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Building a Family Altar: On Family Devotions

Genesis 8:18,20 “So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. . . . Then Noah built an altar to the Lord...”

When Noah left the ark after the flood, the first thing he did was to build an altar and offer sacrifices to the Lord. This he did as a first priority, and he did it in front of his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives. Though Scripture does not give us details, we may assume that Noah’s family was involved in building the altar, and that they took part in the sacrifices which Noah as the family priest offered to God. Noah was motivated in his thanksgiving sacrifices by a deep sense of reverence and awe before the Lord, and by profound gratitude in the salvation of his family from the worldwide flood which has destroyed every other family on earth. It was precisely for this deliverance that he had labored when he built the ark, for Hebrews 11:7 says “By faith Noah, when warned about things not seen, in holy fear built an ark **to save his family.**” Is it possible that this holy man was so deeply concerned with the physical safety of his family that he built a huge ark, but that he could not be bothered to be concerned about their spiritual safety as well? Hardly! So, he built the altar in front of them and set the example for a life lived in holy devotion and fear of the Lord.

Today, many men labor daily to provide physically for their families, but they neglect proper concern for the spiritual training they should be providing as the spiritual leader of the family. I would like to urge you to erect a “family altar” in the daily life of your home, and make sure that the fire never goes out. This is a very practical exhortation, for it involves specific times set apart on a daily basis for Bible reading and prayer. We know that life can get busy, but that is no excuse for a regular habit of neglecting the family altar. Ask yourself

this question: When was the last time you gathered together as a family on the couch and read the Scripture together and prayed together? Perhaps you've never done this! Well, it's not too late to start. This time of family devotions does not have to be very lengthy to be powerfully effective. I suggest choosing a family devotion book or a book of the Bible, reading for about five minutes or so, asking questions in conversational style to involve each family member, then having a time of prayer in which each member prays. The key to this discipline is not how many minutes per occasion you spend, but how many times per week, per month, and per year you do this. A regular pattern of faithfulness is what God calls us to.

If you rebuild your family altar, light the fire, and offer fragrant offerings of 1) meditation on and obedience to His Word, 2) of thankful worship, and 3) of intercession for others, God will "smell the pleasing aroma" of your faith (Gen. 8:21), and bless your family richly. Men, take the lead in this responsibility, for it has been committed to you. Be faithful and you will reap a bountiful harvest in the lives of those you love the most.