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## FAMILY WORSHIP

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## ONE CAUSE OF THE DECAY OF RELIGION IN OUR DAY

**A**ND oh, that other contentions being laid asleep, the only care and contention of all upon whom the name of our blessed Redeemer is called, might for the future be to walk humbly with their God and in the exercise of all love and meekness towards each other; to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, each one endeavoring to have his conversation<sup>1</sup> such as becometh<sup>2</sup> the Gospel; and also suitable to his place and capacity, vigorously to promote in others the practice of true religion and undefiled in the sight of God and our Father. And that in this backsliding day, we might not spend our breath in fruitless complaints of the evils of others, but may every one begin at home to reform in the first place our own hearts and ways; and then to quicken all that we may have influence upon to the same work; that if the will of God were so, none might deceive themselves by resting in and trusting to a form of godliness without the power of it and inward experience of the efficacy of those truths that are professed by them.

And verily there is one spring and cause of the decay of religion in our day, which we cannot but touch upon and earnestly urge a redress<sup>3</sup> of; and that is the neglect of the worship of God in families by those to whom the charge and conduct of them is committed. May not the gross ignorance and instability of many with the profaneness<sup>4</sup> of others be justly charged upon their parents and masters, who have not trained them up in the way wherein they ought to walk when they were young? But have neglected those frequent and solemn commands which the Lord hath laid upon them so to catechize and instruct them, that their tender years might be seasoned with the knowledge of the truth of God as revealed in the Scriptures; and also by their own omission of prayer, and other duties of religion in their families, together with the ill example of their loose conversation, have inured<sup>5</sup> them first to a neglect, and then contempt of all piety<sup>6</sup> and religion? We know this will not excuse the blindness, or wickedness of any, but certainly it will fall heavy upon those that have thus been the occasion thereof. They indeed die in their sins; but will not their blood be required of those under whose care they were, who yet permitted them to go on without warning, yea led them into the paths of destruction? And will not the diligence of Christians with respect to the discharge of these duties, in ages past, rise up in judgment against, and condemn many of those who would be esteemed such now?

We shall conclude with our earnest prayer, that the God of all grace will pour out those measures of His Holy Spirit upon us, that the profession of truth may be accompanied with the sound belief and diligent practice of it by us that His name may in all things be glorified through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From the Preface to the *Second London Baptist Confession of 1677/1689*; reprinted by and available from Chapel Library.



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<sup>1</sup> **conversation** – behavior; lifestyle.

<sup>2</sup> **becometh** – in accordance with; suitable to.

<sup>3</sup> **redress** – remedy; repair.

<sup>4</sup> **profaneness** – contempt or irreverence for that which is sacred; disrespect towards God.

<sup>5</sup> **inured** – hardened.

<sup>6</sup> **piety** – reverence for God, love of His character, and devout obedience to His will.

# A REMEDY FOR DECAYING RELIGION

Oliver Heywood (1629-1702)

**F**OR your sakes, dear Friends, I presume again to appear upon the public stage to be your faithful monitor,<sup>7</sup> to prompt you to your duty, and to promote the work of God in your souls and the worship of God in your families. And I know not how a minister can employ his time, studies, and pen better (next to the conviction and conversion of particular souls), than in pressing upon householders a care of the souls under their charge. This hath a direct tendency to public reformation. Religion begins in individuals and passeth on to relatives, and lesser spheres of relationship make up greater: churches and commonwealths consist of families. There is a general complaint of the decay of the power of godliness and inundation<sup>8</sup> of profaneness,<sup>9</sup> and not without cause. I know no better remedy than domestic piety:<sup>10</sup> did governors teach their inferiors by counsels and examples; did they severely discountenance<sup>11</sup> and restrain enormities<sup>12</sup> and zealously promote holiness and then call on God unitedly and earnestly that He would efficaciously work what they cannot effect, who can tell what a blessed alteration would follow?

In vain do you complain of magistrates and ministers, while *you* that are householders are unfaithful to your trust. You complain that the world is in a bad state: what do *you* do to mend it? Do not so much complain of others as of yourselves, and complain not so much to man as to God. Plead with Him for reformation, second<sup>13</sup> also your prayers with earnest endeavors, sweep before your own doors, act for God within your sphere. As you have more opportunity of familiarity with the inmates<sup>14</sup> of your house, so you have more authority over them from their dependence on you to influence them. And if you improve not this talent, you will have a dreadful account to give, especially as their blood will be required at your hands because their sin will be charged on your neglect.

Oh, sirs! Have you not sin enough of your own, but you must draw upon yourselves the guilt of your whole families? It is *you* that make bad times and bring down judgments on the nation. Would you rather see the agonies of your children and hear them crying amidst infernal torments, than speak a word to them for their instruction, hear them cry under your correction, or supplicate God for their salvation? Oh, cruel tigers and barbarous monsters! You may imagine yourselves to be Christians, but I cannot judge that man worthy to be a fit communicant<sup>15</sup> at the Lord's Table that maintains not the worship of God ordinarily in his family. And he deserves admonition and censure<sup>16</sup> for this sin of omission as well as for scandalous sins of commission; for he bewrays<sup>17</sup> his base hypocrisy in pretending to be a saint abroad, when he is a brute at home. For a right-bred<sup>18</sup> Christian [has respect] to all God's commandments. Such as are righteous before God "walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luk 1:6). Let these then go amongst the herd of the profane, and fare<sup>19</sup> as they do at the last, that make no conscience of family or relative godliness. Such as will not pray now will cry too late, "Lord, Lord, open to us," when the door is shut (Mat 25:11). Yea, they that now will not cry for a crumb of mercy shall in Hell cry out for a "drop of water, to quench their scorched tongues in those eternal torments" (Luk 16:22-24). To these self-destroying hypocrites, I recommend the serious consideration of Proverbs 1:24-31; Job 8:13-15; 27:8-10. O what an honor is it, that the King of Heaven gives you an admittance into His presence-chamber<sup>20</sup> with your families twice a day to confess your sins; [to] beg pardon and supplies of mercy; to give Him the glory of His goodness; and to lay your load on Him and get ease. I hope you will never be averse to it or weary of it. God forbid you should: you are not weary of meal times, if you be healthy. Know and keep these appointed times of coming to

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<sup>7</sup> **monitor** – one who warns of faults or informs of duty.

<sup>8</sup> **inundation** – a flood; an overwhelming accumulation.

<sup>9</sup> **profaneness** – contempt or irreverence for that which is sacred; particularly the use of language which implies disrespect towards God.

<sup>10</sup> **domestic piety** – reverence for God, love for His character, and obedience to His will in the home.

<sup>11</sup> **discountenance** – to view with disfavor.

<sup>12</sup> **enormities** – monstrous offenses or evils; outrages.

<sup>13</sup> **second** – support; assist.

<sup>14</sup> **inmates** – a person who lodges or dwells in the same house with another.

<sup>15</sup> **communicant** – a person who receives the Lord's Supper.

<sup>16</sup> **censure** – an expression of strong disapproval or harsh criticism.

<sup>17</sup> **bewrays** – betrays.

<sup>18</sup> **right-bred** – well-mannered and refined.

<sup>19</sup> **fare** – turn out.

<sup>20</sup> **presence-chamber** – the room into which a great person receives company.

God. If you promise to meet a person of quality at such an hour when the clock strikes, you rise up, crave pardon, and tell the company [that someone] tarries for you, you must be gone. Oh, take not more liberty with God than you would do with men, and keep your hearts continually in a frame for duty.

From "The Family Altar," *The Works of Oliver Heywood*, Vol 4, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria Publications.

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**Oliver Heywood (1629-1702):** non-Conformist Puritan divine. Ejected from his pulpit in 1622 and excommunicated, Heywood preached mainly in private homes after the Great Ejection.



"The writer has met many people who profess to be Christians, but whose daily lives differ in nothing from thousands of non-professors all around them. They are rarely, if ever, found at the prayer-meeting, they have no Family Worship, they seldom read the Scriptures, they will not talk with you about the things of God, their walk is thoroughly worldly; and yet they are quite sure they are bound for heaven! Inquire into the ground of their confidence, and they will tell you that so many years ago they accepted Christ as their Savior, and "once saved always saved" is now their comfort. There are thousands of such people on earth today, who are nevertheless, on the Broad Road, that leadeth to destruction, treading it with a false peace in their hearts and a vain profession on their lips." —*A.W Pink* (1886-1952)

## THE NATURE, WARRANT, AND HISTORY OF FAMILY WORSHIP

J.W. Alexander (1804-1859)

**F**AMILY worship, as the name imports, is the joint worship rendered to God, by all the members of one household. There is an irresistible impulse to pray for those whom we love; and not only to pray *for* them, but *with* them. There is a natural as well as a gracious prompting to pray with those who are near to us. Prayer is a social exercise. The prayer which our Lord taught His disciples bears this stamp on every petition. It is this principle which leads to the united devotions of church assemblies and which immediately manifests itself in Christian families.

If there were but two human beings upon earth, they would be drawn, if they were of sanctified hearts, to pray with one another. Here we have the fountain of domestic worship. Time was, when there were but two human beings upon earth; and we may feel assured that they offered adoration in common. This was the Family Worship of Paradise.

That religion should specially pertain to the domestic relation is not at all wonderful.<sup>21</sup> The family is the oldest of human societies: it is as old as the creation of the race. Men were not drawn together into families by a voluntary determination or social compact according to the absurd figment of infidels: they were *created* in families.

It is not our purpose to make any ingenious<sup>22</sup> efforts to force into our service the history of the Old Testament or to search for Family Worship in every age of the world. That it has existed in every age, we do not doubt; that the Old Testament was intended to communicate this fact is not so clear. But without any indulgence of fancy, we cannot fail to discern the *principle* of Family Worship appearing and reappearing as a familiar thing in the remotest periods.

**While all the church of God was in the ark, the worship was plainly Family Worship.** And after the subsiding of the waters, when "Noah builded an altar unto the Lord," it was a family sacrifice which he offered (Gen 8:20). The patriarchs seem to have left a record of their social worship at every encampment. As soon as we find Abraham in the Promised Land, we find him rearing an altar in the plain of Moreh (Gen 12:7). The same thing occurs in the vale between Hai and Bethel. Isaac not only renews the fountains which his father had opened, but keeps up his devotions, building an altar at Beersheba (Gen 26:25). Jacob's altar at Bethel was eminently a family monument

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<sup>21</sup> **wonderful** – strange; astonishing.

<sup>22</sup> **ingenious** – inventive skill and imagination.

and was signalized by his saying on the way “unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you” (Gen 35:1-2). The altar was named EL-BETH-EL. This descent of religious rites in the family line was in correspondence with that declaration of Jehovah respecting the family religion which should prevail in Abraham’s house (Gen 18:19). The service of Job in behalf of his children was a perpetual service: he “sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all; thus did Job *continually*,” or as it is in the Hebrew, “all the days” (Job 1:5). The book of Deuteronomy is full of family religion, as an example of which we may specially note the sixth chapter. The Passover, as we shall observe more fully in the sequel, was a family rite.

**Everywhere in the Old Testament good men take cognizance<sup>23</sup> of the domestic tie in their religion.** Joshua, even at the risk of being left with none but his family, will adhere to God: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Jos 24:15). David, after public services at the tabernacle where “he blessed the people in the name of the Lord,” returns “to bless his household” (2Sa 6:20). He had learned to connect God’s service with domestic bonds in the house of his father Jesse, where there was “a yearly sacrifice for all the family” (1Sa 20:6). And in the predictions of penitential<sup>24</sup> humbling, which shall take place when God pours on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, the suitability of such exercises to families, as such, is not overlooked: “The land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, apart, and their wives apart” (Zec 12:12-14).

**In the New Testament, the traces of family religion are not less obvious.** We gladly borrow the animated language of Mr. Hamilton of London and ask: “Do you envy Cornelius, whose prayers were heard, and to whom the Lord sent a special messenger to teach him the way of salvation? He was a ‘devout man, one who feared God *with all his house*, and prayed to God always,’ and who was so anxious for the salvation of his family, that he got together his kinsmen and near friends, that they might be ready to hear the apostle when he arrived and share with himself the benefit (Act 10:2, 24, 31). Do you admire Aquila and Priscilla, Paul’s ‘helpers in Christ Jesus,’ and who were so skilful in the Scriptures, that they were able to teach a young minister the way of God more perfectly? You will find that one reason for their familiarity with the Scriptures was that they had a ‘church in their house’” (Act 18:26; Rom 16:5). It was doubtless recognized in regard to spiritual as well as in regard to temporal things, that “if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1Ti 5:3). That spirit of social prayer which led disciples to join in supplication or praise, in upper chambers, in prisons, in the stocks, and on the sea beach could not but have manifested itself in daily household devotion (Act 1:13; 16:25; Gal 4:12; 2Ti 1:3).

Our records of primitive Christianity are so much distorted and corrupted by a superstitious tradition, that we need not be surprised to find a simple and spiritual service such as this, thrown into the shade by sacerdotal<sup>25</sup> rites. Yet we discern enough to teach us, that believers of the first ages were not neglectful of Family Worship.

“In general,” says Neander<sup>26</sup> in a work not published among us, “They followed the Jews, in observing the three seasons of day, nine, twelve, and three o’clock, as special hours of prayer; yet they did not use these in a legal manner, such as militated against Christian liberty; for Tertullian<sup>27</sup> says, in regard to times of prayer, ‘nothing is prescribed, except that we may pray at every hour, and in every place.’ The Christians began and closed the day with prayer. Before meals, before the bath, they prayed, for as Tertullian says, the ‘refreshment and nourishment of the soul must precede the refreshment and nourishment of the body; the heavenly before the earthly.’ When a Christian from abroad, after brotherly reception and hospitality in the house of a brother Christian, took his leave, he was dismissed from the Christian family with prayer, ‘Because,’ said they, ‘In thy brother thou hast beheld thy Lord.’ For every affair of ordinary life they made preparation by prayer.”

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<sup>23</sup> **cognizance** – recognition; conscious knowledge.

<sup>24</sup> **penitential** – expressing sorrow for sin.

<sup>25</sup> **sacerdotal** – pertaining to priests or priesthood; a reference to Romanism.

<sup>26</sup> **Johann August Wilhelm Neander** (1789-1850) – German church historian and theologian. Born a Jew, David Mendel, he was converted to Protestantism and took the name Neander (Greek for “new man”). Wrote the 6 volume *General History of the Christian Religion and the Church*.

<sup>27</sup> **Tertullian** (ca. 155-220) – early Latin father of the church. Born a pagan, converted, finally left Roman Catholicism for Montanism. Coined the term “trinity.”

To this we may add the statements of a learned man, who has made Christian antiquities his peculiar study: “Instead of consuming their leisure hours in vacant idleness, or deriving their chief amusement from boisterous<sup>28</sup> merriment, the recital of tales of superstition, or the chanting of the profane songs of the heathen, they passed their hours of repose in rational and enlivening pursuits; found pleasure in enlarging their religious knowledge, and entertainment in songs that were dedicated to the praise of God. These formed their pastime in private, and their favorite recreations at their family and friendly meetings. With their minds full of the inspiring influence of these, they returned with fresh ardor to their scenes of toil; and to gratify their taste for a renewal of these, they longed for release from labor, far more than to appease their appetite with the provisions of the table. Young women sitting at the distaff<sup>29</sup> and matrons going about the duties of the household, were constantly humming some spiritual airs.

And Jerome<sup>30</sup> relates, of the place where he lived, that one could not go into the field without hearing the ploughman at his hallelujahs, the mower at his hymns, and the vinedresser singing the Psalms of David. It was not merely at noon and in time of their meals that the primitive Christians read the word of God, and sang praises to His name. At an early hour in the morning, the family were assembled, when a portion of Scripture was read from the Old Testament, which was followed by a hymn and a prayer, in which thanks were offered up to the Almighty for preserving them during the silent watches of the night, and for His goodness in permitting them to meet in health of body and soundness of mind; and at the same time His grace was implored to defend them amid the dangers and temptations of the day, to make them faithful to every duty and enable them in all respects to walk worthy of their Christian vocation. In the evening before retiring to rest, the family again assembled, when the same form of worship was observed as in the morning with this difference: that the service was considerably protracted beyond the period which could conveniently be allotted to it in the commencement of the day. Besides all these observances, they were in the habit of rising at midnight, to engage in prayer and the singing of psalms, a practice of venerable<sup>31</sup> antiquity, and which, as Dr. Cave justly supposes, took its origin from the first times of persecution, when not daring to meet together in the day, they were forced to keep their religious assemblies in the night.”<sup>32</sup>

When we come down to the revival of evangelical piety at the Reformation, we find ourselves in the midst of such a stream of authority and example that we must content ourselves with general statements. Whatever may be the practice of their degenerate sons, the early Reformers are universally known to have set great value on family devotion. The prayers of Luther in his house are recorded with warmth by his coevals<sup>33</sup> and biographers. The churches of Germany, in a better day, were blessed with a wide prevalence of household piety. Similar facts are recorded of Switzerland, France, and Holland.

**But in no country has the light of the dwelling burned more brightly than in Scotland.** Family Worship in all its fullness was coeval with the first reformation period. Probably no land in proportion to its inhabitants ever had so many praying families; probably none has so many now. In 1647, the General Assembly<sup>34</sup> issued a *Directory for Family Worship* in which they speak as follows:

“The ordinary duties comprehended under the exercise of piety, which should be in families, when they are convened to that effect, are these: First, Prayer, and praises performed, with a special reference, as well to the condition of the Kirk<sup>35</sup> of God, and this kingdom, as to the present state of the family, and every member thereof. Next, reading of the Scriptures, with catechizing in a plain way, that the understandings of the simpler may be the better enabled to profit under the public ordinances, and they made more capable to understand the Scriptures when they are read: together with godly conferences tending to the edification of all the members in the most holy faith: as also, admonition and rebuke, upon just reasons, from those who have authority in the family. The head of the family is to take care that none of the family withdraw himself from any part of Family Worship; and seeing

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<sup>28</sup> **boisterous** – loud, noisy, and lacking restraint.

<sup>29</sup> **distaff** – a rod on which a fiber, for example, wool or flax, is wound for somebody to use when spinning by hand, or the corresponding rod on a spinning wheel.

<sup>30</sup> **Jerome** (ca. 347-419) – Biblical scholar and translator of the Latin translation of Scripture known as the Vulgate.

<sup>31</sup> **venerable** – deserving honor and respect.

<sup>32</sup> *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Lyman Coleman, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 375.

<sup>33</sup> **coevals** – contemporaries.

<sup>34</sup> **General Assembly** – the supreme court of the Church of Scotland (as of some other Presbyterian Churches), combining judicial, legislative and administrative functions.

<sup>35</sup> **Kirk** – Scottish form of “church,” derived ultimately from the NT Greek adjective *kuriakos*, “of the Lord.”

the ordinary performance of all the parts of Family Worship belongeth properly to the head of the family, the minister is to stir up such as are lazy, and train up such as are weak, to a fitness for these exercises.”

“So many as can conceive prayer, ought to make use of that gift of God; *albeit, those who are rude*<sup>36</sup> *and weaker may begin at a set form of prayer*; but so that they be not sluggish in stirring up in themselves (according to their daily necessities) the spirit of prayer, which is given to all the children of God in some measure: to which effect, they ought to be more fervent and frequent in secret prayer to God, for enabling of their hearts to conceive, and their tongues to express, convenient desires to God, for their family.” “These exercises ought to be performed in great sincerity, without delay, laying aside all exercises of worldly business or hindrances, notwithstanding the mockings of atheists and profane men; in respect of the great mercies of God to this land, and of His corrections, whereby lately He hath exercised us. And to this effect, persons of eminency, and all elders of the kirk, not only ought to stir up themselves and families to diligence herein, but also to concur effectually, that in all other families, where they have power and charge, the said exercises be conscionably performed.”

The faithfulness of private Christians in regard to this duty was made matter of inquiry by church courts. By the *Act of Assembly*, 1596, ratified December 17-18, 1638, among other provisions for the visitation of churches by presbyteries, the following questions were proposed to the heads of families:

“Do the elders visit the families within the quarter and bounds assigned to each of them? Are they careful to have the worship of God set up in the families of their bounds? The minister also is directed in his pastoral visits, to ask, ‘Whether God be worshipped in the family, by prayers, praises, and reading of the Scriptures? Concerning the behavior of servants towards God and toward s man; if they attend family and public worship? If there be catechizing in the family?’”<sup>37</sup>

When the *Confession of Faith* of the Westminster Assembly of Divines was adopted by the Church of Scotland, it contained this provision, which is still valid among ourselves: “God is to be worshipped every where, in spirit and in truth; as *in private families* daily, and in secret each one by himself.”<sup>38</sup>

In conformity with these principles, the practice of Family Worship became universal throughout the Presbyterian body in Scotland and among all the Dissenters<sup>39</sup> in England. In Scotland especially, the humblest persons in the remotest cottages, honored God by daily praise; and nothing is more characteristic of the people at this day. I have sometimes seen Family Worship in great houses,” says Mr. Hamilton, “but I have felt that God was quite as near when I knelt with a praying family on the earthen floor of their cottage. I have known of Family Worship among the reapers in a barn. It used to be common in the fishing boats upon the friths<sup>40</sup> and lakes of Scotland. I have heard of its being observed in the depths of a coal pit.”

The fathers of New England, having drunk into the same spirit, left the same legacy to their sons.

**It is highly honorable to Family Worship, as a spiritual service, that it languishes and goes into decay in times when error and worldliness make inroads upon the church.** This has been remarkably the case among some of the Protestant communities of the continent of Europe. As a general statement, it must be said that Family Worship is not so extensively practiced there; and of course, it cannot be so highly prized as in the churches of Great Britain and America. This is true even when the comparison is made between those in the respective countries whose attachment to the gospel appears to be the same. There are many, especially in France and Switzerland, who as highly value and as regularly maintain the daily worship of God as any of their brethren in England or the United States; but they constitute exceptions to the above statement, rather than any refutation of it. Christian travelers observe, however, that better views on this subject, as on the observance of the Sabbath, are decidedly on the increase in France and Switzerland and probably to a certain extent in Germany and other countries on the Continent. This is to be attributed to the translation of many excellent works from the English into French and their circulation in those countries within the last few years.

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<sup>36</sup> **rude** – ignorant; untaught.

<sup>37</sup> Recited in “Overtures of General Assembly, A.D. 1705, concerning the method of proceeding in Kirk-Sessions and Presbyteries.”

<sup>38</sup> *Confession of Faith*, Ch 21, para. 6

<sup>39</sup> **Dissenters** – persons who refuse to accept the authority of, or conform to, the laws of an established church. The term *Dissenters* was commonly used in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England, especially after passage of the *Toleration Act in 1689*, to denote groups who separated from the Church of England.

<sup>40</sup> **friths** – a narrow inlet of the sea.

From what has been said, it is manifest that the universal voice of the Church, in its best periods, has been in favor of Family Worship. The reason of this has also become apparent. It is a service due to God in regard to His bountiful and gracious relation to families as such, rendered necessary by the wants, temptations, dangers, and sins of the family state; and in the highest degree fit and right, from the facilities afforded for maintaining it by the very condition of every household.

From *Thoughts on Family Worship*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

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**J. W. Alexander (1804-1859):** eldest son of Archibald Alexander, the first professor of Princeton Theological Seminary. Attended both Princeton College and Princeton Seminary, later teaching at both institutions. His first love, however, was the pastorate, and he labored in churches in Virginia, New Jersey, and New York until his death in 1859.



## WHAT GOD IS TO FAMILIES

Thomas Doolittle (1630-1707)

**PROPOSITION 1: God is the Founder of all families: therefore families should pray unto Him**—The household society usually is of these three combinations: husband and wife, parents and children, masters or servants: though there may be a family where all these are not, yet take it in its latitude,<sup>41</sup> and all these combinations are from God. The institution of husband and wife is from God (Gen 2:21-24), and of parents and children, and masters and servants. And the authority of one over the other and the subjection of the one to the other is instituted by God and founded in the law of nature, which is God’s law. The persons, singly considered, have not their beings only from God, but the very being of this society is also from Him. And as a single person is therefore bound to devote himself to the service of God and pray unto Him, so a household society is therefore bound jointly to do the same because a society it is from God. And hath God appointed this society only for the mutual comfort of the members thereof or of the whole, and not also for His own glory, even from the whole? And doth that household society live to God’s glory that do not serve Him and pray unto Him? Hath God given authority to the one to command and rule and the other a charge to obey only in reference to worldly things and not at all to spiritual? Only in things pertaining to the world and in nothing to things pertaining to God? Can the comfort of the creature be God’s ultimate end? No: it is His own glory. Is one, by authority from God and order of nature, *paterfamilias*,<sup>42</sup> “the master of the family,” so called in reference to his servants, as well as to his children, because of the care he should take of the souls of servants and of their worshipping God with him as well as of his children? And should he not improve this power that God hath given him over them all, for God and the welfare of all their souls in calling them jointly to worship God and pray unto Him? Let reason and religion judge.

**PROPOSITION 2: God is the Owner of our families; therefore they should pray unto Him**—God being our absolute Owner and Proprietor, not only by reason of the supereminency<sup>43</sup> of His nature, but also through the right of creation giving us our being and all we have, we ourselves and all that is ours (we and ours being more His than our own) are unquestionably bound to lay out ourselves for God, wherein we might be most useful for our Owner’s interest and glory. Whose are your families, if not God’s then? Will you disclaim God as your Owner? If you should, yet in some sense, you are His still, though not by resignation and wholly devoting of yourselves to Him. Whose would you have your families to be—God’s own or the devil’s own? Hath the devil any title to your families? And shall your families serve the devil, that hath no title to you either of creation, preservation, or redemption? And will you not serve God, that by all this hath a title to you and an absolute, full propriety in you?

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<sup>41</sup> **latitude** – extent; full range.

<sup>42</sup> **paterfamilias** – a man who is the head of a household or the father of a family.

<sup>43</sup> **supereminency** – superiority above all others.



If you will say your families are the devil's, then serve him. But if you say they are God's, then serve Him. Or will you say, "We are God's, but we will serve the devil?" If you do not *say* so, yet if you *do* so, is it not as bad? Why are you not ashamed to do that, which you are ashamed to speak out and tell the world what you do? Speak, then, in the fear of God. If your families, as such, be God's own, is it not reasonable that you should serve Him and pray unto Him?

**Proposition 3: *God is the Master and Governor of your families***—therefore, as such, they should serve Him in praying to Him. If He be your Owner, He is your Ruler too: and doth He not give you laws to walk by and obey, not only as you are particular persons, but as you are a combined society? (Eph 5:25-33; 6:1-10; Col 3:19-25; 4:1) Is God, then, the Master of your family, and should not then your family serve Him? Do not subjects owe obedience to their governors? "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is my fear?" (Mal 1:6) Where, indeed? Not in prayerless, ungodly families.

**Proposition 4: *God is the Benefactor of your families***—therefore, they should serve God in praying to Him and praising of Him. God doth not do you good and give you mercies only as individual persons, but also as a conjunct<sup>44</sup> society. Is not the continuance of the master of the family, not only a mercy to himself, but to the whole family also? Is not the continuance of the mother, children, and servants in life, health, and being, a mercy to the family? That you have an house to dwell together and food to eat together—do not you call these *family-mercies*? And do not these call aloud in your ears and to your consciences to give praises to your bountiful Benefactor together and to pray together for the continuance of these and the grant of more as you shall need them? It would be endless to declare how many ways God is a Benefactor to your families conjunctly; and you are shameless, if you do not conjunctly praise Him for His bounty. Such an house is rather a sty for swine than a dwelling-house for rational creatures.

May not God call out to such prayerless families, as to them in Jeremiah 2:31? "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?" Hath God been forgetful of you? Speak, ye ungodly, prayerless families. Hath God been forgetful of you? No! Every morsel of bread [which] you eat tells you, God doth not forget you. Every time [that] you see your table spread and food set on, you see God doth not forget you. "Why, then," saith God, "will not this family come at me? When you have food to put into your children's mouths—when they do not cry for bread, [so that] you are constrained to say, 'I would, my poor hungry child! I would, but I have it not!'—Why then will you not come at me? Live together and eat together at my cost and care and charge, and yet be whole months and never come at me? And that your children have reason, raiment, limbs, not born blind, nor of a monstrous birth, and a thousand ways besides have I done you good," may God say, "Why then will you live whole *years* together and never together come at me? Have you found one more able or more willing to do you good? That you never can. Why then are you so unthankful as not to come at me?"

You see, when God is a Benefactor to a people (and there is the same reason for families) and they do not serve Him, what monstrous wickedness it is! God hath kept you all safe in the night, and yet in the morning you do not say, "Where is the Lord that did preserve us? Come, come, let us give joint praises to Him!" God hath done you and your families good so many years; and yet you do not say, "Where is the Lord that hath done such great things for us? Come! Let us acknowledge His mercy together." God hath carried you through affliction and sickness in the family: the plague hath been in the house, and yet you live—the smallpox and burning fevers have been in your houses, and yet you are alive—your conjugal companion<sup>45</sup> hath been sick and recovered, children nigh to death, and yet restored—and for all this you do not say, "Where is the Lord that kept us from the grave and saved us from the pit? That we are not rotten among the dead!" And yet you do not pray to nor praise this your wonderful Benefactor together. Let the *very* walls within which these ungrateful wretches live be astonished at this! Let the very beams and pillars of their houses tremble! And let the very girders of the floors on which they tread and walk be horribly afraid! That such as dwell in such an house together go to bed before they go to prayer together! Let the earth be *amazed*, that the families which the Lord doth nourish and maintain are rebellious and unthankful! Being worse than the very ox that knoweth his owner and of less understanding than the very ass (Isa 1:2-3).

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<sup>44</sup> **conjunct** – joined together; united.

<sup>45</sup> **conjugal companion**—spouse; husband or wife.

From what hath been said, I reason in this manner: if God be the *Founder, Owner, Governor, and Benefactor* of families, then families are jointly to worship God and pray unto Him.

From "How May the Duty of Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family?"  
*Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate*, Vol 2, Richard Owen Roberts, Publisher.

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**Thomas Doolittle (1630-1707):** converted as a young man after reading Richard Baxter's *The Saints' Rest*; a gifted writer and preacher and one of the best-known Puritans of his day. Born at Kidderminster.



## MOTIVES FOR FAMILY WORSHIP

**J. Merle D'Aubigne (1794-1872)**

*"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*—*Joshua 24:15*

*"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"*—*Numbers 23:10*

**W**E have said, my brethren, on a former occasion, that if we would die His death, we must live His life. It is true that there are cases in which the Lord shows His mercy and His glory to men who are already lying on the death-bed, and says to them, as to the thief on the cross, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luk 23:43). The Lord still gives the Church similar examples from time to time for the purpose of displaying His sovereign power by which, when He is pleased to do so, He can break the hardest hearts and convert the souls most estranged<sup>46</sup> to show that all depends on His grace, and that He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy. Yet these are but rare exceptions on which you can not rely absolutely; and if you wish, my dear hearers, to die the Christian's death, you must live the Christian's life. Your heart must be truly converted to the Lord; truly prepared for the kingdom; and trusting only in the mercy of Christ, desirous of going to dwell with Him. Now, my brethren, there are various means by which you can be made ready in life to obtain at a future day a blessed end. It is on one of the most efficacious<sup>47</sup> of these means that we wish to dwell today. This mean<sup>48</sup> is Family Worship; that is, the daily edification which the members of a Christian family may mutually enjoy. "As for me and my house," said Joshua to Israel, "we will serve the Lord" (Jos 24:15). We wish, my brethren, to give you the motives which should induce us to make this resolution of Joshua and the directions necessary to fulfill it.

### **WHY FAMILY WORSHIP?**

**1. To bring glory to God:** But, my brethren, if the love of God be in your hearts, and if you feel that being bought with a price, you ought to glorify God in your bodies and spirits, which are His, where do you love to glorify Him rather than in your families and in your houses? You love to unite with your brethren in worshipping Him publicly in the church; you love to pour out your souls before Him in your closets. Is it only in the presence of that being with whom God has connected you for life and before your children that you can not think of God? Is it, then, only, that you have no blessings to a scribe?<sup>49</sup> Is it, then, only, that you have no mercies and protection to implore? You can speak of every thing when with them; your conversation is upon a thousand different matters; but your tongue and your heart can not find room for one word about God! You will not look up as a family to Him who is the true Father of your family; you will not converse with your wife and your children about that Being who will one day perhaps be the only Husband of your wife, the only Father of your children! It is the Gospel that has formed domestic society. It did not exist before it; it does not exist without it. It would, therefore, seem to be the

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<sup>46</sup> **estranged** – alienated; separated; turned from kindness to hostility.

<sup>47</sup> **efficacious** – having the power to produce a desired effect.

<sup>48</sup> **mean** – method by which something is accomplished.

<sup>49</sup> **ascribe** – to attribute as to a cause.

duty of that society, full of gratitude to the God of the Gospel, to be peculiarly consecrated to it. And yet, my brethren, how many couples, how many families there are, nominally<sup>50</sup> Christian, and who even have some respect for religion, where God is never named! How many cases there are in which immortal souls that have been united have never asked one another who united them, and what their future destiny and objects are to be! How often it happens that, while they endeavor to assist each other in every thing else, they do not even think of assisting each other in searching for the one thing needful, in conversing, in reading, in praying, with reference to their eternal interests! Christian spouses! Is it in the flesh and for time alone that you are to be united? Is it not in the spirit and for eternity also? Are you beings who have met by accident, whom another accident, death, is soon to separate? Do you not wish to be united by God, in God, and for God? Religion would unite your souls by immortal ties! But do not reject them; draw them, on the contrary, tighter every day, by worshipping together under the domestic roof. Voyagers on the same vessel converse of the place to which they are going; and will not you, fellow-travelers to an eternal world, speak together of that world, of the route which leads to it, of your fears and your hopes? “For many walk,” says St. Paul, “Of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phi 3:18); but “our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phi 3:20).

**2. To protect your children from sin:** But if it be your duty to be engaged with reference to God in your houses for your own sakes, ought you not to be so engaged for the sakes of those of your households whose souls have been committed to your care, and especially for your children? You are greatly concerned for their prosperity, for their temporal happiness; but does not this concern make your neglect of their eternal prosperity and happiness still more palpable? Your children are young trees entrusted to you; your house is the nursery where they ought to grow, and you are the gardeners. But, oh! Will you plant those tender and precious saplings in a sterile and sandy soil? Yet this is what you are doing, if there be nothing in your house to make them grow in the knowledge and love of their God and Savior. Are you not preparing for them a favorable soil, from which they can derive sap and life? What will become of your children in the midst of all the temptations that will surround them and draw them into sin? What will become of them in these troublous times, in which it is so necessary to strengthen the soul of the young man by the fear of God, and thus to give that fragile bark<sup>51</sup> the ballast needed for launching it upon the vast ocean?

Parents! If your children do not meet with a spirit of piety in your houses, if, on the contrary, your pride consists in surrounding them with external gifts, introducing them into worldly society, indulging all their whims, letting them follow their own course, you will see them grow vain, proud, idle, disobedient, impudent, and extravagant! They will treat you with contempt; and the more your hearts are wrapped up in them, the less they will think of you. This is seen but too often to be the case; but ask yourselves if you are not responsible for their bad habits and practices; and your conscience will reply that you are; that you are now eating the bread of bitterness which you have prepared for yourself. May you learn thereby how great has been your sin against God in neglecting the means which were in your power for influencing their hearts; and may others take warning from your misfortune, and bring up their children in the Lord! Nothing is more effectual in doing this than an example of domestic piety. Public worship is often too vague and general for children, and does not sufficiently interest them; as to the worship of the closet, they do not yet understand it. A lesson learned by rote, if unaccompanied by any thing else, may lead them to look upon religion as a study, like those of foreign languages or history. Here as everywhere, and more than elsewhere, example is more effectual than precept. They are not merely to be taught out of some elementary book that they must love God, but you must show them God is loved. If they observe that no worship is paid to that God of whom they hear, the very best instruction will prove useless; but by means of Family Worship, these young plants will grow “like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither” (Psa 1:13). Your children may leave the parental roof, but they will remember in foreign lands the prayers of the parental roof, and those prayers will protect them. “If any,” says the Scripture, “Have children or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home” (1Ti 5:4).

**3. To produce real joy in the home:** And what delight, what peace, what real happiness a Christian family will find in erecting a family altar in their midst, and in uniting to offer up sacrifice unto the Lord! Such is the occupation of angels in heaven; and blessed are those who anticipate those pure and immortal joys! “Behold, how

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<sup>50</sup> **nominally** – existing in name only.

<sup>51</sup> **bark** – a small ship.

good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa 133). O what new grace and life piety gives to a family! In a house where God is forgotten, there is rudeness, ill-humor, and vexation of spirit. Without the knowledge and the love of God, a family is but a collection of individuals who may have more or less natural affection for one another; but the real bond, the love of God our Father in Jesus Christ our Lord, is wanting. The poets are full of beautiful descriptions of domestic life; but, alas! how different the pictures often are from the reality! Sometimes there is a want of confidence in the providence of God; sometimes there is love of riches; at others, a difference of character; at others, an opposition of principles. O how many troubles, how many cares there are in the bosoms of families!

Domestic piety will prevent all these evils; it will give perfect confidence in that God who gives food to the birds of the air; it will give true love toward those with whom we have to live: not an exacting, sensitive love, but a merciful love, which excuses and forgives, like that of God Himself; not a proud love, but a humble love, accompanied by a sense of one's own faults and weakness; not a fickle love, but a love unchangeable as eternal charity. "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacle of the righteous," (Psa 118:15).

**4. To console during times of trial:** And when the hour of trial comes, that hour which must come sooner or later, and which sometimes visits the homes of men more than once, what consolation will domestic piety afford! Where do trials occur, if not in the bosoms of families? Where then ought the remedy for trials to be administered, if not in the bosoms of families? How much a family where there is mourning is to be pitied if it has not that consolation! The various members of whom it is composed increase one another's sadness. But if, on the contrary, that family loves God, if it is in the habit of meeting to invoke the holy name of God, from Whom comes every trial, as well as every good gift; then how will the souls that are cast down be raised up! The members of the family who still remain around the table on which is laid the Book of God, that book where they find the words of resurrection, life, and immortality, where they find sure pledges of the happiness of the being who is no more among them, as well as the warrant of their own hopes.

The Lord is pleased to send down the Comforter to them; the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon them; an ineffable<sup>52</sup> balm is poured upon their wounds, and gives them much consolation; peace is communicated from one heart to another. They enjoy moments of celestial bliss. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me," (Psa 23:4). "O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave! Thine anger endureth but a moment: in thy favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psa 30:3).

**5. To influence society:** And who can tell, my brethren, what an influence domestic piety might exert over society itself? What encouragements all men would have in doing their duty, from the statesman down to the poorest mechanic! How would all become accustomed to act with respect not only to the opinions of men, but also to the judgment of God! How would each learn to be satisfied with the position in which he is placed! Good habits would be adopted; the powerful voice of conscience would be strengthened: prudence, propriety, talent, social virtues, would be developed with renewed vigor. This is what we might expect both for ourselves and for society. Godliness hath promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

From *Family Worship*; available as a small booklet from Chapel Library.

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**J. H. Merle D'Aubigne (1794-1872):** a pastor, as well as professor of church history, president, and professor of historical theology at the Ecole de théologie de Genève. Author of several works on Reformation history including his well-known *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* and *The Reformation in England*.



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<sup>52</sup> **ineffable** – indescribable; incapable of being expressed.

# THE WORD OF GOD AND FAMILY PRAYER

Thomas Doolittle (1630-1707)

**M**ASTERS of families ought to read the Scripture to their families and instruct their children and servants in the matters and doctrines of salvation. Therefore, they are to pray in and with their families. No man that will not deny the Scripture can deny the unquestionable duty of reading the Scripture in our houses, governors of families teaching and instructing them out of the Word of God. Amongst a multitude of express Scriptures, look into these: “And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses” (Exo 12:26-27). And there is as much reason that Christian parents should explain to their children the sacraments of the New Testament, to instruct them in the nature, use, and ends of baptism and the Lord’s Supper: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach [*whet or sharpen*] 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,” that is, morning and evening (Deu 6:6-7; 11:18-19). “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). And God was pleased with this in Abraham: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord” (Gen 18:19). This then is undeniable, if the Word is to be believed, received as our rule, and obedience to be yielded thereunto. And the Heathens taught a necessity of instructing youth betimes.<sup>53</sup>

The reason of this consequence, from family reading and instructions to family praying, is evident, (we need to beg of God the illumination of His Spirit, the opening of the eyes of every one in the family,<sup>54</sup> the blessing of God upon our endeavors, without which it will be to no saving benefit) and will be more manifest, if we consider and lay together these things following:

1. *Whose word it is that is to be read in the family together*—the Word of the eternal, blessed, glorious God. And doth this call for and require preceding prayer, no more than if you were to read the book of some mortal man? The Word of God is that out of which God speaketh to us. It is that by which He doth instruct us and inform us in the highest and weightiest concernments of our souls. It is that from which we must fetch remedies for the cure of our spiritual maladies. It is that from whence we must have weapons of defense against our spiritual enemies that do assault our souls and be directed in the paths of life.<sup>55</sup> And is not prayer together needful then, that God would prepare all their hearts to receive and obey what shall be read to them of the mind of God? Is all the family so serious and so sensible of the glory, holiness, and majesty of that God that speaketh to them in His Word, that prayer is not needful that they may be so? And if it be needful, should it not first be done? And when it hath been read, and the threatenings, commands, and promises of the glorious God been heard, and your sins discovered and God’s wrath against them, and duties enjoined, and precious privileges opened, and promises of a faithful God, both “great and precious promises,” made to such as do repent, believe, and turn to God with all their hearts unfeignedly;<sup>4</sup> have you not all need together to fall down upon your knees, to beg and cry and call to God for pardon of those sins that by this Word you are convinced you are guilty of and to lament them before the Lord? And that when your duty is discovered, you might have all hearts to practice and obey, and that you might unfeignedly<sup>56</sup> repent and turn to God, that so you may apply those promises to yourselves and be partaker of those privileges? From this then, there is great reason, [that] when you read together you should also pray together.

2. *Consider what great and deep mysterious things are contained in the Word of God which you are to read together.* And there will appear a necessity of praying together also. Is there not in this Word the doctrine concerning God, how

<sup>53</sup> **betimes** – speedily; soon.

<sup>54</sup> “But, before every thing else, address thy prayers to God, that the gates of divine light may be opened to thee. For these things can neither be perceived nor understood by any one, except by him on whom God and his Christ bestow this privilege.”—Justin Martyr (110-165).

<sup>55</sup> “Holy scripture is (1) The *chair of God* from which he addresses himself to us. (2) It is *God’s school* in which He teaches us and communicates information. (3) It is *God’s dispensary* and the spiritual office from which He distributes His healing medicines. (4) It is *God’s armory* and grand collection of suitable weapons from which He furnishes us with defensive and offensive arms for our protection against enemies of every description. (5) It is *the hand of God* by which He leads us onward through the paths of faith and righteousness and safely conducts us unto life eternal.”—Johann Gerhard (1582-1637).

<sup>56</sup> **unfeignedly** – without hypocrisy; sincerely.

He might be known, loved, obeyed, worshipped, and delighted in? Concerning Christ, God-man, a mystery that the angels wonder at and no man fully understands or can express and fully unfold?<sup>57</sup> Concerning the offices of Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King? The example and the life of Christ, the miracles of Christ, the temptations of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, His death, the victories of Christ, the resurrection, ascension, and intercession of Christ, and His coming to judgment? Is there not in the Scripture the doctrine of the Trinity, of the misery of man by sin, and his remedy by Christ? Of the covenant of grace, the conditions of this covenant, and the seals thereof? The many precious, glorious privileges that we have by Christ—reconciliation with God, justification, sanctification, and adoption? The several graces to be got, and duties to be done, and of men’s everlasting state in heaven or hell? Are these, and such like, contained in the Word of God that you ought to read daily in your houses? And yet do not you see the need of prayer before and after your reading of it? Weigh them well, and you will.

**3. Consider how much all the family are concerned to know and understand these things so necessary to salvation.** If they are ignorant of them, they are undone. If they know not God, how shall they love Him? We might love an unseen God and an unseen Christ (1Pe 1:8), but not an unknown God. If they in your family know not Christ, how shall they believe on Him? And yet they must perish and be damned, if they do not. They must for ever lose God and Christ and heaven and their souls, if they do not repent, believe, and be converted. And yet when that Book is read by which they should understand the nature of true saving grace, is not prayer needful? Especially when many have the Bible and read it, yet do not understand the things that do concern their peace!

**4. Consider further, the blindness of their minds and their inability, without the teachings of God’s Spirit, to know and understand these things.** And yet is not prayer needful?

**5. Consider, yet further, the backwardness of their hearts to hearken to these weighty, necessary truths of God, and their unwillingness naturally to learn, show prayer to be necessary that God would make them able and willing to receive them.**

**6. Once more, consider that prayer is a special means to obtain knowl edge from God, and a blessing upon the teachings and instructions of the master of the family.** David prayed that God would “open his eyes,” that he might “behold wondrous things out of God’s law” (Psa 119:18). There are “wondrous things” in the Word of God. That fallen man should be recovered is a wondrous thing. That a holy God should be reconciled to sinful man is a wondrous thing. That the Son of God should take upon Him the nature of man, and God be manifested in the flesh, and a believer justified by the righteousness of another—these are wondrous things. But there is darkness upon our minds and a veil over our eyes, and the Scripture is a clasped, closed book that we cannot savingly understand these great wonderful things, to have our love chiefly upon them and our delight in them, except the Spirit of God take away the veil and remove our ignorance and enlighten our minds. And this wisdom is to be sought from God by fervent prayer. You that are masters of families, would you have your children and servants know these things and be affected with them? Would you have impressions made upon their minds and hearts of the great concernments of their souls? And therefore you do instruct them? But can you reach their hearts? Can you awaken their consciences? Can you not? And yet doth it not become you to pray to God with them, that He would do it? While you are a-praying jointly with them, God may be secretly disposing and powerfully preparing their hearts to receive His Word and your instructions from it.

From “How May the Duty of Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family?”  
*Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate*, Vol 2, Richard Owen Roberts, Publisher.



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<sup>57</sup> “Let every faithful and believing Christian devote his attention to the sacred scriptures. In them he will find wonderful exhibitions, worthy of the faith by which they were produced. He will behold the men of the world lying in their wickedness, the rewards of the godly, and the punishment of the wicked. He will also look with wonder on wild beasts overcome by religion, and their fierceness changed into mildness, and the souls of men recalled into their lifeless bodies. But a spectacle far surpassing all these will be displayed to his enraptured view—he will see that devil who wishes to triumph over the whole world, lying as a vanquished foe under the feet of Christ. Brethren, what an appropriate, delightful, and necessary spectacle is this!”—Cyprian (200-258).

# SEVEN REASONS FAMILIES SHOULD PRAY

Thomas Doolittle (1630-1707)

**R**EASON 1: *Because we receive every day family-mercies from the hand of God.* He loads us daily with His benefits (Psa 68:9). When you wake in the morning and find your dwelling safe, not consumed with fire, not broken through by thieves, is not this a family-mercy? When you wake and find none dead in their beds, that news is not brought you in the morning, there is one child dead in one bed and another in another, and there is not a lodging-room in the house but the last night one or other died in it; but on the contrary you find all well in the morning and refreshed by the rest and sleep of the night—are not these and many more such mercies to the family, that when you rise you should call them all together jointly to bless God for? If it had been otherwise, [if] master or mistress [were] dead, children or servants dead, would not the rest say, “It would have been a mercy to us all, if God had spared him, her, or them?” If your house had been consumed by flames, and God had turned you all out of doors before morning, would you not have said, “It would have been a mercy, if God had safely preserved us and our dwellings and caused us to rest and sleep and rise in safety?” Why, Sirs, will you not acknowledge mercies to be mercies, till God hath taken them away from you? And if you do, should you not give the praise daily unto God? Was it not God Himself that watched over you while you did sleep, and could not, did not, watch yourselves? “Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. For so he giveth his beloved sleep” (Psa 127:1-2).

And as you have had many family-mercies in the night to bless God for in the morning, so you have many family-mercies in the day to give thanks to God for at night before you go to bed. Methinks you should not quietly sleep till you have been together on your knees, lest God should say, “This family that hath not acknowledged My mercy to them this day, nor given Me the glory of those benefits of which to them I gave the comfort, shall never see the light of another day, nor have the mercies of one day more to bless Me for. What if God should say unto you when you are laid down in your beds, “This night your souls shall be required of you, you that went to bed before you had given Me the praise of the mercies that I had given unto you all the day, and before you had prayed for My protection over you in the night.” Take heed: though God be patient, do not provoke Him.

**REASON 2: *You should pray to God daily in your families, because there are sins committed every day in your families.*** Do you indeed sin together, and will you not pray together? What, if you should be damned all together? Doth not every member of your family commit many sins every day? How great is the number then of all, when considered or put together? What! So many sins every day under your roof, within your walls, committed against the glorious, blessed God, and not want prayer? One sin should be lamented with a thousand tears; but you have not one tear shed by one, and another by another, in prayer together, for a thousand sins. Is this to repent daily, when you do not confess them daily? Would you have God to pardon all the sins of your family? Say, would you or no? If you would not, God might justly let you go to your graves and hell too, with the guilt of sin upon your souls. If you would, is not pardon worth asking for? Would you have it and not beg it at the hands of God? Would not all judge that man worthy of death, that being justly condemned, might yet have life for asking for and will not? How do you, how *can* you quietly go to your beds and sleep with the guilt of so many sins upon your souls and have not prayed to have them blotted out? What is your pillow made of, that your heads can rest upon it under the weight and load of so much guilt? Is indeed your bed so soft or your heart so hard, that you can rest and sleep, when to all the sins of commission in the day, you add this sin of omission in the evening? Lay to heart your daily family-sins, and you will feel a reason why you should pray to God in your families daily.

**REASON 3: *You should pray in your families daily unto God, because you have many daily family-wants, which none can supply but God.*** God [needs] not your prayers, but you and yours [need] God’s mercies! And if you will have them, should you not pray for them? Can you supply your families’ wants? If they want health, can you give it them? If they want bread, can you give it them except God first give it unto you? Why then did Christ direct us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mat 6:11). If they want grace, can you work it in them? Or do you not care though they die without it? Is not God the Giver of every good gift? “Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (Jam 1:17).

Mercies are above and good things are from above, and prayer is a means appointed by God to fetch them down. “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” (Jam 1:5). Do you think you do not want wisdom to discharge your

duties to God and man, that you do not want wisdom to manage your family for their temporal, spiritual, and eternal good? If you think so, you are fools. And if you think you want it not, by those very thoughts you may discern your [lack] of it. If you think you have enough, it is plain that you have none. And should you not ask it of God, if you would have it? If you and yours want health in your family, should you not ask it of God? Can you live without dependence upon God? Or can you say you have no need of God's help to supply your wants? Then you speak contradictions: for to be under wants and not to be dependent beings is a contradiction. To think you do not live in dependence upon God is to think you are not men nor creatures. And if you do depend on Him and want His help to supply your [needs], your own indigency<sup>58</sup> should bring you upon your knees to pray to Him.

**REASON 4: *You should pray in your families daily because of your families' daily employments and labors.*** Every one that puts his hand to work, his head to contrive, should set his heart to pray. For will not your trading be in vain and your laboring and working, your carking<sup>59</sup> and projecting for the world, be to no purpose without the blessing of God? Will you be convinced if God Himself doth tell you? Then read Psalm 127:1-2: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows." Bread of sorrows! What bread is that? Bread gotten with much care, and labor, and toil, is "bread of sorrows." Without God, you labor to get bread for yourselves and families in vain. You might miss of it after all your labors. And without God's blessing, if you eat it when you have got it with much toil and care, you eat it in vain; for without Him it cannot nourish your bodies.

And yet is it not necessary to pray to God to prosper and succeed you in your callings? Prayer and labor should both promote what you aim at. To pray and not to do the works of your callings would be to expect supplies while you are negligent. To labor and trade and not to pray, would be to hope for increase and provision without God. Religion that puts you upon holy duties doth not teach you to neglect your callings, nor yet to trust to your own endeavors without praying unto God. But both are to keep their place and have a share of your time.<sup>60</sup> Prayer is a middle thing betwixt God's giving and our getting. How can you receive, if God do not give? And why do you expect that God will give, if you do not ask? "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jam 4:2).

What ye work for, pray for. And what ye pray for, work and labor for. And this is the true conjunction of labor and prayer. Or will you be like to them [whom] the apostle speaks to? "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain" (Jam 4:13). You *will*? But will you not ask leave from God whether you shall or no? You will go? What! Though God cast you upon a bed of sickness or into your graves? Do, if you can. You will continue there a year? What! If death drag you out as soon as you come there? If death fetch your bodies to the dust and grave and devils fetch your souls to hell, after this will you "continue in such a city for a year?" If one part of you be in the grave and the other part in hell, what is left of you to continue in the city? You will buy and sell, will you? What! If God give you neither money nor credit? With whom, I wonder? And you *will* get gain? You are resolved upon it; you will thrive, and prosper, and grow rich. What! If God curse your endeavors and say, "You shall not?" You will all this, and you would have your will; but your power is not equal to your will. Here is much will, but not a word of prayer. You should not go unto your work nor to your shops and callings, till you have first prayed unto God.

**REASON 5: *You should pray to God in your families daily, because you are all every day liable to temptations.*** As soon as you wake, the devil will be striving for your first thoughts. And when you are risen, he will be urgent with you to do him the first service and attend you all the day to draw you into some heinous<sup>61</sup> sin before night. And is the devil a subtle, watchful, powerful enemy and unwearied? And do you not all need to get together in the morning that Satan might not prevail against any of you before night, till you come to God together again? How many temptations might you meet with in your callings and your company, which without God you will not be able to resist! And how might you fall and dishonor God, discredit your profession, defile your souls, disturb your peace, and wound your consciences! This Origen<sup>62</sup> bewailed in his lamentation. For, that day [in which] he omitted prayer, he heinously sinned: "But I, O unhappy creature! Skipping out of my bed at the dawning of the day, could

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<sup>58</sup> **indigency** – poverty.

<sup>59</sup> **carking** – care; anxiety; distress.

<sup>60</sup> **Desiderius Erasmus** (c.1466-1536) – "We must not confide so much in our own industry as to neglect the Divine aid; nor, on the contrary, ought we so to depend upon that gracious aid as to remit our exertions, and to neglect our duty."

<sup>61</sup> **heinous** – grossly wicked; abominable.

<sup>62</sup> **Origen** (c.185-c.254) – theologian and Biblical scholar of the early Greek Church.



not finish my wonted<sup>63</sup> devotion, neither accomplish my usual prayer; [but] folded and wrapped myself in the snares of the devil.”<sup>64</sup>

**REASON 6: *You should pray in your families daily because all in your families are liable to daily hazards, casualties, and afflictions.*** And prayer might prevent them, or obtain strength to bear them, and prepare you for them. Do you know what affliction might befall your family in a day’s time or in a night’s time, either in regard of sickness, death, or outward losses in your estate? Might not you hear of one man’s breaking in your debt and gone away with so much, and another gone away with so much? And are you indeed so weaned from the world, that this shall not put you into a passion and cause you to sin against God, or that you can bear it without murmuring and discontent, that you need not pray for a composed frame of heart, if such things befall you? Do you know if you go abroad yourself or send a son or servant that you or they may return alive again? Though you go out alive, you may be brought back again dead. Had you not then need to pray to God in the morning, that He would keep you in your goings-forth and comings-in and bless Him together in the evening, if He do? How many evils is man exposed to, whether he be at home or abroad! Anacreon<sup>65</sup> lost his life by the kernel of a raisin going wrong down his throat. Fabius,<sup>66</sup> a senator of Rome, in a draught of milk swallowing a small hair, was strangled. Do not your daily sins cry aloud for daily punishments? And should you not in daily prayer cry as loud that God in mercy would prevent them? Or if they come upon you, to sanctify them for your good or remove them? Or, if they remain, to support you under them? Know indeed that you are nowhere safe without God’s protection, night or day. If your houses were built upon foundations of stone, and the walls were made of brass or adamant, and the doors of iron, yet you would be no longer safe than [so long as] God protects you from all dangers. Pray, then.

**REASON 7: *You must pray to God in your families daily, or the very Heathen will rise up against you Christians and condemn you.*** Those that never had the means of grace (as you have had), nor a Bible to direct and teach them (as you have), nor ministers sent to them (as you have had in abundance), do shame many that are called “Christians” and go for great professors too. When I have read the sayings of some Heathens, showing what they were wont to do, and consider and know the practice and negligence of many Christians in their families, I have been ready to conclude the Heathen to be the better men. It was their manner to sacrifice to their gods morning and evening, that they might have the favor of them and be successful in their outward estates as you may learn from their poets.

Do not the Heathen shame many of you? They were wont to say, “Now we have sacrificed, let us go to bed.” You say, “Now we have supped, let us go to bed,” or, “Let us play a game or two at cards and go to bed.” Are you men or swine in the shape of men? Mr. Perkins<sup>67</sup> likened such to swine that live without prayer in their families, “Which are always feeding upon the mast<sup>68</sup> with greediness, but never look up to the hand that beats it down, nor to the tree from ‘whence it falleth.”

From “How May the Duty of Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family?”  
*Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate*, Vol 2, Richard Owen Roberts, Publisher.



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<sup>63</sup> **wonted** – accustomed; habitual.

<sup>64</sup> **Eusebius of Caesarea** (c.260-c.339) – theologian, church historian, and scholar. Quoted from his *Ecclesiastical History*.

<sup>65</sup> **Anacreon** (c.587-c.485 BC) – ancient Greek poet born in Teos, Asia Minor.

<sup>66</sup> **Quintus Fabius Pictor** (fl 200 BC) – one of the first Roman prose historians and member of the Roman Senate.

<sup>67</sup> **William Perkins** (1558-1602) – Puritan preacher and theologian educated at Cambridge and sometimes called the “Father of Puritanism.”

<sup>68</sup> **mast** – the nuts of forest trees accumulated on the ground, used especially as food for swine.

# THE FATHER AND FAMILY WORSHIP

J.W. Alexander (1804-1859)

**T**HERE is no member of a household whose individual piety is of such importance to all the rest as the father or head. And there is no one whose soul is so directly influenced by the exercise of domestic worship. Where the head of a family is lukewarm or worldly, he will send the chill through the whole house. And if any happy exception occur, and one and another surpass him in faithfulness, it will be in spite of his evil example. He, who ought by his instructions and life, to afford a perpetual incitement<sup>69</sup> to his inferiors and his juniors, is made to feel in case of such delinquency, that they must look elsewhere for guidance, even if they do not weep in secret places over his neglects. Where the head of the family is a man of faith, of affection, and of zeal, consecrating all his works and life to Christ, it is very rare to find all his household otherwise-minded. Now one of the chief means of promoting such individual graces in the head is this: his daily exercise of devotion with the members. It is more to him, than to others. It is he who presides and directs in it, who selects and delivers the precious Word, and who leads the common supplication, confession, and praise. To him, it is equal to an additional act of personal devotion in the day; but it is more. It is an act of devotion, in which his affection and duty to his house are particularly brought before his mind; and in which he stands in the place and pleads the cause, of all that he holds dearest upon earth. No one need wonder then, that we place family-prayer among the most important means of reviving and maintaining the piety of him who conducts it.

Observation shows that families which have no household worship are at a low ebb in spiritual things; that families where it is performed in a cold, sluggish, negligent, or hurried way, are little affected by it and little affected by any means of grace; and that families where God is worshipped, every morning and evening, by all the inmates of the house in a solemn and affectionate service are blessed with increase of piety and happiness. Every individual is blessed. Each one receives a portion of the heavenly food.

Half the defects and transgressions of our days arise from want<sup>70</sup> of consideration.<sup>71</sup> Hence the unspeakable value of an exercise, which twice every day calls each member of the household at least to think of God. Even the most careless or impious<sup>72</sup> son, or servant, must now and then be forced to talk a little with conscience, and meditate a little on judgment, when the grey-haired father, bowed before God, with trembling voice pours out strong supplication and prayer. How much more mighty must be the influence on that larger number, who in ten thousand Christian families in the land are more or less impressed with the importance of divine things! And how peculiar and tender and forming must the same influence be, on those of the domestic group, who worship God in the spirit, and who often wipe the gushing tear, as they rise from their knees, and look around on husband, father, mother, brother, sister, child—all remembered in the same devotion, all clouded with the same incense of intercession!

Perhaps among our readers, more than one can say: “Times without number have I felt the influence of domestic worship on my own soul. When yet a child, no one means of grace, public or private, so awakened my attention, as when the children were prayed for day by day. In wayward youth, I was never so stung by conviction of my sin, as when my honored father earnestly besought God for our salvation. When at length in infinite mercy I first began to open the ear to instruction, no prayer so reached my heart, or so expressed my deep affections, as those which were uttered by my honored father.”

**The maintenance of domestic religion in every house is primarily entrusted to the head of the family, whoever this may be.** If he is totally unfitted for the charge by an unbelieving mind or an ungodly life, the consideration is one which should startle and appall him; and it is affectionately submitted to any reader whose conscience may plead guilty to such an imputation. There are instances, where divine grace has so endowed some one of the household, even though not the parent or the senior, as plainly to devolve<sup>73</sup> on him the performance of this duty.

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<sup>69</sup> **incitement** – stirring up of feelings.

<sup>70</sup> **want** – lack; absence of.

<sup>71</sup> **consideration** – mature thought; serious deliberation.

<sup>72</sup> **impious** – not showing due respect for God.

<sup>73</sup> **devolve** – to pass on or delegate to another.

The widowed mother, or the elder sister, or the actual guardian, may stand in the parent's place. But inasmuch as in a majority of cases, the service if rendered at all must be rendered by the father, we shall treat the subject under this supposition, premising that the principles laid down apply in most of their extent to all the other influences.

**No man can approach the duty of leading his household in an act of devotion without solemn reflection on the place which he occupies in regard to them.** He is their head. He is such by a divine and unalterable constitution. These are duties and prerogatives which he cannot alienate. There is something more than mere precedence in age, knowledge, or substance. He is the father and the master. No act of his and nothing in his character can fail to leave a mark on those around him. This he will be apt to feel when he calls them about him to pray to God. And the more devoutly he addresses himself to the work, the more will he feel it. Though all priesthood, in the proper sense, is now done away on earth and absorbed in the functions of the great High Priest, there is still something like a priestly intervention in the service of the Christian patriarch. He is now about to go before the little flock in the oblation of a spiritual sacrifice of prayer and adoration. Thus it is said respecting Christ: "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name" (Heb 13:15). This perpetual offering, the head of the family is about to make. Until long perseverance in a deadening formality of routine shall have blunted all sensibility, he must yield to the solemn impression. It will sometimes lie like a burden at his heart; it will sometimes swell within his affections, like "wine which hath no vent" (Job 32:19). These are salutary and elevating emotions, which go to form the grave and lofty character which may be observed in the old peasantry of Scotland.

Though he be but a poor and unlettered man, who bows his hoary head amidst a band of sons and daughters, yet is he more sublimely honored than prayerless kings. His head is encircled with that "crown of glory," which is found "in the way of righteousness" (Pro 16:31). The father, who year after year presides in the sacred domestic assembly, submits himself to an influence which is incalculably strong on his own parental character.

**Where is a parent so likely to admit the impression of his responsibility, as where he gathers his household for worship?** It is true at all times that he is bound to watch for their souls; but now he is placed where he must feel it to be true. His family are met in a religious capacity and looking up to him for guidance. His eye cannot light on a single member of the group who is not committed to his especial charge. *Among all these there is not one for whom he shall not give account at the judgment-seat of Christ.* The wife of his youth! To whom shall she look for spiritual watch, if not to him? And how unnatural the family-relation, when this guardianship is repudiated and this relation reversed! The children! If ever saved, it will probably be in some degree consequent on his exertions. Domestic, and apprentices, and sojourners, are all committed for a term longer or shorter to his care. The domestic minister will surely cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" and most of all when in the very performance of these duties. If his conscience is kept awake by personal acquaintance with God, he will never enter upon family-worship without sentiments which involve this very accountability; and such sentiments cannot but have their impression on the parental character.

Unspeakable good would ensue, if every father could feel himself to be the earthly but divinely-appointed head-spring of religious influence to his household. Is it not true? And is there any means of making him feel it to be true, which can be compared to the institution of Family-Worship? Now he has assumed his rightful place as an instructor, a guide, and an exemplar<sup>74</sup> in devotion. Now his mouth, even though he be a silent or a bashful man, is opened.

**The hour of domestic prayer and praise is also the hour of Scriptural instruction.** The father has opened God's word in the presence of his little flock. He thus admits himself to be its teacher and under-shepherd. Perhaps he is but a plain man, living by his labor, unused to schools or libraries, and like Moses, "slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exo 4:10). Nevertheless, he stands by the open well of wisdom, and like the same Moses, may draw water enough and water the flock (Exo 2:19). For the time, he sits "in Moses' seat," and no longer "occupieth the room of the unlearned" (1Co 14:16). This is encouraging and ennobling.<sup>75</sup> As the loving mother rejoices to be the fountain of nourishment to the babe which clings to her warm bosom, so the Christian father delights to convey, even by reverent reading, "the sincere milk of the word" (1Pe 2:2). He has found it good to his own soul; he rejoices in an

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<sup>74</sup> **exemplar** – one that is worthy of imitation.

<sup>75</sup> **ennobling** – to make someone more noble or dignified.

appointed means of conveying it to his offspring. The humblest master of a house may well feel himself exalted by recognizing such a relation to those who are under his care.

**The example of a father is acknowledged to be all-important.** The stream must not be expected to rise higher than the fountain. The Christian householder will feel himself constrained to say, “I am leading my family in solemn addresses to God—what manner of man should I be! How wise, holy, and exemplary!” This undoubtedly has been in cases innumerable, the direct operation of Family-Worship on the father. As we know that worldly men and inconsistent professors are deterred from performing this duty by the consciousness of a discrepancy between their life and any acts of devotion, so humble Christians are led by the same comparison to be more circumspect and to order their ways in such a manner as may edify their dependants. *There cannot be too many motives to a holy life, nor too many safeguards to parental example.* Establish the worship of God in any house, and you erect around it a new barrier against the irruption<sup>76</sup> of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

**The master of the house in Family-Worship appears as the intercessor for his house-hold.** The great Intercessor is indeed above, but “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks” (1Ti 2:10) are to be made below; and by whom, if not by the father for his family? The thought of this must bring solemn reflections. The parent, who with any sincerity, comes daily to implore blessings on his wife, children, and domestics, will bethink<sup>77</sup> himself as to what they need. Here will be an urgent motive to inquire into their wants, temptations, weaknesses, errors, and transgressions. The eye of a genuine father will be quick; his heart will be sensitive on these points; and the hour of devotion will gather these solitudes together. From such a motive, as we have already seen, holy Job, after the festivities of his children, “sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings, according to the number of them all; for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually” (Job 1:5). Whatever may have been the effect on the sons, the effect on Job himself was, no doubt, an awakening of mind as to his parental responsibility. And such is the effect of Family-Worship on the head of a household.

The father of a family is under a wholesome influence, when he is brought every day to take a post of observation, and say to his own heart, “By this single means, in addition to all others, I am exerting some definite influence, good or bad, upon all who surround me. I cannot omit this service needlessly; perhaps I cannot omit it at all without detriment to my house. I cannot read the Word, I cannot sing, I cannot pray, without leaving some trace on the tender mind. How solemnly, how affectionately, how believingly, should I then approach this ordinance! With how much godly fear and preparation! My conduct in this worship may save or may kill. Here is my great channel for reaching the case of those who are submitted to my charge.” These are wholesome thoughts, naturally engendered by a daily ordinance which too many regard as little better than a form.

**The Christian *husband* needs to be reminded of his obligations; he cannot be reminded of them too often.** The respect, the forbearance, the love, which the Scriptures enjoin towards the feebler and more dependent party in the conjugal<sup>78</sup> alliance, and which are the crown and glory of Christian wedlock, are never more brought into action, than when they who have plighted<sup>79</sup> their faith to one another years ago are brought day by day to the place of prayer and lift up a united heart at the feet of infinite mercy. As the Head of every man is Christ, so the head of the woman is the man (1Co 11:3). His post is responsible, and that in spirituals. He can seldom feel it more sensibly than when he falls down with the partner of his burdens at the throne of grace.

From *Thoughts on Family Worship*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.



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<sup>76</sup> **irruption** – breaking or bursting in.

<sup>77</sup> **bethink** – cause oneself to reflect or consider.

<sup>78</sup> **conjugal** – marital.

<sup>79</sup> **plighted** – pledged; betrothed.

# WOMEN LEADING FAMILY WORSHIP

John Howe (1630-1705)

**QUESTION:** Some have desired to be informed, “Whether in case of the absence or sickness of a husband from or in the family, it be incumbent on the wife to keep up family duty in such a case?” And the case is the same as to widows, or others of that sex, who are sole governesses of families.

**Answer:** it must be said in general to this, that one rule cannot be suited to all cases. There may be very great variety as circumstances differ. But,

1. Nothing is plainer than that while the conjugal relatives remain, the female relation hath a real part in the government of the family. That is plainly enough asserted in 1 Timothy 5:14: that it is the woman’s part to “guide the house.” The word is *oikodespotein*, to have a despotical<sup>80</sup> power in the family, a governing power, which must be solely in her in the absence or failure of the other relative; and that must by no means be abandoned or quitted. And whereas all power and all order is from God, it cannot be denied or disowned or laid aside without an injury to Him.

2. Hereupon, if there be in a family a prudent pious son or a prudent pious man-servant, who may be assigned to this work, it may fitly enough be done by such a one by her appointment. And so the authority that belongs to her in her station is preserved and the thing done. That such a work as that is may be assigned to another, is out of all doubt and ought to be so, where it may most fitly and most duly be so. And none question the fitness of assigning such a work stately to another, in such families where persons are kept on purpose for the discharge of family duties.

3. It is possible, there may be families that do entirely at present consist of those that are of the female sex; and concerning them there is no question.

4. Where the family is more numerous, and consists of the male sex, of whom none are fit or willing to undertake that business, and it cannot be done by the governess with decency or to edification; in that case she is to follow the example of Esther, (a very laudable one,) with her maidens and younger children still to keep up to this worship in her family; and, as much as in her lies, to warn and charge the rest, that they be not omissive for their part, (though they do not concur with them,) together or severally in calling on the name of the Lord daily.

From Family Religion and Worship, Sermon 5.

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**John Howe (1630-1705):** non-Conformist Puritan author and preacher. Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell. Born in Loughborough, England.



# MEMORIES OF FAMILY WORSHIP

John G. Paton (1824-1907)

**T**HE “closet” was a very small apartment betwixt the other two, having room only for a bed, a little table, and a chair, with a diminutive window shedding diminutive light on the scene. This was the Sanctuary of that cottage home. Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire and “shut to the door”; and we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to

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<sup>80</sup> **despotical** – literally from the Greek, “to command and give leadership to a household, to manage a home.”

be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most Holy Place. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice pleading as if for life, and we learned to slip out and in past that door on tiptoe, not to disturb the holy colloquy.<sup>81</sup> The outside world might not know, but we knew, whence came that happy light as of a new-born smile that always was dawning on my father's face: it was a reflection from the Divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived. Never, in temple or cathedral, on mountain or in glen, can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking and talking with men, than under that humble cottage roof of thatch and oaken wattles.<sup>82</sup> Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, or blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes and shut itself up once again in that Sanctuary Closet, and hearing still the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, "He walked with God, why may not I?"

Besides his independent choice of a Church for himself there was one other mark and fruit of his early religious decision, which looks even fairer through all these years. Family Worship had heretofore been held only on Sabbath Day in his father's house; but the young Christian, entering into conference with his sympathizing mother, managed to get the household persuaded that there ought to be daily morning and evening prayer and reading of the Bible and holy singing. This the more readily, as he himself agreed to take part regularly in the same, and so relieve the old warrior of what might have proved for him too arduous spiritual toils! And so began in his seventeenth year that blessed custom of Family Prayer, morning and evening, which my father practiced probably without one single avoidable omission till he lay on his deathbed, seventy-seven years of age, when even to the last day of his life, a portion of Scripture was read, and 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, far away many of them over all the earth, but all meeting him there at the Throne of Grace. None of us can remember that any day ever passed unhallowed thus: no hurry for market, no rush to business, no arrival of friends or guests, no trouble or sorrow, no joy or excitement, ever prevented at least our kneeling around the family altar, while the High Priest led our prayers to God, and offered himself and his children there. And blessed to others, as well as to ourselves, was the light of such example! I have heard that, in long after-years, 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 close up underneath my father's window and heard him pleading in Family Worship that God would convert "the sinner from the error of wicked ways, and polish him as a jewel for the Redeemer's crown." "I felt," said she, "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 Savior."

My father had a strong desire to be a Minister of the Gospel; but when he finally saw that God's will had marked out for him another lot, he reconciled himself by entering with his own soul into this solemn vow—that if God gave him sons, he would consecrate them unreservedly to the Ministry of Christ, if the Lord saw fit to accept the offering and open up their way. It may be enough here to say that he lived to see three of us entering upon and not unblessed in the Holy Office—myself, the eldest born; my brother Walter, several years my junior; and my brother James, the youngest of eleven, the Benjamin of the flock.

Each of us, from very early days, considered it no penalty, but a great joy, to go with our father to the church. The four miles were a treat to our young spirits, the company by the way was a fresh incitement, and occasionally some of the wonders of city-life rewarded our eager eyes. A few other pious men and women, of the best Evangelical type, went from the same parish to one or other favorite Minister at Dumfries—the Parish Church during all those years being rather miserably served; and when these God-fearing peasants "foregathered" in the way to or from the House of God, we youngsters had sometimes rare glimpses of what Christian talk may be and ought to be. They went to the church, full of beautiful expectancy of spirit—their souls were on the outlook for God. They returned from the church, ready and even anxious to exchange ideas as to what they had heard and received of the things of life. I have to bear my testimony that religion was presented to us with a great deal of intellectual freshness, and that it did not repel us, but kindled our spiritual interest. The talks which we heard

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<sup>81</sup> **colloquy** – a conversation, especially a formal one.

<sup>82</sup> **wattle** – a construction of poles intertwined with twigs, reeds, or branches, used for walls, fences, and roofs.

were, however, genuine; not the make-believe of religious conversation, but the sincere out-come of their own personalities. That, perhaps, makes all the difference betwixt talk that attracts and talk that drives away.

We had, too, special Bible Readings on the Lord's Day evening—mother and children and visitors reading in turns, with fresh and interesting question, answer, and exposition, all tending to impress us with the infinite grace of a God of love and mercy in the great gift of His dear Son Jesus, our Savior. The *Shorter Catechism* was gone through regularly, each answering the question asked, till the whole had been explained, and its foundation in Scripture shown by the proof-texts adduced. It has been an amazing thing to me, occasionally to meet with men who blamed this “catechizing” for giving them a distaste to religion; every one in all our circle thinks and feels exactly the opposite. It laid the solid rock-foundations of our religious life. After-years have given to these questions and their answers a deeper or a modified meaning, but none of us have ever once even dreamed of wishing that we had been otherwise trained. Of course, if the parents are not devout, sincere, and affectionate—if the whole affair on both sides is taskwork, or worse, hypocritical and false—results must be very different indeed!

Oh, I can remember those happy Sabbath evenings: no blinds down and shutters up, to keep out the sun from us, as some scandalously affirm; but a holy, happy, entirely human day, for a Christian father, mother, and children to spend. How my father would parade across and across our flag-floor,<sup>83</sup> telling over the substance of the day's sermons to our dear mother, who, because of the great distance and because of her many living “encumbrances” got very seldom indeed to the church, but gladly embraced every chance, when there was prospect or promise of a “lift” either way from some friendly gig!<sup>84</sup> How he would entice us to help him to recall some idea or other, praising us when we got the length of “taking notes” and reading them over on our return; how he would turn the talk ever so naturally to some Bible story or some Martyr reminiscence, or some happy allusion to the *Pilgrim's Progress*! And then it was quite a contest, which of us would get reading aloud, while all the rest listened, and father added here and there a happy thought, or illustration, or anecdote. Others must write and say what they will, and as they feel; but so must I. There were eleven of us brought up in a home like that; and never one of the eleven, boy or girl, man or woman, has been heard, or ever will be heard, saying that Sabbath was dull or wearisome for us, or suggesting that we have heard of or seen any way more likely than that for making the Day of the Lord bright and blessed alike for parents and for children. But God help the homes where these things are done by force and not by love!

From *Missionary Patriarch: The True Story of John G. Paton*, Evangelist for Jesus Christ among the South Sea Cannibals, reprinted by Vision Forum.

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**John G. Paton (1824-1907):** Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides. Began his work on the island of Tanna which was inhabited by savage cannibals. Later went to Aniwa. Gave the Aniwan people the first hymn book in their own language as well as the New Testament.



## IMPLEMENTING FAMILY WORSHIP

Joel R. Beeke

**H**ERE are some suggestions to help you establish God-honoring Family Worship in your homes. We trust this avoids two extremes: an idealistic approach that is beyond the reach of even the most God-fearing home, and a minimalist<sup>85</sup> approach that abandons daily Family Worship because the ideal seems so out of reach.

### *Prepare for Family Worship*

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<sup>83</sup> **flag-floor** – stone floor.

<sup>84</sup> **gig** – a light carriage with one set of wheels drawn by one horse.

<sup>85</sup> **minimalist** – one who provides the minimum amount.

Even before Family Worship begins, we should privately pray for God's blessing upon that worship. Then we should plan for the *what, where, and when* of Family Worship.

**1. What.** Generally speaking, this includes instruction in the Word of God, prayer before the throne of God, and singing to the glory of God. But we need to determine more of the specifics of Family Worship.

First, have Bibles and copies of *The Psalter*<sup>86</sup> and song sheets for all the children who can read. For children who are too young to read, read a few verses from Scripture and select one text to memorize as a family. Say it aloud together several times as a family, then reinforce that with a short Bible story to illustrate the text. Take time to teach a stanza or two of a Psalter selection to such children, and encourage them to sing with you.

For young children, try using *Truths of God's Word*, which has a guide for teachers and parents that illustrates each doctrine. For children in grade four and up, try James W. Beeke's *Bible Doctrine* series with accompanying teachers' guides. In any case; explain what you have read to your children, and ask them a question or two.

Then sing one or two psalms and a sound hymn or a good chorus like "Dare to be a Daniel." Close with prayer.

For older children, read a passage from Scripture, memorize it together, then apply a proverb. Ask questions about how to apply those verses to daily life, or perhaps read a portion from the gospels and its corresponding section in J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*. Ryle is simple yet profound. His clear points help generate discussion. Perhaps you'd like to read parts of an inspirational biography. However, don't let the reading of edifying literature replace Bible-reading or its application.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Holy War*, or daily meditations by Charles Spurgeon [such as Morning and Evening or Faith's Checkbook] are appropriate for more spiritually-minded children. Older children will also benefit from William Jay's *Morning and Evening Exercises*, William Mason's *Spiritual Treasury*, and Robert Hawker's *Poor Man's Morning and Evening Portions*. After those readings, sing a few familiar psalms and perhaps learn a new one before closing with prayer.

You should also use the creeds and confessions of your church. Young children should be taught to say the Lord's Prayer. If you adhere to the Westminster standards, have your children memorize the *Shorter Catechism* over time. [If your church uses the *Second London Baptist Confession*,<sup>87</sup> you can use Spurgeon's or Keach's *Catechism*.<sup>88</sup>] If the *Heidelberg Catechism* is used in your congregation, read on Sabbath mornings the Lord's Day of the Catechism from which the minister will be preaching at church. If you have *The Psalter*, occasional use can be made of the Forms of Devotion found in Christian Prayers. Using these forms at home will afford opportunity for you and your children to learn to use such forms in an edifying and profitable manner, a skill which will stand you all in good stead when the liturgical<sup>89</sup> forms are used as part of public worship.

**2. Where.** Family worship may be held around the supper table. However, it might be better to move to the living room, where there are fewer distractions. Whatever room you select, make sure it contains all of your devotional materials. Before you start, take the phone off the hook, or plan to let your answering machine or voice mail take messages. *Your children must understand that Family Worship is the most important activity of the day and should not be interrupted by anything.*

**3. When.** Ideally, Family Worship should be conducted twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. That fits best with Scriptural directions for worship in the Old Testament economy in which the beginning and close of each day were sanctified by the offering of morning and evening sacrifices as well as morning and evening prayers, and [in] the New Testament church which apparently followed the pattern of morning and evening prayers. The *Westminster Directory of Worship* states, "Family worship, which ought to be performed by every family, ordinarily morning and evening, consists in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and singing praises."

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<sup>86</sup> *The Psalter* – a book containing psalms, or the Book of Psalms, used for singing in worship.

<sup>87</sup> This *Confession of Faith* is the doctrinal standard of many Baptist churches. First published in 1677 and adopted in 1689, it is known by many simply as the "1689." This and Spurgeon's *Catechism* are both available from Chapel Library.

<sup>88</sup> As foreign as it may sound to modern Baptists, historically Baptists faithfully used confessions and catechisms for training their families and worshipping in their homes.

<sup>89</sup> *liturgical* – means "of or relating to liturgy," which comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*. *Liturgy* means public worship according to set forms and rites (such as read texts and prayers, i.e., the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*), often with reference to the Lord's Supper. This is in contrast to worship which does not follow a formal structure.



For some, Family Worship is scarcely possible more than once a day, after the evening meal. Either way, heads of households must be sensitive to the family schedule and keep everyone involved. Practice the principle of Matthew 6:33 (“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness”) in establishing a family schedule.

Carefully guard this time of Family Worship. If you know ahead of time that the normal time will not be suitable on a certain day, reschedule worship time. Don’t skip it, however; that can become habitual. When you can keep to your appointed times, plan carefully and prepare beforehand to make every minute count. *Fight every enemy of Family Worship.*

*During Family Worship, aim for the following:*

**1. Brevity.** As Richard Cecil said, “Let Family Worship be short, savory, simple, tender, heavenly.” Family worship that is too long makes children restless and may provoke them to wrath.

If you worship twice a day, try ten minutes in the morning and a little longer in the evening. A twenty-five minute period of Family Worship might be divided as follows: ten minutes for Scripture reading and instruction; five minutes for reading a daily portion or an edifying book or discussing some concern in a Biblical light; five minutes for singing; and five minutes for prayer.

**2. Consistency.** It is better to have twenty minutes of Family Worship every day than to try for extended periods on fewer days—say forty-five minutes on Monday, then skipping Tuesday. Family worship provides us “the manna which falls every day at the door of the tent, that our souls are kept alive,” wrote James W. Alexander in his excellent book on Family Worship.

*Don’t indulge excuses to avoid Family Worship:* If you lost your temper at a child a half-hour before Family Worship time, don’t say, “It’s hypocritical for me to lead Family Worship, so we’ll skip it tonight.” You don’t need to run from God at such times. Rather, you must return to God like the penitent<sup>90</sup> publican. Begin worship time by asking everyone who witnessed your loss of temper to forgive you, then pray to God for forgiveness. Children will respect you for that. They will tolerate weaknesses and even sins in their parents so long as the parents confess their wrongdoings and earnestly seek to follow the Lord. They and you know that the Old Testament high priest was not disqualified for being a sinner but had first to offer sacrifice for himself before he could offer sacrifices for the people’s sins. Neither are you and I disqualified today for confessed sin, for our sufficiency lies in Christ, not in ourselves. As A. W. Pink said, “It is not the sins of a Christian, but his unconfessed sins, which choke the channel of blessing and cause so many to miss God’s best.”

*Lead Family Worship with a firm, fatherly hand and a soft, penitent heart:* Even when you’re bone-weary after a day’s work, pray for strength to carry out your fatherly duty. Remember that Christ Jesus went to the cross for you bone-weary and exhausted but never shrunk from His mission. As you deny yourself, you will see how He strengthens you during Family Worship, so that by the time you finish, your exhaustion is overcome.

**3. Hopeful solemnity.** “Rejoice with trembling before the Lord,” Psalm 2 tells us. We need to show this balance of hope and awe, fear and faith, repentance and confidence in Family Worship. Speak naturally yet reverently during this time, using the tone you would use when speaking to a deeply respected friend about a serious matter. Expect great things from a great covenant-keeping God.

*Let’s get more specific:*

### **1. For the reading of Scripture**

*Have a plan:* Read ten or twenty verses from the Old Testament in the morning and ten to twenty from the New Testament in the evening. Or read a series of parables, miracles, or biographical portions. Just be sure to read the entire Bible over a period of time. As J.C. Ryle said, “Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.”

*Account for special occasions:* On Sunday mornings, you might want to read Psalm 48, 63, 84, or John 20. On the Sabbath when the Lord’s Supper is to be administered, read Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Matthew 26, or part of John 6. Before you leave home for family vacations, gather your family in the living room and read Psalm 91 or Psalm 121.

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<sup>90</sup> **penitent** – repentant; remorseful; regretting one’s sins.

*Involve the family:* Every family member who can read should have a Bible to follow along. Set the tone by reading Scripture with expression, as the living, “breathing” Book it is.

*Assign various portions to be read by your wife and your children:* Teach your children how to read articulately and with expression. Don’t let them mumble or speed ahead. Teach them to read with reverence. Provide a brief word of explanation throughout the reading, according to the needs of the younger children.

*Encourage private Bible reading and study:* Be sure that you and your children close the day with the Word of God. You might follow Robert Murray M’Cheyne’s *Calendar for Bible Readings*<sup>91</sup> so that your children read the Bible on their own once each year. Help each child build a personal library of Biblebased books.

## **2. For Biblical instruction**

*Be plain in meaning:* Ask your children if they understand what you are reading. Be plain in applying scriptural texts. The 1647 *Church of Scotland Directory* provides counsel here:

“The Holy Scriptures should be read ordinarily to the family; and it is commendable, that thereafter they confer, and by way of conference, make some good use of what hath been read and heard. As, for example, if any sin be reproved in the word read, use may be made thereof to make all the family circumspect<sup>92</sup> and watchful against the same; or if any judgment be threatened that portion of scripture which is read, use may be made to make all the family fear lest the same or a worse judgment befall them, unless they beware of the sin that procured it: and finally, if any duty be required, or comfort held forth in a promise, use may be made to stir up themselves to employ Christ for strength to enable them for doing the commanded duty, and to apply the offered comfort in all which the master of the family is to have the chief hand; and any member of the family may propose a question or doubt for resolution” (par. III).

Encourage family dialogue around God’s Word in line with the Hebraic procedure of household question and answer (cf. Exo 12; Deu 6; Psa 78). Especially encourage teenagers to ask questions: draw them out. If you don’t know the answers, tell them so; and encourage them to search for answers. Have one or more good commentaries on hand, such as those by John Calvin, Matthew Poole, and Matthew Henry. Remember, if you don’t provide answers for your children, they will get them elsewhere—and often those will be wrong answers.

*Be pure in doctrine:* Titus 2:7 says, “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.” Don’t abandon doctrinal precision when teaching young children; aim for simplicity and soundness.

*Be relevant in application:* Don’t be afraid to share your experiences when appropriate, but do that simply. Use concrete illustrations. Ideally, tie together Biblical instruction with what you recently heard in sermons.

*Be affectionate in manner:* Proverbs continually uses the phrase “my son,” showing the warmth, love, and urgency in the teachings of a God-fearing father. When you must administer the wounds of a father-friend to your children, do that with heartfelt love. Tell them you must convey the whole counsel of God because you can’t bear the thought of spending eternity apart from them. My father often said to us with tears: “Children, I cannot miss any of you in heaven.” Tell your children: “We will allow you every privilege an open Bible will allow us to give you—but if we say no to you, you must know that flows out of our love.” As Ryle said: “Love is one grand secret of successful training. Soul love is the soul of all love.”

*Require attention:* Proverbs 4:1 says, “Hear, ye children, the instruction a father, and attend to know understanding.” Fathers and mothers have important truths to convey. You must demand a hearing for God’s truths in your home. That may involve repeated statements at the beginning like these: “Sit up, son, and look at me when I’m talking. We’re talking about God’s Word, and God deserves to be heard.” Don’t allow children to leave their seats during Family Worship.

## **3. For praying**

*Be short:* With few exceptions, don’t pray for more than five minutes. Tedious prayers do more harm than good.

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<sup>91</sup> Available from Chapel Library.

<sup>92</sup> **circumspect** – cautious; careful to consider all circumstances and possible consequence.

Don't teach in your prayer; God doesn't need the instruction. Teach with your eyes open; pray with your eyes shut.

*Be simple without being shallow:* Pray for things that your children know something about, but don't allow your prayers to become trivial. Don't reduce your prayers to self-centered, shallow petitions.

*Be direct:* Spread your needs before God, plead your case, and ask for mercy. Name your teenagers and children and their needs one by one on a daily basis. That holds tremendous weight with them.

*Be natural yet solemn:* Speak clearly and reverently. Don't use an unnatural, high-pitched voice or a monotone. Don't pray too loudly or softly, too fast or slow.

*Be varied:* Don't pray the same thing every day; that becomes monotonous. Develop more variety in prayer by remembering and stressing the various ingredients of true prayer, such as: Invocation,<sup>93</sup> adoration,<sup>94</sup> and dependence. Begin by mentioning one or two titles or attributes of God, such as, "Gracious and holy Lord . . ." To that add a declaration of your desire to worship God and your dependence upon Him for His assistance in prayer. For example, say: "We bow humbly in Thy presence. Thou who art worthy to be worshiped, praying that our souls may be lifted up to Thee. Assist us by Thy Spirit. Help us to call upon Thy Name by Jesus Christ, in whom alone we can approach to Thee."

*Confession for family sins:* Confess the depravity of our nature, then actual sins—especially daily sins and family sins. Recognize the punishment we deserve at the hands of a holy God, and ask God to forgive all your sins for Christ's sake.

*Petition for family mercies:* Ask God to deliver us from sin and evil. You might say, "O Lord, forgive our sins through Thy Son. Subdue our iniquities by thy Spirit. Deliver us from the natural darkness of our own minds and the corruption of our own hearts. Free us from the temptations to which we were exposed today."

*Ask God for temporal and spiritual good.* Pray for His provision for every need in daily life. Pray for spiritual blessings. Pray that your souls are prepared for eternity.

*Remember family needs, and intercede for family friends.* Remember to pray in all these petitions that God's will be done. But don't allow that subjection to God's will stop you from pleading with God. Plead with Him to hear your petitions. Plead for everyone in your family as they travel to eternity. Plead for them on the basis of God's mercy, His covenant relation with you, and upon the sacrifice of Christ.

*Thanksgiving as a family:* Thank the Lord for food and drink, providential mercies, spiritual opportunities, answered prayers, returned health, and deliverance from evil. Confess, "It is of Thy mercies that we are not consumed as family." Remember Question 116 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, which says, "God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them."

Bless God for who He is and for what He has done. Ask that His kingdom, power, and glory be forever displayed. Then conclude with "Amen," which means "certainly it shall be so."

Matthew Henry said that the morning Family Worship is especially a time of praise and of petition for strength for the day and for divine benediction on its activities. The evening worship should focus on thankfulness, penitent reflections, and humble supplications for the night.

#### **4. For singing**

*Sing doctrinally pure songs:* There is no excuse for singing doctrinal error, no matter how attractive the tune might be. [Hence the need for doctrinally sound hymnals such as the *Trinity Hymnal*.]

*Sing psalms first and foremost without neglecting sound hymns:* Remember that the Psalms, called by Calvin "an anatomy of all parts of soul," are the richest gold mine of deep, living, experiential scriptural piety available to us still today.

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<sup>93</sup> **invocation** – calling upon God for help.

<sup>94</sup> **adoration** – perhaps the highest kind of worship, involving reverent contemplation of God's perfections and acknowledging them in words of praise and postures of reverence, i.e., Rev 4:8, 10, 11: "...and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come...the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

*Sing simple psalms, if you have young children:* In choosing Psalms to sing, look for songs that children can easily master and songs of particular importance for them to know. Choose songs that express the spiritual needs of your children for repentance, faith, and renewal of heart and life; songs that reveal God’s love for His people, and the love of Christ for the lambs of His flock. Words such as righteousness, goodness, and mercy should be pointed out and explained beforehand.

*Sing heartily and with feeling:* As Colossians 3:23 says, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” Meditate on the words you are singing. On occasion, discuss a phrase that is sung.

### ***After Family Worship***

As you retire for the night, pray for God’s blessing on Family Worship: “Lord, use the instruction to save our children and to cause them to grow in grace that they might put their hope in Thee. Use our praise of Thy name in song to endear Thy name, Thy Son, and Thy Spirit to their never-dying souls. Use our stammering prayers to bring our children to repentance. Lord Jesus Christ, breathe upon our family during this time of worship with Thy Word and Spirit. Make these life-giving times.”

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## **HEATHENS AND CHRISTIANS**

**John G. Paton (1824-1907)**

*The following is an excerpt from Missionary Patriarch, The True Story of John G. Paton, Evangelist for Jesus Christ among the South Sea Cannibals, edited by James Paton. This remarkable autobiography displays the wonders of God’s saving grace. After years of laboring among the cannibals, God used Paton’s digging of a well to break the grip of paganism and bring the cannibals to bow before our sovereign God. Having been stunned by the sight of water coming out of the ground in the well, the old chief Namakei later gave this testimony in Paton’s mission church:*

“My people, the people of Aniwa,<sup>95</sup> the world is turned upside down since the word of Jehovah came to this land! Who ever expected to see rain coming up through the earth? It has always come from the clouds! Wonderful is the work of this Jehovah God. No god of Aniwa ever answered prayers as the Missi’s<sup>96</sup> God has done. Friends of Namakei, all the powers of the world could not have forced us to believe that rain could be given from the depths of the earth, if we had not seen it with our eyes, felt it, and tasted it as we here do. Now, by the help of Jehovah God, the Missi brought that invisible rain to view, which we never before heard of or saw, and,”—(beating his hand on his breast, he exclaimed)—

“Something here in my heart tells me that the Jehovah God does exist, the Invisible One, whom we never heard of nor saw till the Missi brought Him to our knowledge. The coral has been removed, the land has been cleared away, and lo! the water rises. Invisible till this day, yet all the same it was there, though our eyes were too weak. So I, your Chief, do now firmly believe that when I die, when the bits of coral and the heaps of dust are removed which now blind my old eyes, I shall then see the Invisible Jehovah God with my soul, as Missi tells me, not less surely than I have seen the rain from the earth below. From this day, my people, I must worship the God who has

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<sup>95</sup> **Aniwa** – (ah-NEE-wah) a tiny island among the New Hebrides in the Pacific Ocean.

<sup>96</sup> **Missi** – the tribal term for *missionary*.

opened for us the well, and who fills us with rain from below. The gods of Aniwa cannot hear, cannot help us, like the God of Missi. Henceforth I am a follower of Jehovah God. Let every man that thinks with me go now and fetch the idols of Aniwa, the gods which our fathers feared, and cast them down at Missi's feet. Let us burn and bury and destroy these things of wood and stone, and let us be taught by the Missi how to serve the God who can hear, the Jehovah who gave us the well, and who will give us every other blessing, for He sent His Son Jesus to die for us and bring us to Heaven. This is what the Missi has been telling us every day since he landed on Aniwa. We laughed at him, but now we believe him. The Jehovah God has sent us rain from the earth. Why should He not also send us His Son from Heaven? Namakei stands up for Jehovah!"

This address, and the Sinking of the Well, broke, as I already said, the back of Heathenism on Aniwa. That very afternoon, the old Chief and several of his people brought their idols and cast them down at my feet beside the door of our house. Oh, the intense excitement of the weeks that followed! Company after company came to the spot, loaded with their gods of wood and stone, and piled them up in heaps, amid the tears and sobs of some, and the shoutings of others, in which was heard the oft-repeated word, "Jehovah! Jehovah! "What could be burned, we cast into the flames; others we buried in pits twelve or fifteen feet deep; and some few, more likely than the rest to feed or awaken superstition, we sank far out into the deep sea. Let no Heathen eyes ever gaze on them again!

We do not mean to indicate that, in all cases, their motives were either high or enlightened. There were not wanting<sup>97</sup> some who wished to make this new movement pay, and were much disgusted when we refused to "buy" their gods! On being told that Jehovah would not be pleased unless they gave them up of their own free will, and destroyed them without pay or reward, some took them home again and held on by them for a season, and others threw them away in contempt. Meetings were held and speeches were delivered, for these New Hebrideans are irrepressible orators, florid,<sup>98</sup> and amazingly graphic; much talk followed, and the destruction of idols went on apace. Byand-bye two Sacred Men and some other selected persons constituted themselves a sort of detective committee, to search out and expose those who pretended to give them all up, but were hiding certain idols in secret, and to encourage waverers to come to a thorough [conversion to] Jehovah. In these intensely exciting days, we "stood still" and saw the salvation of the Lord.

They flocked around us now at every meeting we held. They listened eagerly to the story of the life and death of Jesus. They voluntarily assumed one or other article of clothing. And everything transpiring was fully and faithfully submitted to us for counsel or for information. One of the very first steps in Christian discipline to which they readily and almost unanimously took was the asking of God's blessing on every meal and praising the great Jehovah for their daily bread. Whosoever did not do so was regarded as a Heathen. (Query:<sup>99</sup> how many white Heathens are there?) The next step, and it was taken in a manner as if by some common consent, that was not less surprising than joyful, was a form of Family Worship every morning and evening. Doubtless the prayers were often very queer, and mixed up with many remaining superstitions; but they were prayers to the great Jehovah, the compassionate Father, the Invisible One—no longer to gods of stone.

Necessarily these were the conspicuous features of our life as Christians in their midst—morning and evening Family Prayer, and grace at meat;<sup>100</sup> and hence, most naturally, their instinctive adoption and imitation of the same as the first outward tokens of Christian discipline. Every house in which there was not prayer to God in the family was known thereby to be Heathen. This was a direct and practical evidence of the new religion; and, so far as it goes (and that is very far indeed, where there is any sincerity beneath it), the test was one about which there could be no mistake on either side.



"I trust there are none here present who profess to be followers of Christ, who do not also practice prayer in their families. We may have no positive commandment for it, but we believe that it is so much in accord with the genius and spirit of the Gospel, and that it is so

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<sup>97</sup> **wanting** – lacking.

<sup>98</sup> **florid** – very ornate; flowery.

<sup>99</sup> **query** – question.

<sup>100</sup> **meat** – food in general; meal time.

commended by the example of the saints, that the neglect thereof is a strange inconsistency. Now, how often this Family Worship is conducted in a slovenly manner! An inconvenient hour is fixed; and a knock at the door, a ring at the bell, the call of a customer, may hurry the believer from his knees to go and attend to his worldly concerns. Of course, many excuses might be offered, but the fact would still remain that, in this way, we often restrain prayer.”  
—*Charles Spurgeon* (1834-1892)

“Praise is certainly not at all so common in family prayer as other forms of worship. We cannot all of us praise God in the family by joining in song, because we are not all able to carry a tune, but it would be well if we could. I agree with Matthew Henry when he says, “They that pray in the family do well; they that pray and read the Scriptures do better; but they that pray, and read, and sing do best of all.” There is a completeness in that kind of Family Worship which is much to be desired.”  
—*Charles Spurgeon* (1834-1892)

“We deeply want a revival of domestic religion. The Christian family was the bulwark of godliness in the days of the Puritans; but in these evil times hundreds of families of so-called Christians have no Family Worship, no restraint upon growing sons, and no wholesome instruction or discipline. How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advance when His own disciples do not teach His Gospel to their own children?”  
—*Charles Spurgeon* (1834-1892)

“Would you keep up your authority in your family? You cannot do it better than by keeping up religion in your family. If ever a master of a family looks great, truly great, it is when he is going before his house in the service of God, and presiding among them in holy things. Then he shows himself worthy of double honor, when he teacheth them the good knowledge of the Lord, and is their mouth to God in prayer, blessing them in the name of God.”—*Matthew Henry* (1662-1714)

“Happy is the household which meets every morning for prayer! Happy are they who let not the evening depart without uniting in supplication! Brethren, I wish it were more common, I wish it were universal, with all professors of religion to have family prayer. We sometimes hear of the children of Christian parents who do not grow up in the fear of God, and we are asked how it is that they turn out so badly. In many, very many cases, I fear there is such a neglect of Family Worship that it is not probable that the children are at all impressed by any piety supposed to be possessed by their parents.”  
—*Charles Spurgeon* (1834-1892)