

God's Way of Give at the Feast of Tabernacles

Can you believe it? We are now well into the countdown to the Feast of Tabernacles. Only a few weeks to go! Let us take a look at a couple of Feast scriptures to get us into the spirit of the Feast:

And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, (Deuteronomy 14:26)

But is the Feast of Tabernacles just a time for physical feasting? Is it a time just for *getting* all of those things that *your soul lusteth after*?

No! The Feast of Tabernacles is clearly a time of giving!

Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: and thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice. Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: *every man shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee. (Deuteronomy 16:13-17)

Again, the Feast of Tabernacles is clearly a time of giving! God commands His children to give – to our family members, to our employees (for those who are employers), to God's ministers, to strangers, to orphans, to widows, to God Himself and His church.

How then can we give at the Feast of Tabernacles? How can we live God's "way of give" at the Feast? Perhaps it has been a tight year for you and, as it is, you barely have enough to manage your Feast expenses.

In this article, I would like to suggest to you some ways in which we can give at, and in preparation for, the Feast of Tabernacles. Most of these suggestions will not cost us a cent.

General points

- ***Prepare to rejoice and to learn to fear God***

According to God's Word, these are the main reasons why we attend the Feast:

And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. (Leviticus 23:40)

And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always... And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, (Deuteronomy 14:23, 26)

And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice. (Deuteronomy 16:14-15)

- ***Be excited, not fearful!***

Yes, God wants us to learn to fear Him in the proper ways, and I'm sure that those ways will be discussed during the Feast. But God does not want His children to be cringing, faithless, fearful cowards (Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40; Revelation 21:8). Be excited! Get excited! Prepare to rejoice and to enjoy the Feast. If you have any concerns that might prevent you from rejoicing at the Feast and you would like some help with them, please don't hesitate to ask. The ministry, the deacons, the ushers, the Information Table staff are all there to help you in any way they can.

- ***Don't be critical!***

Please do not negatively criticize the Feast location just because it may not, in your opinion, have all the facilities of your hometown or other great Feast sites you've been to. Be patient. Take it for what it is and make the very best of it.

- ***Participate in church activities***

There will be more than enough for you to do during the eight days of the Feast. Without overdoing it, take part in as many church functions as possible: choir, special music, picnics, tours, group meals, volunteering, etc. You will enjoy the Feast much more if you do.

- ***Lend a hand***

Let all things be done decently and in order. (I Corinthians 14:40)

This scripture applies to many areas in this discussion of living God's way of give at the Feast. Proper organization is a must, and willing volunteers are always needed. Even if you don't think you can volunteer in a certain capacity for the whole eight days, if you're in good health, please still sign up. Schedules can be drawn up and *many hands make light work*.

- ***If you must stay home***

It is, of course, preferable to go to the location where we believe that God, through His ministers, has placed His name. But it is understood that, for circumstances beyond our control, this is not possible for every member. Still, even if you must stay home for the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day, God still wants you to rejoice and to learn to fear His name. God has made the Feast a very special time, so please, if you are staying home, set the eight days aside and make them as special as you possibly can. Make a point of having some special activities and treats, according to your budget and health restrictions, and try to spend time with other brethren who are also unable to attend the Feast.

- ***Share!***

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, avoid the temptation to spend the eight days of the Feast in the spirit of the "way of get." Share the blessings God has given you with others, especially those less fortunate than yourself. Keep a special lookout for fatherless children, widows, widowers and singles.

- ***Pray!***

Be sure to put aside time every single day before and during the Feast to talk to God. Pray in detail for those you know who are sick, for those who are troubled, and for those who are unable to attend the Feast. Pray for God's inspiration on the sermons and sermonettes, and for His blessing that all of the air conditioning, telecommunications, sound and tape recording equipment will operate without any problems.

Services

- ***Plan to be at every service***

Plan your travel arrangements so that you can be present at *every* single service, from the opening night to the afternoon service of the Last Great Day. When planning, try to leave a little margin for unexpected emergencies. Do not miss a service because you want to take the kids to *Six Flags* for a full day. As we have already determined, these eight days are not your family vacation time and, although there is nothing wrong with theme parks per se, the purpose of God's commanded feasts is not for such visits.

- ***Listen!***

Be attentive. We attend the Feast to learn to fear God and He inspires eight full days of special teaching. The messages are always diverse and interesting. Also, please listen to all the announcements – even the ones that may not concern you directly. You might, for instance, be able to forward the details of the family picnic to a young mother who missed the announcements because she had to take her baby out of the meeting hall. Arrive early and choose a seat near the front, where you will be less likely to be distracted by any disturbing movement that might be taking place in the hall. Aside from this reason, it is thoughtful to leave the rear seats for special-needs brethren and for parents with young children. If and when interruptions do take place, strive to concentrate even harder on the messages. If you notice a child fidgeting or misbehaving within your field of vision, make an extra effort to concentrate on what the speaker is saying. Try to look at him with a kind of tunnel vision, if necessary.

- ***Do not interrupt others***

Don't you be the individual or family who is guilty of initiating or permitting any disturbance to the other brethren. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on children. Please don't *shuffle!* Get your books and your children's' activities ready well before services, not during the first hymn or during the first few minutes of the sermonette. This is very distracting for the song leader or the sermonette man. At the other end of the service, please don't start putting your books away as soon as the minister giving the sermon says, "And for the final scripture..."

- ***Sing!***

A whole sermonette could be devoted to this subject. We are commanded to sing praises to God:

Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart. (Ephesians 5:19 RSV)

O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. (Psalm 95:1-2)

Hearty hymn singing is spiritually good for us as well as being an enjoyable offering to our heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Think about the words you are singing, sing to God with gusto, and don't *ever* be ashamed of doing so!

- ***Keep the meeting hall tidy***

Make sure that your children pick up any papers, cups, glasses and other trash they have left on the floor or seats. Apart from being your duty, this will be helpful to the ushers and to the hall's cleaning staff.

Children

- ***Teach your children to stay quiet during services***

Many brethren do not have the opportunity to enjoy formal Sabbath services throughout the year and, by necessity, spend most Sabbaths at home. So, when the Feast comes around, many church children are unprepared for the quiet behaviour that is necessary for peaceful and orderly services. In the few weeks left between now and the Feast, parents should make a point of training your little ones to sit quietly while you are doing your daily Bible study and on the Sabbaths while you are listening to the telephone transmission.

- ***Take your young children to the restroom ten minutes before services begin***

Please do not let them go in and out of the meeting room repeatedly once services have commenced. This is unnecessary as well as being very distracting and annoying for other members who are sitting in the seats around you and your family.

- ***Prepare activities to keep your children occupied during services***

Please get these activities ready before services so that you don't make any unnecessary and disturbing commotion once services have commenced.

- ***Bring quiet toys and activities to services***

Please do not bring rattles or squeaky toys. You may think it's cute and humorous when little Lucy is squeaking her rubber Bunny during services, but those around you who are trying to listen to the sermon certainly will not.

- ***Try to time babies' sleep time for the service period***

Many of us have been in the same position as you young mothers and fathers and we understand that this is not always easy to plan. However, you will save yourself a lot of going in and out of services whenever you can manage to do so.

- ***Use the mothers' and fathers' rooms***

If your baby or older child cries or makes noise, please take him (or her) out right away. Do not try to tough it out in the hope that he will soon quieten down and fall asleep. Don't be embarrassed. Again, we've been through it and we know how it feels. But please keep in mind the sensitivities of the other members who are trying to listen to the message.

- ***Do not hesitate to discipline your children, if necessary***

But please do it in a private place! Hotel restrooms are *not* private. Although it may take you out of services for a longer period than you would like, it would be preferable for you to take your child back to your room for this purpose.

- ***Do not let your children wander alone or in groups outside the meeting hall during services***

This is especially important for the safety of younger children, but applies to teens as well. Your children belong in the meeting hall with you. This rule is proper for our respect and worship towards God, for the church's good example to the hotel staff and other hotel guests, and for the comfort and peace of mind of all church members.

- ***Do not let your children sit unsupervised at services***

This rule applies to teens as well as to pre-teens. The two-hour periods for church services are not appropriate times for children to fellowship and to giggle. They have lots of time for those activities before and after services. Such behaviour is annoying and distracting to other members. If you have another person's child or children sitting with you, it is your responsibility to make sure that they are behaving properly and quietly.

- ***Teen activities should be chaperoned by responsible adults***

We are proud (in the proper sense of the term) of our teens and we are happy that, despite all that has happened in the church in recent years, they still enjoy attending the Feast with us. We are not distrustful of them but, in God's sight, it is proper to supervise their group activities.

Manners and example

- ***Be considerate to everyone***

At the Feast, God puts His children in circumstances which, for most of us, are different from those we are used to in our everyday lives. It may be difficult for you to stay in a little hotel room if you are used to living in a big house, perhaps on a large lot, or even an acreage. Nevertheless, please be considerate at all times and in all places: when travelling, at services, in your hotel room, in restaurants, and at church activities.

- ***Keep the noise down***

You might be the kind of person who can burn the midnight oil and still rise bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at six the next morning. If so, please be quiet and considerate to those in the rooms above, below, and on all sides of your room. It is not at all pleasant to be kept awake in the wee hours of the morning by a group who are talking and laughing loudly in an adjacent room.

- ***Look after your hotel room***

Most of us live in homes much larger than our Feast accommodation and our eight or nine days in a hotel room can feel somewhat cramped. Nevertheless, please spare a thought for the hotel's housekeeping and maintenance staffs, also for the good name of the church, by keeping your room clean and tidy. Spend a few minutes tidying your room and bathroom before leaving for services each morning. The housekeeping staff will thank you for it.

- ***Be friendly and polite***

Through the apostle James (James 2:1-6), God commands us not to be respecters of persons. So, do not be friendly and polite *just* to the church ministers and members, but also to everyone you encounter at the Feast: the airline staff, the restaurant waitresses, the hotel staff, and the taxi driver. Smile!

- ***Even if you're tired***

Our Feast schedule may cause us to cram as much into the eight days as we possibly can. This, plus different than usual food and lodging arrangements, can lead to lack of sleep, tiredness and irritability. I'm sounding like a commercial for sleeping pills! But tiredness is not an acceptable excuse for impolite behaviour. Try to get an ample amount of sleep during the Feast, and please guard against the impulse to be grumpy with others, even when you are tired.

- ***Say "Please" and "Thank you"***

The magic words! In my travels with my job throughout the years, I have often been dismayed at the lack of common courtesy displayed by so many travelers of all ages. It seems to be the accepted norm today to treat hotel, airline, restaurant and store staff as if they were slaves:

"I'll have the steak dinner!"

"Get me a magazine!"

"Two more drinks over here!"

"Give me some more coffee!"

At a hotel restaurant in Mexico City, some years ago, I witnessed the ultimate in bad manners when a man bellowed, uncontrollably, at a poor little Mexican waitress who spoke very little English, "Bread! I want bread!" This is NOT the accepted standard for God's people! God commanded His people to treat even slaves and servants with common decency and respect! Service industry employees are *not* our slaves. They are not lesser human beings because we are paying their company for them to do a job for us. Be polite. Get into the habit of saying, "Please", and "Thank you" and teach your children to do the same. There are few examples worse than hearing a child speaking to an adult waitress as though she was a lower life form. If your child omits the *magic words*, give him or her *the look*. If he or she still doesn't get the point, don't hesitate to ask, "Haven't you forgotten something?" Follow up as necessary.

- ***Learn appropriate tipping***

The practice of tipping is a commonly accepted North American standard. Although you may not agree with it and feel that the prices are already high enough, it is common courtesy to tip. Very little of the cost of the meal goes to the waitress. Most waiters, waitresses, and hotel housekeeping staff earn very low wages and depend on tips to make up a somewhat decent income. For good restaurant food and service, the standard tip is fifteen percent for waiters and waitresses. Add more at your discretion for better than average food and service. One dollar per day is the norm for hotel housekeeping staff.

Health and Safety

- ***Do not eat or drink too much***

God commands His people to enjoy good food and drink at the Feast (Deuteronomy 14:26) – food and drink that we may not, perhaps, be able to afford on our regular family budgets during the rest of the year. The Creator of good food and drink enjoyed this part of His creation during His years as a man but, as our example, He never overdid it even though He was accused of doing so (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). Gluttony and drunkenness are clearly forbidden throughout God's Word:

Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (I Corinthians 6:10)

And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. (Deuteronomy 21:20)

For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. (Proverbs 23:21)

If you eat and drink in modest quantities, you will feel much better for it, you will feel more alert in church services, and your example to the community as a representative of God's church will be enhanced.

- ***Early to bed and early to rise..***

"...makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise," as the saying goes. Although I doubt that this practice will bring physical wealth during the eight days of the Feast, it certainly will help towards the development of spiritual health, wealth, and wisdom. One of the many benefits of the Feast is the opportunity to fellowship with our friends, old and new. But with only eight days available for such fellowship, we can overdo it. We attend the Feast to learn to fear God;

and we usually learn much better after a good night's sleep. One additional point on this, as previously mentioned, is that if we fellowship late into the night in our hotel rooms, it is very possible that we will disturb our neighbours.

- ***Exercise!***

If we are not diligent, we will have a very sedentary eight days at the Feast. A week and a day of sitting in services, sitting in restaurants, and sitting in hotel rooms added to a couple more days sitting in cars and airplanes will make us feel sluggish and irritable. Try to participate in as many church-organized picnics, tours, and other activities as possible. If you meet some new friends (which you almost definitely will) and you want to spend time getting to know them, suggest a walk or a visit to a local park. Walk and talk!

- ***Drive safely***

Daily on our newscasts, we hear about the results of unsafe driving. Speed kills, so please slow down. Yes, even if your flight was late. Yes, even if your car broke down. Yes, even if it means missing the opening night service. Better to miss one service than to spend the Feast in a hospital bed... or worse!

- ***Supervise young children at all times***

We touched on this subject briefly in an earlier section. God has not yet set up His Kingdom on earth. Until He does, this is still Satan's world and society. Although every effort has been made to choose a Feast site that is comparatively safe, there is not one city, town or even village on this earth that is totally, one hundred percent safe. There are wicked people everywhere. We do not need to be paranoid, but neither should we invite trouble. There are other sources of danger too. Keep a close watch on young children around automobiles, water, and electricity. Your Feast environment may not be as well guarded from these hazards as your home is.

Finances

- *Save your Festival Tithe*

It is probably a little late to be giving advice on this point for this year's Feast. But perhaps you can keep it in mind for future years. God wants all of us to attend His Feast at the place where He places His name, if we are physically able. For most of us, Feast attendance would be absolutely impossible if we did not save our Second Tithe according to God's command. Most of us know, by now, that God commands us to save ten percent of our income for Holy Day expenses:

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: and thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, and the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee. (Deuteronomy 14:22-26)

We should also teach our children the *habit* of saving their Second Tithe, so that when they grow to adulthood, the practice will not be a surprise to them. Give them two jars or cans and mark them "1T" and "2T." Teach them to calculate ten percent of their allowances and "wages" for special jobs, to deposit those tithes in the appropriate containers, and to enjoy watching the amounts grow as the Feast draws near. You might also like to teach your children to prepare their Holy Day Offerings well in advance. A child's offering loses its meaning if the parent just gives him a dollar or two to put in the basket at the last minute.

For adults and older children, it is wise to calculate how much Second Tithe funds you expect to have available, to prepare a Feast budget and then to stick to it. God wants His Feast to be a blessing to His children, not the cause of additional financial burdens upon us.

Let's all be preparing for God's Feast!

Let's all be preparing to rejoice and to learn to fear the great God.

Let's all be preparing to live God's way of give at the Feast of Tabernacles!

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