



HELPING CHILDREN Delight IN THE Sabbath

By Lani Hilton

A son of one of my friends told his mother that he hated Sunday because he was not allowed to do anything. His mom was sad because she realized that in their home, Sunday had become a day of saying, “Don’t!”

Does this situation sound familiar? If we as parents focus on telling

Matching Sabbath activities to the ages of our children has worked for our family.

our children what they cannot do on Sunday, we may miss valuable opportunities to help them engage in meaningful activities. What can we do so children look forward to Sunday? How

can we make Sunday a day of delight for them? (see Isaiah 58:13).

Analyzing and planning how to improve the Sabbath day experience of our families can foster success. After pondering how our own family could better honor the Sabbath, my husband and I came up with some ideas that have worked for us. These



ideas are presented here for other families to pick and choose from, if they so desire. The list of suggestions is not meant to be exhaustive (or exhausting!).

Gospel Games

The expression “the family that plays together stays together” can be true even on Sundays. Toys and games can be turned into more Sabbath-appropriate activities by tying in gospel themes.

Toy blocks can be used to build any type of structure from the scriptures, such as King Benjamin’s tower (see Mosiah 2), the walls of Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 4–6),

or the lions’ den (see Daniel 6). Encouraging children to build scriptural objects directs them to meaningful and uplifting play and piques their interest while family members read and discuss the related scriptural accounts.

Dress-up is another simple quiet game and is easily adapted by encouraging children to dress up as people in the scriptures. It can be a great opportunity for scriptural discussions and role-plays.

Playing dolls and house can set the stage for sweet teaching moments. We can remind our children of the essential role of mothers and fathers, teach them how important love is in

a family, and thank them for all they do to help the family be happy. A short statement of testimony like “I know God gave us families to help us become who He wants us to be” can invite the Spirit during casual play-time. Identify some faithful mothers (such as Hannah in 1 Samuel 1–2; the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4; Elisabeth in Luke 1) or faithful fathers (such as Abraham in Genesis 22; Lehi in 1 Nephi 1–5; Alma in Alma 26–42) and read their scriptural accounts with your children.

Puppets are ideal for acting out scenarios like sharing, obeying, helping with chores, forgiving, being kind, including others, practicing good



manners, and respecting family members. Parents and older siblings can play along and can demonstrate the stark contrast between choosing right and choosing wrong.

The game “**20 Questions**” can be turned into a gospel game by using a character, place, or object in the scriptures. Choose one of these things without telling anyone, and then have family members ask yes-or-no questions about what you chose so they can try and guess what it is. Whoever guesses the correct answer in fewer than 20 questions can choose the next person, place, or thing for others to ask questions about. Before going on to the next person, consider sharing a lesson you have learned from what you chose.

Drawing pictures spans all ages. One idea is to give everyone one minute to draw a scripture story,

person, place, or thing. Starting with the youngest, every family member holds up the picture he or she drew and gives the others a chance to guess what it is. After the answer is guessed, the illustrator can share a lesson learned from the chosen scripture story or what applications the story may have.

Field Trips

With energetic children, it may be helpful to have a meaningful field trip or Sunday-appropriate outing for a different teaching venue.

For example, particular settings can help us visualize and understand more about the plan of salvation. Visiting a cemetery or a family with a newborn baby can remind us of how our mortal life begins and ends. Peaceful gardens can help us ponder the Creation and the Atonement. On temple grounds we can reflect on

eternity and the ordinances and covenants needed for exaltation.

Of course, paying a visit to grandparents or other relatives, where possible, can also enrich our Sabbath experience and can help to strengthen family ties.

In addition, you might consider inviting someone to come visit you. We have enjoyed inviting recently returned missionaries to come to our home and tell us experiences from their missions.

Family History Activities

President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has observed, “In addition to time with family, you can experience true delight on the Sabbath from family history work.”¹ As children participate in family history, they will look forward to and have delight in the Sabbath.

One idea is to hold a **family tree gathering**, in which relatives gather to work on and celebrate their shared family history. Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that such gatherings “should be a recurring effort. Everyone [can] bring existing family histories, stories, and photos.”² To do this, it may be helpful to have family tree gatherings in conjunction with an event that is already scheduled, like a monthly Sunday dinner with extended family.

Children can also become active participants in family history by conducting **interviews** with family members, both those who live close by and those who can be contacted by phone or through the internet. FamilySearch.org contains a list of possible interview questions (see [familysearch.org/wiki/en/Creating_Oral_Histories](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Creating_Oral_Histories)). You may choose to upload to the “Memories” section of [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) the answers you receive so that they will be available for other family members.

Another family history activity is **reading journals** out loud. Parents reading about events and feelings when they were younger can foster family closeness. Reading accounts from mission journals teaches the joys and challenges of mission life.

You could also try **creating a quiz**. Invite children to interview a relative or find a book with stories and facts about an ancestor and come up with quiz questions they could ask other

family members. You could also use journal entries, letters, and scrapbooks as resources.

Children may enjoy **memory games** using pictures of ancestors. After becoming familiar with the photos and names, you can flip them over and then take turns turning two photos over at a time to try to find a match. You could try matching two of the same pictures or matching pictures to names.

Gospel-Learning Plan

Gospel instruction can happen any day of the week, but there is a power that accompanies gospel learning on the Sabbath. President Nelson taught: “We make the Sabbath a delight when we teach the gospel to our children. Our responsibility as parents is abundantly clear.”³

Creative ideas of things we can do to help our children focus on the Savior and His gospel are limitless. We can encourage them to draw gospel art, listen to or create music that is centered on the Savior, or visit those who are sick or lonely. Additionally, we can direct children to spiritually strengthening activities found online at [friend.lds.org](https://www.friend.lds.org) and [youth.lds.org](https://www.youth.lds.org) and watch with them uplifting videos from *Mormon Messages* or *The Life of Jesus Christ Bible Videos*.

Creating a routine has helped our family set consistent habits and made the ideal situation more likely to happen. Having a routine has simplified

planning and ensured that we have a variety of quality activities. For example, you might take a field trip on the first Sunday of the month, focus on gospel games on the second Sunday, concentrate on videos and Church websites on the third Sunday, and make family history a priority on the fourth Sunday.

Truly a good plan can help ensure a delightful Sabbath. Family members will be blessed as you direct them to a variety of simple, gospel-centered activities. Prayerfully decide what specific plan is best for your family.

Elder L. Tom Perry (1922–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counseled:

“Let your family be filled with love as you honor the Sabbath all day long and experience its spiritual blessings throughout the week. . . .

“ . . . Let us prepare and conduct ourselves on the Sabbath in a manner that will call down the blessings promised us upon ourselves and our families.”⁴

I know the Sabbath can be a day of delight for our children and for us as we do those things that will draw us close to the Lord and to each other. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 131.
2. Quentin L. Cook, “Roots and Branches,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 47; see also Sally Johnson Odekirk, “What’s a Family Tree Gathering?” *Ensign*, Oct. 2014, 36–39.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” 130.
4. L. Tom Perry, “The Sabbath and the Sacrament,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 9.