

Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 2:2, 3; Deut. 5:12–15; Isa. 58:12–14; Ezek. 20:12; Heb. 4:9–11.*

Memory Text: “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NIV*).

If there is anything in the Christian faith relevant for people living at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is the Sabbath. It is the medicine badly needed by millions in societies plagued by stress, heart problems, and burnout. It offers escape from the never-ending pressures of modern life. It provides a possibility to recharge our empty batteries and to refocus on the real priorities in life. The Sabbath tells us that there is a time to close the door of our home and our mind to the clutter and noise of the world and to come into the presence of the One who made us and who knows what we need.

“If there is any command hurried and hassled modern people need, it is the Sabbath. We are so busy trying to create meaning in our own life and serving ourselves that we forget that God is the only One who can give meaning to our lives. We show our ‘resting’ in Him by resting on His day.”—Jon L. Dybdahl, *Exodus*, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 186.

The Week at a Glance: Why is the Sabbath so important for us? Why did God institute the Sabbath? What is holy time? Who or what makes the Sabbath holy? How can we make Sabbath keeping a delightful and meaningful experience?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 23.

God's Gift for Busy People

Two basic institutions for all humankind date from the first week of earth's history: marriage and the Sabbath. They are an intrinsic part of the divine program for human happiness. No wonder that both have, through the ages, been so much under attack from the evil one. God knew what humanity would need, and He therefore created time with a perfect cycle of six "normal" days plus one extraordinary day, the Sabbath. And ever since, those who have respected this divinely instituted rhythm have been blessed by it.

Why did God Himself rest on the seventh day after the creation of the world? *Gen. 2:2, 3.*

With what term does the prophet Ezekiel refer to the Sabbath? What do you think that means? *Ezek. 20:12.*

"After resting upon the seventh day, God sanctified it, or set it apart, as a day of rest for man. Following the example of the Creator, man was to rest upon this sacred day, that as he should look upon the heavens and the earth, he might reflect upon God's great work of creation; and that as he should behold the evidences of God's wisdom and goodness, his heart might be filled with love and reverence for his Maker.

"God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God and meditate upon His power and goodness. He needed a Sabbath to remind him more vividly of God and to awaken gratitude because all that he enjoyed and possessed came from the beneficent hand of the Creator."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 47, 48.

What is your experience with the Sabbath? Do you enjoy it? Do you come to a deeper appreciation of God through contemplating the marvels of His creation? If not, what changes could you make that could help you have a more fulfilling Sabbath experience?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Mark 2:27, 28*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: The Sabbath allows us to separate ourselves from the world in order to rest and commune with God.

Feel: The joy provided for us through the Sabbath.

Do: Experience the Sabbath as God intended.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Remembering the Sabbath (*Lev. 23:3*)

A We live in a hectic world. It is a blessing to have a day to rest! How do you spend your Sabbaths? What elements of the day contribute to rest and refreshment? What is your idea of the ideal Sabbath?

B The Ten Commandments tell us to keep the Sabbath holy. Define *holy*.

II. Enjoying the Sabbath (*Mark 2:27*)

A The Sabbath is a day dedicated to rejoice in our Creator and take a break from the normal rhythms of the world. Why is it then easier to make the Sabbath a day of rules rather than communion with Jesus?

B It is very easy for Sabbath observance to become legalistic, with constant questioning of the appropriateness of a particular activity. How can we distinguish what is Sabbath-appropriate?

III. Sharing the Sabbath (*Luke 4:16*)

A To experience the Sabbath as God intended, we must look to His Son as an example. What did Jesus do on the Sabbath?

B How can we apply His observance of the Sabbath to our lives?

▶ **Summary:** The Sabbath is a holy day set apart from the rest of the week. It is our time to rest and commune with God.

Holy Time

The word *holy* occurs in the Bible in different settings. People are sometimes referred to as holy; so are objects or time periods. The core meaning is “to set aside for a specific use.” Priests were *holy* people because they were singled out for service in the sanctuary. They handled *holy* vessels and instruments, which were withdrawn from secular use for a specific ritual purpose. Similarly, *holy* days are marked by God for a specific purpose. Once they have been singled out as *holy*, they are no longer available for common use, because they have been destined for a higher purpose. The activities on such *holy* days must correspond with the purpose God has attached to such days.

We must “remember” to keep the Sabbath holy. Do we or does God make the day holy? What difference does that make? *Gen. 2:3, Isa. 58:13.*

“The [S]abbath is a powerful testimony to the sovereignty of God. Only he can create, and only he can make something holy. This is why Adventists object so strongly to the change from [S]abbath to Sunday as the Christian day of rest and worship. Without a clear divine mandate, such a development is nothing less than an affront to God.” —Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997), p. 403.

How does the weekly holy seventh-day Sabbath impact those who choose to obey the command to keep the Sabbath according to God’s appointed day of holy time? *Exod. 31:12, 13.*

Keeping the Sabbath combines internal with external aspects. When our Sabbath keeping is only a matter of external behavior, following a list of rules, we have missed its true meaning. But, at the same time, our Sabbath keeping is visible to others. It tells other people that we are separate and different. It is a sign of our loyalty to our Creator and Redeemer.

God wants His people to be “holy”; that is, He wants people who have consciously separated themselves from the things of this world. How should keeping the Sabbath help you in a concrete way to be “separate” from the world? How should the reality of the approaching Sabbath each week serve as a reminder to you when facing temptations during the week, that we are supposed to be a holy people, a people separate from the defiling things of the world?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Sabbath is a time for resting in Jesus apart from the everyday cares of the world.

Just for Teachers: If you can, bring in symbols, logos, or pictures of images or signs to stimulate discussion regarding what these items symbolize. What is the power of symbols? How do they manage to mean something without using any words to get their message across?

No competent sailor of the Spanish Main (today's Caribbean Sea) failed to know what the white grinning skull and crossbones on a black flag meant: pirates. The sight of that flag on an approaching ship needed no words to explain what most likely would follow if the ship pursued could not escape in time, and that was plunder and mayhem. And a deadly fight for the ship's cargo of sugar, emeralds, or rum—with the ship itself as the ultimate prize. And when the smoke of gunpowder cleared from the decks, those unlucky enough to still be alive would be given the dubious honor of either joining with the pirates or being eaten by the sharks. All these thoughts flooded the minds of the crew of a merchant ship as the maniacally grinning flag known as the Jolly Roger approached. That was the power of the symbol, without the pirate captain ever needing to speak a word of challenge.

Symbols don't need to be terrifying to be powerful. For Sabbath keeping Christians, the Sabbath is also a powerful sign or symbol, but unlike the Jolly Roger, it is one of peace and rest. Keeping the Sabbath is a sign to the world that we are created by God, redeemed by Him, and that He has the ability to make us holy, now and forever.

Consider This: Before attacking another ship, pirates hoisted, or raised, the Jolly Roger up their ship's mast in order to strike fear in the hearts of the other ship's crew. The Sabbath, in a way, is also like a flag, but one with a vastly different effect. How is it a visible sign of our allegiance to God? In what ways can we as Sabbath keepers "hoist" the Sabbath so that all may see our intentions to honor our Creator? What can the way the pirate flag was used tell us about the power of symbols to affect others? In what way can the Sabbath be observed to influence others positively? How can our lives be living symbols of the Sabbath?

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Experiencing the Joy of the Sabbath

When we talk about the Sabbath commandment, we usually refer to the version we find in Exodus 20. There the commandment is anchored in the Creation of the world. Every Sabbath we are reminded that God is our Creator and that we are His creatures, with all that this glorious truth implies. But in the version of the Ten Commandments in the book of Deuteronomy we discover an additional aspect. The weekly Sabbath is also a commemoration of Israel's delivery from Egyptian bondage and thus, by extension, of every kind of slavery from which God's grace has set humanity free.

Read Deuteronomy 5:12–15 carefully and compare it with Exodus 20:8–11. What do they add to each other? How do they complement each other? Are there possibly still other things we ought to “remember” in our Sabbath keeping? If so, what might they be?

The Sabbath is a sign not only of creation but of redemption. It points us to the salvation we have in Jesus, who not only re-creates us now (*2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15*) but offers the hope of an eternity in a new heaven and a new earth (*2 Pet. 3:13*). In fact, the Jews have seen the Sabbath as a symbol of the “world to come”; that is, the new heaven and the new earth. It's a weekly foretaste of what we will have for eternity and should serve as a special reminder of what we have been given in Jesus.

On a more practical level, the Sabbath helps to free us from the slavery of the clock and the calendar. Many are slaves of computers and mobile phones also. For many people it has become incredibly difficult to separate work time from leisure time. It seems that modern life requires that we can always be reached and always must be ready to switch into our work mode. The Sabbath is the perfect antidote to this disease, which threatens every form of true rest, both physical and spiritual.

“Setting aside a holy Sabbath means that we can cease our productivity and accomplishments for one day in every seven. The exciting thing about such a practice is that it changes our attitudes for the rest of the week. It frees us up to worry less about how much we produce on the other days. Furthermore, when we end that futile chasing after wind, we can truly rest and learn delight in new ways.”—Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 19.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Review the first question in Sunday’s study with the class. Class members should come to the conclusion that God rested on the seventh day to celebrate His created works.

Bible Commentary

I. Whose You Are *(Read Genesis 2:2, 3 with your class.)*

The Sabbath is intrinsically linked to God as Creator. As this text shows, the Sabbath was instituted right after God had completed His work of Creation, when He came aside to celebrate that work. “The observance of the Sabbath is then a mark, or sign, that he who honors the day acknowledges Jehovah as his God, for only to Him do these facts of creation apply.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 646. The Sabbath then is also a safeguard against all other false theories of our existence. Why is that so important today, especially at a time when evolution popularly is taught?

Consider This: Discuss the connection between the Sabbath and our Creator God. How does the Sabbath serve to safeguard us against false ideas about our origins?

II. Free Indeed *(Review with your class Deuteronomy 5:12–15, noting especially verse 15. Also look at Exodus 31:12, 13 and Ezekiel 20:12.)*

Just for Teachers: Emphasize for your class members that the primary theme in the texts is that God makes us holy.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, we see that the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt is tied in with Sabbath keeping. Likewise, as we keep the Sabbath week after week, we are reminded of God’s power to deliver us from sin and make us holy. “The Sabbath thus becomes for the Christian a memorial not only of creation but of the re-creation of the image of God in his own heart and mind. . . . The Sabbath is thus a ‘sign’ of redemption as well as creation.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 972.

Consider This: What is the Sabbath meant to remind us of? Discuss the ways in which the Sabbath acts as a memorial.

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Modeling Sabbath Rest to the World

Read Isaiah 58:12–14. What principles can we take away from these verses about Sabbath keeping that help us better experience the blessings God has for us if we remember the Sabbath properly?

It is an extremely unfortunate reality: Many Adventists do not truly enjoy God’s Sabbath. Some remember with utter frustration the ways in which the Sabbath was kept in their parental home. Even in Adventist institutions, Sabbath keeping can leave much to be desired. Rules and regulations are supposed to ensure that the Sabbath is kept “holy.” Some of these rules are based on biblical principles, but many have, in actual fact, more to do with tradition and culture than with a “Thus says the Lord.”

The Sabbath never must be a day mainly associated with prohibitions and restrictions. If we are looking for a model to follow, we must let ourselves be inspired by the example of Jesus.

Look carefully at the following passages and discover how Jesus, our ultimate Example, kept the seventh-day Sabbath holy. *Mark 2:23–3:6, Luke 4:16, 6:1–11.*

“Heaven’s work never ceases, and men should never rest from doing good. The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds. The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honored the Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

Try to imagine what the “perfect” Sabbath would be like. How would you keep it? What would be available to you that you could not have during the workweek? Bring your description to class on Sabbath.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**III. To Rest or Not to Rest** (*Review Isaiah 58:12–14 with your class.*)

In following God’s example and His injunction to keep the Sabbath, we also rest or cease from our labors. However, the Sabbath is about more than a list of dos and don’ts. To rest in Jesus means to be in active communion with Him.

“God requires not only that we refrain from physical labor upon the Sabbath, but that the mind be disciplined to dwell upon sacred themes. The fourth commandment is virtually transgressed by conversing upon worldly things or by engaging in light and trifling conversation.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 703.

If we truly keep the Sabbath in the way that God intended, we will be blessed in all areas of our lives—physically, mentally, socially, and financially. We truly will ride on the high places of the earth and be uplifted more than we ever can imagine.

Consider This: How should the Sabbath be kept holy? Why is abstaining from work not enough? What does true rest mean?

►STEP 3—Practice

Just for Teachers: Ask for a volunteer to read the parable aloud to the class. Then answer the questions that follow.

Parable:

Suzie’s cell phone vibrated with a text message from Ted: “CAN’T WAIT TO SEE YOU SUNDAY AT 1.” Ted was at another university, but on Sundays he would drive the 50 miles so that they could spend two or three hours together.

Suzie woke up very late on Sunday. She had stayed up late the night before, studying for an exam. When Ted knocked on the door, Suzie gave him a hurried hello and asked if he wouldn’t mind waiting while she finished her laundry. A half hour later, they rushed out the door.

At the diner, Suzie ran into a friend from high school whom she hadn’t seen in years. They did a lot of catching up. Ted looked bored, but Suzie thought, *I still have some time left to spend with him. Besides, I can make it up next Sunday.* The friend barely had left when Suzie’s cell phone rang. It was Sarah, telling her that today was the last day for the sale on those fabulous black patent leather pumps they had been wanting. Reluctantly, Ted went with Suzie to the mall. But by the time they were done shopping, it was time for Ted to head back.

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The Sign of Rest

As Sabbath keepers we often are accused of trying to work our way to heaven by keeping the Sabbath. We hear that all the time. How should we respond?

Read again the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20. What does it tell us to do? It tells us, as well as our sons, our daughters, our servants, our animals, and even the strangers among us to rest. It's all about rest.

Now, a simple question: How is it that the one commandment devoted to rest, the one commandment that specifically expresses rest, the one commandment that gives us a special opportunity to rest—how has this been turned into the universal “New Covenant” symbol of works? The only commandment that, by its nature, is all about rest has become, for many, the metaphor for salvation by works.

What's wrong with this picture?

Indeed, far from being a symbol of works, the Sabbath is the Bible's eternal symbol of the rest that God's people have always had in Him.

Read Hebrews 4:9–11. What is the message to us here about the Sabbath?

From the pre-Fall world of Adam and Eve's Eden to the New Covenant rest that God's followers have in Christ's work of redemption for them, the Sabbath is a real-time manifestation of the rest that Christ offers to all. In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus calls us to rest in Him. He will give us rest, and that rest finds one expression in His universal Sabbath day. Anyone can say that they are resting in Christ: anyone can say that they are saved by grace. But the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is a visible expression of that rest, a living parable of what it means to be covered by His grace. Our weekly rest from our secular, worldly works stands as a symbol of our rest in the completed work of Jesus for us.

Our obedience to this commandment is a way of saying, “We're so sure of our salvation in Jesus, we're so firm and secure in what Christ has done for us, that we can—in a special way—rest from any of our works because we know what Christ has accomplished for humanity through His death and resurrection.”

Sabbath is a very real, very expressive, very visible expression and manifestation of the rest that we have in Jesus and what He has done for us. We don't have to say it; we can express it in a real way, a way that those who don't keep the Sabbath can't.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Where did all the time go? Suzie wondered, as Ted drove away. *Oh well,* she promised herself, *I can make it up to him next week. . . .*

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How is keeping the Sabbath similar to a relationship?
- 2 How do you think Ted felt after that date? How do you want God to feel after each Sabbath with you? What can you do to improve the time you spend with God?
- 3 Why do you suppose that Suzie acted the way she did? How are we often similar to Suzie in the way we treat God?
- 4 Each Sabbath carries a reminder that the great God of the universe wants to spend time with us personally. What can we do to make our time undivided and purposeful?

► **STEP 4—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Help your class to understand that the best way to enjoy the Sabbath is to prepare for it.

Friday is the preparation day for the Sabbath, but if we begin preparing ourselves, physically and spiritually, from Sunday, we will be able to enjoy more fully the blessings of the Sabbath and be a blessing to others, as well.

Try This:

- 1 Make a list of all the things that you need to do to be ready for Sabbath. Now do something from that list starting on Sunday and ending on Friday.
- 2 Prepare a special dish on Friday to be enjoyed at the beginning of the Sabbath.
- 3 Have a Friday night vespers or a Sabbath afternoon sing-along. Learn some songs that celebrate the meaning of the Sabbath.
- 4 Draw a picture or do a painting of what Sabbath means to you. Hang it in a place where all who enter your home will be blessed by it.

Further Study: Read the comments made by Ellen G. White on the giving of the Ten Commandment law in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 303–310, and on the story about Jesus’ Sabbath keeping together with His disciples in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281–289.

A rich source for additional information is, Walter F. Specht, “The Sabbath in the New Testament,” in Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1982), pp. 92–113.

Note in particular this passage: “In Mark’s account (chap. 2:27), Jesus then raised the issue of the purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not an end in itself. . . . It was designed to be a blessing to man, a day of physical rest, but also a day devoted to spiritual exercises. The Pharisees treated the day as though man were created to serve the Sabbath, rather than the Sabbath meeting the needs of man. R. Shim‘on ben Menasya about A.D. 180 made a similar statement [to the statement made by Jesus]: ‘The Sabbath is given over to you but you are not surrendered to the Sabbath.’”—Page 96.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, compare your descriptions of what a “perfect” Sabbath would be like. What can you do to come as close as possible to that ideal?
- 2 Earlier in the week it was suggested that some of the rules and restrictions we apply to the Sabbath are rooted more in tradition than in the Word of God. As a class, discuss what these human-made rules might be, as opposed to what the Bible says. How can we know the difference?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea expressed in Thursday’s lesson. How can we better show the world that the special rest that we enjoy in Jesus through the Sabbath reveals the reality of Christ’s grace in our lives? What things might we have done that give others the wrong impression?

Summary: The Sabbath is God’s gift to humanity. It is the perfect antidote for today’s restlessness and stress. It is a very specific weekly amount of time that God has made “holy” for us. The day can, if approached with the right attitude, be a source of physical and spiritual rest and a time of great joy. The ultimate Example of true Sabbath keeping is Jesus, who referred very significantly to Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath.