

“Draw Near to God!”

James 4:5-10

Intro. – Several years ago when our kids Adam and Marah were very young I was asked to develop a workshop around the following subject: Developing a Prayer and Devotional Life in the Family. Initially, I declined. I was totally inadequate for the task...; nevertheless, I was persuaded that my circumstances would make for some positive input, would I please reconsider...

How many here are presently having some kind of prayer and devotional time as a family? How many of you are satisfied with that time? Let me ask another question. How many of you are having a private prayer and devotional time? How many of you are satisfied/pleased with that time? Here’s the point I want to make. A lot of frustration and dissatisfaction with one’s family devotional time is parallel with one’s own personal prayer/devotional time. What can be done to change this? Is it really that pressing of a matter? What are the alternatives to not having a prayer/devotional life in the family?

With all of this in mind, I want you to know we are all on equal ground. What I’m about to develop through this message will appear basic, simple and obvious. Ironically, this is what so often happens -- something simple gets turned into something hard and difficult. I am convinced of this based on Scripture and the experience of many other godly people.

Purpose: to better understand the urgency in having a prayer/devotional time

Our text gives a clear promise – *draw near to God and He will draw near to you*. The significance of this, on a personal level, is that it affects the family as well -- your immediate family and your church family. Let’s answer three questions in order to accomplish the purpose of this message.

I WHAT is a Family to Do?

- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 makes clear that life is made up by time. How well we utilize our given time is going to determine the health and well being of our homes.
- Illus. – Dr. Wilson W. Grant (pediatrician/author) in book *The Caring Father* 3 incidents that helped motivate him to be a better husband/dad:
 - 1) Learned how kids spell love... “T-I-M-E”
 - 2) Son Brad after finishing housework said, “Tell you what, Dad. You don’t have to pay me, just play a game of basketball with me.”
 - 3) Again, son Brad doing work together on model racer for Cub Scouts... “I wish I could buy time. If I could, I would buy some right now.”
- all of us wish we could “buy time” but, again we can only wisely use the time given – note following:

A. Take Time for TRAINING

1. Do it while kids are young
 - Illus. – Prof. Suzuki trains Japanese children to be skilled musicians by age 6 or 7:
 - 1) until age 2 parents play classical music...
 - 2) at 2 start series music lessons for the parents...
 - 3) gives child miniature violin so they can get the “feel”...
 - 4) lessons begin lasting from 2 to 3 minutes
 - 5) build up to lessons lasting one hour...
 - recently gave concert 1500 kids (average age 7) playing classics of Beethoven, Chopin etc. “By the time they are old enough to know the violin is a difficult instrument to play they have already mastered it!”
2. Do it while they are teenagers
 - a. Illus. – TV station called homes to take a survey. Results? More kids home than parents!
 - b. parents can get so wrapped up in their lives they forget importance of training their kids...

- c. teenage critical yrs – need to teach responsibility, how manage time, money, emotions etc. and most importantly, their relationship with God...

B. Take Time to IMPROVE

- 1. People obviously intent upon improving their personal lives – education... physically fit... etc.
- 2. Take the time to improve your family’s life... give them your presence and emotional support...

C. Take Time for MOODS

- 1. Romans 12:15 *“Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.”*
- 2. Pure love matches moods – there will be those who rejoice while at the exact same time there are those who are weeping... Happens in the home – give family opportunity to blow off steam, as well as, blow their own horn. Don’t play “can you top this” or be a wet blanket...

D. Take Time for ETERNAL MATTERS

- 1. Matthew 6:19-20 *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.”*
- 2. Take time for one another’s souls – absolutely nothing more precious than each other’s souls... that mate needs to be a Christian... kids above all else need to be a Christian...
- 3. Lord and His Church vital in this area – family is dependent upon church for *eternal matters!*
- 4. Take time for devotions. Why? Leads to taking time for eternal matters... Point: take the time!!

II WHEN is a Family to Do It?

- in the past I have been made think I was a bad husband/dad because I didn’t take an hour each day with my family in devotions. I refuse to do that to you; instead, let me simply give some practical principles which when put to into action will help draw you and your family closer to God:

A. Meal Time is Prime

- 1. E.R. Jerkins (practicing counselor) tells of the time while speaking at a HS assembly asked, “How many of you sat down this past week and ate at least one meal with your family?” Less than 25% said that all members of their family sat down for a single meal the last 168 hours.
- 2. Consider mealtime as sacred
 - a. finding a specific command about this...(hard pressed), but, a principle certainly there.
 - b. it was an annual meal Jews were suppose to observe and teach their kids... “Passover”
 - c. it was at a meal Christ instituted a memorial feast where Christians assemble each first day of the week to remember Christ’s death until He returns.
 - d. it is a meal/feast that will usher in eternity and all God’s people will be gathered together
 - 1) Revelation 19:9 *“...Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb...”*
 - 2) personally have a hard time picturing at this feast a TV blaring, people wandering all around, fights taking place etc.
- 3. Mealtime ought to be pleasant
 - a. a well prepared and planned meal lends itself to a most pleasant experience... be thankful for parents (moms/wives in particular) who day in and day out masterfully prepare mealtimes!
 - b. it’s a time to communicate – of the day’s happenings and of tomorrow’s challenges...
 - c. instead of making mealtime a 3 ringed circus with sideshows, make it the center of attraction!
- 4. Mealtime is a training ground – Deuteronomy 6 and several other OT passages where parents are instructed to train their children in direct association with meal and mealtime...
 - a. for fewer years than I care to admit, I now understand why mealtime was and is important ...
 - b. in growing up we tried a devotion time prior to bed, but with 4 teens and hectic schedules just not practical... but, mealtime, was prime time. I urge you to make it so in your home!

B. Bedtime is Ahead Time

- 1. Especially for little ones, this is ideal time for devotions and prayer time.

2. Ideal time to wrap up the day, making applications, reaffirm God being a vital part of our lives...
3. Examples of what Mary did with Adam and Marah:
 - a. reading of several books... singing of songs/choruses... (cassettes with great little songs...)
 - b. answering of "heavy questions..."

When is a family to do it? Take the time best suited!

III HOW is a Family to Do It?

- no "set rules" given Biblically – must take the time to do it however!

A. Personal Efforts and Goals

1. Need to make family time, as well as, private time.
2. Reading – God's Word... solid good books...
3. Praying – called upon to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) i.e. be ever in the attitude of prayer fully aware of God's ever presence.

B. Efforts of Others

1. Talk to other brothers and sisters in Christ as to what their efforts along these lines are...
2. Find out what works in other families...

C. Resources for Ideas

1. Here's where use of the church library can be most helpful... There are some excellent resources available to you and your family that will help along these lines...
2. Focus on the Family Magazine – recognize some theological problems, but, generally speaking this is an outstanding source...
3. Internet full of solid material to help along these lines...
4. Point is that God has done everything under the sun to provide sources to help us with this particular need we have as individuals and as families...

Conclusion: Years ago in England, Sarah Adams a much loved literary talent was asked by a preacher to write the words to make a song. The song was to describe what Jacob experienced God's appearing to him as recorded in Genesis 28. After having caught the gist of this preacher's sermon, Sarah Adams masterfully condensed that biblical account into a song I'm sure you all know well.

Many sobering stories have been told of how this song was used in the hour of difficulty. William McKinley repeated this song often while on his death bed after being shot at the Pan American Exposition 1901. And in 1912, the unthinkable happened to the unsinkable. April 15, 1912, 1517 people lost their lives after the HMS Titanic hit an iceberg and immediately sank. This being her maiden voyage, the frivolity of the passengers went from ragtime music to the band playing this hymn "Nearer My God to Thee."

The theme of this song ought to be our heart's desire when it comes to our personal and family life. The Bible gives this command, as well as, promise – Draw near to God and He will draw near to you!" Don't be content to simply follow God. Let's learn to walk with Him!!