

A Time for Families

The Feast of Tabernacles teaches the tremendous value and purpose of the family, and at this Feast God will be watching to see if you understand that lesson.

By Gerald E. Weston

“Good morning! Are you Mr. Jones?”
“Yes.”

“Are you Mr. Ronald Carl Jones?”

“Yes, I’m Ronald Carl Jones.”

“Congratulations, Mr. Jones! I have here in my hand a gift for you. As you can see, it is a certified cashier’s check, made out to you, for \$1 million. It is yours with no strings attached. You are free to cash it and spend it for whatever your heart desires.”

“But I don’t understand,” a dumbfounded Mr. Jones muttered.

“My employer,” explained this most unusual visitor, “who wishes to remain anonymous, is a very wealthy man. He has chosen you at random to be the recipient of this gift. It is yours. Please take it.”

So began another episode in the old television series, *The Millionaire*.

Have you ever wondered how you would respond to such a visitor? Those of you who remember that popular series recall that the gift of \$1 million more often than not caused grief and sorrow to the recipients. Usually, before the affair was over, friends were lost, husband and wife were fighting and the family was worse off than before.

But what would you do if you suddenly became rich? Would you handle your newfound wealth wisely? Would it be a tool to enhance your life and that of your family, or would you go on a selfish spend-

ing spree trying to buy happiness? What about your mate and your children? How would they react? Would you all become closer together united-



ly using your gift in a godlike manner? Or would you divide up the loot and go off on individual pursuits of pleasure?

A time for learning

Do you realize that God wants to know the answers to these questions? During the Feast of Tabernacles, if you have faithfully saved your festival tithe and attend, God is going to find out!

God commands us: “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 . . . And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after [desires]” (Deut. 14:22-23, 26).

Once a year your family is given an opportunity to see what it is like to be

just a little bit rich. Once a year God can observe your family to see if you are growing in your ability to rightly handle this sudden wealth.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a time for learning. We are told in verse 23 to keep this Feast “that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always.” When the all-wise God thought up this wonderful time of year, He had far more in mind than a yearly spending spree when He commanded us to “bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after.”

So how are you and your family going to do? Are you expecting the things money can buy to bring happiness at the Feast? Are you going to, by your example, teach your children the false value that happiness is something that can be bought?

You will do just that if, day after day, you dispense the family funds and send each family member off in his own separate direction — Dad to his golfing, Mom to her shopping, Suzy to her sunning and Johnny to the nearest electronic arcade.

While all the above pursuits have merit under the right conditions, in the right balance, at the right time, make sure Johnny’s fondest memories of this year’s Feast are elevated above intergalactic drum beats, bleeps on screens, merciless electronic mayhem and constantly feeding of quarters to a computerized hog!

The Feast of Tabernacles is far more than that. The Feast is not for one member of the family only. Among other things, it is a time for families. It is a time when the true

Illustrations by Warren Chang

value of the family and the purpose of the family should be taught.

God's command is, "Thou must eat them [tithes] before the Lord thy God . . . thou, and thy son, and thy daughter" (Deut. 12:18). This scripture in no way implies a selfish, every-man-for-himself attitude.

So how can your family learn the lessons God intends at this time of the year?

Feast foreshadows the Millennium

Realize what the Feast of Tabernacles pictures.

The apostle Paul tells us in Colossians 2:17 that God's Holy Days are a "shadow of things to come." We know the Feast of Tabernacles foreshadows the time just ahead of us when Jesus Christ will set up His government on this earth and reign for 1,000 years.

When we remove ourselves from our normal routine to keep the Feast, we are going to get a taste of what this new world will be like.

Some people think of the Feast in terms of physical, material things. They think of all the money they have to spend and all the fun and happiness it can buy.

But the world the Feast pictures is very different from this present, evil world. Universal prosperity and abundance are included in the picture, but they are merely the by-products, not the causes of, peace, unity, cooperation and outgoing concern.

The building block for this new society — the place where peace and unity have to start — is the family living according to God's laws. It is here that man learns the lessons of godly love and right government.

How ironic it would be to attend the Feast, which pictures the world tomorrow, and only practice today's arguing, fighting and striving to get the most for self. How paradoxical it would be to attempt to act out what life will be like in the Millennium and let the opportunity to build family unity and understanding slip by.

Conversely, how beautiful it is to see families rejoicing together, acting out and experiencing, through harmonious interaction, what it will be like all over this earth in a few years.

Just how beautiful right family living can be was brought home to me during my first Feast of Tabernacles, in 1964. I had only attended one regular Sabbath service, the Day of Atonement, and then I was off to the Feast in Squaw Valley, Calif. Everything was new, different and impressive.

I remember the sermons were inspiring, but a main lesson I learned was brought home to me in a way more powerful than any preached sermon could have been. It occurred in Blyth Arena on "Family Night." All the brethren were present for the occasion.

The evening began with games for the small children. Hundreds participated. All were divided into various age groups and assigned different locations on the arena floor. Thousands of adults and older brothers and sisters looked on, enjoying the games.

When I saw what was going to take place, I was sure chaos would reign. It didn't. Never before had I observed such a smooth-running, well organized activity for so many small children. I had no idea that so many children could be so obedient and orderly and have fun in the process.

It was indelibly impressed on my mind that there was something special about families in the Church of God.

After the special children's activities the children played in an orderly manner on the sidelines as the teens and older adults enjoyed various kinds of dances. The music was wholesome and the whole evening uplifting, with entire families rejoicing together.

Thinking back on that Feast later, I was struck by how similar it was to Jeremiah's vision of the Millennium:

"Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd [compare this to the command about the Festival, in Deuteronomy 12:17-18] . . . Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together" (Jer. 31:12-13).

The whole focus of the world

tomorrow is based in family closeness. Jeremiah 33 describes the Millennium in terms of the joy of a wedding, the beginning of a new family:

"Again there shall be heard in this place . . . The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good" (verses 10-11).

In today's world the joy of the wedding rarely matures into a full acceptance of the responsibilities of the married state. The result is delinquent and disrespectful children who prey on and harass the aged. The children, in turn, have less joy in future generations.

Theodore Roosevelt summed up the situation: "When home ties are loosened — when men and women cease to regard a worthy family life, with all its duties fully performed and all its responsibilities lived up to, as the life best worth living — then evil days for the commonwealth are at hand."

During the time the Feast of Tabernacles pictures, men and women will regard a "worthy family life" as the life best worth living. Notice how Zechariah describes the end results of parents fully performing their responsibilities:

"There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech. 8:4-5). There is no hint of delinquency or disrespect — only harmony and joy.

Once you understand what the Feast of Tabernacles foreshadows, and the importance of the family in this millennial picture, you can fully set your mind to help your family rejoice and learn together during this Feast.

Draw closer to God and each other

Before the Feast arrives you should plan the kind of Feast you want to have. Call a family conference and discuss your goals, if you have not yet done so.

Your family's No. 1 goal, of course, should be for everyone to grow closer to God. Plan now how

you are going to "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," and you can be sure happiness at the Feast "shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

At home you have a certain routine. The Feast may disrupt that routine, if you let it. Make sure every family member has time and a quiet place for prayer every day. This may take some resourcefulness, and may also involve setting aside time for family prayer. But at least a portion of your daily prayer at the Feast should be as a family.

The Feast is also a great time for family Bible study. Clear time on your schedule for it, and stick to it. Decide now what you will study. How about a family reading of Herbert W. Armstrong's book, *Tomorrow... What It Will Be Like?* What about going through the biblical prophecies about the Millennium?

Not enough time, you say? Sure

there is. At home you get up early enough to be at work or school by 7 or 8 a.m. You go to bed between 10 and 11:30 p.m. Is there any real reason to drastically change your schedule? If not, you should have plenty of time before morning services, which are usually scheduled for 10:30.

Some people will probably stay up half the night every night — but is the purpose of the Feast to cram as much physical pleasure into as short a period of time as possible? Do you refrain all year long from running "to the same excess of riot" as those outside the Church (I Pet. 4:4) and then take a recess from righteousness for eight days? Is that what God intended when He said "bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after"?

The fact is that there is enough time for your family to feast on fellowship with God. One thing God will learn during this Feast is how

your sudden wealth affects your priorities.

Your second goal should be to grow closer as a family. If you fulfill your first goal you will already be well on the way, but plan now to spend the greatest portion of the Feast together — not scattered to the four winds.

By this I do not mean every minute of every day must be spent together. But plan activities you can do as a family. Also keep in mind the value of one-on-one father-son or mother-daughter excursions. Build anticipation by bringing the whole family into your Feast planning.

Not everyone is going to be equally excited about every activity, but that is all a part of learning to give and share, part of what family life is to teach us.

Recently I asked a number of people to recall some of their memorable activities on their way to, dur-

Let Your Light Shine!

"Never again!" the weary motel owner grumbled. "Never again will I let those people in my motel!"

Making little effort to hide his bitterness, he went on: "And they call themselves 'religious.'"

"Here for a convention," they said. What a mess they've left! They preach against smoking and drinking, yet they've scattered cigarette butts and liquor bottles all over the place. And I've heard them use profanity, too!"

He stood there shaking his head sadly.

The actions of the members of this well-known religious denomination of the world had preached more loudly to the unfortunate motel owner and his staff than all the tracts and pamphlets they distribute in great abundance. There is something we in God's Church can learn from this.

The Feast is unique. Members of the Church of God are on public display individually and as groups at Feast time as they are at no other time of the year.

Who are we? What do we really stand for? Do we really believe what we preach? What are the results of the way we proclaim? Happiness? Sincerity? Courtesy? Concern? Or poor

behavior, sour personalities and selfishness?

People wonder. Many of them have heard *The World Tomorrow* broadcast or seen *The Plain Truth*, or they are aware of Ambassador College or the name "Worldwide Church of God." "What kind of people are these?" they may have asked. At Feast time some of them will have a chance to see.

Others have never heard of us before. But they, too, will see our example. When they find out we belong to God's Church, they will judge our God by what they see in us.

In airports, hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, taxis, travel agencies, unfamiliar stores and shops — at Feast time we will find ourselves in environments we are not used to, perhaps encountering languages and customs strange to our way of doing things. Our light will be seen by cross sections of society in all probability totally different from those we come in contact with the rest of the year.

Nevertheless, wherever we deal with people we will be dealing with potential members of God's Family — people who someday will be keeping the Feast just as we are. We must show them how good God's ways are. We never know when our example will lead someone else to the

truth — or, on the other hand, drive him from it!

"Ye are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men [why?], that they may see your *good* works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).

"Be aglow with the Spirit" is the way the apostle Paul expressed it (Rom. 12:11, Revised Standard Version).

When it is appropriate, we should let others know we are traveling to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. We don't have to call undue attention to it, but neither does our explanation always have to be "We're going to a church convention" or "We're on a part-business, part-pleasure trip" or something similarly vague.

Our speech should be "seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (I Pet. 3:15).

Letting our light shine and being a good example to those in the world — as well as to other brethren! — is a great responsibility.

As part of preparing for the Feast, here are some reminders of ways in which we can resolve to set the kind of example God wants us to set:

- *Motels and hotels.* Courtesy and promptness in paying bills are important. While we aren't expected to leave the rooms exactly as they were when we arrived (after all, we will have slept in the

ing and returning home from the Festival. Here are some ideas to get you thinking:

- “Spent a beautiful afternoon out on Lake Ozark with [another family] on a large pontoon boat. We enjoyed the warm, sunny day and all went swimming off the boat when we anchored it in a secluded cove. I remember this quite well because it was an activity thoroughly enjoyed by all 10 people involved, ranging in age from 6 to 36.”

- “Went to the zoo. Related much there to world tomorrow (hearing and seeing a lion roar, for instance).”

- “A side trip to Mt. Vernon was a special treat for our whole family. Not only did we enjoy a beautiful, warm fall day touring the estate and feeling a sense of history, but it provided many hours of good conversation throughout the year and gave the children a good topic for their ‘What

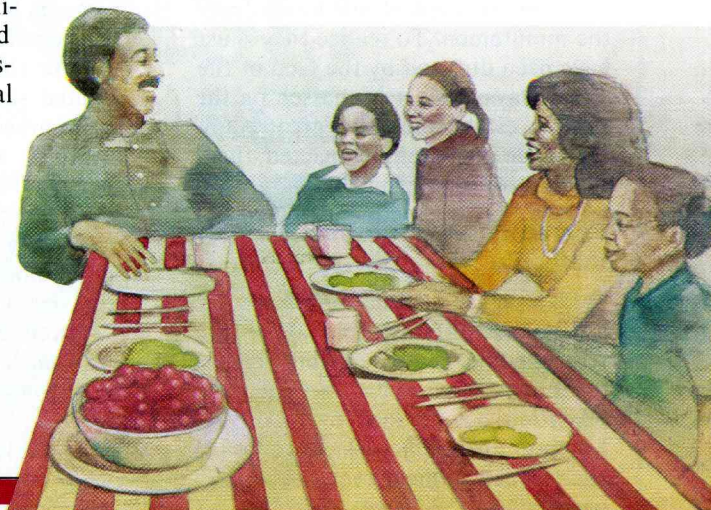
I Did on My Vacation’ talk that the teachers had them give when they returned to school.”

- “No single event made the Feast at Tucson memorable; rather, it was a combination of all the activities we did together as a family that made it special.”

- “The Feast to our family has always been an opportunity to learn. We have tried to balance the social, historical and educational activities with those provided by the Church. We have attempted at each Feast to cover at least one activity that each member of the family had on his activity list. A ‘must’ for each Feast is the ‘Family Night’ provided by the Ambassador Col-

lege students, be it live or on film.

“Another ‘must’ of equal importance at each Feast is to take our family out to the best restaurant we can afford, either as a single family or with other families. More can be done by this activity to give your children confidence as they grow than most other activities you can do. We



beds and used the towels and washcloths), still we should not leave the rooms a mess either.

During our stay we should be careful not to disturb others with loud partying, television or radios. And if we have a quantity of beer or liquor bottles to dispose of, it probably wouldn't be a bad idea to dump them in a trash can outside rather than leave them in the rooms.

- **Transportation.** An extra amount of kindness and patience is often needed while traveling. Planes, trains and buses can be late. There may be long lines to wait in. And when all is said and done, we may not get the seat we requested next to the window.

Long trips may be fatiguing, and it is very easy to become irritated and short-tempered. A trip is an excellent opportunity to exercise our ability to “pray always.”

There is a special need to be on guard when driving. If Jesus Christ were to get into a car or truck and drive to the Feast today, He would follow the rules of safety and the highway laws.

- **Restaurants.** Make the meal pleasant for those with you and for those at other tables, as well as for the often worn-out waiter or waitress who serves you. If he or she does an excellent job and you have the festival tithe available, leave an excellent tip.

And don't make a scene about butter versus margarine, or the color of flour or

sugar. There are ways to quietly avoid the wrong foods without calling attention to what you are doing.

- **Other public places.** Once again, courtesy is the rule. “Be courteous” is the way the King James Version translates I Peter 3:8. It really is a question of keeping the second great commandment: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:39). So show others the way of give in action.

- **Dress and grooming.** Appearance is important at Feast time when we assemble in God's presence. Especially during services, we should try to look our best. Our appearance says something to the outside world. And it says something to God: It says we respect Him and His ways.

- **Helping others.** Be aware of the widows, the fatherless and those who are alone. Include them in your Feast activities. The world tomorrow will be a time of helping others. We should practice helping others at the Feast.

Announcements may be made asking for volunteers to set up or take down chairs, direct traffic, provide transportation and accept numerous other opportunities to help. Don't let “someone else” do all the helping. That's not the spirit of the world tomorrow.

- **Eating and drinking.** God tells us to rejoice before Him with good food and drink — even strong drink. But He does not give us any excuse for gluttony or

drunkenness. In fact, we must be especially careful with alcoholic drinks because it is possible to stay within our own limits and still sin by offending someone else.

We in God's Church understand that alcoholic beverages can be properly used and enjoyed. Therefore, we have a freedom others may not have.

“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak” (I Cor. 8:9).

This principle, given by the apostle Paul concerning the eating of meats, applies equally well to the use of alcoholic drinks. Great care should be taken that their use does not offend anyone else.

Also, be considerate of any brother or sister who abstains because of health or other reasons. Don't tempt him or her. And when you are pouring the drinks, don't keep filling someone else's glass.

“Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also” (Hab. 2:15).

Let the other person make his own decision as to how much he wants.

Rejoice at the Feast, but remember: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (I Cor. 10:31-32).

Let's keep the Feast in the spirit of the world tomorrow! — By Clayton Steep □

try to show our family some of the finer things of life.”

• “One memorable time for our family was the stop we made at historical Lexington and Concord, Mass., to follow the trail of Paul Revere and the minutemen.

“A beautiful setting on a warm autumn day was truly peaceful as we retraced the steps of our forefathers, the minutemen. To realize they must have been directed by the God of the Feast Days to start Manasseh on the road to establishing this great country made the event reenacted there much more significant to us.”

Character — more precious than gold

Planning and doing things together are important if the whole family is to feast together, but exercising character is more important. More than one Feast has been ruined by bickering, fighting, impatience, lack of tolerance and moodiness over not getting one's way.

Human nature rarely gets upset over something meaningful. It's usually “Hurry up in the bathroom” or “I don't want to eat there again” or “Not another line to wait in” that sends us into depression.

Some crisis will no doubt occur. It might be when your navigator reads the map wrong and you miss your turn, causing a delay in arriving at your motel. Perhaps someone will forget the toothpaste. Whatever the problem, is it really worth the hassle? Satan would like to make you think so.

Without cooperation, patience, self-control and outgoing concern, your temporary dwelling will be a hotbed of strife and conflict. Months of planning will be tarnished or destroyed for lack of character.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For

the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (Jas. 1:19-20).

Just as no man is an island, neither is your family unit. Some families get into a kind of collective selfishness. The attitude is best expressed by the family that says by its actions: “Look out! Get out of our way! If you don't move, we won't be able to spend all our money before the time is up.”

Behind such actions you will find lust and greed. It would do us well to remember, as we contemplate the Feast, Paul's admonition to Timothy:

“But they that will be rich [those who think money and what it can buy is the secret to happiness] fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

“For the love of money [and what it buys] is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Tim. 6:9-10).

Our obligation goes beyond our immediate families. When Jesus on one occasion was informed that His mother and brothers were outside the house and not able to get in because of the crowd, He said: “Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!” (Mark 3:31-35).

The human family — a type of God's Kingdom

God has given us the family unit as a type of the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God there are different members — the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, the Church that will be married to Christ at the resurrection and the children of that marriage relationship — those qualifying to be part of the God Family during the Millennium and White Throne Judgment period.

Through the human family we learn how the Kingdom of God will operate — how it will be governed from the top down, how the attitude of give as opposed to get will permeate every decision and

action. Through the family we learn real, godly love.

The family unit is so important that God warns that unless it is functioning the way He intends, there would be nothing on this earth worth saving:

“Behold, I will send you [one coming in the spirit and power of] Elijah [Luke 1:17] the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord [that's our time now]: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse [utter destruction]” (Mal. 4:5-6).

This prophecy clearly shows that the family unit is not in very good shape today. Divorce, liberalism and women's “liberation” have all taken their toll on the family, but God gives us further insight into the problems of this end-time age.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous . . . disobedient to parents . . . Without natural affection . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness . . . from such turn away” (II Tim. 3:1-5).

That is the world we live in, and don't think some of its leaven hasn't rubbed off on you!

In a few years from now, our multibillionaire God is going to send His Son back to this earth. At that time those who have recaptured the true values in family living will be resurrected into the Family of God and given rewards and wealth that would put even Mr. Jones' millionaire friend to shame.

Before you enter that Family, God will have to know you believe to the depth of your being that the principles of right family living are more precious than gold. God will not risk your coming to His heavenly feast with a selfish “I-want-to-get-for-me” attitude.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a great opportunity to show where your treasure is. God will find out by the end of the eight days how you and your family react to sudden wealth, and what is most important to you. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). □

