Sabbath Now
Daily Readings
August 7 - 11
Day 1 - Being Willing

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 11:28-30
We have talked a lot about freedom this year. It is one of the main themes of the Bible. Ultimately it is what Jesus achieved on the cross, securing a freedom for us which we had no hope of attaining by ourselves. While freedom from sin and freedom to relate to God is an accomplished fact, it is a gift which we have to actively receive and choose to participate in. The principle of Sabbath rest is a part of choosing to experience God’s freedom.

Jesus did not offer ‘Nine Special Coping Strategies’ or ‘Seven Spiritual Stress Management Techniques.’ Instead he extended an invitation, “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.”

Eugene Peterson, author of The Message, comments, “Sabbath is not primarily about us or how it benefits us; it is about God, and how God forms us. It is not, in the first place, about what we do or don’t do; it is about God – completing and resting and blessing and sanctifying. These are all things that we don’t know much about… But it does mean stopping and being quiet long enough to see – open-mouthed – with wonder – resurrection wonder… we cultivate the “fear of the Lord”. Our souls are formed by what we cannot work up or take charge of. We respond and enter into what the resurrection of Jesus continues to do.”

Sabbath Practice:
Lectio Divina: (Divine Reading) This is an ancient practice of taking a small portion of scripture and reading it over several times. The first time for information – what is the passage about? After pausing to take it in, slowly read a second time listening with the ears of the heart for any particular word or phrase that stands out for you. Sit with this word and mull it over, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal its meaning or significance. Read the passage a third time and just sit in silence for a few minutes letting it sink into your spirit. Carry your special word into the rest of your day. Try this with today’s reading in Matthew.

Prayer
Loving Father, forgive me for the times I am so preoccupied and busy ignoring your gift of freedom and rest. Show me how to enter in to a space where you are forming my soul, and accept the rest that only you can bring, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 2 - Stop Now

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 6:33-34
Sabbath is about surrender. If we wait till all our jobs are done and our work is finished, we will never stop. Despite so many good intentions it is all too easy to get caught up in the mundane, the routine, the important and the urgent; and when we are honest, caught up in our own self-importance. Surprisingly the world continues to turn when we surrender the steering wheel! Sabbath calls us to stop because it is time to stop. “Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it liberates us from the need to be finished....The old wise Sabbath says: Stop now. As the sun touches the horizon, take the hand off the plough, put down the phone, let the pen rest on the paper, turn off the computer and leave the mop in the bucket and the car in the garage. There is no room for negotiation, no time to be seduced by the urgency of our responsibilities. We stop because there are forces larger than we that take care of the universe, and while our efforts are important, necessary, and useful, they are not (nor are we) indispensable.” Wayne Muller.

Sabbath Practice:
Sabbath Box – When you have set aside some special time, create a box for those things you and your family choose to put aside. Perhaps a cell phone, keys, TV remote or something symbolic like a pen drive representing a computer. The box could also hold things you felt are left undone. Write a word or phrase for something worrying you that you choose to put aside for now. Light a candle and speak the things that are still left to do. As the candle burns, allow the worries to melt away. At the end of your Sabbath time, reclaim your items. As you empty the box note how you respond to what you take up into your life once more.

Prayer
Father God, thank you for the opportunity to leave things in your hands knowing, that as I choose to put down my cares and worries, you hold them and me. I remember again that you are in charge, not me. Help me to put time with you ahead of my drive to get things finished. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 min)

Scripture Reading – Mark 2:23-28
Health is such a hot topic almost everywhere you look. Whether it be the latest piece of exercise equipment, the cutting-edge science in diet and nutrition, a new mindfulness practice or the miracle supplement to ease those aches and pains, we seem willing to try the next new thing (often at considerable cost) in the hope of achieving wholeness and a sense of wellbeing.

Those of us who remember having small children may recall trying to get them to take a much needed nap, often despite their adamant protests that they don’t need to rest. As a parent we know that the rest of the day is going to go so much better if they accept a time of sleep and quiet. Perhaps as big people our protests are not a lot different? There is no space, there is too much to be done, people need me, I couldn’t possibly...! Why are we so slow to welcome the ‘prescription’ that our loving heavenly parent offers? He knows that the rest of life will go so much better if we are willing to build in periods to withdraw from the frantic and the urgent. Sabbath was made for us, for our benefit, our wellbeing. It costs nothing – except our willingness to let go of our control and trust in space taken to value God’s work in us. It is God’s preventative medicine.

Sabbath Practice
Thinning: Simplicity can be part of Sabbath practice. Just as any good gardener who has generously planted seed knows the value of thinning out seedlings to allow sufficient room for healthy growth, ‘thinning’ our overabundance is making space for life. What can I let go of? It can be a small thing: a book never read can be given to a library. Clothes, not worn or outgrown can be donated. An old appliance gathering dust or a project that no longer brings us joy can be passed on. Pick one thing a week to let go of. Express gratitude for past usefulness but let go what is no longer nourishing. Feel the sense of release as you part with it.

Prayer
Almighty God, help me willingly accept all that you have planned for my good. Please meet with me as I make space in the middle of busyness, as I consider the abundance of my life, teach me how to let go with gratitude, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 4 – Tied in Knots

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Luke 13:10-17
There are so many of the recorded events of Jesus’ ministry, which occurred on a Sabbath. This is surely no coincidence. Here a woman is bent over and crippled, bound by a physical infirmity attributed to a spirit. As Jesus’ world collides with her broken and hurting existence, freedom comes instantly. There is no suffering or bondage in heaven and as he touches the woman, Jesus has brought the reality of his world into her experience.

There is more to this story than one women’s healing. The religious people who immediately criticise Jesus for breaking their Sabbath regulations are also bound. They are tied in knots over keeping the letter of the law without being able to embrace the heart or purpose of what that law stood for. Worse still, they make it their duty to bind up their whole nation in legalistic red tape that turns God’s good gift – a day to delight in – into a burden and a measuring stick with which to judge their neighbour. Jesus sees this woman oppressed by the enemy. But he also sees his own people oppressed, in need of being set free by the truth of his kingdom message. Surely Sabbath is exactly the time to stand up straight and embrace health and freedom, and celebrate renewed relationship with God!

Embracing Sabbath rest is not just for our benefit alone. “The world aches for the generosity of a well-rested people” Wayne Muller. As we claim wholeness and health, rest and relationship, to that extent we are free to offer these blessings to a needy world.

Sabbath Practice
Confession: Ritual cleansings are traditional parts of Sabbath observance. Naming the things that bind us, weigh us down, or restrict our freedom can be a type of cleansing. Before Sabbath time, in a quiet space, speak aloud anything for which you need of forgiveness. Confess times when you were not clear, kind or honest. Be willing to bring these things into the light so they can be released. You may choose to share something with a trusted companion. Welcome God’s light as you enter Sabbath time.

Prayer
Loving Father, I choose not to allow anything to hide in the darkness. Instead I open myself to the light of your love and accept your forgiveness, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Day 5 – A Sabbath Psalm

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Psalm 92
Eugene Peterson and his wife have developed a Sabbath practice of packing a lunch and some binoculars and heading for a hiking trail along a river or up into the mountains. They begin with reading a Psalm, praying briefly together and then walking for the next two or three hours in companionable silence; each alone with their thought and observations, yet together in sharing the beauty of the outdoors. “We walk leisurely, emptying ourselves, opening ourselves to what is there: fern shapes, flower fragrances, birdsong, granite outcropping, oaks, and sycamores, rain, snow, sleet, wind.” When they stop for lunch they give thanks for both the food and their surroundings. Then there is time to talk and share their sightings, feelings and thoughts.

For Peterson there are only two rules for Sabbath keeping: play and pray. We should not fear silence or boredom. Putting aside our regular “work” whatever that might be, provides a period of inactivity in which to become more attuned to God’s activity.

Sabbath Practice
Sabbath Walk: A South American tribe would take a journey of several says, then suddenly stop walking, make camp, sit down and go no further for a couple of days. They explained that a time of rest was necessary so their souls could catch up with them. A simple walk, with no particular purpose and preferably in silence is a favourite Sabbath exercise. Allow half an hour to walk without any particular agenda, simply letting your soul catch up with you. Do not hurry, do not plan, just amble, sensitive to your surroundings, the fragrance, the colours, the feel of the earth. Follow your own timing and curiosity. At the end of thirty minutes notice what has happened to your mind, body and sense of time.

Prayer
Creator God, I open myself to your recreating love as I find rest in the rhythms of nature. Help me see the ebb and flow of times and seasons, the patterns of growth and dormancy, and trust the seasons of your work within me. Holy Spirit lead me in a healthy balance of work and rest, play and pray, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)
Saturday/Sunday
Notes...