

Sermon 4

Sabbath School in Action

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Main Text: Acts 2:41-42

“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

The Power of Sabbath School

Kristen had not visited church for twenty years. She was drifting through life without an anchor of faith to hold her. As a young mother with a little toddler, life’s challenges felt overwhelming. But one day she remembered that when she was 11 years old, her grandma used to take her to Sabbath School at the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She remembered the Bible stories she learned from her teacher, Rose. She also remembered how much she loved going to Sabbath School. It seemed like so long ago, but the more she thought about it, the more she realized that Sabbath School had something she wanted back in her life.

One day she decided to visit Sabbath School and church again. To her great surprise, Kristen discovered that Rose was still teaching Sabbath School twenty years later. Rose was delighted to learn that Kristen still remembered some of the lessons she learned when she was a child. Kristen requested personal Bible studies so she could find answers to life’s questions.

Remembering her childhood Sabbath School and coming back to church became a turning point in her life. After completing Bible studies, Kirsten was baptized and became a member of the church. In reflecting on her spiritual journey, Kirsten said, “Life without God was difficult.” When she turned to God, she found what was missing in her life. Her new church family encouraged her commitment to God and made her feel welcome. “This is the right church, and this is where I need to be,” she said.

Kirsten’s story reminds us of the power of Sabbath School. No matter how far she slipped away from God and church, she never forgot Sabbath School. The seeds that were sown in her heart twenty years before sprung to life when she was ready. Today, God is calling for youth and young adults who will help recapture the evangelistic purpose of Sabbath School. God wants to use you to help some searching person find answers. He wants your Sabbath School to be a place where people can connect with God.

Sabbath School is About People

Imagine with me for a moment a Seventh-day Adventist Church without Sabbath School. You would go to church on Sabbath morning where you would hear a sermon, but there would be no interactive Bible study. You would sit in church where everybody faces the front, but you would miss the circle where everybody faces each other. You would learn from the pastor, elders, and other leaders, but you would never hear from most people in church.

It's easy to feel invisible and go unnoticed in church, but Sabbath School is the best place to be seen, heard, known, and remembered. This is because Sabbath School fosters personal connections with both peers and cross-generational relationships. While church accommodates social interaction before and after the program, Sabbath School is designed around personal interaction from beginning to end. It is common to only know a few names in church but to know everyone's name in your Sabbath School.

The Sabbath School places supreme value on the individual person. While the church service is optimized to reach large crowds, Sabbath School is optimized for small groups. Jesus emphasized the power of personal contact by touching people when He healed them (read Matt. 8:3, 15; 9:29; 17:7). Those who start a channel on Youtube or TikTok can quickly be seen and heard by millions, but touch is not about reaching large crowds. Touch is about giving personal attention to one person at a time. Sabbath School is all about touch. Sabbath School is not a program. Sabbath School is about people. It provides some of the best spaces to be personal with people and show that Jesus cares.

Done right, Sabbath School promotes what many young people are looking for today: a place of belonging, community, and connection. With good leadership and strong support of the members, Sabbath School can be a place where young people develop the habits and culture of the early church. Let's examine our Bibles today and analyze the example of the early church.

Recapturing the Culture of the Early Church

The Bible reading, Acts chapter 2:41, 42, identifies three elements that were essential to the culture and practices of the early church: **(1) mission, (2) doctrine, and (3) fellowship**. Mission was always core. Acts 2:41 says, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." Doctrine and fellowship were also non-negotiable. Verse 42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." If any one of these three elements had been neglected, the early church would have been unrecognizable. The purpose of Sabbath School is to blend the key ingredients of the early church—mission, doctrine, and fellowship. Sabbath Schools that are vibrant and alive are strong in all three areas, creating a place where lives are changed, people find belonging, and where people grow and mature in Christ.

1. Mission. The early church was born for mission. It was born to grow! It is very important to understand that in the early church, every church member was called a disciple. For example, Acts 6:2 says, "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables.'" Notice carefully that the word disciples does not describe the twelve apostles but describes the whole multitude of believers in the church. This is important, because in the early church the members were not pew warmers. Every believer was an active disciple and disciple-maker. The early church also considered every member a preacher. Let's look at Acts 8:1: "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." Don't miss it! The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, but everybody else was scattered. Then verse 4 says, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word." Who was preaching? It was not the twelve apostles who were back in Jerusalem still. It was all the other members of the church who went everywhere preaching! Did they always preach to large crowds? No! The Bible sometimes uses the word preaching to describe a Bible study with one person. Acts 8:35 uses the word

preaching to describe Philip's Bible study with the Ethiopian eunuch: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him." Sermons do not require large crowds. Some of the best sermons are given to just one person. The early church multiplied through the total member involvement of believers who were active disciples and preachers. Today, God is looking for young people who are more than pew warmers, young people who will be active disciple-makers and powerful preachers. The church needs young people who will help Sabbath Schools recapture their evangelistic purpose. Every Sabbath School should be a place where people are trained and equipped for local outreach and invest in cross-cultural missions from around the world.

2. Doctrine. The early church was defined by doctrine. Notice how our theme verse emphasizes that everybody who was baptized "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). The apostles' doctrine was their system of teachings that they received from Christ and the Scriptures. People who are leery of doctrine would never have felt comfortable in the early church. The church today should place no less emphasis on the doctrines of Christ. We need to teach and preach the Jesus of the gospels, the Jesus of Revelation, and the Jesus of the whole Bible. The mission of our church is dead unless we are committed to reviving and restoring the Christ-centered doctrinal teachings of the apostles in every Sabbath School and in every church service every week. A Sabbath School without a strong culture of Bible study is just a social club. Our Sabbath Schools need young people who can clearly explain the doctrinal truths of the Bible. More than ever before, Sabbath Schools should be known for their in-depth study of the Scriptures.

3. Fellowship. The early church was held together by fellowship. Remember, our theme verse from Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Fellowship defined the early church just as doctrine did. Those early churches ate together, spent time together, and wrote letters to each other when apart. Perhaps Adventists have too often considered fellowship optional. Just as it is the mission of God's end-time remnant to restore the doctrines of the apostles, so the mission of God's remnant must include reviving the rich, close fellowship of the early church. The interactive format of Sabbath School promotes fellowship. Sabbath School is a place where people look forward to connecting with friends and engaging with each other.

Today, God is calling the next generation of leaders who will help Sabbath Schools and churches rediscover the apostolic model of (1) mission, (2) doctrine, and (3) fellowship. The pillars of Sabbath School are designed on the same model. Thriving Sabbath School classes are strong in Bible study and prayer, mission, and fellowship. Every Sabbath School participant can contribute to the success of Sabbath School by living the principles of Acts. You don't have to be a Sabbath School teacher or leader to help your Sabbath School reach more people for Jesus.

Make it Real!

What role can you play in helping your Sabbath School realize its true potential? Let's consider practical ways that you can help your Sabbath School:

Spend Time with God. You can help your Sabbath School be strong when you first spend time alone with God. You cannot give what you do not have. Do not go to Sabbath School to get a blessing; go to Sabbath School to be a blessing. You become a very valuable participant in Sabbath School when you study the Scriptures deeply and complete your weekly lesson. Everybody should share the burden of helping the Sabbath School be a place where people find substantive Bible

answers. Sometimes, young people don't want to speak too much in Sabbath School, because they are afraid of saying something wrong or are self-conscious about how their peers might view them. But people are encouraged, and their faith grows when they see youth and young adults who read the Scriptures with interest and who can clearly explain the meaning. Young people should never underestimate the strong positive influence they can have on their peers. While it can be very difficult when your peers make jokes about you being too religious or exclude you because you are different, always remember that it is more important to consider what God thinks of you than what people think of you (John 12:43). Never allow peer pressure to silence you from being involved in Sabbath School. Study your Bible seriously and share what God lays on your heart. Let Jeremiah 15:16 be your experience: "Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." If you spend quality time in God's Word during the week, you will have something important to share in Sabbath School.

Notice Who's Missing. One of the ways that you can help your Sabbath School be more missional is to notice who is missing. Every year children drown in public swimming pools with people nearby who could save them if they noticed. Sometimes people are shocked to find a lifeless body at the bottom of the pool with people swimming all around. In total disbelief, people ask what happened. Why did nobody notice? Why didn't the person splash or yell for help? But drowning people can't yell for help, can't splash, can't scream. They are under water and cannot get air. The Sabbath School is like a swimming pool. When people are drowning spiritually, they do not kick and scream and make noise. People drown silently. When people stop coming to church, they don't make some big announcement to tell people they are never coming back. People who are struggling slip away silently, oftentimes without making any cries for help. It happens every week. It happens in every church. If somebody is missing from Sabbath School that you were expecting to see, give them a call or send them a text message and check in with them. Make sure they are okay and let them know that you miss them. One call or text message can make all the difference in the world in bringing people back. And remember, teachers need help noticing who is missing. Teachers need help letting people know how much people care for them. Every Sabbath School participant should get involved in noticing who is missing and reaching out to them. If somebody is sick or discouraged, offer to visit them, bring them a gift, or help them with a need. Your kindness lets them know they are not alone and have not been forgotten by their Sabbath School family. You can also think of people who have never been to Sabbath School that you want to see join. You can be the person to invite them for the first time.

Take an interest in cross-cultural missions. Another way you can help your Sabbath School become more missional is to show interest in cross-cultural missions. Pay attention when your Sabbath School plays mission report videos, or somebody reads a mission story from another part of the world. The mission spotlight is not just a time-filler. The mission spotlight helps you connect with brothers and sisters in Christ from far away distant places. By understanding how God's work is succeeding or struggling in other parts of the world, you learn to care about the global church family that you belong to. The Bible teaches the importance of all parts of the body working together, even if we are from opposite sides of the world. As the Bible says, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). When you give to foreign mission offerings, you are sacrificing to help brothers and sisters who can never repay you. This is the kind of outward focused living that is so important for Christians.

Make Memories Together. You can help your Sabbath School enjoy the blessings of fellowship.

- If your Sabbath School has a group chat on Whatsapp or some other social media platform, use that platform to celebrate people's birthdays and other important milestones in their life such as graduations, passing a big test, moving, getting a new job, etc. Recognizing people in their important moments helps bond groups together.
- Help your Sabbath School do some social activities together outside of Sabbath morning. Do things together that help build positive memories with the group. Share a meal together, go on a hike, visit the beach or a mountain, do an outreach project together, have a game night, etc.
- At any event, always look for people who are alone or may feel uncomfortable. Help them feel welcome and feel like they belong in your group.

Conclusion

Today, God is calling for spiritually committed young people who will work for the salvation of their peers and bring a new spark to your Sabbath Schools. You may think of lots of reasons why God could find somebody better than you. But God has a work for you to do that nobody else can do. There are people that you can reach better than anybody else. God wants you! No matter what your age is, are you willing to respond to God's call?

1. Are you ready to recapture the culture of the early church by giving strong emphasis to the three essentials of (1) mission, (2) doctrine, and (3) fellowship?
2. Are you committed to going to Sabbath School to be a blessing rather than to get a blessing?
3. Will you pay attention to who is missing and send them encouragement?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for refreshing us with your Word today. Help us to be deep in your Word and committed to the mission you have given us. Help us to pay attention to people around us who might be spiritually drowning. We pray for the people that you want to bring to our Sabbath Schools. Help us to be ready for them and welcome them. Help our Sabbath Schools to be places where lives are changed, and people are attracted to You. Help each one of us to take responsibility for our own spiritual health and for people around us. We pray, in Jesus' name, Amen