



"O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together" (Psalm 34:3).

The Family Altar

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Topic: Family; Prayer.

A family altar will alter a family! It is desirable for us to have separation of the church and state, but a separation of the church and the home is tragic.

Our culture has made the church building the center of religious observances. Ancient people of God recognized the importance of the home in their spiritual lives. One of the most solemn ceremonies in ancient Judaism, the Passover, was held in the home. Their temple was the center of religion, for there they thought the presence of God dwelt; however, their homes were religious centers also. Religious instruction took place in the home day by day, as God had purposed that it should.

To speak of the Word of God when one lies down, rises up, sits in his house, or walks in the way (Deuteronomy 6:7) necessitates a time when God is given special thought in the home. Our way of doing that is, in part, by having a time when the family gathers and meets with God. We call that a "family altar." Family worship is essential to the spiritual prosperity of your family.

I. BASIS OF A FAMILY ALTAR (Deuteronomy 6:4-6)

A. A personal relationship with God is essential to a family altar.

Deuteronomy 6:4 recites the Jewish Shema, which says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." Notice the pronoun "our." The same persons who call Him "our God" are the ones who are to teach the things of God to their children. The parents must have a personal relationship with God

before they begin to teach their children. The Word of God must be in their hearts before they can share it with another. Could that be the reason for the neglect of a family worship time in so many homes?

B. A love for God is essential to a family altar. To *"love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might"* is sure to produce a testimony for Him in the home (Deuteronomy 6:5). When Jude commanded, *"Keep yourselves in the love of God"* (Jude 21), he did not mean we could keep God loving us by what we do. He rather meant that we should continue to be conscious of the love of God and walk in its blessings. The person who loves God will want his family to know the love of God also.

C. A possession of the Word of God is essential to a family altar. When God's Word is in the heart of the parent (as commanded in Deuteronomy 6:6), it will be shared with the children. The Holy Scriptures will guide a person's inner motives, his actions, and his desires (Deuteronomy 11:18). Look at your own life. Is there a personal relationship with God, a personal love to God, and a personal possession of the Word of God? If so, you have the prerequisites for a family altar in your home. If not, seek the Lord for them.

II. DEMAND FOR A FAMILY ALTAR (Deuteronomy 6:7)

A. The purpose of the family altar is to teach children the things of God. It is more than just teaching. There must be diligent teaching. That is how they learn *"the difference between the holy and profane, and . . . to discern between the unclean and the clean"* (Ezekiel 44:23).

Psalm 78:1-8 commands each generation to receive the report of the work of God from the previous generation and pass it on to the following generation. The purpose of such instruction is *"that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be . . . a stubborn and rebellious generation . . . that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God"* (Psalm 78:7, 8). If you want your children to walk with God, have a family altar to teach them about God.

B. The leader of the family altar is the head of the family. God speaks of *"thou"* and *"thy,"* both forms of the personal pronoun "you." Both the bishop and deacon are to have exemplary home lives in which the children are taught to obey the principles of godly living (1 Timothy 3:4, 12). The Christian man who would have his home be what it ought to be

must follow that example. The husband of the home should take the lead in family worship. If he refuses to do so, the wife must do so for the sake of the children.

C. The importance of the family altar is such that it must be followed "*diligently*." The principle of Ecclesiastes 9:10 must apply here: "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. "Parents must be "not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord"* (Romans 12:11) in the guarding of a family worship time each day. Among the many things you do as a family, few will be as impressive and contribute as much as a family altar.

D. The method of the family altar is just to talk of God. Read the Bible that God may speak to you. Engage in prayer that you may speak to God. Review the day's blessings that you may speak each to the other about the work of God. Recount your blessings. Share your needs. Remember the promises of God and you will enjoy your family worship.

E. The constancy of the family altar is to be maintained. Have a set hour when you meet God with your family, but do more than that. In all the activities of the day (sitting, walking, resting, rising) make time to speak of God. Thus you can recognize His hand upon you in all circumstances. It is an excellent way to teach your children and to train yourself to "*pray without ceasing*" (I Thessalonians 5:17).

F. The purpose of the family altar is spiritual growth. God desires that "*children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land*" (Deuteronomy 31:13). God says the family altar is a good place to teach your children. It is a part of the injunction, "*Train up a child in the way he should go*" (Proverbs 22:6). Parents, have a family worship time with your children. They will remember it the rest of their lives.

The adults profit from family worship also. The young adult who does not have children will profit. The older adult whose children are gone will profit. Have a family altar for the good of your own. soul.

III. INFLUENCE OF A FAMILY ALTAR (Deuteronomy 6:8, 9)

A. A family altar can influence the works of your hands. Psalm 128:2 says that you shall "*eat the labour of thine hands.*" That means that you will receive according to your deeds. Good acts will bring blessings; evil acts will bring judgment. But if the Word of God is bound "*for a sign upon thine hand,*" it will keep you from evil. You can join fellow believers

in praying with honest hearts. *"Establish thou the work of our hands upon us"* (Psalm 90:17), and God will bless you. It will make a difference in your conduct if you meet God each day with your family in worship.

B. A family altar can influence the thoughts of your mind. The lesson text speaks of Holy Scripture being as *"frontlets between thine eyes."* Surely that means more than wearing it as decoration or as a mere piece of jewelry. It means that the Bible will govern what you look upon. Since the eyes are the windows of the soul, it will determine what you think. The influence of meeting God daily will keep you looking at what is right and rejecting what is wrong (Proverbs 4:25). Try it!

C. A family altar can influence what enters your house. When the Word of God is written upon *"the posts of thy house,"* it will keep some things out and let other things in. It will govern what publications are brought into the house, what programs are watched on television, and what beverages are permitted to be drunk; it will govern the family for good.

Please do not take this passage so literally that its spiritual application is missed. One may wear phylacteries on the hand and between the eyes, and even have portions of Scripture on the doors and gates of his house, and still be estranged from God. But when the Bible teaching governs one's eyes, hands, and home, godliness will reign there.

IV. PROTECTION OF A FAMILY ALTAR (Deuteronomy 6:10-13)

A. A family altar will keep you from forgetting God. None of us are likely to forget that there is a God. But we are likely to forget to look to Him during the daily pressures of life. But if we meet Him daily in family worship, we will remember Him and look to Him for daily help (Deuteronomy 8:11, 12). Then we will remember that His blessings provide for us the things that we need (Deuteronomy 8:17, 18).

B. A family altar will promote a reverent spirit toward God (Deuteronomy 6:13). When one fears the Lord, he will serve Him in sincerity and in truth and put away all those things which displease God and harm man (Joshua 24:14). A reverent spirit arising from meeting God daily in family worship will enable us to do that duty.

C. A family altar will motivate you to serve God. God requires you *"to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul"* (Deuteronomy 10:12). God accepts service done *"with reverence and godly fear"* (Hebrews 12:28). Meeting Him each day in family worship will

cultivate that spirit within you.

V. METHOD OF A FAMILY ALTAR

Many people resolve to have a family worship time, begin it, and soon drop it. Why? How can one have a consistent family worship period? Consider these suggestions.

A. Have a set time and place where you meet God with your family. You will never "have time" if you do not "set the time." Make it an appointment you will not break.

B. Magnify the Bible by reading it aloud together. Each member can have his own Bible (even little children who cannot read). One can read, the reading can be alternated, or each can read a verse around the family circle. One may read from one version and another read the same passage from another version. But make Bible reading a center of the worship.

C. Give time to prayer. Thank God for His blessings. Praise Him for His protection and provision. Petition Him for your needs. One family member may pray aloud or all may pray aloud in turn. But the important thing is to pray.

D. Deal with problems of interruption. Set a time when all the family can be together. Encourage all family members to share. (Children should be required to attend and adults encouraged to do so.) Have one person to respond to interruptions such as the telephone, the door bell, etc. Take the little children to the bathroom before you begin.

Keep on observing worship time day by day, even if some family members lose interest. That interest can be renewed. The blessings of meeting God with your family will far outweigh the problems. Have a "church in thy house" by meeting God daily in family worship.

You need to pray. Your children need praying parents. Your neighbors need praying neighbors. Your church needs praying members. Your nation needs praying citizens.

QUESTIONS

1. How will a family altar alter a family?
2. What is the basis for having a family altar in your home?
3. How can Ezekiel 44:23 relate to a family altar?
4. How does Psalm 78:7, 8 show the benefits of a family altar?
5. How could a family altar affect one's conduct?

6. How could it keep the family from forgetting God?
7. What is the best time for a family altar in your family?
8. How should you lead in family worship time?
9. How should interruptions be dealt with during family worship?
10. Will you make a commitment to God to have a family altar each day?