

## Family Worship

**O** COME, LET US WORSHIP and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker." Psalm 95:6. Could not this call to worship be sounded today throughout the land? The center of all religious teaching is the home, and the center of the home is the family altar, or family worship. A family without the prayer circle is like a family living without a roof over their heads. When the storms come and the winds blow and the rains fall and beat upon that house, there is no protection.

According to the Bible, daily prayer and sacrifice were offered in patriarchal times. This was true also during the time of Christ when a lamb was offered each morning and each evening with the prayers of God's people. Wherever Abraham pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained, and many strangers passing by were reminded of the true God.

"In a sense the father is the priest of the household, laying upon the family altar the morning and evening sacrifice. But the wife and children should unite in prayer, and join in the song of praise. In the morning before he leaves home for his daily labor, let the father gather his children about him, and, bowing before God, commit them to the care of the Father in heaven. When the cares of the day are past, let the family unite in offering grateful prayer and raising the song of praise in acknowledgment of divine care during the day."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 392.

Parents stand in the place of God to their children; they represent God to them and they are responsible to God for them. Family worship, rightly conducted, is a period of instruction appropriate to the age of those taking part. It is a spiritual school, which helps to fix the habits of life in reverence and faith. Christian parents will see to it that family worship is established and maintained in their homes; other-

wise the knowledge and practice of religion will gradually die out.

"If ever there was a time when every house should be a house of prayer, it is now. . . . And yet . . . some who profess to be Christians have no family worship. They do not honor God in the home; they do not teach their children to love and fear Him. Many have separated themselves so far from Him that they feel under condemnation in approaching Him. They cannot 'come boldly unto the throne of grace,' 'lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,' Hebrews 4:16; 1 Timothy 2:8."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 42.

You know, radio friends, by sincere, earnest prayer, parents could make a hedge about their children. To leave them the habit of daily worship in the home is worth more than to leave them a good bank account, property, or a college education.

A Japanese girl, studying in an American college, had seen a great deal of America, but the thing she longed most of all to see was the inside of a Christian home. When the holidays came, she was invited to spend the Christmas vacation in the home of one of her classmates. She had a delightful time, and as she was about to leave at the end of the vacation, the mother asked, "How do you like the way we Americans live?"

"Oh, I love it! Your home is beautiful, but," she said with a far-away look in her eyes, "there is one thing I miss, and that makes your home seem queer to me. I have been with you to your church and I have seen you worship your God there, but I have missed the God in your home. You know, in Japan, we have a god shelf in every home, and the gods are right there in the house with us. Do not Americans worship their God in their homes?"

Neglect of family worship in Christian homes is commonly due to one or all of three things: (1) lack of time, (2) lack of interest, (3) consciousness of unforgiven sins.

Now, friends, just think this over and see if it is not so. Take that first cause, lack of time. Family worship is begun and carried on for a while. Then someone oversleeps; Father has

to rush to work; Mother is hurried and worried; the children must get off to school; time must be saved; breakfast must be served, for we cannot go without eating, even though we must rush through it. We say, "Well, I am sorry, but we shall have no time for prayer this morning." It isn't long before this same thing happens again, and then again, until finally morning worship is forgotten.

You say you are too busy? Suppose I ask you a question. If you knew that your children would be sick through the neglect of family prayer, would you have it? Of course, you would. If one child were smitten down with fever each morning that you neglected family worship, would you have it? O yes, of course, you would surely have it then. And if there were a law that you would be fined five dollars if you did not meet for prayer each day, would you have family worship then? Many people would.

Well then, friends, when we profess to be children of God, it is surely a poor excuse to say that we have no time or opportunity for family prayer, if we would have it for such simple reasons as those we have just mentioned.

Take the second cause, lack of interest. This may be because of the way in which family worship is conducted. The family drifts together; the chapter is chosen willy-nilly with no thought or plan; long prayers are made. The whole program becomes distasteful. With no care or thought, family worship may become of little interest.

Take the third cause, consciousness of unforgiven sins. You know very well, friends, if we are not living right before God, it is hard to pray. When we cherish some sin or indulgence because we do not want to give it up, it condemns us. Sometimes we may feel too guilty to appear before God in family worship. Perhaps we have stumbled and failed and become discouraged. In such a condition, how can we approach God with our children in worship and make it more than a mummery? If our children know that we are not living according to the light of Heaven revealed in the Word of God, how can we conduct family worship with benefit to them and to our-

selves? This, without doubt, is one of the chief causes of neglect of family worship today.

If we do not have family prayer in our homes, let us heed the Scriptural exhortations: "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." John 16:24.

The remedy for lack of time is system. It is not that we lack time. All of us have 24 hours a day, but we do not all plan and use our time aright. Lack of system in the home is responsible for more ills than almost any other lack.

In reference to the second need, the remedy for lack of interest is to put brains into our religious exercises and teaching. It will take effort and planning to make family worship interesting; but, friends, it's worth it. Make the service short, vary it, have different ones read on succeeding days, have the children take part. Some days, just one child may pray, or Father or Mother may pray. Other days, have all join in the Lord's Prayer. Give thought to these things and there will be continued interest. Make song a part of the service, perhaps just one verse of some old hymn. Learn the songs by heart so there will be no delay in looking them up in books.

I look back to morning worship as the brightest spot in boyhood's memories. Father led worship in our home. When he was not there—and he was gone much—Mother led out. Then, as we boys grew older, we were given responsibility for the morning worship. I am sure that I owe more to family worship than to any other factor in early life. My conversion can be traced to family worship. There I learned to love God and the Word of God. There, as Father explained the Bible to us, I learned more about it than in any studies or classes I have taken since. Remember, the Good Book says: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6.

Our morning worship was usually right after breakfast. Father would sit down in his big chair and we would all gather around. And I can still hear those words of the morning hymn:

“Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee.”

—*Reginald Heber.*

And then I can hear the evening song as we gathered together while the shades of night were falling:

“Day is dying in the west;  
Heaven is touching earth with rest;  
Wait and worship while the night  
Sets her evening lamps alight  
Through all the sky.”

—*Mary A. Lathbury.*

Yes, I can remember those days. And, better still, I am enjoying them right now with my own children around my big chair.

Last of all, let us mention the remedy for the third reason why family worship is often not held—condemnation in the heart. The remedy for that is to come to Christ and receive His forgiveness. Parents, we must be right with God; we cannot be hypocrites and draw our children to heaven. We must believe Christ’s promises: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28. “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” John 6:37. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9.

Every night we may know that our sins are forgiven. Every morning we may rise with joy and a free soul. Then that joy will be manifest in our homes, and the greatest cause for the neglect of family worship will be removed.

Teach the tiny tots to pray. Let their earliest speech contain the name of Jesus. Here are some suggestive prayers for little ones:

“Jesus, bless a little child;  
Teach my heart the way to Thee;  
Make it gentle, good, and mild;  
Loving Saviour, care for me.

Amen.”

“Dear Father, I am glad you know  
The way my footsteps ought to go.  
Help me to walk as Jesus walked,  
And always talk the way He talked.  
Amen.”

Our prayers are to be simple. The Lord's Prayer is given to us as a model. Of its 65 words, 48 are words of one syllable, 15 of two syllables, and only two of three syllables. Of the 65 words, 58 are of Anglo-Saxon origin, which compose nine tenths of the daily speech of the common people. Yes, let us be simple in our prayers in family worship. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:3.

It may be that the home is divided, and either the father or the mother does not take part in the worship. Still it should be held by the believing member of the household. You may never know what good it will do.

As an example, a friend writes that his father was not a Christian; his mother became one. She determined to hold family worship with the children. The father left the house night after night whenever the mother took up the Holy Book. But one evening he said to himself: What's the sense of my going off just because Mother wants to play this silly game every night? It's my house. I'll just stay here and read the paper. So he hid himself behind his newspaper, while the mother gathered the children to her knee, read a Bible story, and then with them knelt down and prayed.

The father paid no attention until his boy began to pray a simple short prayer that ended: “Bless Papa, and help him to know the truth, and to keep the Sabbath. For Jesus' sake. Amen.” Father got up and tiptoed to the door, but he had not closed it behind him before he heard his baby girl lisp: “An' bless Papa, an' help him to keep de troof.”

He wandered around outdoors until bedtime. The next day his mind was even more disturbed. At worship that evening he laid down his paper and listened; and when it came to his boy's prayer, that father slipped to his knees for the first time

in his life; but he was up before they saw him. The next day was the Sabbath. After the morning chores were done, Father put on his best clothes, and to his wife's inquiry replied, "Why, my dear, I thought I'd go to Sabbath school with you, if you don't mind." No, she didn't mind, and for years thereafter that man held important positions in the church and did a great work for God.

There are families where either the father or the mother has never yielded to Christ, but the other one has held worship with the children; and today those children are rejoicing in Christian experience and holding high positions in the work of the church.

So, Mother or Father, don't fail those children; but, most of all, don't fail the Lord Jesus. May it be true in your home and in mine that every morning will see the children gathered about the Holy Word, and every evening breathe a benediction of prayer. We need it, the children need it, our dear ones need it, the times need it, the state needs it, our country needs it, the world needs it.

And so, fathers and mothers everywhere, hear the word of the Lord: "O come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker." Psalm 95:6.