



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SABBATH OBSERVANCE

“IN CHRIST” AND THE SABBATH

Because Sabbath is about a relationship with Christ, we each can say, “Because I am in Christ, and Christ is in me, because my character has been transformed by His character, the Sabbath takes on a richer and more profound meaning for me.”

In my dissertation, I summarized the meaning of the Sabbath as follows:

The Sabbath is a holy gift of time created by God on the seventh day of creation week, given as a memorial to celebrate the power of His creation. Its sacred, delightful hours provide spiritual and physical rest and undistracted time to worship and focus on the Creator. It is “God with us” in a deeper sense than during the week. Not only does it point back to creation, but it represents redemption from sin and the future “God with us” at the second coming. It provides concentrated time for service to others and for healing. It has two dimensions: a vertical relationship focused on God and horizontal relationships with fellow human beings.^[1]

When we have a profound relationship with Jesus and understand the meaning of the Sabbath, we can more easily find guiding principles to keep the Sabbath well. Here is a list of some guiding principles for living the Sabbath, which I have derived from my statement on the meaning of the Sabbath and is based on Scripture.

PRINCIPLE 1: PREPARING

Sabbath-keeping means preparing for this special day so we can enjoy its benefits (see Hebrews 4:11; Exodus 16:28-30; Luke 23:54-56).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle

1 is based: God is a preparer. He prepared the beautiful Garden of Eden and the plan of salvation before He created humankind and the Sabbath (see Genesis 1-2; Proverbs 8:27-31; 1 Peter 1:20); He has prepared an inheritance for the redeemed, the kingdom prepared since creation (see Matthew 25:34); He has prepared a place for us—a custom-made home in heaven (see John 14:1-3); He will prepare the Holy City as a bride adorned for her husband (see Revelation 21:2).

PRINCIPLE 2: RESTING

Sabbath-keeping means resting from work, life’s burdens, and secular concerns and distractions—one of the purposes for which God gave us the gift of the Sabbath (see Exodus 16:28-29; 20:9-10; 23:12; 34:21; Nehemiah 13:15-22; Jeremiah 17:27; Luke 23:54-56).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 2 is based: God is the epitome of rest. “My soul finds rest in God alone” (Psalm 62:1, NIV). Through Jesus, God offers rest to all who come to Him (see Matthew 11:28). Jesus Himself rested on Sabbath after He worked all week creating the earth (see Genesis 2:1).

PRINCIPLE 3: RENEWING

Sabbath-keeping means observing the day in a manner that renews us physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and socially since our loving Creator provided the Sabbath vacation for our welfare (Mark 2:27). This produces a sense of well-being that lowers stress (Matthew 11:29-30).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 3 is based: God is a restorer of our being—“He restores my soul” (Psalm 23:3, NIV) He exudes renewal, (see Psalm 103:5; Matthew 11:29-30; Isaiah 40:31; 2 Corinthians 4:16).

PRINCIPLE 4: HEALING

Sabbath-keeping means observing the day in such a way as to foster healing, relief, release, liberation, and refreshment. Any action that hurts oneself or others is Sabbath-breaking. (Isaiah 58; Matthew 12:9-15; Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:38,39; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; and John 9).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 4 is based: God is a healer (see Exodus 15:26; Psalm 103:3; 147:3; Matthew 4:23; Acts 10:38). He has “healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2, NKJV). God the Son announced that His mission is to restore sight to the blind and to release the oppressed (see Isaiah 61; Luke 4:18, 19).

PRINCIPLE 5: CELEBRATING

Sabbath-keeping means celebrating the creation, or birthday, of the world (see Genesis 2:1-3), and of our redemption (see Deuteronomy 5:15), so its atmosphere

should be one of celebration, joy, and delight (see Psalm 92; Isaiah 58:13).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 5 is based: God celebrates and rejoices. He celebrated creation (see Genesis 2:1-3; Proverbs 8:27-31). He rejoices when people come to him (see Deuteronomy 30:9; Isaiah 62:5; Zephaniah 3:17; Luke 15). He will celebrate at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9). He is a source of joy (see Psalm 43:4). Speaking of God, David said, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11, NKJV). “You will find your joy in the LORD” (Isaiah 58:14, NIV).

PRINCIPLE 6: SANCTIFYING

Sabbath-keeping means keeping the Sabbath day holy—setting it apart for a special focus on God, His Word, and His agenda, to seek intimacy with Him, embrace Him wholly, and nurture a love relationship with Him that makes us holy. (see Exodus 20:8; 31:13; Isaiah 58:13; Ezekiel 20:12). This nurtures our “vertical” relationship—our relationship with God.

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 6 is based: God is holy (see Leviticus 11:44; 19:2), personal and loving (see 1 John 4:8), and He seeks intimacy and special time with His family (see John 15:15; Revelation 3:20). He sanctifies, or makes holy, the Sabbath and His people (see Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:11; 31:13).

PRINCIPLE 7: REMEMBERING

Sabbath-keeping means remembering, reflecting, and rejoicing about the Creation of the world (see Exodus 20:11), redemption from sin (see Deuteronomy 5:15; Luke 4:16-19), and Christ’s second coming and the creation of the new earth (see Isaiah 66:22, 23).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 7 is based: God remembers and reflects on important happenings. For example, He paused to reflect on His accomplishments at creation (see Genesis 1:4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:11). He remembers His covenants with humanity (see Genesis 9:15, 16; Leviticus 26:42, 45).

PRINCIPLE 8: WORSHIPPING

Sabbath-keeping means participating in corporate, focused worship of God with our church family (see Leviticus 23:3; Isaiah 56:1-8; 66:22, 23; Mark 1:21; 3:1-4; Luke 4:16; 13:10; Hebrews 10:25; Revelation 14:7). This nurtures both our “vertical” and our “horizontal” relationships—those with God and with our fellow human beings.

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 8 is based: God desires corporate worship (see Isaiah 66:22, 23). Jesus attended and led out in worship services while on earth (see Luke 4:16).

THE EXCUSES OF MOSES

Exodus 3:1–4:17

PRINCIPLE 9: BASKING

Sabbath-keeping means enjoying, studying, experiencing, and basking in the world God made, rather than working at maintaining it (see Psalms 92:4, 5; 111:2-4; compare Romans 1:20). At creation, God was filled with satisfaction, rejoicing “in his whole world and delighting in mankind” (Proverbs. 8:31, NIV).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 9 is based: God is Creator, and He appreciates His creation—He considered it all “very good” (Genesis 1:31, NIV).

PRINCIPLE 10: RESPONDING

Sabbath-keeping is a joyful human response to God’s grace in obedience to His loving command to remember Him and His Sabbath gift (see John 14:15). It is not meant to be a means of earning our salvation (see Romans 3:20; Hebrews 4:9, 10). We respond to God’s gift of rest by working for Him in His strength and for His glory (see Exodus 20:8, 9; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Hebrews 13:20, 21).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 10 is based: Love motivated Jesus’ keeping of His Father’s commandments (see John 15:10).

PRINCIPLE 11: TRUSTING

Sabbath-keeping means trusting God to take care of what we leave undone during the hours of the Sabbath (see Exodus 16:14-30; 20:10; Psalm 5:11, 12; Matthew 6:33). It means learning to depend on God rather than on ourselves.

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 11 is based: Jesus trusted His Father no matter how much Satan tempted Him to do otherwise (see Luke 4:1-13). He demonstrated this trusting attitude as He suffered for our Salvation (see Matthew 26:39; Luke 23:46).

PRINCIPLE 12: FELLOWSHIPING

Sabbath-keeping means nurturing our relationships with family and friends (see Mark 1:29-31; Luke 14:1). In the gift of the Sabbath, God provides time for focused fellowship with the whole family—even the family animals (see Exodus 20:8-11). Sabbath and family go together (see Genesis 1:1-2:25; Leviticus 19:3). This nurtures our “horizontal” relationships—those with our fellow human beings.

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 12 is based: The members of the Godhead are relational (see John 15:15). God’s relationship with us is the foundation of our relationship with each other (see John 13:34,



So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Genesis 2:3



35; 17:20-23). Jesus fellowshiped with others on Sabbath (see Mark 1:29-31; Luke 14:1).

PRINCIPLE 13: AFFIRMING

Sabbath-keeping means rightly representing the atmosphere of the Sabbath by a spirit of acceptance, love, and affirmation rather than a spirit of judgment and criticism (see John 7:24).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 13 is based: God is accepting, loving, and affirming (see Matthew 11:28; John 3:16; Romans 8:38; Ephesians 1:3-10; Revelation 22:17).

PRINCIPLE 14: SERVING

Sabbath-keeping means serving other people in love and witnessing lovingly for God (see Isaiah 58:7-10; Matthew 12:12; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; 13:12, 16).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 14 is based: Jesus is a Servant and Proclaimer of the Good News (see Luke 4:18-21; Philippians 2:5-11). He went about doing good (see Acts 10:38).

PRINCIPLE 15: CARING

Sabbath-keeping means caring for necessary physical needs on Sabbath; no creature—animal or human—should be allowed to suffer on this day (see Exodus 23:12; Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:27).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 15 is based: God supplies all our needs, all the time (see Exodus 16:26, 35; Joshua 5:12; Matthew 6:25-33; John 5:16, 17; Philippians 4:19), and He advocates that we care for the needs of all His creatures (Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5).

The principles above are based on God’s character, and they provide a foundation for our Sabbath rules/practices. God will help us to reflect and live His character as we translate these principles into actions. What better day to reflect His nature than on Sabbath—the day above all days!

^[1] May-Ellen M. Colón, “Sabbath-keeping Practices and Factors Related to These Practices Among Seventh-day Adventists in 51 Countries,” Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2003, pp. 25, 26.

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When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He called him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. In response, Moses made up excuses, telling God why he was not the man for the job.

In this sermon, we will look at Moses’ excuses and God’s response to them. As God’s people today, we, like Moses, have received from God a special calling. We are called not to deliver people from physical bondage but to preach Christ’s message of deliverance to a world in bondage to sin. We are called to “go into the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15; 1 Peter 2:9, 10). Too often, though, we behave just like Moses, making excuses.

Let’s begin by reviewing the story of how God called Moses. (Read Exod. 3:1-10). Now let’s consider the five excuses given by Moses.

I. “WHO AM I?” (EXOD. 3:11)

Remember that Moses was once a member of the ruling house of Egypt. But now he was a humble shepherd. It had been 40 years since he had been in Egypt. He was 80 years old, already past the average lifespan for his generation.

For these reasons Moses wondered whether he was the right man for the job. But God’s response was quick and should have been adequate as He assured Moses, “I will certainly be with you” (Exod. 3:12). God promised to be with Moses, and this alone should have been enough.

Some of us may insist that we are insufficient for the task. It is true that by ourselves we are insufficient, but God can make us sufficient. (Read 2 Cor. 3:5, 6). Look what He did with the apostles, those 12 uneducated and untrained men (Acts 4:13).

Through Jesus, God has provided us the same assurance given to Moses (Matt. 28:20). With His help, we can accomplish anything He wants us to do. We can say with Paul, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13).

Our excuses for not doing what the Lord has called us to do are lame and may merely indicate a lack of faith, yet we come up with excuse after excuse. When Moses’ first excuse was refuted, he quickly came up with another.

II. “WHAT SHALL I SAY?” (EXOD. 3:13)

Moses knew that if he went to the

children of Israel, they were bound to ask questions such as, “Who is this God who sent you to us? Why are we to leave the country that has been our home for the past 400 years?”

Again, God’s response was quick. (Read Exod. 3:14, 15). God told Moses what he should say in response to the Israelites’ questions.

Again, we sometimes use the same excuse today. We may try to excuse ourselves by saying that our knowledge is inadequate. But God has told us what to say. It is really quite simple. (Read Mark 16:15, 16.) How simple? (Read 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 2:2).

As we return to the story, we see that although God told Moses what to say, Moses soon raised a third objection.

III. “SUPPOSE THEY WILL NOT BELIEVE ME?” (EXOD. 4:1)

Now that he had been given words to say, Moses suggested that the people might not listen to him. Had he already forgotten that God would be with him? God responded by equipping him with several convincing proofs to demonstrate to the dubious Israelites.

- Moses’ staff, which turned into a serpent (Exod. 4:2-5).
- His own hand, which turned leprous (Exod. 4:6-8).
- The water, which turned to blood when it fell on dry ground (Exod. 4:9).

Some today hesitate for the same reason. The fear of failure keeps us from trying. But just as God gave Moses convincing evidence, so He has given us the evidences necessary to convince the honest and sincere person.

The Word of God, especially its evidence concerning the resurrection of Christ and fulfilled prophecy, is able to produce faith (Rom. 10:17; John 20:30, 31). For this reason, we cannot justify not sharing the gospel with others. One would think that by this point in his discussion with God, Moses would accept the call, but he quickly concocted a fourth excuse.

IV. “I AM SLOW OF SPEECH AND SLOW OF TONGUE” (EXOD. 4:10)

Moses claimed that he was not an eloquent speaker, but God was not moved by this objection.

- He already knows the inability of those He calls (Exod. 4:11).
- Again He promised to be with

Moses (Exod. 4:12).

- He had even arranged a mouthpiece for Moses (Exod. 4:14-16): his brother Aaron. Aaron was sent earlier so as to arrive at the right time (Exod. 4:27).

Some Christians also try to use this excuse. They lament that they cannot speak well or are too timid to speak in public. But fear did not stop the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 2:1, 3, 4), and it has not stopped others. Some have even overcome real speech impediments to become preachers. I know of one who, despite a severe stammer, preached at any opportunity.

We have considered four excuses that Moses gave, but as we can see, they were not really valid. In Exodus 4:13, we learn the true reason that Moses kept making excuses.

V. “PLEASE SEND SOMEONE ELSE”

Moses simply did not want to go! His previous excuses were simply attempts to hide the fact that he did not want to accept God’s challenge. Now that the facade is removed, God’s impatience with Moses becomes evident. His anger is kindled against Moses (Exod. 4:14a). (Read verses 15-17 with an emphasis on the word “shall” to appreciate the anger of the Lord).

We may find similar parallels in our own lives. Usually the excuses we dream up are just that—excuses—not valid reasons. We would rather God send someone else! We really don’t want to do what God has called us to do.

CONCLUSION

With Moses, we know the rest of the story. He answered the call and went to Egypt. He led the children of Israel as God delivered them out of Egyptian bondage. In humility he trusted God and accepted the enormous challenge that had been given to him.

But what about us? What will be the rest of our story? Will we listen to the call to share the gospel with the lost? Will we listen to the call to obey the gospel of Christ? Or will we make excuses and one day suffer the wrath of God? Only time will tell, but if you know what you should do, follow Moses’ example and respond to God’s loving call.

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