

COMMUNAL SABBATH GUIDE



InterVarsity

Communal Sabbath Guide

Truly Resting in Jesus as a Community

Dear Chapter Leaders,

Our biggest prayer while developing this guide has been for your entire chapter to experience joy and rest in Jesus. So, this is intended for chapters who want to grow closer to God *together*, as a normal practice of chapter life.

Here's what you'll find:

- Leader's Guide
 - Intro to Sabbath (also for chapter handout)
 - Planning sheet
 - Suggested Schedules
- Chapter Materials
 - Intro to Sabbath (use same page from Leaders' Guide)
 - Discipleship Guide (2 pages—one for before sabbath and one for after)
- Other Resources
 - Suggested Prayers
 - Notes on Context

Blessings on your chapter as you pursue God together!

Praying for you,

Discipleship & Leadership Department

Intro to Sabbath

Biblical Foundations of Rest

Why & What is Sabbath?

- it's *commanded*:
 - Sabbath is how we follow God in resting (Gen 2:1-3)
 - Sabbath is act of faith in God's power (Ex 31:14-17; Deut 5:12-14)
- it's *commended*:
 - Jesus invited his followers to rest in him (Matt 11:28-30)
 - Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and he gives flexibility (Mk 2:27:28)

Sabbath is a gift! It's also an active choice to start each day, week, etc. focused on God.

- Sabbaths usually include:
 - a time of proclaiming and focusing on God's holiness and might (prayer)
 - a time of both rest and play (remembering God's gifts and promises)
 - a time of renewal and celebrating God's provision (worship)
- Sabbath is *not*:
 - a time to focus on our failings instead of God's greatness (celebrate!)
 - going to be perfect—our weakness, Jesus' strength (he's in control)
 - meant to be the same as other days (Sabbath is something special)

Sabbath creates an "interruption" to the norm that highlights what God is doing.

Why communal Sabbath?

- Practicing sabbath has always been a mark of being God's people:
 - the command was given to the community, not just individuals (Deut 5:1-15)
 - communal sabbath helps a group focus on Jesus' call *together* (Matt 28:18-20)
- Practicing sabbath is part of being healthy as God's people:
 - when we are restless and dry, that affects our communities (Col 3:12-14)
 - being part of a community is work, for leaders *and* members (Col 3:15-17)
 - allowing for mistakes and missed opportunities is part of trusting God to be big enough to build the Kingdom, not us. healthy sabbath practices lead to healthy chapters overall.

Sabbaths teach communities to rest, because God is at work.

Leaders' Guide: Planning Sheet

Preparing Well to Rest, Play, and Worship

Ask—how will we invite our chapter into rest? Ideas (check all that you decide on):

- ☐ simple prayer gathering
- ☐ group picnic/nap on the quad
- ☐ chill movie night
- ☐ breathing exercises (yoga if appropriate)
- ☐ other: _____

Ask—how will we help our chapter to play well? Ideas:

- ☐ dodgeball, pool, or pickleball tournament
- ☐ board game/video game night
- ☐ baking/cookie decorating contest
- ☐ simple hike or bike ride
- ☐ other: _____

Ask—how will we lead our chapter into sabbath worship? Ideas:

- ☐ open mic for testimonies, performances
- ☐ new/different styles of prayer & music
- ☐ open requests worship night
- ☐ incorporate art, dancing, etc.
- ☐ other: _____

Sabbath ideas to keep in mind:

- “no phone zone” for group activities (unless they’re needed for a game)
- a change in location can be helpful. Try to avoid the usual classrooms, houses, and spaces that your chapter normally gathers in *as a group*.
- you're calling your chapter members to “delight, be disciplined, and debrief” the sabbath
- plan for *rest*, not for success

How can chapter leaders rest during this communal sabbath, too? Ask alumni, volunteers, and ministry partners to provide leadership. Ideas:

- which volunteers/alums could host at their home, provide snacks, and clean-up?
- which partner churches might be able to lend their space, worship team, A/V equipment, etc.
- who can mentor you during the sabbath, reminding you that you can’t “mess this up,” and stepping in for any emergencies, etc.?
- resist the temptation to try to control everything. resist the world’s call to be productive and ask God to show you how to let go of being worried about results.

Pray for rest for yourself and your chapter. Praise Jesus for his faithfulness!

Leaders' Guide: Suggested Schedules

- In the weeks leading up, give out the Intro to Sabbath sheet so that chapter members can come prepared with questions.
- Sabbath during the week:
 - meet during the regular Large Group time (but in a different location, if possible)
 - student leaders do Q & A
 - go over the Discipleship Cycle questions in pairs or small groups
 - Large group debrief the questions and begin the official sabbath time with prayer.
 - release until first communal event.
 - have one or two restful, fun activities throughout the week (keep the schedule light!)
 - either a few days later or the following week, meet for a time of feasting: food, worship, etc.
 - go over the Discipleship Cycle questions in pairs or small groups.
 - end with prayer
- Sabbath on a weekend:
 - meet in the morning. provide breakfast snacks, with someone else's help!
 - Q & A
 - go over the Discipleship Cycle questions in pairs or small groups
 - begin the official sabbath time with prayer.
 - encourage members to spend the day together. encourage extroverts to slow down and listen, and introverts to try to recharge with other introverts.
 - have one or two at most restful, fun activities during the late morning and afternoon (keep the schedule light!)
 - that evening, meet for a time of feasting: food, worship, etc.
 - go over the Discipleship Cycle questions in pairs or small groups. remember that a good debrief allows members to be truly involved, instead of just being spectators.
 - end with prayer

Discipleship Cycle: Hear and Respond Actively

Preparing for Sabbath

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Remember to allow space for introverts/internal processors.

Part One—Hearing God’s Word: Beginning the sabbath

1. What do you think of the idea of a sabbath? Have you done one before?
2. Pick a verse or two from the *Intro to Sabbath* page. Verse(s): _____
What do you see? What makes sense? What doesn’t make sense? What questions do you have?
3. What might Jesus be saying to you about this upcoming sabbath? What might the Holy Spirit be saying to your chapter?
4. Are there parts of sabbath you’re excited about? Nervous?
5. Anything you need more clarity about? (ask chapter leaders—they're there to help!)

Pray together that this Communal Sabbath will be restful and that God will speak!

Part Two—Responding Actively to God’s Call: Sabbath

1. Go Sabbath in Community!
2. Go! Why are you still here haha?

Discipleship Cycle: Debrief

Learning from Sabbath

(Discuss in pairs or small groups. Remember to allow space for introverts/internal processors.)

Part Three—Debriefing *together* (conclusion to the sabbath)

1. How did it go? Was it what you were expecting? Choose 2-4 words to describe your sabbath.
2. What communal activities did you do? Did you enjoy one part of the sabbath more than the other?
3. Has God brought any Bible verses, prayers, or worship songs to mind? What other words, images, or songs have come to mind?
4. Did parts feel natural or easy? When did you feel God's presence?
5. Did some things feel awkward or hard? When did it seem that God was absent?
6. Do you think God is saying anything to your group about your chapter, the campus, the global Church, the world?

Ask Jesus for wisdom to follow Him as a community. Praise Him for His provision!

Other Resources

Suggested Opening Prayer

Liturgical style—Call and Response

(Bold is for leader, Plain text for members)

Lord you are good, and you give good gifts
to your children.

Help us to follow you now into the
wilderness,
trusting you to provide all that we need.

Help us, O Lord, to rest in you.

Lord, you give us bodies that hunger and
thirst.

Help us to look to you first,
Then give us all that we need.

Help us, O Lord, to rest in you.

Lord, you give us work so we can buy
books, pay bills, and enjoy good gifts.
But even more, you give us work that we
might be like you,
provide tangibly for those of us who are in
need,
and provide a heart of generosity for those
of us who can give.

As a community, help us, O Lord, to
rest in you.

As we commit to rest from our work,
as we commit to give up good gifts
for a season,
open our minds and hearts to your
goodness.

Help us, O Lord, to rest in you.

As we begin this sabbath together,
O Lord,
Help us to follow you, even when it
feels uncertain.
As a community, we trust you to
provide all that we need.

All: Help us, O Lord, to rest in you.

Based on the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13)

(Can be done by one leader, different people, as One Voice prayer)

God, we thank you for teaching us how to pray. So, as we begin this sabbath together, we call your name holy. We call you: _____.

We ask for your kingdom to come, your will be done, in our community here as it is in heaven. Give us today what we need to live. We lift these concerns to you and ask that you help us rest from worrying about: _____.

Forgive us for our sins and help us to forgive others.

Let us not be tempted to focus on our work and daily grind, but on your goodness and grace.

We thank you for: _____.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Suggested Closing Prayers

From Psalm 65

(can be read by one leader or many, or as a group)

**Note that this prayer is focused on ancient Israel in the Old Testament, and we can now use it as God's people who know Jesus from every tribe, language, and nation.*

For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.

Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion;

to you our vows will be fulfilled.

You who answer prayer,

to you all people will come.

When we were overwhelmed by sins,

you forgave our transgressions.

Blessed are those you choose

and bring near to live in your courts!

We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,

God our Savior,

the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas,
who formed the mountains by your power,
having armed yourself with strength,
who stilled the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
and the turmoil of the nations.

The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;
where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.
You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.

You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.

The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.
The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.

Close in prayer:

- Praise for how God provided during the communal sabbath
- Request for unity and true shalom-peace in the chapter
- Prayer to continue in good communal habits of growth and learning
- Request for non-believers to experience Jesus through the community
- Request that new members would be welcomed by the community
- Praise that God never changes even as we grow in our understanding
- **Praise for true rest in Jesus!**

Notes on Context: Unity in Diversity

Interdenominational Contexts

Because God values diversity, InterVarsity does, too. And because InterVarsity is an inter-denominational organization (not attached to any specific denomination, finding common ground among many different traditions), not all chapter members will sabbath the same.

In fact, being flexible with sabbath rhythms and requirements is an important part of calling people to rest in Jesus. And being clear from the start allows folks to feel welcome and not like they're an inconvenience to be dealt with.

Some members will come from traditions that have a very "high" and strict view of sabbath, while others will be part of denominations that value other spiritual rhythms more than a sabbath. Some folks will not have heard of sabbath at all before, even if they are practicing one. Keep this in mind during planning and during the sabbath & debrief.

Chapter Context

This guide is intentionally flexible in recommending the components of a communal sabbath. Rather than assuming what your chapter looks like, we trust you as staff and student leaders to find what works for your chapter—to choose the details of music, food, activities, etc.

If you are contextualizing for a specific community (for example Black Campus Ministries, Graduate Students, Greek Students, etc.), you can ask these questions:

1. What is the normal routine of our chapter that we want to see God "interrupt"?
2. What does rest look like for our specific community? Play? Worship? How can we build on those ideas, and how can we challenge those norms?
3. How much time does our community have? Do we need to make changes to the schedule?

General Notes:

Some of this material is excerpted from <https://intervarsity.org/blog/wonder-flexible-committed-sabbath-rhythms-students>. Also encourage your chapter members to pursue church sabbath!

This guide is for *communal*, not individual, sabbath, and is currently being used as part of the Strategic Plan *Developing Student Leaders* (SP2) curriculum. Questions? Contact Sara Chang at sara.chang@intervarsity.org or Chandra Crane at chandra.crane@intervarsity.org.

For a further resource—one which is from a Native perspective—check out this Ministry Library discipleship cycle: <https://library.intervarsity.org/library/visions-restoration>. We also highly recommend the new First Nations Version, available from InterVarsity Press. The Native perspective of community and wholeness is especially helpful in a communal sabbath.