

A FATHER'S PRAYER

George Swinnock (1627–1673)

I PRAY that the Word of Christ may dwell richly in my heart and house so that my whole family will have their daily meals of this spiritual food. How can I expect that children who know not the God of their fathers should serve Him with perfect hearts? (1Ch 28:9). Alas! How often are their ignorant hearts full of sin—like dark cellars abounding in vermin! O that I might so talk of the Word of God in my house, when I lie down and when I rise up, that it may be written upon the posts of my house and on my gates (Deu 6:7-8). O that I may so often water the young plants in it that their first acquaintance may be acquaintance with God, and that from their childhood they may know the Holy Scriptures and be wise “unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 3:15). Though others labor to leave their children rich, let my endeavor be to leave mine godly. Lord, enable me so to teach them Your trade in their youth that they may not depart from it when they are old (Pro 22:6), that their well-led young years may be like the sweetness of a rose, whose smell remains in the dried leaves.

I pray that all the voices in my house may harmoniously sing God's praises. May they not, like trumpets and pipes, make a sound being filled only with wind, but have focused and prepared hearts when they sing and give praise. Drunkards have their songs deriding those who are good; atheists have their sonnets that dishonor the blessed God. Why should not the voice of joy and rejoicing be in the tabernacle of the righteous? (Psa 118:15). Though my house is a tabernacle and all the inhabitants in it travelers, yet our work is pleasant. O let us go merrily on and make God's statutes our songs in this house of our pilgrimage (Psa 119:54).

My sinful habits will do more harm to my family than my precepts can do good. Children are more apt to be led by the eye than the ear. Therefore, I wish that I may take heed to myself, weigh and watch over

all my words and works, not only for my own, but also for the sake of these who are under my charge. O that I might be wary in all my ways and be so serious in *spiritual* actions, so sober in *natural* actions, so righteous towards men, so devout towards my God, so faithful in every relation, and so holy and heavenly in every condition, that I would be able to say to my children and servants as Gideon to his soldiers, “Look on me, and do likewise” (Jdg 7:17).

I pray that my house may not only spend some part of every weekday, but also the whole Lord’s Day, in the service of my God. It is a special privilege granted me by the Lord for my family’s profit, wherein I may be especially helpful to my own and my household’s everlasting happiness. O that not the least part of it may be lost or profaned by any within my gate, either by worldly labor, pastimes, or idleness, but that I may be so mindful of my charge as to take care that my children forbear what my God forbids and spend that sacred day fully in sacred duties. To this end, I desire that all my household, male and female, if they are able, may appear before the Lord in public and give Him praise in His temple. In private may I sharpen the Word on them (as the mower sharpens his scythe) by going over it again and again, according to the precept of Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Lord, let my house on Your day be like Your house, employed wholly in Your worship. And let Your gracious presence so assist us in every ordinance that Your glory would fill the house.

I pray that I may manifest my love to the souls in my family by manifesting my anger against their sins. My God has told me, “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him” (Lev 19:17). If I indulge my children in unholiness, I would be bringing them up for hell. Many times, the deepest purple sins are those that are dyed in the wool of youth. O the sad aches that many have when they are old because of falls they received when they were young! Let me never, like Eli, honor my sons above my God, lest my God judge my house forever because my children make themselves vile, and I restrain them not (1Sa 3:13). Lord, let me never be so fond and foolish as to kill any in my family with soul-

damning kindness; but let my house be as Your ark, containing not only the golden pot of manna, seasonable and profitable instructions, but also Aaron's rod, appropriate reproof and correction.

I pray that I may never expose my family to Satan's suggestions by allowing them to be lazy. Let me be busy myself in my specific calling and make sure that others are diligent in their places. The lazy drone is quickly caught in the honeyed glass and killed, when the busy bee avoids that snare and danger. O that I and mine might always be so employed in the work of our God that we may have no leisure to hearken to the wicked one! Lord, since You have entrusted everyone in my house with one talent or other with which he must trade, cause me and mine to work in this world and to look for rest in the world to come.

I pray for growth in holiness and purity in my house that I may be careful to keep it in peace. Our bodies will suffer as much in fever as our souls in the flames of strife. Satan, by the grenades of contention, will hope in time to take the whole fortress. "Where strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work" (Jam 3:16). Love is the new commandment, the old commandment, and indeed all the commandments. Therefore, let love be the uniform of all in my family. Marriage fellowship is the nearest union and dearest communion in this world. The fruits of religion will thrive best if cherished by the sweet breath and warm breeze of love in this relation. Therefore, Lord, let my wife be to me as the loving hind and pleasant roe. Let me be ravished always with her love (Pro 5:19). Let us not provoke each other except to love and to good works. Let our only strife be to see who can be most active in serving Your majesty by furthering one another's eternal happiness. Enable us to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal 6:2), and to dwell together as fellow heirs of the grace of life that our prayers be not hindered (1Pe 3:7).

In a word, I pray that I may, like Cornelius, fear the Lord with all my house (Act 10:1-2) and so govern it according to God's law that all in it may be under the influence of His love and be heirs of everlasting life. Lord, be pleased to so help me in managing this weighty trust that my house may be Your house, my children Your children, and my wife

belong to the spouse of Your dear Son, so that when death gives a bill of divorce and breaks up our family, we may change our place but not our company. May we all be promoted from Your lower house of prayer to Your upper house of praise, where there is no marrying nor giving in marriage, but all are as the angels (Mat 22:30), ever pleasing, worshipping, and enjoying You the Blessed, “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:15), to Whom be glory, hearty and universal obedience, forever and ever. Amen.

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George Swinnock (1627-1673): Puritan preacher and author; born in Maidstone, Kent, England.

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