

THE FAMILY ALTAR

Personal and Family Devotions

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K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple Stupid)

"And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and said, How shall the ark of the LORD come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the LORD unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obededom the Gittite. And the ark of the LORD continued in the house of Obededom the Gittite three months: **and the LORD blessed Obededom, and all his household.**" (2 Samuel 6:9-11). The ark of the covenant is the CENTERPIECE in the tabernacle, the most important piece of furniture, the place where God made known His holy presence in the midst of the most holy place.

Where the ark of God was, it was a blessing. That place was a BLESSED PLACE. The tabernacle was blessed. The temple was blessed. The house of Obededom was blessed. God was there in a special way. God was in that place. Where God was was a blessing. It wasn't just a blessing to Obededom, who opened the door to have it there, but for all his household. Everyone in his household was blessed. God was there. The ark was there. It was in his home. All his household knew it and were blessed. Wherever God is honored there is to be found His blessing.

The HEART, the HOME, the ASSEMBLY (church) – all three of these places are a special concern to God and where God can manifest Himself in a special way. God can certainly be in the heart (Gal. 2:20). God can certainly be in the home (Gen. 18:19). God certainly ought to be in His church (Rev. 2:1; 1:20). Everything is in the presence of the omnipresent God, but the enjoyment of His presence requires a healthy relationship to God by way of the cross.

The believing heart should be knowing that it is set apart for God to be God. "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (1 Cor. 7:14). Wherever the ark was, that territory was blessed. When the ark was at the home of Obededom, his territory was blessed. Wherever God is found in the heart, that territory is blessed and set apart. If God is found in the heart of a believing wife or a believing husband, then the territory of that home (including the children and the unbelieving spouse) is set apart in a special way. One REAL BELIEVING PERSON IN THE HOME makes a big difference.

When God is having His rightful place in the heart then the believing believer is showing God's place in the home. As in His Church so let it be in the home "that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor. 14:25). Again Jacob points us in the right direction: "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not. And he was afraid and said, How dreadful (awesome) is this place" (Genesis 28:16-17).

"I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 2:2-4).

David walked with God. Solomon was encouraged to walk with God. David reminded Solomon that if Solomon and his sons who followed him (Rehoboam, etc.) would take heed and follow God, then they would be blessed. Solomon had a great privilege that men in other homes did not have. He had a David in his home. Solomon was exposed to David. If Solomon would represent God properly (verse 3), then his children would have an advantage. Again we see the principles of 1 Corinthians 7:14. One believer exposes everybody to the possibility of the blessing of God! What they do with this privilege is up to them, but they have this privilege. They have the privilege of KNOWING GOD. They may use or abuse this privilege. The very best thing one can do for each and all whether near or far is personally to exercise and to enjoy being in the presence of God and God's presence in them.

Personal Devotions

"Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Sandwiched between the command to REJOICE ALWAYS and the command to BE THANKFUL ALWAYS is the command to PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. Believers ought to pray. Individually we ought to pray. Prayer is the believer's interaction with God, on a very personal basis. Praying practices God's personal presence in a very personal way. God is here and now for me and I am here and now for Him. I am moment by moment His and He is moment by moment mine. Thus there ought to be our own, personal, devotional walk and talk with God.

You need to expose yourself to God, to be reminded of God's presence. It is not hard to do. You just have to want to do it. You need to be God-conscious and to be knowing that God knows all about you. If it were very cold outside and I said, "Go out and get a breath of fresh air." You could then walk outside and EXPOSE YOURSELF to that fresh air. It would be all around you. If you stayed there, then the cold and the freshness of the air would get to you. The same would be true if I said, "Go and expose yourself to the light of the sun." You would go out and subject yourself to the sun and the sunshine. So it is with prayer. We need to EXPOSE ourselves to God. It is not a hard thing, we just need to do it.

We are to recognize that we are always in the personal presence of God (Psalm 139:7-8; 46:1,10). Many of us don't do this. It takes time to do it. It takes thought to do it. It means you need to stop thinking about YOU and your problems, and you need to expose yourself to God. Stop and think about God. Let God get to you. It makes a big difference in everything. He makes a big difference in everything. He is the One who stirs us and stimulates us and helps us.

You need to have a practical, personal, present relationship to God. You need to have a personal relationship to God that is daily maintained and daily exercised. One believer in a home makes a great difference, in the sense of people being exposed to a very great God. How is your own personal prayer life? How is your own personal devotional life? What kind of QUALITY time do you spend with God? Do you spend time on your knees before Him? A humble position by a humble heart for heavenly business with the most high god. One's heart attitude and action is the key.

You need to spend time with God in a devotional way, not only in an academic way. Some people think, "I need to sit down and open 13 books and study this and that." There is a place for this, but this may not be the same as personal devotions. There is a difference.

Most of us do not know how to have a devotional relationship with God. We don't know how to do that. We are all tied up within ourselves--protecting, promoting, etc.. It can be easier for women to look for and want to exercise a personal relationship in that sense than men. Often we get all tied up within ourselves and we can't have a devotional life. God can't get to us. He needs to get to us, and we don't let anyone get too near us rightly and in the light of reality especially God's Holy Person.

Through the day there may be times and spots where we can get a moment alone where we can quietly read a verse and think about what God has said. Not 45 verses, but one verse. Seek to lock on to one simple truth. It is amazing how just one verse meditated upon can refresh us and help us to re-focus on the Lord and help us to set our course straight. This is what we need because each truth possessed rightly makes possible wise practice. We need to be able to do this in the crises of life. We need to be able to tap information quickly when we need it. We need to practice this and thus be more prepared, thinking right so as to be acting right.

Are you able to let God's Word govern and guide you? Are you able to take God's Word and apply it correctly to your own heart when the crisis comes? Many cannot do this. The key is to learn how to do this when there is no crisis. Learn it as a way of life. When the crisis comes along you are then ready to put your faith and God's facts to work. You are ready to tap the nutrients you need to keep your whole system fired up for the right. We need to work out God's working on a continuous basis.

Stop somewhere during the day and read something. Read a verse. One doesn't need to read a lot. It wearies us to think about reading the Bible for 14 hours. But what about 14 seconds? 14 seconds is not very long. It is long enough to read a verse such as 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Read it and let it sink in. Think about it. Meditate on it. "Chew" on it. Assimilate it into your system. We need to do this in a personal way. Consider eating a candy bar or such for energy, refreshment, so your mental consumption of God's Word.

It is very hard to have family devotions is you are not having personal devotions. It is hard to take God's Word and apply it to your family if you are not in the habit of taking God's Word and applying it to your own heart in a personal way. If God and His Word and His truth is not real personal and practical to you, how is it going to be real and personal and practical to your family?

The Head of the Home

We need to keep God at the center. This is what FAMILY ALTAR is all about. FAMILY ALTAR is an affirmation that God is at the center of the home. **CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THIS HOME.** Christ is Resident and President and thus He ought to be so in the believing heart. Family altar is the time to stop and to remind all the family (saved and unsaved) that God is at the center. The home is to be GOD'S PLACE. It is a place set apart for God. You are reminding the family that the home is God's place and He is in charge of it. It is to be a place of blessing. It is to be a place to be obedient and God-conscious, a recognizing and reverencing God's presence here and now.

Family altar is a listening and a learning. Not everyone has to say something. You don't have to go and read 35 verses. You may at times want to read a long chapter. This is fine for you and for

another person who may want to do this. But for family altar you would not normally want to sit down and read 35 verses. You would not want to do this unless you have the right conditions which could include older ones who are spiritually with it and who really want to exercise the time and the mind. Not many have this situation.

Seek to hit your target. Open God's Word with a view to know and possess that which is right and real. Go after something. Read something. Not everyone needs to read and to make comments. It is good when they do, but they do not need to. It is for PRAYER and PRAISE, at least for the believer's part. It is a time to offer your petitions (concerning the home, school, work, health, etc.). Bring these things before God, the One that you have recognized as being at the very CENTER. "This is God's place and I'm in God's place and it belongs to Him. We are looking to Him to protect the front door, the back door and the windows, all that is within and without. May our God manage our souls, substance and situations. May God keep us."

You need to be in the place where you are trusting the Lord, working at things and exercising a GREAT GOD. Give God credit for being God. Keep God in the right place. Make Him Lord of your heart. Make Him Head of your Home. Let HIS LOCAL ASSEMBLY be your priority, even as it is HIS. Help the family to know the CAPABILITY of God, the CONDUCT of God, COMPETENCY of God, the COMFORT of God, etc. Cultivate these ingredients in family altar. In the midst of all the problems and pressures, seek to develop a God-inspired composure, a learning, a loving, a leaning and trusting.

God wants to make your heart home for His blessing. In blessing your heart He will bless the hearts of others, at least indirectly. Make sure in family altar that you keep God and His Word UP FRONT.

Some Practical Suggestions

Keep it simple and on the level of the listeners. If you have young children at family altar, don't try to tackle the great prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39. This would be way over their heads. If you have little children, then you are not able to do what you might otherwise do if it were just you and your marriage partner. Pick simple things. Don't try to do long, laborious things. Do something that is on target. Think about it. Talk about it. Talk to God about it (those who are able to talk to God about it). Not everyone is in the place of prayer. Don't force a young person (or any person) to pray, but you can insist that the young person be respectful while you have family altar, God speaking to you, you responding to God.

Some people sing, and singing can be included as a part of family altar. This is up to you, in view of your background and what you are comfortable with. Don't get disappointed. Don't get discouraged. Be very flexible. Make sure your heart is FIXED and locked in, but know that time and conditions are not fixed. Keep your heart right, but know that things around you may not be right or always be easy, especially in our day. Years ago on the family farm the family would get up together, do chores together, eat breakfast together, etc., and there would be a space for the family to meet together for prayer. They were different days. There was no television. People got up very early and normally they would go to bed not long after dark. They did not go out running around to some club or to some gym or to some night class or to some athletic event. They were all home. It was easy to do certain things back then. Today it is not like that in most homes. People are in many places, at varying times.

Try to find the right time spots for family altar. Work at it. Try to do it whenever possible, seeking to surely do it. Don't allow your heart to cool down because of irregularity. Do it every day that you can, not just when you want to.

Family altar is a specific time when the family sits down together to meet with God and to be subject to His Word, but throughout the day the believing parent has the privilege of exercising God's truth in a way that ought to be instructive for the family members: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7). Use each and every occasion to teach the young ones about a great God. This can be done while driving in a car, while working in the kitchen, while sitting at meal time, while reading to them prior to bedtime, etc. Use each and every occasion to point them to a great God.

Keep It Simple!

When it comes to different ages, shoot for where they are at. It is best to set before them SIMPLE TRUTHS which they can understand because a simple truth (GOD LOVES YOU, GOD IS FAITHFUL, GOD CARES, GOD KNOWS, etc.) is always appropriate for an older child or adult as well. We all need to be reminded of the simple truths. Better to do this than to hit the more advanced truths and not reach the younger ones at all.

Real young children usually cannot even sit for 15 minutes. You need to shoot for your target and get it fast and not linger too long. Learn to improvise. Keep it simple. Hit your target. Meet together on a consistent basis as best you can. If it doesn't work out on a certain day, don't get discouraged by that. Desire and determine to have family altar each day that you can.

The men ought to lead in family worship. The men ought to "play the man." However, realistically we need to understand that some men are not in the place to do this, and may never be in the place. They may never let God get to them in this way. The men ought to be encouraged to lead but they may never be in the place to do it. The believing wife cannot sit back and wait forever for the husband. She may need to do her part to make it go. If the President of the bank is not doing well, then the Vice President will need to do what he or she can to keep it going. If on the battlefield something happens to the doctor so that he cannot function, the nurse will have to step in and do what the doctor normally should do and would do as best she can.

Don't be discouraged and disappointed. Be very flexible. Make the time flexible. It doesn't always have to be at the exact same time. Don't be unbending in your plans: "Today we must do verse 10 and tomorrow we must do verse 11." Who says you must do it? Maybe some other verse would hit the target in a better way.

"It blessed my heart!" It may have blessed your heart, but this does not necessarily mean that it is the thing to share with the family. It blessed your heart because you experienced some truth or saw some truth that someone else might not be ready for. Your little child may not be ready for that truth at all. Bring before the little children some truth that is going to be REAL for them, on their level, in their world of experience. You may also take the truth that blesses your heart and make it suitable for the others.

Make time to do it. Watch the time. Try not to be a long time in doing it. Watch your praying. When you pray alone, you can pray as long as you wish. When you are praying with your family, be careful that you don't pray a long time. The same is true in the local assembly. It is best to PRAY SHORTER than longer. You can always pray more than once, but PRAY SHORT. When a believer goes on and on and on in public prayer minds tend to drift and wander. The prayers that we have recorded in the Old Testament and the New Testament are for the most part very short.

In your family prayers, you do not have to mention everything. If you were to try to mention

everything, there would be no end to it. Hit the key items! "God, you need to help us in school, at work, etc." Whatever is near and pending, a concern and care, such ought to be brought to God and His throne of grace.

Seek to get participation from different ones. The father does not need to be the only one to ever speak or read or pray. Let different ones read verses if and as they are able. Let different ones pray and share and ask questions, depending upon the people involved, their attitudes, etc. Don't force the issue: "Now it is your turn to pray whether you want to or not!" "Read that verse, whether you want to or not!" No, pressing the issue to read may not serve for the good. They do not have to pray. In fact, they do not have to BELIEVE. God commands all men everywhere to believe, but God does not force any person to do this, does He? God does not force people to get saved. God does not force people to go to heaven. Let people get ready. Give people the freedom to do it. When they are ready, let them try it (reading or whatever), even if they mess it up.

The same would be true of baptism. Don't force a young person in the direction of water baptism. You can certainly point them in this direction, but let it come from their heart. Let it be their decision, not the parent's decision. The reality of their personal relationship should be the source out from which comes their decision.

Vary things. Vary participation. Vary prayer requests. Don't do the same thing in the same way every day.

Family altar is not hard. Don't make it hard. Do the best you can with it in the presence of God who knows our frailty and failure. *Get your own heart right* and then avail yourself of every occasion and opportunity to do it on a regular basis. There are many things going on in our day that make it difficult for everyone to get together in the right setting. But this does not mean that you don't pursue it and that you don't do it. Keep your own heart FIXED. That you can do.

Keep your heart with all diligence. Maintain a devotional, PERSONAL relationship with the Lord, not just an intellectual relationship. Ten thousand volumes of KNOWLEDGE is not what you need. You need a PERSONAL knowledge of a PERSONAL God. The lowly, humble-hearted believer who knows His God is far better off than the intellectually brilliant rabbi of all rabbis. The little child who lets God be God is far better off than the most brilliant professor in the largest seminary of the world who is not believing.

Practice these things. May God help us to do it!

"And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? **For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD,** to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen.18:17-19).

God's great commitment to Abraham involved Abraham's commitment to God as illustrated in the fact that Abraham communicated his commitment to his children. He communicated to his children the fact that he was committed to God. There was no question in the minds of his children or grandchildren that Father Abraham was involved with God. Father Abraham was committed to God. Whenever they talked about Abraham, they would be able to say this: "Surely our father is serving and honoring God. He is committed to God. He is submitting to God." This evidenced God's commitment to Abraham which evidenced God's commitment to His great Name, His own glory and honor.

Committed?

We need to have this same commitment, so that we are not communicating that we are committed to every one and every thing apart from God. Often the statement is made: "I'm committed to my family." "I'm committed to my children." etc. Too often this leaves us with a limited message and it is not the healthiest kind of communication. They need to see the right example. My commitment to my children or anyone or anything is very much limited to ME. One's circumstances and conditions will govern that commitment. If I can be rightly committed to God, and communicate that commitment to God and dependence upon God, then I am telling the family that they need to be committed to God, not to me, but **TO GOD**. That is what they need to do. They need to be committed to God. We need to be **SHOWING** that they need to be committed to God and dependent upon God. We ought to show that. Abraham did that.

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart" (Deut. 6:6). As Israel was to do so Abraham would command his children and tell them the way to go. God commanded His people and the commandment of God (the Word of God) was to be hidden in the heart of God's people. Thus, an Abraham, who honored God's Word, would **COMMUNICATE** that **COMMITMENT** by way of **COMMANDMENT**. The result is that anyone around the believing heart will know to whom the believing heart is committed.

This is true at work. You can do the very best job you can, in the grace of God, doing it as unto the Lord. Your co-workers will know, if not now then soon thereafter, that your motivation is not because of the pay check and not because of the great working conditions, etc., but it is because of your relationship with the Lord. It is because of HIM. It is not because you are treated rightly or wrongly. It is not because the pay is right. It is because you are serving the Lord. It is not going to be very long before your co-workers come to know that you are committed to the Lord. Everyone around will have opportunity to know that.

"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7). There is going to be a communication in one form or another, that God and His Word is up front in whatever is happening. "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deut. 6:8-9). It is difficult to be in such a home without knowing who the home belongs to! Put God's Word in front of you. Let it be a reminder to you. Keep it before your mind. Keep it in your heart: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). It is easy to forget things that are in front of you all the time unless you use them. But you can look at them and ask, "What does it say? Why does it say that?" Having God's Word bound on thy hand etc. and not believed and understood and practiced won't do you much good. You lock in your heart what you are really believing.

It is HIS Home!

"And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deut. 6:9). There is a wall sign which says, "CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THIS HOUSE." This is important. We want the children and others to know this. Whose property is this house, this home? Whose furniture and belongings are these? It all belongs to God. He is the Head of the house. He is the **HEAD** from the front door to the back door to the upstairs to the basement. What goes on and who does what concerns God and thus should concern the believers.

He is the HEAD of the HOME, the LORD of the HOUSE. We want everyone to know this. There is no ROOM where He is not present. There is no ROOM where His holy influence should not have sway. The child and all are to be reminded: "This is not your home. This is His house. Sorry, it is not my home but it is HIS home." If it is your home, then there can be a debate about what and how things are done. But if you communicate consistently and effectively over a period of time that the home is HIS, then there is less debate or argument: "It is not my home. These are not my rules. These are not my house rules. These are GOD'S HOUSE RULES. It all belongs to God." Sometimes we say this but we do not communicate this by example and exercise. The result is that we get into trouble time and again because the young people have not been raised with this understanding.

The parents' commitment needs to be up front. If someone says, "Do your dad and mom believe?" "Yes, and they are responsible to God." The little boy or girl is being raised with this understanding. They are understanding this: "These, my parents, trust in and talk to the invisible God. They know the invisible God. This house is His. It is God's house." They are raised with this. This reduces many of the arguments that young people try to use with their parents. It needs to be settled that the house and the home is GOD'S PLACE. What we do and don't do must be resolved before God and His Word.

These are not hard things, but do we communicate them? If we don't communicate them, then to that measure we run up against all kinds of flack and problems. As young people they are going to go after us, because it is us versus them. They are raised in this place, and they feel they have a RIGHT (and they do in a certain measure) and they are going to assert their rights against you (what they want to do and the way they want to do it). We face problems because we communicate that it is **our** home and **our** place. But if we communicate that this is God's place and if we communicate this on a consistent basis, then we have a whole different ball game.

For example, suppose workmen were to come in to the church building to work during the day and they want to play hard rock on their radio. We could share with them that this is not our place and is not their place, but this is God's place, and that kind of music is out of place in God's place. It does not belong here. Do you think they would argue with this? No, because it is the church. What do they expect of God's church? The church belongs to God. Even the irreligious people realize that if it is communicated that the building belongs to God and it is in the territory of God, then debate is not quite so okay. So they do not make a big deal about it. Thus if we communicate that the house is God's place, then we have great help immediately with the children. It helps them and it helps us. It is God's place!

"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Proverbs 1:8). Here we see that the parents are responsible to COMMUNICATE. "Hear the instruction!" "Forsake not the law of thy mother!" What instruction is there to hear? What law, Mom, do you go by? What is your law? What code of law do you work with, Mom? The believing heart can say, "Hear the words of your father; hear the laws of your mother. These should come from God and we as your parents represent God and His Word."

FAMILY ALTAR – Its Importance

It is important to the parent. If I am praying and trusting God as in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 ("PRAY WITHOUT CEASING"), then family altar will be a reminder that we need to be praying. Family altar reminds us to pray. As we put family altar in the right place, then the benefits are there to be realized. Even in the church covenant we are reminded to "maintain family and private devotions; to educate our children in the Word of His grace and to seek the salvation of our kindred and

acquaintances."

I need to pray and to have my own interaction with God by way of His Word, and as I am communicating and trusting and walking and growing and praying and letting the Lord be the Lord, then FAMILY ALTAR is much easier. If my heart is right with the Lord and if I am a healthy believer, then family altar is easier to do. If you are not doing it, then it is time to do it. It is harder to do it if you have not been doing it. It is harder to find time to do it. But let us start to set our heart and home right. Let us not just open the Bible when it is time to have Family Altar. Such starts the time from a weakened position. May we delight in God's Word all the time (Psalm 119:97).

It is a personal thing. If you want to make Family Altar good, then make your own heart time good. Do you want to have good Bible times with your family? How is your own personal Bible time going (personal devotions, etc.)? Do you want to have good prayer times with your family? How is your own personal prayer life?

Too Busy?

Are you too busy for such things? Well, so is everyone else. God did not seem to make any allowances for a busy life. He said, "PRAY WITHOUT CEASING" (1 Thess. 5:17). God did not ask you about your conditions or your circumstances, He just said, "DO IT!" We breathe without ceasing! We just keep on breathing without ceasing! Even when things go bad we keep on breathing. If we are in the smog where the air is not so good, we still keep on breathing. If we were in the midst of a burning building with smoke everywhere, we may not wish to breath, but we must breathe anyway. *Breathers* need to be *breathing* and *believers* need to be *believing*.

Believers need to BELIEVE always, no matter what the conditions or circumstances might be. We must never take a vacation from being BELIEVING BELIEVERS. "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:28-29). Here we have the great requirement for God's people. These religious, committed Jews wanted to know what they could DO, in the light of their exposure to the Lord Jesus Christ. His answer: BELIEVE!

Prayer

What is PRAYER? Prayer is believing God. Prayer is the exercise of believing that GOD IS. God is there ready to BE GOD. Prayer is one's communication with God. Suppose you were to see the doctor. You are brought into the examination room where you are told that the doctor will be in shortly. When he comes in he finds you staring out the window. He says, "Hello," but you do not respond. Finally you turn you head but you never look at the doctor and never say a word. You then get up and leave the examination room and leave the office. Would this be a good appointment with the doctor? You need to communicate. You need to communicate with God. You need to believe God.

Faith

Part of the struggle with family altar and faithful attendance, etc. is simply that we are not believing God. We are not practicing what we say we believe. We get one shot at truth on a Wednesday night and another shot on a Sunday, but that's it. We are not feeding our own souls. The Bible is a closed Book to us except during the preaching services. Thank God for what we can get from the regular services, but that is not enough to keep us going. We need to eat more than that. We need to exercise more than that. If we don't do the things personally that keep us in tune, then we

certainly are not going to help anyone else, including our family members. Family altar is going to be difficult to do under such circumstances. If we are not hearing and heeding, how shall we encourage others? See 1 Timothy 4:16.

Family altar is a time to get together to listen and to learn. It is a time to pray. It is a time to thank God, to petition God, to praise God. It is a time to bring the problems to God and to thank Him that He is there, even a very present help in time of trouble (Psalm 46:1). It is a time to bring the problems to God so that we need not be overcome with the problems. The problems need to be DEPOSITED with God and left with Him. If the problem involves the whole family, why not do this as a family. Perhaps the other family members are not in the place to do this, but at least they will recognize that at least you were willing to deposit it with God. At least you were willing to trust God. Family altar is a very specific time when this can be done. It is a time to remind one and all in the home that we have a great God that we trust. It is a time to remind one and all that God is sufficient for every situation that the family might encounter.

Humble Confession

At family altar we are able to confess our sins. Do the children think that you are perfect? Have they ever heard you acknowledge sin and wrong doing and confess it to God at family altar time? Have they ever heard you pray, "God be merciful to me, a sinner. God, thank You for your undeserved kindness!"

You can be confessing that God is in control. God is in control of everything. God is God. God's management is always present. God is the HEAD of the house. God knows what He is doing. "God, thank You for Your long-before-being-angry with my prideful doing, with my personal indifference to your all wise management of my soul, situations and society.

There ought to be a containing and a restraining that comes with family altar. The benefits are huge in doing this. We are reminding the family that God is there and that God is in charge. We are reminding the family that we must go by God's Word and follow God's rules. It's good, for example, to know that God never slumbers or sleeps. How are they going to know this if we don't teach them? Remember, the average young person never reads the Bible. Many adults don't either. These truths must be communicated to the young ones (and the older ones). This can be done during family altar. The humbled heart finds God's Holy and Happy working.

Old Fashioned?

Across the country Sunday evening services are disappearing. Old fashioned, mid-week prayer meeting services are disappearing. Family worship is also disappearing. People have lost sight of a PERSONAL GOD. Doctrine is becoming an endangered species: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:2-4). We are in great danger of finding doctrine extinct. This is not good. Family altar develops and cultivates us in these needed areas of development and discernment.

Reverence and Respect

Family altar ought to develop proper manners. We need to help one another to STOP and to realize that there is SOMEONE who is noble enough and great enough to demand our attention

and our respect and our reverence. We are to be teaching the young people this. This will also help the young people to reverence and respect others who are in authority over them. Family altar can be a time when young people are reminded to be respectful to policemen, teachers, and others who are in authority over them.

Family altar can develop great composure, great confidence and great competence. It gives us incentive to try. The average young person in the home is involved more or less in developing SELF WORTH. They need to be steered in the right direction. They need to understand that they do not need to have a certain sized nose or ears, etc. Their confidence and hope does not depend on such things. Their confidence does not depend on how high their IQ is or how awkward they might be physically. Their hope and sureness is to be found in God. Family altar should be pointing them in this direction. If we see this and roll up our sleeves and go after it, then we will change a whole lot of things about family altar.

It is not unreasonable to ask men and women to personally pray, is it? If you are believers, should you not pray? Are not believers supposed to pray? We are not wrong in asking of the membership: Do you pray? Do you read your Bible? Do you have family altar? [Members are supposed to be believers; believers are supposed to do these things in order to be healthy believers and growing believers.] It is not being nosy or intrusive or prying in the wrong way when we ask such things. We have every right to know if the body is healthy. If there is something wrong we want to know about it. If we need a healthy believer for some service or function, we don't want to put an unhealthy believer into that place for it will not produce the best results.

Work At It

We need to do the best we can with family altar, in light of scheduling problems that may arise. Don't purposefully make your schedule so that family altar cannot work. Your motivation would be wrong in so doing. We need to learn to roll with variations in scheduling and various things that come up. It is not as simple as it might be if we lived on a farm. The family would work in the field and then come in for supper, etc. Life is not always that simple. In our society it is sometimes hard to get the children all together. As children get older and involved with more activities, it gets more difficult. But keep working at it, and don't let the activities be an excuse not to have family altar.

When the children are little, you need to keep it very simple. Share real simple things. If you have six children in the family and one is very little, then you need to cater to this within reason. Try to handle this properly and relax with it. You can't go and spend 35 minutes with three 3 year olds. They can't sit that long and their attention span is not that long. You need to pace yourself in light of where the children are at. Three minutes well done is worth 30 minutes that doesn't go anywhere. The issue is not LENGTH of time but QUALITY of time. You need to hit the target, locking on to God and His truth in some area of thought.

It is not easy today to find a prescribed time every day (6:00 a.m. in the morning or 6:00 p.m. at night). It does not always work that way. Don't get upset with that. You need to be flexible. Just shoot for your target. Seek to have family altar whenever possible.

Be Flexible

Have personal prayer times. We need to personally pray and we need to personally trust God. Thus we are prepared to exercise our heart in the direction of family altar. There are times when you can and there are times when it will not work out. It might be time for family altar and all the children might be asleep! They all might be totally exhausted. If this is the case, it is not necessary

to wake them all up. We need to roll with these things. Use your common sense. If the Mother has been up all night with the baby and the baby is fussy and sick and crying, then this might not be the ideal time for family altar. Learn to adapt and adjust. Exercise good common sense which is to be governed by Biblical sense.

At the same time make sure you do not lose your motivation and your direction. Don't lose what you are doing and why you do it. If you lose these things, then this is not good.

Easy Does It

Keep things simple during family altar. Don't sit down and have 35 dictionaries with you. There could be a place to do this in your own time of Bible study, but family altar is not the place.

What are you after? Know what your target is and shoot for it. It does not have to be long: 5 minutes or 3 minutes or 10 minutes WELL DONE is worth 40 minutes or 90 minutes which does not do the job. Read God's Word devotionally. You don't have to read all the hard places in the Bible. Read easy places. Read them again and again. Read the Psalms. Read the gospels. Keep it simple. Read simple things. Don't look to read passages that you don't understand. Read the passages that you do understand (at least somewhat) and that are meaningful to you.

Take for example the verse we looked at earlier. "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, **that ye BELIEVE on him whom he hath sent**" (John 6:29). This is a simple statement. What does God require of us? TO BELIEVE! This is clear. You can know this. You don't have to read all of John chapter 6. You may not even understand most of what is in John chapter 6. But at least you can get something out of verse 29. What does God ask of us? He asks us to BELIEVE! This makes for a great quiet time and for a great family altar time. God has told us to BELIEVE HIM! Let's do this! You can encourage your family to pray in this way: "Let's pray that God would help us to understand what it is to believe, why believing is so important and for God to encourage the exercise of our belief." This is a great prayer request.

If we choose passages that we don't even understand, then one of the children might say, "Dad, what does that mean?" Dad is not able to help him. Or, Dad could give a wrong explanation of the passage, explaining that it means something when it does not mean that at all! "I think it means this." But come to find out that it does not mean that at all. For example, in the book of Proverbs it says, "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). One could easily go and say, "You need to go and show yourself friendly." But if you really understood the verse you would realize that the person going around showing himself friendly is the wrong kind of guy. It is not describing good conduct, but bad conduct.

Read and note things that are ready and ripe for you. Why? Because God will stamp that which you believe as you rest on His Word. You might be sincere and have an earnest desire to explain something in light of what you think it means, but does this cause God to override what it really means and make it work? Certainly not. God does not and cannot change His Word. He cannot change the prescription, just because you may misunderstand it or misuse it.

K.I.S.S. [Keep It Simple Stupid]

Thus it is better to stick with things that are simple, especially with young people and children involved. Hit your target. Emphasize basis truths: GOD IS FAITHFUL! GOD IS TRUE! GOD CANNOT LIE! GOD IS LOVE! IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD? "We can trust God

tonight, because He neither slumbers nor sleeps." GOD IS AN VERY PRESENT HELP IN TIME OF TROUBLE!

Don't decide to go through the book of Isaiah, vowing before God to read at least one chapter of night until all 66 chapters are finished. This is not likely the way to have family altar. Instead, take the simple truths (some of which can be found in Isaiah, such as Isaiah 41:10; 53:6; etc.) and make them WORK (put them to work) for you and for your family.

Don't say, "We must finish chapter 28 of Isaiah." You are putting yourself under an unnecessary burden by doing this.

Don't say, "We must spend 45 minutes in family altar, not one second more, not one second less." LIFE will not afford you this kind of precision.

Exercise TRUTH in the realm that you understand, and look for God's working in God's will, for His glory, on account of His great Name.

MAKE TIME!

TAKE TIME!

WATCH THE TIME! (Don't go too long!)

Vary the content. Be flexible.

May your family altar contribute to the well being of one and all. May your family altar encourage the local assembly of believers. May the local assembly of believers encourage your family altar.

Doctrine Demands Obedience (2 Tim. 4:3-4)
Obedience Produces Biblical Behavior
Biblical Behavior Expresses
A Healthy Fear of God
A Healthy Fear of God Produces Worship
The Prayerful Exercise of One's Person
Makes for the Personal Knowing
of One's God and the Enjoyment of the Gospel

In his seventeenth year my father passed through a crisis of religious experience, and from that day he openly and decidedly followed the Lord Jesus.

Every morning and evening, even to the last day of his life, a portion of Scripture was read, his voice was heard softly joining in the psalm, and his lips breathed the morning and evening prayer, falling in sweet benediction on the heads of all his children, many of them far away over all the earth, but all meeting him there at the throne of grace. None of us can remember than any day ever passed without this. No hurry for market, no rush to business, no arrival of friends or guests, no trouble or sorrow, no joy or excitement ever prevented our kneeling around the family altar while our father led our prayers to God, and offered himself and his children there.

And this example was blessed to others as well as to ourselves. Years after, the worst woman in the village of Torthorwald, then leading an immoral life but since changed by the grace of God, was known to declare that the only thing that kept her from despair and from the Hell of the suicide was when, in the dark winter nights, she crept up underneath my father's window and heard him pleading in family worship that God would convert "the sinner from the error of his wicked ways and

polish him as a jewel for the Redeemer's crown." "I felt," she said, "that I was a burden on that good man's heart, and I knew that God would not disappoint *him*. That thought kept me out of Hell, and at last led me to the only Saviour."

[From *Thirty Years With South Sea Cannibals*, the Autobiography of John G. Paton, Moody Press (Revised Edition), pages 14-15]

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 by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. *Deuteronomy 6:6-7*

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. *Ephesians 6:4*

Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. *Genesis 18:18-19*.

Based upon Pastor George Parsons' Bible Training Hour message of 1/2/94 dealing with the subject of personal devotions and the family altar.
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The Middletown Bible Church, 349 East Street Middletown, CT 06457 (860) 346-0907