

How to Have A Family Altar

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CHAPTER EIGHT

How to Conduct the Family Altar

"To Thee may each united house
Morning and night present its vows;
Our servant there, and rising race,
Be taught the precepts of Thy grace."

HERE WE HAVE THE ROOT IDEA of family worship. Every member of the family should - if possible - be present both morning and evening. First there is the reading of GOD's Word; then, prayer for the family, suited to the wants and understanding of all present. In this chapter it is our privilege to enlarge this idea and to write of "*How to Conduct a Family Altar.*" Frequently folk really want to have regular family worship, but they do not know just how to go about it. There are four parts to a family altar.

FIRST PART - YOU

Much of the value of your family worship will depend on you and on what you bring to it. Your mind must be yielded to think GOD's thoughts after Him. The Bible said, "**As he thinketh in his heart, so is he.**" Thoughts are not passive but are active molders of character. The spiritual tone of our life is largely determined by our thinking.

Negative thinking poisons the body, disrupts the nervous system, distorts the mind, kills the spirit of worship and blocks the spiritual growth. "**Whatever things are true... honest... just... pure... lovely.. of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things**" (Philippians 4:8). The will must be yielded to CHRIST. No day must be allowed to close with unconfessed and unforsaken sin. Family worship will keep us from sin or sin will keep us from family worship. All known sin must be judged, confessed, and forsaken as the Lord enables. Thus is life kept open for vigorous spiritual growth.

The spiritual life must be full of CHRIST. CHRIST is a life to be lived. It was wonderful when we trusted Him as our Saviour from sin's condemnation, but it is our daily privilege to trust and live Him as our very life! In the family altar worship the fullness of CHRIST's life within the heart is united with the fullness of His presence in the midst of the family to make the lifeline of the family altar.

And through this divine lifeline each member of the family altar ministers to every other member, and He ministers to all according to the needs of each. And we believe that through this lifeline there is a sense in which our blessed CHRIST Himself is ministered unto, by the believers around the family altar.

THE SECOND PART - PREPARATION

As we come to the holy hour of family worship our attitude must be quiet, worshipful, and reverent. Paul said, "**Study to be quiet**" (I Thessalonians 4:11). "**The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him**" (Habakkuk 2:20).

As we become quiet, our minds are cleared and enabled to concentrate on this "**one thing needful**." It is in this way our souls are made ready for those things which are to follow.

THE THIRD PART - THE WORD OF GOD

We should not only read the Scriptures but we should search the Scriptures (John 5:39).

We should search the Scriptures: earnestly (Psalm 119:18); anxiously (Psalm 119:9); regularly (Acts 17:11 and Psalm 1:2); carefully (Luke 24:27; II Timothy 3:16, 17); humbly (James 1:22); unitedly (Matthew 18:20; Luke 24:33-36); and by families (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; I Thessalonians 2:11).

There are five rules to apply for the thorough study of any portion of GOD's Word:

- (a) read it through;
- (b) think it over;
- (c) pray it in;
- (d) work it out;
- (e) pass it on.

Dwight L. Moody said that the topical study of the Bible is the key to the mastery of the Word of GOD. He suggested topics that are valuable for the use of the Word of GOD in family worship. "Take love, for instance, and spend a month searching what the Bible says about love, from Genesis to Revelation. Thus you will learn to love everybody whether they love you or not. In the same way take grace, faith, assurance, Heaven, and so on. When you read your Bible be sure you hunt for something. Use a reference Bible and you will find the best commentary in the margin. Take up one word in a book such as the "believes" in John. Every chapter, but two, speaks of believing. Look up the nineteen personal interviews with CHRIST. Take the conversions of the Bible. The seven blessed and overcomes of Revelation. See what I John 3 says about assurance and the six things worth knowing.

Take up the five precious things of Peter; the verily's of John; the seven walks of Ephesians; the five much mores of Romans 5; the two receiveds of John 1; the seven hearts in Proverbs 23; and especially an eighth; the lookings, the lookings back, the beholds of the Bible."

Every family should have a Cruden's Concordance and use it fully in the preparation of the studies in the Word of GOD around the family altar. D. L. Moody found in *Bagster's Scripture Index* (Bagster's Polyglot Bible) every topic of which would make a profitable Bible reading.

The Psalms are always very popular at family devotions.

To make your use of the Psalms more edifying and enlightening, we give you the interesting comment and analysis of W. F. Crafts found in his *The Bible and The Sunday School* (Published in 1876. Record of proceedings at Sunday school conference).

"David's Psalms are his autobiography and ought to be read in connection with his biography in Samuel in order to get his complete history from both the outward and inward points of view. The Psalms will be ten-fold more significant if read with the events that suggested them and the bare outline of David's public history will be shaded and tinted into life-like distinctness and completeness by inserting at appropriate places these heart chapters of historic song. I have accordingly arranged the Psalms of David in their probable historic connection, as given by the best Biblical scholars." (*Lange's Commentary*; Dr. William N. Taylor's *David, King of Israel*; a book by Henry Linton, on the Psalms of David and Solomon.)

1. David's Shepherd Life - I Samuel 16 - Psalm 23; 19
2. David's Victory over Goliath - I Samuel 17, 18 - Psalm 8; 9
3. Saul's Effort to Capture David in His Own Home - I Samuel 19:11 - Psalm 59
4. Jonathan's Warning - I Samuel 20:35-42 - Psalm 11; 64
5. David's Flight to Ahimelech, the Priest - I Samuel 21:1-9 - Psalm 52
6. David's Flight to Gath - I Samuel 21:11 - Psalm 56; 70
7. Escape from Gath - I Samuel 22:1 - Psalm 34
8. David in the Cave of Adullam - I Samuel 22:1-2 - Psalm 57; 142; 131; 40; 141
9. In the Forest of Hareth - I Samuel 22:5 - Psalm 63; 17
10. Escape from Keilah to the Mountains of Ziph - I Samuel 23:10-13 - Psalm 31; 54
11. David Sparing Saul - I Samuel 24:1-16 - Psalm 7 - can appeal against Cush who had slandered him to Saul saying, "**David seeketh thy hurt.**"
12. The Cave of Engedi - I Samuel 23:29 - Psalm 35; 36
13. Wilderness of Paran. Incident of Nabal. (Nabal means "fool.") - I Samuel 25 - Psalm 53
14. Ziklag - I Samuel 27 - Psalm 16; 38; 39
15. David, King of Hebron - II Samuel 2:1-7 - Psalm 26; 101
16. King at Jerusalem - II Samuel 5:6-25 - Psalm 21; 108

17. The Ark Brought to Jerusalem - II Samuel 6 - Psalm 132; 15; 24; 138; 29; 94
18. Wars of David with Edom, Syria - II Samuel 8 - Psalm 60; 61; 44; 20
19. David's Penitence for the Great Transgression - II Samuel 11, etc. - Psalm 51; 32; 6; 69; 103
20. Absalom's Rebellion - II Samuel 15-18 - Psalm 4 first evening of flight, Psalm 3 next morning, Psalm 5; 143; 126; 28; 61; 144; 62; 42
21. Ahithophel's Treason - II Samuel 15-18 - Psalm 55; 41; 109
22. Victory over Absalom - II Samuel 18 - Psalm 43 - David's prayer at Mahanaim while Joab fought Absalom in the woods
23. Sheba's Rebellion - II Samuel 20 - Psalm 2; 84
24. David's Review of His Many Victories - II Samuel 22 - Psalm 18
25. The Pestilence withdrawn - I Chronicles 21 - Psalm 30
26. The Building of the Temple - I Chronicles 28, etc - Psalm 65; 67; 68
27. David's Review of His Life - II Samuel 22 - Psalm 145
28. Giving the Kingdom to Solomon - I Chronicles 29 - Psalm 72; 91

The first verse of every Psalm sets forth the theme of the whole Psalm. The last verse of the Psalm shows how the theme has been worked out, or the grand conclusion of the whole matter. The themes of the Psalms cover every fundamental need of individual and family life.

We suggest that the Bible readings should prayerfully be selected on Sunday for the following week. And whoever is to read the Scripture portion should study out his passage before time for family devotions and let the HOLY SPIRIT impress upon his mind those thoughts and ideas which he should bring out. The needs of each member of the family should be kept in mind so that when the Scripture is read and expounded each person may receive a choice morsel!

Note the chapters on "*Conducting the Family Altar in the Light of Child Needs.*" Parents often complain that they do not know enough about the Bible to teach it to others. But, of course, we must always remember that, since GOD has commanded parents to teach their children the Word of GOD, they are under Scriptural obligation to prepare themselves to do this.

There are only five requirements necessary to make any parent an acceptable teacher of the Word of GOD.

These five requirements are the very ones necessary to make us obedient, growing Christians, so it is quickly seen that there is no good reason why any Christian parent may not be a worthy teacher of the Word of GOD to his children.

1. Salvation: John 21:15; 3:5, 10; Acts 3:6; I Samuel 3:6; 16:7
2. Prayerfulness: Romans 15:30; II Corinthians 3:5; Exodus 28:12, 29
3. Consistent Example: Acts 1:1; Ezra 7:10
4. Tenderness: II Corinthians 2:4; Psalm 126:5, 6
5. Study: II Timothy 2:15
6. Summary of it all: I Timothy 4:11-16

Some people advise that children should not be taught the doctrinal portions of the Word of GOD.

This idea is a trick of Satan by which he hopes to keep the great doctrines of GOD's Word away from the little minds. Read the doctrinal portions of GOD's Word to your children and trust the HOLY SPIRIT to impart understanding.

In the daily worship of the family with its exposition, testimonies, and prayers, the more difficult portions of GOD's Word will be understood by even the youngest minds as time goes on.

An old divine says: "It is well for the servants and children of the family to have Bibles of their own. They can read, each of them a verse in turn, until the chapter is finished. This part of family worship is thus brought home to every one of the family, as a matter in which one personally has an interest."

There are some portions of GOD's Word that should frequently be the subject for meditation and study. Such portions are: John 1, 3, 14-17; Isaiah 53; Romans 3-8; 12-15; Leviticus 16; I Corinthians 13; 15; Revelation 21; Matthew 5, 6, 7; Genesis 1, 2, 3; Luke 11; 14; Ephesians 1-4; I Thessalonians 4, 5; Philippians 3.

Many times the parent may want to tell a story, and we make the following suggestions. Read the story over several times and each time try to see it through the child's eye. A well-told story will include four parts.

1. The Introduction. This may be only two or three sentences which serve to make a connection with the hearers for the telling of the story.
2. The Body. This includes the main incidents of the story. The body of the story will present the action of the story characters, which is generally directed toward the solving of some problem; the answering of some question; and the supplying of some need as the background for the action, drama, and conflict of the story.
3. The Climax. This is the moment when the need is either fulfilled or frustrated. The question is answered or the problem is solved.
4. Conclusion. A word or two is all that is needed to bring the story to a conclusion.

The method of telling the story is important.

Four rules suffice:

1. Be simple - tell the story in the children's language.
2. Be natural - If you live the story you are telling you will be natural.
3. Take your time - Be brief and don't rush.
4. Let the story have its own effect - Don't use the story as a basis for moralizing. The flannelgraph is used by many parents with great effectiveness.

One may include a poem in the devotions from time to time. This will add variety and freshness which will keep the interest lively.

Sometimes it is well to have a little period of praise and testimony.

Praise sets the spirit of the family altar in the major key and seems to diffuse upon all a heavenly fragrance. The devil hates praise to CHRIST, his Conqueror on the Cross; we can say that while the devil will even attend prayer meeting, we don't believe he will stay long if he detects a strong atmosphere of praise. The old "Amen Corners" or "Praise Corners" in the old-fashioned meetings serve to "bind the powers of darkness," "drive the demons away," and set the waves of glory flowing! The devil hates Praise to GOD, whereas GOD loves the sweet sacrifice of praise. When we praise GOD the angels draw nigh with heavenly sweetness and the HOLY SPIRIT responds with a mighty "Amen" as the joy, glory, and power roll over the souls of the redeemed.

Frequently set aside a few moments for praise to GOD for some answer to prayer, and let a constant spirit of happy praise characterize the whole family devotion. While prayer is being made by one member, the others may encourage by an "Amen," or a "Praise the Lord," or "Blessed be GOD," and such brief notes of praise. If this note and the spirit of praise is lacking in your family worship, then it is no doubt a dull affair, with more duty to it than real joy.

It is wise to let the children share some of their school experiences at family altar devotions. This will give the children a sense of fellowship and security in their experiences which is vitally important.

THE FOURTH PART - PRAYER

Our prayers should be brief and to the point. And a one or two minute prayer by each member is best, especially where small children are present. It is wise to concentrate on one or two objectives and not try to pray for everything at one time. Prayer that covers too much ground gives the impression of vainly beating the air.

Our prayer objectives will cover the needs of family, church, missions, neighbor, community, school, lost souls, the sick, the needy, rulers and the heads of nations. Your children will hear

you pray for them - not against them, not to them, nor at them. Your loving prayers for their needs will never be forgotten. They'll never forget how their father prayed for them "to be kind and pure and true to CHRIST."

In some future hour of great temptation or great peril, the prayers of a godly father or mother will come between and save them from destruction. I remember the young man who said, "How well do I recall how that memory of my father kneeling there with his family and praying for me saved me in a terrible moment of temptation from throwing my life away. I couldn't yield to that temptation for I would have had to trample over the prayers and over the kneeling form of my father, and I couldn't!"

One woman recently said: "My father died when I was nine. But for those nine years we always had a family altar. And the sweet memory of my father praying for me has for these forty years flooded my soul with grace and strength." GOD pity the child who doesn't have that memory! I think of a girl nineteen years of age with whom I recently talked. She said, "I'm living a life of compromise; it seems the tides of awful temptations are going to sweep me helplessly over the precipice to destruction.

I seem powerless to do anything about it." I asked her about her parents and she said, "They're good church members. They hold important offices in the church . . .

But for all their Christian profession and activity I can say that I've never seen or heard my father pray for me. I have never seen or heard my mother pray even so simple a prayer as 'God bless daughter.'

My Dad and Mother have never read GOD's Word with me or put their arms around me and talked to me of my life, my problems, and how GOD can help me and I can help GOD to become the kind of woman GOD wants me to be. Sometimes I'm so confused; I wonder if they really care." A tragedy! But it is being repeated in thousands of other so-called Christian homes, even of evangelists, pastors, deacons, official board members, and a great host of others!

Many pastors are so busy with church that their own children are going to hell, and their own families don't seem to know how to live what their father preaches.

The children should be encouraged to pray. The best way to learn to pray is by praying. And the prayers of the children yield clear knowledge to the parents of their spiritual state. The little ones should be taught to pray simple prayers. You may make up prayers for your child to learn. You may get hints as to what you could make up into prayer by talking with your child about what he thinks it would be right to pray about. Praying at your knee will long be remembered as one of the most wonderful experiences of his childhood.

Mr. C. R. Howell says: "Say not that you have no time for all this. We make time for other important home duties, and why not make time for this the most important of them all?"

Mr. John H. Howe says: "No man can behave himself well in any station or relation in a family that doth not let this thought lie deep in his mind: 'Thy family is a constitution made for religion, as well as for other business'."

In closing, we give a rule which should never be broken in family worship: never quarrel, argue, or debate at family worship. This will kill the spirit of worship and will give the powers of darkness ground to take over. Another reason for this rule is that if the children hear debate and argument at family worship, they will lose respect for the authority of GOD's Word, for the authority of the parents and for the devotion of family worship itself. If strife is associated with family worship, the children will develop a positive dislike for the family altar! If the parents have any differences of opinion, let them discuss these differences between themselves, never at the family altar and never before the children!

~ end of chapter 8 ~
