

RIVER *Flow*

Seven Days of Devotional Practice
October 11 – 17, 2026

Call Sabbath a Delight Isaiah 58

A Note Before You Sit

This week walks one chapter of Isaiah and the long biblical road beneath it. It begins with a piety that is real and still somehow turned the wrong way, and ends at a Sabbath called a delight. The question it keeps putting to you, from different angles, is this: when delight in God and the open hand to your neighbor seem like two separate things, which have you been holding, and which have you let go? Come to each day unhurried, and look again at whether it was ever two things to begin with.

There are several ways to use this guide, from the most shared to the most personal:

- 1.** As a group — watch this Sabbath's sermon together (our website and YouTube), then walk the week and discuss the questions at the back.
- 2.** As a group that meets once a week — each person walks the days alone, and you gather one day, in person or on Zoom, to pray that day together.
- 3.** One-on-one — read it with someone you are discipling, taking a day, or the closing questions, as your conversation.
- 4.** On your own, or with your family, a day at a time.

— *Pastor Mel Baga, D.Min.*
Lead Pastor, Auburn SDA Church

Daily Devotional Guide

SUNDAY, October 11 — The Delight That Asks God to Take Its Side

“they delight to draw near to God” — Isaiah 58:2

Read: Isaiah 58:1–5

Reflect: These people are not lax. They seek God daily, delight to know his ways, ask for righteous judgments. The Hebrew says they *delight* — *ḥāpēš* — to draw near. That is what makes the chapter searching: it addresses not those who have stopped caring, but those who care, whose caring has bent back on itself.

Watch what they want. They ask God for *mishpat*, judgments in their favor, while the same day driving their workers and withholding the laborer’s pay. They want justice as a verdict and refuse it as a practice. A piety can be sincere and still be curved — bent on securing God for my side rather than being drawn onto his. What do I want when I draw near to God?

Notice: Through the day, notice one moment when you want God on your side. Do not fix it. Only see it.

Pray: Lord, I do draw near to you, and I am not always sure what I am seeking when I do. Show me the difference between wanting you and wanting you on my side. Amen.

Stay: Find a quiet place and sit in silence before God, twenty minutes or less as time allows. The aim is to rest your thoughts, not to empty your mind. Sit with both feet on the floor and hands open, and let thoughts and sensations settle. When one rises, notice it and let it go gently, without scolding yourself. To release it, return to a short word chosen beforehand — *God, love, let go* — or notice your breath, then let even that fall away. The point is not performance but presence: staying silent with God in the privacy of your own devotional space, giving the Spirit room to do his unseen work in you and through you.

MONDAY, October 12 — Two Gospels, and Half a Gospel

“The kingdom of God has come near” — Mark 1:15

Read: Mark 1:14–15

Reflect: Dallas Willard noticed that the American church preaches two gospels, and both manage sin. The conservative gospel manages guilt — forgiveness now, heaven later — with little to say about the life between. The liberal social gospel manages society’s ills, with little to say about the soul before God. Each takes a real part of the whole and calls it the whole.

What both have lost is the gospel Jesus actually preached. He came into Galilee announcing not a transaction but a reign: the kingdom of God has come near. A kingdom is not a private rescue but a whole order of life. The forgiven, remade person is inside it — real and central — yet not the whole of it. The reign reaches the structures too: how power and wealth are held, how the worker and the stranger are treated, the shape of our common life. The gospel is that kingdom come down to earth, spreading through every part of life now, until the earth itself is made new. A salvation that saves only the inside of a person is too small for the word Jesus used.

Notice: Notice today which half comes more naturally to you — the saved soul or the mended world. Only notice it.

Pray: Lord Jesus, I have settled for halves of your gospel and called them whole. Give me the kingdom you actually preached. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. Today, when you return to your word, let it be a word that names him King.

TUESDAY, October 13 — There Are Not Two Gospels

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good” — Micah 6:8

Read: Micah 6:6–8

Reflect: Many of us carry a quiet ranking: the real gospel — personal, saving, eternal — and beneath it the social gospel, a kindly supplement, lesser, perhaps not quite gospel at all.

It helps to know where that ranking came from, because it is not from Scripture. It hardened a century ago, in the fight between fundamentalists and modernists, when each side seized half of a biblical whole and called its half the gospel. So the task is not to add a lesser gospel to a real one, but to recover the wholeness a privatized piety cut in half. Even the word tells us: *euangelion* was public announcement language — an inscription at Priene calls the birth of Augustus good news for the whole world. Micah had already staged the question: not thousands of rams, but do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God. One gospel, never two.

Notice: Notice where you have called an act of mercy “not really the gospel.” Let the thought surface without settling it.

Pray: Father, I have ranked what you have joined. Teach me the one whole gospel, and unteach me the halves. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. Today let the silence hold the question without hurrying to answer it.

WEDNESDAY, October 14 — The Worship God Could Not Stand

“Let justice roll down like waters” — Amos 5:24

Read: Amos 5:21–24

Reflect: The prophets are where the dichotomy shatters, because they confront the worshiper who thinks private piety is the real thing and justice optional. God speaks through Amos without softening it: I hate your feasts, take away your songs. This is Israel’s own worship, refused — because the festivals are full and the courts are empty of justice. To wrong the poor is no small thing; Proverbs says it insults their Maker, whose image they bear.

Then the verdict: let justice roll down like waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. It is the ground Isaiah stands on when he names the fast God chooses — loose the bonds, share bread, bring the homeless poor into the house. Worship and justice are not ranked here; they are one act, and God himself refuses to let them be torn apart. Mercy to the neighbor is not beneath worship. It is worship, with a body.

Notice: Notice one place your worship this week has run ahead of your justice. Do not scold it. Name it.

Pray: Holy God, you have refused worship before. Let justice flow where my singing has been. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. Today let the silence be a place where nothing is performed for anyone, not even God.

THURSDAY, October 15 — The Gospel Jesus Defined, and Will Judge By

“He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” — Luke 4:18

Read: Luke 4:16–21

Reflect: When Jesus rose to say what he had come to do, he reached for Isaiah. Good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, the Lord’s year of favor — Jubilee. He read it, sat down, and declared it fulfilled that day. This was his own definition of his gospel, in his own mouth, and it was irreducibly for bodies, for the poor, for the crushed.

He would also make it the hinge of the last judgment. In Matthew 25 the nations are sorted not by what they professed but by whether they fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, came to the prisoner. As you did it to the least of these, the King says, you did it to me. One cannot hold that scene and still call mercy an optional sweetener on the real, saving gospel. Jesus made it the hinge salvation’s verdict swings on.

Notice: As the Sabbath nears, notice one concrete mercy you could carry into it — not as a task, but as an offering.

Pray: Lord Jesus, you told us plainly what your gospel is. Do not let me want a smaller one. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. On this eve of Sabbath, let the silence be preparation, the body already slowing toward rest.

FRIDAY, October 16 — More Adventist, Not Less

“the man became a living being” — Genesis 2:7

Read: James 1:27; 2:14–17

Reflect: The instinct to save souls and leave society alone rests on a picture of the human being that Adventism has already rejected: a soul trapped in a body, waiting to be extracted. Scripture does not know that soul. The human becomes a living *nephesh*, a whole creature; there is no detachable part to rescue out of the rest. Salvation, then, is the redemption of whole persons in a community and a creation — exactly what our own tradition has always held.

Ellen White called medical and welfare work the gospel’s “right arm,” not an appendage to it. So the whole gospel is more Adventist, not less. One honest word: “the social gospel” as a movement did, in places, collapse salvation into reform and lose the cross — that real error is why the wariness exists. But we are not recovering Rauschenbusch. We are recovering the prophets and Jesus. Faith without works, James says plainly, is dead.

Notice: Notice where you, or your church, treat mercy as the gospel’s optional add-on rather than its right arm.

Pray: God of the whole person, you made me one creature, not a soul with a body attached. Make my faith and my works one thing. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday. Let the silence gather the week, the body already slowing toward the Sabbath.

SABBATH, October 17 — Call the Sabbath a Delight

“and call the Sabbath a delight” — Isaiah 58:13

Read: Isaiah 58:13–14

Reflect: The chapter that opened with a curved delight ends with a healed one. Turn your foot from your own pleasure — your own *hēpeš* — on my holy day, Isaiah says, and call the Sabbath a delight, *’ōneg*. It is the same self the week has followed: the desire that reached for God in verse 2 and bent toward self in verse 3, now pried loose and fastened on God again. Sabbath delight is not the coziness of a protected hour. It is what an uncurved self feels from within.

So the week flows as it does. The hand that opens to the homeless poor in verse 7 and the heart delighting in the LORD in verse 14 are not two religions. They are one restored person, and the Sabbath is where that person is reassembled and sent. We worship, we connect, we serve — not a slogan but the shape a Sabbath-delighted life keeps taking all week. In Scripture there is no soul to rescue apart from the body; the human is a living *nephesh*, whole in delight and whole in mercy. The day of rest is not a retreat from the world God is reclaiming; it is where we are made ready to re-enter it, glad.

Notice: Rest today without earning it. Then notice, without rushing to act, one place the week ahead is already asking your open hand.

Pray: Lord of the Sabbath, you have called this day a delight, and I am learning what you mean. Reassemble me here. Send me out glad, with my delight in you and my hand already open. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday, and let this be the week's fullest sitting. Today you are not preparing for anything. You are home. Rest in the quiet, and let even the resting be a gift received rather than a thing achieved.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Willard says both the conservative and the liberal gospel are managing sin — one guilt, one society — and both have lost the kingdom Jesus preached. Which half have you been holding, and what did it cost you not to notice?
2. Many of us quietly rank a “real” gospel above a “social” one. Where did you first learn that ranking, and what shifted when you heard it called a modern invention rather than a biblical truth?
3. God refused Israel’s own worship because the courts were empty of justice. Is there a place your worship has run ahead of your mercy — and what would it mean for the two to be one act?
4. Jesus made “the least of these” the hinge of the last judgment. Does that unsettle anything you had assumed was secondary to the gospel?
5. If there is no soul to rescue apart from the body — if the human is a whole *nephesh* — how does that change what you think salvation is for?
6. Ellen White called welfare work the gospel’s “right arm.” Where is your church, or your own life, treating it instead as an optional add-on?
7. The week ends by calling the Sabbath a delight. As you rest, what is the one place the coming week is already asking your open hand — and how will worship, connect, serve take shape in it?