

April 18, 2020

Hello Brethren,

In some ways it feels like we've been caught in some kind of a weird time loop – we kept Passover and the Holy Days, and we are continuing to keep the Sabbath – but we are doing it all separate. And the weeks when we must do it this way keep going on and on... We call and write to one another, and I've been told many times that everyone is praying for everyone, which is very important and encouraging. But it still seems so very strange to do this all without being together. Hopefully the day will come soon when we can get back together again!

In the meantime, let's consider what I think is a very good question. Without meaning to embarrass her, (but making sure I give her the credit) Lyndi Fultz earlier today asked "What do you do to make the Sabbath special?" As I thought about her question I realized what a valid and important question it really is! Prior just a few weeks ago, there were quite a few things we collectively did to make the Sabbath special, such as:

- Everyone dressed up for services, because we understood we were coming into the presence of the King of the Universe. And we also wanted to make sure there was a distinction between the Sabbath and the other days of the week. It was special!
- We would decorate the stage with either nice artificial flowers, or on Holy Days real cut flowers. It made the lectern and stage look better, colorful, and special.
- When we sing hymns we stand and sing, raising our voices to God and singing praises to Him. And it seems that no matter how many times we sing a hymn, even if you have it memorized along with all four parts, there is still something powerful about the words. In most cases those lyrics come directly from scripture, and are full of meaning.
- In all three congregations someone is standing by the door before services to greet everyone coming in, sometimes help tote diaper bags, crock pots or other things into the building. There is always smiling, handshakes and hugs, laughter and enjoyment clearly evident.
- Seeing each other is always a joy, and the smiles, hugs and handshakes continue once we get on inside too. The fellowship with others who have been called by God and share the same Spirit is perhaps one of the things we miss most during this time!
- The list can go on and on with snacks, occasional pre-teen and teen/young adult Bible studies, monthly pot luck's and congregational Bible study, and more.

For the last month we've been unable to do any of these things. What is holy time hasn't changed, because the days still roll along the same as they always have, and the time God sanctified is still sanctified. And I trust we are all still observing the Sabbaths as commanded!

Without a doubt services are a little more relaxed than before. We don't have to drive anyplace, or set up a hall, snacks, chairs, sound systems and the like. Most of us can just log in to a webcast and we're ready to go. So it may be easy to let our standards slip into the casual and carefree (perhaps careless?) standards of our culture

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do things to make the Sabbath special!

I appreciated the comments I read in response to her question. We too dress more nicely, and we stand up to sing and also for the prayers. We have our Bibles and notebooks out for services, just like normal. We've maintained our family tradition of a nicer than normal meal on Friday evening to begin the Sabbath. And we've had time on the Sabbath we haven't normally had for family time, Bible games and if the weather was nice, even a little walk. And it sounds like many of you are doing these same things.

When we are staying at home for almost everything, primarily working from home and not seeing many other people, it can be easy to slip into the same casual approach to the Sabbath. After all, keeping the Sabbath at home can begin to feel very little different from what we do the rest of the week. (I read a comment earlier this week where a lady said she just washed a load of pajamas – because she needed work clothes for the week!). I don't think our Father wants us to slip into a Sabbath-in-pajamas approach!

I'm sure it's true that a lot of people who are working from home are doing so much more casually than they would from the office – and there's probably nothing wrong with that. But is that what we want to carry over into the Sabbath? What are we doing to differentiate the Sabbath from the other 6 days of the week?

That may prove to be a rather unique challenge at this time, but it is something worthy of us giving it some thought, and making sure we do. Remember the words of Isaiah the prophet *“If you turn your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day 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 shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD had spoken.”* (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Let's be sure we are focused on not only keeping the Sabbath but making it special. If we have children at home, we need to make it special for them too. Even while we can't meet together – or perhaps especially while we can't meet together – we must honor the time God established as holy, and do so in a way that is pleasing to Him!

Remember, our local webcast will begin at 9:30 am CDT tomorrow, and then there will be a Headquarters webcast beginning at 12 noon. I hope you have a peaceful and delightful Sabbath!

Best regards,

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