

The Family Altar

by Raymond Golsworthy

Establishing a daily family altar for prayer and Bible study is essential for building a strong spiritual foundation for children and bringing blessings and benefits to the family.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:6, Deuteronomy 11:21, Joshua 24:15, Proverbs 14:11, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 1:18, 1 Timothy 3:4, 2 Timothy 3:15

Topics: "Family Prayer", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Raymond Golsworthy preaches about the importance of establishing a daily 'family altar' through the practice of 'family prayers', emphasizing the Biblical authority and background for this practice. He highlights the blessings and benefits that come from honoring the Lord in the home, such as spiritual growth, unity, and the training of children in the ways of the Lord. Golsworthy also addresses the battle against implementing family prayer, acknowledging the difficulties and offering guiding principles for overcoming obstacles. He encourages families to prioritize this practice, as it not only impacts the present but also lays a foundation for future generations and the testimony of the church.

Transcript

"The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish." (Prov. 14:11)

Introduction

We begin by asking you a question. Have you ever had the privilege of regular participation in Christian 'family prayers'? Have you, with others, sat by quietly while a godly father, for instance, takes from the shelf a well-worn Bible and reads to all, the daily portion? And then, when the precious Bible is reverently closed, have you knelt down with the others while the loving parent briefly commits the little family to the Lord for His mercy and protection through the day? If you happen to be one who has enjoyed this priceless privilege, you will know exactly what we have in mind as we send forth this appeal. And you will join us in our prayerful longing that countless multitudes in every place might come to know this selfsame blessedness.

This message certainly comes from a burdened heart, for it touches a matter of great importance, and bears down upon a vital secret which can be of untold value to the church of God in the days in which we live. It certainly concerns those who seek the welfare of their children, and their children's children, and

many such may be responsible to take some very practical steps in this connection.

What we are pleading for, of course, is just this simple practice of daily 'family prayers'. It has been our own great privilege to drink deep into the blessedness of this practice, both in our own home and in many other homes where it has been our joy to sojourn as itinerant servants of the Lord in many parts of the world. Memories crowd in of happy homes amidst the snows of Scotland, the towns and cities of Europe, the burning plains of India, the sheep lands and fruit orchards of Australia, and the favoured islands of the Philippines. In all these places, and more, we have met the Lord as we have taken our place with the members of some Christian family for their few brief minutes of 'family devotions'. What is written, therefore, is rooted in considerable experience; we have seen this simple practice bringing untold blessing to Christian families in many lands.

On the other hand we have had to witness the many breakdowns and tragedies which increasingly show themselves among the younger generation of so-called Christians; breakdowns, and tragedies which, very probably, could have been avoided and averted if Christian parents had known and grasped, in time, this blessed secret of the 'family altar', and if they had been willing to pay the price for its simple application in their own homes. But now those young and impressionable and formative years have all slipped by; the course of life is set, and only mighty miracles of grace can get us back to where we might have been. In fact we have to say that certain priceless values and advantages have been for ever lost.

In a recent survey of members of a group of evangelical churches in Ohio, U.S.A., it was learned that ninety per cent of those members never have family worship. The same is probably true in other places, and this, we believe, goes right to the heart of the need that we have mentioned. Those tragedies exist, to a large extent, because something vital was missing in the testimony of the home.

Of course we know that there is no mere technique or formula, which, by itself, provides the answer to such a situation. We do believe, however, that, when the hearts of the parents are truly for the Lord, and when there is, in consequence, the longing to see the much-loved children deeply established in the Lord, and visibly rejoicing under His gracious smile, there most certainly are Scriptural ways and means that can be employed as being divinely conducive to the end in view. This treatise deals with one of those appointed ways and means, and if our simple suggestion is adopted, in real dependence on the Holy Spirit, blessing will come to many families, and our homes will begin to approximate more closely to what God wants them to be. More important, perhaps, the church and the churches will thus become revitalised, and material will be gathered which, may be greatly used of God for coming generations.

What the Bible teaches

For convenience and simplicity we shall group our thoughts under three main headings.

First we shall think of the Biblical authority and background for this practice. Of the very much that might be said in this connection, we shall here present only a few brief tokens, but even these will be more than adequate to show that this simple practice of 'family prayers' is most certainly supported by the Word of God.

Beginning in the New Testament, we notice that Christian parents are expressly enjoined to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). This, of course, embraces many matters, but including, we would say, this matter of a daily occasion for family prayer together. The root idea in the verse is that the Christian home is intended to function as the child's first happy school in the realm of

spiritual things. If this is so, what better occasion could possibly present itself than this daily meeting with the Lord at the 'family altar'? Here, most certainly, we can do much to bring up our children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord", and we can count on the Lord's wonderful presence with us at those times.

We are told, for instance, that, "from a child", Paul's beloved Timothy had "known the holy scriptures" which were able to make him "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"(2 Tim. 3:15). We learn that he was blessed, too, by having a mother called Eunice who had unfeigned faith, and his grandmother Lois was just the same (2 Tim. 1:5). No one will question, then, that it was in that homely domestic setting that the boy himself had come to know those Holy Scriptures, and had been made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ. The faith had come by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10: 17). We are not expressly informed of the details, but we can well imagine how, in that home at Lystra, the children were regularly assembled, and the Word of God was opened to them by parents and grandparents who had already proved for themselves the power of its saving message. Little did they imagine, at that time, how the captivated boy before them was destined to become the chosen associate and companion of the great apostle Paul! Day by day, and little by little, the Word of God was finding entrance into the heart of the attentive child, and creating, as it always does, a beautiful faith unfeigned. No doubt Lois and Eunice had their difficulties in arranging these occasions, for evidently there were particular complications in the home (Acts 16:1), but, by their unfeigned faith, they pressed through these difficulties, and blessing followed. In answer to their prayers, the occasions were made possible, and in the end they had this great reward.

Reverting now to the Old Testament, it is very noticeable that, again and again, the Israelites were expressly commanded to be specially diligent in teaching the Word of God to their children (Deut. 4:9,10). A few chapters further on, the instructions are repeated, and further details added: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6-7). Surely, in these verses, we have strong warrant and support for our present practice of Christian family prayers! "These words shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children...when thou liest down and when thou risest up".

As if this were not enough, the great divine demand echoes out again, just a few pages further on, and in terms, this time, which will surely move our hearts to action. Almost word for word, the Spirit repeats the call to lay up God's words in our hearts and in our souls, and to teach them to our children, when we are seated in our homes, when we lie down, and when we rise up. Then are added the wonderful words: "That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth" (Deut. 11:21).

What could be more inviting and alluring? Days of heaven upon the earth; days in the land which He swore unto our fathers to give us! This is what we may know if we will lay up God's Word in our hearts, and if we will teach it to our children. And let us remember that, in this dispensation, we do not have to think of an earthly and material land, which the Lord has given us! We, thank God, are privileged to live in the days of the vastly greater spiritual antitype! To us the land is that great rich fulness of Christ in which the grace of God has set us (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:3). If then, we will lay up God's Word in our hearts, and teach it to our children, our days shall be multiplied in that land, and so shall the days of our children! We shall find ourselves eating and drinking continually into that great all-sufficiency of our living and exalted Lord, for, what He is in glory, He is for us, and we shall find ourselves declaring exultingly with Paul, "I can

do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

Oh, that Christian parents, in our day, might really dwell in this great land of Christ! And oh, that our children, too, might come into that same land, and live long in it! We may be sure that, if they were truly enjoying the greatness and all-sufficiency of Christ, the subtle appeals of Egypt and the wilderness would cease to captivate them. Rather would they say with their parents and with the ancient prophet, "What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard Him, and observed Him" (Hos. 14:8).

But we must not digress. We are simply noting that all these blessings, physical and spiritual, are the fruits of laying up God's Word in our hearts and souls, and teaching it to our children. How wonderful if God could say of parents nowadays what He said of Abraham; "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord à that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19).

What a commendation that was of the ancient patriarch! God was confident that he, at least, would teach his children after him. Oh, that He might be able to have the selfsame confidence in those who are the heads of Christian families today! And to such, the daily 'family altar' would be the suitable and prized occasion.

Before we close this section we would like, perhaps, to go a little deeper, and mention a matter, which is of tremendous significance in this connection.

We refer to the place given to the Christian home in the Epistle to the Ephesians. As we scan that Epistle as a whole, we see that all those precious doctrines of the church, presented in the first three chapters, are made to focus down immediately, and very strongly, on the Christian home. Twenty-one verses are given to this subject, and, in effect, the apostle is pleading earnestly for the establishing of families and households, which will, in their very constitution and behaviour, worthily express the exalted truths, which he has earlier set forth. This is most impressive. There is no mention, just here, of local churches, nor of elders or deacons, nor of the problems of the local work! Even the passage in chapter four regarding the various gifts distributed by the ascended Lord upon His members, envisages, for the time, the universal church, and the universal workà "until we all come to a perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ!"

Why this silence, then, for the time, regarding local churches, and why this emphasis instead upon the Christian home? The answer, surely, is very obvious. The Holy Spirit is carefully showing that the Christian home is intended by God to be the first collective outworking of redemption. Here, in the homely family circle, God plans to have His initial glorious expression of the church. Here, first of all, shall the mystery be seen. That is what God always works for, and that, incidentally, is why He said to the Philippian jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house."

Needless to say, the local church becomes, in turn, the fuller sphere of testimony, for it is the happy aggregate of all such homes, but, on that matter, even Ephesians, for the time, is silent. It all starts in the home! The rest will surely follow!

In practical terms, it means that, in regular family affairs, first of all, Christ is to have the preeminence; there, in the family circle, He is to be known as Lord; there, in everything, His will is to be consulted and His directions followed. There, beneath that roof, His Name is to be worshipped and His glory praised. There, in everyday affairs, the great ascended Lord of glory is to be our all in all. In such a situation will be

found the first clear focus of the eternal mystery.

It may appear that we have deviated somewhat from the simpler matter of our subject, the daily practice of Christian 'family prayers', but to those who have eyes to see, the connection will be very obvious. God wants His testimony established in our homes, and, while this has its bearing on numerous far-reaching issues, we ask, "What could be more conducive to this great end and purpose than this daily gathering of the family to the Word of God and to the ministry of prayer?" This, surely, would be altogether foundational to the testimony in view.

Blessings and benefits

Now we come to our second word on this matter and we shall discuss the blessings and benefits of this practice. Again we have to say that those blessings and benefits are numberless. But we shall mention just a few. It hardly needs to be said that whenever Christ is set in His rightful place as Lord, blessings and benefits abound. Wherever we have His government, we shall have what Isaiah calls the "increase" of that government (Isa. 9:7). Some typical examples of that increase are later described by the prophet when he says: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isa. 35:5,6).

The hymn writer puts the same truth in other words when he declares:

"Blessings abound where'er He reigns: The pris'ner leaps to lose his chains, The weary find eternal rest, And all the sons of want are blest".

Now if this is true in a general sense, and it is, it will also be true in a particular sense, including this matter of instituting the 'family altar' in the home. Such a move is a very practical honouring of the Lord as Lord, and a granting to Him of the first and foremost place in the daily schedule of the family. It is, in actual essence, a veritable enthroning, on that territory, of this glorious King of kings. We can reasonably expect, therefore, that 'millennial blessings', in their deep and spiritual form, will begin to appear within that home! Throughout the family, Isaiah's wonderful prophecy, for instance, will begin to have its blest fulfilment. New vision will be granted; new hearing experienced; a new walking and leaping will be made possible, (how great the need for this!), and a new song will be heard! Surely that should be enough to provoke some action in this matter! The very enthroning of the Lord in this particular respect is sure to bring its train of blessing. What a heartening prospect for the Christian parent! And, of course, that well-worn Bible, handled by the parent every morning in the presence of the children, is sure to bring its own deep blessing to the home. God told Joshua that if he would meditate on the Scripture "day and night" he would make his way prosperous and he would have "good success" (Josh. 1:8). Many are the families who have proved the truth of that sure promise, and have done so through the daily reading of the Word together. In the course of that homely exercise, the Word of God itself has "Converted the soul; made wise the simple, rejoiced the heart, and enlightened the eyes" (See psalm 19:7,8). In other matters, too, there has been practical success; all faithfully granted by the Lord in keeping with His promise.

Let us mention, now, some of the particular and personal blessings, which usually attend this practice, and starting, perhaps, with the one who is privileged to be the head of such a house, and who has the honour and responsibility of presiding at these prayers. That such a one will receive a special blessing there can be no doubt. It is a responsibility, of course, and means an extra load, but God is no man's debtor, and He sees to it that the regular home ministry brings its own reward.

There is, of course, the priceless joy of seeing the family developing and rejoicing under the gracious smile of God, and that, itself, is wonderful. But there are, as well, particular 'side blessings' which such an one will surely know.

Perhaps, for instance, this father of the family has been very recently converted, and he could hardly find the courage to utter an exhortation, or even a simple prayer, in the larger company of the local church. Much as he would like to do so, the words will not come! But here, in his own familiar home, it is very different! Surrounded by the trusting love of little children, and by the humble helpfulness of an understanding wife, he can begin immediately to exercise a precious ministry, which, incidentally, will be all the better for its spontaneity and brevity. During those few minutes together in the morning he can become accustomed to presiding at the gathering and to hearing his own voice as he reads from the Scriptures in the presence of other listeners. Sometimes he will feel the urge to add a little comment; some simple thought that has been quickened of the Spirit to his own heart as he has read the allotted portion. These may be small beginnings, but who knows where such a ministry may end? Very quickly it can spread to the larger gatherings of the local church, and possibly far beyond! This, surely, is a benefit, and quite a considerable one, which very frequently attends this exercise. All unconsciously, it has been the ideal training ground for wider ministry!

Another important matter suggests itself just here, and it may be well to mention it. If there are servants in the house, these also can usually be gathered from their several tasks, and all in the home can be encouraged to 'bow the knee' together before the great Lord Christ. This very act of kneeling down with those who serve us, often helps to maintain a happy working atmosphere and to offset proud and haughty attitudes which frequently spoil our more affluent and favoured families, particularly among the children. To be sure, our appointed positions in life may be different, but, meeting thus together before our Maker, we are made to realise again, that, in the ultimate things that really matter, we are all on common ground. All are sinners, and only the grace of God can save us (Eph. 2:8). Impressions of that kind will bring, in time, their untold benefits, particularly to the children, and will leave their mark, in years to come, in richer Christian character.

And what a wonderful opportunity, incidentally, for sowing the seeds of the gospel into the hearts of the servants! In earlier life they may have had no Christian background whatsoever, and would never feel free to attend the more public Christian meetings. But here, at 'family prayers', they can listen every day to a few verses from the Word of God, and, when they hear the prayers, they can see and feel the blessedness of a genuine Christian life lived in fellowship with our unseen heavenly Friend! Little by little, the Word will do its saving work, and those who serve us daily can thus be brought to Christ. (See 1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18).

Often a visitor in the home, taking part in the regular daily prayers, also receives a blessing; something, maybe, which he or she would never get in any larger gathering. And possibly such a one will be encouraged, by what has been seen and tasted, to incorporate the happy practice into his or her own home. And so, praise God, the blessing spreads!

It has been our own frequent experience that an unconverted tradesman or business acquaintance, dropping by at that particular time, has been invited to sit in, for a moment, on the little family gathering, (it is always short; ten minutes at the most) and has been noticeably touched by the Holy Spirit through the verses read, or through the very sight of a Christian family kneeling down in prayer together and blessedly united in this act of worship. All these are blessings, which can be known through the daily operation of the

'family altar'.

Before we close this part of our message there is another solemn matter, which we feel urged to touch upon. It relates again to the relationship that exists between the individual Christian home and the local church, and has to do, particularly, with the principle of eldership in that local church. God's Word tells us that an elder must be: "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity", and then is added the significant parenthesis: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. 3:4,5). Another translator renders it: "He must have proper authority in his own household, and be able to control and command the respect of his children" (J.B. Phillips).

This, of course, is a tremendous matter, the far-reaching significance of which can hardly be imagined. Those who covet the welfare of the local churches, and of the testimony of Jesus as a whole, should ponder much this inspired directive regarding elders, and they should lay to heart this clear insistence on a right domestic background for all who would hold this office. And, of course, the whole matter is very definitely related to what we are now studying. We may say that this simple practice of 'family prayers', with all that inevitably accompanies it, provides a most desirable foundation in the developing and qualifying of one who is later destined to become a shepherd of God's flock! The very responsibility often does very much towards the setting of our homes in order, and towards the fitting of us, in the eyes of God, for further responsibilities which yet may come to us. Those who have ears to hear will hear.

The benefits and blessings of this simple practice are indeed innumerable. We have not even mentioned the benefits, which will accrue in the sacred area of the relationships between the husband and his wife. Being Christians, they will long to grow up together into Him, and to know a deepening oneness with each other in every realm. Here again the 'family altar' will serve its gracious purpose. It will provide a daily occasion for the husband and wife to take their place together as the appointed leaders in the home and as the eager helpers of each other in the training of the children.

We may add that, even among Christians, in these unnatural days of rush and drive, the holy harmony of husband and wife comes under constant challenge, for the devil certainly hates this living symbol of the oneness of Christ and His church (Eph. 5: 31,32). In view of this, apart from all else, there is a growing need for this daily exercise and fellowship together. Those few minutes every morning, when parents are found fulfilling their mutual ministry to their family, will aid them much in their own relationships and in their deepening life together in the Lord. Many will testify to this.

The battle against family prayer

We have mentioned the Biblical authority for this practice of 'family prayers', and have also listed some of the blessings, which will follow. The message, however, would not be complete without some reference to the battle entailed in the actual implementation of the plan.

It is a strange fact that whenever this matter is raised in any land or in any company, difficulties and questions immediately arise! Even those who are sincerely desirous, and perhaps deeply wistful about it all, will reluctantly voice their doubts as to the practical workability of it...in their case! Mention will be made, for instance, of the wild pace of modern living, and the virtual impossibility of incorporating those few minutes into the already heavy schedule of the harassed family. Sometimes it is objected that all have to be hurried off to work or school together; sometimes, that they have to leave at different times! In both cases, strange to say, it is accepted as a convincing veto against the 'family altar' and the rights of God !

Now let us say immediately that we know full well that there are many difficulties, and certainly every case is not the same, but behind it all, is there not here some sinister intelligence putting up a desperate battle? Is this, perhaps, the "roaring lion" of whom Peter spoke, who "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8)?

Yes, there are these difficulties, and, for ourselves, we are prepared to face them helpfully and squarely. Some, we know, have had to make very big adjustments and considerable sacrifices, or perhaps content themselves with some alternative arrangement to which the Lord has mercifully led them, in their case. But, when all is said and done, it is our sincere conviction that this wholesale turning back, with all the resultant and immeasurable loss, is by no means justified. That will very much need to be pressed through, we do not question, nor that the Lord may need to be consulted very earnestly regarding some great difficulty which seems to stand quite firm across our way. But to give up, before the battle is even fought, seems to us an untold tragedy. If the alternative gains and losses were really understood, and rightly valued, we believe the battle would be fought, and, by His grace, the victory won, and yet another family would be added to those who daily know the joys of the 'family altar', and who now and in eternity will reap the fruits thereof!

This is no place for listing and attempting to answer all the possible and conceivable difficulties. It is better for each individual to bring his own particular situation to the living Lord, doing so with a vigorous and expectant faith and a fully open heart, and with no fixed prejudices or conclusions regarding the issue. Praise God, we worship a living God Who moves the mountains, (Jud. 5:5; Mic. 1:4; Mark 11:23; etc.) and, with such an approach, the sincere enquirer will usually find that, after all, there is a way, if only he will pay the price!

Whatever the difficulties may be, it is probably safe to say that the thousands of Christian families who have got through in this matter have somehow and somewhere faced those selfsame difficulties! This means that someone, somewhere, has faced your difficulties and has fought your battle, and, by God's grace, has got the victory! The 'family altar' has been actually instituted in that home, and now, years afterwards, parents and children are reaping the precious fruits. Best of all, perhaps, the Lord has gained spiritual material and substance for His wider purposes. Lives are now available to Him for what He wants.

The sufficient motive for such an aggressive and productive attitude is usually to be found in what we would call an adequate sense of the urgent need, and in a far-seeing and spiritual appraisal of the very much that stands to be gained or lost by the decision made. And, of course, right at the foundations, the love for the children has been what it ought to be, engendering a due concern and holy jealousy for their highest good.

Oh may God raise up parents of this kind in these dark, and darkening, days when our subtle and plausible enemy is everywhere around! And may God help them to press through on this matter and to set up this 'altar' in their homes, securing to themselves, and to their children, the blessings we have mentioned, and, perchance, to their children's children! May God save our rising generation from the kind of parents who easily give in to our blustering and deceptive foe, and who take the line of least resistance, mildly hoping, that their children will not be too much the losers! That, we say, is neither Christian character nor true parental love.

But we certainly know the many problems, and have every sympathy with the honest parent who is truly baffled on this score, and who does not see at all how God can do it in their circumstances. We would only

urge such parents to hold on strongly to the Lord about this matter. In due time they will see what can be done where true parental care is a functioning reality, and where the inner choice of Christ's own Lordship in the home is deep and genuine. Often, too, we find we have to take a step of faith, and there it is that God shows us His surprises! That this may be your experience is our earnest prayer.

Some guiding principles

For the sake of those who may now be exercised about actual details, we would suggest the following as guiding principles for family prayers.

1) Let it be clearly understood that we are not here referring to a weekly meeting in the home, for instance. That is quite another matter, and is not to be confused with what we are here proposing. We only have in mind the daily, and much simpler, occasion for the reading of the Word of God together, during the course of the morning meal, for instance. This other matter of a weekly family meeting is altogether different, and, we would say, fraught with extra difficulties. The members of the family are probably overloaded with meetings, and the very thought of yet another, creates reactions, and may be more than God is asking of them. 'Family prayers' are different from meetings, and helpful cooperation is more easily secured for the brief occasion, as they start out for the day.

2) Let the time be in the morning if at all possible. Do not settle for an evening alternative unless absolutely necessary. One of the main objects is to enable the family to anticipate the coming day together, under the Lordship of Christ, and to encourage them to face the various responsibilities that await them as 'in the Spirit', and in happy fellowship together. And, apart from all else, Christ deserves the best time of the day, for in all things He must have the pre-eminence. (Col.1:18).

3) Make use of the morning mealtime if you can, having the reading while the family is seated at the table, either before, or after, the meal. This simple plan saves a lot of extra organising and a lot of effort, too, in gathering the family from various directions and occupations. At the mealtime they are already gathered and the opportunity is there!

Of course, many families do not have the morning meal together, and some other arrangement may need to be made. But, we repeat, work for this better and easier way if you can. Many families could eat together if certain sacrifices were made, and if wholesome discipline were obtaining through the family. Some who conceivably could sleep longer may need to rise a little earlier in order to take the family meal together.

The extra time is not lost in any case, and good use can be made of it when the meal is over and 'family prayers' completed. In fact, in many cases, it could prove a very great advantage to be up a little earlier than has been wont, and children, particularly, will soon come to appreciate the extra time available and to make good use of it. Incidentally, the warnings of Proverbs 6:9,10 and Proverbs 24:33,34 could well be taken to heart in many of our Christian families who genuinely mean business in the things of the Lord!

The earlier start, of course, may also necessitate something of a curtailment of unnecessary indulgences the previous night, and strong leadership and wise parenthood in these things is, no doubt, a tremendous factor. We need to settle it, that, if we want blessing, there must be order, and leaders have to pay a price for this.

4) Let the time used for the 'family prayers' be very brief. Seven to ten minutes are usually quite sufficient, and the shorter time gets better support from the family, and better results, too, than something unnecessarily prolonged. This is specially so when children and others are eager to get started with their busy programme for the day. A Christian parent will show loving understanding in these things, always being as cooperative as is possible, consistent with the interests of the Lord.

5) Let the head of the house ask for complete quietness while he reads, say, fifteen or twenty verses from the Word of God, and then makes, perhaps, the very briefest of comments. In this way the family can go right through a suitable book, such as one of the Gospels, or the Psalms, or Proverbs, and, later on, other books, as the Lord shall lead. Even reading without comment is sure to bring a blessing, for the Book held in the hand is itself the dynamic and faith-creating Word of God. (Rom. 10:17).

6) After this brief reading, let all kneel down together, if at all possible, while the head of the house commits the family to the care and keeping of the Lord for the day to come, and brings some word of praise for mercies and blessings hitherto received. Friends and relations can also be remembered, and any special needs of which the family may be aware at any given time. These could include sicknesses or other problems, and we may mention that children are often helped by a brief but sincere remembrance of their school examinations, and such like matters. All is shared together, and all is spread before the Lord in simple, trusting, faith. Let the focus of the prayer be on the living Christ Himself, that all may become freshly mindful of Him, and of His great love and mercy. Such a family rises from its knees, immensely strengthened, and those who meet them, through the day, will quickly recognize it.

7) It is sometimes helpful to make a slight change on the Sunday morning, such as including a song or taking the reading from a different part of the Bible, or even getting one of the children to do the actual reading of the Scriptures in the hearing of the others. A little variety of this kind helps to offset any lurking tendency to monotony and is often helpful in many ways.

8) Do not regard 'family prayers' as a substitute for individual 'quiet time' or 'personal devotions'. The individual time with the Lord must always be encouraged and is a basic principle of progress.

9) In all the matters we have mentioned: let the head of the house seek, for himself, a deepening godliness of character. Children are often quick and accurate in assessing the moral and spiritual qualities of parenthood. If the family exercise is to be appreciated and effective, it is basic that the head of the house be genuinely honoured and respected by all the family. He must be known as one who sincerely seeks the glory of the Lord, and who, in the home and out of it, does always those things that please Him (John 8:29). It cannot be overstressed, that, inconsistencies there, can rob the whole occasion of its usefulness; in fact they can build up resentments and cause great harm. Notice that, in these respects, the 'family altar' becomes a constant challenge to the head of the house, and provides an ever-present provocation to still more godliness. This is another bi-product of the exercise!

All the above suggestions, we believe, can be helpful to those who are now personally concerned about this matter, and who desire to see this 'family altar' established in their homes. The best advice, however, is just to make a start in true dependence on the Lord, and being constantly alive, in Him, for counsel and direction. Simplicity and spontaneity are the greatest assets, and we can surely approach this matter knowing that the Lord wants it to be, in every way, a joy, and not a burden. Let the Spirit be Lord, and let there be liberty (2 Cor. 3:17).

'Family prayers' are a wonderful way to honour the Lord as He should be honoured, and, as we have said, infinite gains will follow. By this simple practice, the spiritual is given the place of prominence and priority, which rightly belongs to it. A new atmosphere is progressively apparent in the home, and a sense of the opened heaven. The whole level of living becomes elevated, and Christian character begins to grow apace. Often, it is only years afterwards that the benefits will be fully recognized and assessed, but, that they will be there, all in due time, there can be no doubt. Thus will the heart be gladdened, and the Lord glorified, for 'He is faithful'.

We would urge all who have read these paragraphs, to seek the Lord about this matter, especially those who have responsibility for the spiritual guidance of a Christian home. We are sure that what is written enshrines a vital secret which can be of untold blessing to us, and to our children, and, as we have said, it will leave its mark of blessing, too, on the fuller family gathering of the local church. Best of all, it will surely affect that final family gathering, up in heaven, of the whole household of faith (Gal. 6:10). Around that Throne, please God, may our children be brought up faithfully in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. All this will greatly magnify our Lord, and that, of course, is the single end in view.

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

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