

How to Celebrate *the Sabbath*

A simple guide for Christian homes

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Sabbath Starter Guide

Letter To The Reader

Shabbat Shalom!

If you are reading this, it means you have chosen to honor the Sabbath — and I want you to know how grateful and excited I am for you! There are many traditions you can choose from when keeping the Sabbath, and we encourage you to simply pick and choose whichever ones fit your family. This is not about legalism or obligation. It's about honoring God while reconnecting, recalibrating, and resting with your family! I think there is a reason why the fourth commandment says "Remember to keep the Sabbath..." He knew we would forget!

The Bible keeps the Sabbath instructions surprisingly simple. First, we're told not to work like we do on the other six days (Exodus 20:8–11). We're also told not to buy or sell, or cause others to work for us (Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15–17). And finally, we're invited to rest, refresh, and refocus our hearts on God (Leviticus 23:3).

Outside of that, there's so much freedom in how you can enjoy the day. As we move further through this short guide, I will share some of our favorite family traditions as well as other traditions that many other families use as part of their sabbath experience.

However you choose to spend the Sabbath, the goal is the same — honor God and bless your family. If you're doing that, I believe the Father is more than pleased. Just remember the two boundaries He gives us: **from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday**, we don't work like we do on other days, and we don't buy or sell. *Everything else is about enjoying the gift of His rest.*



Understanding Work and Rest

What Is Work?

Now you might be asking, “*What is considered work?*” and that would be a good question. And it’s kind of tricky to answer to be honest. So, let’s take a look at the Hebrew and then show you a few scriptural examples that can narrow it down even further. The Hebrew word for “work” is *melakhah* (מְלָאכָה), which means occupational work, business activity, or creative labor—the kind of things you do to produce, earn, or maintain your livelihood during the week.

From Scripture, we see that “work” on the Sabbath includes any activity related to your regular occupation or business, such as buying and selling (Nehemiah 10:31), harvesting or field labor (Exodus 34:21), transporting goods for trade (Jeremiah 17:21–22), or doing household production that could have been done ahead of time. However, the Bible also shows what is not considered work: acts of kindness, mercy, and necessity are permitted. Yeshua healed the sick on the Sabbath, fed His disciples, and reminded the Pharisees that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:12). Even David, when hungry, was allowed to eat the consecrated bread (Luke 6:3–4). These examples help us understand that *the Sabbath is not about rigid inactivity, but about ceasing from our ordinary, profit-driven labors so that we can focus on God and do what brings life*. For some, doing the dishes, mowing the grass or gardening is work. For others it is a blessing (although my kids would never agree that doing the dishes is a blessing on any day of the week!)

In any case, **Sabbath is a time to cease from labor, enjoy rest, strengthen family bonds, and realign your walk with God.** This guide will help walk you through one way to welcome Sabbath into your home. Although there are a lot of variations we have used over the years, this is the basics of what we do each week. Whether you are by yourself or have a large family like we do, use what blesses you, adjust for your household, and make it your own!



Sabbath Made Simple

An Erev Shabbat (Evening Sabbath) Ceremony

Note: This takes place during the Friday evening dinner service, a special meal that welcomes the Sabbath. In our home, as in many others, it is a tradition to begin the Sabbath around the dinner table with family and friends. This meal not only ushers in the day of rest but also sets the tone of joy, peace, and blessing for the Sabbath ahead.



Greeting

Welcome everyone and tell them “Shabbat Shalom,” which means in its most simplistic version “Peace to you on this Sabbath.” If you have a spouse or a family, let them know how much you have looked forward to this time and how much you are eager to spend time with them.

Opening Scripture Readings

We like to begin by having a child or another family member read a couple of key Scriptures out loud. First, we hear **Genesis 2:1–3**, where we’re reminded that “the heavens and the earth were finished,” and on the seventh day God rested and blessed it. Then, we turn to **Exodus 20:8–11**, where God tells us to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” and calls us to set this day apart from all the others. These verses help set the tone for everything that follows, reminding us why we



An Erev Shabbat (Evening Sabbath) Ceremony

Candle Lighting Ceremony



In many traditional Jewish and Messianic homes, it's customary for the woman of the house to light the Shabbat candles. There are a few different reasons given for this. Some say it's because the woman sets the atmosphere of her home and is the primary caregiver of the family. In that way, she reflects the work of the Holy Spirit, and so she has the honor of ushering in the Shabbat. Others explain it as a

symbolic act of redemption: since the first woman, Eve, was the one who "extinguished the light" through her sin in the garden, the women of the home now have the privilege of *symbolically bringing the light back each week*.

In our house, I'm usually the one who lights the candles, but that's mostly because I'm the "pastor" and Bible teacher in our home! The truth is, there's no biblical rule about who must light the candles. We've even had our kids do it from time to time, and it's always been special.

When it's time to light the two candles, I like to explain that the light and fire we see **represents the light of Yahweh (God)**. (I hold up the lighter so they can see the flame.) **The first candle stands for Yeshua (Jesus), the light God sent into the world. The second candle represents us.** I ask everyone, "Do we go to Him, or does He come to us?". They reply, "we go to Him!" Then, I hold the unlit candle above Yeshua's candle and explain that for God's light and power to truly fill our lives, we have to stay close to His presence and allow Him to burn away the impurities in us. And then, when we least expect it, His flame jumps to our wick, to our lives!



Once the flame catches, I place the two candles side by side and point out how they now look the same...*a reminder that we are called to reflect the image of Yeshua*. Then we pass the candles around the table from opposite sides, each person saying "**Shabbat Shalom**" to the next, until the two candles meet and cross. Finally, we set them at opposite ends of the table. If you're a single person or part of a small family, you can still do this, just adapt it to your setting and pass the candle around your space as a simple but powerful reminder to draw near to His light.

An Erev Shabbat (Evening Sabbath) Ceremony

Blessing Over The Bread (Challah)



As we move toward the blessing over the bread, I like to hold up the braided challah and talk about what it represents. The three strands can symbolize many beautiful things—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; a husband, wife, and God; or even a mother, father, and children. Before it's baked, each strand is clearly separate. But once it goes through the heat of the oven, the strands are fused together into one loaf. In the same way, the trials and challenges we face as families are meant to draw us closer together, not pull us apart. As we pass the bread around the table, I share

Yeshua's words: *"This is My body, broken for you... whoever eats of it will never be hungry again."* Each person takes a piece, remembering not only the bread before us but also the *living Bread of Life* who was given for us. Don't forget to mention that "Bethlehem" (Beit Lechem) means House of Bread! And Bethlehem is actually where they made the bread for the Holy Place for the temple in Jerusalem!

Prayer: Before saying the blessing in Hebrew, either me or someone else will pray a sincere prayer from the heart thanking God for sending Yeshua, the Bread of Life, and for His Word.

Hebrew Blessing Over the Bread: At this point we normally sing the blessing in Hebrew and then say it in English. Why sing? Because singing is joyful and this is a celebration!

Hebrew: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

Transliteration: Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

English: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

An Erev Shabbat (Evening Sabbath) Ceremony

Blessing Over The Wine/Grape Juice

At this point in the evening, I like to tell the story of the grape. It begins its life growing in comfort on the vine, soaking up the sunshine and enjoying the safety of its surroundings. Then, one day, the Master of the vineyard comes along, removes it from the vine, and it's suddenly crushed. What seemed like the grape's perfect life comes to an end, but through that crushing, it is transformed into something far greater: *wine, fit for the King's table*. In the same way, the trials and tribulations we go through often become the very things that shape us into our *true purpose*. This wine reminds us not only of the blood of Messiah, poured out for us, but also of the joy and celebration of the Sabbath. And so we pause to pray, thanking the Father for the blood of His Son and for the gift of this time of rest and delight. **In our home, we use grape juice. You can choose what's best for yours.*

Hebrew Blessing Over the Wine: We now sing the blessing in Hebrew and then say it in English.

Hebrew: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן

Transliteration: Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

English: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.



An Erev Shabbat (Evening Sabbath) Ceremony

Blessing Over The Family

After the bread and wine, we take a moment for one of my favorite parts of the evening— blessing the family. Husbands speak blessings over their wife, and wives over their husband. Parents place their hands on their children and speak life, encouragement, and hope into them, praying for God’s favor, protection, and guidance in the week ahead. This isn’t just a formality, it’s a sacred moment to look your loved ones in the eye, affirm who they are in Him, and remind them of how deeply they are loved by both you and the Father.

If you’re in a single-parent home, or if you live alone, you can still take part in this tradition. You might speak a blessing over yourself, declaring God’s promises out loud, or over close friends and loved ones in prayer. The heart of this moment is to release God’s truth, hope, and love over the people He’s placed in your life.

Blessing Over The Food

Once the blessings have been spoken, we move into blessing the meal. Often one of the children, or another person at the table, will pray and thank God for the food He’s provided. Then, with hearts full of gratitude, we share in the meal together, enjoying not only the food but also the fellowship around the table.



On Sabbath Day

Resting Continues

One of our favorite Saturday morning traditions is to save the second challah bread loaf from Friday night and turn it into French toast on Saturday morning. There is almost nothing better than my daughter's challah bread made into French toast!

After breakfast it is all relax and reconnect time. Some people head to the park, take a relaxing walk, curl up with a good book, or watch a wholesome family movie. Some like to unplug completely, turning off their phones and electronics from **Friday night sundown until sundown on Saturday**, while others might fill the house with praise and worship, invite friends or family over, or pull out some board games. For us, mostly still in our pajamas, we gather in the afternoon for family Bible study. It's simple, it's restful, and it draws us closer together. In a world that doesn't stop, is constantly pushing us to do and create, and is forever pushing thumb-scrolling distractions all week long, this is where the demands stop and the river of God's peace flows once again. The Shabbat is a commandment we have forgotten and the devil has stolen the blessings it contains. *Now is the time to take back what is rightfully yours and enjoy the blessings that it brings!*

Other Traditions

Sometimes, before we begin eating, we take a moment to go around the table and share. One week, each person might say something they're thankful for from the past seven days. Another time, we might have everyone share something they truly appreciate about the person sitting to their left or right. At other times, we'll go around and talk about something God has taught us during the week. These moments open the door for encouragement, gratitude, and meaningful conversation.

After dinner, the evening can go in different directions. Some nights, we bring out the board games and have a game night. Other times, we'll watch a wholesome family movie or put on some video praise and worship together. No matter what activities we choose, we almost always make an effort to set the table beautifully, using our nicest dinnerware, wine glasses for the adults (Welch's Sparkling Grape Juice is our personal favorite), and fresh flowers as a centerpiece. *Speaking of flowers, one tradition I love is for the husband to bring home flowers for his bride each week whenever possible.*

Of course, there are also evenings when life is busy, and we keep things simple with paper plates and an easy meal. But whenever we can, we try to **make Shabbat dinner special**. It's a night set apart from all others, and creating a sense of beauty and celebration helps remind us just how sacred and joyful this time truly is.

Bringing It All Together

Make Your Own Traditions!

As the evening continues, we remember that Shabbat is more than just a tradition, it is a gift, a weekly appointment with our Creator. It's a time to pause, to rest, and to fill our homes with His presence. Over time, you'll discover your own unique family traditions, little touches that make Shabbat special in your household. But let this guide be your first step toward making the Sabbath the delight that God intended it to be—a time of joy, restoration, and deep connection with Him!

Thank you so much for joining us in this movement to celebrate Shabbat in all its fullness. If you would like to help us grow this movement and support this ministry with a small thank you donation, you can do so at the QR code or, following the link:

<https://passionfortruth.com/donate/>



Shabbat Shalom!

Jim Staley



The Best Challah Bread Recipe Ever!

Challah (Bread Machine – 1 lb loaf)

Ingredients

- 6 egg yolks
- 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ cups warm water
- 1 stick ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) melted butter
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 5–6 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons yeast



Instructions

1. **Prepare Wet Ingredients:** In a small saucepan over low heat, warm the water and butter together until the butter melts. The mixture should be hot but not so hot that it burns your finger (too much heat can kill the yeast).
2. **Load Bread Machine:** Add ingredients to the bread machine in the order listed
3. **Dough Cycle:** Select the “Dough” setting on your bread machine. If the dough is too sticky once mixed, add a little extra flour until manageable.
4. **First Rise:** When the dough cycle is complete, transfer it to a lightly floured surface. Let it rise 1–2 additional hours in a warm place.
5. **Shape the Challah:** Gently braid or form the dough. Avoid rolling tightly—pull and arrange gently for a fluffier loaf.
6. **Second Rise:** Let the shaped loaf rise for another 30 minutes.
7. **Egg Wash & Optional Topping:** Brush the top with egg wash. Optional: sprinkle with honey and cinnamon sugar for sweetness, or leave plain.
8. **Bake:** Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). Bake for about 25 minutes, but times may vary depending on oven, humidity, and baking surface. For best results, bake on a stone sheet.

