

The Sabbath



The Sabbath. It's embedded in our denominational identity, but do we really understand it? Celebrate it? Delight in it?

If you have grown up as an Adventist, the Sabbath has always been a part of your life. You were probably accustomed to a set of norms for this day. From sundown Friday to sundown Sabbath, you were taught to “guard the doors of the Sabbath.” There were acceptable activities in which your family participated. You no doubt greeted the beginning of the Sabbath with worship; you attended Sabbath school and church; you probably participated in Sabbath afternoon activities and closed Sabbath with prayer.

The activities were often common to your friends' families, so a community evolved around this day. However, norms differed across families to some degree. I remember it was not acceptable for me to ride my bike on Sabbath, but a close friend was allowed to do so. As a result, the focus was often on how I am limited in my activities by the Sabbath or what I am obligated to do on the Sabbath without truly understanding the purpose of the Sabbath.

Instead, we should consider the original intention for the Sabbath—rest, blessing (“favored by God”), and sanctification (“set apart”)—and find ways to experience this on the Sabbath. As the *Encounter Bible Program* for our K–12 students emphasizes, the Sabbath was born of creation and will last into eternity. It was more than a day; it was more than a memorial. The Sabbath was a gift as well as a symbol of allegiance, acknowledging a covenant relationship between a loving God and His children.

Our response to this gift should be to remove the distractions so we can focus on the relationship. The boundaries tell us how important the Sabbath is to God; they protect the Sabbath from being invaded by other things that would distract us from building a relationship with God.

The experience of the Israelites in the desert where God gave them manna day after day, week after week, for forty years offers a powerful example of how we are to honor His day. The manna was a weekly reminder to them to honor the Sabbath day by intentionally preparing for it and protecting it from needless work so they could focus on their relationship with God.

Jesus also provided an example in how he honored the Sabbath. He used the Sabbath to bring joy and delight into people's lives. It is a day to do good to others, to bless others through our words and actions (Matt. 12:12).

Celebrating the Sabbath as God intended blesses our lives and is a sign of our devotion to Him and His will for our lives. Isaiah 58:13–14 says, “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord . . .”