

lesson three

JULY 13–19

Sabbath: A Day of **Freedom**

“And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’” (Mark 2:27, NKJV).



A prisoner is freed to depict how we should view the Sabbath—a day in which we can discard the cares of the week.

Matt. 11:28;
John 8:31–36

Introduction

The Bondage of the Sabbath?

Have you ever felt out of place? Have you ever felt this way at church and thought, *Isn't church supposed to be a haven for those in desperate need of a Savior?* If I, as a member of the church, have felt left out, can you imagine how many visitors have had a similar experience? Perhaps this sad reality is rooted in our view of the Sabbath and its purpose. In the book of Mark, we read that the “sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). But at times we lose sight of the purpose of the Sabbath and end up breaking it without even realizing it.

In the very passionate local church in Peru in which I grew up, there were rules that you did not break and things you did not say on Sabbath.

What is the purpose of the Sabbath? Adam and Eve used this time to strengthen their relationship with God and with each other. In the Old Testament, the Israelites had laws that demonstrated the beauty of trusting God by keeping the Sabbath, as in the story of the manna and even the sabbatical year. The early church in Acts used the Sabbath not only to worship but to build a community that would strengthen the families and church as a whole. In the very passionate local church in Peru in which I grew up, there were rules that you did not break and things you did not say on Sabbath. Looking back now, I appreciate how passionate members were about reverence and Sabbath keeping. However, I often wonder whether there is a better way to convey the same message without losing the “joy” of the Sabbath.

One of the main struggles for the Israelites was the burden of Sabbath keeping upon them. They had so many rabbinical rules that many became “stiff-necked” and hardened their hearts toward God. A burdensome Sabbath without joy and without communing with God is not the Sabbath God intended for us. Do you feel burdened every Sabbath? John 8:32 reminds us that “the truth shall make [us] free.” Our Savior gave us the Sabbath to rest, commune, worship, and break free from the things holding us down (school, work, problems, debts, etc.). Why do we still hold on to our burdens when we have someone who promised us, “‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’” (Matt. 11:28, NKJV)? Is it because we are so focused on the dos and don'ts that we cannot enjoy the Sabbath?

Once we realize the freedom the Sabbath offers and how we can enjoy it every week, our keeping of it will drastically change. We will be a blessing to others because we have learned to receive the blessing of the Sabbath. I challenge you to make the Sabbath a day of freedom and not of bondage!

Logos Sabbath, Day of Freedoms

Exod. 16:16–26;
20:8–11; 25:1–11;
Deut. 5:12–15; 15:1–11;
Mark 3:1–6;
Luke 6:6–11; 13:10–17;
14:1–6;
John 5:1–18; 9:1–34

Historically, religious discourse over the Sabbath has focused on its legal and calendrical dimensions. But what relationship, if any, is there between the Sabbath and the themes raised in the work of social justice? This week, we'll look particularly at what the Bible says about freedom and its connection to the Sabbath.

The Sabbath, Day of Dignity

Observed even after the fall of humanity, the Sabbath offers, in our sin-ridden world, a radical vision for society. The seventh-day Sabbath commandment, recorded in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15, recognizes the day as one of rest for all. The Sabbath is not just for the believer or the citizens of just one country—or even just humans!

In the civil law revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, God also granted a sabbatical year (*shmita*, in Hebrew) to the Israelites. Every seven years, they were to release fellow believers from debts owed, including releasing those who had indentured themselves because of their debt. God reassured Israelites with the promise that “the Lord your God will bless you” in the keeping of the *shmita* (Deut. 15:6, ESV).

He wants to free us from the tiring toll of sin.

Moreover, God commanded the children of Israel in this sabbatical year to allow their land to rest after six years of cultivation (Lev. 25:1–11). But how, then, were they supposed to eat in the Sabbath year? Amazingly, but expectedly, God promised that He would produce “a crop sufficient for three years” in the sixth year (Lev. 25:20, ESV). God promised abundantly greater than what the Israelites could expect: He provided food for the sixth year and the seventh year of rest as well as for the first year of the next seven-year cycle when new crops were being sown. In a similar manner, God provided a double portion of manna on the sixth day of the week to the journeying Israelites, since manna would not fall on the seventh-day Sabbath (Exod. 16:16–26).

The Sabbath offers freedom from the burdens of human toil. This divinely granted freedom compels us to recognize the dignity and humanity of all humankind—values that are diminishing in today’s world. Moreover, by keeping both the weekly Sabbath and the Sabbath year, God’s people acknowledged that everything ultimately comes from God, not from their own works. When we accept God’s divine power to provide by keeping the Sabbath, we safeguard against avarice and selfishness and the inhumanity that results.

The Sabbath, Day of Identity

As you may have gathered from the lesson so far, the Sabbath is more than a day marked by what we can and cannot do. Like no other day, it teaches us about both God's desired relationship with us and His desired relationship for us with one another. Moreover, as a twofold memorial, it reminds us of our God-given identity.

The Sabbath is a memorial—or remembrance—of Creation and redemption. When we remember the Sabbath day, we remember that God is our Creator and our Redeemer (Exod. 20:11; Deut. 5:15). And when we know God's relation to us, we come to know ourselves as He intended: created with a purpose and redeemed for service.

The Sabbath reminds us of the freedom that lies in knowing God's identity in relation to us. The world is searching for the meaning of humanity and the meaning of existence. So much existential pain—and vast social consequences—come from not knowing the true answers to these questions. On the seventh day, we remember our origins, our present condition, our redemption, and all that Christ is to us. The Sabbath reminds us that God furnishes our deepest ontological desires.

The Sabbath, Day of Healing

Throughout His ministry, Jesus dispelled long-perpetuated misconceptions about the Sabbath. In six of the seven miracles that He performed on the Sabbath—the healings of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–13), the man with the shriveled hand (Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11), the woman with the eighteen-year disability (Luke 13:10–17), the man with dropsy (Luke 14:1–6), and the blind man (John 9:1–34)—the Jewish religious leaders accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. But by performing these miracles, Jesus revealed the true meaning of the Sabbath as a day for healing in Christ.

The Sabbath reminds us of the offer of freedom in Jesus in a world of sickness. He wants to set us free from our spiritual and physical ailments. He wants to set us free from the bondage of society that clouds the true meaning of His Word. He wants to free us from the tiring toll of sin.

The Sabbath, Day of Freedom

By remembering the seventh day as God commands, we recognize our ultimate dependence on Him alone for our spiritual, physical, social, and mental sustentation. The Sabbath is an experience of the true freedom that comes from trusting in the merits of Jesus alone to redeem us, sustain us, and teach us love for one another.

REACT

1. Where in Scripture does the Sabbath offer freedom?
2. Now having studied a few aspects of the Sabbath as they pertain to social justice, why and how do you think the Sabbath is relevant in your culture and country, and more broadly, in our world today?

Testimony *Sabbatical Principles for All Humankind*

Exod. 23:10, 11;
Lev. 25:1, 11;
John 5:1, 18

“Jesus stated to them that the work of relieving the afflicted was in harmony with the Sabbath law. It was in harmony with the work of God’s angels, who are ever descending and ascending between heaven and earth to minister to suffering humanity. Jesus declared, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’ All days are God’s, in which to carry out His plans for the human race. If the Jews’ interpretation of the law was correct, then Jehovah was at fault, whose work has quickened and upheld every living thing since first He laid the foundations of the earth; then He who pronounced His work good, and instituted the Sabbath to commemorate its completion, must put a period to His labor, and stop the never-ending routine of the universe.”¹

“He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath.”

“God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. And man also has a work to perform on this day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God’s holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour’s pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.”²

“Every seventh year special provision was made for the poor. The sabbatical year, as it was called, began at the end of the harvest. At the seedtime, which followed the ingathering, the people were not to sow; they should not dress the vineyard in the spring; and they must expect neither harvest nor vintage. Of that which the land produced spontaneously they might eat while fresh, but they were not to lay up any portion of it in their storehouses. The yield of this year was to be free for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and even for the creatures of the field. Exodus 23:10, 11; Leviticus 25:5.”³

REACT

1. In music, harmony adds to melody and makes the song fuller and richer. How could “acts of mercy” done on the Sabbath add to our experience?
2. There is a clear relationship between Sabbath and acts of social justice. How can the principles of the sabbatical year be made part of our lives today?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 206.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

3. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 531.

Isa. 58:10–14;
61:1, 2;
Luke 4:17–19

Evidence

“Going to Church”: God’s Antidote for Gun Violence?

One day at lunch, I asked my friend Chris, an atheist, what he thought the solution was to school shootings and gun violence across America. I was surprised when he said, “Church is the only thing I know of that can solve these problems. The problem with gun violence is that these troubled individuals begin to seclude themselves from their community. The solution is to build communities that reach out to people like this. Atheists have tried but have never mastered this notion of church.”

“As an atheist, I’ve often considered coming to church, . . . they are the best community builders that I know.”

Chris’s statement challenged me to expand what it meant to “go to church on Sabbath.” For Chris, church was the ideal place for the lonely, addicts, troubled, marginalized, and those desperate to find rest and community. Could it be that God designed Sabbath, and all its gatherings, to be an antidote to the problems of society?

Chris reminded me of what Christ said when He went to church on Sabbath (see Luke 4:17–19; Isa. 61:1, 2). His statements echo Isaiah 58 on social justice, and His actions on earth mirrored Scripture (Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:6–11; 13:11–17; 14:1–6; John 5:2–9).

My church has a potluck meal every Sabbath after the sermon. When I encounter the hungry during the week, I invite them to join us at our church for our potluck, where they can take leftovers afterward. Our church provides a program on Sabbath afternoons for immigrants who want to improve their conversational English. Many lonely people who just want to talk and be listened to also find community in these Sabbath afternoon events.

At the end of our lunch conversation, Chris told me, “As an atheist, I’ve often considered coming to church, purely because they are the best community builders that I know and what our society needs to overcome social problems of racism, classism, and gun violence.” As Christians, we shouldn’t be surprised. Chris is calling us what Isaiah prophesied Sabbath keepers would be called: “The repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in” (Isa. 58:12).

REACT

1. Ask your friends what they think the solutions are to specific problems in your community.
2. Pray about activities your church could sponsor on Sabbath afternoons that would care for the lonely, the marginalized, and the troubled.

How-to *Make Sabbath Just Again*

Ps. 92:5;
Isa. 66:23;
Luke 6:9

What does Sabbath freedom truly mean? Is it simply a day focused on ourselves? Or maybe a time of one-on-one communion with God? Sabbath, in fact, is a day set aside to show us how to live in harmony with the creation and, more important, with our Creator. What does this look like in real life? How can Sabbath show us what it means to love our fellow humans as Christ commanded us to love “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40, 45)?

Spending time in creation will help you renew your commitment to Sabbath freedom.

Understand the purpose of Sabbath. To appreciate the practical meaning of Sabbath, we have to look as far back as Creation. The origin of Sabbath is all about rest—rest for people, animals, and even for the land (Lev. 25). When we understand it’s all about rest, we’ll find little ways to provide rest for the wonderful creation of God, whether human or not.

Find those around you who need a break. The Sabbath was intended for all humanity, not just those of one religion (Mark 2:27). After all, everyone needs rest. Do you know a young mother who never gets a break because she’s always taking care of her kids? Offer to take the children on a nature hike and let the mother have a break. Do you know someone who works on a farm and has to do some necessary labor on Sabbath morning like milking cows? Offer to lend a helping hand before heading off to church.

Worship with others who have a heart for God. While we may not always realize it, worship itself is a form of rest. It separates us from the daily activities of labor and connects our hearts and minds heavenward so that we may be renewed spiritually. As we sing, share, pray, and listen with fellow believers, we help each other lift the burdens of the week. As we unite at the foot of the cross, we lead our fellow believers to the place where Christ took the ultimate stress for us so that we could have an eternal Sabbath rest in Him.

Take care of yourself too. Sabbath rest is for everyone, including you. This means ensuring you keep yourself in good health. Get eight hours of sleep, eat a nutritious diet, and get outside in the fresh air and sunshine. Spending time in creation will help you renew your commitment to Sabbath freedom.

REACT

1. Make a list of practical ways you can relieve the burdens of those around you.
2. How can those of us Christians who know the Sabbath truth ensure we remember to apply it when it comes to caring for our fellow human beings?

Jason Miller, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

Matt. 12:11, 12

Opinion

A Gift Worth Sharing

“Who among you wouldn’t rescue your donkey from a pit on the Sabbath day?” This question was posed by Jesus well over two thousand years ago (see Luke 14:5). Like the Pharisees, we are often shy about actively engaging in acts of mercy on the Sabbath. But Jesus shows us that on the Sabbath, more than on any other day, we are called to rescue His sheep.

Jesus delighted in performing acts of mercy and kindness on the Sabbath. It was on a Sabbath day that He healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5), opened the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:14), delivered a woman who had been afflicted by a spirit for eighteen years (Luke 13:11–16), and restored a man’s withered hand (Matt. 12:9–13).

Like the Pharisees, we are often shy about actively engaging in acts of mercy on the Sabbath.

By lifting people out of suffering, sickness, and sin on the Sabbath, Jesus granted them rest from the things that ailed them and so shared the Sabbath with them in the truest sense. His highest and purest joy was to ensure that others could rest from their burdens on the Sabbath.

And if we think of Sabbath as a rest we can actively invite others to share in, service becomes foundational to our worship experience. Recognizing those around us as Jesus’ sheep, we cannot leave them lying in the pits of sin, pain, and suffering while we enjoy Sabbath in comfort. We will want them to enjoy the same rest that we do. By visiting the sick, comforting the mourning, and feeding the homeless, we invite them to rest from the heavy burdens they carry.

This kind of service takes us out of ourselves and blesses us as much as it blesses others. Compassion, empathy, and mercy gladden the receiver as well as the giver. The “helper’s high” is real: giving truly does make us happy.¹

Sabbath reminds us that God is our Creator and Redeemer and that everything we have is a gift from Him. But His blessings are given so that we can be a blessing to others. The Sabbath is one of His greatest gifts; why not share it?

REACT

1. Why are acts of kindness on the Sabbath that much more special?
2. In what practical ways can you, your family, and your church extend the Sabbath rest to your community?

1. Sander van der Linden, “The Helper’s High: Why It Feels So Good to Give,” OdeWire.com, December 2011, 26, 27.

Exploration

Sabbath: Made for Man

Mark 2:27

CONCLUDE

In this week's lesson, we have learned about the Sabbath and some ways in which we can keep and enjoy the many freedoms of the Sabbath. As we stop to take relief from our busy lives and to worship on the Sabbath, we are reminded that the Sabbath commemorates Creation and affirms God as Creator of the earth.

In Mark 2:27, Jesus says, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Christ reminds us that the Sabbath isn't just a weekly ritual filled with liturgy or one more thing we have to do at the end of the week. Rather, He has given us the freedom to understand and celebrate the Sabbath in its multifaceted biblical depth and beauty.

CONSIDER

- Helping someone prepare for the Sabbath. For example, if you have a roommate who doesn't observe the Sabbath, as you prepare for Sabbath, clean up not only your space but also that of your roommate's so that he or she can experience rest on the Sabbath.
- Inviting your friends to worship with you on Sabbath.
- Spending the Sabbath in nature alone or with friends and worshipping God through the natural beauties of creation.
- Taking some time on Sabbath to volunteer and provide services to the weak and needy within your community. Remember, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.
- Creating an activity that illustrates to others the importance of the Sabbath.
- Sharing a testimony of how keeping the Sabbath has been a blessing to you.

CONNECT

Mark 2; 3; Luke 6.

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 29, "The Sabbath"; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, chap. 91, "Proper Observance of the Sabbath."