

# Developing Spiritual Habits In 2025

## July: Solitude & Rest

In July, we are going to focus on the related practices of solitude & rest. The plan has three main components, plus some supplemental resources.

1. Daily Bible reading, reflection, and prayer.
2. Practicing moments of solitude throughout the week.
3. Practicing a weekly day of rest.
4. Supplemental Resources: Sermon links and practical tips at the end of this document.

To help you prepare, read the introduction (this document) before July 1.

### BIBLE READING: EXODUS

We will continue the pattern of **Read/Reflect/Pray**. Read a passage of Scripture; reflect on a verse or a theme in the passage (a daily reflection question provided); write a prayer that brings your reading and reflection into a conversation with God.

The readings will take us through most of Exodus. **Why Exodus?** This is the foundational redemptive story of Israel, in which God delivers his people out of slavery in Egypt and leads them to the Promised Land. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament describes this as a journey toward rest, which points to our ultimate hope of rest in Christ (Hebrews 3:18-4:3).

The Exodus story moves from the economy of exhaustion to the gift of Sabbath. Israel's deliverance meant freedom from slavery and rest from the heavy yoke of forced labor. It was both physical and spiritual rest. In the same way, our deliverance means freedom from slavery to sin and rest from the heavy yoke of the law.

Walter Brueggemann says we are ruled by the gods of do-more and have-more, and that practices like solitude and Sabbath are how we resist their tyranny. We can do this because Christ has delivered us and invited us to take his yoke upon us (Matthew 11:29).

Throughout the Exodus story, there are "moments of holy solitude: Moses before the burning bush, alone on the mountain, and later in the tent of meeting where "the LORD would speak to Moses face to face." These scenes model a rhythm of withdrawal and return—quiet presence with God that fuels public faithfulness. We see the same pattern in the life and ministry of Jesus. Solitude is not escapism. It is the quiet place where identity and vocation are formed.

This is the pattern of the gospel: ***we rest in what God has done in Christ, and from that place of peace, we offer our lives in obedience to God.***

The Exodus story begins with frantic labor but concludes with God dwelling in the Temple, among a people learning to move only at His cloud-and-fire pace. This vision points us to Jesus, who "tabernacled among us" (John 1:14). He reveals God's glory to us and gives us access to his presence. He is our rest.

As you walk through the book of Exodus in the next 30 days, let the narrative expose the ways you are prone to serve the gods of do-more and have-more. Step into some holy moments with God and learn to rest in his grace. The goal is not simply to finish a reading plan but to experience the liberating power of God that can transform you into a rested, worshipful witness.

## PRACTICE: SOLITUDE & REST (*What is the difference?*)

**Solitude** is a time of intentional withdraw from distraction (people, noise, screens, etc.). The purpose is to be alone with God without disruption, to center your thoughts on him, and create space for him to speak to you. There is not one way to practice solitude, but a range of expressions. Here are a few practical guidelines:

***How long should I withdraw?*** You can withdraw for a few minutes or all day. There are different purposes for different periods of time, but there is not a minimum requirement.

***What do I do during a time of solitude?*** For a shorter time, say 5-30 minutes, find a quiet place, be still before the Lord, take a deep breath, and then focus your attention on God. You can say/write a prayer, read a Psalm slowly and/or multiple times, meditate on an aspect of God's character. You might also confess sin or cast your burdens on God.

***How is this different than the daily assignments in Exodus?*** It doesn't have to be. You can find a quiet place for your read/reflect/pray rhythm. But you can also find smaller moments throughout the day to get a moment of solitude. I have found that even a few minutes of solitude before a meeting or launching into a new task can be very fruitful.

In the Bible, when people come from periods of solitude, they are outward focused. Having received from God, they are ready to give their attention and effort for the good of others.

**DAILY PRACTICE:** Observe a time of solitude at least once a day. It can be as little as 5 minutes, but it needs to be quiet, undistracted, and focused on God.

**Rest** is a rhythm of intentional ceasing, a pause from ordinary work and productivity. In addition to physical rest, the purpose is to surrender outcomes to God and find freedom from anxiety through trust in his provision.

In the OT, God commanded a day of rest called the Sabbath, which literally means "to cease" ... to "rest from labor." Dallas Willard said it is a day to "put your doing down." While we are not bound by the law of the Sabbath, it remains a wise practice for Christians.

**WEEKLY PRACTICE:** Observe a day of rest four times this month. I encourage you to set aside a 24-hour period of rest, but whatever the length of observance, make it a regularly scheduled time to stop. **Refrain** from as much activity as possible. **Resist** the urge to make things happen or control outcomes.

It is not merely a day off. It is a day with God.

- Receive the gifts of good food, unhurried play, time with loved ones, a good nap, and so on.
- Spend time with God: go to church, read the Bible, pray, etc.
- A day of rest might also include moments of solitude.
- Be available to move toward the needs of others.
- As anxieties and pressures come to mind (they will!), write them down in a journal and ask God to help you wait until tomorrow to worry about those things.

# DAILY READING PLAN (JULY)

Date	Passage	Reflection Questions
July 1	Ex. 1	<i>What are some pressures and “tyrants” in our culture that steal our rest?</i>
July 2	Ex. 2	<i>What do you see about God’s timing in this chapter?</i>
July 3	Ex. 3	<i>What can you apply from this passage to a moment of solitude with God?</i>
July 4	Ex. 4	<i>What excuses do you have that keep you from unhurried obedience to God?</i>
July 5	Ex. 5	<i>How does the enemy and our culture work against God’s design for rest?</i>
July 6	Ex. 6	<i>What promises do we have in Christ that give us hope for rest?</i>
July 7	Ex. 7	<i>What false sources of life and vitality do I need to let go of?</i>
July 8	Ex. 8	<i>What good things have become excessive and destructive in my life?</i>
July 9	Ex. 9	<i>How might God be using discomfort to call you to greater dependence?</i>
July 10	Ex. 10	<i>Has consumption outpaced contentment? How do you need to simplify?</i>
July 11	Ex. 11	<i>What fears do you need to bring to God?</i>
July 12	Ex. 12:1-13	<i>How is the cross of Christ a place of rest for us?</i>
July 13	Ex. 12:14-28	<i>What kind of preparation is required for me to take a day of rest with God?</i>
July 14	Ex. 12:29-51	<i>What will I have to leave behind if I am to pursue solitude and rest with God?</i>
July 15	Ex. 13	<i>Am I willing to move or stop at God’s pace?</i>
July 16	Ex. 14	<i>What am I striving for in life? How can I cease striving and start trusting?</i>
July 17	Ex. 15	<i>How does worship recenter our souls and bring us rest?</i>
July 18	Ex. 16	<i>Am I seeking God for daily provision? How does that bring rest?</i>
July 19	Ex. 17	<i>What am I grumbling about these days? How can I turn complaints into prayer?</i>
July 20	Ex. 18	<i>What burdens do I need to share with others?</i>
July 21	Ex. 19	<i>How does our identity in Christ enable us to work from a place of rest?</i>
July 22	Ex. 20	<i>How does the law point us to Jesus? How does he enable us to keep the law?</i>
July 23	Ex. 21	<i>How can I protect rest for others?</i>
July 24	Ex. 22	<i>How can I pursue justice for others?</i>
July 25	Ex. 23	<i>What rhythms of worship and rest do you need to commit to?</i>
July 26	Ex. 24	<i>What can I learn from this passage about how does God relates to us?</i>
July 27	Ex. 34:1-28	<i>What does rest look like when we have failed?</i>
July 28	Ex. 34:29-35:1-3	<i>How does this scene point to Jesus? (see John 1:14-18)</i>
July 29	Ex. 40:1-16	<i>Why do you think God is so concerned about the details of the tabernacle?</i>
July 30	Ex. 40:17-33	<i>How does Moses point to Jesus in this passage? How does that bring us rest?</i>
July 31	Ex. 40:34-38	<i>What is “the glory of the Lord”? How do we live for God’s glory?</i>

# SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

*Providence Sermons on the theme of rest (apparently, we think this is important!)*

Sermon Title & Text	Resource Link
Sabbath Rest (Genesis 2:1-3, Todd)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/sabbath-rest-2/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/sabbath-rest-2/</a>
Sabbath Rest (Genesis 2:1-3, Will)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/sabbath-rest/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/sabbath-rest/</a>
Remember the Sabbath Day (Exodus 20:8-11)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/remember-the-sabbath-day/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/remember-the-sabbath-day/</a>
Sabbath Rest for a Redeemed People (Deuteronomy 15:12-15)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/deuteronomy-sabbath-rest-for-a-redeemed-people/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/deuteronomy-sabbath-rest-for-a-redeemed-people/</a>
The Lord of the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15-22)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/the-lord-of-the-sabbath/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/the-lord-of-the-sabbath/</a>
Rest For Your Souls (Matthew 11:28-30)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/rest-for-your-souls/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/rest-for-your-souls/</a>
Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-3:6)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/lord-of-the-sabbath/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/lord-of-the-sabbath/</a>
Finding Rest in the Work (Mark 6:30-44)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/finding-rest-in-the-work/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/finding-rest-in-the-work/</a>
True Rest (Hebrews 3-4)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/true-rest/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/true-rest/</a>
Rest For Weary Souls (Hebrews 3-4)	<a href="https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/rest-for-weary-souls/">https://providenceaustin.com/sermon/rest-for-weary-souls/</a>

## PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR OBSERVING A DAY OF REST

When the Bible talks about rest, sometimes the emphasis is on physical rest and sometimes it is about spiritual rest. These are helpful categories to consider because the Sabbath day was given for both.

### Physical Rest

For many of us, this starts with our job. That seems obvious, but it is also one of the biggest temptations. *I'm just going to do this one thing, send this one email, check in with that person*, and so on. A hard stop is important. Do whatever you can to protect the day from the intrusions of work.

When my kids were young, I decided not to do any work on Saturdays (Sunday is a workday). It was hard at first. There was always something I needed to do, like finish the sermon. Even when I resisted doing things, I was still working in my mind. It took a while for the Sabbath to feel restful. But over time, my mind and body learned to relax on Saturdays. I stopped working, and then I even stopped thinking about work (to the point that I forgot about multiple Saturday church events until someone called me).

Physical rest isn't just about your job; it is also about your labor. It is about the impulse to get things done and make things happen. Dallas Willard says the Sabbath is a day when we "don't try to make anything happen." This applies to everyone and every vocation.

**What counts as "work"?** Be careful here. We need some boundaries, but we don't want to end up like the Pharisees, who got so entangled in the rules of rest that the day became confusing and burdensome.

Jesus offers a helpful paradigm: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). If you are overly worried about what counts and doesn't count, you will end up serving the day. If you focus on what brings rest and renewal to you, and those around you, the day will serve and bless you.

Let's apply this to the various activities we might wonder about:

***Should I mow the lawn on my day of rest?*** Maybe. If you mow lawns for a living, or you hate mowing the lawn, then don't do it. If you feel restless and are just looking for something to do, then resist that impulse. But if you sit at a desk all week, and mowing the lawn sounds therapeutic, then get out there and enjoy it.

***Should I cook?*** If you enjoy cooking, sure. Otherwise, plan ahead and keep it simple. This is a good example of the fact that it takes some work to rest well, like preparing for a vacation, for example.

***Should I go to a kid's sporting event?*** This is a dilemma for many families, and good people come to different conclusions. That is a helpful reminder that our goal is to form convictions, not find a set of rules. I don't think we should make a habit of missing church for kid's activities, or adult activities for that matter. Outside of that, I love watching my kids play sports and would gladly do that on a day of rest. But there won't be any movies made about me for that conviction (see *Chariots of Fire*).

***Should I go shopping, or even buy things online?*** Because of our consumer culture, I think we should limit this as much as possible. Much like our need to unplug from technology, it does wonders for the soul to unplug from consumer activities. Focus on giving thanks rather than getting things.

***Should I clean the house?*** Again, not if it feels like work. However, you may find great joy in doing things that serve others (we will come back to this idea).

The best question is not, "Can I do this?" The best question is: "Does this serve God's purposes to give me a day of rest and renewal?"

## **Spiritual Rest**

Let me start by saying that spiritual rest is related to physical rest. We are not two things, body and soul. We are embodied souls. That is what makes the day of rest so powerful.

Spiritual rest is about being satisfied with God. When God rested on the seventh day, it was not because he was tired. It was because he was satisfied. His work was "very good," and he stopped to enjoy it. On our day of rest, we stop to remember all that God has done and to enjoy his presence.

To keep it simple, I focus on these three things:

**Spend time with God.** It isn't merely a day off; it is a day with (God). Do something to set the tone. Read or meditate on Scripture. Pray. Journal. Sing. Go to church. Make a plan for what you will do and then look forward to that time.

**Play.** What is life-giving recreation to you? (Hint: it's not media) Take a walk, ride a bike, chase the kids, play volleyball, whatever. I wouldn't spend the whole day doing this but take some time to play.

**Be available to others.** The Sabbath day was given to the whole community. It protected people from being used and exploited and reminded them of the image of God in every person. Jesus once healed a man on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees were enraged because it constituted "work." Jesus said to them: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). One of the most satisfying ways to connect with God is by loving and serving others. So, build in plenty of margin. Be interruptible and fully present with people. Put their interests above your own.

## **A Typical Day Of Rest**

When my kids were younger (middle school age), a typical Saturday went something like this: Sleep in as much as possible without it being annoying to my family. Make a pour over coffee, a slower process that I enjoy. Eat breakfast with Deb (and the kids if they were up). Have some unhurried conversation with whoever was at the breakfast table. Then, maybe read a little bit.

Beyond that, I didn't really have any plans. In the spirit of not trying to make anything happen, I just hung around until someone asked me to do something. My youngest son figured out that I was very agreeable on Saturdays, so he often asked me to take him rock climbing and get tacos. That's a 2-to-3-hour thing, and I almost always said yes. If Debbie asked me to do something around the house, I did that. If one of the boys had a game, we went watch. If the weather as nice, I liked to get outside and do something recreational.

After dinner, we usually played a game or watched a movie.

Right before I went to bed is when I would remember all the things I had to do the next day. So, I would ask God to give me a good night's sleep and express my trust in him to give me what I would need ... tomorrow.

All in all, it was wonderfully uneventful, and that's the point. The particulars will probably look different for you, but my advice is to keep it simple and work it out as you go.

### **In summary:**

1. Don't do work
2. Spend time with God
3. Do things you enjoy
4. Be available to others

## **WHAT IF I HAVE LITTLE KIDS?**

Yeah, that's a thing. It's hard to find a moment alone when you have young children, much less a WHOLE DAY of rest.

A simple solution is to work together as a couple on this. Help each other carve out some quiet space during the day by scheduling some time that you will take the kids so the other can get away, or vice versa. I know that is easier said than done. The main thing is to start somewhere and build from there. As you figure it out, here are two truths to hold onto:

**God is big enough for you to rest.** We tend to put a lot of pressure on ourselves to do all the things the right way—when there really isn't even a right or wrong way for most of the things we fret about. God is fully aware that a parent's work never ends, and yet, he wants you to trust that He is able to hold things together while you rest. He will give you what we need to do the work another day.

**We aren't all going to do it the same way.** This day might look different across the families in our church, but here are two basic guidelines:

- 1) Say "no" to the things that drain you. You don't have to have the whole day figured out. Start with the things that are obviously laborious for you and say "no" to those things. If it's laundry, say no to the laundry that day. If it's cooking, prep ahead or give yourself grace and eat a frozen pizza.

- 2) Say “yes” to the things that are life-giving. Think especially about things that you want to do but never find time to do: exercise, writing, crafting, gardening, hiking, etc. Planning ahead is part of saying yes to these things.

The Sabbath day is a wonderful day to say “yes” to the kids! Without the distractions and to-do lists of a normal day, you will be free to say yes to all kinds of things that your kids want to do. The unhurried playtime will bring joy and renewal to all involved. Try to make this simple adjustment in your mind on the Sabbath: “I get to” instead of “I need to”

Here is a list of simple ideas for all parents, but especially for moms (from my wife, Deb).

- Take a walk or a hike that allows you to listen and look at nature instead of being worried about how many steps you’ve taken or how fast you are going to burn calories.
- Prep your meals the day before so you can pull them out or turn on a crockpot.
- Use paper plates to avoid dishes.
- Put your phone away as much as possible. Resist the urge to scroll social media.
- Read or listen to Scripture while nursing your baby.
- If you have other little’s, turn on some fun music while nursing and let them dance around and sing. While you are at it, marvel at how God created your children so uniquely
- Lie down with all your kids and read stories.
- Do some nature crafts or other crafts with your kids—just being available in a way that your children see a difference—they will look forward to Sabbath.
- Rest while your kids are resting.
- Have a special toy or coloring book that the kids get whenever you are going to sit down and read the bible or a devotional.
- If you run a business from home, don’t use your Sabbath to “catch up” on things. Put the business down.
- Maybe it can be a day that you share around the dinner table about God’s blessings in your lives from the previous week. Little kids love talking over dinner. Again, low expectations. This might last 3 minutes. Be glad and move on.
- Talk about this with your people. Share challenges and ideas. Hold each other accountable. Sabbath is a community affair.

“Sabbath is that uncluttered time and space in which we can distance ourselves from our own activities enough to see what God is doing.” – Eugene Peterson