

## ***The Christian Life***

### ***Rest***

Lesson #8 for May 23, 2009

Scriptures: Genesis 2:2,3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Isaiah 58:12-14; 66:23; Ezekiel 20:12; Mark 2:27,28; Hebrews 4:9-11.

1. The purpose of this lesson is to discuss the true meaning of the Sabbath and its role in our relationship with God.
2. The purpose of the Sabbath is for us to think about God and to consider all that He has done for us, all that He wants to do for us, all that He means to us, and what we can do for Him.
3. In our world today where people are constantly on the go, on the phone, on the computer, etc., a time to stop and talk about what is really meaningful is more important than ever. The Sabbath is a time for us to have a “date” with God, with our spouses, and with our families in a meaningful “togetherness.” That is the best part of the week.
4. The Sabbath was designed by God to be a 24-hour “date” with our Best Friend. Marriage and the Sabbath are the two institutions that we still enjoy that were created before the entrance of sin into this world. Both of these institutions are all about relationships. Relationships are what give meaning to human life. If “God is love,” (1 John 4:8,16) do you think He cares about relationships? Isn’t the Sabbath all about relationships?
5. Does anyone need to tell young lovers that a date is desirable and exciting? Do we think of the Sabbath as a date with God? God designed the Sabbath as a time to set aside all worldly interests and pursuits so that we can focus on the most important thing in life—our relationship with Him. (Ezekiel 20:12)
6. Did Adam and Eve ever get tired? The Sabbath is not about resting from an exhausting week! You might think so if you observed some Seventh-day Adventists today! It is about taking time apart from our busy schedules to relate to God.

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*, p. 48.2.

When Adam and Eve were created, their Creator would have loved to have spent all the time with them. But He realized that Satan would have demanded equal time. So, God limited His time with Adam and Eve to a short period each evening—plus the Sabbath. But that only allowed them to “touch bases.” God knew that if they were to become good friends, they needed a time to “rub souls.” That was the purpose of the Sabbath.

7. What has been your experience with the Sabbath? Think back to your childhood—if you were observing the Sabbath at that time—and down through your life. Do you really look forward to the Sabbath each week? Why? Or, why not? Do your children look forward to the Sabbath? What things do you do each Sabbath to make it meaningful? What do you learn about God each week? If your relationship with God is meaningful, your date with God will be very meaningful. The Sabbath is/was intended to be a time of personal relationship with God, not just a time to sleep! The word “rest” used in the Bible and in this lesson is not the word used for sleep, but the word meaning “a cessation of other activities.” If you stop and analyze the accusations that Satan had made against God, most of them had already been answered by the end of creation week! Don’t you think the whole universe wanted to see how these new and distinct beings would react to God’s generous treatment of them? Satan had wanted to be able to create. He could not. Adam and Eve were given the power to procreate! Satan must have been extremely jealous!
8. Think back to the best Sabbath that you have ever experienced. What was it that made that Sabbath meaningful? Did you spend it with family and friends? Did you spend significant time—really meaningful time—talking about God? What did you learn about God during those special hours?
9. One way to make the Sabbath meaningful is to spend time in nature. Children love to have the attention and time of their parents in doing something together that is meaningful in nature. Last Sabbath I took a walk with my grandchildren and some of their friends. While the children were playing safely in one area, some of us walked on ahead and found a western diamondback (raccoon-tailed) rattlesnake on the road ahead of us.
10. The Sabbath was never intended to be a day hedged about by multitudes of rules—of “do’s and don’ts”! But, if we are not certain about our relationship with God, it is very easy to be awkward in our observance of the Sabbath. God knows us very well—He knows everything about us. (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7) The Sabbath is not a time for us to put on a show to try to impress God. We couldn’t anyway! The Sabbath is a time to be honest about our relationships. It is a time for us to get close to our children and seek to show them that their relationship to God is more important than anything they might be exposed to on television or the Internet.
11. How can we be sure that our Sabbath observance is following God’s rules and not a lot of human rules? Are you really comfortable in your relationship with God?
12. What would happen if you invited some unbiased observers to watch you as you kept the Sabbath for 24 hours? Would they be attracted by what they saw? Would they believe that you were having a wonderful time on your date? Or would they be puzzled by why you were doing what you were doing?
13. Why do many who observe our “Sabbath-keeping” believe that we are trying to “earn” our way to heaven? The Sabbath was intended to be a time of rest, not a time to work—even for our salvation!

14. What makes some time “holy” and other time “not holy”? It depends on your attitude. You can be completely “unholy” in church, and you can be very “holy” on a walk in nature. Why did God set aside the seventh day as a Sabbath? Do we need physical rest? Do we need a cessation of our weekly activities? Or do we need time with our Maker?

There is a story told about an older church member who loved to sit on the front row in church but usually ended up sleeping, and even snoring, during the sermon. That annoyed the pastor so he tried to think of some way to prevent it. Once on Sunday morning, he concluded his sermon with an appeal for everyone who wanted to go to heaven to please stand up. The congregation stood except for the sleeper. Then the pastor said, “If you don’t care about going to heaven, (then raising his voice considerably) please stand up.” When the elder gentleman heard those words, he jumped up. He looked around and then said, “Pastor, I don’t know what we are voting for, but it seems you and I are in the minority!”

15. What does the word “holy” mean? The basic root meaning of this word is “to set apart for a special purpose.” If the Sabbath is “holy” time set apart for us to relate to God, then it is no longer to be used for our normal activities from the week. So, is the Sabbath God’s day or our day? (Mark 2:27,28) If a young couple goes on a date, is it for his benefit or hers? Or both? What can we do to make the Sabbath a “delight”? (Genesis 2:3; Isaiah 58:13)
16. Why does it matter that we set aside a *specific* day—the Sabbath—to relate to God? If you have set up a date with someone, is it important to have a time and a place to meet? Can you celebrate just any day as your birthday? Or does it need to be a specific day? The Sabbath has many very special meanings attached to it. No other day can have those same meanings. Dates are opportunities to “grow” a relationship. They are memorials in time to what is really meaningful in that relationship. God says to us, “This is our date; you are mine, and I am yours if we can have a meaningful relationship.” Do you feel like you belong to God? Do you love to spend time with Him? If you honestly don’t, does that make the Sabbath an uncomfortable date? What does it mean to really *know* God? Remember that in biblical terms, really “knowing” means “intimacy.” Can you think of yourself as being intimate with God? (Genesis 4:1; John 17:3; Matthew 7:21-23)
17. What are the basic purposes of the Sabbath? The seventh-day Sabbath is God’s way of reminding us about the answers to the existential questions in life: 1) Where did we come from? 2) What are we doing here—what are we supposed to accomplish while we are here? 3) Where are we going in the future—what happens to us after we die?
18. The Sabbath reminds us of where we came from by clearly pointing back to our creation. We are not the result of a long line of one-celled protozoans, mollusks, amphibians, and apes. We are “sons and daughters of God”! The Sabbath also reminds us that when we got ourselves into serious problems—even slavery—God came to deliver us. (Exodus 1-20; Deuteronomy 5:12-15) The Sabbath also reminds us that our relationship to God is the key to our salvation. After being crucified, Jesus rested in the grave over the Sabbath to add meaning to that day. Finally, God reminds us that the Sabbath is to be a foretaste of heaven. (Isaiah 66:23) The

existential questions are what give real meaning to life. If we are not sure why we are here, what we are supposed to be doing, or where we are going, meaning is lost.

19. As a day of rest or separation from our weekly activities, the Sabbath is to remind us that our purpose here on this earth is not just to make money, build nice homes, have a good job, get a good education, and live a comfortable life, but rather to have a meaningful relationship with the King of the universe! We need the physical rest, but we need the spiritual relationship much more.
20. Ellen White states, "If man had always observed the Sabbath, there would never have been an unbeliever, an infidel, or an atheist in the world." {ST, February 13, 1896 par. 7}

Wasn't Satan an unbeliever? Or was he a rebellious "believer"?

Had the Sabbath been universally kept, man's thoughts and affections would have been led to the Creator as the object of reverence and worship, and there would never have been an idolater, an atheist, or an infidel. {GC 437.2}

In the future, the national and international Sunday laws will apparently not just demand that we worship on Sunday, but most likely will prohibit the correct worship on the Sabbath. Is God drawing "a line in the sand" here and forcing us to make a choice. Why is the difference between Sunday and Saturday such a big deal. When we truly choose to worship God, will we do it the way He asks us to or the way we want to? Will we worship the true God or the selfish "pretend god" who is claiming to be the true God? What kind of God are we worshipping? The real Sabbath-keeper focuses on God, while the traditional Sunday-keeper "keeps" a few hours and uses the rest of the day as he pleases. Satan hates to see people who really care about the truth about God. If our ability to stand fast and not be deceived in the last days depends on our ability to distinguish between the true God and the pretender, then the Sabbath is essential!

The Jews in Jesus' day kept a "day" but they did not keep the Sabbath. Their Sabbath keeping was all about them and not about God.

21. We need to remember that meaningful relationships change us. The Sabbath—as a memorial of the most important events in the history of the human race—should remind us of all that God means to us. Think of all that He has done for us. Why did God make a "memorial in time" rather than some "concrete" memorial in stone (Buddha or the Kaaba) or some other way for us to remember Him? Almost every other religion has some other kind of memorial. Many of them are idols made of stone, metal, or wood. Those idols can be moved around at our discretion. But we cannot change the Sabbath in any way. The early "adventists"—before there was a Seventh-day Adventist Church—started to keep the Sabbath from 6:00 p.m. on Friday to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. Then they realized that from "even" to "even" meant sundown to sundown. God knows that if we seek to worship Him through some tangible symbol, what soon happens is idolatry. One can pick up an idol and move it around! But one cannot do that with the God of Mt. Sinai. He is in charge, and we are not! We cannot move it forward or backward.

We cannot trade days. The Sabbath is intended to remind us that the God of the universe is the most important thing in our lives.

22. We also need to recognize that Sabbath “observance” can never be forced. God is not a God of force.

The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan’s deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. {DA 22.1}

The Devil is the one who chooses to use force. So, think about the restrictions we place on ourselves and on our children concerning Sabbath observance. How many of those restrictions make for a better relationship with God? How many of them are mere traditions? How many of them are culturally-determined? Do our children truly look forward to the Sabbath? Or do our “traditions” “turn them off” and annoy them?

23. Why do you think Jesus—while a human being—called Himself the “Lord of the Sabbath”? Shouldn’t the Sabbath be all about getting to know Him?
24. **How many different things can you think of that Jesus did on the Sabbath? How can we be more like Him in our Sabbath observance? He preached, He explained the Scriptures, He healed, He ate, He walked through nature, and perhaps most noticeably in Scripture, He ignored masses of human regulations about the Sabbath! In light of Jesus’ Sabbath observance, what would you describe as the perfect Sabbath for you and your family? Might it be by ignoring some human regulations for the Sabbath?**
25. 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. Talking upon anything or everything which may come into the mind is speaking our own words. Every deviation from right brings us into bondage and condemnation.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 2, p. 703.0.
26. In what ways is the Sabbath a blessing? Are you “refreshed” physically, mentally, socially, spiritually, even financially (Malachi 3:10) as a result of your Sabbath observance?
27. Read Hebrews 4:9-11 and review the context. What do those verses mean to you? Did the children of Israel ever really enter into God’s rest? They had hardly entered the land when they

began to adopt the religious customs of the pagans that they had failed to drive out or destroy. Is that Sabbath-like rest still available to us in our day? Virtually all Christian groups claim to observe a day in honor of God. How does the seventh-day Sabbath as observed by Seventh-day Adventists differ? Do our Christian friends observe a day? Or only a few hours? Do they set aside their weekly activities and dedicate that time specifically to thinking about and enjoying God?

28. As a result of the relationship that you have with God based largely on how you spend Sabbaths with Him, do you feel secure in your salvation?
29. How much time do you spend during the week in preparation for the Sabbath? Or is the Sabbath a time to collapse and rest in preparation for the next week? If you had a date with a very important person that you admired greatly and with whom you “long” to spend time, would you prepare everything well in advance to make sure that the time was most profitably spent? Have you ever had a date with anyone more important than God?
30. This lesson tells us that what God wants most of all is an intimate, personal relationship with each one of us. He wants to spend quality time with us. He wants us to look forward to that time together. And He wants us to do it in meaningful relationships with other human beings. **God wants us to have a wonderful time. We could not do God a greater disservice than to make the Sabbath a burden—as the Pharisees did in Jesus day.**
31. So what should we learn about God from keeping the Sabbath correctly? God’s original plan was for us to spend the day in wonderful fellowship with Him in the Garden of Eden. What would you have done on such a day? It would be a time to ask questions, explore answers, and enjoy our growing relationship. If the King of the universe is willing to spend that kind of time with us, surely we would recognize that He wants to be our Friend. He really cares about our relationship. He set aside the Sabbath as a memorial to what is most meaningful in life. When we became sinners, we needed the Sabbath even more. In our selfish pursuit of money, power, position, and pleasure in life, we need to stop and “smell the roses” with God. The Sabbath reminds us of all the most important times when God has interacted with us as humans—creation, freedom from slavery, redemption, and heaven.

© 2009, Kenneth Hart, MD. **Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.** [Info@theoX.org](mailto:Info@theoX.org)

Last modified: April 18, 2009

Z:\My Documents\WPISSTG-Hart\Christian Life\SS-8-Christian Life-2009\_05\_23-2009\_04\_04-fin+.wpd