**Sacred Rest 5 Day Reading Plan**

PLAN DESCRIPTION:

How can you keep your energy, happiness, creativity, and relationships fresh and thriving in the midst of never-ending family demands, career pressures, and the stress of everyday life? In this five-day Bible plan based on her book Sacred Rest, Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith gives the weary permission to embrace rest, set boundaries, and seek sanctuary without any guilt, shame, or fear.

PUBLISHER:

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**DAY 1**

**Devotional**

CONSUMING FIRE

There should be a “Get Out of Your Responsibilities” card you can play on those days when life is just too difficult, days when everything within you wants a moment simply to be still. That thought flittered through my mind as I lay stretched out on the foyer floor.

I never knew how hauntingly healing cold wooden planks could be for the body. I never realized the many facets of peace and rest available when you lay yourself down on purpose. Peace comes in many forms. On this day it came in a ten-minute reprieve in the middle of the chaos that had become my life. There was no time to break away and do it right. No time for any long, drawn-out me-time ritualistic activities. No mani-pedi. No hot tea and biscuits. No caramel macchiato. No Dead Sea salt–infused bath.

No, on this day, time would not allow me to bury my exhaustion in any of my normal vices. So, I did what any sane burned-out human would do after picking up the kids from daycare. I set them in front of the TV with a snack, and I lay on the floor. I stretched out my back against the boards, palms down, and closed my eyes. In that moment of focused ceasing, I felt the beginning of peace stir within my body.

Peace came slowly. It was as if God himself breathed a divine exhalation, releasing new strength into me. I inhaled it. I clung to the moment, needing it to last just a little longer. I needed even more to satisfy my longing for rest. Not a desire for more sleep, but a yearning to be soul-free. Come to think of it; maybe it wasn’t that I needed to be filled, but rather, I needed to pour out. Regardless of which direction the energy was flowing, something powerful was happening on that floor.

The voices of my children rang out with laughter as they delighted over the antics of the cartoon they watched. Inwardly I laughed along with them. The smile creeping on my lips was only mildly disturbed by the dog licking my face and the toddler crawling over my leg. It was sloppy peace, but it was mine. It was peace in the middle of a mental storm.

I could complain, but it would be futile. If I’m completely honest, I’m to blame for this storm. I created it. I fueled it. I continually recruit and pull others into it with me. I didn’t mean to do it. It is just a reality of the life I created.

You see, I’m a doer. If I’m not doing something, I’m wasting my time. At least that is what I thought, until a few years ago when I found myself looking up from a compromising position into the face of my smug husband asking, “What in the world are you doing on the floor?” Only one answer came to mind— burning.

The image that came to mind was that of kindling being consumed by fire. I was the kindling. I was burned out, and the life I had created was consuming all I held valuable. But on this day, I was kindling being consumed by an eternal fire. A fire with the power to destroy the heaviness of busyness and ignite a hunger to tap into the source of this strange, sloppy rest I found. Hunger to draw nearer to the sacred sanctuary of rest.

**Scripture**

Hebrews 12:28-29

Luke 3:16

Luke 24:32

**DAY 2**

**Devotional**

GIVE IT A REST

It’s no coincidence I named my youngest son Isaiah. It was in the book of Isaiah that I started hearing the heart of God on the topic of rest. The truth of this Scripture lay upon my shoulders like a cashmere shawl on a crisp fall day. Its warmth is far-reaching and satisfying. Its truth came at a time when I had no excuses left. I was at my lowest point, exhausted and extinguishing. In Isaiah 30: 12– 15, God is talking to the people about the many promises He has told them to expect in their lives. Great promises they have yet to see. The delays have made them skeptical of His faithfulness. The hard times have made them question His love. He explains to them it is not by His choice they have not seen the promises fulfilled; it is by their choices.

His reply as I interpreted it: “You hate this word I’m telling you. You would rather trust in a system that has been driving you into the ground and rely on that system more than you would like to rely on My way of doing things. That’s why you’re in the situation you’re in now. You mistrust truth, and that mistrust is a high wall you are afraid to traverse. But traverse it you must, because staying put will lead to a collapse, a breaking that will come suddenly. It will be like a vessel ruthlessly smashed to the ground, leaving in its wake unrecognizable fragments. All that will be left are the shards of the promise. Listen now to the solution. In returning and resting, you shall be saved, in quietness and trust shall be your strength. But you are unwilling. You are unwilling to do the simple. You resist doing what should come naturally. You would rather do that which is hard. You would rather struggle than rest. You would rather work under a sense of obligation than learn how to surrender to peace. You would rather fight for every blessing rather than trust goodness is following you. You would rather see it before you believe it. You are afraid of rest.”

He was right; I was afraid of rest. I had every right to be afraid of rest. Rest is a daunting proposition when you’ve worked for everything you have. Privilege did not come with my birth package. A better life came with a hefty cost, the most valuable of which was my soul. I no longer found this price acceptable in my life. It is not acceptable for your life either. It’s time to give it a rest. It’s time to stop with the excuses and the reasons we have to maintain the status quo. It’s time to lay aside the notion of endless work being the end to the means.

It’s time to stop trying to fulfill every promise by our blood, sweat, and tears. It’s time to go back to the beginning when rest was required, when rest was sacred. When quietness was not a weakness and trust was not something to fear. Where we saw them for what they truly are, needed ingredients in a life worth living. Return to rest, quietness, and trust as a deer returns to a stream. Return to the source of your strength, and in doing so, you will be saved.

**Scripture**

Isaiah 30:12-15

Psalm 42:1

Psalm 62:5

**DAY 3**

**Devotional**

SWEET SLEEP

Have you ever tried to fix your chronically tired self by purposely sleeping a few extra hours on the weekend, only to wake up feeling like you’ve never rested at all? You had great intentions, but missed one vital piece of the puzzle: Sleep is not rest. As different parts of an intricate system, sleep and rest are designed to work together to ensure every part of you has a way to regenerate and be restored.

If I were sitting across from you right now, our conversation might go something like the one I had with a friend many years ago.

“Why do you think sleep isn’t helping our fatigue? I’m more tired now than I was before we fell asleep.”

“I wish I knew. When I was in college, I could sleep like a baby. The second my head hit the pillow I’d be out. In medical school, I started having trouble falling asleep. At first, it took five to ten minutes before I could go to sleep. Now it can take up to an hour when I lie down at night.”

 “Wow, an hour. As tired as you are at the end of a shift, I would have thought you’d fall asleep quickly,” I mused.

 “I know, right? But that’s the thing; good sleep is gentle. It comes in quietly, descends upon you, and replenishes you. Bad sleep comes in like a flood, overtakes you, and leaves you feeling spent. It’s the good I’m missing.”

Sleep is a biological necessity. Trying to omit it will slow your productivity and eventually kill you. In an attempt to check this life function off our to-do list every night, many of us have settled for sleep at any cost and of any quality. Our problem isn’t simply a need for more sleep. Our problem is that we are missing the good. Sleep is different from rest, but good-quality sleep trickles down from a life well rested. We may sleep in response to rest, but resting doesn’t require us to be in a state of sleep. Sometimes as my friend confessed, sleep is not restful at all. Then there are also those times when even with a lack of sleep, we surprisingly feel rested and ready to tackle the day. The deciding factor is the difference between good sleep and bad sleep.

Nightly we attempt to enter into the five stages of sleep, non-REM stages one to four and stage- five REM. High-quality sleep begins in stage three of non-REM sleep when your brain ceases active processing. You lose your conscious awareness about your surroundings. Your brain and body both enter a quiet state. Bad sleep is fitful and devoid of calm. The mind may wander sporadically over the events of the day, and you may find your legs restlessly moving in response to the pent-up tension in your muscles.

There has to be a bridge between good and bad sleep, and that bridge is rest. Sleep is solely a physical activity. Rest, however, penetrates into the spiritual. Rest speaks peace into the daily storms your mind, body, and spirit encounter. Rest is what makes sleep sweet.

**Scripture**

Proverbs 3:24

Psalm 127:2

Jeremiah 31:25-26

**DAY 4**

**Devotional**

A SECOND CHANCE

The sacredness of rest remains even when we refuse to acknowledge it. The need to break away, for the body to have periods of peace, is rooted in our anatomy. We must have opportunities to heal. The mind must have a reprieve from thinking. The body needs rest from movement. Emotions need a release. The senses desire to be quieted. We need the social grace to find rest in another. Our soul yearns to soak in the created beauty around it, and our spirit calls for a relationship with the holy.

On the day she left the hospital, Cynthia left the staff a handwritten note. “Thank you. May I never forget the kindness you’ve shown, the love you’ve shared, or the care you’ve given. But most of all, may I never forget who I was when I was in your presence. You have made me better.” Cynthia’s words were for her medical team, but she echoed the heart’s cry of many.

Healing occurs when we allow ourselves the time, space, and grace to be in the presence of God in the middle of our busy lives. What Cynthia was most thankful for wasn’t anything that had to be done in a hospital. The hospital just happened to be the place where her life was revived. It was the place she found life-changing direction. In the middle of the messiness, in the middle of the trauma, in the middle of the pain, she found herself. The nurse who showed me the note had tears in her eyes. Cynthia was never alone on her journey; none of us are. We are all connected by our collective humanity. Sometimes the hard places have to be broken before we are willing to let others in.

Peace, understanding, and revelation came into that place for Cynthia. The place where our fear of being broken beyond repair meets our fear of staying the same. The place where things are hard and life gets difficult. Healing and wholeness require access into our lives, and room to make us better. That is what rest does. Rest causes you to be still and seek to know God. It calls for you to look deeper at yourself and your surroundings. It forces you to stop.

We often view life as if looking through the window of a speeding car. Rest, rather, implores you to slow down and fully live. It challenges you to shift from having the scenery fly by in a blur to inhaling the scent of pine on the scenic route of your life. To take it all in and experience it. Rest is not simply pushing the pause button on your day. Rest is not merely taking a break. Rest is about replenishing, restoring, renewing, recovering, rebuilding, regenerating, remolding, and repairing. Rest begins with the prefix re- because it requires us to go back to a prior state. It is a second chance. It’s an opportunity to put back in order anything that has shifted out of alignment with God’s best.

**Scripture**

Exodus 33:14

Psalm 16:8-9

Psalm 46:10

**DAY 5**

**Devotional**

REDEFINE REST

My research and observations on rest revealed a gaping hole in our definition of rest. Rest had become synonymous with sleep or a cessation of all activity. But what if rest is in itself a vital activity required to tend to the garden of our lives? What if rest is the water that replenishes the dryness? What if rest is fertilizer awakening us to growth and greatness? What if rest is the hands of the gardener pulling up the weeds threatening to edge out beauty?

All rest is not created equal. Much of what we consider rest fails to work because it is not restful. Shifting our activities or changing the location of where we are active is no more restful than doing those same activities at home. The most effective rest occurs when we are purposefully reviving the parts of our life we regularly deplete. Any so-called rest that does not meet this goal isn’t rest; it’s just more work adding to the busyness.

When I first realized there were different types of rest, I was captivated by the revelation. How can rest be complicated? Isn’t resting supposed to be simple? So if it’s so simple, why do so many of us have such a hard time doing it? And when we do it, why do we still not feel rested? These were the questions that led me on a quest to dig deeper, to uncover the hidden secrets of the well rested and to recline there in that knowledge until I too found room to breathe.

Just in reading this devotional, you have used physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, sensory, and creative energy. Each is drawing from a different energy pool. Each needs to be restored in preparation for the next time it will be called upon. Your body needs physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, sensory, and creative rest. Omit any one of these, and you will feel the consequences of the resulting rest deficit.

So what kind of tired are you?

If you awake full of energy every morning and are dragging by the afternoon, you may be missing adequate physical rest to sustain your day. If you get out of bed tired in the morning and then become energized as the day progresses, you may be experiencing creative restlessness. And if you experience an overall lack of meaning and fulfillment, a spiritual or emotional rest deficit may be to blame. Understanding which type of rest you are deficient in is critical to correcting this imbalance.

 If your job is mentally draining but physically undemanding, physical rest will fail to leave you feeling rested. Mental rest is what’s required to bring your mental reservoir back to a healthy level. If you spend most of your day staring at a bright computer screen or hearing constant noise, your body will need sensory rest to feel renewed. If your circumstances cause you to struggle with faith and the meaning of life, your soul will desire spiritual rest to return to a place of peaceful contentment. For every depleting activity in your day, there is a counter reviving activity to balance the scales.

Take a moment identify your rest deficits. Complete the free personal rest deficit assessment you’ll find [here](http://www.restquiz.com). It’s important you take an introspective look at your current state. Doing so will allow you to see immediately which types of rest you need to focus on getting and which types you already excel at obtaining. [LINK: <http://www.RestQuiz.com>]

Did you enjoy this reading plan? If so, *c*lick [here](http://ichoosemybestlife.com/sacred-rest/) to learn more about the book *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*by Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith [LINK: <http://ichoosemybestlife.com/sacred-rest/>]

**Scripture**

Matthew 11:28-29

Psalm 3:3-5

Exodus 20:8