

How to Have A Family Altar

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CHAPTER TEN

Conducting the Family Altar in the light of Child Needs (Continued)

GENERAL SURVEY OF ADOLESCENCE: 12-18 YEARS

BEFORE WE CONSIDER different periods within the general period of adolescence, we would like to make a brief analysis concerning the mental, moral, and spiritual forces which will exist throughout the entire period. This we trust will serve as a fruitful background for a wise and meaningful understanding of the adolescent person. These forces will make their appearance around the ages of twelve or thirteen, and then will gain increasing intensity until in the years sixteen to eighteen they will be manifest in full force.

THE DESIRE TO BE POPULAR

The child of this period manifests an intense desire to be socially popular. He wants to be liked and accepted by others as a person of worth. This desire is good and wholly acceptable. Some parents wholly misunderstand this drive, with the result that they are indifferent to it or else eager and zealous to suppress this as unchristian and as an evidence of wickedness. Nothing could be more harmful to the growing personality of the adolescent than this unwise attitude on the part of the parents.

This desire will not be destroyed, no matter how hostile the parents and others may be. In an environment of hostility the desire will go underground and be repressed in the subconscious depths of the child's mind to seek fulfillment in hidden and often times highly unacceptable ways.

Let us keep this desire out in the open by accepting it and understanding its divine purpose. Rather than trying to repress the adolescent desire for popularity, let us accept it and guide it into spiritually and Scripturally acceptable channels!

We must recognize that this desire for popularity, when left unguided and uncontrolled by the parents, is one of the main sources of worldliness, compromise, and delinquent behavior. But the answer to this danger is not in the direction of either ignoring or fighting this newly awakened desire. The answer is in the wise guidance of this desire into spiritual and Christ-honoring channels of understanding and expression.

But the question is how to guide this desire. As always, GOD's Word has the answer to our problem and the light for our darkness. In Matthew 5:16, we have valuable help in our problem of understanding and guiding the adolescent desire for popularity.

The clue to our spiritual guidance of this desire is found in the command: "**Let your light so shine before men.**"

The unsaved adolescent has no light but only self, so he seeks to let self shine before men! Even Christian children make this sad mistake of seeking by every means to let self shine.

The first need of every adolescent is salvation-light. Remember JESUS said, "**I am the Light of the world.**" If your adolescent is saved, he must be guided to see, in the prayer and study of the family altar, that only by letting the light of CHRIST shine will he be a worthwhile person, truly respected and trusted by men and women. And most of it can be given to the child indirectly through the prayers and studies of the family altar.

But not only do we need to know the spiritual meaning of this desire but we must know the manner in which it may be fulfilled: "**Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.**" This is GOD's method for popularity. Good works is the only way to gain either sincere or durable popularity with men. Look in the Bible for a contrast. Lot let himself shine and the world saw his evil works. The world feared him and obeyed him but did not love, respect, or trust him. His was the cheap, shallow popularity that so many young people settle for.

But Abraham let his light shine. The result: he was not feared or elected to city councils or sumptuously entertained, but he was respected, trusted, and the world knew he was the man of GOD who enjoyed real power with GOD.

Abraham had real popularity, power with GOD that gains respect from men!

The object of popularity is told us in the last phrase of verse sixteen. "**and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.**" A trinity of nines gives us the full understanding of how this adolescent desire for popularity may be interpreted and directed into spiritual channels which fulfill this desire:

- study the nine blessings of Matthew 5:2-12;
- the nine fruits of Galatians 5:22, 23;
- the nine gifts of I Corinthians 12:4-10.
- First Corinthians 13 gives us that love which is the heart and life of all the gifts, fruits, and blessings.

The adolescent is growing in selfhood. This growth is manifested in an increasing desire to shift from external authority and control to internal conviction and self-direction.

This growth is a healthy sign and is a preparation for the independence and responsibilities of adult life. Here again we have a preparatory and therefore a healthy tendency, but it is fraught with dangers. The child is apt to discard all authority in his desire for self-direction.

The child with wise and understanding parents will rarely go to extremes. Those adolescents who become completely bitter, hostile, aggressive, and delinquent during this period usually do so because their parents oppose their growth toward greater independence and self-direction!

Again we urge parents not to attempt to suppress this God-implanted growth toward greater self-direction but to co-operate with it and to guide it into greater freedom.

Many parents greatly hinder their children at this point by fighting their striving toward greater independence. He may resign himself to the external authority of his parents, but he will then be bound to a childish pattern in his emotional growth. He will not grow in the inner power of self-control and self-direction. Our word of wisdom to parents is: gradually loose your adolescent child from your apron strings; help him to stand on his own feet and to increasingly direct his own life.

The second possible result of fighting this growth is that the adolescent will not submit but will strongly resist. If your resistance is severe enough, he may become lawless and delinquent beyond your greatest fears! He is a child now, but he is rapidly becoming an adult. The child is soon to render obedience to GOD, not through his parents, but through himself alone! This shifting of the center of obedience from another (parents) to self is to the end that the child may grow into adulthood able to fulfill the divine command of Galatians 6:4, 5: **"But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden."**

PHYSICAL CHANGES

Another outstanding characteristic of the adolescent is the physical change he is undergoing. Not only is GOD preparing him for the social (desire and drive for popularity) and spiritual (desire and drive for inner self-direction) responsibilities of adult life, but for the physical responsibilities as well. It is remarkable that GOD draw special attention to the twelfth year of JESUS (Luke 2:42) and then directly follows with the account of His experience in the Temple and His going back home with His mother and Joseph. GOD says, **"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"** (Luke 2:52). And we notice GOD calls attention to the same three-fold development we are considering here

- (1) the social, **"Jesus increased in... favour with GOD and man"**;
- (2) the Physical, **"Jesus increased in... stature"**;
- (3) the spiritual, **"Jesus increased in wisdom."**

Wisdom here refers to an inner growth of strength and self-direction to bear before GOD the responsibility of obedience.

At twelve He **"was subject unto them"** (v. 51), but He was increasing in wisdom.

The increase in stature both as to size and as to creative power is one of the most embarrassing and confusing experiences of the adolescent. His increase in size makes him awkward and clumsy. Do not make remarks about his clumsiness. Help him feel at home with himself.

Explain to him your kindly attitude by word that he may know you understand how he feels.

The inner bodily changes are perhaps felt more than even the outer bodily changes in size. This is the period when the creative and reproduction side of life is coming into full development.

These newly awakened powers bring the adolescent into a whole new world.

The awakening of the creative and reproductive powers can be a rich experience full of spiritual values if the child is given wise instruction concerning reproduction and concerning its divine place in life. He must have clear guidance as to just what is happening in his own body and how this is one of the most beautiful and enriching experiences in life. Faithful instruction will cause the child to realize that his creative energies make all life more rich and beautiful to the man or woman whose body has been presented a living sacrifice, "**holy, acceptable unto God.**" Help the child to realize that if he is saved his body is the temple of the HOLY SPIRIT! Much of this instruction must be given in the heart-to-heart talks between mother and daughter, and father and son.

Some of this instruction can be indirectly given through the family worship. If you fail, the consequences may be grave indeed!

This is your golden opportunity to teach your child how to "**put... on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof**" (Romans 13:14). If you fail to teach him, he may make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof and thereby stumble headlong into tragedy and soul-damning rebellion against GOD!

We advise every parent to read a good book on this subject and to get down on his knees and claim the promise of James 1:5 for this responsibility of his. "**If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.**"

INTEREST IN THE OPPOSITE SEX

In the adolescent years (15-18), there is a great upsurge of interest in the opposite sex.

Do not laugh at this or seek to discourage it. This is natural and only needs to be guided. This interest in the opposite sex is a God-implanted interest and is meant as another means of preparation for adult life. From GOD's Word you will find stories and teaching which will guide the adolescent in the most worthy expression of this interest.

Make your child's friends of both sexes feel at home in your home. Share your home with them for friendly get-togethers. This will keep them out of the movies, taverns, and parked cars all of which are used of the devil to lead these youngsters into grievous sins!

Invite your children's friends to your family altar. Nothing will show up the undesirability of a bad companion more than this.

During later adolescence, the boy or girl should be encouraged to have many friends. It is unfortunate if a girl and boy allow their friendship for each other to become exclusive. Try to help them see that these years are a time for trying many friends and evaluating them according to the Word of GOD, until later on the special one will be found.

During adolescence GOD's rule for special friendships and the choosing of a marriage partner

should be held before the child with faithful constancy (II Corinthians 6:14-18). Many Christian young people scorn and transgress this rule but only to break themselves upon it.

It is easy to get married contrary to GOD's rule and to chum with special friends "**unequally yoked**"; but it is not easy to lie awake nights with bitter regrets while we ask ourselves over and over again, "Why did I do it?" Parents must drill this great unbreakable rule of Scripture into the very hearts and minds of the adolescents. More lives have been destroyed or have become backslidden through the transgression of this law than we would ever care to admit!

Adolescence is the fruitful time to give much of GOD's Word and His requirements showing the Scriptural place of the woman and the man; the Scriptural place of husband and wife. A woman out of GOD's commanded place is a curse and not a blessing. A man out of his commanded place is a misfit; a curse, not a blessing! Not a little of our present trouble in churches and homes goes back to women and men who are out of their Scriptural position!

Train your children to know their places and in humility to take them.

Around the ages of 15, 16, and 17, children usually weary of school and are impatient to join the workaday world of grownups. If at all possible, the parents should hold them to the task and great opportunity of study.

Let them know that education is important. They are very wise who will continue their education; then they will be in a position to reap the benefits of such a choice all their life long.

ALL ALONE - THE TENDENCY TO MELANCHOLY

There is a tendency for the adolescent to feel that he is alone and that no one really understands him.

But as a wise Christian parent you will prevent this feeling from getting a firm hold on your child. Show him that you believe in him and are standing by him. Open your home to your child and his friends!

Nothing will do so much to break the feeling of isolation and loneliness of our adolescent as the day-by-day fellowship of the family altar. To show how effective, deep, and lasting is the fellowship of family worship one has, in later years, written the following account:

One day a family of seven were gathered around a saintly, white-haired woman who presided on the throne of that home. The old-fashioned bowed spectacles lay upon the pages of the open Book as she dropped words of wisdom and gospel-love into the ears and hearts of those children, sitting there, looking up into her beloved face:

"In childhood's hour I lingered near
That hallowed spot with listening ear
To gentle words that Mother would give
To fit me to die and teach me to live.
She told me that shame would never betide

With truth for my motto and CHRIST for my guide;
She taught me to lisp my earliest prayer
As I knelt beside that old armchair."

~ end of chapter 10 ~
