

May 2, 2020

Hello Brethren,

After two full months of not holding “in-person” Sabbath or Holy Day services I believe we have seen and learned some lessons we never would have otherwise, and perhaps never knew we needed to learn! We have been meeting “separately together” via both local and Headquarters webcasts, and it seems this is going to need to continue for some little time more.

So while we are still separated, somewhat isolated from one another and practicing “social distancing”, I want to talk for a few minutes about fellowship.

Is fellowship really an appropriate topic at a time when we can’t even get together? I believe so, and in fact I think it is particularly important right now!

I’m sure we’re all familiar with Psalm 133 where David wrote “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” (Verse 1). It is a beautiful thing that rejuvenates to the very core.

In the next verse he describes it to be like valuable and scented oil that is poured in abundance on a person. That symbolized blessing and abundance. It was something that was cause for much rejoicing as it was encouraging and enriching to everyone involved with the whole experience.

What a beautiful picture of our fellowship. It is precious, joyful, encouraging and enriching to us all! I can’t recall the number of times I’ve seen a bit of a traffic jam at the doorway of our church halls because the warm greetings, laughter and hugs stop the flow of traffic! It isn’t a bad thing, just a wonderful picture in my mind as I see my brethren so happy to see one another – and at those times we’d only been apart for a week!

In verse 3 David likens our unity to the dew of Mt. Hermon, the highest point in Palestine. Its top is one of the few places where snow may fall. Snowmelt, rain runoff and the heavy dew that falls and begins to run down all flow down to provide life-giving moisture for the semi-arid land below and around.

Such joyful fellowship really is life-giving! We may be having a “down” day one Sabbath, and perhaps not even feel like getting out and seeing anyone. That can happen to me too. Believe it or not there have been a few rare times when I didn’t particularly feel like going anywhere or seeing anyone. Perhaps you can relate to those feelings too.

But I get up, shower and shave, get dressed and drive to the Church hall. And before long the friendly greetings, lighthearted teasing and the genuine love and concern shown makes me completely forget what I was feeling before. In fact, I can honestly say that over the past 43 or so years, there have been exceedingly few Sabbaths I have come home without being grateful and encouraged by having gone and seen my brethren!

While we can't meet I am continuing my efforts to talk with you all as often as I can – generally by phone. And with almost every call or conversation we talk about how much we look forward to getting back together, and how wonderful it will be to see each other and fellowship face-to-face once again! I suspect our first few Sabbaths especially will be wonderful and very memorable for the encouragement and support of one another in person! It is something to anticipate, plan for and pray for!

But what about right now? If everything works out as anticipated, we are planning toward returning to in-person Sabbath services on June 6th. That leaves us a month before we can be together once again. Does that mean we can't fellowship until then?

Absolutely not! I have been so very pleased to find out so many of you who have been sending cards through the mail, or "e-cards" on the internet, writing letters and emails and making dozens and dozens of calls to each other just to stay in touch, say "Hi" and give encouragement. Circumstances are such that it is not wise for us to meet in person right now, but that has not stopped you from continuing to fellowship with one another, and let your love and concern be clear and apparent!

For the next month it is important that we continue to do these things. No one should feel abandoned or that they've "fallen through the cracks" somehow. We know we are each important in the sight of our Father who called us and sacrificed His Son on our behalf. But we also need to know we are still important to each other and that we are loved. That is, after all, the essence of what fellowship is all about!

One of the lessons we'll learn from this particular trial is that no virus threat, no government restrictions or "shelter at home" policies, no "social distancing" can impede the love, concern and care that is shown through the warm and genuine fellowship of God's people.

Fellowship is not an end in itself. It is a natural result of a close-knit and loving spiritual family. But it is more than just a result. It is also a means to develop that closeness, and a means to build unity within the Body of Christ.

For the next month we can eagerly anticipate the time when we can begin to get back together again, but in the meantime let's not forget that we are not hindered from continuing in Christian fellowship.

Tomorrow we'll have our local webcast beginning at 9:30 am, and the Headquarters webcast will begin at 12 noon. I want to wish you all a wonderful and encouraging Sabbath!

Best regards,

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