

BUILDING UP A “FAMILY ALTAR”

Bible reading: Mathew 19:14; Ephesians 6:4; 3:20-21; Proverbs 22:6

Brother Watchman Nee taught that building up a “family altar” was very necessary in order to lead our children to know the Lord.

I. The practice of the “family altar”, that is, family meetings with prayer and Bible reading, includes talking with the children about their day, having fellowship with them, reading the Bible or another proper book with them, and having genuine prayer with them according to what is in their hearts:

- A. It is clear that the base of such times together is a proper care for the children in every important aspect of their lives (as W. Nee describes in points A to G in chapter 33, “Parenthood,” *Messages for New Believers Vol. 2*). Building up a “family altar” that is spiritual in nature requires a proper human care as the base. If the human care for the children is lacking, it will not be possible to build up something of a spiritual nature. We must first mend whatever is necessary and build up something positive in the relationship between the parents and the children, BEFORE trying to practice having a family time to build up the “family altar”.
- B. Building up a “family altar” should not be a kind of new “movement”, but rather, a permanent practice in the homes of everyone who has children.

II. The “family altar” should be at the children’s level:

- A. On the positive side: These are times of having intimate, sincere, dialogue with the family, as well as times of genuine prayer and reading of the Bible.
- B. On the negative side:
 - 1. Some meetings fail because they are too long or too deep.
 - 2. Sometimes the children don’t understand why are they sitting there.
 - 3. In some meetings the parents talk about deep doctrines.
 - 4. Such meetings become a real suffering for the children.
 - 5. Even so, some parents are not sensitive to this.

III. To build up a “family altar” we have to encourage and attract our children:

- A. On the positive side: Parents need to devise a way to attract their children and encourage them to participate in these meetings.
- B. On the negative side:
 - 1. One problem in many home meetings is that we don’t show enough affection.
 - 2. Sometimes the children are not attracted by their father or mother to stay in the meeting, but rather the whip is the only thing that motivates them to stay in the continue meeting.
 - 3. They don’t want to participate in such meetings, but they come because they are threatened by the whip. If the whip were not there they would not come. Such a practice will never turn out well.
 - 4. **Never** punish your children for not participating in the family time together. If you spank them once, this could create a problem that will be in them for the rest of their lives.
 - 5. The parents should attract their children to the family time of worship. Don’t force them to come. This will only result in terrible consequences.

IV. To build up the “family altar” we suggest that there be a time in the morning and a time in the evening. [As is true with every kind of *practice*, nothing should be carried

out in a legalistic or rigid way. Every practice should be carried out according to the leading of the Spirit and according to the actual circumstances]:

A. On the positive side:

1. Rise up a little bit earlier in the morning.
2. Spend some time with the children before they go to school.
3. Your meeting should be short, full of life and should never long.
4. It should never exceed fifteen minutes, or be less than five minutes.
5. Ask every attendant to read a verse.
6. The father should take the initiative to choose some phrases and talk about them. If the children can memorize something, ask them to do it. Don't ask them to recite the whole verse. Just ask your children to remember the meaning of one sentence. [This means that we don't want the atmosphere of a class at school.]
7. At the end of the meeting, pray to ask the Lord's blessing. Pray according to things that the children can understand.
8. After praying, send them to school.
9. Every time you sit at the table to eat, you should sincerely thank the Lord for the food.
10. The meetings at night can be longer and should be led by the mothers.
11. There is no need to read the Bible at night, but it is needed for the family to pray together.
12. Particularly, the mother should gather the children and talk to them.
13. Accompanied by the father, the mother should encourage the children to talk.
14. Ask them if they had to face a problem that day. Ask them if they fought among themselves, and if something happened that day that bothered them. The mother has failed if she allows a barrier to rise up between her and the children.
15. The children should feel free to talk to their mother with full confidence.
16. The mother should learn to bring out what is in her children's heart.
17. If they don't want to talk today, ask them again the next day.
18. Lead your children. Allow the children to pray a little bit and teach them to say some words. This meeting should be full of life.
19. Ask them to confess their sins, but don't force them to do it.
20. The children should pray one by one.
21. Finally, end the meeting praying yourself, but don't make a very long prayer. If your prayer becomes too long, your children will get bored.
22. Nourish them according to their capacity. If you try to do too much, you will overwhelm them.

B. On the negative side:

1. Don't pray deep or lofty prayers. Neither make long prayers; be simple.
2. You should not pretend; some children learn to pretend as a result of the strict parent's pressure on them.
3. Children don't usually say lies, but you may cause them to lie.

V. Pay attention to the children's repentance:

- A. Explain to them what it means to sin, and that we all sin (including daddy and mommy!).
- B. You should give the proper importance to the matter of repentance, and then lead them to the Lord. At the proper time, you can ask them to sincerely receive the Lord.

VI. The family atmosphere should be an atmosphere of love:

- A. If the parents learn to be the friends of their children, and if the children feel comfortable and trust their parents, there will be few problems in the family life.

(This outline was developed from chapter 33, *Parents*, MESSAGES FOR NEW BELIEVERS, volume 2, by W. Nee; we recommend to digest and assimilate the whole chapter.) You may connect directly to read the section of the chapter on building the family altar by connecting to:

<http://www.ministrybooks.org/books.cfm?xid=MCDY7S4FCD6HY> From there you may read the entire chapter: Parents.