

Sabbath and my Relationship with God



What role does the Sabbath have in my personal relationship with God?
How can the Sabbath enrich my life and bring me closer to God?

*Dear Andrew**,

Today, we want to take a look at some more thoughts on the topic of “Sabbath”. I hope this helps you to experience even more joy on this “gifted day”. But what does keeping the 7th day holy have to do with “joy”? What does the Bible say about this?

*“... If you call the Sabbath a delight ... **then you will find your joy in the Lord ...**”* (Isaiah 58:13-14 NIV)

“Supreme joy is independent from outer relationships; because its inexhaustible source is in God.”

Eva von Thiele-Winckler

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4 NKJV)

We read in Isaiah 58:11-14 NIV: **“The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”** (verse 11)

The Lord promises us His continual guidance, as well as strength and a fulfilled and meaningful life. This promise applies to everyone who lives in complete surrender to Jesus and daily renews their vow to Him.

*“Your people will **rebuild** the **ancient** ruins and will **raise up** the **age-old** foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”* (verse 12)

Maybe our spiritual life has become barren and dry? Maybe our relationship with God is in ruins? Hence, we cannot share the good news of salvation through Christ with joy and dedication, because we haven’t built on the “age-old foundation”. And new projects or mission plans don’t help either! But what does this “age-old foundation” consist of on which we should build?

The verses 13 and 14 are surprising: a wonderful promise can be fulfilled for us when we establish **a personal friendship relationship with Jesus – and this happens when we keep His day holy with our whole heart, amongst other things.**

* Andrew according to the biblical Andrew in John 1:41-42.

What does your personal faith look like?

Do you find that you are practicing a mundane, mediocre, maybe even boring **religion**?

Or do you think that your faith in Jesus makes your life rich, because you know that you are being led by God and you experience exciting situations time and again as a result of your answered prayers?

This depends on our personal relationship with God. Do we live in close contact with the Holy Spirit every day? And how can the Sabbath help us with this?

I can say from personal experience: **The Sabbath and daily personal devotions are the main source for keeping my personal relationship with God alive.** The Sabbath isn't only a special day; in the center of our worship on this day is a wonderful personage and we praise and honor our God. This eternal and all-powerful God invites us to delight in His presence especially on Sabbath. This is the heart of the Sabbath: fellowship with God.

The Lord says: *“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day ...”* (verse 13)

The Lord calls us to respect the Sabbath as His possession. We should keep this day holy so that our fellowship with God is closer and more intimate. We have to make a conscious decision for this every week.

How is this actually done? Isaiah explains:

“... 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, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” (verses 13b and 14)

This means: we reserve this day for fellowship with God and leave everything aside which could distract us or keep us from this.

What role does the Sabbath have in my relationship with Christ?

“Then you will find your joy in the LORD ...” (Isaiah 58:14 NIV)

When God is the source of our joy, then we have an inspirational, exciting, rewarding, sustaining and wonderful faith. I am thankful with my whole heart that I can live in this faith. Is it the same for you?

The foundation of Christian faith is the living God Himself, the Creator of heaven and earth.

From God's perspective we are all sinners. The punishment for our sins is eternal death. Out of love Jesus offers to take this punishment in my place and give me His righteousness. This trade takes place when I trust Jesus Christ and completely surrender myself to Him.

What happens to me when someone else dies for me?

I develop a deep affection for this person. A personal relationship is formed, which is bound by love and thankfulness. *A personal relationship with Christ is the heart of biblical Christianity.*

This personal relationship with Christ not only determines my joy, strength and motivation in faith, but also my salvation.

1 John 5:12 says:

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (NKJV)

How can we “have” the Son of God?

How can I “have” a wife or husband? By **entering** a specific and binding relationship and **remaining** in it. The goal of the Christian faith is the restoration of a personal relationship with God, which was broken by sin. By having a relationship with Jesus Christ, I also have a relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26).

The Development of a Relationship takes Time

“Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.” (Benjamin Franklin) Love is dependent on time. There is no friendship nor love relationship whose development hasn’t needed time and nurture. A relationship can only remain alive when both parties consistently make time for each other.

What role does the Sabbath have in my personal relationship with Christ?

The Sabbath is the most outstanding and qualitatively best time to nurture my relationship with God. This has to do with the term “to keep holy”. How does something become holy? Through God’s presence. Every Sabbath God wants to give us the best of Himself, namely Himself personally, His presence.

The Sabbath has other important functions; but these can barely develop when a personal, intimate relationship with God is missing.

The Sabbath shows me, amongst other things, that Jesus takes a full day of time for me every week. He wants us to keep the Sabbath so that we have time for Him. This intensive relationship with Jesus on Sabbath results in daily shorter fellowship in our personal devotions. Through the Sabbath and my daily devotions, the fellowship with Jesus shines into my week, my family life and my everyday work.

What comprises a personal relationship?

As a rule, a personal relationship has to do with four questions:

- › Who is the first person?
- › Who is the second person?
- › What kind of relationship is it?
- › How can this relationship be formed and maintained?

What does the Bible say about the first person – about people, you and me?

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ...” (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

The apostle Paul described his nature before he surrendered to Christ as follows: **“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells ...”** (Romans 7:18 NKJV)

Who is the second person?

The Word of God shows us that God is a personal being. We are created in God’s image. This implies a similarity between God and humans. And it means that God and humans **can have fellowship with each other**. We turn to a living God and worship a personal God, not only through verbal prayers and songs of praise, but through everything we think, want, say and do.

Since Christ is the all-powerful Creator (John 1:1-3,14; Hebrews 1:2 et al.), He has the governmental power over everything created (Matthew 28:18). He is the ruler. Everything belongs to HIM. HE is the great owner. Even you and I – we belong to HIM. We are His creatures.

What is the right kind of relationship between Jesus and me?

Since our Creator Jesus is infinitely superior to us and we are dependent on Him as our Creator, our relationship is a type of “steep grade”: He is the master and I am the follower, He is the lord and I am the servant. But because He loves me so much, this dependency on Him isn’t a problem. In fact, it gives us many advantages and pure joy. In this relationship we can even be Jesus’ friends. Jesus said to His disciples:

“You are my friends ...” (John 15:14 NKJV)
There is mutual respect between friends. Friends enjoy each other. They enjoy spending time together, they help each other, they stand up for each other. That is exactly what we want and that is what our great God wants too! Friendship is always entered voluntarily. No one can be forced to be a friend. God also doesn’t force us. A relationship with God is the greatest relationship that we can have. It is based on Jesus’ sacrifice for me and it is a relationship of trust and love, in which God has taken the initiative and humans answer His offer.

How can I enter this relationship?

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born... of God.” (John 1:12-13 NKJV)

Our relationship with Christ is formed by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior in a prayer of surrender. This first step in affiliation with Christ is then made public and affirmed by the symbolic act of baptism.

(The steps in a prayer of surrender are in *Letter to Andrew No. 13: Seize Life.*)

I wish everyone that wants to enter a covenant with Jesus through baptism to first have an “engagement period”. During this time your trust and love will grow and you will get to know the rest of the family better. The “engagement period” helps us to then enter this intimate love relationship with Jesus with firm inner conviction, heartfelt trust and great joy, because it will change our life in this world. We should prepare ourselves well for this.

(The topic of biblical baptism is discussed in detail in *Letter to Andrew No. 20: Let Everyone of You be Baptized.*)

How can this relationship be maintained?

By daily renewing and affirming my surrender to Jesus by completely trusting Him and doing what He tells me and what He commanded in His Word.

We are programmed for a 24-hour rhythm. We eat daily, drink daily, move daily and sleep daily. God’s Word says: the inward man is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

This includes our prayer connection and also reading the Bible or listening to spiritual discourses or sermons. Naturally our thoughts and desires, our speech and actions in our everyday life are included.

We enjoy speaking about Jesus and through our love for other people in word and deed we testify that we are God’s followers and His children. Fellowship with God’s children is also a part of this “renewal program”. The Sabbath plays a large role in this.

According to Deuteronomy 5, the Sabbath is a sign of liberation from Egyptian bondage.

This means: Christ has the same authority and power today to free us from the slavery of sin and can bring us into God’s kingdom.

What God wants to give us with the Sabbath – fellowship with Him – and what we should pay attention to is shown in the verse we had at the beginning in Isaiah 58:13a (NKJV):

“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day ...”

This day belongs to God, it doesn’t belong to us! God promises us that when we observe His ownership of the Sabbath, *“then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth”* (verse 14). Isn’t this a great offer from God?

The text continues:

“call the Sabbath a delight!”

Some sort of amusement is not what is meant – for fun and entertainment. No, God wants to be the source of our joy! This deep, inner joy, it is a joy in the Lord which permeates our whole life, when we have it.

The fellowship with Christ on Sabbath should be our main “filling-station” for our life, from which we are filled with strength, joy and love. Through the Sabbath strength and joy should shine into our whole life.

Do we realize what the Sabbath has to do with our personal relationship with God and Christ?

He wants us to take part in His character, His love, His serenity, His peace and His actions.

He can only give us His presence when we devote our **complete and undivided attention** to Him. Quality time with God isn't possible when we are busy with something else and are constantly distracted.

This intimate fellowship with Christ is the most valuable thing in this world. Literally everything depends on it. And the Sabbath, which we reserve completely for God, provides room for this quality time. It is the base between the Lord and His children. When we have joy on Sabbath, because we have loving fellowship with Jesus, then we won't consider the Sabbath an obligation, but rather as a need and a joy.

Some practical questions arise here.

How do I spend the Sabbath with Jesus?

What is appropriate for this day? What should I exclude? What principles help me to make the right decision in different situations?

As Seventh-Day Adventists we don't want to draw up a list. But we recognize some guidelines from the Bible, which help us to apply the principles to our present situation. What does the Lord say?

The Sabbath commandment begins with the statement:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”
(Exodus 20:8 NKJV)

God is telling us to plan the Sabbath ahead of time and to look forward the whole week to this day with Him. Plan your whole week so that you are well prepared for the Sabbath. Then you can spend the day with Him without being distracted.

When I reserve the day for God, then I am keeping it holy. For God, keeping something holy means **to set apart**. The purpose of the Sabbath is to dedicate it to God, to place it at His disposal, to spend this time with Him. But that is only part of keeping it “holy”. The second part – the presence of God – is definitely an aspect of the Sabbath.

What made the burning bush holy? What made the temple holy? What makes the Sabbath holy? Through the presence of God, through fellowship with our Lord. So, we can see in the first sentence of the Sabbath commandment that the chief purpose is fellowship with God.

Friday is a special preparation day.

In the Bible it is called **the Day of Preparation**.

This also means, amongst other things, that we prepare appropriate and suitable clothing for Sabbath and the church service. In 1 Timothy 2:8-10 and 1 Peter 3:3-4 God's Word addresses particularly women *"that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation"* (NKJV). This has to do with the fact that when a man looks at a woman it can cause visual enticement. Our God wants women to help men remain free from wrong thoughts. God wants brothers to be able to look at their sisters with joyful and pure hearts. In general: no sloppy clothing, but also not a fashion show! We want to honor our wonderful Lord and His gift of the Sabbath with clean and tasteful clothing.

Amongst other things, we find in Exodus 16:23 that food for the Sabbath should be mostly prepared ahead of time, so that the women can rest on Sabbath. And why?

Because God values and wants fellowship with the women just the same as with the men. And because this fellowship is just as important for the sisters as it is for the brothers.

Ingrid, my dear wife, prepared a special meal for supper every Friday evening. It was always a joy for the family. On Friday she also prepared a delicious stew and a good dessert for Sabbath. When we managed the retirement center in Bad Aibling – with 140 residents and 64 patients at the time – my wife also instituted this here as well.

It was greatly appreciated. What effect did it have on the kitchen? They got along with one employee for more than 200 people and one additional helper for a few hours at breakfast time.

This special time goes from when till when?

The day of rest begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday (Genesis 1; Leviticus 23:32; Mark 1:32).

It is a good custom to begin Sabbath together by praising God through song, prayer, reading the Bible and sharing experiences. In the same way, we want to close the Sabbath.

When I was an apprentice in Kempten im Allgäu, we met in families' homes on Friday evening during the winter months to welcome the Sabbath together. We sang our favorite songs and shared our experiences with God. It was a wonderful time each week. There were always 9-10 young people present – no one wanted to miss it!

On Sabbath we should set aside every activity for making a living and every other kind of work. The commandment says in Exodus 20:10: *"... in it you shall do no work ..."* (NKJV) (See the topic of rest on page 11.)

Exodus 34:21 says: *"Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest."* (NKJV) This Sabbath commandment applies not only for normal events, but also to times when there are especially urgent and important tasks.

I noticed when I was reading Amos 8:5-7 that it talks about people who are already thinking on Sabbath about their business and worldly matters that they want to take care of afterwards. Can God be pleased with such an attitude?

But the Bible lets us know that there are exceptions, for example when a sudden emergency arises. Jesus mentioned the case of an ox that fell into a well. However, if an ox falls into a well multiple times, then the well should be covered ...

Furthermore, acts of compassion are appropriate: naturally sick people, old and young people and even animals should and may be provided for. But even these good deeds on Sabbath shouldn't dim the main biblical aspect of the Sabbath, namely fellowship with God and rest. Each of us needs the Sabbath to maintain and strengthen our relationship with God.

According to Luke 23:50 even Jesus' dead body wasn't taken care of on the Sabbath. We learn from this, amongst other things, that in general we shouldn't have funerals on Sabbath.

In addition, Jesus commanded us to pray in Matthew 24:20 that we wouldn't have to flee on Sabbath. I think God recommended this because we especially need our relationship with God during times of flight. (How God answered this prayer during the siege by the Romans of Jerusalem in 66-70 A.D. is described in detail in *Letter to Andrew No. 11: What Jesus said about Jerusalem, His second coming and the end of the world.*)

Isaiah 58:13 says in the *Good News Translation*: "... if you value my holy day and honor it by not traveling ..." The Sabbath isn't intended as a day of travel and in many respects not as a day for tourism.

What about eating at a restaurant on Sabbath? Situations could arise during travel that make it necessary to eat at a restaurant. But when we are at home and can prepare something, then we shouldn't go to a restaurant and let others work for us.

Sabbath is also not a day for going to school or taking part in continued education. There are countries which have laws for religious freedom and students don't have to attend school. But God's command is still in effect even when the state doesn't allow it. (See the book "*One Miracle after Another*", the story of Pavel Goia in communist Romania by Greg Budd. Available at the *Adventist Book Center*.)

Should a couple have their wedding on Sabbath? Most weddings are associated with a considerable amount of work. This doesn't correlate with resting on Sabbath and uninterrupted fellowship with Jesus.

Our Lord masterfully summarized thoughts about the Sabbath during His life on earth in Mark 2:27-28: "... *The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.*" (NKJV)

Sabbath was created by Christ **for mankind. And for what purpose? Primarily for special fellowship with Himself. Even though the Sabbath was made for man, Jesus remains Lord of the Sabbath.** This means that He says how this day with Him is intended to be.

This fellowship enriches our lives, through which we have a life of abundance here and later eternal life.

Some people think that we want to earn God's kingdom by keeping the Sabbath. This is a great fallacy. We are saved by God's grace, which we accept by faith. The Sabbath strengthens our fellowship with Jesus and makes it more intimate. When we reserve the Sabbath for Him, then we are expressing our love, our trust and our obedience. Just as we sing in the songs: "My Jesus, I love Thee" or "Jesus is my joy, my all". This should be the subject matter of this day.

When we save this day for our Lord, how can we have fellowship together?

What does God's Word say? I have kept the order which is in the Bible. First, the things we should omit so that we can have quality time with God and then the things we should do in order to make the most out of our fellowship with Him.

The Sabbath is a day of "sacred assembly" (Leviticus 23:3 NIV). So, meeting with God's children for a "worship service" in homes, a chapel or a church. Jesus also went to a synagogue on Sabbath for the worship services of that time (Luke 4:16). The Bible shows us that Jesus went out into nature with His disciples on Sabbath afternoon (Matthew 12:1). Sabbath midday and afternoon are especially valuable times for family and friends.

It is also good to visit, encourage and help sick and suffering people on Sabbath. It is also worthwhile to show people the way who are seeking Christ or to read in the Bible together with them. Sometimes there are meetings at the church in the afternoon.

In some churches I had the impression that they didn't see Sabbath as a day of rest, but rather as a day of work for God. There wasn't only a worship service, but also church board meetings, church business meetings, choir practices and other things. This is completely missing the meaning of Sabbath.

Some of my most beautiful memories of Sabbath are on Sabbath afternoons when I read my Bible or our valuable books alone, or when each person read in the Bible and then we discussed together what we had read.

"... If you call the Sabbath a delight ... then you will find your joy in the Lord ..." (Isaiah 58:13-14 NIV) What a great promise!

When the Lord gave Isaiah this call to keep the Sabbath, spiritual renewal was necessary. Today, like then, spiritual renewal is also desperately needed. We need intimate fellowship with Jesus on Sabbath and from the Sabbath into the whole week, otherwise we will be washed away by the ever greater hectic and temptations in this life.

God's last message to humankind in Revelation 14:6-12 calls to worship the Creator God and hence to keep the true Sabbath: "... *Here are those who keep the commandments of God ...*" (verse 12 NKJV) "*Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*" (Matthew 28:20a NKJV)

The central issue in the last great controversy, which is quickly nearing, will be the question of the Sabbath.

Keeping the Sabbath as God intended connects us with Jesus. It creates the atmosphere for developing and maintaining our relationship with Christ. Keeping the Sabbath means: Giving the Lord priority over everything else on this day. The Sabbath is completely bound to Jesus. HE instituted it. HE practiced it with His people in the wilderness. At that time, HE made it to a test and HE will make a test in the last days again. HE anchored it in the ten commandments. HE kept it as a human on this earth and HE will keep it as king of eternity together with us every week.

(More on this topic in *Letter to Andrew No. 10: Jesus and the Sabbath – What relationship is there between Jesus Christ and the Sabbath?*)

The Lord wants us to think about the Sabbath, because He wants us to think about Him. **He wants to bless our lives through His presence.** He wants to maintain His trust and love relationship with us and place our life on a divine foundation. Sabbath was made for man and Jesus remains Lord of this day.

May keeping the Sabbath as God intended help the Lord Jesus to be more and more the source of our life and our joy. There is a close correlation between keeping the Sabbath and our relationship with Christ.

In the last days, the Sabbath will be proclaimed more comprehensively and precisely because of its great importance to every person. Are we willing to rethink how we keep the Sabbath and our relationship to Christ and make any necessary changes?

Keeping the Sabbath with an emphasis on a personal relationship with God will bring about revival and reformation. When we have an intimate relationship with God, then the Lord can give us revival and reformation.

Will we humble ourselves and honestly face this question? *“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight ... then you shall delight yourself in the LORD ...”* (Isaiah 58: 13-14 NKJV)

Dear Andrew,

I hope your joy and love for our Lord continually grows, especially through the Sabbath. May your personal relationship to God *“be the source of your joy”* (Isaiah 58:14).

With warm regards,

Helmut

The Seven Blessings of the Sabbath

The Bible expresses this with seven verbs:

1. Rest

“schabbat”: This word means to cease, to take a break. It emphasizes bodily rest on this day.

2. Mental Rest

“nuach”: Here it doesn't only have to do with ceasing, pausing, taking a break, but rather it expresses the idea of being still and a peaceful existence, simply being able to mentally recuperate. This is mental rest.

3. Spiritual Rest

“naphasch”: “refreshed”, literally “to gather the soul” (from “nepesch” = soul). It is a word that is used in Psalm 23, where David says: “He restores my soul.” The Sabbath is a time for us to let our souls be restored. And this is emotional rest, rest of our disposition, spiritual rest.

4. Celebration

“asah” is an active word, which describes creative activity, creative design, something you make or create. If we take the word literally, then it means: We “recreate” the Sabbath every week, we “make” it.

5. Rest in our Salvation

In Genesis 2:2 (Hebrews 4:4) is the word *“kallah”*. Here it has to do with the rest in the gospel, meaning humans can rest because they are justified by God's grace.

6. God gives me new strength

This word is *“berech”* to bless. This is a rest that gives us strength – it means blessing and receiving new strength.

7. Time for Love

“qadasch”: hallow. This takes place through His presence. It is a very personal rest.

