A Date with DAD

Quality Time with Our Heavenly Father

A Note

Today, we live in a commuter and computer world. We live our lives moving from one isolated network of people to another, each related to different activities, programs or locations such as work, recreation, school, home and church. Most of our relationships are shallow and temporary, lasting only as long as our involvement in a particular program or activity. Few relationships are secure and permanent—even between family members. When relationships get boring or tough, we tend to move on rather than work through difficulties to a deeper level of commitment. We commute rather than commit.

What is the answer to our fragmented lives and lack of stable relationships? Sabbath. *A Date with Dad, Quality Time with Our Heavenly Father* is a quick-reference summary of the practical guidelines from the longer booklet *Out of the Fast Lane, Observing the Lord's Day, the Lord's Way* which also explores the Biblical foundations of Sabbath. *A Date with Dad* is written in the first person as if it comes directly from the heavenly Father himself. Hope you find it helpful and life-transforming!

My Child,

Since we have known each other for a while now, I thought it would be a good thing if we spent more time together. You may think I'm demanding, asking for more time, but this would be a time with a special purpose—just think of it as a "date."

You may think we're already together enough at church, Bible study, incidentally throughout the week, and during our relatively short personal quiet times together, but I am convinced it's important that we spend a significant amount of quality time together on a regular basis. Lately, I've been feeling a little neglected. We may be together busily doing things all the time, but we haven't been focusing on one another. I'm afraid our relationship has been suffering because of it.

I know you better than you know yourself, but I'd like you to get to know me better. I'm positive we will enjoy just being together the more quality time we spend with each other. Also, I want to include your family, friends, and acquaintances in our times together so they can get to know me better too. Your relationships with them will deepen and grow more enjoyable as well.

Actually, I've always wanted to spend this kind of time with you. As I mentioned in my Fourth Commandment:

> *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

As you can tell, I have a clear idea of how I would like us to spend our time together. Here are some thoughts about our date.

What kind of a date are we going to have?

- *A day of rest* ~ a change of pace, refreshment, not more work to do—a day in which I rest and invite you to rest, too.
- *A day of reflection* ~ a time to reflect on our past week together and what we accomplished—to recall how I worked in your life and how we partnered together—so you realize and remember that I am your Creator, shaping you, week by week, into my image.
- *A blessed and holy day* ~ time set aside with me so I can purify your mind and heart and fill you with my Spirit to overflowing.
- *A shared day* ~ invite your family, coworkers, friends, even strangers—those who know me and those who don't—I want to share our lives and our time together with others.
- *A joyful day* ~ like a party. Our date is for celebration. Although I do want to spend time alone with you—for reflection and rest, I also want us to reserve plenty of time for fun and feasting with others—hardly a somber occasion—more like a family reunion.

When and how long will our date be?

- *A day a week* ~ I want to set aside an entire day each week, at least a full twenty-four hours.
- *Evening to evening* ~ I prefer beginning our date just before dinner and ending the following evening after dinner. Starting and finishing with a meal provides a good beginning and ending.
- *Same time each week* ~ The exact time for these meals doesn't matter to me so much, as long as it is consistent each week and enables everyone in the household to get together for dinner.
- *After work is finished and dinner is prepared* ~ Starting in the evening gives us time to finish whatever work we are doing and be prepared for our special time together. Sleep, after a relaxing evening meal, is especially restful.
- *When everyone can be there* ~ Our date must be scheduled so it is convenient for everyone we would like to include and invite.

Who shall I invite?

- *Everyone who lives with you* ~ While on our date, I don't want anyone in your home slaving over a hot stove cooking, painting the house, fixing the car or babysitting your children. I want everyone in your family and anyone else living, or otherwise working in your home, to rest along with us. I want you to invite them on our date too.

- *Coworkers and employees* ~ People who work with and for you need their rest as well. It's not good if your rest makes others work harder or prevents them from resting. By occasionally inviting coworkers and employees to join us, you let them know you would like to relate to them beyond roles and responsibilities. Your relationships with them will undoubtedly deepen and grow beyond mere function.

- *Strangers and non-believers* ~ Invite people who are not like you and even those you just happen to meet. I'm especially concerned about those who don't know me. I want you to reach out to them so they can join us on our date. They will see and taste the love we share and, hopefully, want to have a loving relationship with me too.

Where will we spend our date?

- *At home or wherever* ~ I prefer to spend most of our date together at your home, where you are most relaxed and comfortable. Of course, if you happen to be away on a trip somewhere—wherever you are staying is fine with me. I want us to stay put and kick back together—not running around all over the place.

- *At church* ~ What time we don't spend at your home, I'd like to set apart to be at your church—along with my other children. And, if you are far away from home, as long as we are together, any church in the world will do.

What should we avoid to maximize our time together?

- *Work* ~ The main thing we won't do is work.

- *Traveling, cooking or shopping* ~ I also don't want us to spend too much time traveling, cooking or shopping. What I really want is your full attention—and the full attention of those you have invited to be with us on our date. Do these things together or not at all, if you can help it. Think light—light travel, light cooking, light shopping. Nothing major. I want quality time with a minimum of distractions.

- *Household chores* ~ Please don't do six tubs of laundry, fix the plumbing, pay the monthly bills, change the oil in your car, or do heavy yardwork—you know, stuff that is time-consuming, energy-draining, or family-scattering. Sometimes, it can't be avoided. OK, I understand. Just don't make it a habit.

- *Church and ministry business* ~ And, I want you not only to be with me but focused on me, so even doing things for me can be a distraction. You might think I like going to church budget meetings with you on our dates because it has something to do with church, but I don't.

- *Escapism entertainment* ~ Being mesmerized by television, movies, computer games or the Internet doesn't please me either. However, you also might think I would never want to watch a video or television with you—but I may, especially if it stimulates discussion about my Book or my Son—you know, if it helps you to understand me better. Obviously, I am not happy with a lot of stuff out there these days. I trust my Spirit will help you decide. I mainly want us to have a healthy and positive time together with you and your significant others.

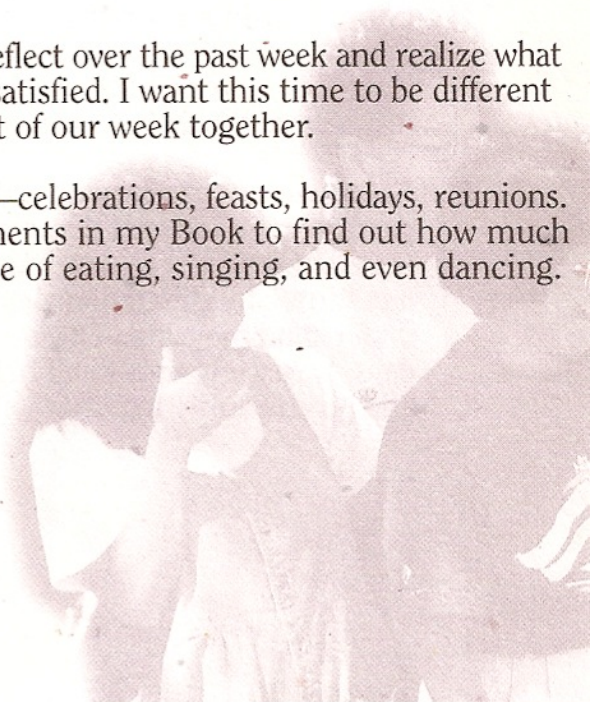
What are we going to experience on our date?

- *Fun and freedom* ~ I want us to enjoy a day of rest, relief and relaxation; fun and freedom.

- *Thankfulness* ~ I just want you to be thankful and to appreciate what I have given you.

- *Fulfillment* ~ I want you to kick back, reflect over the past week and realize what we have accomplished together and be satisfied. I want this time to be different from how we spend time during the rest of our week together.

- *Celebration* ~ You know, I love parties—celebrations, feasts, holidays, reunions. Just check out the Old and New Testaments in my Book to find out how much I love a good, wholesome and holy time of eating, singing, and even dancing.



- *Intimacy* ~ But, I would like you to balance our fun-date time with solitude, quiet reflection, and deep conversation with me. I just want to "hang out!" There is no better way for you to get to know me better.

- *Identity and purpose* ~ I would like you to realize why you are doing what you do the rest of the week. Are you doing things for self-centered reasons or for me? I would like you to know how important you are to me, discover who you really are, and realize who is most important to you.

How might we spend our time together?

There are many ways in which we could spend quality time together and achieve what I desire to happen between us. However, I thought it might be helpful if I gave you a concrete idea of how we might spend our day and then we can go from there. We can adjust the details to fit whatever situation we are facing at the time. In other words, I'm flexible. I want our date to be a blessing, not a burden. So, here's a sample:

A SAMPLE SABBATH

Let's start on Saturday at 6 p.m.
Be sure to finish up whatever you need to—
chores, cleaning, e-mails, cooking dinner,
so you can feel free to fully enjoy our date together.

EVENING

Reflection

We gather together as a family for dinner around 6 pm. I know you are accustomed to the old eat-and-run routine—everyone wolfing down food and then scattering to do whatever. Well, this meal will be different. It will be leisurely—a time of sharing as we eat. And, preferably, there will be no dishwashing. We could use paper plates and throw them away afterwards, or put the regular dishes in the sink or dishwasher to be washed later. Sometimes we might want to use as little dinnerware as possible. At other times, we might prefer to pull out our best china for a special feast.

As we share with each other around the dinner table, we recall what went on during the past week . . . people we've met . . . relationships that have grown . . . what was especially enjoyable, fun, or funny . . . what was learned . . . what was accomplished . . . how I answered prayer or how something I wrote in my Book helped you solve a problem. In any case, we find fulfillment and satisfaction as we recount our blessings and the fruit of our labor.

Relaxation

Then, with full tummies, we can sit back and relax. Maybe we'll watch a meaningful video, listen to the crackle of flames in the fireplace, sing songs around the piano, or perhaps share with each other what you are learning about my Son and me from my Book. We can eat some popcorn, s'mores or ice cream sundaes for dessert. At evening's end, we will have a time of conversational prayer together—about our evening, how our relationship has grown this past week and how great our date will be tomorrow.

NIGHT

Rejuvenation

We will go to bed early, peaceful and calm, after a relaxing evening. You can be at peace because you have been reminded during the evening that I'll be watching over you while you sleep. Positive thoughts and feelings linger as you drift off. After you get a good night's rest, you will be renewed and refreshed, ready for the rest of our "date."

MORNING

Reverence

Our date will continue in the morning. After a light breakfast of pastry or cold cereal—something that doesn't take much preparation—we are off to church for a prayerful time of worship, fellowship and outreach, a perfect beginning to our day.

Remembrance

When we're together at church as a larger family of faith, I would like you to remember how and why I created you. I would like you to remember how I've faithfully provided for you, how I've acted in your lives—individually, as a family, and as a church community. And, I want you to be assured that I will continue to care for you.

Realization

I would like you to realize, I mean deep in your heart, how much you need me—how little you can do on your own. Remember that I am always with you in whatever you do, wherever you go—I am here—even as you think these thoughts.

Rejoicing

You know, the more time we spend together, the more deep down joy you will have. It's just an inevitable thing. As you remember and realize how much I love you, you cannot help but rejoice.

AFTERNOON

Relationships

During the afternoon, we will take time to build our relationships. After the formal gathering at church in the morning, we can hang out there awhile for whatever fellowship activities have been planned. Then we can invite people home, or perhaps visit a sick church member or friend. And, we'll spend time with your invited guests . . . just being together will help to nurture and celebrate our relationships.

Reaching out

I'd like it if you would invite people you may not know very well . . . even those who don't know me very well, if at all. Of course, if our guests do not know me yet, we will need to remember to use words they will understand. You and I speak a special language—we tend to use words in a way that is foreign and strange to those who are not yet part of my family. Otherwise, we should just be ourselves around those who are invited, allowing them to experience the way we relate with one another and the difference our relationship makes in your life and in your relationships with those around you. Hopefully, they too, in time, will want to become a child of mine.

Review

As our date comes to a close, we can spend a little time over dinner reviewing what happened. Or, you can do so after dinner if you have guests. Can we communicate better? How can we make our dates even more special in the future? How did our guests respond? Is there anything we should do to follow through with them? How might we better demonstrate our love for those who do not yet know me? Is there anything that came out during our date about your life and relationships that you would like to change? What should be done about it?

At the end of our date, spend some time together in prayer, expressing your joy and thankfulness for the special day we've just shared with one another, and offering the upcoming week to me so I can help you meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Refreshment

When all is said and done, I promise, you will be rested and renewed. You will be ready to begin the week with a "fresh" new start.

THE BOTTOM LINE

As we continue to have these "dates" together, we will get better at planning them. Sharing them with others will become more comfortable too. First dates are always the toughest. But, if we faithfully keep our dates, they will soon become the highlight of each and every week. We will look forward to spending this time together, and become eager to invite others to join us.

In a nutshell, here's the overall flow of what our dates look like.

EVENING
Reflection
Relaxation

NIGHT
Rejuvenation

MORNING
Reverence
Remembrance
Realization
Rejoicing

AFTERNOON
Relationships
Reaching out
Review
Refreshment

Remember, all I've shared in this letter is not cast in stone. I'm flexible. Some dates may be different depending upon when your guests are available, when your church worships, or whatever happens. I just want quality time with you and those you love. As I said before, I want our dates to be a blessing not a burden. I can't wait to get started!

Love,

YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER

alias Divine DAD

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