

How to Spend Sunday

by F.B. Meyer

A well-spent Sunday is one that is spent with family, engaging in activities that promote reverence and participation, and creating simple traditions that bring joy and contentment.

Scripture: Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15, Psalm 100:2, Psalm 118:24, Proverbs 22:6, Isaiah 58:13-14, Matthew 18:20, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 10:24-25

Topics: "Family Worship", "Sabbath Observance"

Description

F.B. Meyer emphasizes the importance of spending Sundays meaningfully, sharing personal memories of his own joyful Sundays spent with family. He advocates for family unity, encouraging parents to involve their children in spiritual practices like family prayers and Bible readings, rather than relegating them to separate activities. Meyer highlights the significance of creating a joyful atmosphere filled with singing and shared meals, which fosters lasting memories and spiritual growth. He warns against self-indulgence and criticizes the tendency to prioritize personal leisure over family engagement on this sacred day. Ultimately, he calls for a Sunday that nurtures reverence, joy, and togetherness, shaping a foundation for a fulfilling week ahead.

Transcript

"A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content."

So the old couplet runs, but the difficulty lies in how to spend Sunday well. Too many seem only proficient in the art of how not to do it. Now I feel able to give some advice on this matter, as the Sundays of my early life were the red-letter days of the whole week; and as I look back on them, the recollection sends blessed thrills of joy through my heart. It is as though the light of those days, their fragrance and dew, lie still in the garden of my soul, where I now walk with the many concerns and added interests of manhood.

The art of making Sunday a happy day, if art there was, on the part of my parents, lay in their sharing its hours with the whole family. There was no exclusiveness, no withdrawing from the general life for selfish purposes, no sign that the children were a bother, to be got out of the way as expeditiously and for as long a period as possible. This is where so many families go wrong. The children are sent off to the nursery to spend the time with servants, who may have little interest in them or religion, or dismissed to the Sunday-school, that the parents may have unbroken leisure for sleep or pleasure. It is the only day in the week I can get for myself, says the father. It is the only day in the week that I can have my husband to myself, says the mother. It is the only opportunity we have of seeing our friends, say both. And so the

children are left to their own devices; and on those Sunday afternoons, however unconsciously, the seeds of bitter harvests are sown. Directly self comes into the first place in the home-life, we begin to prepare for ourselves almost interminable pains in after years. The path of safety and true happiness is in seeking the well-being of those around, from the smallest babe to the most unkempt servant who has come under the shelter of our roof.

A well-spent Sunday must not begin with self-indulgent lying in bed. Of course breakfast may be a little later, and the very essence of a happy Sunday lies in everything being different from every other day of the week; but when the hour has been fixed, it should be kept. It makes such a difference when the father, mother, and children are all to time, and can begin breakfast together.

May I not here put in a strong plea for family prayers on this, if on no other, day of the week? Where the father is absent on business, as a commercial, or before breakfast, as a mechanic, it is not possible for the whole family to gather at the family altar; and there is the more reason why, on Sunday morning, the father should take his true position as head and priest of his house gathered before God. Why should not each child say a text, mother and father and servant doing the same? In one family in Edinburgh, where I love to be, the father, a professor in the University, reads his verse in the selected chapter, then each of the children, and the baby-boy on his knee repeats his after his father, and finally each of the servants, down to the last boy who has come in to black boots, or to the Scotch sewing-lassie with her broad accent. But how ennobling it is for them all to take this audible part!

After breakfast our mother used to read to us, and give us references to find in our Bibles. We began, away back as far as I can remember, with Peep of Day, then Line upon Line, Cobbin's Commentary, and so upward. In many cases I suppose the children of your families will go to Sunday-school, instead of this home Bible-class; but where it is so, let me put in an earnest word in favor of the young people meeting their parents, when the school is over, and sitting beside them during the service in the house of God. If they sit with the Sunday-school children, the fidgetting around will be almost certain to divert their minds; besides which, most churches relegate the poor children to the farthest and most uncomfortable parts of the building, -- a distant gallery, with hard seats and high backs, -- as if little bodies never wearied, and little minds didn't find it hard to strain for the preacher's far-travelled voice. What a reversal of matters would take place if the Lord were to take direction! I believe he would send all the people who occupy the best positions packing from their comfortable seats, which make them so drowsy, into the uncushioned gallery, and call all the happy children down to the best softly cushioned pews, where he could keep them well in sight, and hold their quick eyes fixed on his all the time.

If the father would let the boy sit next him, and find the places, and write the text out during the sermon, if he were too young to attend, and make a comfortable place for his head if he got sleepy; and if the mother could take the little girl's hand in hers, to say nothing of passing surreptitiously a little piece of sugar-candy to keep her from coughing (!), I cannot but think that those Sunday services would not be so great a weariness, but in after years would be recalled with pleasure by the lonely traveller in the backwoods, or the shepherd amid the Australian wolds.

In many cases the wife must stop at home and prepare the dinner, and, with a little management, a hot dinner need not take more time than a cold one. We always had a sirloin of beef and roast potatoes. Through a long course of years, without a single variation, that was so. Even now, when I eat sirloin of beef, especially the undercut, I have a kind of Sunday feeling. I remember that my father always had to turn the joint upside down, and that it was an exciting moment for us all, lest he should splash a drop of

gravy over the clean cloth. If a drop did go over, my mother hastened, with a palliating excuse, and applied salt, for what reason I have not the remotest idea; but it served as a temporary expedient, and covered the mishap. These things may appear trivial, but they always were associated with Sunday, and that made them memorable.

Have plenty of singing on Sunday. During the afternoon we read our books or stories, but, as half-past four arrived, we felt that the climax of the day had come. My mother was not a pianist, but she could just get through the tunes of the old Psalmist; so she played, and my father sat beside her, and sang with his deep bass voice, and I stood beside him and took the air, and my sister sang too. We always had, "How sweet the Name," "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah" (to "Mariners"), and, very often, "Around the throne of God in heaven," in memory of a little angel sister. Why should not all the homes into which this little volume comes start half-an-hour's song-service each Sunday? But the father and mother must themselves take part.

Then tea; and after tea we said a hymn all round; and, as I got older, I was encouraged to read what I had written of the morning sermon. And so the blessed day passed to its close. If old enough, there was the evening service and supper (oh, the rapture of sitting up to eat a potato in its jacket, with a pat of butter inside, with pepper and salt!). Again you say, very trivial, and quite unworthy of occupying the space here, or the time of the writer, who, at fifty years of age, should care for something better. Well, reader, you may say what you like, but these simple things made Sunday the day of days, and became the seeds which have yielded harvests of content and blessed-Bess.

It is a mistake to gad about from one minister to another. It begets a critical and captious spirit, and leads one to subordinate the worship of the sanctuary to the sermon. Find out the minister who, on the whole, helps you most, and the church which needs you most, and concentrate your time and thought on these. Never criticise the preacher before your children, and encourage them to remember and repeat what they can. Would that preachers would contrive to drop a few handfuls on purpose for the weary little listeners, whose eyes would glisten if their story were to be dropped into the discourse; and the parents would be proud to explain that "our minister always thinks of the children."

It is very important that habits of reverence be inculcated in children. "Why do I make you boys shut your eyes in prayer?" asked a young lady of my congregation, of her class of ragged boys. Instantly two or three ragged arms went up, and one sharp youngster answered,

"To teach us manners, ma'am."

Was it not exactly true? The manners of the heavenly court are as exacting as those of the Queen's drawing-room, and it is well to begin early enough to inculcate them. Be in time at service; be reverent in your demeanor; take part in all you can; if you cannot sing, make a joyful noise; and never allow the Bible, or anything that belongs to God, to be made a subject for witticism in your presence.

Sunday company is, on the whole, to be eschewed. But, if friends drop in, ask them to fall in with your usual routine; and with them, or in their absence, let the conversation be tintured, as far as possible, with the spirit of the day. My parents never talked familiarly of God, but, somehow, there was a Sunday air about the conversation; and certain subjects, such as business, or pleasure-seeking, or story-books, would seem incongruous. But there was no restraint, no gloom, no Pharisaism, nothing irksome and tedious. To look happy, to dress in our best, to sing, to talk cheerfully about all that interested us, this was the high and happy key-note of our family life on this best and brightest of days.

Once more I crave indulgence if I have been too personal in reciting these remembrances of the past, but my motive has been at least innocent and transparent; for what has been may be done again, and it seemed better to photograph the dear old past than to produce a fancy picture which might seem rather a dream than a possibility.

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