

Prepare for next year's Feast!

The king is dead! Long live the king!

This is the saying that the nobles of England cried immediately upon the death of any one of their monarchs. Sometimes they mourned the death of the deceased king, and sometimes they did not, but always they looked forward with optimism to the reign of the new monarch, with the hope that he would learn from the good and bad examples of the old.

In these days and weeks immediately following the Fall Feast days, we in God's church can utter a similar cry:

The Feast is over! Prepare for the Feast!

Or more accurately this year:

The Feast of 2004 is over! Let us prepare for the Feast of 2005!

The purpose of this article is to encourage you to be preparing – both physically and spiritually – for next year's Feast... being armed with the experiences of this year's Feast which has just finished.

Do not murmur!

This first topic is one that we usually think of immediately after the Feast of Unleavened Bread when we examine the murmuring attitudes of the Israelites after God had brought them out of Egypt by means of some of the most marvellous miracles ever. But we also need to consider it now, after the Fall Feasts, and again we need to learn from the bad, murmuring examples of the Israelites.

And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.
(Exodus 16:8 KJV)

Here are a few questions:

- Was this Feast of 2004 your "best Feast ever"?
- If not, why not?
- What was the problem?
- Or what were the problems?
- What were the areas that you would like to see improved next year?

Please think about these questions, but please do not murmur about them! Murmuring among each other gets us absolutely nowhere. In fact, as we see from the Israelites' examples, that it is very detrimental. It can even be hazardous to our health! Rather, we should resolve to do something positive about any negative experiences we encountered!

Tell those who can do something about it

First and foremost, we should pray about any problems we experienced. We should pray that God will take any negative, murmuring, complaining attitudes out of us, and help us to turn them into some positive, constructive suggestions.

Please ask yourself another question: "What can *I* do to make next year's Feast even better?"

Here is one thing we can all do: Take the time now – during the next day or two – to sit down with pencil and paper and write down what, in your opinion, was bad about this year's Feast.

- Bossy ushers?
- Bad sound?
- Not enough restaurants?
- Poor service?
- Hotel taking us for granted?
- Not enough local attractions?
- Not enough choice of Wal-Marts?

Then write down what, in your opinion, could be done to correct or improve those situations. But do not stop there! Send your positive suggestions – not just a negative list of complaints – to those who are in positions to be able to correct any problems. These would normally include your pastor or your festival coordinator. They will consider your positive input, will deal with it themselves or will, if necessary, forward it to the appropriate department heads.

Perhaps you did not like the Feast site itself. If this is the case, you are probably aware that other cities in other relatively central locations are constantly under consideration. But, here again, send your input to your pastor or your festival advisor. Send positive input, constructive input – not just "I do not like this or that location!"

Wherever the Feast is next year – wherever God places His name – resolve to be there! Remember that the physical location is secondary to the spiritual inspiration of God upon His Feast spokesmen.

Practice friendliness

Did you have a less than perfect Feast this year because:

- You did not make any new friends?
- You did not meet any new people?
- There were no new people there to meet?

There *were*, in fact, *lots* of new people to meet – new people of all ages – new people who most of us had not met before. So perhaps the problem lies elsewhere:

- Were you tied to the same old group of friends?
- Were you tied to your own family and relatives?
- Do you consider yourself shy?

If any of these factors applies to you, then this is all the more reason for you to prepare for Feast 2005 by practicing being friendly during the coming year. How can we do this? It is quite simple really, but it does require a little effort:

A man who has friends must himself be friendly... (Proverbs 18:24)

Despite many different translations and renditions of this verse, the concept implied in the "old" King James Version is a valid one: If you want friends, you must show yourself friendly.

We can practice being friendly at church services each Sabbath, especially when we have visitors from other areas. Whenever you meet someone new, thrust out your hand, give him a firm handshake, and simply say, "Hello, my name is Fred Bloggs and I live in Paducah, Tennessee!"... of course, substituting your own name and home town. Follow up your initial greeting with, "What do you do for a living?" or "Where do you work?" Most people love this question... especially those who have been retired for a long time!

We can also practice friendliness at work, in the grocery store, in the bank, and so many other places in our everyday lives.

Were you excessively tied to your own family during this year's Feast, to the extent that it prevented you from meeting new people? We must learn to take time to get closer to our spiritual brothers and sisters, even if it means spending a little less time with physical families. Here is Jesus' example on this point:

While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with you." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

Now this, of course, does not mean that we should ignore our physical family members at the Feast. The Feast certainly is a great opportunity to spend time with our physical family members – especially those who we may not be able to see as frequently as we would like to throughout the rest of the year. Also, we can be sure that Jesus loved His physical mother and brothers dearly. But His Father's will was His top priority, and time spent with His spiritual family was part of it.

Prepare your children

This was probably the best Feast for many years as regards the behaviour of children of all ages during services. With very few exceptions, there was less crying, less talking and other loud noises, less noise from noisy toys, fewer trips in and out of the hall, fewer children hanging around the water tables in the corridor, etc. All-in-all, the parents seemed to be doing a better job of looking after and restraining their children; and this made services much more comfortable for everyone. However, there is always room for improvement, and this means that preparation and training are required throughout the coming year:

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

Effort spent in proper training now will lead to benefits that will extend way beyond next year's Feast of Tabernacles... on into your child's adult life and even further on into eternity!

Here are two effective training methods that were suggested to my wife and I some years ago when our daughters were little – training methods that will prepare babies and young children for proper behaviour during Feast services. One is a daily training session. The other is a weekly session.

Let us begin with the daily session. Mothers' Bible study time can serve as an excellent training period for their babies. Here is how: Put your child on the same blanket you would normally put him (or her) on for services. Gently, day after day, teach him to stay on the blanket and remain quiet. Give him books to read and QUIET toys to play with – special books and toys that are reserved for that special time.

The weekly training session is similar to the daily session and it takes place, of course, on the weekly Sabbath Day.

Like many branches of God's church today, we, in the Church of the Great God, have two sets of circumstances for Sabbath services. We have those, usually in larger groups, who meet for weekly Sabbath services in relatively formal assemblies – typically in some kind of rented hall or hotel room. Others, generally the smaller groups and individual families, keep Sabbath services in a home environment.

No matter which kind of group you belong to, Sabbath services are the perfect weekly training ground for proper behaviour at the Feast. Your children should not be permitted to play with or talk to other children during services. If you allow this, they will not know any difference when they come to the Feast, and they will disturb other church members without knowing they are doing wrong.

In both daily and weekly training sessions, discipline and punishment for infractions should be dependent upon your child's age and level of understanding. Please do not expect too much right away from very young babies or even from older children who have not had the benefit of previous training in this regard. Always keep in mind how lovingly our heavenly Father trains us. Be gentle, be patient, but be consistent.

Save your Festival Tithe

If you really want to be with your spiritual brothers and sisters next year at the location where God chooses to place His name, you need to start immediately to save your Festival Tithe. The scriptures covering this necessity are so familiar that we should not even have to turn to them. But we will quote just one:

And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. (Deuteronomy 14:23-26)

We find God's commands to save our Festival Tithe in the same area of His Word that we find His commands to keep His feasts so, as the old Doris Day song tells us: "You can't have one without the other!"

Some members may need to supplement their Festival Tithe with additional funds if the expected amount of their festival tithe is calculated to be insufficient to cover their Feast expenses. This will take some advance thought and planning. Considering the priority God places on our attendance at His Feasts, we should, if necessary, be willing to forego some unnecessary expenditures during the rest of the year so that we can save those funds and put them towards our Feast expenses. Another tip to bolster your festival tithe funds is to put a day's worth of your regular budgeted grocery money towards each day you expect to be away for the Feast.

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The Feast is over! Prepare for the Feast!

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