

A PRACTICAL PRIMER ON PRAYER

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN -

FAMILY PRAYERS

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

ONE SUMMER my husband and I went visiting relatives. It was a pleasant surprise to go into home after home and see that they held family prayers. I think it would surprise all of us if we knew how many homes across the length and breadth of the United States have family prayers. It isn't a thing one goes around talking about - but it is done!

If your family isn't used to having them, you will not find them as difficult to begin as you think. If you are one of the younger members of the family, it might be well first to go to your mother or your father to ask for help. If, however, you are one of the older young people or one of the parents in the home, you might well, after breathing a little prayer to GOD for help, say aloud, "Don't you think we ought to pray together each day?"

Your family may look surprised and may even demand a reason for your suggestion. Now it is for you to straighten your shoulders, smile your most appealing smile, and reply, "We're united in everything else; why not in our prayers to GOD?" They will probably agree to try family prayers, and that is when your battle will really begin. Everyone is so busy.

In this day when the prophecy, "**Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased**" (Daniel 12:4), is being fulfilled, it is difficult to persuade people to stop long enough even to realize that they are only going around in circles. And they will continue to go round and round until they practice waiting on GOD. "**They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint**" (Isaiah 40:31).

Once you have gained your family's consent, select the time which is most convenient. After a meal - breakfast or dinner - is usually best. You will find the new habit difficult to form. There will be times when every member of the family thinks he has a good excuse for not staying for devotions. That is because "**we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places**" (Ephesians 6:12).

Satan will try to discourage you, to make you think you can't succeed. But if everyone leaves,

hold the devotions by yourself. Remember that the Word is the "**power of God unto salvation**" (Romans 1:16) and doggedly continue. In time your very faithfulness will win your family.

In discussing family devotions, it would be easy merely to tell a person to read the Bible and pray. But you need to use wisdom in selecting what you will read and in deciding for what you will pray. Here are a few suggestions for the Bible reading.

Many devout families read and reread only their favorite passages of Scripture. We need the full revelation of GOD from cover to cover.

You should plan to read the Bible through in family worship; but it is best to read the New Testament first, because more people are acquainted with it and people enjoy hearing that about which they know something. The Psalms might be read next and finally the Old Testament.

The first time you read the Old Testament, I suggest that you skip any chapter which does not hold your family's interest, such as the genealogies and the description of the Tabernacle furniture. Many a girl or boy has started to read the Bible and hasn't gone beyond Exodus because he did not understand the symbolism in it and thought it dry. You wouldn't want this to happen in your family.

Paul fed only milk to the babes in CHRIST. As your family grows spiritually, they will want to hear each "**jot and tittle.**" Remember that "**All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness**" (II Timothy 3:16). In other words, while all is inspired, it is not all written for the same purpose. Some passages may be more fitting for family worship than others.

Instead of having one person always read the Scripture, why don't you have each member take a turn? That will help them all to acquire a Scriptural vocabulary, and they will not be embarrassed if sometime they are asked to read the Bible in public.

Along with the Bible, some families use a devotional guide. An older Christian will be glad to help you select one. For the average family, these guides are of value. They are gauged to the spiritual depth of the average person and point out truths that he would not observe for himself.

As you go on with the Lord, however, you will find that much in them is surface truth and you will instinctively seek something deeper. You may have to satisfy this urge in your private devotions; but if you are fortunate enough to have a family who grows with you, you will want to use a devotional book.

The books are usually deeper than the booklets. The very fact that they are printed in the more permanent form shows that at least the publisher thought they were of more lasting value.

Among the better known devotional books are *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers, the *With CHRIST* series by Andrew Murray, *Streams in the Desert* by Mrs. Cowman.

There are others which may be bought in any Christian book store; they are also listed for purchase in Sunday school literature. While the Bible is sufficient for all our needs, it is true that

these writers have prayed, and the Lord has revealed rich secrets to them. Their books throw a light upon Scripture which we might not see.

No matter which you use - devotional guide or book - it will provide a means for someone else to take part in devotions. If you can manage the situation tactfully, it is good to have the one who needs the Scripture most read it. He will have to pay more attention if he does the reading.

Of course you will pray together. You may feel that, because you are with your own family, you are free to pray anything you wish. You are fortunate if that is true of your family; but in most families even our prayers will, out of Christian love, have to be gauged by the spiritual depth of the weakest member.

Any family should be spiritual enough to thank GOD for His goodness and to ask guidance in daily life; at first, perhaps, there will be no more than that. In time, however, most families broaden their viewpoint by including others in the prayer, not only friends and the sick, but also the work of missionaries and other specific needs.

Lead them onward step by step in prayer.

If it is at all possible, persuade each member of the family to pray. Help them to find their voices for the Lord. "**Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven**" (Matthew 10:32). Explain to them that a spirit of thankfulness is more important than the length of the prayer. Encourage them to say even an audible, "Thank Thee, Lord."

Suggest that they ask, "Lord, teach me to pray," and He most certainly will answer. But if they can find their voices no other way, you might repeat the Lord's prayer together.

Encourage them to pray, but do not insist. After all, prayer is to GOD and is sacred. One cannot force it, any more than one would force the opening of a rosebud.

Be sure to include the children in your family worship. A baby should be so young when he begins to attend that he doesn't remember the first time any more than he remembers the first time he ate. A friend of mine, a widow with five children, said that when she knelt to pray, her baby used to toddle over to her and cuddle beside her.

Sometimes he even crawled over her feet. She didn't scold the boy, for she explained, "I want his earliest memory to be of his mother kneeling in prayer."

When children are present at the devotional time, it should be lighter. For instance, you might read a book of Bible stories written especially for children. But be sure to read a few verses directly from the Scripture so that they will learn Bible phraseology and have them learn a short memory verse and join in prayer.

If you have a piano in your home, you are fortunate; but if you don't, sing anyway. Some like to open and close the devotions with a hymn. If someone can pitch the tune, that is fine; but if not, anyone can "**make a joyful noise unto the Lord.**" JESUS and His disciples sang at the Last

Supper. Scripture says, "**And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives**" (Matthew 26:30).

If the children ask questions, answer the questions. They may not seem important to you, but they may be of the utmost importance to the child. Little minds are deep, and they make decisions which shape their thinking for the rest of their lives.

If you do not know the answer to the question asked, promise to find out what it is. Most people ask what are called "stock questions." That means that other people have asked them before, and Christian books have been written with the answers. You can buy these books at your Christian bookstore or through the advertisements in your Sunday school papers, and they are worth your investment.

This may sound like work, but what of that?

We are "**workers together with God**" and are instructed to be "**workmen that needeth not to be ashamed.**"

Family worship need not take much time. If there are school children in the family, one has to get up only fifteen or twenty minutes earlier to have devotions before the children leave. And the day is started right for the entire family.

Making children aware of the presence of GOD is both important and easy. It is important because a knowledge of His presence will be a lifetime check on their actions, and it is easy if His presence is natural to you. Let them hear you offer a word of thanksgiving each morning.

Accustom them to hearing audible prayer at any time of the day or night when there is need for prayer. Make His presence a reality to them, for He is there.

Perhaps your next question will be, should you have family worship when you have company? The answer is, most assuredly, yes.

Your home is your castle; and if guests are there at the usual time for family worship, you should invite them to join you. If they are Christians, they will be delighted. If they are not Christians, a glimpse into the secret of the Christian home may be a help to them.

The only change necessary would be to omit the more personal references in your prayers and to select the Scripture with care. "**Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves**" (Matthew 10:16). Do not read a difficult doctrinal passage or a passage such as the one on a woman's having long hair, which might only start a discussion without benefit to their souls. Read some beautiful message, such as Psalm 103 or Isaiah 55 or John 14.

Try to give your guests a longing to read the Bible for themselves.

In Everything Give Thanks - II Thessalonians 5:18

Give thanks! GOD's mercies manifold

Most gracious and abundant are,
Supplying to the mind and heart
The blessings which would life enrich:
Perhaps not wealth of lands or gold,
Which perish often in their use,
But tasks of worth to be performed,
Whose final fruitage rich should be-
The wish and will to love and serve,
A place wherein to play one's part,
That when the days have passed away,
And reckoning for them be made,
It will be counted quite enough,
If faithfulness has marked the way,
If whatsoever was the task,
The Master's glory was the goal.
Then thankful be, nor fear to tread
The unknown path which love directs,
Assured that GOD will ne'er forsake,
But true and constant e'er remain.

- Fred Scott Shepard

~ end of chapter 7 ~