



# HEAVEN IS TOUCHING EARTH WITH REST

Even after I stopped going to church, I still kept the Sabbath.

BY MATTHEW VOLLMER

Illustration by Kristen Solecki

IF THERE WAS ANYTHING I MISSED ABOUT belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist church, it was keeping the Sabbath: a period of rest and reflection that had, during my childhood, awaited my family and me at the end of every week. Those hallowed hours between sundown on Friday and sundown on Saturday always felt like they constituted a kind of sanctuary in time, an invisible cathedral we Adventists constructed with our hearts and minds, the feeling of which I could still summon by listening to “Borrowed Angel,” the opening song of Anita Kerr’s *A Sunday Serenade*, which my father often placed on the turntable of our hi-fi as the last rays of sun were leaking into the cove where our little house lived. The blank glass of the silent TV reflected our living room, where a fire blazed in the hearth. In the kitchen, a pot of lentils bubbled on the stove. Cheese danishes bloated slowly in the oven. Our expectations—and our meals—were always simple, as they were in the homes of most of the Adventists we’d ever known, the majority of whom avoided “flesh foods” and, following the example of the prophet Daniel, who’d refused the rich food and wine of King Nebuchadnezzar, elected to eat a legume-rich diet of fruits and vegetables. As evening grew nearer, my mother lit candles. My sister set the dining room table. Dad stoked the fire, stabbing cindery logs. Embers wafted like celestial fireflies up the flue. Another week had ended. At some point, we might sing “Day is dying in the west / Heav’n is touching earth with rest / Wait and worship while the night / Sets her evening lamps alight / Through all the sky.”

There had been something magical about those evenings: the palpable sense of a restorative force at work in our lives and in our home. To stop work, turn off the TV and radio, set aside newspapers and secular magazines and acknowledge the arrival of Sabbath rest with prayers and throat-warming songs seemed like the most natural and comforting thing in the world. The keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath was so obviously right, you could feel it in your bones. Like so many of the things we were expected to believe and know, like acknowledging that alcohol

and cigarettes were poisons to be avoided, or that dead people were just that, dead; or that no loving God would perform a miracle to torment sinners forever with hellfire, keeping the Sabbath *made sense*. And when I consider the things I miss most about being an Adventist, it is always this tableau to which I return: the nights when, as a family, we retreated from the world, and entered a time outside of time, a sacred space of quietude that foreshadowed—as we believed Holy Scripture indicated—the heavenly paradise our family would someday inherit, and where we would reside together for all eternity.

When I consider the things I miss most about being an Adventist, it is always this tableau to which I return: the nights when, as a family, we retreated from the world.

Even after I stopped going to church every week, I still kept—more or less—the Sabbath. Anytime I applied for a job—busing tables at a golf course in Massachusetts, delivering meals to the tables of tourists at the Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone, working as a cashier at Barnes & Noble and at the Record Exchange in Raleigh—I always let my managers know that, due to “religious convictions,” I would be unavailable for work on Saturdays. Exodus 20:8–11—“Remember the sabbath day,” etc.—might as well have been imprinted into my DNA. As I was often reminded in my youth, it was the sole commandment that began with the word “remember,” and the only one that the rest of Christendom seemed to have forgotten. And so it was easy to think that we Adventists were special. That we had access to what felt like secret knowledge, even though it had been spelled out, plain as day, by the Lord our God. 🙏

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*Adapted from All of Us Together in the End by Matthew Vollmer. Hub City Press, April 2023. Reproduced with permission of Hub City Press and the author. Matthew Vollmer is the author of half a dozen books of fiction and nonfiction. He lives in Blacksburg, Virginia, where he teaches in the English department at Virginia Tech.*