

Sabbath Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26, 27; Gen. 9:6; 2 Pet. 2:19; Rom. 6:1–7; Exod. 19:6; John 5:7–16.*

Memory Text: “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings” (*Lev. 23:3, NKJV*).

We hear all sorts of arguments against keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, don't we? We hear that Jesus changed the Sabbath to Sunday or that Jesus abolished the Sabbath or that Paul did or that the apostles replaced the seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday in honor of the Resurrection and so forth. In recent years, some of the arguments have become more sophisticated, claiming, for instance, that Jesus is our Sabbath rest, and therefore we don't need to keep that day or any day holy. And, of course, there will always be the argument, strange as it is, that by resting on the seventh day we are somehow seeking to work our way to heaven.

On the other hand, some Christians have become more interested in the idea of rest, of a day of rest, and though they argue that the day is Sunday or that it doesn't matter, they have picked up on the biblical notion of rest and why it is important.

Of course, as Seventh-day Adventists we understand the perpetuity of God's moral law and that obedience to the fourth commandment, as it reads, is no more working our way to heaven than would be obedience to the fifth, sixth, first, or any other commandment.

This week we will look more at the rest God has given us in the Sabbath commandment and why it's important.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 4.

Sabbath and Creation

Of all the Ten Commandments, only the fourth begins with the verb “remember.” It’s not “Remember, you shall not steal,” or “Remember, you shall not covet.” There is only “Remember the Sabbath day . . .”

The idea of “remembering” presupposes history, presupposes that something happened in the past that we need to, well, remember. When we remember, we make connections with the past, and “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” marks a straight line back to the Creation week itself.

Read Genesis 1:26, 27 and Genesis 9:6. What do these verses teach us about how special we as human beings are—and how radically different we are from the rest of God’s earthly creation? And, too, why is it so important that we understand this distinction?

When we remember Creation, we remember that we are created in God’s image, something that is not said about anything else depicted in the Creation account. It’s obvious that, as human beings, we are radically different from any other creature on the planet, regardless of how much DNA we share in common with some other animals. And, contrary to popular mythology, we are not mere advanced apes or more highly evolved versions of some primeval primate. As humans, made in the image of God, we are unique among all that God created on this world.

How does the Creation story remind us of our relationship to creation? Genesis 2:15, 19.

Realizing that God also created our world reminds us of our responsibility to creation. We are to “have dominion” over creation. Having dominion does not mean exploiting it. We are to rule as God’s regents. We are to interact with the natural world as God would.

Yes, sin has marred and messed up everything, but this earth is still God’s creation, and nothing gives us the right to exploit it, especially to the detriment of other human beings, which is so often the case.

Besides honoring a memorial of God as the Creator, in what ways can Sabbath keeping help us to be more conscious of our need to be good environmental stewards?

Celebrating Freedom

As we saw earlier, the Sabbath points to more than just the days of Creation. The second time we hear the Ten Commandments, Moses was reviewing Israel's 40 years in the wilderness. This time, the sentence introducing the reason for keeping the Sabbath holy is not about Creation but, rather, about liberation from slavery and bondage in Egypt (*Deut. 5:12–15*).

And though, today, we are not slaves in Egypt, we can all face another kind of slavery, one that, in some ways, can be just as oppressive.

What other forms of slavery do we face today? Read Genesis 4:7, Hebrews 12:1, and 2 Peter 2:19.

Sabbath is a celebration of freedom from all the things that keep us in bondage. On Sabbath, we are reminded that there is freedom from sin, not in our own power but in the power of God, which is offered to us by faith. We also are reminded that this is a freedom we did not earn. The firstborn Israelite children were saved by the blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts the evening before their exodus from Egypt (*Exodus 12*). We, too, have been saved by the blood of the Lamb, and are now to walk in the freedom that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Read Romans 6:1–7. What is Paul saying here that can be linked to what we have been given in the Sabbath?

In the very wording of Deuteronomy 5:15—“And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm” (*NKJV*)—the people were reminded, again, that it was the work and power of God in their behalf that saved them. How much more should we, as Christians, realize that it's only the work and power of Christ in our behalf that has saved us from sin?

This command tells us to rest in the salvation that God has earned for us by His mighty arm. We are set free from our own attempts at righteousness as we remember that God is Creator and that we can trust Him to re-create us, too, and to free us, even right now, from the bondage of sin if we are willing to let Him work in us.

What has been your own experience with the slavery of sin? How can we learn to appropriate for ourselves the promises that we have been given in Jesus of freedom from that slavery?

The Stranger in Your Gates

Read Exodus 19:6. What does this text tell us about the status of ancient Israel? (See also 1 Pet. 2:9.)

Israel had been called out of Egypt to be God's covenant people, the nation through whom, had they stayed faithful, the gospel would have been spread to the world. No question, they were the object of God's special care and concern; given special privileges; and, at the same time, given special responsibilities.

Read Exodus 23:12. What else is going on here? What does this text teach us about how God viewed others besides the Israelites themselves?

The universality of the Sabbath is something that many people miss. Of course, the most common error is that it was only for the Jews, an error exposed in the first two chapters of Genesis. After all, God created all people; so, all people should remember the Sabbath day.

Though we should always keep in mind what the Sabbath represents to us, we should remember, too, what it should tell us about others, as well. In a sense, our resting and relating to our Creator and Redeemer will drive us automatically to look at others with new eyes, to see them as beings created by the same God as we were, loved by the same God who loves us and who died for them as well as for us. As we have seen (*Exod. 20:10, Deut. 5:14*), the servants, the strangers, and even the animals should be given a Sabbath rest.

That even the strangers within their gates; that is, even those not (yet) partaking of the covenantal promises given to Israel—that even they should enjoy the Sabbath rest says a lot. Human beings, even animals, should never be exploited, abused, or taken advantage of. Every week, the Hebrew people—and we, too—should be reminded in a powerful way of just how much in common we have with other people; and even if we do enjoy blessings and privileges that others don't, we must remember that we are still part of the same human family, and thus, we are to treat others with respect and dignity.

How could your own Sabbath keeping, perhaps, become a blessing to those who don't keep the Sabbath? That is, how can you use the Sabbath as a witness to others?

Serving Others Honors God’s Sabbath

In the New Testament world, the religious leaders had Sabbath keeping down to a fine art. There were dozens of prohibitions and rules established to help keep the Sabbath holy.

This included a prohibition against tying or untying anything, separating two threads, extinguishing a fire, transporting an object between a private domain and the public domain, or transporting something for more than a specific distance in the public domain.

What charge was brought against Jesus in John 5:7–16?

Completely ignoring the wonderful miracle that Jesus had performed and the freedom from disease that He had given this man, the leaders were obsessed that the healed man was carrying his bed in public on Sabbath. Instead of seeing how the “‘Lord of the Sabbath’” (*Mark 2:28, NKJV*) utilized this special day, the leaders were intent on maintaining their own rules and regulations. We need to be careful that in our own way and in our own context we don’t make similar mistakes.

How does Isaiah 58:12–14 outline God’s agenda for Sabbath keeping?

God does not want empty worship or pious silence. He wants to see His people engaged with other people, especially the downtrodden and marginalized.

Isaiah makes this very plain in Isaiah 58:13, 14: “‘If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken’” (*Isa. 58:13, 14, NKJV*).

Pursuing our “pleasure” (*Isa. 58:13, NKJV*, or our “own interests,” as the *NRSV* translates here) is equivalent to “trampling the Sabbath” (*NRSV*). Human agendas are not part of God’s Sabbath ideal. Rather, we are invited to look out for those who struggle, who are captives, who are hungry and naked and walk in darkness, and whose names no one seems to remember. More than any other day of the week, Sabbath should take us out of ourselves and our own selfishness and cause us to think more about others and others’ needs than about ourselves and our needs.

The Sign That We Belong to God

During World War II, England was expecting an imminent invasion by the German army. Preparations were made to defend the island home as much as possible. Extra fortifications were installed along the beaches. Roads, of course, would offer the enemy the fastest routes to their objectives, and consequently, blockades were installed at strategic points. English authorities then did something strange. In order to slow down and confuse the enemy, railway signs were removed and road signs were taken down. Engraved markers on stone or on buildings couldn't be taken down, but they were covered with cement.

Signs are significant. They serve as markers and guides. In the pre-GPS era, we all had maps and watched for signs.

What is the Sabbath a sign of? Read Exodus 31:13, 16, 17. In what ways can we apply what is said here to ourselves, today, people who believe in the perpetuity of God's law?

Though these words were spoken specifically for ancient Israel, we who are Christ's are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (*Gal. 3:29*), and the Sabbath today remains a sign between God and His people. Exodus 31 points out that the Sabbath is a sign of God's perpetual (or eternal) covenant (*Exod. 31:16, 17*). This sign helps us to "know" our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier. It's like a flag that gets raised every seven days and functions as something to help us remember, since we tend to forget.

God's Sabbath is a constant reminder of our origins, our liberation, our destiny, and our responsibility to the outcasts and the marginalized. In fact, the Sabbath is so important that instead of our coming to it, it comes to us, every week and without exception, a perpetual reminder of who we are, who made us, what He is doing for us, and what He will ultimately do for us when He makes new heavens and a new earth.

A holy God invites His human covenant partners to consider the rhythm that governs what really counts—the saving relationship between the Creator and Redeemer and His wayward creation. Every week, and with the force and authority that comes from God, we are commanded to enter into the rest that we have been freely given in Christ Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross" (*Heb. 12:2, NKJV*).

How can you learn to have a deeper experience with God during the Sabbath?

Further Thought: “All through the week we are to have the Sabbath in mind and be making preparation to keep it according to the commandment. We are not merely to observe the Sabbath as a legal matter.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 353.

“All heaven is keeping the Sabbath, but not in a listless, do-nothing way. On this day every energy of the soul should be awake, for are we not to meet with God and with Christ our Saviour? We may behold Him by faith. He is longing to refresh and bless every soul.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 362.

“The demands upon God are even greater upon the Sabbath than upon other days. His people then leave their usual employment, and spend the time in meditation and worship. They ask more favors of Him on the Sabbath than upon other days. They demand His special attention. They crave His choicest blessings. God does not wait for the Sabbath to pass before He grants these requests. 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.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Environmental care has become a highly charged political debate in many countries. How can we as Adventists be good stewards of nature without taking on political agendas?
- 2 Service begins in the mind. How can we foster the mindset of serving those around us (in our families, churches, and communities) more passionately? How does the Sabbath offer us more opportunity to be able to do just that?
- 3 Every Sabbath we are reminded that all humanity was created by God. It helps us see people through God’s eyes. How should the Sabbath help us remember that racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender differences are irrelevant when it comes to being made in God’s image and being the objects of His love?

Angel at the Gas Station

By TERRI SAELEE

Lamphai Sihavong stared in bewilderment at the confusing maze of highways around and above her in the U.S. city of Chicago. She had no idea how to find her husband. She looked at the four children seated in the car and wondered what to do next.

The couple had arrived in the United States as refugees from the Southeast Asian country of Laos, and they were driving with their six children across the country to find work. Leaving Sacramento, California, the family first traveled 1,400 miles to Grand Island, Nebraska, where they had heard about work at a factory. But when they arrived, they learned the jobs were filled. Then they heard about a possible job in Holland, Michigan, another 750 miles away. The family started out on the 12-hour journey to Michigan. Lamphai's husband led the way, driving the moving truck with two children and all their belongings. She followed with the other four children in the car.

All went well until Chicago. Lamphai tried to follow her husband closely, but she got stuck in heavy traffic and lost sight of his truck. Overwhelmed by the maze of roads, she stopped at a gas station. Neither she nor her husband had cell phones. She had no way to contact him, and she had no idea how to find their destination. Her only hope was God. She was glad that missionaries had visited their refugee camp in Thailand to tell them about God. Together, she and the four children prayed earnestly to God for help.

As they opened their eyes, they saw a pleasant-looking man walking toward them.

"Let me guess," he said. "Are you looking for your husband, Veuy?"

"Yes!" Lamphai acknowledged with surprise.

She wondered how the stranger knew her husband's name.

"Get in your car and follow me," the man said. "I'll help you find him."

Lamphai followed him back onto the road and through a maze of highways until suddenly she saw her husband's moving truck. Gratefully, she and the children turned to wave their thanks, but the stranger was gone.

The family arrived safely in Michigan, and Veuy and Lamphai found work and began attending the Holland Seventh-day Adventist Church. Soon they invited new Lao friends to join them, and the church gave the small group a room to worship in their own language. Today the group has its own church where Lamphai introduces people to the God who sent an angel to the gas station.



Several Lao congregations have sprouted up across the North American Division as a result of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2011. With this quarter's offering, you will help provide pastors and resources to groups like Lamphai's.

Part I: Overview

Have you ever lost something, but it was in plain sight and you did not see it? Let's suppose you lost your car keys. You searched all over the house but could not find them. Suddenly you remember. You left them in your jacket pocket hanging in the closet or in your purse on a chair in the kitchen.

God has given us the gift of remembering. What if we did not have that gift? What if the only thing we knew was the present? Life would be terribly complicated. In this week's lesson, we will return to the subject of the Sabbath and look at it from a different perspective. You will recall that the fourth commandment begins with the word "remember." None of the other commandments begin that way. Remembering presupposes you have known something before. The Sabbath commandment is a perpetual reminder to the entire world of God's creative authority. Wherever we are in the world, whether we recognize it or not, the Sabbath comes to all humanity offering its blessings each seventh day.

Throughout Scripture the Sabbath reminds us that Christ made us, redeemed us, delivers us, re-creates us, and is coming again for us. Our lesson this week underscores the fact that in God's eternal plan, Sabbath is a day of blessing, delight, worship, and service. Especially on Sabbath, as we linger in His presence, participate in corporate worship, and seek Him anew, He re-creates us in His image.

Part II: Commentary

In 2008, there was a fascinating article published, titled "Neurotheology: Are We Hardwired for God?" The article quotes Dean Hamer, a PhD behavioral geneticist. The author of the article, René J. Muller, PhD, states, "In 2004 Hamer published *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired Into Our Genes*, which was showcased in a *Time* cover story on neurotheology. Hamer made it clear that he had approached his work with the tools of natural science: 'The first task for any scientist attempting to link genetics to spirituality is to show that spirituality can be defined and quantified.' " "Hamer's work is not about demonstrating the existence of God, which is the domain of religion, but about showing that spirituality is a real phenomenon that can be described and measured. . . . Religion, he believes, is rooted in nurture and spirituality in nature." —"Neurotheology: Are We Hardwired for God?" *Psychiatric Times*, May 1, 2008, <http://psychiatrictimes.com/view/neurotheology-are-we-hardwired>

-god. Hamer joins a growing number of scientists who believe that we are “hardwired for God.”

In Genesis 1:26, the biblical narrative recounts the creation of human beings. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ ” (*NKJV*). Genesis 1:27 continues: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (*NKJV*).

What does it mean that human beings were created in the image of God? Certainly, it means more than a mere physical resemblance. Both animals and humans procreate. The image of God has to do with the totality of who we are physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We have been given conscience, reason, and judgment to make moral and ethical decisions. But most of all, written into our genetic code, in our DNA, at the deepest level, we are beings who worship. The Sabbath fills that aching void in our hearts to reconnect with our Creator. The Sabbath is not some legalistic requirement or an exclusively Jewish institution. The Sabbath is a celebration of the life that Christ has given us. It is a reminder to care for the environment around us that also is the object of our Creator’s care.

The Sabbath and the Environment

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden, He instructed them to “tend and keep it” (*Gen. 2:15, NKJV*). Adam also was given the privilege of naming all the animals (*Gen. 2:19, 20*). Our first parents were close to nature in their garden home and were instructed by God to preserve their natural surroundings. The Sabbath was a weekly reminder both of their relationship to God and their environment. Worshiping the Creator also includes caring for His creation. Currently, industrial pollution is destroying our planet. “Toxic pollution affects more than 200 million people worldwide, according to Pure Earth, a nonprofit environmental organization. . . . Americans generate 30 billion foam cups, 220 million tires, and 1.8 billion disposable diapers every year, according to the Green Schools Alliance. . . . Pollution in China can change weather patterns in the United States. It takes just five days for the jet stream to carry heavy air pollution from China to the United States, where it stops clouds from producing rain and snow. About 7 million premature deaths annually are linked to air pollution, according to [the World Health Organization]. That is one in eight deaths worldwide.”—Alina Bradford, “Pollution Facts and Types of Pollution,” Live Science, February 28, 2018, <http://livescience.com/22728-pollution-facts.html>. The Sabbath is a clarion call to care for God’s creation.

The Sabbath and Deliverance

When Moses restates the Sabbath command to a new generation just about

ready to enter the Promised Land, he begins, “ ‘ “Observe the Sabbath day” ’ ” and concludes with “ ‘ “and remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” ’ ” (*Deut. 5:12, 15, NKJV*). The Sabbath is a sign of deliverance. The Israelites were held in bondage to the Egyptians for centuries. Miraculously, God delivered them. They did not deliver themselves. God delivered them by His “mighty hand.” The Sabbath is a reminder of the power of God to deliver us out of any situation.

At Creation, God spoke, and our world came into existence. God’s Word is an all-powerful, creative, life-changing Word. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that there is nothing impossible for God. Since He created the world with His Word, He can re-create our hearts. Since He brought light out of darkness, He can lighten our darkened minds. Since He spoke, and fruit trees appeared with their ripe, delicious fruits, He can produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Since He breathed life into Adam, He can breathe new life into our lives. Romans 6:1–7 speaks of the new life that Christ gives us as we voluntarily die to the old life as manifested in the ceremony of baptism. There is a direct linkage between the original life God created in Eden and the newness of life that occurs when God re-creates our hearts. In the beginning, God created life, and once again He makes our lives new. The Sabbath is a symbol of Creation and God’s new creation.

The Sabbath as a Symbol of Refreshing and Blessing

God designed the Sabbath for all humanity. Its refreshing blessing, according to Scripture, is for each one of us (*Exod. 23:12*). The blessings of the Sabbath are not exclusively for the Jews. According to the Old Testament, they are for every person. The Sabbath not only is a day of worship but also a day to bless others. Jesus performed more healing miracles on the Sabbath day than on any other day. For Jesus, the Sabbath was a day to touch others with His healing grace.

Consider the case of the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda, located in Jerusalem, just inside the Sheep Gate. Bethesda means “house of mercy,” or “house of grace.” Evidently, Jesus was on His way to Sabbath worship when He saw a man who had been in a horrible condition for 38 years. Recounting this experience, Ellen G. White describes Jesus as “walking alone in apparent meditation and prayer” when He saw “one case of supreme wretchedness.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 201, 202. It was the Sabbath, and Jesus knew that this act of healing would generate significant controversy among the Pharisees. The priests had 39 different

regulations governing acceptable work on the Sabbath. These “meaningless requirements” and “senseless restrictions” were an “intolerable burden.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 204. We are told that Jesus “by His words and by His works of mercy . . . was breaking the oppressive power of the old traditions and man-made commandments, and presenting the love of God in its exhaustless fullness”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 205.

Seeing his hopelessness, Jesus asked the poor sufferer, “ ‘Wilt thou be made whole?’ ” (*John 5:6*). It was impossible for the man to make himself whole. By faith he responded to the Savior’s command, “ ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk’ ” (*John 5:8*). New life flowed into every nerve and tissue of his body. Miraculously he was made whole. By faith he accepted Christ’s word and acted upon it. This Sabbath miracle, as each of Jesus’ Sabbath healings, is intimately tied to a deeper spiritual truth. Accepting the Word of God by faith and acting upon it, we are made whole. The point of this Sabbath miracle is that Jesus is both our Creator and our Redeemer. The One who made us can re-create us and make us whole again. He meets us where we are, sees our needs, redeems us by His grace, and turns our despair into hope.

Part III: Life Application

God urged the people of Israel, through the prophet Isaiah, to make a decided reform in their Sabbath-keeping practices. In Isaiah 58:13, 14, He urges, “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the earth” (*NKJV*). In biblical times, placing your feet on a piece of property was a symbol of ownership. The Sabbath belongs to God. We do not own it. It is His, so He graciously invites us to find our deepest delight and highest pleasure in worshiping Him and blessing others on the Sabbath.

- How can the Sabbath become even more meaningful for you?

- Are there any aspects of your Sabbath keeping that you would like to change?

- In your range of priorities, how important is Sabbath worship to you?

- List at least three specific things you can do to bless others on the Sabbath.

1.

2.

3.

Notes


