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Celebrating the Sabbath as a Family

— By E. Jeffrey Hill, '77

AS individual members of the Church of Jesus Christ, it's easy to generate a list of things we can do to keep the Sabbath day holy. It takes more creativity to think of what a family with children of different ages can do to make Sunday a special, spiritual day. Most families try and fail and try again. It's hard. But those families that stick with it until they find their own ways to successfully celebrate the Sabbath will reap blessings of stronger family relationships, kinder communication, spiritual depth, and more family fun. Here are five principles, with numerous practical applications, that might help families make Sunday sacred in their homes.

Worship Together as a Family

Along with attending church meetings together, there are many ways a family can make the Sabbath a day of worship.

Get to Bed Early on Saturday Night. A family can worship better on Sunday if its members have gotten enough rest the night before. Make it a priority to get young children to bed early and encourage teenagers to return home at a reasonable hour on Saturday night.

Pray and Read Together. Just because the Sabbath is different, do not get out of the weekday routine of family prayer and scripture reading. Read the scriptures at a pace family members enjoy. Family scripture study can help young children read at an early age. If you teach them to recognize the phrase *and it came to pass*, they can make regular contributions when the family reads the Book of Mormon.

Give Priesthood Blessings. The Sabbath is an excellent day for turning the hearts of fathers and children toward each other through father's blessings. Parents can also share their patriarchal blessings with their children and talk about the guidance contained therein.

Fast as a Family. Before a fast Sunday, a family might eat a meal together Saturday afternoon or evening, discussing common purposes for the upcoming

fast. Then they could remind each other of these purposes throughout the fast. Parents can encourage children to fast to the degree appropriate for their age. (Younger children might fast for only one meal.) Break the fast by praying as a family about the purposes of the fast. Ask children about their experience fasting and about any promptings they might have received.

Proclaim the Gospel. Together decide to become friends with a family of another faith in the neighborhood and plan an activity with them. If the time is right, invite the family to go to church with your family. You could also have each family member write his or her testimony inside copies of the Book of Mormon to be given to personal friends and acquaintances. Or you might give the family one of the Church's "pass-along cards."

Redeem the Dead. Sunday is a good day for focusing on family history. Help children learn their family history by reading or telling stories about their ancestors. Gather family conversion stories. On a large map place tacks and labels to indicate where ancestors were born, married, and died. Or make a dinner with food from the country of a particular ancestor. As you learn together about your ancestors, create a four-generation pedigree chart with each child.

Don't Take a Vacation from the Sabbath. When away on a family vacation, make the effort to clean up and go to Sunday meetings wherever you happen to be. If no meetings are available where you are vacationing, get permission to have your own family sacrament service.

Make the Sabbath Different

As a day of worship, Sunday should feel distinct from other days of the week. By carefully controlling the home atmosphere, families can help create and maintain reverence throughout the day.

Sunday Should Look Different. Wearing nice clothes all day can help us keep the Sabbath. Girls might wear dresses and boys nice shirts and slacks. Exactly what is worn is less important than that the clothes reflect the spirit the family wants for the Sabbath. These may or may not be the clothes worn to church, but they would be nicer than everyday clothes. Even meal preparation and clean-up has more of a "Sunday" look when the family wears nice clothes and aprons.

Sunday Should Sound Different. Families can carefully select the music they listen to on Sundays. Appropriate music can set a tone of reverence for the home. Families may wish to refrain from playing everyday music on this holy day. Many quiet CDs with religious musical themes are available. Families can also sing hymns, primary songs, family songs, and other inspirational music.

Sunday Should Feel Different. Young children need to play. They will not sit quietly on the couch all day. As parents you can help them select activities in harmony with the mood you want on the Sabbath day. Set aside quiet Sunday toys that are not played with on other days. Play Sunday versions of games like charades, where family members act out scripture stories. Put together a religiously themed jigsaw puzzle as a family. Or enjoy a game of Book of Mormon trivia together. The possibilities are endless.

Sunday may not be the best day for children to play with friends. It may be a better day for children to play with their parents and siblings. And finally, to give the Sabbath a more sacred feel, a family may choose not to watch TV or play videos or computer games; if there is a TV program your family really would like to see, you can record it on video and watch it on a weeknight.

Sunday Should Taste Different. "Sunday dinner" is a tradition that brings families together for a delicious meal and pleasant words. Too often this undertaking detracts from the Sabbath experience of the person responsible for the meal (often the mom). However, if everyone in the family helps with meal preparation and clean-up, this tradition can promote the spirit of the Sabbath. Eat the meal at a leisurely pace and feed the soul with conversation and thanksgiving, not just the belly with food.

Build Family Relationships

Because family members spend time together Sunday, it is a good time for them to get to know each other better and strengthen their relationships.

Celebrate Marriage. As a family, read old love letters written during your courtship and the first years of marriage. Look through journals, photo albums, and videotapes of when you dated and were newlyweds. It is good for kids to see that their parents experienced young romantic love. Sometimes the best thing a couple can do to strengthen their relationship on the Sabbath might be to take a restful nap together.

Create a Shared Family History. Write a family history with highlights from the parents' courtship to the present day. For information for such a history, bring out family scrapbooks, photo albums, and home videos. You might have family members bring their journals and share personally meaningful entries. Or ask each family member to answer the question "What is one moment when our family was very close?"

Read and Walk Together. Get out of the house for a leisurely Sunday afternoon walk as a family and appreciate the beauties of God's handiwork in the great outdoors together. Let children talk about anything they want. Focus on being a

listener and not a speaker. Reading together as a family also helps build strong family relations. Your family could read out loud the Church magazines, an inspirational classic, a biography, or a religious book.

Keep in Touch. Sundays are also a good time for families to build connections with extended family members or immediate family members who are away from home. Gather the family around a speakerphone and call grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandchildren, and immediate family members at college, on a business trip, or away from home for some other reason. You may wish to write a family letter or send a care package to a family member who is on a mission or in the military.

Plan for Family Happiness

Sunday is a good day for families to look forward by setting goals and coordinating schedules.

Set Couple and Family Goals. Couples and families can plan for their future by setting formal goals for the next week or month or year (or decade or century). You could envision your marriage and family 15 years from now and write a detailed journal entry of what will be going on in your family in the year 2017. It can also be fun to make a list of 100 things the family wants to do in the next 25 or 50 years. It is amazing how many you will do if you write them down.

Hold Family Councils. Hold a weekly family planning meeting, where all family members can address their needs and wants. Set family goals related to temple work, missionary work, and perfecting the Saints. This is also a good time to review your family calendar and organize your week. You may also decide to sit down individually with a child to help him or her set personal goals.

Serve Others

Sunday is a great day to serve others as a family. By opening your home and by looking for opportunities in your community, you can find many ways to experience the joys of service on this day.

Perform Family Service. You might invite another family over for Sunday dinner and dessert. Or you could make a treat together and deliver it to friends or new neighbors as a family. There are also many appropriate Sunday service opportunities in the larger community. Go to a retirement home and present a family fireside or musical program or just talk to the residents. Visit friends, relatives, or ward members who are in the hospital. Or contact a soup kitchen or homeless shelter and provide service there, such as serving a meal.

As this compilation of ideas and practices illustrates, there are as many ways to

successfully celebrate the Sabbath as a family as there are families. It's not easy, but through persistence families can discover practices that are both fun and meaningful for all family members. And keeping the Sabbath day holy as a family will not only invite the Spirit but will improve communication among family members, increase love and kindness within marriage, and strengthen all family relationships. It's worth the effort.

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