

How to Have A Family Altar

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CHAPTER NINE

The Conduct of the Family Altar in the light of Child Needs

THE CHILD

THE EDUCATION OF THE CHILD begins at birth. Long before the child reasons, he picks up feelings, attitudes, responses, habits, and all that forms his life and personality.

The attitudes and habits which the child acquires in these early years are absorbed out of his environment and shaped out of the impressions and influences about him every day. The parents by their life and teachings, and the home by its atmosphere provide the materials out of which the child will form the foundations of his life for good or ill. What goes into the child during the first six years will largely determine what that child will be in character and personality all the rest of his life! A life is basically as strong as the foundations upon which it is reared! We say this to emphasize the solemn importance of the first six years and the tremendous responsibility of the parents. Remember, that apart from CHRIST and GOD's Word, your child has nothing in him but God-forsaking, yes, God-hating, self-loving, sinful flesh.

Many parents say, "A child is too young to train until he is eight or nine or even older. I'll wait till he gets old enough to understand." To say this is equivalent to saying, "I'll just let the flesh and the devil have charge of my boy till he gets older, then I'll teach him the Word of GOD."

When you get ready to teach him the Word of GOD, he will already be in the grip of the flesh, the world, and the devil! From birth to about six, the child is tender, pliable, open and very impressionable. He will never again be so pliable and open as he is in these early years.

After six, his character and personality will have a "set" to them. GOD has made the child pliable and tender and open so that he might be molded toward GOD and His Word in the very foundations of his being by his parents.

Whoever, whether GOD or the devil, wins these first six years in the life of a child will lay the foundations of that child's life - the one for good and blessing, and the other for ill and damnation! Pray and plan and work to claim the blessing of that sentence for your precious child and to avoid the curse part!

All you need to do for the devil to claim those first six tender, critical and life-forming years of your child is nothing. The less you do the better. If you plan to wait till he is six before you seriously undertake his spiritual nurture, you will be doing the best you can to give the flesh and the devil a free and powerful hand in the foundation of his life! Now think this over; pray it in; then work it out GOD's way. To give GOD and His Word a free and life-molding power in your

child's life during these strategic years, you must do something and do it daily and earnestly.

METHODS OF DOING

What this child needs first of all is a spiritual atmosphere marked by harmony, cheerfulness, kindness, and love.

Like a sponge, he soaks up the atmosphere he sees and hears and feels around him! The child's emotional and spiritual impressions are received from his home environment and form the material out of which his habits, attitudes, and character will be shaped for life.

In an environment characterized by quarreling and melancholy, the child becomes tense, fearful, hateful, and he feels insecure. Children from one to six are very sensitive to any discord in the home. Children who are unfortunate enough to absorb out of their home environment feelings of insecurity, fear, tension, and hate will find their whole life colored by these feelings. To say the least, they are off in the race of life on the wrong foot emotionally and spiritually.

A child of three months is too young to understand Galatians 5:22, 23, but he is not too young to enjoy it. The greatest secret of shaping the life of the child of from one day to six years of age is to make Galatians 5:22, 23 the very spirit and life of your home! Then your child will literally feed on the love of GOD both emotionally and spiritually. He will absorb that out of his environment which will make him emotionally and spiritually healthy and strong.

Your next duty is to let your child hear the Word of GOD. This is the law of faith. Our aim is to lead our child to CHRIST as soon as possible. Many parents object that a four-month-old baby is too young to understand the Word of GOD. Therefore, they reason, he should not hear it.

But GOD's Word says, **"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of GOD"** (Romans 10:17). Your duty, dear parent, is to let your baby hear the Word of GOD. Somehow by the action of the HOLY SPIRIT through the Word of GOD, that child will receive faith. GOD says:

"with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10). Babies have ears to hear with! They have hearts to believe with! The HOLY SPIRIT who holds the reins of that child's mind and heart is mightily present to bless when you give the Word of GOD! You may wonder about this, all the time forgetting that GOD has plainly said:

"For the Word of GOD is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:12, 13).

Therefore, **"Exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"** (Hebrews 3:13).

It is your duty to exhort your child daily with the blessed Word of GOD.

If you do that, you will be amazed to see what the HOLY SPIRIT will do in that little heart! In II Timothy 3:15, Paul said to Timothy, "**From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is Christ Jesus.**" In Matthew 19:13, we read about the action of some very wise mothers: "**Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray.**"

Wise mothers! Privileged children! This is the family altar - bringing our children to CHRIST in His Word that He might touch them!

But notice! The disciples were like many of us Christians today. They probably thought these little ones were too young to appreciate or understand JESUS. "**And the disciples rebuked them.**" Then notice whose side JESUS took in this difference: "**Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven. And he laid his hands on them.**"

We say they are too young, too little and so on. But JESUS said, "**For of such is the kingdom of Heaven.**"

We say they can't understand. But JESUS said, "**For of such is the kingdom of Heaven.**"

GOD apparently has gateways and doorways into the very innermost being of the little child that we know not of. We must become childlike in order to enter the kingdom. JESUS said, "**Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.**"

The parents' great privilege during the first six years is to make his child acquainted with CHRIST as his Maker and his loving Friend. Before the child is three-and-one-half, he should be saved and know that CHRIST made him and loves him. The child should learn to lovingly speak the name of "JESUS" right along with the name of "Daddy" and "Mother." Some would say that it will be difficult for a child to believe in CHRIST because CHRIST can't be seen.

There are two answers to this common objection:

1. You witness to CHRIST, and the HOLY SPIRIT will make Him real to the child's heart. The HOLY SPIRIT knows how to make CHRIST, who is unseen, as real to the child as his parents who are seen.
2. Remember that this obstacle has no real basis in fact. In the first six years of his life, the child has a strong sense of the reality of the invisible. There is a strongly developed dimension of his being that senses the reality of the invisible and that reaches out to experience and to know that reality. The little child is actually eager and hungry to know that reality.

The failure to supply this need through the Word of GOD causes him to people the invisible with objects of his own imagination - fairies, gremlins, Santa Claus, and so on. GOD has given the child a strong sense for the reality of the invisible as a foundation for receiving the truth of CHRIST and His Word in the earliest and tender years.

We should pray diligently for those parents who starve their children for the Word of GOD and then feed the child lies about fairies, Santa Claus, witches, gremlins, and other such stories.

These are the devil's lies and substitutes for the Lord JESUS CHRIST and the Word of GOD.

While the children cry for bread, so many feed them naught but stones!

PRAYERS

During these first years the child may learn and pray simple thanksgiving prayers and sing simple songs.

Through his prayers he should be taught to trust the Lord JESUS CHRIST under all circumstances; to express thankfulness for all blessings received; to recognize CHRIST as the Creator and Sustainer of the world and the Giver of all good things. He should be taught to pray for others.

During this period the children can catch the missionary vision by becoming acquainted with the children of other lands through pictures and simple stories. Children of this age are very fond of stories. Much of our instruction will be given through this medium.

The purpose of the story told is to make CHRIST real; to place eternity's values in full view; to awaken emotions of love, reverence, sympathy, and to suggest avenues of expression for his love and sympathy.

Early should the child learn that one of the best ways to show love toward CHRIST is by helping and serving others. Children should be taught activities of kindness such as giving to poor children; making scrapbooks for children in hospitals and in mission fields. They may furnish food for animals and water and food for the birds. In this way, they are taught to live the life of CHRIST.

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The child of this period is limited in the control of his emotions.

He is more or less impulsive; his reasoning power is growing, and he has increased power to handle and understand simple concrete ideas. This child's mind needs to be definitely cultivated with the great truths and doctrines of the Word of GOD in as simple a way as possible.

Every Christian parent should have contact with a good fundamental bookstore for material they may use in their family altar devotions to suit the needs of any age. We should aim to develop such attitudes as:

- Zeal to know and do the will of GOD.
- Reverence for GOD.
- Appreciation of GOD's power, wisdom, and holiness.

- Appreciation to GOD for all the good things of life.
- Praise and thankfulness to God for His blessings
- Gratitude to parents and friends for their kindness.
- Kindness to others

As will be seen in a moment, stories will be used from the Word of GOD which bring out these qualities.

THE SUBJECT MATTER TO BE USED IN FAMILY WORSHIP TO REALIZE THESE AIMS

The Psalms furnish a rich source for many of these themes.

It is a source of blessing to seek for our Lord JESUS CHRIST in the Psalms. They are full of Him. The children will marvel at the richness of His glory in the Old Testament Scriptures. Remember, **"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself"** (Luke 24:27). And the disciples said, **"Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"** (Luke 24:32). Later He said unto them, **"These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures"** (Luke 24:44, 45).

The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, and Ruth supply character studies which answer many of our aims. For example, the life of Abraham shows GOD as a kind and loving Father, gives us interesting truths about knowing GOD's will and doing it. Abraham's life shows him kind to others and a true helper in time of need. As you give these truths out, your child will hear and drink them in. What he drinks in today will appear in strong Christian character tomorrow. Believe it, and like Jonah, by this faith you can call all other appearances (which sometimes might make you despair and doubt) as a lying vanity!

The whole childhood of JESUS can be summed up in the great words, **"I must be about my Father's business"** (Luke 2:49). **"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them"** (Luke 2:51).

Because His childhood was grounded in this double obedience, it may be said that **"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with GOD and man"** (Luke 2:52).

Study the flight into Egypt; JESUS among the doctors'; CHRIST blessing little children; CHRIST feeding the multitudes; the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Every Christian home should be in contact with some fundamental missionary family. The children should be encouraged to write to some missionary children of their own age. Through this personal friendship they will learn of the needs of missions firsthand and they will acquire a personal interest in the missionary field.

The child of this age may well save enough out of his allowance to send to his missionary friends

for the work of CHRIST "over there." Think! If only twenty thousand children from our Christian homes gave a penny a week to missionaries the amount would be around eight hundred dollars in a month's time!

The stories for children of this age should have action and a strong sense of the dramatic in them.

Telling the story is much better than reading it. The flannelgraph is good for occasional use. The children of this age deeply love hymns. If there was more singing in families there wouldn't need to be so much scolding. Singing together brings harmony, unity, and joy into the family circle.

Be sure the hymns are within the understanding of the child. Also the hymns should be within the child's range of voice. We suggest such hymns as: "Holy, Holy, Holy"; "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"; "This is My Father's World"; "HOLY SPIRIT, Friend Divine"; "JESUS Loves Me."

The child of this age should be encouraged to pray silently and in the family devotions. The prayers should be simple and close to his own life. Themes for his prayers might be: thanks to GOD for the gift of the Lord JESUS CHRIST as our Friend, Lord and Saviour; for the sunshine and rain; for home, friends, strong bodies; happy hearts, and so on. He should pray for the needs of church, school, and home; Sunday school, community, pastor, and missionaries.

Teach the child that the worship of the family altar should be carried into the lives of others by golden deeds of kindness. You can think of many good deeds for him to do. We mentioned many under our treatment for the pre-school child.

AGES 9-11

This child is naturally more thoughtful than the child of 6-8, and thus presents wider opportunities for training and development. This period marks the dawning of life's real idealism. Many conscious and deliberate choices are made during this period. The child is more than ever before evaluating life situations and making decisions according to his limited but growing sense of values. If the child's training has been thorough around the family altar and in his contacts with his parents, he will reflect this in the decisions he makes.

The conscience of the child is developing through his dealing with parents, friends, and teachers. From these associations, especially with the parents, come many ideas which develop the moral and spiritual ideas of the child.

One of the chief characteristics of this age is the emphasis on loyalty. Loyalty to the group, or the gang, is especially manifest and offers the outstanding cue to the parents in their spiritual direction and guidance. The Junior's loyalty may be used to develop loyalty to our Lord JESUS CHRIST and to impress upon the child how vital such loyalty is. It is a cornerstone virtue, for if loyalty is rightly placed in our Lord JESUS CHRIST, all else will be taken care of in due season and proper order.

It is well that this drive of loyalty comes before the turbulent years, beginning at twelve. Loyalty to CHRIST is a firm anchor for the adolescent years.

The child will manifest a strong desire to belong to groups. About the only time he spends at home is for eating, chores, studying, devotions, and sleeping. He wants to be out with "the gang" as much as possible.

Parents should see that the child secures good Christian fellowship in his church and as much as possible in school and neighborhood. Much of this child's contact, whether boy or girl, will be with unsaved and untrained children of the same sex. This situation cannot be avoided; parents need to have no fear if they have been true to the letter and spirit of Deuteronomy 6:5-9. He will have to learn how to mix with the unsaved without being swept off his feet into their ways and their sins.

While the child seeks loyalty to his chums, he should always realize that loyalty to CHRIST and His Word is of first importance.

The sense of honor and loyalty developed in the gang, or club, lays the foundations for dependable relationships in the future life!

That the child's intellect is increasingly alert is manifested by exploring and asking questions - mostly why and how; before, his questions were mostly what. His inquisitiveness regarding the things of GOD provides a natural point of contact through which to instruct him in the things of GOD. Do not ignore or laugh off his questions!

Do not answer his questions lightly! Answer them as fully as possible. No greater opportunity is provided, under perfectly natural circumstances, to guide and instruct the child in the Word of GOD!

The admiration of heroes is beginning to appear in this period but reaches its highest peak between the years of twelve and fourteen. This is another powerful motive in the natural constitution of the child which parents may guide and encourage for the child's spiritual development. Let us use these natural drives for the highest religious and spiritual ends. Let us not permit them to be wasted on cowboys, comic-book heroes such as Superman, movie characters, etc. The God-implanted interests are meant to be used for God-intended ends.

In our family devotions we will seek to furnish the child with the correct ideals, truths, heroes of the faith, through stories which depict moral struggles and victories and loyalty to GOD, no matter how strong the test or how great the temptation. We will give stories from the Word of GOD showing right standards of conduct, fair play, generosity, and service, so that he may be strengthened against the evil day when the passions and allurements of the world tempt him.

Adolescent changes should be anticipated in this period, especially as regards the fact of sex. Parents should have their child's confidence so they may give wise information to the child regarding the purpose of physical changes in the life of a growing boy or girl.

False modesty which will make the child feel that the subject is in itself unclean should be avoided!

False modesty on the part of the parents will cause the child to feel that this subject cannot be

openly discussed with anyone.

Then at the very time when the child needs the confidence of his parents, he will be denied. His guilt and shame will drive his confusion in upon his own mind. Out of such an unfortunate experience he will develop unhealthy attitudes toward one of the greatest forces and most beautiful facts in life! Ignorance in children regarding this matter leads to tragedy! **"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."**

THE WORD OF GOD FOR THESE CHILDREN

Dr. Dawson found in his studies that from eight years on the interest in the Old Testament greatly rises, reaching its maximum at thirteen in the case of boys and twelve in the case of girls. It is evident that boys and girls between nine and fourteen are more attracted to the Old Testament than to the New Testament. There is an interest in the poetic which begins around nine years, rises steadily to the fourteenth year, and then falls off until at twenty it is down to average interest. The poetry of the Word of GOD touches the deepest springs in this child's personality.

He is more ready for historical material than at any previous age, especially the biographical material.

Use the stories of Abraham, Joshua, Moses, Solomon, Samson, David, Daniel, Ruth, and Jacob. Also use the material concerning our Saviour Himself. He said: **"I have given you an example."**

Through the example of His life they will

- (1) develop a deep sense of loyalty to Him and all He stands for;
- (2) have their questions answered and the needs of their mental inquisitiveness fulfilled;
- (3) have guidance and wisdom that they may learn to make wise choices;
- (4) CHRIST will be that Hero for them who will excite their wonder, love, respect, and admiration. And He will be the Hero who will shape their ideals and aspirations and determine their sense of values!

Brief studies may be made of Peter, Paul, John, Andrew, and Thomas. In these studies around the family altar emphasize:

1. Loyalty to CHRIST and man
 2. Faith in CHRIST
 3. Love for CHRIST
 4. Zeal to win souls and do His blessed will at all times
- The natural basis in the growing child to which each of the above emphases answer is:

- (1.) His growing sense of loyalty;
- (2.) His seeking for a faith which answers his questions;
- (3.) His need for a guiding principle and motive within to guide him into wise and right decisions;
- (4.) His seeking for a hero whom he may follow after and whose will he may obey. Continue to

develop the missionary zeal of the child.

Biographical material of great missionary heroes such as Livingstone, Carey, Moffat, Judson, Stam, and others, may be used with great effectiveness.

Among the hymns that especially appeal to this age are: "Onward Christian Soldiers"; "Faith of Our Fathers"; "Holy, Holy, Holy"; "Silent Night"; "Nearer My God to Thee"; "Day Is Dying in the West."

The Lord's Prayer should be used much at family worship. Let the child memorize this prayer.

~ end of chapter 9 ~
