out. He has offered us freedom. He has offered us nothing short of life itself.

An Offer of Freedom

Freedom from hurry, worry, and frenzy begins with an unexpected offer from God. Read the following slowly and contemplatively together.

¹² “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

1. God clearly ties overwork (and our addiction) to back-breaking slavery. Why do you think He says this? In what ways is overwork a form of slavery in our lives?

2. How does God say we can walk out of slavery and into freedom? How does this make you feel?



Session One | **Confronting an Addiction**

God offers a beautiful vision of a life of freedom. Don't forget. This vision is not just an ideal for super-Christians. It's an offer for every follower of Jesus, no matter how complex your season in life. Here's the next step. Work through the following LTW exercise in preparation for session two and pray your deepest desires for freedom to God.

Exercises for Session Two

1. Read "The Rest of God" (chapter 3) and "We're Not in Egypt Anymore" (chapter 6) from *The Rest of God* by Mark Buchanan.
2. Experiment with an ancient practice called *examen*. To do this, make some time at the days' end (maybe when you're lying in bed before sleep). Mentally walk through your day and ask: When was I most hurried? When was I most worried? When did I live my life doggedly in the future (or the past), instead of the given present? Ask God to reveal your addiction to you. Then, ask Him how these same moments might be transformed by resting in Him.
3. Complete the discussion questions for session two. Come ready to discuss!

Interlude

You've finished the first session of this guide! You're admitting and confronting the most common modern addiction—to hurry, worry, and busyness. You're officially on a path to something better and God-ordained. This is an exciting opportunity!

Don't forget that it's best to go on this sacred journey alongside others. Make some time to get together and deepen your relationships. Grab coffee just to chat. Go to a baseball game. Gather your families for a movie night. Do something that simply celebrates the joys of being human and knowing others. This is good for its own sake but will also help you grow as you complete future sessions.

"One measure for whether your rested enough is to ask yourself this: How much do I care about what I care about? When we lose concern for people, both the lost and the found, for the bride of Christ, for friendship, for truth and beauty and goodness; when we cease to laugh when our children laugh (and instead yell at them to quiet down) or weep when our spouses weep (and instead wish they didn't get so emotional); when we hear news of trouble among our neighbors and our first thought is to hope it isn't going to involve us—when we stop caring about the things we care about—that's a signal we're too busy. We have let ourselves be consumed by the things that feed the ego but starve the soul. Busyness kills the heart." (Mark Buchanan)



Session Two | An Offer of Rest



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. Is there anything causing you anxiety, worry, or fear in the past weeks? Pray for one another about these things.

Discuss your experience with the practice of examen. What insights did you learn about your daily rhythms? What, if anything, did you sense God speaking to you?

Session Two | An Offer of Rest

Rest from Weariness

In session one, we confronted the reality of an addiction from which most (all?) of us suffer. It's an addiction to hurry, worry, and busyness. Its outcome is nothing short of tragic. When we chase the fulfillment of our deepest longings through wearisome striving, we miss out on life. That's because life happens in each present moment. In fact, we were created to live our lives with Jesus in the here and now. That's when He speaks, leads, convicts, forgives, and guides us.

It's a tragedy to miss out on all that and so much more.

The consequences of our addiction are severe and yet, just like any addiction, this one has a strong hold on us. That's mostly because we use hurry and busyness to attain (we sure hope) our deepest desires for belonging, fulfillment, achievement, and the like. Catch this. We strive so hard because we want to feel like our lives are whole, meaningful, and purposeful. It's a sad human irony. We destroy that which we seek by the way in which we seek it.

What we need is a better vision for our lives. We need a way of living more fulfilling than the one we chase through our addiction. The good—incomparable, joyful, hopeful—news is that Jesus offers us just such a vision. Hear His words from the book of Matthew:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus' offer for rest is not just about lying in a hammock amongst the trees (although that's a great idea!). It's about discovering our life in and with Him. We learn in this passage that He already knows you are worn out. That's exactly when He meets us—when we cannot go on with life as usual. He offers us His way of living as the restful solution to our frenzied addiction.

1. Why does Jesus specifically call people who are worn-out with life? Are you ready to self-identify as weary and burdened?

2. How is the rest Jesus offers in this passage different from simply taking a break from activity?

3. Jesus' yoke is His distinctive way of living. How would you describe the life Jesus offers and how is it different from our daily experience?

4. Finally, how does Jesus say that we step into this more restful way of life?



Session Two | An Offer of Rest

Someone to Trust

The **first** part of Jesus' vision for a restful way of life is that we would find our lives in and with Him. In other words, we are called to share each present experience—here and now—with Him. This is quite different from the scattered lives we live. It's key to overcoming our addiction. The **second** part of Jesus' vision is that we trust *in Him* to fulfill our deepest longings, rather than our frenzied way of life.

Our life in Jesus fulfills our deepest longings that busyness and striving simply cannot.

Jesus shows us over-and-over in the Bible that we can and should trust in Him for what we desire most in life—meaning, belonging, and fulfillment. For instance:

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" ³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. ⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:35-41)

Here, the disciples fear for their very lives. What they learn has nothing to do with enhanced nautical skills but, rather, with trust in their Creator for what they desire (in this case, safety).

Are there specific areas of your life you need to entrust to Jesus?

Let's summarize. Jesus offers each of us a two-fold vision of a new kind of life. First, we are called to live our lives with Him, instead of alone. Second, we are called to trust in Him, rather than our own striving, for what we most deeply desire in life. Here's the punchline:

Sabbath is a crucial practice in living the calm, restful, peaceful life that Jesus offers.

When we incorporate Sabbath into our lives, we turn our gaze away from the busyness and towards Jesus and the good things He's given to us. We then trust in Him—literally by setting aside time when we could have been productive—to give us all good things. Walking into this life involves two initial steps (discuss these together):

1. **Confession** is the act of saying aloud—to yourself, others, and God—the sin in your life. It is always the first step on the road to healing. Is there anything about your frenzied life that you need to confess to God or others?

2. Likewise, **repentance** is the act of turning and walking the other way—from destructive behaviors. Are you ready to walk away from your hurry, and busyness addiction?



Session Two | An Offer of Rest

Exercises for Session Three

1. Read “Restore” (chapter 10), “Feast” (chapter 11) and “Listen” (chapter 12) from *The Rest of God* by Mark Buchanan.
2. Make space to experience what one author calls “useless beauty,” i.e., those things that are valuable to us, but that do not lend themselves to productivity (e.g., sunsets, laughter, art, music, recreation). Make note of how enjoying useless beauty makes you feel.
3. Continue to practice examen in the evening (see the exercise from session one).
4. Complete the discussion questions for session three. Come ready to discuss!

“We strongly need to see the manifest hand of God in what we are and what we do. We need to be sure he is pulling the load, bearing the burden—which we are all too ready to assume is up to us alone. We must understand that he is in charge of our efforts, and the outcome will be good, right. And all of this is encompassed in the biblical term, ‘Sabbath.’” (Dallas Willard)



Session Three | Discovering Sabbath



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. How have you spent your free time over the past weeks? What words would you use to describe it (e.g., rejuvenating, refreshing, wasteful, fretting)?

1. Review your experience with examen since you last met. Have you learned anything new or heard from God through this practice?
2. Describe your experience with "useless beauty." What was it and how did it make you feel?

Session Three | Discovering Sabbath

Now we arrive at the heart of the matter. It's time to discover (or, perhaps in your case rediscover) the ancient practice of Sabbath. God gave humanity the Sabbath at the very creation of the world. For six days, the book of Genesis tells us, God made all that we know and love. On the seventh day, He rested from His labors. This creative pattern was meant to teach the Israelites how to organize their week. Work is good. It's from God. When we work, we imitate God's own creative efforts. However, it's not good for our lives to be nothing but activity. Part of living well is resting well. The Israelites called this day of rest *Shabbat*. It began with a simple meal and lighting a candle on Friday evening and did not conclude until the day's end on Saturday.

Sabbath is a day (and other times) we set aside for resting and delighting in God's presence and the good things He has given to us.

God gives us this day of rest so that we might surrender our concerns and anxieties to Him and trust in His ability to give us everything we need. When we do this, we taste holy freedom and can enjoy the good things God's given, like our family and friends. That's what Sabbath is for. It's what it's all about—a day for nothing but relaxation and enjoyment. It's a freedom practice.

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:30-31)

1. What strikes you or stands out about this workshop's definition of Sabbath (see above)?
2. What do we learn about the importance of rest from the life of Jesus? Why do you think it was necessary even for Him (being God incarnate) to rest?
3. Do you have any concerns about practicing Sabbath? Does it sound idealistic to set aside an entire day for rest?
4. Which of Buchanan's dimensions of Sabbath (i.e., restore, feast, and listen) made the greatest impact on you and why?



Session Three | Discovering Sabbath

The Heart of Sabbath

Sabbath is not just a practice. It's first a posture of our hearts. At its worst, Sabbath can be part of a legalistic spiritual checklist. In other words, it's easy to go through the motions of merely "taking a day off" without experiencing the endless benefits of Sabbath-keeping. This happens when our bodies are at rest, but our hearts and minds are elsewhere. We'd rather be accomplishing, impressing, and proving our worth by our work. When our hearts are still attuned to work, Sabbath is drudgery. It is legalism. It is without benefit.

²³ One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." ²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:23-28)

What does Jesus teach us about the heart of Sabbath-Keeping?

So, what does it mean for our hearts to be ready for Sabbath—the real thing? Glad you asked! It means, **first**, that we admit just how tired we are. We are honest with ourselves and God that we have *had it* with striving and going at life alone. This one's easy to say and often difficult to do. But, if we want the benefits of Sabbath, we must walk into these spaces with God. Now is a great time to refresh your memory of session two.

Second, we recognize that God oversees the outcomes in our lives. He's the one who saturates our lives with meaning—not us. We matter, ultimately, because we matter so much to Him. Our lives are valuable, ultimately, because they are so valuable to Him. The Sabbath heart, then, is one that finds its joy and comfort in surrendering all things to God.

What does it mean to surrender all things to God?

When we do this, fully and completely, we discover that: (1) It's safe to cast our cares on God and simply rest; (2) Life is teeming with goodness that was obscured by our addiction; and (3) Our life is finally about living with God. Let's sum it all up. The Sabbath heart is one that desires above all to be with and to trust in God.

¹ As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42:1-2)

Trust leads us to the Sabbath and the Sabbath builds trust in us.

Discuss your reactions to this section. What do you need to do—very practically—to foster a heart that is ready to receive the Sabbath?



Session Three | **Discovering Sabbath**

Exercises for Session Four

1. Read “Remember” (chapter 13) and “Reflect and Anticipate” (chapter 14) from *The Rest of God* by Mark Buchanan.
2. Make time and space to reflect on the meaning of surrender and trust in God. Ask Him what it means and what he’s calling you to do.
3. Try it! Pick a day over the coming weeks and set it aside for Sabbath. Be kind to yourself. Sabbath-keeping takes time to learn. We will discuss in more detail in session four.
4. Complete the discussion questions for session four. Come ready to discuss!

Interlude

You’ve finished the third session of this workshop! You’ve discovered that the rest Jesus offers is found when we practice the Sabbath. It’s God’s gift to us. You’re on a restful and rejuvenating path—and that’s something to be celebrated!

Don’t forget that it’s best to go on this sacred journey alongside others. Make some time to get together and deepen your relationships. Grab coffee just to chat. Go to a baseball game. Gather your families for a movie night. Do something that simply celebrates the joys of being human and knowing others. This is good for its own sake but will also help you grow as you complete future sessions.

“Taking our cues from Moses, we see that one of the main functions of sabbath-keeping is to give us a regular, built-in opportunity for remembering who we are and to whom we belong. No matter how enslaved we’ve been during the week, on the sabbath we remember our true identity as free people. We remember how God has been with us, liberating us in the first place, and we find our freedom once again so we can continue to live on God’s terms for us.” (Ruth Haley Barton)



Session Four | Practicing Sabbath



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. How often have you been jealous, critical, or irritable towards others these past weeks? Reflect on the reasons for this and pray for one another.

1. What did you learn about the meaning of surrender and trust in God?
2. How was your practice of the Sabbath? Any highlights or concerns?

Session Four | Practicing Sabbath

Where We've Been

Let's review. In session one, we confronted a harsh reality. Most of us are addicted to a frenzied way of living that leaves us burnt out, tired, and anxious. We quite often use busyness in attempt to bring meaning to our lives. It's time to own up and admit that we are addicts. In session two, however, we saw that God doesn't leave us in this misery. Rather, He offers us rest—the kind that comes from discovering our lives in Him. His presence itself is what brings about a new way living. In session three, we learned that this practice called **Sabbath** is crucial to walking in the rest that Christ offers. Here is our definition:

Sabbath is a day (and other times) we set aside for resting and delighting in God's presence and the good things He has given to us.

Sabbath is a calling. It's a heart. It's also a skill, i.e., something we learn over time to do well. This leads to this final session, where we learn some practical steps of Sabbath.

Preparing for Sabbath

Sabbath won't just happen. Setting aside a day to rejuvenate is a great start, but duties and obligations will threaten to disrupt what we've begun. Preparation for our day of rest is crucial. This means, among other things that we:

- Complete household chores before our Sabbath begins. Here, we are talking about the mundane stuff of life, e.g., cleaning, laundry, lawn care, grocery shopping, and the like.
- Fulfill any relational obligations that do not concern the Sabbath, e.g., texts, emails, phone calls, or meetings.
- Plan what you want the Sabbath to look like, i.e., what you want it to include. It can be stressful to plan the Sabbath while trying to experience it at the same time.
- Make time on the eve of your Sabbath—even a few minutes will do—to break mentally and emotionally from the frenzy of life.

Again, this practical step will take time to master. Be gracious to yourself as you learn. And don't skip this step. If you do, you'll find work tasks slowly conquering your Sabbath celebration.

³⁵ *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35)*

1. What does Jesus do to ensure that He can rest and spend concentrated time with God?

2. What do you need to do, likewise, to prepare for a meaningful Sabbath?



Session Four | Practicing Sabbath

Rhythms of Sabbath-Keeping

Recall that our definition of Sabbath features not only a single day set aside. It also includes “other times” of rest. Here are some healthy **weekly** rhythms of Sabbath.

Set aside an entire day. Per the last section, this means planning for the Sabbath. It also means devoting a full 24-hours. We need it for our rest. For our time with God. For our time with others. Don't skimp on Sabbath time.

Rest physically, mentally, and spiritually. Sabbath is not only about bodily rest (although it is that). It's about learning to live mentally in the present—to enjoy what God's given each moment. It's about remembering that our lives are full only when we are with him. Make sure you have space for holistic rest.

Rest and rejuvenate according to your personality. Sabbath doesn't need to look the same for everyone. Some enjoy splitting wood while others find it to be cumbersome. Study your own life. What is life-giving? What renews your spirit? What leaves you feeling rested? Incorporate those things!

Cultivate important relationships. Spend time with family and friends. Listen to them intently and without interruption. Speak life-giving words into their souls. Celebrate the gift that they are in your life.

Celebrate beauty. Don't forget to be mindful of “useless beauty” all around you. Make time to slowly notice the leaves on the trees, the wind in the fields, or the sounds of a quiet woods. Praise God for the good things He's given simply for us to enjoy.

Sabbath can, and should, be all these things over time. The key to a well-rounded Sabbath is mindfulness. Be mindful of each dimension as you master the art of rejuvenating rest.

In addition, it is good to take at least a half-day **monthly** for a Sabbath retreat. This can be as simple as spending some time in a quiet room at home with God to scheduling a day at a retreat center. The key is to be alone and quiet with God. Don't set an agenda for this time. Simply walk into a space of “hanging out,” as it were, with Him. Let Him speak to you whatever He thinks you need to hear.

Finally, it is good to take a Sabbath vacation **yearly**. This can be incorporated into planned vacation time or can simply be time you take off from work and stay home. Make sure you give plenty of quiet space in your time off. Make space for each dimensions of weekly Sabbath (see above) in a more prolonged and extended way.

Spend time sharing your vision for weekly, monthly, and yearly Sabbath. What excites you? What concerns arise? Help one another set life-giving Sabbath goals.



Session Four | Practicing Sabbath

Reflections on the Sabbath

You've now encountered an essential practice God has given to build us in the way of Jesus. Take some time to reflect and celebrate what He has done. We invite you to continue your journey by digging into one of the other LTW guides offered at startlivingtheway.com!

1. How did you grow because of this practice? What was especially meaningful? What was challenging?
2. How do you plan to integrate Sabbath-keeping as part of your regular spiritual life?
3. How do you plan to celebrate the good things God has done over these past weeks?

"Contemplative in the context lectio divina, our spiritual reading of the Holy Scriptures, signals the recognition of an organic union between the word 'read' and the word 'lived.' The contemplative life is the realization that the Word that was in the beginning is also the Word that was made flesh and continues to be the Word to which I say, 'Let it be to me according to Thy Word.'" (Eugene Peterson)

