

LENT 2014 SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP AGREEMENT

Why a 4-week Lenten small group on Spiritual Growth?

To help recognize we are all on a spiritual journey, each seeking to grow closer to God, each in different ways through different means within different time frames. The Lenten small group study will make us more aware of our journey and encourage us as we encourage others. Each week we study another aspect of the journey to help us sharpen the awareness. There is not one “right” practice, but each of us can actively participate in one or more things that bring us closer to God, other people, and all of God’s creation. This Lent our theme for exploration is called, “Rediscovering Rest and Worship: Sabbath-Keeping as a Way of Life.”

How will we do this?

- By getting to know one another
- By supporting one another through listening, sharing, praying, and being present to one another
- By discovering meaning in God’s word and applying it to our lives
- By enjoying one another’s uniqueness and appreciating each other’s faith journey

What are the Lenten small group values?

- We agree to make our meeting a high priority and attend regularly.
- We will pray for one another.
- We will not judge or attempt to fix one another no matter what is shared. We will not give advice to one another unless we are first asked.
- In order to provide an atmosphere of openness and trust, personal things spoken within our groups will remain within our groups.
- We will strive to become a caring community by sharing our experiences, our struggles, our feelings, our joys, our hurts, and our questions as we may freely decide to do.

What main topics will be covered?

- Week 1 - Week of March 9 – Sabbath
- Week 2 - Week of March 16– Rest
- Week 3 - Week of March 23 – Worship
- Week 4 - Week of March 30 – Sabbath-Keeping as a Way of Life

What will we do each week?

Our meetings will generally follow this flow:

- Opening Prayer
- Bible study and sharing on the week’s topic
- Sharing about last week’s spiritual exercise
- Closing prayer

What are the Lenten small group practical arrangements?

- Meetings once a week during Lent for 4 weeks, beginning the week of March 9.
- Each session will be approximately 1 1/2 hours long.
- Each session will include scripture study, reflection on the scripture as it applies to your life, and a spiritual exercise for you to try.

Signature _____

Date _____

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE
RESPECTful Communication Guidelines
and Mutual Invitation

RESPECTful Communication Guidelines

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use EMPATHETIC listening

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong.

Mutual Invitation Explanation

In our small group, in order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak in response to a question, we will proceed in the following way: The facilitator or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Who you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you have something to say but are not ready yet, say “pass for now” and then invite another to share. You will be invited again later. If you don't want to say anything, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION ONE: “Sabbath”

Need: RESPECTful Communication Guidelines, Spiritual Growth Group Agreement, Mutual Invitation Explanation

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
3. Introduction
 - a. Share your name, where you live, and how long you have been at Peace Lutheran Church.
 - b. Some basic information about spiritual growth groups:
 - i. Spiritual growth groups are groups of people who come together to encourage their spiritual growth by getting to know one another and sharing their faith journey with each other.
 - ii. Spiritual growth groups have these elements: sharing, study, and prayer.
 - iii. We plan to meet for 1½ hours. It’s important to stick with this schedule. We want to respect each other’s time commitments, so let’s start and end on time.
 - iv. We’ll meet for four sessions only. After that, some of us may choose to continue as a small group, but do not feel you are obligated to continue.
 - c. Review the RESPECTful Communication Guidelines on the previous page. Questions? Do we agree to use these guidelines in our time together?
 - d. Review the Spiritual Growth Group Agreement together. Questions? Sign and date to show your agreement.
4. A Beginning Point
 - a. Review the Mutual Invitation Explanation on the previous page. Using the process of mutual invitation, share your idea of a great “day off.” Use the list below to select one or more activities. My idea of a great “day off” would be...
 - i. reading a good book
 - ii. getting some extra sleep
 - iii. spending time with family
 - iv. walking or hiking—alone or with someone I like
 - v. running or working out
 - vi. going shopping
 - vii. watching sports—on TV or at the game
 - viii. eating a meal with friends
 - ix. playing my favorite sport
 - x. going to the movies or a concert
 - xi. other: _____
 - b. Talk about this question as a group: What comes to your mind when you hear the word “Sabbath”? One goal of this series is to expand and deepen your understanding of Sabbath.

5. Learning and Sharing

- a. Keeping Sabbath is central to the Christian faith and it has its roots in the faith of the Jewish people. “Sabbath” means to “cease,” and it refers to one day per week in which God intends God’s people to cease work. Begin by prayerfully reading two primary Bible passages about the command to keep the Sabbath.
 - i. **Read Exodus 20:8-11** with its commandment to “remember” the Sabbath that is grounded in the story of creation.
 - ii. **Read Deuteronomy 5:12-15** with its commandment to “observe” the Sabbath that sees to it that no one, not even animals, will work without respite, and that connects the Sabbath to God’s deliverance of God’s people from slavery and oppression.
 - iii. How do both or either of these passages connect with your life?
- b. The Meaning of Sabbath: Read aloud the following quotes about the meaning of Sabbath. After all are read, choose one that most connects with you, and using mutual invitation, share with the group the parts of the quote that speak most to you and why.
 - i. *Keeping Sabbath offers us the God-given gift of rest. It allows us time to look at ourselves and at our lives apart from the everyday world. More important, it offers extended time and space to give thanks and praise to God for the many gifts in our lives.* (Living Well book)
 - ii. *Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is a day when we partake of the wisdom, peace and delight that grow only in the soil of time—time consecrated specifically for play, refreshment and renewal. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest. But the Sabbath has proven its wisdom over the ages. The Sabbath gives us the permission we need to stop, to restore our souls. As part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is already woven into the fabric of our society. Many of us still recall when, not long ago, shops and offices were closed on Sundays. Those quiet Sunday afternoons are embedded in our cultural memory.* (Wayne Muller)
 - iii. *Forgetting the Sabbath is like forgetting to unwrap the most beautiful gift under the tree. If we forget to rest we will work too hard and forget our more tender mercies, forget those we love, forget our children and our natural wonder.* (Wayne Muller)
 - iv. *Sabbath keeping is not about taking a day off but about being recalled to our knowledge of and gratitude for God’s activity in creating the world, giving liberty to captives, and overcoming the powers of death.* (Dorothy C. Bass)
 - v. *Sabbath is a discipline and practice in which we ask, consider, and answer the questions that will lead us into a complete and joyful life. As such, the Sabbath is a teaching that has the potential to redirect and transform all our existence, bringing it into more faithful alignment with God’s life-building and life-strengthening ways.* (Norman Wirzba)

- c. Use the following thoughts and questions to reflect on your understanding of Sabbath.
 - i. Shabbat—the Jewish Sabbath—is the heart of Judaism. In observant Jewish homes, Shabbat begins each Friday night at sundown with the lighting of the Sabbath candle. Until the following sundown on Saturday, all activities associated with work or commerce are prohibited. For Christians, Sunday is the traditional Sabbath, the day of rest and worship, chosen to correspond to Jesus’ resurrection on a Sunday. Yet for many in modern times, Sunday is a day of work or other activities and cannot be fully a Sabbath, so Sabbath time must be found at other times in the week.
 - ii. For many people, keeping Sabbath is difficult. Why do you think that is the case?
 - iii. When do you observe Sabbath in your week? How do you mark the Sabbath in your life today? When in your week or year do you experience *real* Sabbath? Where do you go, what do you do, and who are you with? How do these places, activities, and people contribute to this experience of rest and renewal?
- d. Some speak of Sabbath as intentional time set aside in the week for focusing on R & R – rest and relationships (with God and loved ones). Think about your life and the rhythm of your week. Begin thinking about what it would mean for you to find more intentional time for rest, relationships, or both. If you find it difficult to set aside Sabbath time, think about setting aside small chunks of time in your week for Sabbath keeping. If setting aside a whole day sounds impossible right now, try 15 minutes, 1 hour, or a half day as a start, with the goal of increasing it over time.

6. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Each week you’ll be given the opportunity to try a spiritual exercise, or Sabbath practice. At the next session, you’ll be invited to share about the experience.
- b. Choose one (or more) of the spiritual exercises listed in Appendix A and commit to try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.

7. A Month of Sabbaths – Are You Ready to Begin?

- a. Appendices D and E are meant to help you make Sabbath-keeping a permanent part of your life. Appendix D helps you develop Sabbath practices by inviting you to consider what to exclude and what to include in your Sabbath time. Appendix E invites you to commit to intentionally creating Sabbath time in the rhythm of your week and reflecting on your Sabbath practices. If you think you have an adequate understanding of Sabbath and are ready to commit to Sabbath-keeping for one month starting this week, then on your own time, work through and answer the questions in Appendix D: Developing Sabbath Practices. Commit to use the suggestions in Appendix E: A Month of Sabbaths: Reflecting on Your Sabbath Practices. Each week for 4 weeks you’ll return to Appendix E to answer the reflection questions and make positive changes in your Sabbath practices.
- b. You may choose to postpone this process until a later week, especially if you want to grow in your understanding of Sabbath-keeping through these small groups first. Each week you will have the opportunity to start the month-long process.

8. Before Next Session

- a. Read Appendix B: Reflections on Sabbath-Keeping. If you like, bring a thought or question next session that arises out of this article.

9. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
 - i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an “amen” as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today’s small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a “popcorn” prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may “pop” in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION TWO: “Rest”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
3. A Beginning Point
 - a. In this session we concentrate on *rest*. In this context, *rest* means taking time to rejuvenate our bodies physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Take a few moments and think about this definition of *rest*. As we continue this session, keep in mind the idea that *rest* rejuvenates our bodies physically, emotionally, and spiritually and how this session may help you *rest*.
4. Learning and Sharing
 - a. Is there a thought or question that arose out of the article you read in Appendix B: Reflections on Sabbath-Keeping? Share with the group.
 - b. Read **Genesis 2:2-3**. *Rest* is built into the very rhythm of creation. On the seventh day, God *rested*. Respond to Wayne Muller’s statement in the article in Appendix B, “In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between action and *rest*.”
 - c. In his book *Sabbath*, Wayne Muller writes, “If we do not allow for a rhythm of *rest* in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath.” What do you think he means? Have you had an experience of that?
 - d. Read **Psalms 23** together slowly. What strikes you about verse 2, “He *makes* me lie down in green pastures”? What do you fear about taking time to *rest*? Talk about a time you’ve been *made* to *rest*.
 - e. Read **Matthew 11:28-29**. In what ways are you weary and carrying heavy burdens? What do you think Jesus means when he says, “I will give you *rest*”?
 - f. When we read the Gospels, we see, Jesus led a hectic life of teaching, healing, ministering to people’s needs. Jesus would sometimes withdraw to *rest*. He knew the wisdom of *rest*. Read **Mark 6:30-32**. A little earlier in Mark chapter 6, Jesus sent out his twelve disciples to drive out demons, heal, and preach. Imagine the flurry of activity that came next. Now Jesus knows they need *rest* to be refocused and renewed. How have you experienced God refocusing and renewing you through *rest*?
 - g. There is deep wisdom in taking Sabbath *rest*. Here are some of the lessons *rest* teaches us. What would you add? Which resonates with you the most and why?
 - i. *Rest* rejuvenates our bodies physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
 - ii. *Rest* reminds us our value and worth is not in our work. It is in knowing we are beloved children of God.
 - iii. *Rest* reminds us we are not in control of our lives. *Rest* helps us trust God to provide for our needs.
 - iv. *Rest* helps us be more content with what we already have and less worried about what we don’t have.
 - v. *Rest* liberates us from the need to always be finished. *Rest* says, it’s ok to let it be for awhile and return to it later.
 - vi. In a U.S. culture that values “doing,” *rest* helps us value “being.”
 - h. In what ways would you like to grow in the Sabbath practice of *rest*?

5. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week's spiritual exercise (Sabbath practice): Each week you're invited to share about the spiritual exercise you tried this past week. How was the spiritual exercise you tried? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?
- b. This week's spiritual exercise: Choose one (or more) of the spiritual exercises (Sabbath practices) listed in Appendix A and commit to try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. You may choose an exercise you've already done or try something new. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.

6. A Month of Sabbaths – Are You Ready to Begin?

- a. Appendices D and E are meant to help you make Sabbath-keeping a permanent part of your life. Appendix D helps you develop Sabbath practices by inviting you to consider what to exclude and what to include in your Sabbath time. Appendix E invites you to commit to intentionally creating Sabbath time in the rhythm of your week and reflecting on your Sabbath practices. If you think you have an adequate understanding of Sabbath and are ready to commit to Sabbath-keeping for one month, starting this week, then on your own time, work through and answer the questions in Appendix D: Developing Sabbath Practices. Commit to use the suggestions in Appendix E: A Month of Sabbaths: Reflecting on Your Sabbath Practices. Each week for 4 weeks you'll return to Appendix E to answer the reflection questions and make positive changes in your Sabbath practices.
- b. If you have already started this process, please use Appendix E weekly to reflect on your Sabbath practices and make positive changes.
- c. You may choose to postpone this process until a later week, especially if you want to grow in your understanding of Sabbath-keeping through these small groups first.

7. Before Next Session

- a. Read Appendix C: What Is Sabbath in the Bible? If you like, bring a thought or question to next session that arises out of this article.

8. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
 - i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an "amen" as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today's small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a "popcorn" prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may "pop" in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION THREE: “Worship”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
3. A Beginning Point
 - a. In this session we concentrate on *worship*. *Worship* includes Sunday morning church service gatherings; quiet times with God spent in Bible reading, reflection, and prayer; and honoring God in all aspects of our lives. Take a few moments and think about this understanding of *worship*. As we continue this session, keep this expanded understanding of *worship* in mind.
4. Learning and Sharing
 - a. Is there a thought or question that arose out of the Dorothy Bass article you read in Appendix C: What Is Sabbath in the Bible? Share with the group.
 - b. In her article in Appendix C, Dorothy Bass speaks about two renderings of the Sabbath commandment in the Bible, the two scripture passages we read in Session 1, **Exodus 20:8-11** and **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**, that summarize the most fundamental stories and beliefs of the Hebrew scriptures: creation and exodus, humanity created in God’s image and a people liberated from captivity. How does this help you better understand the meaning of the Sabbath?
 - b. Again, read **Psalm 23** together slowly. Verse 3 says, “He *restores my soul*.” Talk about a time you experienced your soul being restored by God. What activities or rituals have you discovered that put you in a space in which God is reaching you to restore your soul?
 - c. Worship has individual and communal dimensions. We’ll explore both together. Read **Matthew 6:5-6**. God invites us to spend time with God in personal devotion and reflection. Why is personal devotion and reflection important? Those who would like, please share your experience (practices, rituals, techniques) of personal devotions.
 - d. A significant aspect of worship is *prayer*. Last session we saw, in his hectic life of teaching, healing, and ministering to people’s needs, Jesus would sometimes withdraw to rest, and he would spend time in prayer. Read **Luke 5:16**. In your life, what is the value and purpose of *prayer*?
 - e. Read the thoughts and illustrations below on prayer connected to Sabbath. Which one connects with you most and why?
 - i. One translation of the biblical phrase “to pray” is “to come to rest (in God).” Wayne Muller writes, “When Jesus prayed he was at rest, nourished by the healing Spirit that saturates those still, quiet places. In the Jesus tradition, prayer can be a practice of simply being in the presence of God, allowing the mind to rest in the heart... Prayer is like a portable Sabbath, when we close our eyes for just a moment and let the mind rest in the heart.”
 - ii. Rest quiets our mind and heart to help us listen to God. Prayer helps us be present to God who is always present to us. Prayer is connected to wisdom and discernment. Through meditation, prayer, and stillness, we refine our vision and sharpen our hearing.

- iii. A potter tells this story: “I was having difficulty with my pots. I would center my clay and then keep bringing it out, out, to its edge, and then, pushed to its limit, it would collapse. Over and over again I would center it again, raise it, bring it out to its farthest edge, and it would collapse. Eventually I got tired of this challenge, of pushing the clay to its edge, and I reluctantly surrendered to the fact that I needed to keep the clay closer to the center. Ah... as I thought about it, I realized, I am not the potter; *I am the clay*. I have been brought again and again to my edge, only to collapse. God is inviting me to live my life close to my center. Properly centered, the clay will hold. Prayer helps me stay centered in God.”
 - f. Read **Psalm 100**. What words or phrases in this psalm help you think about the value and purpose of worship?
 - g. God invites us to worship God as a community. Why is regular communal worship important? What are some obstacles to regular Sunday worship? How do you (or could you) make regular Sunday worship an integral element in your Sabbath practice?
 - h. In what ways would you like to grow in the Sabbath practice of *worship*?
5. Spiritual Exercise
- a. Sharing about last week’s spiritual exercise (Sabbath practice): Each week you’re invited to share about the spiritual exercise you tried this past week. How was the spiritual exercise you tried? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?
 - b. This week’s spiritual exercise: Choose one (or more) of the spiritual exercises (Sabbath practices) listed in Appendix A and commit to try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. You may choose an exercise you’ve already done or try something new. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
6. A Month of Sabbaths – Are You Ready to Begin?
- a. Appendices D and E are meant to help you make Sabbath-keeping a permanent part of your life. Appendix D helps you develop Sabbath practices by inviting you to consider what to exclude and what to include in your Sabbath time. Appendix E invites you to commit to intentionally creating Sabbath time in the rhythm of your week and reflecting on your Sabbath practices. If you think you have an adequate understanding of Sabbath and are ready to commit to Sabbath-keeping for one month, starting this week, then on your own time, work through and answer the questions in Appendix D: Developing Sabbath Practices. Commit to use the suggestions in Appendix E: A Month of Sabbaths: Reflecting on Your Sabbath Practices. Each week for 4 weeks you’ll return to Appendix E to answer the reflection questions and make positive changes in your Sabbath practices.
 - b. If you have already started this process, please use Appendix E weekly to reflect on your Sabbath practices and make positive changes.
 - c. You may choose to postpone this process until a later week, especially if you want to grow in your understanding of Sabbath-keeping through these small groups first.

7. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
 - i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an “amen” as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today’s small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a “popcorn” prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may “pop” in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION FOUR: “Sabbath-Keeping as a Way of Life”

2. Welcome
3. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
4. A Beginning Point
 - a. In the previous sessions, we learned Sabbath-keeping involves *rest*, which means taking time to rejuvenate our bodies physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We know Sabbath-keeping is about *worship*, which includes Sunday morning church service gatherings; quiet times with God spent in Bible reading, reflection, and prayer; and honoring God in all aspects of our lives. This session explores Sabbath-keeping as a way of life, practicing rest and worship and other aspects of Sabbath in our daily lives.
5. Learning and Sharing
 - a. Sabbath is not just the absence of work. It is the presence of _____. How would you complete this sentence at this point in our spiritual growth series?
 - b. Read **John 14:6**. Jesus says he is the Way. How do you understand these words in your life?
 - c. Read **Acts 2:41-47**. The early Christians referred to themselves in the book of Acts as followers of the Way. What were some of the rhythms and practices of the early Christian community? How do these relate to Sabbath-keeping?
 - d. Let's explore a few more aspects of Sabbath-keeping as a way of life.
 - i. Surrender. Wayne Muller writes, *“Sabbath requires surrender. If we only stop when we are finished with all our work, we will never stop—because our work is never completely done. With every accomplishment there arises a new responsibility. Every swept floor invites another sweeping, every child bathed invites another bathing... If we refuse rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. 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... 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.”* What is God inviting you to surrender to God this Lent? How might your Sabbath practice help you surrender?
 - ii. Gratitude/contentment. Read **Philippians 4:11-13**. Paul writes from prison how God has taught him to be content in all circumstances. Sabbath helps us focus our heart not on what we need but on what we already have. Meister Eckhart, the Christian mystic, said if the only prayer we ever prayed our whole life was “Thank you,” that would be enough. Gratitude cultivates in us a conviction that we have enough. How have Sabbath practices helped you grow in gratitude and contentment?

- iii. Clarity of vision and purpose. Muddy water can become clear if it is allowed to remain still. When we rest and pray, there is a spiritual gravity that allows all things at rest to settle, to find their place. When we rest and pray, we feel a renewal of energy and a gradual clarity of perception and vision. This is important as we seek to do acts of service to others and as we move forward as a congregation in our work in community development. Doing good requires more than simply knowing what is wrong and trying to do something about it. Doing good requires taking time to rest and pray and seek God's will for what is best for the whole community. Otherwise our actions may have unintended, unhealthy consequences for others. Wayne Muller gives the example of the decision, years back in community mental health, to deinstitutionalize psychiatric patients. The idea was to return them to their community, to use less public money, to let them be free to be cared for by their families at home. Yet the decision was made without thoughtful and prayerful reflection on consequences. Who in the communities would care for them when they were released? Why did their families not care for them before? What resources would they need to care for them better now? These were questions that weren't adequately addressed. Now many former psychiatric patients are homeless, without support and care. Can you think of other examples of action without Sabbath rest for reflection?
- iv. Being Sabbath for others. We can learn to be Sabbath for others, to be a non-anxious, non-judgmental presence of active listening and concern. We can learn to be present with others, listen to their stories, gently encourage them, remind them of God's deep love for them. Who has been Sabbath for you, and how? How might God be calling you to be Sabbath for others?

6. A Month of Sabbaths

- a. If you have already been using Appendix D and E to help you make Sabbath-keeping a permanent part of your life by committing to "A Month of Sabbaths," now is your chance to talk with a partner about it. If you have not yet started the process of "A Month of Sabbaths," now is your chance to begin.
- b. Turn to Appendix D: Developing Sabbath Practices. Work through and answer the three questions under the heading, "Saying 'No' – What to Exclude." By saying no to some things, there is permission to say yes to others. With a partner, share some of your responses and listen for their feedback and encouragement.
- c. Work through and answer the three questions under the heading, "Saying 'Yes' – What to Include." With a partner, share some of your responses and listen for their feedback and encouragement.
- d. For the next month, if you have not already, commit to use the suggestions in Appendix E: A Month of Sabbaths: Reflecting on Your Sabbath Practices. The goal is to help you make Sabbath-keeping a permanent part of your life.

7. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week's spiritual exercise (Sabbath practice): How was the spiritual exercise you tried? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?
- b. Think back on these four weeks. How have these sessions helped you grow in faith or become more aware of God's presence in your life?
- c. Into the future, think about the spiritual exercises (Sabbath practices) we tried during these four weeks. What practice(s) might you incorporate into the pattern of your life so you might keep growing in your relationship with God? Try "stepping out on faith" and in the future, reflect on your feelings and the results of your stepping out.

8. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
 - i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an "amen" as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today's small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a "popcorn" prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may "pop" in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

9. Encouragement for the Journey

- a. God's blessings as you continue the journey with God and as you seek to remember the Sabbath in your life! Keep in mind Jesus' words from **Matthew 28:20**: "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age," and the psalmist's words in **Psalms 121:7-8**: "The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore."

APPENDIX A: SPIRITUAL EXERCISES (SABBATH PRACTICES)

1. *Light a candle.* Set aside sacred time for a family meal, for prayer or meditation or simply quiet reading. Set a candle before you, offer a simple blessing, and let the world fall away.
2. *Practice thanksgiving.* Give thanks before meals, upon rising, when going to sleep. During Sabbath, we are less concerned with what is missing and more grateful for what has already been given.
3. *Bless your children.* Place your hand gently on their heads and offer your blessing. What do you most wish for them? Self-knowledge, courage, safety, joy? Let them hear your prayers for their happiness.
4. *Invite a Sabbath pause.* Choose one common act—touching a doorknob, turning on a faucet, or hearing the phone ring. Throughout the day when this occurs, stop and take three silent, mindful breaths. Then go on.
5. *Take a walk.* Stroll slowly to nowhere in particular for 30 minutes. Let your senses guide you. Stop and observe deeply whatever attracts you—a tree, a stone, a flower. Breathe.
6. *Pamper your body.* Take a guilt-free nap. Take a leisurely bath with music, special scents, candles. Walk barefoot in the grass. Stay in bed longer than usual—when you wake up, don't get up. (It's called "slotha yoga.") Enjoy being together with your significant other. The Sabbath is a day of delight.
7. *Create a Sabbath box.* Put your to-do list, your keys, your wallet, your credit card, your cell phone—anything you don't need in Sabbath time—into the box. Or write down a particular worry or concern and drop it in. Just for now, let it go.
8. *Turn off your phone.* Or the computer, the TV, the washer and dryer. Create a period of time when you will not be disturbed or seduced by what our technologies demand of us.
9. *Prepare a Sabbath meal—or a Sabbath cup of tea.* Even if you are alone, you can choose foods you love, put flowers on the table, take time to enjoy every dish, give thanks for the bounty of the earth.
10. *Seek companionship.* One of the most precious gifts we can offer is to be a place of refuge, a Sabbath for one another. Ask for companionship when you lose your way. Give quiet time and attention to others.
11. *Reset your inner compass.* Make a list of the values and principles that guide your life—both those you follow and those you would like to follow. Speak them aloud, alone or with loved ones.
12. *Surrender a problem.* The Sabbath reminds us that a force larger than ourselves is at work healing the world. Imagine that God already knows how to solve your problem. Turn it over to God's care.

13. *Practice centering prayer.* Choose a single sacred word as an object of meditation. Following your breath, return again and again to that word, such as love, peace, or mercy. Using your breath in silent contemplation, listen for God.
14. *Practice the ancient spiritual exercise of the Examen.* Practice being attentive to your life by reflecting on your highs and lows for the day. Highs are the times you felt joy or promise or fulfillment or a deep sense of God's presence. Lows are the times you felt despair or disappointment or regret or a sense of God's absence. Offer your highs and lows to God.
15. *Listen to beautiful music.* Music is a language that connects beneath words, deep in the body and heart. Choose music that speaks to your soul, and listen to it.
16. *Practice lectio divina.* *Lectio divina*, or contemplative reading, is an ancient practice of reading scripture. Choose a short passage of scripture and quietly reflect on it, allowing it to quietly work on you, as leaven in the bread. Read slowly and chew on the words. How is God ministering to you through God's Word? Scriptures you may wish to ponder:
 - a. Psalm 23
 - b. Psalm 121
 - c. Psalm 37:1-7
 - d. Psalm 118:24
 - e. Isaiah 43:1-7
 - f. Isaiah 40:31
 - g. Jeremiah 29:11
 - h. Matthew 6:25-35
 - i. Matthew 11:28-30
 - j. John 14:6
 - k. Romans 8:28
 - l. 2 Corinthians 5:17
 - m. Philippians 4:6-8
 - n. Hebrews 11:1

APPENDIX B: REFLECTIONS ON SABBATH-KEEPING

(Adapted from *Sabbath: Remembering the Sacred Rhythm of Rest and Delight* by Wayne Muller. New York: Bantam Books, 1999.)

Busyness Of Modern Life

In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between action and rest. As the founder of a public charity, I visit the offices of wealthy donors, crowded social-service agencies and the small homes of the poorest families. Remarkably, within this mosaic there is a universal refrain: “I am so busy.” I speak with people in business and education, doctors and day-care workers, shopkeepers and social workers, parents and teachers, nurses and lawyers, students and therapists, community activists and cooks. The more our life speeds up, the more we feel weary, overwhelmed and lost. Despite our good hearts and equally good intentions, our life and work rarely feel light, pleasant or healing. Instead, as it all piles endlessly upon itself, the whole experience of being alive begins to melt into one enormous obligation. It becomes the standard greeting everywhere: “I am so busy.” We say this to one another with no small degree of pride, as if our exhaustion were a trophy, our ability to withstand stress a mark of real character. The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves and, we imagine, to others. To be unavailable to our friends and family, to be unable to find time for the sunset (or even to know that the sun has set at all), to whiz through our obligations without time for a single mindful breath—this has become the model of a successful life.

Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points that show us where to go. We lose the nourishment that gives us succor. We miss the quiet that gives us wisdom. Poisoned by the hypnotic belief that good things come only through tireless effort, we never truly rest. And for want of rest, our lives are in danger.

How have we allowed this to happen? This was not our intention; this is not the world we dreamed of when we were young and life seemed full of possibility and promise. How did we get so terribly rushed in a world saturated with work and responsibility, yet somehow bereft of joy and delight?

We Have Forgotten The Sabbath

Most spiritual traditions prescribe some kind of Sabbath, time consecrated to enjoy and celebrate what is beautiful and good—time to light candles, sing songs, worship, tell stories, bless our children and loved ones, give thanks, share meals, nap, walk and even make love. It is time to be nourished and refreshed as we let our work, our chores and our important projects lie fallow, trusting that there are larger forces at work taking care of the world when we are at rest.

Sabbath time is a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, because it honors the necessary wisdom of dormancy. If certain plant species do not lie dormant during winter, the plant begins to die off. Rest is not just a psychological convenience; it is a spiritual and biological necessity. Perhaps this is why, in most spiritual traditions, “Remember the Sabbath” is more than simply a lifestyle suggestion. It is a commandment, an ethical precept as serious as prohibitions against killing, stealing and lying. How can forgetting the Sabbath—forgetting to be restful, sing songs and find nourishment and delight—possibly be morally and socially dangerous?

Roger is a gifted, thoughtful physician. Physicians are trained to work when they're exhausted, required to perform when they are sleep-deprived, hurried and overloaded. "I discovered in medical school," Roger told me, "that the more exhausted I was, the more tests I would order. I was too tired to see precisely what was going on with my patients. I could recognize their symptoms and formulate possible diagnoses, but I couldn't hear precisely how it fit together. So I would order tests to give me what I was missing. But when I was rested—if I had an opportunity to get some sleep, or meditate, or go for a quiet walk—I could rely on my intuition and experience to tell me what was needed. If there was any uncertainty, I would order a specific test to confirm my diagnosis. But when I was rested and could listen and be present, I was almost always right."

Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is a day when we partake of the wisdom, peace and delight that grow only in the soil of time—time consecrated specifically for play, refreshment and renewal. Many of us, in our desperate drive to be successful and care for our many responsibilities, feel terrible guilt when we take time to rest. But the Sabbath has proven its wisdom over the ages. The Sabbath gives us the permission we need to stop, to restore our souls. As part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is already woven into the fabric of our society. Many of us still recall when, not long ago, shops and offices were closed on Sundays. Those quiet Sunday afternoons are embedded in our cultural memory.

Much of modern life is specifically designed to seduce our attention away from Sabbath rest. When we are in the world with our eyes wide open, the seductions are insatiable. Hundreds of channels of cable and satellite television; phones with multiple lines and call-waiting, begging us to talk to more than one person at a time; mail, e-mail and overnight mail; fax machines; billboards; magazines; newspapers; radio. For those of us with children, there are endless soccer practices, baseball games, homework, laundry, housecleaning, errands. Every responsibility, every stimulus competes for our attention: Buy me. Do me. Watch me. Try me. Drink me. It is as if we have inadvertently stumbled into some horrific wonderland.

Plea For A Renewed Sabbath

The point is not to return to some forced, legalistic Sabbath. We rightfully chafe against the dreary and humorless Sundays that obscured the more traditional healing prescriptions of companionship and laughter. A new Sabbath must invite a conversation about the forgotten necessity of rest. Sabbath may be a holy day, an afternoon, an hour, a walk—anything that preserves the experience of life—giving repose and nourishment. During Sabbath, when we take our hand from the plow and let the earth care for things, while we drink, if just briefly, from the fountain of rest and delight.

I make a plea for renewed Sabbath-keeping. As a nation, we cannot live like this, endlessly rushing about in a desperate frenzy, never stopping to enjoy the blessings of family and friends, unable to taste the fruits of life. We can change society by beginning a quiet revolution of change in ourselves and our families. Let us take a collective breath, rest, pray, meditate, walk, sing, eat and take time to share the unhurried company of those we love. Let us, for just one day, cease our desperate striving for more, and instead taste the blessings we have already been given, and give thanks. Religious traditions agree on this: God does not want us to be exhausted; God wants us to be happy. And so let us remember the Sabbath.

APPENDIX C: WHAT IS SABBATH IN THE BIBLE?

(Excerpted from *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* by Dorothy C. Bass. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997.)

The way in which time is organized is a fundamental building block of any community. So basic is this that most of us take the pattern we are used to for granted, as if it were self-evident that time must be arranged in this way. For all the spiritual descendants of Abraham—Jews, Christians, Muslims—time flows in seven-day cycles. Other cultures move through time in different cycles, however. In most ancient societies, rest days followed lunar phases. During the French Revolution, anti-Christian leaders tried to weaken popular religious traditions by abolishing the seven-day week. The rhythms of the week subtly pattern the days and years of our lives; and they are filled with meaning.

The Sabbatarian pattern—six days of work, followed by one of rest—is woven deep into the fabric of the Bible. The very first story of Hebrew and Christian scriptures climaxes on the seventh day, the very first time there was a seventh day. Having created everything, God rests, and blesses this day, and makes it holy. In this way, Karl Barth has suggested, God declares as fully as possible just how very good creation is. Resting, God takes pleasure in what has been made; God has no regrets, no need to go on to create a still better world or a creature more wonderful than the man and woman. In the day of rest, God's free love toward humanity takes the form of time shared with them.

Later, God teaches the people of Israel to share in the blessing of this day (Exod. 16). After bringing them out of Egyptian slavery into the wilderness, God sends them manna, commanding them to gather enough each morning for that day alone. Mistrusting, they gather more than they need, but it rots. On the sixth day, however, they are told to gather enough to last for two days. Miraculously, the extra food does not rot, and those mistrustful ones who go out on the seventh morning to get more find none. God is teaching them, through their own hunger and nature's provisions, to keep the Sabbath, even before Moses receives the commandments on Sinai.

When those commandments come, the Sabbath commandment is the longest and in some ways the most puzzling. Unlike any of the others, it takes quite different forms in the two passages where the Ten Commandments appear. Both versions require the same behavior—work on six days, rest on one—but each gives a different reason. What is wonderful is that each reason arises from a fundamental truth about God's relationship to humanity.

The Exodus commandment to "remember" the Sabbath day is grounded in the story of creation. The human pattern of six days of work and one of rest follows God's pattern as creator; God's people are to rest on one day because God did. In both work and rest, human beings are in the image of God. At the same time, they are not God but God's creatures, who must honor God by obeying this commandment.

In Deuteronomy, the commandment to "observe" the Sabbath day is tied to the experience of a people newly released from bondage. Slaves cannot take a day off; free people can. When they stop work every seventh day, the people will remember that the Lord brought them out of slavery, and they will see to it that no one within their own dominion, not even animals, will work without respite. Sabbath rest is a recurring testimony against the drudgery of slavery.

Together, these two renderings of the Sabbath commandment summarize the most fundamental stories and beliefs of the Hebrew scriptures: creation and exodus, humanity in God's image and a people liberated from captivity. One story emphasizes holiness; the other, social justice. Sabbath crystallizes Torah's portrait of who God is and what human beings are most fully meant to be.

APPENDIX D: DEVELOPING SABBATH PRACTICES

Saying “No” – What to Exclude

You can begin shaping your Sabbath practice by deciding what should be excluded from your Sabbath time and what should be included. There are three categories of things that we do well to exclude from our Sabbath time.

1. **Work:** What constitutes work for us? We must commit ourselves to not doing these things in our Sabbath time. We need to identify the challenge and temptations related to our work and establish clear boundaries to protect Sabbath time.

- How can you say “No” to work on the Sabbath?

2. **Buying and selling:** If we are out buying, selling and engaging in the world of commerce, it means someone has to work and we are contributing to it. It feeds our consumerism, an aspect of life in our culture that needs rest on the Sabbath.

- How can you say “No” to buying and selling on the Sabbath?

3. **Worry:** The Sabbath is an invitation to rest emotionally and mentally from things that cause worry and stress, such as budgets, major decisions, and planning the week ahead. If we observe Sabbath on Sunday, perhaps Sunday evening after dinner is a time when, from a place of rest, we can engage in some of the decision-making that needs to be done.

- How can you say “No” to worry on the Sabbath?

Suggestion: Prepare a “Sabbath box” or “Sabbath basket.” For example, if your Sabbath is Sunday, each Saturday evening, put all the things you don’t need in order to observe the Sabbath into the box or basket. This might include cell phones, credit cards, and so on. Put work projects and homework in the box, as well; you can take them out again on Sunday evening.

Saying “Yes” – What to Include

What is to replace all that we are excluding from our Sabbath practice? The simple answer is, whatever delights you and replenishes you. Consider the following three things to include in your Sabbath practice.

1. ***Resting the body.*** What are the activities that rest and replenish your body? The invitation of Sabbath time is to replace the time you would normally spend working with activities that you find restorative, such as a walk or other physical exercise, eating your favorite foods, reading, and listening to music.

- How can you say “Yes” to resting the body on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?

2. ***Replenishing the spirit.*** Another invitation of the Sabbath is to pay attention to what replenishes the spirit, and choose only those activities that renew you and bring you joy. Find personal activities that replenish the spirit: silence, reading, dancing, and listening to music. Find activities for the whole family that replenish the spirit: a special meal, recreation, games, sharing stories, gathering with relatives and friends.

- How can you say “Yes” to replenishing the spirit on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?

3. ***Restoring the soul.*** Perhaps the deepest refreshment is the invitation to renew the soul through worship and quiet reflection. This is the part of us that gets most lost during the workweek, which is governed almost completely by the value of productivity. In addition to personal activities, such as silence and prayer, identify rituals or shared activities that create a spirit of reverence for God on this day such as a special meal with a Scripture reading and time to go around the table and talk about where God seemed particularly present with you during the week. Light a candle to mark the Sabbath day.

- How can you say “Yes” to restoring the soul on the Sabbath? What types of activities can you do?

APPENDIX E: A MONTH OF SABBATHS: REFLECTING ON YOUR SABBATH PRACTICES

FIRST WEEK

Take time at the end of the week to reflect on the Sabbath time in your week and record your individual and/or family activities in your Sabbath time.

- How much Sabbath time did you set aside? Was it purposeful? Was it time for rest and listening for God? Did something hold you back? If so, what could you do to prevent it from holding you back?
- Which activities fit in the “exclude” category?
- Which fit in the “include” category?
- Resolve:
 - to make regular worship a priority for the next three weeks
 - to eliminate one activity from your “exclude” list for your Sabbath time next week
 - to add one activity from the “include” list for your Sabbath time next week

SECOND WEEK

Reflect on your activities during your Sabbath time this week.

- How much Sabbath time did you set aside? Was it purposeful? Was it time for rest and listening for God? Did something hold you back?
- What activities remain in the “exclude” category?
- How did the changes in your activities enhance your well-being?
- What activity from the “include” list will you add for your Sabbath time next week?
- How will these choices help you adopt a Sabbath attitude that helps keep your life in balance?

THIRD WEEK

Reflect on your activities during your Sabbath time this week.

- How much Sabbath time did you set aside? Was it purposeful? Was it time for rest and listening for God? Did something hold you back?
- What remains to be excluded?
- What activity will you add or enhance to complete the “include” list next week?

FOURTH WEEK

After observing a month of Sabbaths in Sabbath attitude...

- How much Sabbath time did you set aside?
- Have your changes allowed for rest and renewal of body, mind, spirit?
- How has your spiritual life grown?
- How have your changes brought you to a new understanding of Sabbath?
- What changes will you resolve to make a permanent part of your life?