

How to Make the Sabbath a Delight

God's Sabbath should be a delight and pleasure to God's people. You need to understand how it can be so for you.

By Leroy Neff



Throughout history, the vast majority of people have not experienced the pleasure that comes from keeping God's Sabbath correctly.

Indeed, most people have not realized that this law of God, or any of God's other laws, exists, let alone kept it!

And even among those who knew of God's Sabbath command, many rejected or ignored it. Or they failed to keep it properly and reap its full benefits.

Even some in God's Church today do not know how to properly observe the Sabbath!

Do you really know what God has instructed? If not — and if you don't follow God's instructions — you are missing out on one of God's great blessings.

When was the Sabbath made?

This article is written in the hope that you may learn more about God's Fourth Commandment, so that you may rejoice — you and your family — in God's Sabbath. Let's start at the beginning.

God created the Sabbath for man as a blessing, to fill a need that all mankind has (Mark 2:27). God put that need in man when He designed and made man. Man needs, for physical rejuvenation, periodic rest and change from his normal physical activities. He also needs time for spiritual rejuvenation.

God made the Sabbath, but when did He make it? He made it when He made man: "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Gen. 2:2-3).

From the time of creation until the Exodus, about 2,500 years later, we find no specific mention of the Sabbath in the Bible. Obviously, however, "righteous" Abel (Heb. 11:4), Enoch (who pleased God — verse 5), Noah (a just man — Gen. 6:9), Abraham (the father of the faithful), Jacob, Joseph and others kept God's Sabbath. These people were righteous in God's sight, and righteousness is keeping God's com-

mandments (Ps. 119:172).

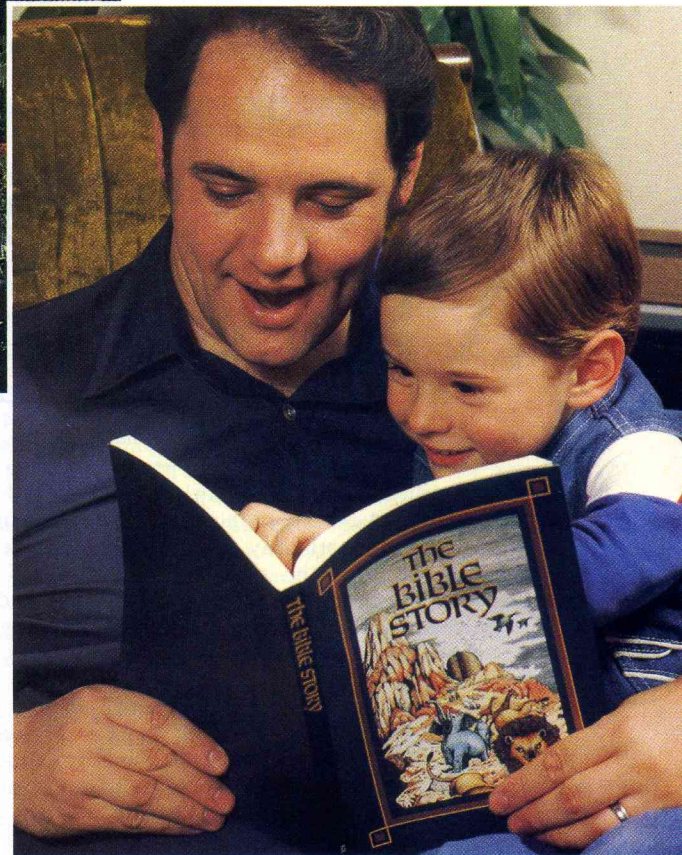
After the Exodus from Egypt, God found it necessary to test Israel and see if they would obey this specific command concerning the Sabbath (Ex. 16). Whether Israel had lost the truth about the Sabbath or whether they had become confused about it during the years in Egypt is unclear. In any event, God made it clear at this time which day the Sabbath was, by a series of miracles. He also made it clear as to how it should be kept.

Now notice: Exodus 16 describes events several weeks before Israel's arrival at Mt. Sinai. When some of the people did not follow God's instruction about the Sabbath, God said, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" (verse 28). The Sabbath had been a command since man's creation, whether or not people knew about it personally all of this time. For biblical proof, write for our free reprint article, "Were the Ten Commandments in Force Before Moses?"

These Israelites were camping in the desert and possessed rudimentary facilities to gather food and fuel, to make fire or heat, to cook, prepare and serve necessary



Time for family closeness — one of the many benefits of properly keeping God's Sabbath. Enjoying the beauty of God's creation as husband and wife and teaching children about God and God's way are two ways to make the Sabbath day special.



food. God, through Moses, instructed the Israelites to make certain preparations on the sixth day of the week, which corresponds with our Friday today.

Preparations included gathering a double amount of manna as well as fuel for the Sabbath (or Saturday). Also see Numbers 15:32-36. The Israelites were also to do any heavy cooking, such as baking and boiling, before the Sabbath (Ex. 16:23). For more information on which day of the week God's Sabbath falls on, request our free booklet, *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?*

Some did not follow God's instruction and went out to gather food on the Sabbath (verse 27). God again had to specifically instruct them, "Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day" (verse 29). Their "place" did not include desert searches for food on the Sabbath.

Today we do not normally live under the same conditions that the Israelites lived in then. But it should be evident from these examples that gathering fuel, gathering food and heavy food preparation should be done before the Sabbath, not during it.

The Bible next mentions the

Sabbath in Exodus 20, where God personally recited the Ten Commandments to the whole nation. The Fourth Command, which instructs about the Sabbath, has the longest text of any command. We need to notice several points as we read this command: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy . . ." (Ex. 20:8).

The Fourth Commandment explained

God first said "Remember." Some of the Israelites had shown a few weeks earlier that they did not remember. In order to remember, you first must know, and Israel had been told.

Today many people have read this command but they do not remember to do what the command specifies. It is the only command people are told to "remember," and it is the one command of the 10 that most people promptly forget or consider of insufficient importance.

Even in the Church it is easy to forget or to neglect taking the

action necessary for obedience. When sunset comes Friday evening we always ought to remember that this time, until the next sunset, is God's Sabbath. It is the very test commandment for God's people, to show whether, even in this, we will obey God.

Sabbath means rest

The next point we should see in this passage is that this is the *Sabbath*. The word *sabbath* is taken from the Hebrew and literally relates to a repose, intermission, cessation or rest. The Sabbath is a day of rest, but that does not mean it is a day of idleness. God tells us things we should do

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on the Sabbath, as well as things we should not do.

The command refers to the Sabbath as a day — 24 hours from even to even (sunset to sunset — Lev. 23:32). God next said that we should “keep it holy.” This means that it already is holy. Only God can make a thing, a person or time holy. He made the Sabbath holy at the creation of man, when He hallowed the day (Ex. 20:11).

“Six days shalt thou labour, and

do all thy work” (verse 9). God has given us six of the seven days of the week to do whatever we need or desire to do. He does not specify exactly how we should use these other days, but He does specify what we should and should not do on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not the day to do the business of earning a living or to do our normal, routine activities.

And, as verse 10 shows, no one under the jurisdiction of a Christian (minor child, employee, even

animals) should be required to work on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath covenant

God explains why the Sabbath should be kept, and why it is holy to Him in the next verse: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (verse 11).

The Sabbath was so important

God's Sabbath— A Special Blessing

By Marc Segall

Shouldn't we, God's spiritual people, be real experts on how to celebrate the Sabbath day as Christ, Lord of the Sabbath, intended? We are, after all, the people specially distinguished by the Sabbath — we are set apart by this unique sign (Ex. 31:13-17).

God gives us special instruction in Isaiah 58:13 on how to keep this day. This verse tells us not to tread our feet on the Sabbath day, which means, figuratively, that we aren't supposed to keep the Sabbath the way we choose to, but the way God says to. God says to call the Sabbath day “a delight.”

We know that we should not work or do our business on this day — it is a time of rest and drawing closer to God. It is a holy convocation. We are not to seek our own ways or pleasures on this weekly Holy Day.

Yet how, specifically, can we “delight” in the Sabbath day? Here are some practical suggestions:

- **Preparation.** Proper Sabbath observance begins before the sun ever sets Friday evening. We should begin thinking early in the week about how we can make the Sabbath special and memorable. How, for instance, can we make the evening meal extra special and enjoyable — something to

really look forward to? What will we do during that 24-hour period?

Discuss the coming Sabbath among your family — really “talk it up” and build excited anticipation for this unique day. If you do, God's Holy Day will not just happen, but will be a day full of purpose — full of benefit for the whole family.

Friday is the day to put the finishing touches on your Sabbath plans — to spruce up the house, to get the chores accomplished to last two days and to prepare the Sabbath meals. “To tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to day,” says Exodus 16:23.

The dinner meal should be the finest, most delicious meal of the entire week. Make your *pièce de résistance* dish and plan a healthy, tasty dessert as a special treat.

With a little imagination, you can add a touch of class to this scrumptious beginning for the Sabbath. Prepare a relaxing setting for the meal. The children can create a colorful centerpiece for the table using flowers, leaves, pine cones or paper cut-outs. A lovely tablecloth, candles and cloth napkins can set a pleasing mood. Think about some inspiring, tranquil music your family can listen

to during or after the meal. All this extra effort sounds like special preparations for company. But think of what this effort will say to your family, since they are the ones being honored.

Another special addition to the Sabbath meal is to invite a widow, widower or unmarried brother or sister in the Church to enjoy this occasion. Your guests will be able to experience real family unity in the Church and you will have added the element of pure religion to your Sabbath day (Jas. 1:27).

- **Family activities.** Follow your leisurely Sabbath meal with a good conversation. Maybe your talk can center around the theme of the Millennium and God's Kingdom. Or make a game out of trying to name all the countries where members of God's Church live, or all the countries Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong, Christ's apostle, has visited to preach the Gospel.

You can make the Sabbath an enjoyable learning experience for your children by playing other games, also, such as naming Bible books or characters or Bible charades. Smaller children can play Bible alphabet games (e.g., think of Bible objects or leaders beginning with various letters) or draw pictures recreating various scenes and stories mentioned in Scripture.

The Sabbath doesn't have to be a drag or a bore for teenagers, either. Teens can involve themselves in activities carefully tailored to focus their minds on God and the Bible and help them keep the spirit of the Fourth Commandment. With publications like *Youth 82*, *The Plain Truth* and *The Good News* available,

to God that He made a separate Sabbath covenant between Himself and Israel in addition to the covenant concerning His overall relationship with the nation (Ex. 19:3-8). This special Sabbath covenant is found in Exodus 31:13-17.

“Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord

that doth sanctify you” (Ex. 31:13). This covenant points out that the Sabbath is a sign to God, showing Him who His people are, and to the people, that they may know who God is. A person who does not have this identifying sign is not a servant of the great Creator God.

God here charges Israel “to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant” (verse 16).

As long as the people of Israel

exist and are having generations (bearing children), this covenant applies.

After Israel entered the promised land, they seldom obeyed God for long, as you can read in the Old Testament’s historical books. The result? God sent the northern 10 tribes of Israel and later Judah into captivity. The prime reason (but, of course, not the only reason) they were sent into captivity was because of Sabbath breaking (see Ezekiel

teens can use the quiet time that the Sabbath offers as a chance to get in some lifesaving reading. Parents can even take information from these magazines and devise games like Bible baseball, complete with rewards for the best answers.

• *Rest and celebrate together.*

Extra rest and sleep are appropriate on the Sabbath. Many of us, in the day-to-day fulfillment of our jobs, have to start early and work late. The Sabbath provides an opportunity for rest and refreshment for everyone in the family.

When you wake up, fill your mind with thoughts of what a special day this is. Remember who you are (1 Pet. 2:9-10) and “be glad in the Lord” (Ps. 32:11). Be reminded of your true identity in God’s sight and of what a magnificent future you have to look forward to.

Play your most inspiring and uplifting music during the day. It will lift your attitude, soothe your nerves and remind you of the purpose of the Sabbath. As the Sabbath breakfast is laid out, listening to and sometimes singing along with beautiful songs can set the mood for a fine meal. To make the morning meal special, too, try to have a wide variety of easy-to-prepare yet delicious entrees and juices.

Afterward, Dad and the children can clear the table and put things away so Mom can have a little private time to herself. It seems moms have the most to do on the Sabbath, yet they, too, need time to pray, study and relax. Everyone else should make sure Mom gets to rest on the Sabbath.

• *Ending the Sabbath.*

The Sabbath is a time for meeting with

other Christians to be instructed in God’s way of life and for fellowship (Heb. 10:25). The box on page 12 offers information on how to make the most of Sabbath services.

On the way home from services, one might occasionally plan a special stop, as long as the stop is not too far out of the way (Acts 1:12). A spectacular natural setting like a botanical garden or scenic park gives you and your family an opportunity to see God’s creative genius (Rom. 1:20). What a perfect place to consider, in a limited way, how this entire earth might be when the world enjoys its sabbath, the Millennium.

As your eyes drink in beauty and your ears absorb soothing sounds, the week’s pressures fade. As you walk hand in hand or arm in arm with your loved ones, the cares of this life temporarily vanish. It is God’s Sabbath day, and nothing else really matters.

When you get home from services, you can end the Sabbath in a special way. Gather around the table and discuss this Sabbath in retrospect. As the last light fades in the western sky, you all can feel inner peace and the strength with which to face the tasks of the coming week. You have not wasted the Sabbath day. You have used it as the Lord of this most impor-

tant day intended.

We must know how to make the Sabbath day a delight, honorable and holy. If we neglect to treat the Sabbath as the special blessing it is, then how can we as parents make the Sabbath a wonderful and positive experience that our children will look forward to each week? God tells us in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:18-21 that we should bless our children with a deep sense of appreciation for the laws of God, that we should help our children understand that keeping those laws is a rewarding experience.

If we do, then when our children are older, they will not depart from God’s laws (Prov. 22:6), but will be in better position to embrace God’s way of life when God begins working with them. □



20). The northern 10 tribes of Israel, in captivity, actually forgot who they were, because they stopped keeping the Sabbath. The Sabbath was the sign that identified who they were, as the Sabbath covenant had explained. The 10 tribes were thus "lost" in history! Our free booklet, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, explains where those 10 tribes are today.

Many people returned to Jerusalem, however, after Judah's captivity, and most were very strict concerning Sabbath observance. However, there were still a few who rebelled. They did their normal work and bought and sold food on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15-22). Nehemiah understood, as we should today, that the routine work of earning a living, buying and selling and transporting

goods from place to place profanes the Sabbath.

Christ's instruction

By the time of Christ, the religious Jews had added a large number of dos and don'ts to the keeping of the Fourth Commandment. These additions were not inspired by God and actually went far beyond the spirit and
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What About Church Services?

If you received a call from the White House in Washington, D.C., asking you to come and visit the President of the United States, or a message from Buckingham Palace in London, England, requesting your presence before the Queen, wouldn't you be excited?

No doubt you would be. You would immediately begin preparing. You would devote great attention to your manners, dress, what to talk about and a host of other important details. You would go to great lengths to ensure that you would do properly everything you had to do — after all, you would be going before some of the most important people on earth.

Should we as God's people give any less attention to detail when we come before the great, omnipotent God who created and rules this universe? We are literally coming into God's presence when we attend Sabbath services.

Participating in church services is, for true Christians, a major part of observing the Sabbath. We appear at Sabbath services, which are commanded assemblies (Heb. 10:25), to be taught by God, through His ministers. The Sabbath day is holy time and the services are holy due to the presence of God (Ex. 3:5).

How we conduct ourselves in those services matters a great deal to God and determines, in large part, how much we will delight in God's Sabbath.

Here are several areas to which we can devote more attention in order to benefit more from Sabbath services:

- **Being prompt.** We should arrive at the meeting place at least a few minutes early so we can get settled and be ready when services begin. Coming in late causes us to miss part of the services and disrupts others in the audience, not to mention insulting God. God is orderly and wants us to be punctual. He has set the example by fulfilling many carefully

By Dan Creed

timed prophecies exactly when they were supposed to be fulfilled. Matthew 24:22 tells us that if God does not intervene in this world's affairs in the dark days ahead, no humans will be left alive. What if God allowed Himself to be late?

- **Singing.** For most of us, the song service is the only part of the church service in which we participate verbally. Singing is a major way we can worship and praise God (Ps. 95:1-2, 100:1-2), and we should participate wholeheartedly, collectively raising our voices in honor to God. We should teach our children to stand and participate as well. Also, we should make sure we handle church hymnals carefully. The hymnals are, in fact, God's property. Children should not write on, color or tear the pages.

- **Dress.** How we dress is important when we come into God's presence. In one of Christ's parables, the king (Christ, symbolically) expelled from the wedding celebration someone who wasn't dressed properly. Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong has always stressed that, when we appear at Sabbath services, we should wear the finest we have. Church services are not a fashion show, but we dress in our best to honor God. If we dress carelessly or are improperly groomed, we are guilty of treating God with contempt.

- **Benefiting from services.** God's children are to dwell together in unity (Ps. 133:1). God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). Consequently, at God's services we should conduct ourselves in an orderly manner.

We should listen attentively throughout the services, realizing that God has prepared a spiritual feast for each of us (Isa. 55:1). Unnecessary talking, passing

notes and sleeping are not characteristics of a good listener. Taking notes can improve how we listen.

Our children should not do schoolwork, read other books or play games. As they grow older they can learn to follow along in the Bible and take notes. Children and teenagers can understand what is being said if we teach them properly (I Cor. 7:14, Deut. 6:7).

There should be as little walking around the meeting hall as possible — walking around distracts the audience and disrupts the speaker. If we need to leave the room, we should go and return as quietly as possible. It is proper to wait for special music to be over before coming back into the room. If a baby is making noise, leave quickly and take care of the problem. Mothers should not linger and visit in the mothers' room.

When services are over, we should police the area where we and our families have been sitting, picking up any trash we might have left. This sets a good example for both those in and outside the Church. Our children should not abuse the facilities by tying up elevators, running up and down stairs and in lobbies or going into restricted areas. The Church has actually lost halls on occasion because of the misconduct of our own people. This casts a bad light on God's Church.

And after services, we shouldn't just rush out immediately. Since it is the Sabbath, we normally would not have any pressing responsibilities elsewhere. Church services are the perfect opportunity for fellowship with God's people as well as being instructed in God's way (Mal. 3:16). Is there somewhere else we would rather be?

Each of us has an awesome responsibility at church services. We are in the presence of God, so let's remember our Sabbath manners. □

Sabbath

(Continued from page 12)

intent of God's law. Some even believed that it was sinful to carry a purse with money, reasoning that since one could not buy anything anyway, carrying money would be carrying a burden on the Sabbath. Carrying a second handkerchief, since it was not needed, would also be a burden, and therefore was prohibited.

Jesus Christ taught and practiced differently concerning the Sabbath. He said — and even His critics had to agree — that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4), that one could, for example, rescue an ox that had, on the Sabbath, fallen into a pit (Luke 14:1-5). Leading an animal to water was not wrong (Luke 13:15).

Christ taught balance, wisdom and having the right attitude in Sabbath observance. The Jews, steeped in physical rituals, could not understand. They would rescue an ox from a pit on the Sabbath, but condemned Christ for healing an unfortunate human being on that day! They, by adding their own traditions and interpretations, had made the Sabbath a burden.

The problem today is that some take Christ's teachings and go to the opposite extreme from the religionists of Christ's time. When Christ said it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath, He was being accused for healing a man with a withered hand. This act did not require work or labor prohibited by the Sabbath command. But this example does not imply that since nursing a sick person is "doing good," a person may be gainfully employed in that occupation on the Sabbath.

Regarding the other example, that of an ox in the ditch, some might conclude that any supposed "emergency" can be taken care of on the Sabbath. Some "emergencies" can wait, especially when they do not affect life or limb of man or beast. After all, an ox normally does not fall into a ditch each Sabbath, or even frequently.

Probably such an occurrence would be rare. And it would not take all day to get the ox out of the pit or ditch.

The Sabbath is a feast

The Sabbath is normally a feast day, not a fast day (Lev. 23:2-3). Obviously, a fast of more than six days includes a Sabbath, and under some circumstances a fast may be appropriate on the Sabbath. But the Sabbath usually ought to be a time for a feast, possibly including some special food delights.

The Sabbath is a holy convocation (Lev. 23:2). A holy convocation is a religious service convened by an authorized minister of Jesus Christ. To neglect such convocations when they are held, except for sickness or occasional unusual circumstances, is to disobey the Sabbath command. Read the solemn warning in Hebrews 10:24-27.

The Sabbath is to be observed each week regardless of pressing duties, rush business or ripe crops (Ex. 34:21).

The Sabbath, when observed rightly, is a delight: "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, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isa. 58:13-14, New International Version).

Have the right approach

You may have heard the phrase "Thank God it's Friday." In the United States people often use this phrase to express their elation that the workweek is nearly finished and a weekend of relaxation lies just ahead.

But this phrase can really mean something important to us as Christians as well. Every Friday we can be thankful because the Sabbath is almost here. The most

enjoyable day of the week is just ahead.

Before sunset Friday evening, we ought to have taken care of necessary business or personal responsibilities so that they are not of concern on the Sabbath. As the Sabbath arrives at our home, we can breathe a sigh of relief. The Sabbath is here.

We have none of the usual weekly responsibilities, no business or job to take care of, none of the concerns that beset us the other six days. This is the day of rest and refreshing that God has provided. A day for holy convocation and fellowshiping with other Christians and, through other Christians, with Christ. A day without the usual mundane requirements and concerns.

At bedtime we should have no business or anxious thoughts to prevent us from resting well. Unless early church services require otherwise, we shouldn't need to set an alarm clock. We normally should be able to have the best night's rest of the week. When we get up there should be no urgency or need to rush. We can relax and enjoy the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a time for real family togetherness that may not be possible during the rest of the week, a special time and opportunity to teach children about God and His ways. A day to do good in serving and helping other brethren at services, or to visit the sick, the widows or the elderly. A time when we can, with some leisure, observe and appreciate the beauties and marvels of God's creation, whether flowers or bees or any part of God's creation conveniently available.

It is a day when we can spend extra time in prayer, study or meditation, since we have added time not available during the rest of the week.

The Sabbath is unlike any other day of the week. It is holy time set apart by God for a special and wonderful purpose.

How you observe the Sabbath will determine how well you please God and how much you will be able to rejoice in this most special day of the week. □