A HAPPY DAY

Consider God’s instructions to Adam in the Garden of Eden: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16, 17). When the serpent met Eve at the forbidden tree, he began his line of questioning with the prohibition: “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” (Gen. 3:1). Yet when God gave His instructions, He began with permission.

Not only did God mention what was permissible before what was prohibited, but what was permissible also far outweighed what was prohibited. Of every tree Adam and Eve were permitted to eat! Only one was withheld. Moreover, God did not grudgingly give them permission to eat, but they could freely eat. Yet as the serpent tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, we tend to focus on what is proscribed more than what is prescribed.

There is a simple children’s song that does not ring true for many a Christian’s experience. The lyrics are as follows:

Sabbath is a happy day, happy day, happy day
Sabbath is a happy day
I love every Sabbath.

Most Sabbath keepers would concede to the benefits of Sabbath observance. But how many actually enjoy the Sabbath? There certainly is a joy in ceasing from your labor. But what of the benefits that derive not from what you are not doing, but from what you are doing?
Write out Psalm 92 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Psalm 92:7–13. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
HANDS OFF

In some residential neighborhoods, and to a lesser degree, in some business areas, the sign “Keep off the grass” may be seen. In a freshly painted building, the warning may be, “Wet paint: do not touch.” In airports, “Caution: wet floor” is common. Each sign warns passersby to avoid contact with an area. Disobedience would lead to unpleasant consequences!

Long before these signs became a part of modern life, God had warned the Israelites that only the Kohathites (of the tribe of Levi) were permitted to transport the Ark of the Covenant (Num. 4:15). They were to do this using poles (Exod. 25:12–14). Direct contact with the ark was forbidden on pain of death (Num. 4:15). Uzzah learned this lesson tragically when, with good intentions, he touched the ark (2 Sam. 6:1–7). In effect, God instituted a “Hands off” policy regarding the sacred ark.

This “Hands off” prohibition applied with equal force to the Sabbath day. “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” (Isa. 58:13, 14, KJV).

“My holy day” and “holy of the Lord” contrast sharply with “thine own ways,” “thine own pleasure,” and “thine own words.” In a relationship with God, the believer must be careful, extremely careful, to make a difference between the sacred and the profane (secular) and to order his or her behavior accordingly. This applies with special force to the Sabbath day, God’s chosen sign of His ongoing work of sanctifying His obedient people.

The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that the holy things of God (the Sabbath, dedicated church buildings, tithe, the body temple, marriage, and so on) must not be manhandled!
NO OTHER GODS

Animism is generally regarded as the belief that a spirit or essence resides in all things, animate and inanimate, material and immaterial. This sweeping concept extends to geographical features and even the forces of nature. Animism lies at the foundation of some so-called primitive religions that worship, or regard as sacred, rivers, trees, mountains, and animals. Perhaps most ancient of all is the worship of the sun itself, or the worship of the sun as a representative of some deity.

Whether the sun, moon, stars, rocks, mountains, rivers, animals, or natural forces (lightning, storms), these are all features or expressions of nature: creation!

The three great monotheistic religions (belief in one God) do not practice animism. They are Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The first commandment directly opposes animism. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3, KJV). This prohibition is supported by the more detailed second commandment: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (Exod. 20:4, 5, KJV). Nothing anywhere in creation must be worshipped. Expressed differently, the Bible’s message is that nothing created must be worshipped!

The wording of the second commandment is partially echoed in the fourth, which describes God as having made “heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” (Exod. 20:11, KJV). The Sabbath commandment, which differentiates Creator from creation, is God’s designated defense against idol worship. Animism is impossible where the Sabbath is understood and properly observed. Speaking of the Israelites, Ellen White writes, “While they kept the Sabbath in the proper spirit, idol worship could not exist.” (Ellen G. White, Royalty and Ruin (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2008), 64.) This second statement is even more sweeping: “Had the Sabbath always been sacredly observed, there could never have been an atheist or an idolater.” (White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 336.)

It should be noted that idol worship extends beyond the things of nature to the very realm of ideas! Ellen White, who often refers to Sunday as the idol sabbath, states that “it is as easy to make an idol of false doctrines and theories as to fashion an idol of wood or stone.” (White, The Great Controversy, 583.) If this be so, then there is no more popular idol today than Sunday sacredness. By it, Satan will eventually blind virtually the entire world. (See White, The Great Controversy, 588.)

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. It is a divinely ordained defense against idolatry and deadly deception.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Isaiah 58:13, 14  
Psalm 122:1  
John 5:1–15  
Psalm 103  
Deuteronomy 28:47, 48  
Psalm 2:11

What other narratives come to mind in connection with Psalm 92?

Review your memorized verse from Psalm 92.
A SABBATH PSALM

At the beginning of every Sabbath each week, Jewish Sabbath keepers read Psalm 92. It is entitled, “A Song for the Sabbath Day,” so it certainly makes sense to read it on the Sabbath. From it we might gather some insight into the ethos of the Sabbath experience from the author’s perspective.

First, “it is good to give thanks to the Lord” (Ps. 92:1). At the close of the week, the Sabbath affords an opportunity to express gratitude to God. Clearly, giving thanks is not limited to the Sabbath, as David states: “To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night” (v. 2). Yet the Sabbath is an entire day set aside “to sing praises” (v. 1) to God for His lovingkindness and faithfulness.

David employs the use of instruments, one of ten strings, the lute, and the harp, to make “harmonious sound” (v. 3) as he praises God. So, music is to be incorporated into our Sabbath worship—harmonious music, that is. Further, in the vein of thanksgiving, the tone of the Sabbath worship experience is joyous: “For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work” (v. 4). There is a time for fasting and somber reflection, but the Sabbath is not it. Rather, the Sabbath is a day of gladness and celebration.

In verse 4 David introduces the concept of God’s work. Indeed, on the Sabbath we ought to reflect on the work that God has done. Was this not God’s example to us from the beginning? (cf. Gen. 1:31–2:3). Included in God’s works is His creation. Spending time in nature as we meditate on God’s creation is an appropriate Sabbath activity. We may come to better understand the mind of God as we do this because His works reveal His thoughts. So, David exclaims that God’s “thoughts are very deep” (v. 5).

God’s works also include His work of salvation (vv. 7, 9). The Sabbath is a day to rejoice in God’s triumph over evildoers. We may undergo oppression at the hand of wicked people, but the Sabbath constantly reminds us that God will subdue our enemies. And “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26). We have every reason to rejoice in God’s works!

Sandwiched between these verses about God’s work of salvation is the climax of the song: “But You, Lord, are on high forevermore” (Ps. 92:8). The pinnacle of our Sabbath experience is to recognize God’s exalted position and to lift Him up in our esteem. Only when God is at the center of our Sabbath experience can we know the joy of Sabbath worship!

Once again, in chiastic form, David returns to the concept of God’s work of salvation in dealing with the wicked. Unlike the “workers of iniquity” who “flourish . . . that they may be destroyed forever” (v. 7), “the righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon” (v. 12). And finally, the psalmist ends with the declaration that “the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (v. 15).
MORE THAN ANY OTHER DAY

Jesus stated . . . that the work of relieving the afflicted was in harmony with the Sabbath law. It was in harmony with the work of God's angels, who are ever descending and ascending between heaven and earth to minister to suffering humanity. Jesus declared, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” All days are God's, in which to carry out His plans for the human race. If the Jews' interpretation of the law was correct, then Jehovah was at fault, whose work has quickened and upheld every living thing since first He laid the foundations of the earth; then He who pronounced His work good, and instituted the Sabbath to commemorate its completion, must put a period to His labor, and stop the never-ending routine of the universe.

Should God forbid the sun to perform its office upon the Sabbath, cut off its genial rays from warming the earth and nourishing vegetation? Must the system of worlds stand still through that holy day? Should He command the brooks to stay from watering the fields and forests, and bid the waves of the sea still their ceaseless ebbing and flowing? Must the wheat and corn stop growing, and the ripening cluster defer its purple bloom? Must the trees and flowers put forth no bud nor blossom on the Sabbath?

In such a case, men would miss the fruits of the earth, and the blessings that make life desirable. Nature must continue her unvarying course. God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. And man also has a work to perform on this day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God's holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour's pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.

The demands upon God are even greater upon the Sabbath than upon other days. His people then leave their usual employment, and spend the time in meditation and worship. They ask more favors of Him on the Sabbath than upon other days. They demand His special attention. They crave His choicest blessings. God does not wait for the Sabbath to pass before He grants these requests. Heaven's work never ceases, and men should never rest from doing good. The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds. The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honored the Sabbath. (White, *The Desire of Ages*, 206, 207.)
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 many trees do you think God created in the beginning?

Why is it that humanity focuses on the one prohibition amidst the vast avenues of permission?

How serious is holiness?

What are versions of animism we find prevalent today?

How is Sunday sacredness a form of idolism?

How can this idea be conveyed without offending keepers of Sunday?

Describe your nexus of worship, Sabbath, rejoicing, loyalty, salvation, and justice.

How was Sabbath a day of permission rather than prohibition for Jesus?

How has this week’s lesson changed your perspective on the Sabbath?