

# The Proper Use of Scripture in Family Devotion

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“Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them,” (Matthew 18:20). Jesus speaks these words to all who come together in his name. They apply not only to congregational worship but also to family worship in the home. The cornerstone of family worship is reading the Word of God and praying together as a family, an art of worship we call a family or home devotion. In these devotions our heavenly Father speaks to us through his Word. Through his Word he strengthens, comforts, and gives our Christian family members peace; he refreshes them with his promises; he supplies direction for each and helps them keep their purpose clear—to glorify God and serve their fellowman. Family members, in turn, express their thanks to God and lay before him their daily needs.

The Holy Scriptures are essential for Christian family worship. They are the Word of God which he has given us to know our Savior and the power to live in him. Through his Word God establishes the Christian family and nurtures its members so they might live in Christ, loving, serving, and forgiving one another. Such living has but one source and cause. It results from living close to the Holy Scriptures. Christian family living is nourished and sustained in no better way than through the daily family devotion in which the word of Christ is central.

No other single custom contributes so much to keeping the family functionally Christian as the home devotion. It is as ancient as Noah building an altar for his family, Abraham gathering his household before him for prayers, and David teaching young Solomon true wisdom. It is as modern as the many Christian families today who regularly worship in the family circle of their homes. For Christians, family worship is a practical necessity. It is the best way they know of letting the word of Christ dwell in them richly (Colossians 3:16).

Much pessimism exists about how many families, including many Lutheran families, have daily devotions. At the same time we have probably never had so many materials available to be used especially for family worship. Yet parents can recite an imposing list of roadblocks that stand in the way of their using these materials. We will do well to take a look at some of the issues Christians face in carrying out the responsibility for establishing the family altar. As we consider these issues, we shall also focus on the proper use of Scripture in family devotion.

These words are based on a firm belief that many families want and need help. Perhaps the greatest need is more and better motivation.

## Motivation to Establish the Family Altar

Oscar E. Feucht in his classic *Helping Families Through the Church* identifies the family devotion as one means of worship the Lord has used mightily to instruct his people and enable them to grow up in their salvation. He says that families who worship together in the home

1. *Learn to know the Bible.* The home in which the Bible is read daily provides each member an acquaintance with Scripture that is hard to get any other way. Here family members are more likely to experience the life in Christ Paul describes in Colossians 3.

2. *Face life with God.* A Christian family is one in which the Spirit of God lives in the members' hearts and gives them power day by day for Christian living. Family worship supplies a daily message from God through which the Spirit works power to overcome the forces of evil and offers courage, comfort, and hope. (Romans 8).

3. *Grow in reverence and prayer.* In family worship we learn to listen to God and be still; we also learn to meditate on his Word and how to speak to him. To meditate is to assimilate into our thoughts the spiritual food God gives us. The psalmist lauds meditation (Psalm 119:97,99). Luther praised practical, active meditation. He found in his daily reading of the Word four points for thought and prayer. “First, I find in it *instruction*; then I find in it reason for *thanksgiving*; then I note that I have not fulfilled it and this leads me to

*confession*; and, finally, I am driven to *petition*, asking my Lord for strength to do his will which I more fully discovered that day.”

4. *Spiritually train their children.* Daily use of Scripture accompanied by comment, discussion, and question and answer feeds the soul. Family worship strengthens the likelihood that parents will do what the Lord requires in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 and Ephesians 6:4.

5. *Talk more about religion.* Daily formal worship invites Christ in to be the head of the house. In that home religion is a part of daily living, not just a Sunday ritual. The home devotion makes the family more open to discussion of their faith life.

6. *Strengthens the church.* The church assists parents in the spiritual education of their children. But where family devotion is a regular occurrence, the home reinforces the lesson of the school and the pastor’s sermon. The ripple effect is that worship in the home strengthens the influence of the church and does much to develop workers for the church.

7. *Develops Christian citizens for the nation.* God-fearing parents who lead their children to Christ in family worship are vital for the righteousness that exalts a nation. The home devotion is a means of helping old and young keep before them the meaning of baptism for their daily living. People who “live in the presence of God in righteousness” make good citizens.

8. *Unify and enrich the home.* Strong families are able to endure and become even stronger when crises arise. Often this happens because strong families are also characterized by deep religious commitment. Where families of any kind worship together, dissension, distrust, fear, and anxiety are more easily dissolved. The family that worships regularly at the family altar is more tuned in to love, serve, and forgive one another.

The faith-born desire to let the love of Christ rule in our homes is the prime motivation to conduct regular family devotions. We have discussed only some of the desirable effects of family worship. Attached to this paper is an inventory of what Kenn Kremer calls “The Blessings of a Healthy Christian Family.” Most of these blessings assume worship at the family altar.

### **Family Devotion in Practice**

Much is happening today in our church and society that promotes the establishment and maintenance of the family altar. We have a Bible translation that speaks contemporary English. The publication efforts of Northwestern Publishing House make accessible a variety of devotional materials for different ages and circumstances, notably *The People’s Bible* and the forthcoming family magazine *Wellspring*. *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* makes its appearance amidst a lively interest in corporate worship, which should assist in creating a favorable environment for fostering family worship. The contemplated K-12 religion curriculum has a built-in encouragement for sharing responsibility for children’s spiritual growth among home, school, and church. Finally, society perceives the deterioration of family values as a national crisis; with that perception has come a wholesome emphasis on the home’s importance in teaching children values. Let this handful of events suffice to suggest these are good times for church leaders to give all families the help many need and want to improve their family devotions.

How and when we worship at the family altar is not a matter of prescription. As in all matters of worship the Lord’s one guideline is simply that “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Within this broad principle families are free to choose the time, patterns, and procedures to meet their needs and circumstances. Similarly, they will select appropriate materials, changing periodically to give variety and maintain interest. Their primary concern will be to use Scripture and conduct their worship “in a fitting and orderly way.” Families who worship together in the home will make proper use of Scripture when they recognize

1. *Their need for the Word.* Worship is a living relationship with God. If our entire lives are an ongoing relationship of worship, we might well ask, “What makes our planned family devotion so essential?” The Apostle Peter offers insight to this question. We are to crave the Word of God like food, says Peter. It causes us to grow spiritually. If we develop this figure of speech further certain things become clear.

We normally eat three meals a day, but we draw nourishment from these meals during the whole day. Most of us don't understand how our bodily systems work together to keep us healthy and vigorous, but they do. In the same way, Christian family members derive strength for their life of worship from their worship life. By the working of the Spirit they grow in their impression of God's activities around them and in their expression of love for God and their fellowman as a result of the nourishment which comes from their home devotion. As they share God's love in Christ and the love of their family members, they are enabled to love others with whom they associate. As they confess their faults one to the other and are accepted for who they are, forgiven for what they have done or failed to do, and live together peacefully and in honesty with one another, they are enabled to be more accepting of all sorts and conditions of persons. In short, the family devotion centered on the Word of Christ. offers opportunity to gather the events of the day and integrate them into a meaningful view of life. Surely, in families where God's Word is in use, God himself is at work satisfying the members' need for the Bread of Life, for living in fellowship with Christ.

2. *The Word is central to family worship.* Here we should talk a bit about the materials and patterns of home devotions. The principle of freedom or flexibility wisely applied will help avoid such weaknesses as lack of comment or discussion, too difficult language, lack of personal application, boredom.

Keeping the Word central in family worship does not mean the Bible is the only material to be used. A basic family devotion library adds to the Bible: the hymnal, catechism, a prayer book or two and some devotional writings aimed to the understanding level of the family members. Much depends, however, on the ability and confidence of the father or mother to serve comfortably as worship leader. The new family magazine *Wellspring* promises to be a rich resource of Christ-centered devotional material that will enable the family leader to challenge all members of the family and achieve interaction and involvement.

The materials mentioned above suggest patterns for family worship. We will look at several of the patterns as they exist, at least in theory. We should remain open to the realization that each family may add its own creative twist to any of the forms. We will be cautious though that freedom applies only to procedure and materials. It dare not preempt the Word from its central position.

The modern devotional booklet, such as *Meditations*, has undoubtedly done more among us than anything else to increase the incidence of family worship. The devotion usually begins with a paragraph or verse from Scripture. A written commentary follows and the devotion closes with a prayer. Some devotion booklets include a benediction, suggested Bible readings, or other prayers for specific days and events. These devotions become more useful and personal if comments, questions, or observations are added. In addition to the modern versions of these books or booklets, we have available for us books of meditations, prayer books, and devotion manuals from centuries past. In them the spiritual insights of great Christians of the past come alive for us today. These pre-packaged devotional materials are always helpful when families are struggling because they find reading the Bible or other more challenging forms of family worship too difficult.

Another pattern is the reading of a well-chosen selection from Scripture without a readymade commentary. Comment and discussion may follow. Where discussion occurs, the family worship becomes a wholesome combination of instruction and worship, interpretation and applications. The devotion closes with a prepared prayer or one composed on the basis of the reading. The discussion and the prayer in this form may readily come close to Luther's elements of meditation: find instruction and reason for thanksgiving, be led to confession and driven to petition.

If the Bible is used for the devotion, the family should have a definite reading program in mind. Bibles, hymnals, and some daily devotional books contain suggested reading lists. The devotion needs a purpose. The leader should guide the reading and suggest things to look for. Questions spur discussion. In general, the questions will lead family members to discuss 1) what the reading says or means to me; 2) what clear truth or principle is stated; and 3) how do I apply this truth to my life.

In families with children parents may opt to relate the family devotion to the Sunday school, Christian day school, or confirmand class lesson. The lesson leaflets or booklets often suggest daily Bible readings. The exposition to the catechism contains a treasure-trove of Bible readings that contain examples of the truth under discussion. Again discussion is vital to making this form live for all the family. Throughout the week the family

and especially the learner gain new insights to a fundamental Scriptural truth. All gain some experience and practice in meditating on that truth throughout the week and in applying it at school, work, and play. The closing prayer will come from the lesson materials or, better, be composed by one or more of the entire family on the basis of the lesson content or memory gem.

These are only three of the possible patterns for family worship. All may seem quite formal. They need not be. The patterns are restricted only by the limits of our imagination and resourcefulness. As families become more comfortable at the family altar, variety will increase within the basic pattern: the Word of God, comment and discussion, personalized prayer, and benediction. An important part of that variety is likely to be increased participation by family members, but the theme of the devotion will be drawn from the Word.

3. *The inexhaustibility of the Word.* Families change as time passes. Marriage forms a family; the birth of a child enlarges the family; later, the family expands and extends; finally, the nest is empty. Throughout the family's history God is present with his Word. He invites the young married couple to build themselves up in their faith; he desires the children to come to him; he offers his Word as security in the time of turbulent youth; he reaches out to give strength, comfort, and hope as the family expands and extends; and when we are old and gray, he does not forsake but continues to do great things. There is no age or circumstance when the Lord does not reach out to feed his people with the Gospel. Indeed the Bread of Life is inexhaustible.

Applied to the family, this inexhaustibility of the Word informs us that the family devotion is always in place. But, the form will vary to meet the family members where they are. In the family with very young children, parents will probably have their regular devotion. The infant will be an observer and learn the important lesson of a right attitude toward God. The toddler will have a very informal time to worship. The morning, bedtime, or story-hour routines offer the parent an ideal time to sing a spiritual song like "I am Jesus' Little Lamb" or "Jesus Loves me," to say a short Scripture verse, and to recite or make a little prayer.

Where there are young school-age children, the family may use one of the numerous devotional books prepared with them in mind. But they may also use the pattern described earlier using Bible stories familiar to the child. Children at an early age can participate in the worship. One may tell the story, another ask questions, or the parent may do both and the children respond. Prayers, too, may come from the experiences of the children, their concerns and desires, things they have to be thankful for, confession of sins, and what they want for those in need. Certainly, the parents are active participants in these devotions and will lead the way, but the informality and participation will give young children the sense that their heavenly Father speaks also to them and loves to hear their prayers.

The teen years put family worship at-risk. All the things that make these years turbulent have a way of getting in the way of regular family devotion. Here, especially, the exercise of creative variations within the basic pattern is helpful. Youth looks for relevant illustrations from life, a foundation on which to build ideals, an opportunity to express their own thoughts. They may even cherish the notion of conducting and planning the family worship. For sure, most will respond to comment and open discussion of the Scripture reading (the Epistles are a good choice), contributing to sentence prayers, and perhaps even offering a question or two which need to be taken seriously.

The family altar perhaps stands most firmly in the family of the elderly. We should rejoice that our publishing house is making available devotional materials targeted to their needs. Here and in the newly-formed family, *The People's Bible* can be a welcome means for the home worship of husband and wife.

The same can be said for the parent or parents who desire to have a separate devotion in addition to that with their children. *The People's Bible* seems like a natural transition to lead the family from over-reliance on the printed devotional book to a more intense use of Scripture for family worship.

These few comments are intended simply to underscore what I have called the inexhaustibility of the Word. Christ comes to all of us at every age of life through his Word. We who are responsible to see that all family members are fed this spiritual food are to choose materials and methods wisely so the Bread of Life is tasty to the palate of those who are fed. Scripture needs to be rediscovered in every generation. It needs to be introduced to the child. The youth need to discover it more fully. Adults need to penetrate its meaning more

deeply. The home devotion can help accomplish these ends for all family members so they might share God's inexhaustible grace in Christ.

4. *The place of prayer in family devotion.* God speaks to us in his Word. He is pleased to have us speak to him in prayer. Prayer is the response of the redeemed child of God to the grace given by the Father. It is a priceless privilege through which we may remove burdens that weigh us down and draw strength for each day's needs. We are able to pray by the Spirit of the Son which God sends into our hearts (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15-16).

Prayer in home worship will flow from the Scripture which is the center of the devotion. The family prayers will reflect the needs in the lives of family members. The chief elements of prayer are (1) *adoration*, we praise God for what he is; (2) *thanksgiving*, we thank the Lord for what he has given; (3) *confession*, we lay before him our sins and failures; (4) *petition*, we ask God for our personal needs, spiritual and material, as Jesus taught us; (5) *intercession*, we bring to him the needs of our neighbors, whoever and wherever they are; and (6) *dedication*, we close our prayer with recommitment, dedicating ourselves anew to our gracious God who loves us and made us his children through Christ.

We can overcome the repetition in our prayers if we work at keeping these six elements in our prayers. The family devotion offers the ideal setting for family members to strengthen their prayer life. We can discuss prayer and help one another understand the essential elements. Young children can write simple prayers for use at the family altar. Each member can contribute to a prayer list for the day. The devotion leader may begin the prayer with an invocation and a sentence of adoration and praise. Then each member adds one sentence until all have spoken. Last, the leader closes by laying everything in the Lord's hands for Jesus' sake. Where family members are experienced, each might add one of the six elements to the prayer.

The catechism and hymnal deserve far greater attention as helps for family devotion, especially with learning and practicing prayer. In the catechism Luther's explanations give us the stuff that ties prayer to our daily lives. The hymnal provides many models of how prayers are made and what they mean. It opens to us a storehouse of prayers for every occasion, every season of the Christian year, and the Christian's life. We need to remind ourselves and our families that the hymnal has not only hymns but is truly a compendium of devotional literature. Christian Worship promises to be just such a rich resource.

One final thought remains on the subject of prayer. It has to do with using God's Word in prayer. In our speechlessness before God, Jesus has taught us to pray with him. God is also happy to have us turn our memory verses into prayer. As examples, just test the richness of the Easter doxology of 1 Corinthians 15:54b-57 and the benediction of Hebrews 13:20,21. The new magazine *Wellspring* should help us "turn to the Psalms as a most helpful resource for conversation with God about the things that matter most." The beauty of praying the Scripture is that it is at one and the same time the Word of God and our word. It is a way of learning to speak to God in words he has given us to speak to him.

Prayer, the Christian speaking to God, is a natural response of hearing God speak to us. Where families worship together, they will just naturally pray together.

### **Problems Confronting Family Devotion**

All of us realize that the hindrances to family devotions are many. We should be equally certain that none of them are insurmountable. Although we could draw up a lengthy list of reasons given for the irregularity or even lack of family worship, let us attempt to group them under three headings. Three reasons why families find it difficult day by day to hear God speak to them, to praise him together, or to uplift and strengthen one another are

1. *Time.* The modern family tends to spend less and less time together. As children get older, peer pressure and school activities take their toll on the time available for family devotion. In homes where mother and father both work, the problem of time increases. Often the family devotion loses out to time that is taken to do other things we want to do.

At root, the problem of time is really one of self-discipline. Even when a suitable time is determined, a powerful commitment is needed to prevent exceptions from crowding out family worship. The telephone,

television, parents' or children's activities, and also church meetings get prior billing. We do well to decide that the absence of one or more family members is insufficient reason to cancel the day's family worship.

Prayer and planning are good antidotes to the problem of time. We can also help ourselves by thinking of ourselves as disciples, those who learn from a master and, who follow his teachings. The word "discipline" comes from the same word as disciple. Discipline is a quality of orderliness gained through self-control. One of the disciplines of Christian discipleship is worship. Worship does not just happen. Christians realize that worship requires a conscious setting aside of time and energy to learn from their Master so that their lives may be devoted to following him. Making time for family devotion today probably means consciously setting aside some other activity. The choice is a test of values, but the choice is a deliberate one, and the faith-born love of Christ generates the power to make possible the correct choice.

2. *The climate in the home.* Here we have the greatest hindrance to family worship and undoubtedly the most difficult to overcome. In far too many families, priorities are askew. Success, or one might say survival, has more value than spiritual growth. Family leaders, particularly the father where there is one, fail to set the spiritual agenda or even think that one dare not be "too religious." The latter view is often lamely expressed in the idea that the Sunday church service is enough religion for one week. This view is tragically out of tune with the spirit of true discipleship and our Lutheran heritage. In kinship with this view is the all too common misunderstanding that we have done our duty if we turn the spiritual training of our children over to the pastor and teachers who serve us in the congregation.

Some parents may have tried to establish the family altar and have found their efforts wanting. The inevitable interruptions of toddlers and infants interfere too much with the worship of other family members. Rather than adjusting to the situation, we easily succumb to laying aside family devotion until all the children are older. Juvenile sabotage may also occur when our children vary widely in ages. One age group or the other finds the devotion irrelevant. These problems are very real. Their resolution begs for creative imagination, fearless experimentation, and firm commitment reinforced by fervent prayer. The magazine *Wellspring* will offer practical assistance to families facing these realities.

The single-parent family and the family in which only one spouse practices his or her faith may present special problems for regular family devotion. In the former instance, most often the mother is that parent and may think herself incapable. In either case, the Christian father or mother bears the duty for spiritual leadership. The Lord expects that parent to take the initiative to conduct the family worship. Let it be with an extended table prayer or brief devotion at some convenient time. In the so-called mixed marriage, the professing parent will do what he or she does with charity in the heart and much prayer. The Lord's favor will surely rest on those homes where father or mother alone leads the family in worship.

3. *Inexperience and fear.* This double-faceted problem may show itself in a number of ways. The basic problem may stem from the adults' lack of confidence in their understanding of Scripture. Closely related may be a lack of skills and healthy attitudes that family members need for intimate communication to take place.

More than likely, fear keeps many from setting a time for family devotion. Some possible sources of this fear are worth exploring. Perhaps neither husband nor wife have ever experienced a home devotion. Unfortunately, some who have had the experience remember it with little or no joy. In these homes both fear of not knowing how and the fear of a second-generation failure easily stifle any effort to establish the family altar.

A special fear of fathers is that they will be embarrassed. They fear that they do not read well or know how to ask or answer questions of their children. An even more basic fear of fathers may be that they see themselves less blessed with ability than their wives for initiating, leading, and maintaining family worship. Consequently, they deem themselves inadequate and incapable of assuming the responsibility they have for family worship. These fears are often exaggerated, but reality for the afflicted individuals lies in their perception.

The shackles of inexperience and accompanying fear place great restraints on the practice of family worship in many homes, but these too, can be overcome. Christian parents need to know that God does not check their worship for good grammar or eloquent speech. He desires their hearts and true faith. Caring mothers and fearful fathers who desire to encourage, comfort, and urge their children to live lives worthy of God need

the assurance that they can exercise much freedom in conducting their family devotion and still be doing it “in a fitting and orderly way.”

Parents, foremost the fathers, have the biblical injunction to instruct their children in the way of the Lord. The three clusters of problems just identified suggest that families need, we believe many are also seeking, help to establish or improve their practice of family devotion. They should be able to find that assistance in their congregations.

### **Help from the Church for Family Devotion**

Wisconsin Synod congregations are well equipped to help their members establish family altars. First and foremost, these congregations believe the gospel of God’s grace in Christ Jesus is revealed to us only in his marvelous Word. Because of this commitment most congregations have established formal agencies for teaching the Word to their members. Through these agencies the church has excellent opportunities to assist the family in carrying out its responsibility as the primary place for everyday spiritual nurture to occur. Consequently, special programs to foster family worship are not necessarily needed. We simply need a more conscious effort to provide this help within the congregation’s existing way of life. Families will receive guidance to improve daily devotion when congregations

1. *Make use of existing education agencies.* Lutheran elementary school teachers and their children are daily engaged in using the elements and basic materials that are essential for sound family worship. No reason exists not to take time to teach the children how to use their learning and materials for family worship. The anticipated K-12 curriculum will give Sunday school and elementary teachers built-in opportunities to foster parental involvement in the worship life of their children. In both of these schools teachers might show parents how to follow Scripture readings associated with the Bible stories. At least some parents will gladly receive this instruction, especially if a forum exists to help them develop the habits and skills they need to lead family worship.

Youth group leaders and high school religion teachers can train teenagers “how to build” a family altar and encourage them to carry on at home. Pastors might take some time in the various adult organizations and Bible classes to discuss some of the issues inherent in family worship. The three most important issues appear to focus on motivation for family devotion, overcoming the barriers, and how to conduct family worship. Husband and wife, father and mother can always benefit from this guidance no matter at what stage they are in the life cycle of their family history.

2. *Model home devotions.* This suggestion lies implicit in making use of existing educational agencies. The classroom of the Lutheran elementary and secondary schools, parenting classes, parent-teacher organization meetings, other organizational meetings, and Bible classes at all age levels are appropriate forums for modeling the family devotion. Modeling is not done by telling. It is done by those who do what is to be modeled. Almost every congregation has at least one family willing to show how they conduct their home devotion, and this need not be the pastor’s or teacher’s family. Carefully-staged role playing and dramatization are reasonable substitutes if real-life modeling is too threatening. In the free exchange that follows, let ideas come from all participants. They will find comfort to know others have similar fears, and they will receive support to make an effort at doing what they know is good for them to do.

Since families change in structure and since variety in form or pattern of the devotion is of value, the modeling or dramatization should occur frequently enough to be helpful to all families at all stages of their history. Several agencies of the synod are making materials available which should make this task easier for called workers and other congregation leaders. The K-12 curriculum, *Meditations*, *Wellspring*, *Christian Worship*, *The People’s Bible* are examples of suitable means for imaginative leaders to help family members see and better grasp the “how” of family devotion. Each of us can add a list of devotional materials and prayer books which we ourselves have used. Of course, Holy Scripture itself is always available to help avoid or overcome excessive dependence on readymade materials.

3. *Work with new families.* Two groups receive assistance when this suggestion is pursued. They are the newly-married couples and the new members. The former might receive basic guidance, sample devotions, and

helpful materials as part of their premarital counseling. The new members might receive, as part of their new-member kit, a tract on family worship, a short list of available materials, a set of sample devotions selected especially for their family situation. Who can doubt the good effect this work with new families could accomplish. The newly-formed family receives a clear message to establish immediately the habit of worshiping at the family altar. The new-member family receives a similar statement that the congregation prizes highly regular family worship.

4. *Make materials available.* Each of the previous suggestions assumes the presence of appropriate devotion materials grounded in the Scripture. Where the congregation holds family worship in high esteem, quite likely one will find a prominent display of materials and a way of purchasing them. The display is located in one or more places: the narthex of the church, the fellowship hall, the school, the church library, or the bookstore. At least once a year, someone or some group is responsible for setting up a larger, special display calling attention to the old standards and the promising new materials. The Sunday bulletin and monthly newsletter are other means of informing parishioners about materials and offering guidance for family worship. The likelihood of families making purchases will increase if simple arrangements exist for acquiring the materials displayed and recommended.

The possibilities for helping families establish or improve their family worship are limitless. The reader will easily add to those presented here. Rather than bemoan the lack of family worship in our homes, we will serve better when we lay aside criticism and offer assistance. Whatever help we give, let these simple guidelines become clear to the spiritual leaders in our families: (1) daily communication with God through the Word and prayer is a part of Christian living; (2) find and use the best time available for your family; (3) use a simple, practical pattern, fitting materials, and a limited time; (4) be regular; (5) address the spiritual needs of all family members; (6) make family devotion time an intimate, satisfying experience; and (7) plan and pray for success.

### **Closing Thoughts**

A flood of ideas, suggestions, and directions have poured across these pages. The materials available to conduct family devotion based on Scripture are abundant; a variety of forms is possible. The danger is that all that has been said may leave the impression that the family devotion, even when based on Scripture, is an end in itself. Not so, and let us constantly guard against this insidious danger.

The broader purpose of family worship is accomplished only when we learn to know and fellowship with Christ. The desired effect of living close to the Word, having dialogue with God, is that this Bread of Life will enable each family member to live in fellowship with Christ. Where family worship serves this purpose, even the casual and informal things family members do and say will reflect their fellowship with Christ. In that family, small children as they play; youth as they study, work and have fun; and adults as they go about their work and enjoy the good gifts of this world; all will be united as one in Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word and will live lives of worship to the glory of their heavenly Father, no matter what problems or opportunities confront them.

Where living close to the Word results in lives of worship, we may be certain that family members also enjoy life in its richest meaning. Jesus himself says of our fellowship with him: “This is life eternal: that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3).

Fellowship with Christ, eternal life—we can find no better reason for the proper use of Scripture in family devotion. Lest we become impatient and look too soon to measure the results of family devotion centered on Scripture, let us keep in mind Luther’s expression of confidence and caution regarding the benefit of the Word.

“Hearing and handling the Word is always good and useful. For although the Word does not always strike home, our heart nonetheless remembers what it has heard and perhaps in an hour and at a time when we need it will begin really to understand it and feel its power and comfort. In like manner, embers which have lain under the ashes for a while will start burning again and give fire when one stirs them up and blows on them. Therefore the Word should not be considered powerless. One should not think that it has been preached in vain. Neither should another word be sought in case fruit does not appear immediately.”



# **The Blessings of a Healthy Christian Family**

## **Blessings of Being Nurtured by God's Word**

- We share the hope of eternal life.
- We have peace with God through knowing Jesus as our Savior.
- We enjoy expressing gratitude to God for all of his blessings.
- We enjoy growing in our certainty of God's promises.
- We find joy in striving to follow God's commandments more and more.
- We appreciate the marvels of God's creation.

## **Blessings of Being Nurtured through Family Relationships**

- We enjoy oneness.
- We are blessed with the ability to share heartfelt joys and sorrows.
- We enjoy a sense of mutual trust and confidence in each other.
- We enjoy unselfish concern for each other.
- We enjoy each other's faithfulness and loyalty.
- We enjoy the support and encouragement of one another.
- We enjoy being able to forgive and be forgiven when wrongs have been committed.
- We enjoy building each other up rather than tear each other down.
- We are blessed with open and honest relationships.
- We are blessed with strong spiritual leadership in our home.
- We are blessed with an understanding of God's roles for husbands/fathers, mothers/wives, and children.
- We enjoy the blessings of honor and respect for authority.
- We enjoy each other's company.
- We are blessed with an attitude that recognizes family as a high priority.

## **Blessings of Developing a Christian Lifestyle**

- We are blessed with a value system that is based on God's Word.
- We appreciate the desire to live a life of self-control.
- We are blessed with a kind and gentle spirit.
- We are blessed with the knowledge that all changes which occur, are under God's control.
- We are blessed with the confidence that God gives the ability to adjust to change.
- We have confidence in God's promise that he will help us cope with every situation or provide a way of escape.
- We have confidence that God will make all things serve his good purpose.

## **Blessings of Growing in a Sense of Mission**

- We know that we are of great value because we have been redeemed by the Son of God
- We know that God's mission and purpose for us gives us a reason for living.
- We are confident that our lives will have a Spirit-directed impact on others.
- We know that God gives us the necessary gifts to accomplish his mission and purpose.
- We are content with the gifts God has given to us.
- We find enjoyment in caring about and serving others.
- We enjoy making use of opportunities to show others the way to eternal life.