

Priscilla Shirer

*Breathe*  
making room for sabbath

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## DEDICATION

To Kay Arthur and Beth Moore,

For teaching me to say “No.”

For inspiring me to put first things first.

For showing me by your example the importance of margin and Sabbath.

For reminding me that doing everything is not the same as doing the best things.

Thank you. You have taught me that life is better when it has room to breathe.

I love you.

*Priscilla*



## PRISCILLA SHIRER

is a wife and mom first, but put a Bible in her hand and a message in her heart, and you'll see why thousands meet God in powerful, personal ways at her conferences.

With a master's degree in biblical studies from Dallas Theological Seminary, Priscilla brings the depths of Scripture to life. Her nine Bible studies span such topics as the exodus, hearing the voice of God, and biblical characters like Jonah and Gideon. She has also written seven books, including the New York Times bestseller *The Resolution for Women*.

Priscilla and her husband, Jerry, lead Going Beyond Ministries, through which they provide spiritual training, support, and resources to the body of Christ. They count it as their greatest privilege to serve every denomination and culture across the spectrum of the church.

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## NOTE FROM PRISCILLA

We moved out to the country in search of simplicity. Jerry and I packed up our three boys, trading a neighborhood of concrete driveways and busy roads, for a more rural setting.

Our much smaller house sits on a sleepy two-lane road. All around us are cattle-filled green pastures instead of brick-clad buildings. Deep creeks replace carefully chiseled sidewalks. Neighbors are friends who wave on their quarter-mile walk up the driveway to the mailbox and then cross the lawn to come over and share sweet tea.

So naturally, seeing all this, I just thought a less complicated life would find us here automatically. I thought it would invite us to sit down in a rocking chair on the front porch and sway the day away under the spell of a cool breeze. I imagined that it would strip us of the need to buy too much, accumulate too much, say too much, or do too much. I assumed that our penchant for excess and busyness would magically wash away just because we moved ten minutes out of the suburbs.

It didn't. Turns out, a geographical move wasn't a suitable replacement for a mental and spiritual one. So, my house in the country soon begged for relief from overcrowded closets and drawers, just like the one in the city, and our family calendar pleaded for freedom from the load of far too many activities, same as before. It all found us right here.

All. Of. It.

That's what busyness and clutter do. They find you. Stalk you in the wee hours of the night. Keep you awake and uneasy. They corner you and demand more time, money, and energy than you have to offer. They coerce you into making bargains you can't hold up on your end. Then they leave you in a heap of exhaustion.

Tired. Overwhelmed. Dilapidated.

But if peace and contentment can't be found by moving to a quieter part of town, and if they can't be obtained by getting better organized, then what's the secret? Where can we find it?

Thankfully, the remedy has always been tucked in the well-worn pages of the Word. So I opened my Bible and took a brand new peek at an age-old principle—the Sabbath. The solution for the chaos was right here all along. I could have found and incorporated it just as well in the old house as I could in this new one. No moving truck required.

Now the Sabbath principle isn't necessarily easy to apply. I suspect that we'll always be a little resistant to it. So, like any good girlfriend, I want to forewarn you: this study journal is going to be difficult. We're sisters, so I feel like I have to spill the beans right up front. As I've taught and written this message, it has made me uncomfortable more than once. I'm not joking. And most of the time, the conviction doesn't stay confined to my heart, mind, and soul, but fills me with a sense of physical urgency to do something about it. Immediately.

This practical topic can't help but challenge you right away. I taught on it for the first time at the Deeper Still event in 2012. All ten thousand of us squirmed in our seats. The video in this study comes from that event, and the book will help you put feet to the message.

I'm asking you to sign up for the long haul—to refuse to go on with life as usual. I mean literally ... sign up. You see that line under my signature? That's for your John Hancock. Sign your name once you've prayerfully agreed to go this distance with me. It's our commitment to each other to do serious business with God on this issue. Require yourself to answer the difficult questions, and make the life modifications that those answers dictate.

You can find room to breathe. We can do it together. It'll make wherever we live so much better. Ready? Let's go. Freedom waits on the other side of our obedience.



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YOUR SIGNATURE

WEEK 1

# THE FREEDOM OF THE SABBATH



## SABBATH SET UP

Harriet Tubman, the great emancipator of thousands of slaves in America, is quoted as saying “I freed thousands of slaves. I could have freed thousands more, if they had known they were slaves.”<sup>1</sup>

If. Only. They. Knew.

Whoa. My eyes widened as I read this statement and realized its implications: Slavery is often the outcome of ignorance or denial; freedom hinges on recognition and acceptance.

**BIG IDEA:** Recognition is the prerequisite of liberation.

I want to confess right here at the beginning of our study: I was a slave and didn’t know it. I was bound by things I never even thought of as possible taskmasters. They were good things God had given me full license to enjoy, yet they had begun to exert far too much control over my life. The very fact that my flesh cringed at the thought of curbing my desire to buy this or eat that, to spend time doing this and not that, should have been my first indicator that something was awry. My flesh was becoming enslaved to things it was meant to enjoy as blessings, not as bondage.

But I ignored the warnings and just carried on.

A captive unaware.

I have discovered, however—and am still discovering, after studying, reading, thinking, and praying about the Sabbath—that this one, beautiful biblical principle delivers freedom from a type of slavery I didn’t even realize existed in my life. In the past, I’d thought of the Sabbath as nothing more than a day—a once-a-week, first-century observance dripping with too many rules and regulations to count, much less to observe. I discounted its relevance for me. Sabbath was so Old Testament, old-fashioned, old-school.

Little did I know that pulling back the layers of this Bible theme would shine a bright spotlight onto something always meant to be so much more than a rigid rule to follow, even when it was first established in Israel for a people who'd known nothing but slavery. God always and eternally intended the Sabbath to be a lifestyle—an attitude, a perspective, an orientation for living that enables us to govern our lives and steer clear of bondage.

Especially the bondages we are least likely to recognize . . .

- to things—like the stuff we buy: shoes, clothes, accessories, home décor, electronics
- to people—the boyfriend, the best friend, the employer
- to hobbies—golfing, watching television, reading, social media
- to indulgences—food, caffeine, chocolate
- to work—our jobs, ministries, careers, volunteer efforts.

I could go on, but somehow I feel like you can probably fill in the blank yourself. In fact, before we even really get started, I think you should.

Below write any things, people, interests, or endeavors that might just hold too much control over you right now in this season of your life. To what or whom do you find it difficult to say “no”?



Each of the following are good things. Some of them are even needful. But, depending on our unique personalities and interests, any of them could begin to control us if they aren't kept in check. Look at the list and consider how much of a danger each poses in your life.



Rate each of the following things on a scale from 1 (low danger) to 10 (extreme danger). Use the extra space on this page to record any thoughts that come to your mind about your relationship with any of these.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| _____ shopping                                   | _____ marriage                              |
| _____ eating                                     | _____ children                              |
| _____ home decorating                            | _____ relaxing                              |
| _____ social media                               | _____ hobbies                               |
| _____ working                                    | _____ exercise                              |
| _____ ministry                                   | _____ my weight                             |
| _____ opinions of my<br>friends                  | _____ my appearance                         |
| _____ opinions of<br>people I don't<br>even like | _____ sleep                                 |
|  | _____ obsessing over<br>something I've lost |
|  | _____ other _____                           |

Together, you and I are going to find out how the Sabbath principle can keep these things from bossing us around, controlling our lives, and becoming masters over us. Sabbath margin is the boundary God intended for us to place around the things we enjoy so that we'll never be a slave to anyone or anything other than Him. He paid far too high a price for us to share our allegiance with any other. Jesus said,

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Freedom from slavery begins with knowing. So let's get to it, shall we?

# SESSION 1: VIEWER GUIDE

Are we so \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ that we can't even enjoy a break when it's thrust upon us?

We \_\_\_\_\_ the things we are \_\_\_\_\_ to.

Because anything we've been given to enjoy outside of the \_\_\_\_\_ in which it was designed to flourish will cause ...

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in our lives.

God's boundaries are \_\_\_\_\_.

In Deuteronomy 5:6-21, Moses reviews the 10 \_\_\_\_\_.

The Sabbath was a \_\_\_\_\_.

Word for Sabbath in Hebrew is \_\_\_\_\_, it means  
 to \_\_\_\_\_  
 to stop  
 to pause  
 to come to an end.

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## SESSION 1: GROUP QUESTIONS

- \* If you'd been interviewed for the newspaper article, how would you have responded to the reporter's question?
- \* Did any good gifts that have begun to have too much control over you come to mind while you were listening?
- \* How do you see evidence that these things or people have too much control in your life?
- \* How do you normally respond to the boundaries your friends establish in their lives? Do you support the boundaries or find yourself being frustrated with them?
- \* God gave the Sabbath to Israel as a gift for which they should have been grateful. In what ways does the thought of having margin and boundaries in your life feel like a gift from God? In what ways does it feel like bondage?

Video sessions available for purchase at [www.lifeway.com/breathe](http://www.lifeway.com/breathe)

## WEEK 1: AND HE RESTED ...

### THIS WEEK'S BIG IDEA:

The Sabbath principle is the key to freedom.

The word “Sabbath” first appears in Scripture during the exodus from Egypt. But that’s not the first time the concept is mentioned. Take note of Genesis 2.

“By the seventh day God completed His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done (Gen. 2:2).”

Obviously, God had the Sabbath in mind from the very beginning.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, a twentieth-century Jewish rabbi and author, wrote something I find profound about this Genesis 2 passage in his book *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. Read the following excerpt slowly, and pay close attention to the portions I’ve highlighted. Note the word *menuha* means *rest* in Hebrew.

“The words: ‘On the seventh day God finished His work’ (Genesis 2:2), seem to be a puzzle. . . . We would surely expect the Bible to tell us that on the sixth day God finished His work. Obviously, the ancient rabbis concluded, there was an act of creation on the seventh day. Just as heaven and earth were created in six days, *menulza* was created on the Sabbath. After six days of creation—what did the universe still lack? *Menuha*. Came the Sabbath, came *menuha*, and the universe was complete.”<sup>2</sup>

Before we continue with Rabbi Heschel’s statement, take a moment to re-read the highlighted portions of the quote. Take your time. I’ll wait.

Record your observations and insights about the highlighted portions of the quote.

Heschel continues:

“Menuha, which we usually render with “rest” means here much more than withdrawal from labor and exertion, more than freedom from toil, strain or activity of any kind. Menuha is not a negative concept but something real and intrinsically positive. This must have been the view of the ancient rabbis if they believed that it took a special act of creation to bring it into being, that the universe would be incomplete without it. ‘What was created on the seventh day? Tranquility, serenity, peace and repose.’”<sup>3</sup>

All right, I’ll wait for you to read the highlighted sections here again as well. Remember, S.L.O.W.L.Y. Drink it in.

Record your thoughts about the highlighted portions.

I’m so intrigued by this. The purpose of God’s Sabbath day was not to put up His proverbial feet, take a load off, and chill out after creating the universe in the previous days. Turns out, He wasn’t doing just nothing. Far from it. He was creating something.

Rest.

Rest was the capstone of creation and without it the universe would be incomplete.

Given the insights from what you've just read, how is the concept of rest more than simply stopping an activity? How is rest a positive, created thing rather than a negative cessation of activity?

Think of how you would teach this idea to a younger believer or one of your children. How might you help that person understand that rest is a real, tangible thing that is worth creating in our lives?

Heschel said that on the seventh day God created "tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose."

To give you an opportunity to think even more deeply about what God created here, choose one or more of those four terms, and search for their definitions online or in your dictionary. Record any interesting defining words below.

Recall and describe a time when you saw “tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose” created in your life as a result of placing Sabbath margin in each of the following:

\* work schedule:

\* family schedule:

\* hobbies:

\* appetites:

\* another area of your life:

Why do you think we tend to view Sabbath space and margin from a negative perspective (stopping something) instead of from God's positive perspective (creating something)?