

## Spiritual Fathering Session 7 Assessments Regarding Family Worship

### The Lilly Foundation Study

In the 1980's, the Lilly Foundation performed a study, comparing churched adults with unchurched adults. They found that most of the adults in church had been raised in Sunday School. Amazingly, however, they discovered that almost the same percentage of adults who were unchurched had also been raised in Sunday School. Probing further, they compared churched and unchurched adults who had been brought up with family devotions. Here, the difference was striking. Almost all those who experienced family devotions growing up were active members of a local church as adults. Those who did not experience family devotions were nearly always unchurched.

Conclusion: *We are trying to fix the wrong thing.* Churches are beside themselves, trying to fix up church so that the lost will come, and the saved will want to stay. As valuable as the church is, it was *never* meant to substitute for home instruction, as commanded in the Bible. *We have traded a God-ordained method of instruction that has worked for one that doesn't work.*

### Reasons Why Men Do Not Lead Their Families Spiritually

First, there is a cultural reason why family worship is not often practiced in our culture. Family worship does not come as naturally to us, partly because **our western culture emphasizes the individual, while eastern culture emphasizes corporate identity and family.** (Japanese piano students) (randall)

So, why do men not lead their families spiritually? Ptacek lists four reasons (pp. 70-1):

- (1) **Wrong priorities. We must decide what has to go in order to make room for what is most important,** or our children run the risk of being a part of the 58% church defection rate in their late twenties, never to return. (randall)
- (2) **Perceived inadequacy. Men often know less about the Bible than their wives. But this is a self-fulfilling prophecy that can be reversed. As a man exercises spiritual authority, he grows in his adeptness.** Men should know this. **Many men were not adept at sports when they first started,** but they practiced and practiced and, eventually, saw results. This is also true of men who learned a **musical instrument** or who applied themselves in a particular **subject in school. God will help a man who humbly confesses his inadequacy,** begging for help so that he can assist his family, as God has commanded him. (randall)
- (3) **Sin. Family worship actually has the potential to make the leader of the home holy. As he studies the word, the father/husband is aware of his own shortcomings.** Confession prior to sharing God's word with the church is essential for the conscientious minister. So it is with the father/husband. Being in this position regularly can be used as a tool by the enemy to condemn but, **if it is handled correctly, the process of condemnation can be reversed, and it can actually be used of God to lead a man to personal holiness, like he has never experienced before.** (randall)
- (4) **Distractions. Perhaps a family argument prior to the time of devotions, or a conflicting schedule, or tiredness or illness—all these things can interfere.** (Ptacek, pp. 70-1) **The head of the family must not only make family worship a priority, but communicate this to the rest of the family so that distractions rarely interfere. Scheduling devotions around a meal is often the best way to make it happen regularly.** Thus, the morning and the evening seem to be the best times to schedule. Bad moods within the family, or in a particular family member, or within the husband/father himself are no reason to suspend family devotions. **Emotions never interfere with our other prioritized activities. We go to work when we are in a bad temper. Children go to school. Emotions should never be given priority over the word of God.** (randall)

### The Benefits of Family Worship

J. W. Alexander, in Thoughts on Family Worship listed fourteen benefits of family worship (given in Ptacek, pp. 58-61):

#### Benefits to the Head of the Family

- (1) It promotes the personal faith of the family head.
- (2) It activates the spiritual gifts of the head of the family. Here, he mentions the **various hindrances to the head of the family exercising spiritual leadership**: “**lack of education**, consciousness of small attainment, **slowness of speech**, **natural diffidence [lack of confidence]**, pride or false shame, and **a sense of inconsistency in life.**” Indeed, inadequacy and an awareness of one’s own weaknesses are a factor here. But notice, that **these same weaknesses do not prevent us from instructing and disciplining in other areas, as well.** In truth, **if every father genuinely searched his own heart before he disciplined his children, he would never discipline them at all.** While it is good for each of us to search our hearts, **we can never let the condemnation of the enemy keep us from obeying the clearly revealed commands of God. We must ask for forgiveness and plead for His grace to overcome our weaknesses and, if need be, we must humbly confess to our families that we are all growing together in certain disciplines of the faith.** We must keep in mind that **all of our weaknesses, whether they are obvious to our family members or not, are only a part of the picture. The other part is the grace that can come through us as we impart God’s truth through our own unique giftedness.** Of all people on earth, a man’s family is tolerant of his own tendencies, because they live with him. **Remember that Moses was unskilled in speaking, but he grew into his role. God often calls people to a task for which they appear to be unfit.**
- (3) It makes the head able to teach. As has already been mentioned, God enables us for the task as we take up the task. **The waters of the Jordan did not part until the children of Israel stepped out into them. Psalm 37:23 says, “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and He delights in his way.” (NASU) “Steps” presupposes motion.** We walk in the light He gives us and, only then, does He *establish* our steps. *Then*, He delights in his way. **Notice the progression in Psalm 37:23: We step out in obedience to His revealed will, He establishes our steps and, in the end, He delights in our way. But it all starts with us obeying, before our steps are established.** It is our job to step. It is His job to establish. Ability will come, but only after obedience.
- (4) It is a means of the head’s sanctification. **If a man responds correctly to the word of God, instead of his weaknesses being a hindrance to his spiritual leadership, his spiritual leadership will serve as a means to make him more fit to lead.** He will allow the word of God to convict him. He will ask the Lord to cleanse and strengthen him, so that these inconsistencies will not continue to show themselves. Sooner or later, the one leading in family devotions will notice that he is of a different disposition at that time than at other times. This naturally leads the head of the household to examine his own life. **Alexander says, “The Christian householder will feel himself constrained to say, “I am leading my family in solemn addresses to God! What manner of man should I be! ...Humble Christians are led...to be...circumspect, and to order their ways in such a manner as may edify their dependents.” (Alexander, p. 49)**

(5) **It makes the head a better father and husband.** This serves as a check against becoming too entwined with work and other activities. It brings the man back before his family again and again. **“In the shop, the market, the field, the highway, the office, the exchange, and even in the pulpit, the father may forget that he is a father. He cannot forget it when the curtain has dropped, when the circle draws more closely around the hearth, when the wife of his youth welcomes him to prayer, and when the eyes of his little ones are fixed on him as the minister of God to their souls. I no longer marvel that Christianity becomes a dying, empty thing, in the houses of those... where there is no joint worship of God. In the rage for amassing wealth, which threatens the church among us, and especially in our great commercial cities, there is an estranging process going on which we fear is too little observed.”** (Alexander, pp. 53-55)

Note his choice of words: **“There is an estranging process...,”** all for the sake of **“amassing wealth.”** How he speaks to our generation today!

It comes back to the fact that we value space more than we value time. I urge us every one to consider long and hard before upgrading to a bigger home. It is a long-term obligation that will nearly always involve money, which can be replaced, and take our time, which cannot be replaced.

We have an opportunity to turn our wealth-crazed society on its head—to live before them, along with our families, in such a way that others, Christians included, will want to know what our secret is.

It is there in the scripture, but practiced by so few.

### **Benefits to the Family**

(1) **It is a daily practice.** This he contrasted to “Sunday only” Christians who, sincere as they might be, do not have the daily reminder of scripture to assist them.

(2) **It counters worldliness and materialism.** This is especially important in an industrialized society. Emphasis is so often placed on providing the best for one’s family in material terms, to the expense of the best spiritually. Regular family worship helps to keep this worldly philosophy at bay.

(3) **It is the best way to teach children the Bible.** “The daily reading of God’s holy word, by a parent before his children, is one of the most powerful agencies of a Christian life. We are prone to undervalue this cause. It is a constant dropping, but it wears its mark into the rock. A family thus trained cannot be ignorant of the word. The whole scriptures come repeatedly before the mind. No part of juvenile education is more important.” (Alexander, pp. 62-63) **What a powerful combination! The voice of the earthly father and the heavenly Father, teaching as one! Every time the children hear a Bible story, they will remember the first place they heard the story—and who told it to them!** (randall)

(4) **It promotes intellectual improvement.** To study the Bible is to sharpen the mind for other, lesser disciplines. **Remember, the Bible is the truth, plus it is also great literature. Those who hear it, read it and study it in order to be more familiar with the Source of Truth will read fringe benefits, as well.**

(5) **It strengthens the family. It strengthens young people against peer pressure.** Alexander understood that a strong family was the best way to cure the ills of society. **Strong families nurture a society that has respect for authority.** “Family worship promotes habits of order. It brings a stated regulation into the house...and above all it adds strength to the principle of subordination and obedience...The habit of so doing must be formed under the parental roof.” (Alexander, pp. 165-6)

(6) **It promotes sound doctrine. [One need only look at American history to see that this is true.** The industrial revolution, the dates of which vary from one historian to another, began as early as 1780 and was completed around 1840. These dates parallel the gradual decline of family worship. As families disbursed, so did family worship. This is also the period where cults began to spring up.

**Witness the following cults and the dates they were started:**

|                               |                    |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Mormons</b>                | <b><u>1830</u></b> |
| <b>The Church of Christ</b>   | <b><u>1832</u></b> |
| <b>Seventh-Day Adventists</b> | <b><u>1863</u></b> |
| <b>Christian Science</b>      | <b><u>1875</u></b> |
| <b>Jehovah’s Witnesses</b>    | <b><u>1876</u></b> |

*These facts speak loudly! As family devotions fell into disuse, heresy began to multiply and flourish.—*

randall]

(7) **It educates the parents.** This is a natural means whereby the husband may minister to his wife, as well, washing her with the word. (Ephesians 5:26) This will encourage her to submit more naturally to him, as well. The husband, too, will become much more intimately acquainted with the word as he teaches it.

(8) **It preserves the spiritual leadership of the head of the family.** Here, Alexander states that any man who does not lead his family in regular instruction is not the spiritual leader of his home.

(9) **It changes the world.** By seeing our lives, some are convinced to convert. Although many, who remain unredeemed, are indirectly affected, the affect is real, nonetheless, and contributes to a more orderly society.