SABBATH AND SCHOOL

The leaders of the Reformation: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli moved and were moved on the public university campus. Through their ministry, revolutions were eventually ignited at the world’s best colleges and universities. However, they were but the tipping point of revival that eventually led to the birth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Arguably, the groundwork of the Reformation was done—at least in part—by a group of people known as the Waldensians, who many Protestant scholars regard as the forerunners of the Reformation. During a time of intense persecution, those faithful, Bible-believing Christians were forced into the mountains and valleys to find safety and religious freedom.

Their young people were tasked with committing large portions of the Bible to memory. At schools in the wilderness of the Alps, students wrote portions of Scripture and wove into their clothing the precious pages of the Bible. They enrolled as students and lived out their faith, dropping seeds of truth. People saw the unmovable faith these students of the valley possessed and were strangely drawn to their example. The Waldensian movement impacted the best universities throughout Europe, setting the stage for the fire of the Reformation.

The power in the Waldensian ministry of public campuses lay in the way they lived their faith, keeping the Sabbath and dropping seeds of truth. They didn’t engage in controversy. As onlookers watched they asked themselves, What does this all mean? The power of the Sabbath served as a tool for these underground missionaries to lead souls to Christ.

Read This Week’s Passage:
Exodus 31:12–18
Write out Exodus 31:12–18 from the translation of your choice. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
INSTITUTIONS OF CREATION

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, two things were immediately instituted: the family and the Sabbath. The family represents the most basic of all social groups, with husband and wife as the two-fold foundation. Although the family is basic and seemingly insignificant in the larger context of society, herein lies the key to the success of the business, the church, society, and government. Members of society, government, and church are but ambassadors of the various families they come from. They will attend school, work with others, lead in enterprises, and rule governments. If they come from strong family backgrounds where ethical principles have been established, they will rule governments with selfless service and successful policies. If their homes are weak, the enterprises they lead will likewise lack in principle and goodness.

The second institution established at Creation was the Sabbath. Immediately after the creation of humanity was the establishment of the Sabbath. This was not the result of chance. It was God’s plan that family and the Sabbath be linked together so that “on this day more than any other, it is possible for us to live the life of Eden” (Education, 250). Through the observance of the Sabbath, families were to establish foundational tools that would serve as a blessing to each member of the home and as a benefit to the communities and entities they would represent.

The fact that the Sabbath was established at Creation implies that even in a perfect paradise, the Sabbath had a useful purpose in the development of Adam and Eve in their perfection. “It was God’s plan for the members of the family to be associated in work and study, in worship and recreation, the father as priest of his household, and both father and mother as teachers and companions of their children” (Education, 250–251).

However, the results of sin have changed life and perverted our associations. Opportunities for holy companionship and communion have become more difficult to develop in today’s societies.

Through love for fallen humanity, God instituted labor but also put boundaries to the burdens of employment. His command is “work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord” (Ex. 31:15). Through an everlasting covenant, God has established the Sabbath as a means by which His children may experience a piece of heaven on earth, while also being a blessing to those they come in contact with.
THE EDUCATIONAL SABBATH

Part of the main passage for this week says, “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you’ ” (Ex. 31:13).

The word surely is emphatic and restrictive. It is emphatic in the sense that God is commanding His people to keep Sabbath. This is not an optional proposition but a divine directive. It is also restrictive—we are to keep the Sabbath only and not keep anything else (or any other day). We are not to take our relationship with God into our own hands and, like Cain, bring to God sacrifices of our own liking. “He has shown you, O man, what is good” (Micah 6:8). We are to do for Him “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

Keep the Sabbath

Of all the words God could have used regarding our relationship to the Sabbath, He chose the word keep. The connotation of this word is that the Sabbath is a treasure. Although some have come to relate to the Sabbath as a rule that must be followed, a weekly delay in the quest toward riches or success, or an inherited penalty for Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, the Sabbath is to God a prized possession that must be guarded at the risk of being lost.

This treasure is not to be guarded with brute force. We do not treasure the Sabbath by burying it underground. The implication of the word keep is that we guard the Sabbath by treasuring it in our mind or memory. Elsewhere, the Bible says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8). Keeping the Sabbath is not a once-a-week practice. To treasure the Sabbath means that in everything we think, do, and plan, we think Sabbath first.

A Sign Between Me and You

In addition to being a treasure, the Sabbath is also a sign between two parties: namely, God and His people. The text implies that the Sabbath is a sign of a covenant. However, many times in Scripture when this word sign is used, it refers to miraculous things that God has done. In the Old Testament, oftentimes it refers to the signs that God made through the hands of Moses during the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Although the Sabbath is certainly a reminder of God’s covenant with us to assure us of salvation, it is also a reminder of the miraculous works of creation, when His Word alone established the heavens and laid down the foundations of the earth. The Sabbath as a memorial of creation reminds us of His miraculous power to create and recreate. The Sabbath as a memorial of His covenant to save us reminds us of His miraculous power to save and redeem. Thus, the Sabbath is a memorial of creation and of redemption.

It is important to note that the Sabbath was not only designed for the Israelites in Exodus 31. God said that the sign was to be between Him and His people throughout their generations.

There is a teaching component to Sabbath. Part of its design was to serve as a teaching mechanism to the next generation, explaining to our children God’s desire for communion with us. Thus, Sabbath was to be the foundation of education. It was designed to provide parents with the opportunity to be the child’s first teacher and to make the knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer the first lessons to be learned. This method of education was to be preserved from the first parents to the last generation of the human family.
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Exodus 20:8–12
Isaiah 58:1–14
Philippians 2:12, 13
Matthew 11:28–30

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with discipleship and harvesting?

Review your memorized verse from Exodus 31:12–18.
JESUS AND THE SABBATH

It was Christ who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt and who gave the command: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God” (Ex. 20:8–10). In the Sabbath commandment, we discover powerful insights into the character of Christ and His relationship with us as we explore the nuances of the text.

We cannot speak about the any of God's commandments without first addressing His preamble to His law. First, God says, “I am the Lord your God.” God is real. He is not a wooden figurine or a lifeless image of gold. He is also your God—He is a personal God. Second, it is this personal God who has delivered Israel and is the Source of their rest from slavery.

Focusing on the duty of observing the Sabbath has often prevented us from noticing the generosity that it expresses about God. Notice how, in the initial part of Exodus 20:8, God defers to us making a living for ourselves first, and then, after we have satisfied our own needs, we turn to His requirements. Also notice that dividing the week into seven parts, God claims only one of those parts as His own, while allowing us to use six for ourselves.

Another telling component of God's generosity is His attention to the needs of those who tend to go unnoticed. The Sabbath commandment includes regard for servants, cattle, and strangers. Although beasts of burden may slip the mind of their owner, God remembers that they also need rest. The Sabbath serves as the great equalizer for the servant, stranger, and owner, showing God's generous concern for all.

Another attribute of God that emerges in the command to keep the Sabbath is attention to detail. He not only tells us to keep the Sabbath, but also provides the two-fold requirement on how to keep it. Like a meticulous accountant, He budgets every day of the week, setting an example for us to not waste even a small fragment of time. While many consider God's fourth commandment to deal with rest, it is easy for some to grasp the fuller picture of the command also to work. Working for six days is as much a part of God's commandment as is resting on the seventh.

One part of keeping the Sabbath entails perpetually remembering and living in view of the forthcoming day of rest. To keep the Sabbath implies that we store it in our memory or remember it. Committing something to memory and perpetually storing it there is an exercise of the mind. Throughout the six days of labor, our minds work in anticipation and preparation for the soon-coming Sabbath. Mental energy is exerted to ensure that proper preparation has taken place in the management of business, family, and society. We plan so that we might rest.

The body also labors. We go to work; we run to and fro; we are busy here and there, accomplishing tasks necessary to successfully fulfill our duty. In six days, we don’t just think, we do all our work. But on the Sabbath, we rest. Our bodies are called to cease from their labors; and so are our minds. The command to allow the servant, cattle, and stranger to rest can have a dual blessing. While their bodies rest, the mind of those directing their labors also rests.

We cannot outwork God. In addition to His personal labor, He also carries the burden of our own labor. Paul says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13). God shares in our labors; He says, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). While Jesus is working in us, however, He also asks us to rest in Him. His invitation is, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).
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Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the chapter, what personal applications are you convicted of in your Sabbath-keeping?

How can you make practical applications of Sabbath-keeping in your school, family, workplace, and church?

A MEMORIAL OF CREATIVITY

“The value of the Sabbath as a means of education is beyond estimate. Whatever of ours God claims from us, He returns again, enriched, transfigured, with His own glory. The tithe that He claimed from Israel was devoted to preserving among men, in its glorious beauty, the pattern of His temple in the heavens, the token of His presence on the earth. So the portion of our time which He claims is given again to us, bearing His name and seal. ‘It is a sign,’ He says, ‘between Me and you; . . . that ye may know that I am the Lord;’ because ‘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.’ Exodus 31:13; 20:11. The Sabbath is a sign of creative and redeeming power; it points to God as the source of life and knowledge; it recalls man’s primeval glory, and thus witnesses to God’s purpose to re-create us in His own image.

“The Sabbath and the family were alike instituted in Eden, and in God’s purpose they are indissolubly linked together. On this day more than on any other, it is possible for us to live the life of Eden. It was God’s plan for the members of the family to be associated in work and study, in worship and recreation, the father as priest of his household, and both father and mother as teachers and companions of their children. But the results of sin, having changed the conditions of life, to a great degree prevent this association. Often the father hardly sees the faces of his children throughout the week. He is almost wholly deprived of opportunity for companionship or instruction. But God’s love has set a limit to the demands of toil. Over the Sabbath He places His merciful hand. In His own day He preserves for the family opportunity for communion with Him, with nature, and with one another.

“Since the Sabbath is the memorial of creative power, it is the day above all others when we should acquaint ourselves with God through His works. In the minds of the children the very thought of the Sabbath should be bound up with the beauty of natural things. Happy is the family who can go to the place of worship on the Sabbath as Jesus and His disciples went to the synagogue—across the fields, along the shores of the lake, or through the groves. Happy the father and mother who can teach their children God’s written word with illustrations from the open pages of the book of nature; who can gather under the green trees, in the fresh, pure air, to study the word and to sing the praise of the Father above. . . .

“As a means of intellectual training, the opportunities of the Sabbath are invaluable. Let the Sabbath-school lesson be learned, not by a hasty glance at the lesson scripture on Sabbath morning, but by careful study for the next week on Sabbath afternoon, with daily review or illustration during the week. Thus the lesson will become fixed in the memory, a treasure never to be wholly lost.

“In listening to the sermon, let parents and children note the text and the scriptures quoted, and as much as possible of the line of thought, to repeat to one another at home.”

(Education, 250–252)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How can Sabbath be made a witnessing instrument?

How are the Sabbath and the family attacked today?

What can God do to enhance your Sabbath and family experiences?

How has the Sabbath been a special sign between you and God?

What are ways to make the Sabbath more meaningful and special in your life?

How does this week refresh your understanding of the Sabbath?

Why must work be coupled with rest?