

Stewards of Our Relationship with God:

## Sabbath and Spiritual Practices



**I**n all our living we belong to God. Stewardship begins with our relationship with God. We've experienced it in the midst of a rush of celebrations and hope-filled worship during the Christmas season. Now experience a season of Sabbath rest in God to deepen that relationship. Sabbath is simply setting aside time to delight in God, a gift to God and oneself in the midst of our rushing, check-

lists, productivity, and burn-out. "God gives, in the midst of relationships, to create, to strengthen and honor, and with the intimacy of one desiring deep and fruitful relationships."<sup>1</sup>

There are many ways of Sabbath keeping. Some people prefer to set aside a specific time daily or weekly to engage in particular spiritual practices. Others prefer to incorporate spiritual practices into the midst of daily life. Through spiritual practices, Christians through the ages have encountered God in life-renewing ways. Prayer is the most traditional but there are many others – fasting, hospitality, forgiveness, gratitude, meditation, Bible study, journaling, worship, listening, living simply, acts of compassion and justice, honoring the body, artistic expression... We become what we practice.

**As centers of hope and transformation, local churches help people live into a new way of life.**

**SUGGESTED LEADERS/PARTNERS:**

Stewardship and Christian Education ministries.

Elders/Deacons, practiced laity and clergy.

Persons trained in spiritual formation suggested by Association or Conference.

**IDEAS FOR LEADERS:**

(Resource Websites and links: [www.ucc.org/stewardship](http://www.ucc.org/stewardship) and [www.uccvitality.org](http://www.uccvitality.org) offer bibliographies and helps.)

- **Announce a sermon series**, “Stewards in the Household of God,” with monthly installments: January – “Remember the Sabbath,” etc. Consult *Inspiring Generosity* for scriptures and seasonal themes.
- **Early in January offer an after-church “Spiritual Practice Sampler.”** Begin with prayer and instructions. Have leaders for each practice stationed in different areas. Invite participants to sample three different practices and receive take-home guides. Sound a bell each 15-20 minutes as a signal to move to a new station. Finally, re-gather and close with a blessing.
- **Each week in January**, Sunday school classes or study groups may focus on a different spiritual practice or chapter in *Prayer, Stress, and Our Inner Wounds*.
- **Offer a small group experience** over several weeks using *Spiritual Deepening in Small Groups* or *Companions in Christ*.
- **Offer a retreat** for an in-depth experience.
- **Engage teens** with the “Prayer,” “Play,” “Time,” or “Music” chapters in *Way to Live*.
- **Engage children and youth** in *God’s Gifts, My Gifts*: “Seek God with Your Whole Heart.”
- **Late in January** explore interest in an ongoing participant-led group.

***“The true purpose of all spiritual disciplines is to clear away whatever may block our awareness of that which is God in us.”***

Howard Thurman