

"And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down." (I Kings 18:30)

I want to present the matter of rebuilding or developing the family altar. If you have one, then you will be rejoicing in what the Scriptures teach. If you don't, I want to encourage you not only in family altar but also in personal, private devotions. You can get something started that will be of great value long-range in the matter of prayer.

I am convinced that family devotions is one of the finest places to develop prayer lives, and a time when children learn early that God hears and answers prayer. Let me give you an example that someone shared with me. A couple that I know and have had a chance to minister to, have three sweet children. They told how that when they heard that I was sick they went as a family and began praying for my recovery. When the word came that I was home from the hospital, they were delighted, and the children said, "See, Jesus hears even our prayers." That is a great lesson for children to learn - that Jesus hears their prayers. If they will continue to learn that, I won't fear too much about their having lives of prayer in the future. This can be developed early in their lives.

THE NEED FOR A FAMILY ALTAR

There has been a general breakdown of the family altar. Elijah found that the altar had been broken down and he had to rebuild it. Now his was a physical altar, but we have had a breakdown of the family altar over the years.

As far as I can tell in my reading, it began in a very serious way back in the middle 1800's, around the time of the Industrial Age setting into this country. Writers began to tell of the difficulties and the problems that came, and it seems that it has been on an increasing slide downward.

We may have to rebuild something that goes back to before our memories, or even our grandparent's memories. You may come from a line where there has been such, and that is not a problem. Most won't understand what it is, how to set it up, how to regulate it, or what is involved. They will feel there is a need, but they don't know how far back to go to

find where the answers are. There is a need to repair this altar that has been broken down.

We know that the Scriptures teach in Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." It didn't say that he will come back to it. He can be trained so that he will never leave it. He will walk in it. I find it a great encouragement that such is possible. We read in Ephesians 6:4 that fathers are to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." These are Biblical teachings.

There is the great passage in Deuteronomy 6 where we have God laying down some principles that are brought back up again in the New Testament. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 says, "And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach 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."

"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" - In other words parents have a responsibility to teach their OWN children. It is good when the church teaches them and the Sunday School teacher. Perhaps the Christian School might also teach them. But that doesn't remove the responsibility from the parents to teach their own children. That is our PERSONAL responsibility to teach OUR children. I have five that God has entrusted to me. I am responsible for their instruction - personally. I appreciate what other help they may get, but I am responsible for my part. We are to teach them DILIGENTLY, not just occasionally or shallowly.

There has been a lot of debate about this verse. If you will read some of the older authors you will find that the debate seems to center not on whether God should be tied to all of our conversation in the home. They all believe that. Whatever you are discussing you ought to be able to bring the Lord or some Scripture into that conversation. Whether you are getting up, lying down, sitting or walking, God is Somebody to be talked about and His Word is to be talked about also.

The debate was whether family devotions ought to be held two or three times a day. I guess we do have to go back

a while don't we? The argument was that it had to be twice a day because that is when you get up and when you go to bed. You ought to have devotions every morning and every evening and some said that you ought to try to have them in the middle of the day too. I won't argue either side. If you like two or three that is fine. It would be progress in most cases if families had devotions once a day. That wasn't even considered by our godly forefathers, but that has become the goal in this backslidden age. That is a rather frustrating thought isn't it?

Let me see if I can help you a little. I did a little figuring and from the age of toddlers until teens are of age to go out on their own, if they attend Sunday School, rarely missing, they would have an opportunity to be instructed about 800 times. IF they attended faithfully Sunday morning, Sunday night, and a midweek prayer meeting for instruction they would have a chance for perhaps another 2,400 times of instruction. If they attended a Christian school, from the first grade through the twelfth grade and were taught the Word of God every day in the school, that would be another 2,100 times. The total would be within just a couple hundred times of what having family devotions once a day during the same time period (and allowing for missing some times at least once a week or maybe twice a week). In other words, the frequency of family devotions would make about 5,000 opportunities, if you only had it once a day. All of the rest of this would only make up the same number of opportunities of instruction.

I am not opposed to what the church and Christian schools can do. I am **STRONGLY** in favor of that. I don't believe in the "forsaking of assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is." There are some that would use family devotions or worship as an excuse not to attend church services. That is wrong. They ought to study the passage in Hebrews and get corrected and get back to the services. The point I am making is that all that they can get otherwise is only half of what they would get if you have family devotions once a day. If you have it twice a day you could have twice the effect at home that all the rest of that put together adds up to.

I want you to see the numerical importance of regular family devotions. It is an enormous opportunity with enormous potential. It just shows the importance of this matter of rebuilding the family altar.

We should consider the importance that God puts on family worship. After they came out of Egypt, God had His ancient people, Israel, build a tabernacle for worship. The tabernacle had around it a high curtain with a courtyard between the curtain and the tabernacle area. The curtained-off area was about 75' x 150' in size and the tabernacle came out of the middle of that, plus the brazen laver and the altar of sacrifice. You could perhaps put 1,000 people in there if you crowded them in standing. But the population of Israel at that time was between 2 and 3 million people. The tabernacle was not built for everybody to come together to worship inside all at once. Keep in mind that they had more than enough money to build. They could have built it larger. But God gave the dimensions. I know the people could assemble outside and around, but God was putting an emphasis on worship being a family-centered matter.

I don't know what the dimensions were of the courtyard of the temple that Solomon built, but by then there were five to six million Jewish people. You might have been able to get 10,000 or 20,000 or maybe even 100,000 in those courtyards, but what is that compared to 5 or 6 million? Somehow we get the idea that worship and prayer ought to go on within the four walls of the church house and that is about it. But God started with it in the home. Adam was to instruct Cain and Abel. Seth was to instruct his family. Enoch was to instruct his family. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Patriarchs down through the ages were all to instruct their families.

You see if we would ever get our families to worship and pray at home, we would have no problem with them worshipping when they got to church. They would have learned at home and would know what to practice when they got to church.

Think about the Feasts of Israel. On the Passover each family was to take a lamb. If the family was too small, then two families would get together. There had to be enough of

them to eat a lamb in one night, but only one lamb. The worship of the Passover was a family-centered worship. The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths was also a family-centered worship. Though the whole nation was worshipping, it was done by families. Oh, what would it be like if our church families were all worshipping once or twice every day in their homes? When they would come together to worship, what a different atmosphere we would have! They have been praying at home and getting answers. When they come they'd say, "Surely if we can get answers at home, look what we can experience all together when we set to praying."

God held Eli responsible for his family and David and Samuel for theirs. When Paul and Silas spoke to the Philippian jailer, they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house." (Acts 16:31) Your family can get in on this. Not that he could believe for the family, but that the whole family could be saved and set up a unit of worship. It wasn't just a man-centered religion. It was for the whole family and God ordained it to be that way. What a message of joy that should have been to that man there in Greece where everything was man-centered. The women were left out and the children were counted as unworthy to be involved in the worshipping.

I have discovered something over the last few years. One of the marks of a healthy church versus a weak church, not only in this country but in other countries, is whether the families of the church have family worship and prayer time. Where that is missing, the churches are greatly weakened.

Recently, I was in Israel and asked them about their family devotions they said, "What is that?" Nobody had ever instructed them about this privilege. It is no wonder that almost every church there is on the payroll of some mission board here in the States, and doesn't intend to get off. They don't understand how to stand on their own. They have no family worship.

Then I went down into Egypt to visit. They have family worship and they are evangelizing and the churches are strong. They are making progress. What a difference between the churches in one country and the next! One

major difference is family worship and the lack of it.

I began to think back and examine some things, nation by nation. I remember hearing that under Communism the Christians didn't tremble when they had to send their children to the only schools that were allowed. They were run by the Communists with a daily class in atheism. They didn't tremble for their children because they had prayed with them and read Scripture with them before they left. They would do the same again in the evening. In fact, the ones that trembled, were often the teachers of the atheism as the Christians would challenge them in the class and witness to other students in the school. Their young people held more strongly to God in the communistic schools under atheism than most children from Christian homes in America attending Christian schools but lacking family devotions. That was a frightening thought to me. I found that family devotions could not only overcome the power of Communism, but also of the Mohammedanism, and Catholicism. Materialism, socialism and terrorism were overcome by its strengths also.

I remember an area in North Ireland where there had been 100 unsolved murders of Bible-believers by Catholic terrorists in a period of two years. They had family worship there. One of the boys told how he had acted up a little at school that day and been disrespectful to a teacher and he wept in family devotions. The father gently told him that he was wrong and that he was glad that the boy was sorry. He said, "You have apologized to the teacher, but you have brought shame on the name of the Lord. We are going to an evangelistic meeting tonight." The boy asked, "Please, you won't make me stay home, will you?" The father said, "No, but you will not be allowed to go to the prayer time before, until you can recover yourself." That was the boy's punishment! Can you imagine punishing the average Christian teenager in America that way? This family had some strength because they had a family altar. Terrorism didn't make those young people fearful.

I had a great-grandfather who travelled West several times. He would go by covered wagon and hook up with a wagon train when he could, but come Sunday morning when

the wagon train was pulling out, he never hitched his horses to his wagon. They would ask, "Aren't you coming Joe?" He responded, "No, this is the Lord's Day." They told him that there were Indians around there and he would be "easy pickins'." He explained to them that his family was going to be worshipping the Lord that day and if He couldn't protect those that worship Him, he didn't imagine that He could protect those that didn't. He lived to an old age, and I'm here as evidence of the Lord's protection.

A family worship can make the difference in the home. You have heard the saying, "The family that prays together stays together". There is a reality there. If we could grasp that we could understand the importance of it. Where there isn't family worship, the family collapses and thus the churches collapse. We are just propping them up again and again. We have family troubles, but we won't use Biblical solutions. We have churches that are weak, our nation's morals are dying, there is a vacuum of leadership, and we will still not use Biblical remedies.

I have a brother that used to be a principal of a large Christian high school. There was a young fellow in the school that was a real problem. He called the boy's father in and told him that the boy was causing so much trouble that they had to take action. He told the father that for the next 31 days he wanted him to take time every evening and, together with his son, read one chapter of Proverbs. He was to discuss the chapter with his son. When they completed the book they would see if there was a change in the boy's behaviour. The father said that he was too busy to do that because he was a businessman. My brother told him that that was fine, tell the boy to get his books, and take him home. He said that if the dad was too busy to spend that time in the Word with his son, they were too busy to do anything for him at the school. They couldn't help him if he wouldn't. The father said that he would take the time. Before the 31 days were over the father and son had bonded, the son's behaviour had changed and the father saw the importance of a family altar. Curious remedy, isn't it? It may seem serious to us, but it is a good one. I recommend it.

We have an opportunity to produce a generation that will know God like a Samuel, David, Joseph, Daniel, Timothy, John, Moses or Solomon. For over 50 years, I have had the privilege to be involved in family devotions. My father saw that we were started right. I can remember a grandmother sitting in on family devotions when I was a child. Recently, I had a grandson sit in on family devotions. That makes five generations that I have been able to share with in family devotions. What a blessed thing that is! Wouldn't you like to be a part of something like that? You will have to start it and recognize the value of it.

According to II Timothy 3, we are told of Timothy, that "from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." A child can learn the Scriptures. You don't have to read to them from devotionals or Bible story books. Read to them from the Word of God. That is why Timothy had an unfeigned faith, like his mother and grandmother had - not his father and grandfather had. They were pagans and lost. His mother had devotions with him and instructed him from a child up that he might know the Scriptures.

Moses had to have been taught as a child, which is why he could act right as an adult. All he had between was heathen teaching there in the courts of Pharaoh. Joseph was taken from his family at the age of seventeen, but he had all that he needed by then. Daniel and the three young fellows with him were taken at a youthful age - perhaps 12 or 13. Jeremiah was but a child when he was called to preach. Samuel went to Eli and his sons and that wasn't a holy home. But he had been taught by his mother and at a very tender age had been dropped off there at the tabernacle. Then there was the little slave girl that had been carried away to Naaman's court. She could speak a word for the Lord with courage when the time was needed.

Don't wait until they are older. Start with them when they are young. Teach them at home. Like it says in the Scripture passage, teach them and talk with them. Do it diligently- when they get up, when they go to bed at night, when you are walking with them, when you sit around with

them. Talk to them. Instruct them. You can present truths in the language of your family, at the speed that they understand, according to the thought patterns of your family and according to the needs they have. Develop a unity in the family and a strength for them in the things that they will have to face. You can indoctrinate them. You can have them memorize Scripture. You can help them prevent sin in their life. You can create spiritual desires and teach of a fear of God. Oh, the opportunities of a family altar!

Joshua could say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." How did he know how his house was going to do? How did he know how they were going to turn out? How did he know what decisions they would make? Because he had been instructing them. He knew where they were and he knew how they had been brought along. He knew where they were headed.

I fear sometimes we can get so busy doing God's work that we can forget to do God's work. Let me see if I can illustrate that with a Scripture from the Song of Solomon. "They made me a keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." We get to caring for everyone else's spiritual needs and never bother to take care of our own home.

When I was lying between life and death and I thought I was going to live but I wasn't sure of it, I told my wife, "I don't know what permanent lasting work may have been done among the church people, and among those other places I have ministered. I have hopes. But I have confidence that what God has started to do, He is going to finish among my children." I told my oldest daughter, "You can tell your brothers and sisters if you want that I am not worried. I have a confidence there." Is that because I am great? No, I have a confidence in God-ordained means. I believe - and Bro. Doom helped me with a phrase on this - that the eternal purposes of God are mixed with the prayers of His people to accomplish His end. If we could learn to use the means that God has given us, we could have the confidence that God has promised us. I had a confidence then. Was everything settled, and everything solved, and everything where I wanted

it to end up? No. But I believed the foundation was there and the direction was set. I felt I could cross over without fear in that area and that I had been able to keep my own vineyard. Whether I had been able to do right in the other vineyards, time would tell. I was concerned that I had cared for my own vineyard. I had seen the importance of that.

My father had an uncle who was a missionary in Brazil. He kept all the other vineyards there. He had books written about him. He died back around 1930 or 1935. He has two daughters in Hell and the other one is lost and has Alzheimer's. She will likely soon be in Hell because he didn't keep his own vineyard. He didn't bother to instruct his own family. He let them go while he was running everywhere else. There is nothing left in his line that could continue the work of God for another generation. Our families are the seed bed of future workers.

HOW TO HAVE A FAMILY ALTAR

I suggest that the passage in I Kings might give us some direction. Notice in verse 30 that "Elijah said unto the people, Come near unto me." They hadn't been with Elijah but had been around the prophets of Baal and their altar. He asked the people to come that he might repair the altar. That is the divine order of Scripture. The altar of the Lord, the family altar in the home, will never be able to be properly built until people first of all turn their backs on all other altars.

LEAVE OTHER ALTARS BEHIND

In this case it was the altar of Baal that they were to forsake. The nature of Baal worship was a religion of convenience and based on emotion. It allowed, tolerated and sometimes promoted that which was sensual. Dance was a part of it and the music was that which catered to the world.

There were other altars that had to be forsaken that were in Dan and Bethel. These had been built under Jereboam and there had been calves put there for the convenience of the people. Thus they could go there to worship where it was easy and convenient instead of difficult and distant. They had to forsake the high places and the groves that had been

established in the different parts of the mountains of Israel where fornication, immorality, and sodomy were tolerated. All of that kind of immoral religion had to be set aside if there was any hope of coming to the altar of the Lord.

Today we have altars. Sometimes as you walk into a home you find the living room furniture is all headed towards one altar. If you are feasting on Hollywood, then you are not going to be able to feast on the Holy Word.

In the book of I Corinthians we read about a false religion and idolatry and how they sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play, where everything was food and recreation or sports. That is what some people live for. You can look around and different people have different altars, different places of worship and different things for which they will sacrifice. Often you will hear about it in their topics of conversation.

These things must be forsaken if we are going to rebuild the altar of the Lord. As long as those things mean so much and control the mind, there is no hope of having right family worship. For that reason, most people today would rather that their family, relatives and neighbors go to Hell than to pay the price to have family altar. That may sound a little rough, but I am just speaking after having been in the ministry for 30 years. I could name many families who would rather see others go to Hell than to pay the price to have a family altar. You have to wonder whether they really know God or not, if they have so little concern about the souls of their family.

By the way, you don't add family devotions to your schedule, because there will never be time to add it in. You will have to take something out and replace it with a family altar. Take out something of lesser value so there will be time to get it in. Otherwise it somehow gets crowded out.

The second area in having a family altar is to **REBUILD WHAT GOD COMMANDS**. After you have forsaken all other altars, then it is the matter of doing what the verse says, "He repaired the altar of the Lord which was broken down."

God gives very specific directions in the Scriptures regarding altars. Altars were not to be fancy or beautiful, and never complicated. They were always simple and natural.

When they built with stones, they weren't even to trim off the rough edges of the stones and make them smooth to look nice. The issue was this - the altar is not an end in itself. It is only a means to serve God. We don't go to worship the altar, but rather we go to the altar to worship God. Noah built an altar so that he could worship the God of glory. We can get so tied in to our family altars we think more of the family altar than the One we are trying to worship there.

In order for an altar to break down it does not require you to attack it or to decide to get rid of it. How many of you have either had private devotions or family devotions in the past, and then found that you didn't have them? Which of you decided that you were going to quit? It only takes neglect for it to fall down. You don't have to decide to take it down. God didn't have them cementing those altars together. Just a little lack of attention, or a little lack of effort and it will fall down all on its own. That is how God set it up. You must constantly work at maintaining your altar. Once you get it started, you must keep it up with effort.

In this case the altar of the Lord was broken down. It just hadn't been used or cared for. Elijah saw it and he said that they were going to build it back up. I admire Elijah. I would have hated to have said that the altar was broken down and have everybody come watch while I tried to rebuild it. When your family altar is out of line, do you announce it and ask everyone to come watch while you try to put it back together again? He built that with everyone watching. It is hard sometimes to confess when things are out of line. But Elijah made it clear that something had gone wrong and that was why they were in the condition they were nationally.

Keep in mind the PURPOSES that God had for altars in the Old Testament.

(1) The first one was for SACRIFICE. This was the place family members learned to sacrifice for God. How few people today know how to sacrifice for God. At best they give Him of their extra. The family altar will teach them to sacrifice for God.

(2) The altars were for WORSHIP. They were for learning how to worship the God of the altar.

(3)Some altars were raised with a TESTIMONY. A family altar in a home is a testimony to that home.

(4)Some altars were raised for PRAYER. There certainly ought to be prayer at a family altar.

(5)They ought to be a REMINDER to another generation. When they crossed the Jordan River an altar was put up to be a reminder of what God had done.

(6)It ought to be a place of REPENTANCE and RETURN.

(7)It ought to be proof of God's REALITY and POWER.

(8)Some were built for FAITH.

(9)Some were for PRAISE, such as Noah's when he came off the ark after the Flood.

For the third area of how to have a family altar, let me try to give you some GENERAL RULES that I have found to be helpful. There are many Scriptures that support these.

(1) Be consistent. Set out with the idea that you are not trying it, but that you are going to live by it. That doesn't mean you can't miss a day here or there. If we go to an evening service and there is not time to have them in the evening, the next night we will be having family altar. We are committed not to just try it for a week, but we decided that that is how we are going to live.

(2) Look at the long-range. Don't have a family altar with just one purpose in mind. God has a variety of purposes and He wants you to function accordingly. With all the opportunities that you have, look at the whole picture and be comprehensive in what you are going to cover.

(3) Be Biblical. Have your family altar based around God and the Word of God. Other things may be nice, but you can't beat God and His Word. I have known some that made their devotions revolve around a catechism, or somebody's sermons, or some book that they had read, but we ought to base it around God's Book. This is simple, but basic.

(4) Don't make it too long. It is better to have it consistently for 15 minutes that to have a 2 hour one and then quit having them because you don't have 2 hours. In their zeal, many new converts (and oh, how I love their zeal), will

keep having them longer and longer and then see that they don't have 2 hours one night and become defeated. It is better to have 15 minutes daily than it is to have 2 hours once a month. It is a matter of learning how to focus and to adjust the time.

(5) Be instructive. Learn how to instruct and teach during the devotional time.

(6) Learn how to be inspirational. It ought to be an encouraging time and not a confrontational time. This is not the time to hash out all the family problems. This is a time of worshipping God and praying to God. You can deal with your problems at another time, but this is time for family altar.

(7) It should be relaxed and yet there ought to be some direction to it.

(8) Keep the devotions simple, natural and basic. Try to keep them balanced in order for them to operate right.

In the morning our practice as a family has been to read from a little book of Scriptures called "Daily Light" at the breakfast table. It takes just a few minutes. One person prays for the day and what we are going to face before we go out and face it. It doesn't take five minutes, but it makes a difference in how the day goes. Then in the evening we will have our regular family devotions. I am not saying this pattern is the answer for everyone, but just that it has worked for us.

In our evening devotions we usually have three parts. We begin with a time of SINGING. Sometimes we will sing choruses and sometimes old hymns. Sometimes it might just be songs with a theme - maybe about the blood, the Holy Spirit or going to Heaven. One night when we had a good bit of time, we decided to sing every Negro spiritual that we could think of and maybe mention any Scripture that went along with it. We had a great time that night just singing one after another. It was an enjoyable time for the family. We might let everybody in the family choose a favorite song and sing a verse of it. If we only have a short time, then only one person will choose a song. Adjust it so that it doesn't become a ritual.

Then we have some SCRIPTURE READING. We may

just work our way through the Gospels, getting to know the stories of Jesus. Perhaps we may read some areas in the Old Testament and they will hear the basic Bible stories. Read Proverbs and get familiar with the wisdom that God had Solomon record there. Maybe we will give a little doctrinal teaching or seasonal teaching around certain holidays. At Christmas time we turn to a certain passage in Luke that we have memorized and make sure that we still know it. Now we are working on a passage in Matthew to see if we can get that memorized also. At Easter, we work on a passage about the crucifixion. We may not get it all down, but we are making progress over the years. We use a very familiar passage and it is naturally getting hidden away in our hearts. Sometimes when time is short I just have them sit down and we will have Scripture from their heart to my heart. That means that they are to quote a verse that is something from their own devotions or their own life that means something particular to them.

Then we PRAY. We might have only one person pray. If there is time, we will give each of them a chance to name one request or praise item. It is amazing sometimes how they word it to get two or three in! We will tolerate that as long as it doesn't get out of hand. This is a chance to deal with what is on our hearts as far as needs for our family, friends, souls of people, missionaries, or issues in the church or our nation. We may have one person pray or each take a turn praying and those are the requests that we pray for.

It won't be long until they will want to have their own personal devotions. They don't get to pray enough during family devotions. Maybe they want to study something a little more in depth.

Then sometimes we had a time of MEMORIZATION. Certainly they will learn the books of the Bible at an early age. They will learn songs of Zion, passages of Scripture. They will get these things tucked away in their hearts. It doesn't have to be long and complicated.

Do you know that if your children have been so trained, and later they are needed to teach a children's Bible class, they will know how to get a group of children together and sing

some songs? They will know choruses for the little ones and songs for the older ones. Whether they are in a rest home or with children in a family's living room, they will be able to instruct them out of the Word of God. They will know how to pray with those children or pray for those older people. They learned that at home. These are things that are normal and natural.

When we have a wedding and the couple being married are strong believers, we give them an opportunity for a dedication service. According to Romans 12 they have already dedicated themselves unto God and now the two have become one. Together they want to make a public dedication of themselves before the Lord. They are going to have devotions, pray for each other, and help each other serve God. They publicly declare themselves. Instead of saying, "I do" they say, "We do" at that time after the vows. Every family ought to do it on their own if they don't do it publicly in a wedding.

PROBLEMS INVOLVED WITH HAVING A FAMILY ALTAR

Over the years I have heard of many problems that may come up with a family altar, so I will try to reduce them to a few categories.

One is - WE ARE TOO BUSY. We are not too busy to eat. Somehow we squeeze that in somewhere.

Duncan Campbell said that he was raised to see the face of God before he saw the face of another in the family. Before they went to breakfast, they were to have spent time enough that they had actually met with God, not just gone through a routine. Any wonder why God used him in revival power? When asked why revival came so sudden in the Hebrides, he said that every home had devotions and they taught the Word of God in the government schools also. So when the Holy Ghost started working they knew what the law was, what sin was, and they saw their sin and knew Who the Saviour was. They realized how they could be saved. We don't have that in America, but wouldn't it be a blessing if we did? If God's people won't have family altar, don't expect your lost neighbors to start. Those in the liberal churches aren't

likely to do it if the fundamentalists don't.

Duncan Campbell said that during times of revival he would walk down the streets when it was bedtime and there would be a light on in nearly every house. As he walked he could hear hymn after hymn from one end of town to the other as the families would be worshipping God before they went to bed. That would sound almost like Heaven and that can happen here on earth. Instead of sharing their rock music with you, you would get to hear the songs of Zion wafting out.

Schedule the time in. If it is just five minutes or fifteen. Too busy? You can adjust your schedule. You adjust everything else according to what you want. We do pretty much what we WANT to do. The question is how much do we really want to do right spiritually and repair the altars of the Lord?

Another problem that I have heard often is - MY SPOUSE IS NOT SUPPORTIVE. If I talked to the spouse they would probably tell me the same thing. I ask if they are opposed to it - I mean really opposed to devotions. Do they hate them or just seem unconcerned? The truth is they are often fearful. "My wife is always correcting how I pronounce words when I read." "My husband is always preaching at me when he reads." If you get them alone, the truth starts slipping out. If you get rid of the confrontational, they both can bless God in the midst of it. Many people are fearful. They think, "What are the kids going to think when they find out that I can't read as well as they can? Maybe they know more than I do. Maybe they will think that I am getting fanatical or something." Maybe they will think that you know how to pray too. The Devil will fill your mind with these excuses and problems.

The third problem may be a combination of the fact that no one is the INITIATOR and SCHEDULING is difficult. Oftentimes

Maybe there is a problem on the SCHEDULE. Oftentimes I have just turned it over to my wife. Because we can't always schedule the same time every night (my schedule doesn't permit it) I have told her to raise the issue and then we will set the time. So she assists me on that

instead of our being at odds over the issue. Work it out according to your own home chemistry. It can be worked out and done in a proper way. We ought to be together in partnership and prayer. It is the "family that prays together that stays together". That is the world's cliché, but it is Biblical too. We ought to be working at encouraging each other and not criticizing each other - assisting and helping each other in having family altar.

Another problem I have heard is that the CHILDREN DON'T WANT TO HAVE THEM. They are rebellious. Well, if we had enough memory we might remember what we once were too. Did you ever rebel against something God said? If you can remember your own rebellion, maybe you can help somebody else with theirs. Don't be surprised if there is rebellion. Is the rebellion active rebellion or just passive? Why are they rebellious? Because they want to be doing something else or is it that they actually hate God or the family? Is it that they don't want any discipline or structure in their life? It may not be nearly as bad as we paint it and therefore it can be dealt with and worked out. Do we believe that God answers prayer for our children? Do we believe that God can deal with rebellion in our children? Then we ought to put it into practice in our own personal devotions. Pray those children to a place where they will be participants rather than rebels during devotions. We must encourage them. We ought to find ways to draw them into it and let God work in their lives.

Another problem may be INTERRUPTIONS. Every time you start to have family devotions somebody is coming to the house wanting this or that. I remember how people used to come when we would have family altar. Dad was so kind and gracious to them that they quit coming during family altar time. Dad was teaching school and there was a substitute teacher in town that was catching a ride with him. He would come and we would be having family altar. He was pounding on the front door and we were in there reading the Bible. He would tell one of us to go answer the door and have him come on in. He would tell him that we were glad to have him and for him to have a seat, explaining that we were

having family devotions. Then he would just go ahead and read and the man would have to just sit there and listen. Then Dad would take prayer requests and ask the guest if he had one. He would offer to let him pray too if he wanted . It did stop the interruptions.

How are strangers going to know how to have devotions if they don't stumble in on it sometimes? It is an opportunity to show them the blessing of it, and that God means more to you than visitors do. It is a matter of priority of God over business.

PHONE CALLS are another interruption. Sometimes we just ignore it. Sometimes one of the children answers it. You may think that we are not at home but it may mean that we are talking to God, and you might have to wait for us to talk to you. Some may think that is rude, but how rude is it for us to quit talking to God to talk to you? The children may go and answer it and tell whoever is calling that we are having devotions and ask them to call back later. It can be handled, if you put the priority on rebuilding the altar of God. Put God first.

What happens if there are **SCHEDULE CONFLICTS**? Well those that can meet do meet. There are times when I can't be there for devotions and my wife carries them on. There have been times that my wife and I had to be gone and we had the children have them.

Adjust your schedule or adjust the time of your family altar. We have even considered using the speaker phone (although we haven't done it yet) to have family devotions with a family member at a distance. The time would be short, but it would be a blessing to be able to get in on devotions from a distance, wouldn't it?

Another problem I have heard is - **WE GET TOO TIRED**, because we have to work such long hours. Do you know why George Mueller started his orphanages? They came because he kept running into a problem when he was pressing the issue of family devotions in the early 1800's to members in the church where he pastored. They said that they were having to work two jobs to make it. Sound familiar? The hours were too long and they didn't have time to worship

God at home. They were burning the candle at both ends and were absolutely exhausted. He told them to just work on one job and they told him that they couldn't make it. He asked them if they were looking to the job for their support or to God. We walk by sight and not by faith, don't we? We know what the Bible says but we also know what we can do sometimes. Mr. Mueller said that he was going to show that God can be trusted in the most difficult of situations. Without ever announcing a need, the most helpless of people can be fed, clothed and cared for. If God can do that for these then He can do that for your children. You may have thought that Mueller did it for the orphans, but that was only a secondary matter. He was trying to prove a point and how eloquently he did so! God can supply.

Whenever our work makes it impossible for us to worship God, our work has gotten out of balance. That may seem harsh. But we may just have to live a little lower, set our goals a little lower, struggle a little more and have the blessings of God on our soul and on our family. Isn't that what we expect of people on the mission field? Somehow we think that as Americans we need to live at the top of the pile - even if our families are lost for eternity. We have been caught by the materialism of the 80's and 90's, and it has gotten out of balance.

You know that I am not saying, "Don't work." You better work or you can't eat. You ought to work six days, but He didn't say six days and six nights! We can be so busy working that we leave God out of our home.

One other problem I hear is that the devotions get BORING. Alter the format. Lighten up a little.

BENEFITS AND BLESSINGS OF THE FAMILY ALTAR

From what I have seen in 50 years of family altars in my own family, and have observed in different homes in our country and other countries I have visited, many blessings come as a result of family devotions.

You know I have never yet had to take any of my children aside and say, "You know I want to tell you what personal devotions are and how you can have your own

devotions." They have already figured that out. They have been at family altar since they were a babe in arms. They get to thinking that there is more that they haven't read, and that they would like to read. They start reading and praying on their own and before long they develop their own personal devotions.

You can see spiritual strength for the future of the Kingdom of God as well as your own family. You can produce laborers for the Kingdom out of your own home. You can learn the laws of getting prayers answered. You can develop a cohesiveness in the family. You can enjoy and practice the worship of God in the home. You can be the salt that has a savor.

You can have an affect on your neighbors. You can see your friends and family and contacts affected as you start praying for one after another jointly as a family. The church is going to be helped. Education will certainly be improved as they are able to learn more because of obedience to God in this area.

The morals of society will be affected. Elections can be affected. The economy can be improved. Our freedoms can be strengthened. Our health can be greatly improved. Leaders can be prepared. These are only a few of the benefits that come with regular, consistent family altars.

IN CONCLUSION

"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) Fathers train up your children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4) Take these sayings and have them in "thine heart and thou shalt teach 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." (Deuteronomy 6:6,7)

These are commands of God and promises from God. We have gone too long without the blessings of God because we didn't use the means that God gave us,- simple, basic, and natural worship of God in the home. The Devil will fight you on it, but God will help you. "Greater is He that is in you

than he that is in the world."

If you set your heart to obey God, He will assist you in that obedience. I strongly, strongly urge you to "sow to the Spirit that you might reap life everlasting." Otherwise you will sow to the flesh and have to reap that terrible corruption. The little ease of putting off devotions may cost you nights of sleeplessness and tear your health down at the end when you realize failure. You don't break God's law - you get broken by it. God said to do it and you will prosper - fail and it will cost you. God will not be mocked. It is a sobering thing, but it ought to be a delightful thing for us to realize that God enables us to worship Him not just when the church comes together, but daily - twice daily or more - in our homes. It doesn't take an hour to get into an atmosphere of worship in the home. You can come together in union in minutes once the practice is established. You get your hearts joined together on this and you will find that you pull together on other things too.

This ought to be normal Christianity. Revive the family altar.