

## How to Have A Family Altar

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### CHAPTER FIVE

#### The Family Altar Truth in Psalm 78 of Asaph

LET us LOOK AT PSALM 78 and I am sure we will see in this Psalm a firm and Scriptural foundation for the family altar. Most of the Psalm is a historic record (from verse 9 onward to the end), which the Psalmist uses to demonstrate the principles he sets forth from verses 3-8.

First we have the principles set forth, then the history to confirm and demonstrate those principles. It is in the principles that the Psalmist sets forth the function, privilege, and necessity of the family altar.

In verse 3 he witnesses that what he is saying was told them by "**our fathers.**" In verse 5 he says, "**For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children.**"

In Ephesians 6:4 the apostle Paul sets forth this very same command as binding on every father in this present dispensation of the grace of GOD, when he by inspiration of the HOLY SPIRIT says: "**And ye, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.**"

According to GOD's Word, the father is the head of the family; it is his responsibility to train his children in the Word of GOD. In the old patriarchal system the father was not only the head of the family, he was the priest of religion. When the Jewish family met for the paschal feast, the father seated at the head of the table was the one who offered the sacrificial lamb to GOD and by his prayers and instructions led his family in the worship of GOD. The father in this present dispensation is still the head of the family and the priest in his own home; now he leads his family in the instruction and worship of GOD through the already once-for-all perfect and never-to-be-repeated Sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of GOD, our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

The tragedy of the hour is that few fathers either know or take their Scriptural place as the head and priest of their own homes, and give definite daily instruction to their children in the Word of GOD! This is a sin against a clear commandment of GOD and is surely yielding its harvest of bitter fruit daily in the lives of thousands of boys and girls.

The terrible backsliding, worldliness, and weakness of the church at this very hour is in large part traceable to the home where the father refuses either through ignorance or indifference to take his Scriptural place as head and priest. Where the spiritual authority of the father is lacking, the life of the home is like a wheel without a hub - spiritually ineffective in its witness.

The fathers are not alone at fault in this sad situation. You can scan long lists of sermon topics

and never find anything like "*The Scriptural Place and Position of the Father*"; "*The Duties of the Father to Instruct Children in the Word of GOD*"; "*The Place of the Father in the Home*"; "*The Responsibility of Father in the Spiritual Guidance of their Children*."

Little if anything is preached on "*The Place of Woman and Mother in the Church and in the Home*"; "*The Relationship of Mother and Father in the Spiritual Upbringing of their Children*."

Even the curriculum in our Christian colleges and seminaries, and frequently even in Bible schools, is woefully lacking in detailed studies along this line. Young men stumble into marriage with only a fragment of preliminary information and guidance. They later find that they are utterly unprepared to lead a family in worship. They know neither their Scriptural rights nor duties as husbands and fathers.

Fathers out of line with their responsibilities to their families are a great hindrance to a genuine work of revival in the church at this present hour!

The Psalmist witnesses to GOD's commandment to fathers in verse 5 and then witnesses to the father's faithfulness to that commandment in verse 3. "**Our fathers have told us,**" he says. Then in verse 4 he resolves that he and the other of these faithful fathers' sons should likewise be faithful. "**We will not hide them from [our] children.**"

This resolve would set the fires of GOD burning in many hearts and homes this very hour if it were made and faithfully carried through by fathers who profess His name.

The function of family worship is set forth in verse 4. It is the transmitting of GOD's Word to the children, or as the Psalmist says, the showing to the generation to come "**the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.**"

By this transmission of His Word from father to children, GOD insures the continued knowledge of His Word from generation to generation. In verse 6 GOD says, "**That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children.**" GOD even lays this commandment upon the yet unborn.

The church with its preaching and its Sunday schools is not meant to replace the home in the carrying out of this important function, but is rather meant to supplement it. The home is GOD's greatest agency for the transmission of His Word from one generation to another. In the very nature of the case, this responsibility cannot be passed on to any other person or persons, or to any other agency; it cannot be shirked except at painful loss to the never dying souls of the children and all concerned!

Now we notice that in verses 6, 7, and 8, GOD gives us vital reasons why every family should have a family altar. Let us look at them briefly.

1. "**That the generation to come might know them**" (GOD's truths).

The family altar yields to the rising generation a knowledge of GOD's Word. Remember JESUS said, "**Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.**" William Lyons Phelps, late

professor of literature at Yale College, said **it is more important to have a knowledge of the Bible without a college education than to have a college education without the knowledge of the Bible.**

2. **"Who should arise and declare them to their children."** Children reared in family altar homes are most likely to build their own homes around the family altar.

This result assures the perpetuation of the knowledge of GOD's Word through the coming generations. The assurance that GOD's Word will be transmitted through the coming generations is the assurance that there will always be a front line of defense against the inroads of unbelief.

3. **"That they might set their hope in God and not forget the works of God."**

The family altar keeps ever before us the works of GOD, and faith continues to grow.

In Hebrews 11 we have a setting-forth of the mighty works of GOD. As we read GOD's works, our doubts melt away and faith becomes stronger than all its foes. The greatest blessing of family worship is that the children learn from the very earliest years to **"set their hope in God"** and will doubtless never be found in that great mass of drifting, bewildered young people who have no hope in GOD and who are foolishly placing their hope in things beneath the sun only to later cry, **"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."**

4. **"But keep his commandments."**

Children who receive a daily nourishment on GOD's Word become strong in the Lord and keep GOD's commandments.

Children who are starved for GOD's Word become weak and unable to resist temptation and keep GOD's commandments.

A child that is well fed on GOD's Word will not become a juvenile delinquent. JESUS said, **"Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you."**

5. In verse 8 there is a hint that those who are not trained in GOD's Word will lack steadfastness of the spirit. And of course the idea is that those children brought up on a knowledge of GOD's Word in the home will have a steadfast spirit.

We have five great fruits of the family altar in the lives of the children (and of the adults, too):

- (a) knowledge of GOD's Word;
- (b) desire to perpetuate GOD's Word;
- (c) hope in GOD and remembrance of His mighty works;
- (d) holiness or commandment keeping;
- (e) steadfastness of spirit.

~ end of chapter 5 ~