

# Entering & Ending the Sabbath



“Beginnings and endings matter, so if there is any way you can have a clear beginning to sabbath and a clear ending, that would be most helpful—for your own psyche and for your shared experience with others.”<sup>1</sup>

We tend to think of the Sabbath and sabbath-keeping in terms of does and don'ts. If we could only figure out what to do and not to do, then we'd be able to sabbath properly, so we think. While the details do matter, the truth is, it's easy to get entangled in them. And while you can have your Sabbath all lined out, all the restrictions delineated and ordinances outlined, “nothing,” contends theologian and author Marva Dawn, “can capture the mystery of the Sabbath, the peace of God's presence in that day, except **the intentional choice of welcoming and honoring it.**”<sup>2</sup>

One way we intentionally choose to “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (set apart as special)” (Deut. 5:12) is through simple rituals. Historically, God's people have entered and ended, welcomed, and made distinct this day in two unpretentious practices called the *Kiddush* (or “a sanctifying or setting apart”) and the *Havdalah* (or “farewell prayers”). Both of these are outlined below.

You only need three things to make these practices a helpful way for you to welcome and honor the Sabbath:

- Two candles
- Three prayers
- A designated time to enter, and to end, your Sabbath

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, 110.

<sup>2</sup> Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: ceasing, resting, embracing, feasting*, 209.

# ENTERING THE SABBATH | *Kiddush*

We have said that scripturally, Sabbath is only described as a set-apart day, twenty-four hours distinct from the other one hundred and forty-four hours of the week. This “different day” has usually been observed or kept, from evening to evening or dinner to dinner, as a sacred feast (Leviticus 23:1-3). While you don’t have to Sabbath from evening to evening, it is a rhythm that allows you to welcome and ease into the details of your sabbath-keeping, allowing your soul and mind and body time to slow down so that the day between the evenings can be a delight.

So, for example, before dinner on the first evening of the Sabbath, you or a family member will **light a candle of remembrance** and invite the family to **pray this prayer:**

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has set us free with Your commandments and favored us in Your labor, and given us in love and favor Your holy Sabbath as an inheritance, a rhythm of life very good with you. This day is the beginning of all holy days, a remembrance of the Exodus from bondage by Your work and the work of Your Son, freeing us to follow Him into life with You. You have chosen us, and You have blessed us to be a blessing to all. And You have entrusted us with Your holy Sabbath in love and favor. Blessed are You, Lord, who makes holy and whole the Sabbath.

That’s it. A simple prayer to remember this day, as Jesus said (Mark 2:27-28), was made for us, created as means of our living free in rhythm with God’s good design and destiny through Jesus. *Because God has worked, God has always been for us, and God is forever with us, and so we, like the day, are whole and holy in Him.*

With a simple spark, we enter the Sabbath, illuminated by remembering the origin and purpose of the day, which we then welcome as a gift of grace by ceasing our striving after life, delighting in God’s finished work in people and places He has given us, and being unbound from those attitudes, actions, inactions, and words that entangle us throughout the week. In other words, [all the details of sabbath-keeping we’ve been discussing](#).

Wayne Muller describes how this setting apart ritual can help us welcome and honor the Sabbath in a way that the details do not overwhelm us. He says<sup>3</sup>, “Light a candle, alone or with friends. *Let each of you speak about those things that are left to do, and as the candle burns, allow the cares to melt away.* Do not be anxious about tomorrow, said Jesus. The worries of today are sufficient for today. Whatever remains to be done, for now, let it be.”

With a heart and mind at rest, we conclude the first evening of the Sabbath, letting our bodies welcome rest in the peace of a good night’s sleep before waking anew into the Sabbath morning and the delights this special day provides.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Barton, 110.

## THE DOOR IN AND OUT |

And while sabbath-keeping will present its own set of complications, [as we've discussed](#), nevertheless, it can and should become a rhythmic and welcomed happiness along life's journey. Yet, the Sabbath is not our end, but a means to ensure we get there, a renovating and reenergizing reprieve for us to enter again into the good labor of living and living for *the* good.

Fortunately, we leave the Sabbath through the same door we entered, through the re-creative grace of Jesus for us and with us. For, as Jesus said,

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, they will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. (John 10:9)

It is through the finished work of Jesus that we enter the rest of God, the Sabbath. It is through the continued work of Jesus in the world, the Good Shepherd alive after death, whose voice continues to lead and guide and comfort us, that we leave the Sabbath with hearts and souls at rest and join Him in His ongoing work of making all things new (Col. 1:15-23, Rev. 21:5).

## ENDING THE SABBATH | *Havdalah*

In the *Havdalah* or the farewell prayers, we light a second candle of distinction. “This light is the first fire of the new week,” says Susan Silverman in her introduction to the Jewish Sabbath or Shabbat. **“It is a sign that the time to begin creating again has arrived. No more dreamlike days until next week. It is now time to invest ourselves in our work again.”**<sup>4</sup>

As we transition into yet another week, we do so by making the connection between creation’s beginning and re-creation’s arrival, the time of justice and peace, God’s kingdom come, and His will being done on earth as it is in heaven through Jesus and our following in-step with Him.

And so, just as before, you or someone in the family will **light the second candle of distinction**, marking the day experienced as holy and the days soon to be lived as holy service. Then you or a family member will **read Jesus’ farewell prayer**:

Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, ‘Father...I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do...I do not ask that you take the people whom you gave me out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are no more defined by the world as I am defined by the world. Set them apart in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I set myself apart for holy service to You, that they also may be set apart of holy service in truth. (John 17:1, 4, 15-19).

And then, together, the family will **pray this prayer**:

We thank you, Father, eternal God, Ruler of the universe, for a community where we can rest with you in your finished work. At peace in your presence together, we can express our hopes and laments, our tears, and our joys in our worship and our work. We know many of us feel the burdening weight of our work, whether in our homes or our offices or in our hearts. Help us not to diminish the burdens but lift them to you, sharing one another's weight as we each navigate our load in your help and strength. Be with us and guide us as we continue in the goodness of your continuous work. May we offer our worship beyond this day and space and into the days and spaces we go, and may it be a sweet offering to you. And so we join our voices, hearts, and hands, singing your praise in our worship and in our work. May you be glorified, now and forever. Amen.

When finished, some Christian households **sing the doxology** before enjoying a meal as the end of the Sabbath and the start of [worshipful work](#).

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Silverman, *My Jewish Learning*, “Havdalah: Taking Leave of Shabbat,” accessed here: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/havdalah-taking-leave-of-shabbat/>.