

## How to Have A Family Altar

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### CHAPTER SIX

#### A Study of the Family Altar Through the Household Visits of JESUS

IN JOHN 2, we have the beautiful story of one of Jesus' household visits, to a marriage feast. In John 2:2, we learn that Jesus was "**called**" to share this joyous occasion.

How many families utterly neglect Him day after day!

Then some trial, suffering, or tragedy comes and the desperate family gathers together to read His Word and plead with Him for help. After JESUS was called, His mother spoke words of wisdom to the servants, words which apply to every home: "**Whatever he saith unto you, do it**" (John 2:5). If JESUS is "called" as Helper, He should be obeyed as Lord and Master! In verse 3 we notice the need "**and when they wanted wine.**" The need appears midway between the call and the exhortation to obedience. Family needs are material, mental, emotional, and spiritual. And out of these unanswered needs come the conflicts that divide families.

In counseling with families about to break up, or with individuals, we find that they have left CHRIST out of the picture. They are desperately trying to answer their needs but they are almost totally ignoring the call to CHRIST and the obedience to CHRIST which makes it possible for Him to answer the need in His own way as only He can.

The most natural approach to any need is just where most people never think to look - calling CHRIST and obeying Him. This is the key to answered needs for families and individuals. Between the calling and the obeying we can pour all our needs and patiently wait upon the Lord to undertake in His own way.

The family altar is a perfect picture of a family calling JESUS into their life with all its hopes, needs, and problems. But what He says to us in our family altar time through His Word and His Spirit, we are to do.

In verse 7 the Lord JESUS spoke to them, "**Fill the waterpots.**" The obedience was instant. "**And they filled them up to the brim.**" This is the key to a home life that is blessed and honored of GOD. Then the Lord JESUS commanded again and He said unto them, "**Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast.**" Their obedience was instant: "**and they bare it.**" There is no short cut to favor with GOD. Instant obedience to His Word is the key to everything GOD has for us.

Obedience to GOD's Word will dissolve every tension; answer every need; solve every problem and destroy every quarrel and ill-will in every family under the sun!

The servants instantly obeyed the Lord JESUS CHRIST and bore the water to the ruler of the feast. And when the ruler tasted it, it was good wine! Somewhere in that brief walk of obedience between the Lord and the ruler of the feast, the water was turned into wine! The need was answered!

Every need is answered somewhere in the walk of obedience! Every home should daily demonstrate divine undertaking and divine miracle! Every family where its members unitedly call upon and obey CHRIST feeds upon the good wine of His favor, grace and power! This man had set forth his good wine at the beginning as was the custom. And the best that man can enjoy in his family as a result of his own workmanship is inferior to that which He can give.

Oh! that men would honor and exalt CHRIST in their families! Then they and their loved ones would enjoy "**the good wine**" that satisfies every desire and answers every problem and supplies every need!

Little wonder then that so-called Christian homes are so often filled with debate, tension, quarreling, and ill-will. Many moderns strive to understand how they can have a happier family life. They read newspaper columns, the latest book by the most renowned psychologist and maybe even attend a "Christian Family Study Forum" in a modern liberal church. They are strangers to His wine, for they never accept Him as their personal Saviour and then exalt Him in the family worship, or obey His Word instantly with no reservations.

In verse 11 we read: "**This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory and his disciples believed on Him.**" Every work of His grace and mercy in a family altar home is a manifestation of His glory!

A family altar home is a home which should be Christ-conscious and very zealous and jealous for His honor and glory! Is your family concerned about the glory of CHRIST when He answers your prayer and supplies your needs? Are you only concerned with the answer or are you occupied with His glory manifested in the answer?

Maybe the answer to this question will explain your family troubles, your wayward boy or straying girl!

Maybe the answer to this question will explain why your marriage seems to be more of a curse than a blessing! Or on the other hand, if the answer to the above question is Yes, then you have an understanding why the smile and joy of Heaven has rested upon your little household. As the disciples observed His glory, they believed on Him.

Oh! parents, teach your children to look for that glory.

Man is by nature short-sighted. He catches the blessings but he misses the glory, is blind to the Blesser! Teach yourself and your children to discern Him and His glory in those family blessings! Ask GOD for eye salve to cure your family's short-sightedness! For as they see Him and His glory they will receive of His fullness and grace for grace - they will grow in faith till their lives become a veritable praise and glory to GOD!

In John 11 and 12 we read about the little family of Bethany. The Word of GOD says: "**Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.**" A beautiful harmony must have existed in this family and a warm atmosphere of mutual love that made the Saviour glad to go there and rest awhile! Our blessed Lord JESUS CHRIST loved to abide in that household where a spirit of love and harmony prevailed. Anything that mars the family love and unity is sin and grieves the Spirit of CHRIST. Is the atmosphere of your home such that JESUS can rest there?

It seems this little family yearned for His presence and must always have had a special place for Him in the home. The home life of Bethany revolved about Him - His likes and dislikes, His desires and commandments!

If CHRIST is not at the center of your home, who is? What is? The HOLY SPIRIT says: "**But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God**" (1 Corinthians 11:3). Also, "**Therefore, let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's**" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

No home can have a right sense of values in small or large matters which does not first make CHRIST its center. The HOLY SPIRIT says: "**For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power**" (Colossians 2:9, 10). He must be made our all in all if our home and personal life is to be complete in Him!

Why are homes weak? Because CHRIST is not the center.

They are like wheels without hubs. They cannot bear much weight before they are crushed in the dust!

**"They made him a supper, and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment"** (John 12:2, 3).

Here we see the picture of the perfect home. Lazarus sat the table with Him in sweet, heavenly fellowship. Lazarus, we may say, symbolizes the blessed fellowship we have with the Lord JESUS CHRIST at the family altar. What was JESUS saying to Lazarus? I don't know but I'll presume it was a word "**in season,**" a word to edify and build up in the Lord.

I judge it was a word that answered to some deep need of Lazarus.

When I was a child, CHRIST often spoke a healing, winning, convicting or enlightening word to my soul at an old-fashioned family altar, and I got up and returned to bed knowing that the need which none other knew was known by Him and that His grace was sufficient. How often in those turbulent years of adolescence did I feel the refreshing, cleansing, waters of the Word wash my mind clean of wearing doubt and blinding confusion! My wayward, wild emotions were made calm and peaceful by the washing of water by the Word.

Remember that precious Word to the heads of families:

**"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish"** (Ephesians 5:25, 26).

There we have it!

Sanctification and cleansing, all by the Word of GOD! Day after day at the family altar during those "growing days" did I experience the blessed fellowship with CHRIST that through His Word cleansed, set apart, and prepared for further growth in grace and unto perfection. As I look back I tremble to think what I would have done without this daily fellowship with CHRIST.

**"And Martha served!"** Martha was busy serving Him.

She symbolizes the service of the family altar, that spirit of love and worship which is carried out into the various situations of everyday living.

**"Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment."** Mary worshiped JESUS! The daily worship of the family together fills the whole house with the sweet odors of Heaven.

What higher act is redeemed man capable of than adoration and praise to his Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer?

Surely a home without worship is like a body without a soul. It is dead to GOD. It is a corpse in the things of the things of spirit and the Word, no matter how much its members may boast of being Christians and no matter how often they may attend church! If you want a little bit of Heaven in your home, make a place each day for family worship! What do the angels and the saints do in Heaven? They worship Him! Oh! how blessed is the opportunity afforded by the family altar to prepare now for that blessed, holy occupation which shall be ours forever in Heaven!

Worship is the one holy occupation of saints; which will never have an ending but will bloom out in full-orbed glory in eternity!

In John 11 we have a picture of a sad day in this home in Bethany. There came a day that threw its blanket of shadows over the once gay and happy home. Death came to Lazarus, the beloved brother. How good at such an hour that home had been one in which He loved to dwell and had been often worshiped!

In the midst of all this sorrow and great loss, JESUS came, and with Him His heavenly aid and comfort. **"Jesus wept... Jesus also counseled, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"** He has tears, but He also has words of hope and

comfort.

Blessed indeed are the homes which have a family altar especially when great bereavement comes. "**The Master is come**" (John 11:28), and He fills the aching void of the heart. At such a time only He Himself can fully supply our need.

JESUS in this case ministered to the need by calling Lazarus forth from the dead. The shores of death may be far, far away indeed, so far as the human mind is concerned. But not for Him - the dear loved "dead" are within calling distance of the Lord of life! And though He does not often, if ever nowadays, raise the sleeping bodies to life, yet He still brings relief.

It is not necessary for Him to do a miracle of physical resurrection to heal the wound in the home that has been grieved by the death of one of its loved members. Just His own blessed presence is all that is needed. And if He is the Lord and King in your home He will console your family and bind you together in His presence so that your sorrow will even be a means of grace and blessing to your home! If your home does not have Bethany's family altar, do not expect Bethany's miracle!

Why call Him King and give Him not the homage of a King? Why call Him Lord of your home if your home does not worship and honor Him as Lord?

In Matthew 9:10 we find JESUS in the house of Matthew, the tax gatherer. The questionings of the Pharisees as to why He should eat with publicans and sinners brought from JESUS this reply: "**They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick**" (Matthew 9:12).

The other day I read the testimony of a young woman recently saved.

She has two little children, and her husband is a promising young business executive. She told how their family had been on the verge of breaking up because of disagreements and tensions between her husband and herself. She said things were so bad they just argued to be arguing. Then, just before she decided to break up her little family, she purchased a Bible and decided to ask her husband if they all might not draw together before bedtime to read the Bible and pray as best they knew how. He agreed to this.

Night after night they met to read the Bible and mumble a few prayers. Finally, they were brought under conviction of sin and accepted CHRIST as their Saviour and Lord.

Family tensions dissolved, and the harmony and tenderness of CHRIST prevailed.

The woman said family Bible reading and prayers had healed their sick marriage. She was glad she didn't get a divorce. Family Bible reading is better than divorce.

The divine Physician longs to come into homes and heal all wounds. The family altar is the way to bring Him into our families through His Word! And you will find Him to be the Great Physician for your home and your soul-sickness if you will only let Him come in to feast with your family around the open Word of GOD!

You will notice as JESUS was journeying, the Word says He saw "**a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom.**" This is a description of the physical location of Matthew. But JESUS saw deeper. JESUS saw that Matthew was sitting in a place of soul-need and spiritual sickness.

And JESUS said to him, "**Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.**" Where did JESUS lead him? "**And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house**" - back into his home. And there Matthew "**made him a great feast in his own house**" (Luke 5:29).

CHRIST would lead many distressed persons right back into their own homes to feast Him and exalt Him there, as the cure for their family and individual sicknesses.

Many a mother praying for a wayward girl would hear Him say, "**Follow me,**" if only she had ears to hear. And if she would only follow, He would lead her right into the midst of the little family and say, "Honor Me and feast with Me here and all thy sicknesses shall be healed, for I am the Great Physician." "**He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him**" (John 14:21).

This troubled man, after being delivered by CHRIST, requested that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, "**Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee**" (Luke 8:39).

It might be that his mental derangement was partly because of inharmonious home conditions! He was directed to go back home and give a clear Christ-exalting witness to his family, with the result that their home would become a bit of Heaven on earth. I can imagine this privileged man never ceased thereafter to daily draw his family around him and witness of JESUS, the Great Physician.

The theme of his own family altar witness overflowed the four walls of his home into the city around, publishing how great things JESUS had done unto him.

One vibrant, pulsating, and faithful family altar home will stir a whole community for GOD! And not only a community but the whole world!

Many communities are experiencing a real famine for the Word of GOD. The faith once delivered to the saints has been denied, and the blessed gospel of salvation through the shed blood of CHRIST is no longer heard or preached.

In these communities are saints who are languishing for the fellowship of those in like precious faith.

In these communities are those who are in need of salvation. In such gospel-starved neighborhoods as these we urge family altar homes to fill the gap and minister to the need.

On Sunday evening or afternoon open your home and invite the neighbors to share your family altar.

Think of what this would mean in gospel-starved communities all over America! Think of the consciences that would be quickened, the interest that would be awakened in the Word of GOD, and the souls that would be saved!

The Early Church was begun, nourished, and sustained in households. Carefully study the following Scriptures:

Act 10:33-48; 12:5, 12-17; 16:40; 20:7, 8; I Corinthians 16:15, 19; Colossians 4:15.

So far as many communities are concerned, we are again in a period of church history when the true witness to CHRIST must be maintained in the home of believers.

Make your Sunday family altar an open-house where all may gather to worship, and to pray and study the Word of GOD.

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