

7 Biblical Principles on How to Keep the Sabbath Holy

Many people, upon learning the great Biblical truth of the seventh day Sabbath, often wonder, “How do I keep the Sabbath holy? What should I do on the Sabbath and what should I avoid on the Sabbath?”

The Bible gives us principles of Sabbath keeping that answers these questions very clearly. These principles show us that the Sabbath is not just a church day. But it is a 24-hour period of sweet and sacred rest in Jesus. The Bible does not give a list of rules on how to keep the Sabbath. But rather it outlines general principles that are to be applied practically with a heart that loves Jesus and desires to please God in all things. These principles are as follows...

1. The Sabbath is a special day to focus on the LORD, Jesus Christ...

The Bible says that John was “in the spirit on *the Lord’s Day*.” (Rev.1:10). According to Jesus, He is “*The Lord of the Sabbath day*” (Mat.12:8, Exo.20:10). In Isaiah 58:13, the Lord calls the Sabbath “*my holy day*.” It is a special day that the Lord Jesus set apart after He created the world in six literal days (Gen.1, Col.1:16, Eph.3:9, Jn.1:1-4). He then gave this special day as a gift of love to the entire human race (Gen.2:2-3, Mark 2:27). It is to be the great memorial of creation and a sacred symbol of re-creation (Exo.20:8-11, Isa.66:22-24). Thus the Sabbath is a special day for God’s people to focus on Jesus Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of all life. It is a special day to come apart from the stresses and cares of everyday living, to be refreshed and blessed by the great Creator who loves us and died for us.

2. The Sabbath is a special day to cease from all common/secular work, business, and activities...

The 4th commandment says, “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 thy God: in it you shall not do any work” (Exo.20:8-10.) In this commandment God gives us 6 days to do our work and commands us to rest and cease from work on the Sabbath day. Obedience to this commandment acknowledges God as our Creator and Provider (Exo.16:26-30, 20:11). According to the Bible, the Sabbath is to be kept and celebrated on the 7th day of the week (Exo.20:8-11) from sunset to sunset (Lev.23:32, Mk.1:32). That means from sundown Friday night until sundown Saturday night, we should “not do any work.” Late Friday afternoon, after Jesus died, “the Sabbath drew on” (Luke 23:54). Then Christ’s followers “rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56). On this special day all common/secular business and should be laid aside. Shopping, housecleaning, errands, homework etc. should be done during the six working days and not upon the Sabbath. All common/secular activities such as television, movies, sporting events, should also be laid aside.

The Lord says in Isaiah 58:13-14, “If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath (from walking on it), from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honorable; and shall honor him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: Then you will delight yourself in the Lord... for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.” The Pharisees made the Sabbath a burden, but Jesus wants us to “call the Sabbath a delight,” as we “delight” ourselves in Him. Sabbath keeping is something we grow into as Jesus teaches us how to “keep it holy.” The

word “*Sabbath*” means to “*cease; rest*”. Human nature is such that our lives are crowded with too much busyness! God saw we needed rest and thus gave us this rest day each 7th day of the week.

3. *Don't cause other's to work...*

Not only does God call us to personally refrain from work on the Sabbath but He also commands us not to cause others to work. The 4th commandment says, “...*you shall not do any work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates.*” (Exo.20:9). As much as it is in our power, we are not to cause others to work on the Sabbath.

Practically, this means that we are not to hire someone to work for or serve us during the Sabbath hours. For example, as a Sabbath keeping Christian, you wouldn't eat at a restaurant on the Sabbath. Now, there's nothing wrong with eating on the Sabbath. But in going out to eat at a restaurant you would be causing someone else to break the Sabbath by serving/working for you. If you were the owner of a business, you wouldn't require your employees to work on the Sabbath. But rather you would close your business on that special day. You would also refrain from buying and selling on the Sabbath (Neh.13:15-22). The 4th commandment not only applies to the believer, but also to the one that is under our influence and “*the stranger that is within your gates*”.

The only exception that Jesus gave to what may be considered work on the Sabbath day is **in the case of emergencies to relieve the suffering of others**. Jesus said, “*What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath*” (Mat.12:11-12). In this passage we find the principle that the greater good of relieving human suffering in the case of an emergencies (that cannot wait for another day) is not to be considered as work or breaking the Sabbath. Thus many in the medical field at times may need to volunteer their time and services on the Sabbath to relieve human suffering.

4. *Friday is “the preparation day.” Luke 23:54...*

The “*preparation day*” (Friday) is a good day to prepare for the Sabbath. Many use this day for finishing their errands, shopping, housecleaning, and cooking. When the sun sets on Friday evening, our minds should be free from all care so as to have an undistracted mind to focus on Jesus. In the wilderness, the Lord instructed Israel to “*bake what you will bake*” on the day before the Sabbath (Exodus 16:23-29). And Paul said the history of Israel in the wilderness is “*an example*” for us “*upon whom the ends of the world are come*” (1Cor.10:6, 11). Thus, if a special meal is planned for the Sabbath, it would be good to do as much of the cooking as possible on Friday, the preparation day.

5. *The Sabbath is a special day to go to church to fellowship with the people of God...*

As our example in all things, Jesus went into the synagogue and worshiped with the people of God each Sabbath (Luke 4:16, 31-32). The New Testament church gathered together and worshipped on the Sabbath Day (Act.13:14, 42-33, 16:13, 18:4). The Bible says, we should not “*forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is*” (Heb.10:25). In “*the new earth... from one Sabbath to*

another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, says the Lord" (Isaiah 66:22-24). We all need the blessing of fellowship with other believers who love Jesus and desire to keep His commandments (Exodus 20:6; John 14:15; 1John 1:7). This is one of the main benefits of the Sabbath day.

6. The Sabbath is a special day to do ministry and be a blessing to others...

Jesus said, *"It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath days"* (Mat.12:12). Jesus healed and helped many people on the Sabbath (Mark 1:21-27; Matthew 12:10-13; Luke 13:10-17). The Sabbath is a good day to visit the sick in the hospital, sing to the elderly in the nursing homes, bring hope to those incarcerated in the prisons, and share the gospel with our neighbors in our community. In doing so, we are following the unselfish example of Jesus.

7. The Sabbath is a special day to rest and enjoy the beautiful things of nature...

The 7th day is a memorial of the creation and the great Creator that made all things good (Gen.2:2-3). Thus the Sabbath day is a wonderful day to enjoy the beautiful things of nature. Take the children for a walk in the park. Relax under a tree. Read the Bible by a stream or lake. Look for spiritual object lessons in nature that point us to the wonderful Creator who made it all (Rom.1:20). Enjoy special fellowship with the One who said, *"Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctifies them"* (Ezekiel 20:12). The Sabbath reveals the glorious truth that the One who created our world in six days, and rested on the seventh, is also able to re-create our hearts back into His own image (Gen.1:26; Psalm 51:10; Eph.4:21-24).

But what if I have to work on the Sabbath?

Kindly, prayerfully, and firmly approach your employer and say, *"I have been convicted by the study of the Bible that I can no longer work on the 7th day Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset). I am willing to work any other day/time to make up for it. How can we work around this?"*

Millions of people around the world have taken this stand of faith. Employers are required by law to accommodate firm religious convictions and are prohibited from religious discrimination. In 9 out of 10 cases you will be able to get the Sabbath off. But in the rare case that an employer will refuse to give you the Sabbath off, God will take care of you. Even if you lose or have to let go of your job, God will help you find another one. Jesus said that He is the one that *"opens doors that no man can shut, and shuts doors no man can open"* (Rev.3:7). Never be afraid to trust God with your life! The story of the three Hebrew boys in **Daniel 3** is an example of what we need to do when the requirements of man go against the laws of God. God blessed the three Hebrews who refused to break the Second Commandment. Though they were persecuted at first, at the end of the chapter, they were promoted. If you stand up for Jesus, He will stand up for you. God promises, *"I will honor those who honor me"* (1Sam.2:30). The Bible says, *"we ought to obey God rather than men"* (Act.5:29).

If you are the only member in your family who wants to keep the Sabbath, don't push it on others. Invite others to experience the sweet joy and rest of Sabbath keeping with you. But give them the freedom to make their own decision. Jesus will guide and help you step by step if you look to Him for direction and strength (Psalm 29:11).

The Sabbath is not a legalistic requirement but it is a special date with a real God. When you keep the Sabbath holy according to these Biblical principles, your life will be filled with blessings. God will make the rest of the 6 days more productive. You will experience exponential growth in your walk with Him! *"This is the day that the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!"* – Ps.118:24