

Elliott 105

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

**July-August, 1961**

**WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, *Editor***

THE PILGRIM PRESS  
14 Beacon St.  
Boston 8, Mass.

EDEN PUBLISHING HOUSE  
1724 Chouteau Ave.  
St. Louis 3, Mo.

## A PARENT'S WITNESS

As I begin editing, there comes to mind this quatrain of George Macdonald:

O Lord, I sit in thy wide space,  
My child upon my knee;  
He looketh up into my face,  
And I look up to Thee.

Here intermingled are the feelings of Christian parents—joy, trust, heavy responsibility, expectancy, power, tenderness, creative love. Here too is the setting of family worship, in which God is praised, his grace is celebrated, and the family is put in eternal perspective.

I am still bigger than my children, but some day I will not be big enough. Above all things else I want them to know and love the One who is now greater than I and evermore will be greater than they—my Father, and theirs.

Through the years our pattern of family devotion has changed often, partly with the change in membership and partly from the dulling of the old pattern. When these words are published our family may have quite a different pattern of evening worship from that which I am about to describe—the shape as I write these words. And we invite you to share with us your experiments in home worship.

At his bedtime the younger child lights the two candles, one on either side of the Thorvaldsen statue of our Lord. After we sing the hymn Mark begins reading FAMILY DEVOTIONS—leisurely, with conversational interruptions. When a scripture is called for, another member of the family reads it. If Mark gets stuck he must turn the reading over to Bill, who finishes. The final action, kneeling prayer, takes many forms—usually beginning with silence, followed by the reading of the FAMILY DEVOTIONS prayer and then spontaneous prayer by one or all, and closing with the Lord's Prayer.

W. E. E.

## *An Introduction*

With this issue Dr. Willis E. Elliott, literature secretary of the United Church of Christ Office of Evangelism, becomes editor of *FAMILY DEVOTIONS*, succeeding Mrs. Estred Schwantes, whose capable and faithful service during a three-year interim has the hearty praise of the Joint Committee on Devotional Guides.

After teaching in colleges and seminaries, Dr. Elliott served for ten and a half years in a pastorate in which family life was a major emphasis. His present position includes the general overseeing of the United Church of Christ literature of evangelism and devotion.

*William E. Wimer*, chairman  
Devotional Guides Committee

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## *To Our Readers*

Your family is your unique family, not a "type." If anyone were to write family devotions specifically for your family, it would have to be you. And we hope that you will advance beyond the stage of letting particular devotional materials use you to the stage where you use "Family Devotions" and other materials in creative family worship.

In order to meet the differing needs of different families at different stages of spiritual maturity, this daily devotional booklet must (1) encourage beginners, not demanding too much of them, and (2) for the religiously more mature, suggest lines of expansion and development. Take advantage of conversation opportunities suggested in and by the readings, use the additional materials at the back of the booklet (in this issue, pages 61 through 64), and do a bit of "homework" (for example, in the "Booknook," cover page 3).

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## GRACE AT MEALS

If your family is regular in daily devotion, you are probably regular also about grace at meals.

You don't all eat all three meals together? Unfortunately, almost no modern families do! So we shall assume that on those occasions when the family does eat together you do express jointly your gratitude to God for the food and the fellowship.

It is a much more searching question whether the members of the family when scattered for work and school express their separate thanks before eating, by a movement of the heart if not also of the lips. Without faithfulness in corporate grace it is certain there will not be faithfulness in individual grace.

In our spiritually undisciplined age Christians are more fruitful at producing arguments against holy habits than patient in practicing them. One who has given up grace or never seriously tried it may call it legalistic, compulsive, or (in our rushed and fragmented lives) impractical. But to the lax and lazy any spiritual discipline seems over-discipline and impractical.

A more serious objection is that this holy habit can become perfunctory, routinized, dull, even dead. One then has the choice of burial or resurrection.

For those who have a concern to think of God many times in the day, regretting their spiritual bearings and reminding themselves of what is vital, the burial of grace is out of the question. It remains then to stimulate and revivify the practice. This can be done (1) by family talk about the importance of grace and (2) by experimenting in new ways of saying grace.

Where begin? After a meal suggest that the family try its hand at writing a few graces for future use. Let one member do the writing, perhaps on cards. The cards can then be placed on a little easel and rotated, with readers in the family taking turns. The card form is beautifully used in "Let Us Give Thanks: A File of Family Prayers and Graces" (The Pilgrim Press, 50c). The twenty-three graces in this collection include several with music, and the cards are packed in a little box which forms an easel. To your own cards and these printed cards you may wish to add graces which you see from time to time in magazines and books.

Samples? Here are a few table graces usable with very small children:

Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest,  
And let thy gifts to us be blest. Amen.

Before I eat, I bow my head  
And thank you, God, for daily bread. Amen.

Dear Father, I thank you for this food,  
And for your love that makes me strong. Amen.

For food and all thy gifts of love  
We give thee thanks and praise;  
Look down, O Father, from above,  
And bless us all our days. Amen.

We thank thee for this food  
And for thy loving care,  
Father of children everywhere.  
We have so much, dear Father:  
We ask a chance to share  
Our many, many blessings  
With children everywhere. Amen.

Bless the Lord, O my soul;  
and all that is within me,  
Bless his holy name.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul;  
and forget not all his benefits. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.  
Thanks be to God for these and all his  
gifts to us. Amen.

Singing graces? Try your hymnal. (In "Sing To the Lord" there are graces on pages 254 and 255, with a list of hymns that may be used as table graces.) The rhythm and melody of a sung grace will add greatly to children's appreciation and participation. Among the most familiar sung graces are these:

*The Doxology (printed on page 25 of this issue). To this tune may be sung also this grace:*

Be present at our table, Lord;  
Be here and everywhere adored;  
Bless these thy gifts and grant that we  
May dwell in fellowship with thee. Amen.

(or, May eat and drink to honor thee.)

*An ancient grace whose profundity will appear if the family talks about what "great" and "good" mean:*

God is great and God is good,  
And we thank thee for our food. Amen.

*And here is a four-part round sung to many tunes:*

For health and strength and daily food  
We praise thy name, O Lord. Amen.

*Several graces are sung to the Westminster Chimes:*

Hark to the chimes! Come, bow thy head.  
God, we thank thee for this good bread.  
Praise God for bread! Amen.

Morning (noontime, evening) has come,  
the board is spread.  
Thanks to him who giveth bread!  
Thanks be to God! Amen.

*(This is more commonly sung to a slightly different tune.)*

*And finally, one which is popular with young people:*

Love be with us at our table!  
By thy hand we all are fed:  
Strengthen us and make us able  
Work to do for thee, O Lord. Amen

## Family Devotions Booknook

Bible, home hymnal, and the current issue of FAMILY DEVOTIONS are standard equipment in many homes.

What "home hymnal"? By far the best, in the editor's opinion, is the one mentioned in the footnote to the July 12 meditation. *Sing to the Lord*, in addition to about 300 child-singable hymns, offers about 130 pages of excellent worship materials useful for the regular or occasional enriching of your home worship. (Philadelphia: Christian Education Press, 1959; \$2.50.)

Some families use FAMILY DEVOTIONS in the morning and tailor-make their worship for the evening. (Yes, of course, some do the reverse.) In 1959 Scribner published a first-class collection of materials for creative family worship: E. and L. McCauley's *A Book of Family Worship* (\$2.95). There is a section for younger children, but the bulk of the materials is for ages 8-15.

The current issue of the quarterly *Family Resource Book* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 60c) provides some helpful leads in setting worship in the broad context of "Christian Family Living" (the title of this issue).

All these, and other materials on the Christian family, are obtainable from either publisher mentioned on the title page of FAMILY DEVOTIONS.

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Contributing to this issue are Wells B. Grogan (July 1-7), Leonard Clough (July 8), Porter French (July 9), Mrs. Walter E. Ulrich (July 10 and 11 and August 18-31), the editor (July 12-14) Harold A. Schulz (July 15-29 and August 16 and 17), Herman Ahrens and Elizabeth North (July 30), the editor and Elizabeth North (July 31), and Ruth Bishop (August 1-15).

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## IS IT "NATURAL"?

When is the most natural time for family devotions in your home? Consider the answers of three homes:

A. "There is no 'natural' time. Family devotion does not come naturally. We *make* the time, artificially, by the clock. It's always the same time each day."

B. "Once in a while—once or twice a month—the family gets into a meditative mood. Then it's 'natural' to talk about God and read the Bible and have prayers and maybe sing a hymn."

C. "When the youngest child's bedtime arrives, it has become 'natural' for the family to gather, converse, read FAMILY DEVOTIONS and the Bible, kneel in prayer, and then sing a hymn."

Here are three ideas of what's "natural." . . . The first is *mechanistic* ("by the clock") and apt to produce an atmosphere of strain that stifles real communion with each other—and therefore with God. . . . The second is *undisciplined*, lax, weak—though good when and if the mood happens. . . . The third is *realistic*, based on recognition of real needs—for regularity in family devotion, for finding the best spot in the family schedule (though in your family this may be another time than the youngest's bedtime), for daily family conversation, and for ritual (order, though not rigid and unchangeable).

Your child's self-awareness and self-understanding develop as he and his parents encounter one another at deeper and deeper levels. This is family "conversation." And when each day has a conversation time which is also prayer time, your child acquires "naturally" a sense of devotion as conversation with God.

W. E. E.

## *Theme: The Legacy of Faith*

"What will you leave your children?"

Commercial interests quite legitimately ask this question and mean "materially." One of our freedoms is the freedom to determine the destiny of our worldly goods.

But we must ask ourselves the question at the deeper level also: what legacy of life-attitudes, images, ideals, culture of the inner life will I leave my children?

As a pastor, the editor struggled with many people who entered adult life suffering from the malnutrition of parental neglect. They were adequately fed, clothed, and housed. But the family round of thoughts and plans did not include the thought of God (except perhaps on Sunday mornings). This deficiency can be made up only with the greatest difficulty.

Contrariwise, I heard Reuben Youngdahl say recently that his father, a grocer, could not leave his ten children anything material, but he left them what in Reuben's opinion is the greatest of all heritages, the memory of a family kneeling daily before God, in the presence of his Spirit and his Word.

What do you plan to leave your children? In the realm of spirit, it cannot be given them after you are dead. It is your present conviction and practice, not a codicil.

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Contributing to this issue are Mrs. Shirley Kasper (September 1-14), Richard C. Braun (September 15-29), Mrs. Eloise Rhodes (September 30-October 14), and Henry V. Harman (October 15-31).

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## To Our Readers

This last issue of the year encourages you to family thinking on some great themes—the content of the Christian faith, the reality of the world Christian brotherhood, the sober need to make truly Christian preparation for Christmas, and the perpetual joy of God's coming to us.

As basis for the first of these themes we might use any great confession of faith or creed. The one we have chosen is the United Church of Christ's Statement of Faith (1959), an affirmation which presents ancient truths in modern garb. The second theme is presented, appropriately, during the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches (in New Delhi, India). And the third and fourth themes, equally appropriately, fall in the traditional periods of Advent and Christmastide.

W. E. E.

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Our cover is our interpretation of the World Council of Churches Assembly theme, "Jesus Christ, the Light of the World." Against the blackness of a world in sin and misery, the Light is represented as bringing hope (green) to the family of man. The mixture of old and new—of the cross, with the electric light bulb and the atomic orbits—suggests "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Contributing to this issue are Mrs. Gerald Jud (November 1-15), Harry Widman (November 16-25 and December 3-4), Richard C. Braun (November 26), Mrs. J. S. Ledgerwood (November 29 - December 2, and 5-15), Alfred Schmalz (December 16-31).

Scripture quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyrighted 1946 and 1952 by the Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches, and are used by permission.

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## WHO'S THE CENTER?

*In many a Christian family there occurs from time to time a conversation something like this. Everyone is busy, and it comes time for the youngest child to go to bed. Father or mother calls the family together, and one of the children says, "But I was doing something important!" The parent says, "But isn't family devotion important?" The answer goes something like this: "But having family worship isn't 'doing' anything!"*

*Well, is it? When we come together at the family altar day after day are we "doing" anything that we can see the results of?*

*The one inescapable test of whether we are doing anything is to ask where the center of our family is. In the artificial games of life, like basketball, everybody knows where the "center" is at the beginning of the game. The people in the stands may think they are the center since without them the game wouldn't even be played. But this is not really true, for games were played long before they were converted into modern spectator sports.*

*Where is the center of our family life? We can get a number of answers depending upon our point of view. The parents are the center of authority, and the children are much of the time the center of attention. Sometimes something the family wants becomes the center of planning. But long before our family began there was a Center of life. And our family life becomes more real as it makes that real Center, God, the actual center.*

## To Our Readers

In a southwestern restaurant the editor recently read these words on the cover of the menu: "Do you bow your head at home and thank God for your food? Then don't be ashamed to do the same here." However you may feel about saying a visible grace in a public eating place, the invitation on the menu raises the whole question of how religion moves out of the home into the world. Of course if religion is a thing confined to the home and the church, it is a weak and even unreal thing. Equally true it is that if religion is only in the church—and neither in the home nor in the world of work and leisure—it is unreal and even sham.

Your faith and that of your children is real and strong only when there is a triangular reality, a sound spiritual engineering principle joining home and church and "outside world" in the love of God and in the service of mankind. It is our prayerful hope that FAMILY DEVOTIONS will help your family to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might" and to "be not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation."

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THE COVER: The covers of 1962 spell out the word "F-A-M-I-L-Y" Families may find that children will want to keep the issues together until they are able to spell out the whole word by covers. . . . Young children are fascinated by letters, for the learning of the Latin alphabet is close to them. They are intrigued by the bits of other alphabets that come to their attention. They hear about the Tower of Babel, and they ask how people can understand each other and translate and hear the word of God. . . . To the left of the "F" of the present cover are two little signs, like curled up leaves. They are the symbols that represent the "F" sound in the Bible. The one on the left is the Old Testament (Hebrew) "F," and the other one is the New Testament (Greek) "F" sound. . . . Your child's imagination may be stimulated in surprising ways if you use this year's covers as conversation starters.

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## YOUR HOME A WITNESS

*"It is very difficult to know what Christianity is unless one has had some intimate knowledge of Christian family life—of the attitude of a Christian husband and wife towards one another and of Christian brothers and sisters towards one another and of Christian parents towards their children."*<sup>1</sup>

These are the words of John Baillie, whose fame as a world churchman matched his fame as a theologian and devotional writer.<sup>2</sup> He and his theologian brother Donald were highly regarded as humble saints in high places. And the home they came from? It is not difficult to imagine. It was a home in which God was the rallying center for every celebration and decision. Their parental home was a witness that continued in the form of their own later lives. Their chief remembrance of it was of who its head was—not mother, not father, but Jesus Christ, who is Lord of the whole family of God. Without such homes "it is very difficult to know what Christianity is." For the home is a microcosm of both church and world, and the most vital link of communication between them.

Your home is, first among other things, an experiment in and experience of Christian community. Beloved community lives in daily consciousness of God and in mutual interdependence through living dependence on the grace of God.

What is the witness of your family? What is the "image" of your family in your community and your church? And what image of family living will remain in the hearts of your children when the last child has left home?

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References 1-7 are to notes on page 64.

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## THE AUTHENTIC SHELTER

Fallout shelters are brand new in human history, but the need for shelter is as old as man. Now that millions of Americans are trying to decide whether they should prepare holes to crawl into, has it been a conversation topic in your home?

The pen, chalk, and watercolor drawing of Henry Moore on the cover of this issue of **Family Devotions** was done in a London subway during the German bombings in World War II. You may wish to use it as a conversation piece in your family, asking each member what it means.

Do you see in it the massive unity of the true family, the members appearing to be almost parts of each other? The family looks solid enough to be a pillar holding up the roof of the "tube." Strength is another way of looking at the same reality, and one is not surprised to learn that the drawing was in preparation for a large-scale bronze sculpture. The great cultural heritage of mankind is suggested by the centrality of the book, and the community of learning is suggested in the boy's hands on the book and the parents' hands on the boy's. There is a hint of the presence of creative love, stronger than any particular family, than any particular shelter, than any particular destructive force—a creative love that roots and flowers in the source and destiny of life.

And what about the aloneness of this family? The shelter pictured is a public one, and perhaps it is only incidental that there is a shelter at all. What is essential is that underneath are the Everlasting Arms and that an overarching concern for mankind can make such protection unnecessary. Christian families will consider their stewardship, whether it is better to give their means for protecting themselves from holocaust or for seeking to prevent holocaust. As for survival, it is the opposite of the gospel call to sacrifice.

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## HYMN OF THE WEEK

During the first four weeks of this issue we have provided what many have asked for, the joining of FAMILY DEVOTIONS to great hymns, one hymn each week.

We often mentioned the singing of a hymn in connection with a particular devotion and have given the reference in what we consider the best family hymnal, *Sing to the Lord*.<sup>\*</sup> But for July we are experimenting with two more specific encouragements: (1) printing the hymn and hymn tune for the sake of convenience, and (2) adding to each devotional the page reference to the hymn for that week, so that the family will have a chance to learn it and deepen their appreciation of it and their worship through it.

Of course your family may prefer to choose its own hymn of the week. If you do, we suggest that you stick with this little discipline for at least four weeks (four hymns) to give it a real trial. Or you may find one or more of the hymns inappropriate to the age level of your children. "Praise Him, Praise Him," for example, may be too young for your children. Or the diction and conception of "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," may be too difficult. If you decide on a change, mark the rest of the days of the week with the number or title of the hymn you have chosen.

Can't sing? Song is normal to Christian worship, and the tunes we have suggested are easy. Don't have an instrument in your home, or on vacation? None is needed, and many families prefer not to use an instrument. Can't all read? It's better to sing from memory, a parent singing a line and then the whole family singing it—until the stanza is known by heart. Seems like hard work? Worship is work, and can be great fun too. It is work done together, as an offering to God and as an experience of personal and family enrichment.

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<sup>\*</sup> Obtainable from the Christian Education Press (1505 Race St., Philadelphia 2, Pa.), Eden Publishing House (1720 Chouteau Ave., St. Louis 3, Mo.), or The Pilgrim Press (14 Beacon St., Boston 8, Mass.). \$2.50. Pianist's edition, \$4.50.

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## FAMILY OR CHURCH—WHICH?

There is currently a running debate on the correlative responsibilities of home and school in our culture. Are parents getting lazy, turning more and more of their duties over to the public schools? Are the public schools cannibalizing our children, demanding more and more of their time and energies? Many P.T.A.'s are coming alive with this issue and the prospect is hopeful.

Another, more fundamental team is that of home and church. Are parents expecting the church to Christianize their children? Is the church trying to Christianize children independently of the home? Are parents and/or children giving too much or too little time to "church activities"? Consider this paragraph from "Christian Nurture in the Family and the Relation of the Church to the Family."<sup>1</sup>

Church and family are mutually dependent. The total faith and mission of the Christian community cannot be divided in a neat fashion and distributed, some parts to families and some to churches. But the family and the church should each attempt to attend to those aspects of the nurturing task most appropriate to it, using the methods most natural to its character. Neither the family nor the church ought to try to shift its own responsibilities to the other or use the other as a means to accomplish its own ends. For example, the family ought not to try to turn over to the church the total job of communicating the Christian faith to its children (as happens when parents think of Christian nurture primarily as instruction and, therefore, as belonging to the church school rather than to the whole Christian community). The church or church school should not act as if the family's chief responsibility for communicating the faith were that of supporting the church school or preparing or supplementing church school study. The church ought not to prescribe programs for the family nor to assume that Christian nurture in the family is dependent upon teaching a specified body of content. The initiative that the church takes in relation to families should be of a kind that helps them to understand their own task in all its breadth and depth, and that offers them certain resources which may be useful to them as they do this task.

Your family worship is the foundation of Christian education in your home. May FAMILY DEVOTIONS be a true help in your praise and learning.

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## FAMILY AFFIRMATION

Family worship is, among other things, a "testifying" to and a celebrating of God's grace. This is the chief function of the UCC Statement of Faith, which can well be used in family devotion as a repetitive reading (a parent speaking a phrase, and the rest of the family repeating from memory). Parents may be surprised at how quickly the children memorize, so that the "lining out" becomes unnecessary.

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to his deeds we testify:

He calls the worlds into being,  
creates man in his own image  
and sets before him the ways of life and death.

He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

He judges men and nations by his righteous will  
declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord,  
he has come to us  
and shared our common lot,  
conquering sin and death  
and reconciling the world to himself.

He bestows upon us his Holy Spirit,  
creating and renewing the Church of Jesus Christ,  
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

He calls us into his Church  
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,  
to be his servants in the service of men,  
to proclaim the gospel to all the world  
and resist the powers of evil,  
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,  
to join him in his passion and victory.

He promises to all who trust him  
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,  
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,  
his presence in trial and rejoicing,  
and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end,

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him. Amen.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

**January-February, 1963**

**WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, *Editor***

Published bimonthly by the Eden Publishing House and The Pilgrim Press, for the United Church of Christ Board for Homeland Ministries Department of Evangelism. Second-class postage paid at St. Louis, Mo. *Publication Office:* 1724 Chouteau Ave., St. Louis 3, Mo. *Editorial Office:* United Church of Christ, 2969 W. 25th St., Cleveland 13, Ohio, and 14 Beacon St., Boston 8, Mass.

## PREPARATION FOR A JOURNEY

Dear Parents:

By the time your newborn baby had completed his first journey from hospital to home, you, as father and mother, had completed a journey of at least nine months. What a long journey it seemed, and yet so brief! Brief, because the journey was also preparation for the longer journey of parenthood, never-ending in this world.

The dawning of a new year has been compared with many things, but most of all with the birth of a baby. New Year's resolutions on which we falter are said to be stillborn, and we are apt to treat them only half seriously. But to be a parent is a continuous preparation for a journey into darkness and light, in this world and the world to come. And this is much more than half serious.

Not to be out of step with the season, the editor presents his offering for inclusion in your list of New Year's resolutions. It is one which can multiply the effectiveness of your family worship. It requires only a small amount of effort. It promises, as an added benefit, a deepening of husband-wife conversation. It comes from the editor's heart as the most promising suggestion he can make in the light of his mailbag.

Because you are reading these words you are probably serious enough about family devotion to be daily at it. Typically, you may give it a few minutes and hope that the scripture for the day is not too long, nor the reading too difficult, nor the suggestions for discussion and prayer too time-consuming. How about deciding ahead of time what you are going to do in family devotions, before the children get in on it? They are your children, the situation is yours, and no editor can tell you precisely what you ought to be doing during your family's home worship. You need to think and talk about the questions your children may ask with regard to the scripture and the theme. Who should do what? Should we sing a hymn, perhaps one suggested or another appropriate one? Is there too much scripture suggested, or not enough.

Family devotions should not be a substitute for husband-wife devotions. Rather, preparation for the former may be an aspect of the latter.

A blessed New Year to you and yours!

# Family Devotions

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**March-April, 1963**

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## MAKING THE HOLY SACRED

When our first child was born, a scholar and poet in a letter to us said, "Enjoy the stages, for they are soon by." The words still strike us as both invitation and command. As parents we are to make the most and the best of what God has given us in our abilities, our children, and our circumstances. What a fearful responsibility, being parents! But at the same time it is an invitation to joy, joy in the God of whom that scholar teaches and that poet sings.

We Christian parents have a distinct way of enjoying our children and their stages, and ours. It involves offering all our joys to God and enjoying them in him—as in the familiar phrase, "man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

This doesn't just happen. In your family, God is not God automatically, but rather through your making him so. As God, he is first. Your family living, and specifically your family acts of devotion, should manifest and exercise this firstness. Do we really believe, as our statement of faith says, that "God seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin"? Then he is seeking to save and redeem our family relationships, and day by day we recognize this supreme fact as we celebrate the gospel of his love together. Do we really believe the words of that most familiar hymn—

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! . . .  
Only thou art holy. . . .

For us as persons and families, only that is really holy which we make sacred. As day by day your family sets aside a sacred time for worship, you are hallowing the Name by taking time to become holy, for the service of God and man.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
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**May-June, 1963**

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## FAMILY DEVOTIONS—PLUS?

From time to time the users of FAMILY DEVOTIONS ask what they may do to supplement the daily selections, especially as their children grow older.

We have made several suggestions, the basic one being that parents who prepare for family worship—say, reading the selection together the night before—tend to expand the material by thinking of things to do, questions to ask to encourage discussion, hymns to sing, Bible passages to read. The other major suggestion has been to use the "Family Resource Books," which were listed in the September-October 1962 issue.

A further resource can be found in the daily prayer calendar of the United Church Board for World Ministries, the current issue being "Directory and Calendar of Prayer, October 1962—September 1963." This includes maps and brief descriptions of work in various parts of the world with which the United Church of Christ is directly related. It also gives the names and locations of the missionaries and of their children. Thoughtful use of this material will not only help to foster a sense of the world-wide church but can make concrete questions for discussion and intercessions in the family circle. Children can identify more easily with work in another land as they become aware that there are children of their own age living and studying abroad. The 148 page booklet can be obtained at 25c per copy from the Purchasing Department, United Church Board for World Ministries, 14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Mass.

How to use the Missions Calendar of Prayer? For smaller children, just reading the text would not be satisfactory. But the parent who has read the material ahead of time, or who can simplify it on sight, can communicate both the basic information and a sense of excitement, gratitude, and joy in our co-laborers, children and adults, for the kingdom of God.

12

# Family Devotions

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**July - August, 1963**

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## WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RELATIVES?

In the world today there are almost twice as many people as when the editor was born, but most American families are more alone than ever before. Like a giant centrifuge, a thing called "mobility" spins 30,000,000 of us each year off from our old centers of place and kin. For the modern child, "family" tends to mean only father, mother, siblings, and self.

Let's look at a few implications of this new nomadism.

1. Internal and external strains tend to rend the family, the old rituals and insulations dropping away. One of the sources of strength, now largely lost, was the proximity of relatives (the "tribe").

2. As families fall apart, the question becomes more conscious, What holds families together? Thus the slogan, "Families that pray together stay together." Read as a reason for praying together, the slogan is dubious; but as an effect from praying together, it is undeniable. As the old natural centers fall away, the modern family may rediscover the Center, its Center, God as the source and center of life. This in part accounts for the present revival of the family altar. The need is not new, but it now strikes us with a new intensity. The family's devotional solidarity now seems less optional than it used to.

3. And the relatives? The temptation to live tribally is reduced, and "the neighbor" can become important in new ways. Relative and neighbor are closer to a parity, equal visitors equally invited to participate in the family life, including its Center in family worship.

4. "Family" can eventually be realized as "family of God," the Church under the Father and then mankind under the Creator-Redeemer-Sanctifier. As tribe-family and nation-family mean less and less, the common Center and common circumference will become increasingly meaningful. The lack of cohesiveness in modern life can be received as an invitation to a more profound and comprehensive spirituality.

# Family Devotions

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## REGULAR OR SPONTANEOUS?

A recurring question in family religion goes something like this: Isn't family worship more authentic, more real, when it is spontaneous? If so, doesn't a contrived regularity make for unreality in family devotions?

But is the antithesis real? Rather, the relation of *regularity and spontaneity* is more like the relation between musical exercises and musical composition. The former depends upon the latter for its meaning, but the latter upon the former for its very existence. The family that does not regularly worship God at home will find few if any occasions of spontaneous turning toward him in prayer, praise, song, and the celebration of his word.

The question sometimes takes this form: Should family devotions be a *pleasure or a duty*? Again the antithesis seems unreal. Pleasure and duty support each other, as in artistic disciplining and creating. Without commitment and a sense of duty, family devotions will not even exist and will therefore have no chance to be a pleasure. Furthermore, if the major incentive is pleasure rather than self-offering in gratitude to and in service of God, is not the center of the experience our pleasure-feeling rather than God himself? Then too, pleasure is evanescent and produces no regularity in life. It may start regularities, such as the family itself; but it is powerless to continue them. In the roots of both the family and of worship there is romance, but romantic notions are inadequate to continue either family worship or the family itself.

Walter Kerr in *The Decline of Pleasure*<sup>1</sup> speaks to this issue: "The worst hour you will ever spend with your children is, inevitably, the children's hour, the hour that has been purposefully scheduled. An adult can unsettle a child utterly by giving him his fully focused attention." But family devotions are not the children's hour, nor the parents'. They are God's; they center in him and his will and his kingdom, or else the whole experience has the stiff and inauthentic feel of a performance. At its worst it does focus on the children, becoming a subtle school in which parents apply religious sanctions to their squirming offspring.

Pitfalls in family devotions? But of course! Pitfalls in all of life's truly significant disciplines and opportunities. The blessing of God be upon your family as you strive and fail and fall and pick yourselves up again and go on worshipping him in your home.

# Family Devotions

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## PREPARING FOR ADVENT

The literature of the Advent-Christmas season abounds more and more, as does the custom of adopting some additional family ritual during this period. Each denomination provides materials for Advent in addition to Christmas materials. From United Church: Evangelism (2969 West 25th Street, Cleveland 13, Ohio) you may obtain the following pamphlet material:

"Advent—Day by Day in the Home" (45c), "Advent in Our Home" (7c), "Family Christmas Service (for the home)" (2c), and "Lighting the Christmas Candles" (8c).

On the universal theme of loyalty to God through loyalty to man above all lesser loyalties, some families may want to add to their family worship a daily reading in Herbert Wernecke's "Celebrating Christmas Around the World" (Westminster, 1962, \$3.95). Order from United Church Bookstores (1505 Race Street, Philadelphia 2, Pa. or 14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Mass.).

And what about the meals the family does not eat together? Families that have family worship almost certainly say grace together when they are together for a meal. But a common grace, on cards, can be used for a particular meal even when the family is scattered; and experiment with this is a possible additional spiritual discipline during Advent. Former issues of *Family Devotions* (July - August, 1960 and 1961) have printed a number of graces. Here are a few more:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever. Amen.

We thank thee for these gifts, O Lord,  
Pray feed our souls, too, with thy Word. Amen.

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The eyes of all wait on thee, O Lord; and thou givest them their food; thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the hunger of every living thing. Amen.

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## DO I HAVE TO?

Yesterday a man who is proud of the good religious discipline he experienced as a child told me in distress that his children, ages eleven and fourteen, have stopped going to church school. Said I, "When you were their ages, did you want to quit?"

"Yes, but I knew I couldn't, so I never thought much about it, and it was better that way."

"And your children will not have a chance to say it was better that way?" I countered as he hopped on his train.

The quizzical expression on my friend's face betrayed his confusion and wonderment. Why had he let his children take over? And did they really want to, or were they only testing their freedom (as I suggested to him)? The conversation revealed that it would not occur to him to let his children's feelings take over in relation to their attendance at public school. That is so obviously important, underlined by the truancy law! Is there no law in the life of the family, subordinating child to parent? No law in the life of the spirit, subordinating feelings to duties?

This is not a matter of trampling on a person's emotions or treating the person as of secondary importance to institutions (family and church). Rather it comes down to helping the person mature in bringing his affectional life under the control of a higher power—that of the spirit and the Spirit. The American child today is more apt to be violated by an excess of freedom than by oversevere limits.

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* speaks to the conflict between the life of desire and the human heritage of obedience, reason, and creative freedom. The family faithful in family devotions and in church worship is doing more than sustaining the spiritual heritage. It is also attacking the demoralizing laxity of our permissive culture. "I don't want to" should be treated by neglect or by humor or by discussion. But certainly not by concession!

To put the matter in its largest context, the temptation to neglect God in home and church and world is so powerful that it can be countered only through the insight that the purpose of life is to worship God. In church Sunday mornings we do openly what we should be doing in our hearts all week long; and in private and family devotions we feed the inmost, deepest, and only eternal dimension in our lives.

A maturing new year to you and yours.

16

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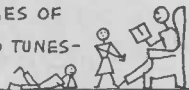
## ANY HYMNS TODAY?

In a Westminster Choir College (Princeton, New Jersey) leaflet, President Lee H. Bristol has presented "Fun with Your Hymn Book" in the form of the following cartoons. We hope that it will nudge you toward the use of the treasures of Christian hymnody in your daily family devotions. For some suggestions on a hymn of the week during the weeks of this period, see cover page 3.

1. TO START THE DAY—  
SING A HYMN



7. READ THE STORIES OF  
THE HYMNS AND TUNES—



2. AS GRACE AT MEALS—  
SING A HYMN



8. AT FAMILY PRAYERS—  
READ A HYMN



3. AT BED-TIME PRAYERS—  
SING A HYMN



9. WHY NOT WRITE SOME  
HYMN WORDS YOURSELF—



4. AROUND THE PIANO—  
SING A HYMN



10. TRY PLAYING "DID YOU KNOW?"  
WITH STORIES  
ABOUT HYMNS  
AND TUNES...



5. SING HYMNS FROM  
DIFFERENT LANDS—



—(LIKE)

6. SING HYMNS FROM  
DIFFERENT CENTURIES



"DID YOU KNOW CHARLES WESLEY  
WROTE MORE THAN 6,500 HYMNS?"

# Family Devotions

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## CAN ALL LIFE BE HOLY?

From our Jewish and early Christian heritage we have a deep conviction that the fundamental tone of life is to be a sanctifying of the name of God through consecrating all life. God's name is sanctified, consecrated, magnified when we seek him and acknowledge him in all the occasions of our lives. We can give to God our day, our year, and all life's special crises and blessings.

Our day? Early Christians prayed at 9 A. M. (Acts 2: 15), at noon (Acts 10: 9), and at 3 P. M. (Acts 3: 1). These were public occasions of prayer; in addition there were prayers on rising and retiring—private prayers, for which corporate parallels soon developed. The long established custom of "Ohana" (family devotion) in Hawaii is in line with this Christian tradition, and many homes there set aside both the beginning and the close of the day for family praise and prayer.

The year was given to God, in what we now call the Church Year—a combination of a nature cycle and a series of historical remembrances of Jesus.

Life's great events were given to God—birth, marriage, sickness, death, the first use of a new house and a new church.

Does all this seem complicated and artificial? If so, what would you substitute for it? The God who said, "Be holy, for I am holy," sent his Son to teach us to pray "Hallowed be thy name." How we bless God and life is not important, but whether this is our fundamental desire and goal is all important.

In an atmosphere of persecution and in a civilization which did not permit devoting even so much as a special day in the week, the early Christians could not always gather for public prayer. But they did find ways to lead disciplined lives of personal, family and small group devotion. That is the point and the issue.

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## CONSCIENCE AND HOPE

"I have read so much, I am more confused than ever!"

It seems today just as bad to read too much about how to be good parents as to read too little. At least one would gather so from listening to parents' conversation. Anxiety and guilt seem to deepen as one attends to the insights of the religious heritage and the behavioral sciences.

Neurotic conflict may be carried down from one generation to the next, we read. Are we condemned by heredity? The forces outside the home are too strong for most homes. Are we then helpless in the face of environment?

But why should we concentrate on the limitations of heredity and environment? Why should we not rather more than offset these negativities with the potential of the family for dealing with its own existence and its own future? Your family is not responsible for its heritage, but only for what it is doing with its biological and cultural legacy. You are responsible, however, for deciding how you shall use your resources of attention, time, and money.

Yes, parents bless and blight children's lives and personalities. God gives both these facts to work with. But the all-embracing fact, and the one which should impress us more than any other, is that his grace is sufficient. He works with us as we live together and learn to work within and even use our limitations in solving our problems and in serving our world. The great prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr seeks to present before the throne of grace a cry for the maturity of knowing what we are responsible for and what resources are at hand for meeting this responsibility: "Lord, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, and the courage to change what ought to be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference."

This serenity, this courage, and this wisdom are values deeply nourished through the practice of family devotion. As you offer up your common life, and each his own life, to God, may you know this all-sufficient grace, celebrate the all-loving presence and grow toward the fullness of the stature of Christ into a triumph which is no creation of man but in which man participates through grace, the power of love and forgiveness through which new meaning and new direction, peace, joy, communion, and community reappear.

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## TELL US A STORY!

"If I had my choice of talents, I should like to be more than anything else a *real* storyteller!" The sensitive parent who said this revealed both her high appreciation of the value of storytelling and her self-depreciation as a storyteller. The priceless ability to tell stories well does not lie on the surface of any life, and it is only by trying and trying again that one develops whatever talent one may have.

A public school teacher who for seventeen years began each school day by telling a Bible story says that for the past three years, during which she has not been permitted to begin the day in this way, teaching for her has been a less rewarding experience and the atmosphere of the classroom has been less creative and less joyous. Though a good teacher with an excellent record, she looks forward to retirement as freeing her from the tyranny of a system in which storytelling, when it occurs at all, must specifically leave out the greatest subject—God.

Rainer Maria Rilke at the turn of the century was aware of the forces and factors now at work in this parent and this teacher. He invites adults to tell children "Stories of God" (from the title of his book, published by W. W. Norton, 1963, \$1.25 paper), and he prompts this rewarding activity by telling adults stories which he urges them to retell to children. The stories are themselves highly sophisticated and not appropriate for reading to children younger than junior high level, but this raises the question of how much reading there should be in family devotions. If the parents or parent prepares the family devotional period ahead of time, will it not lend directness occasionally to eliminate printed material and "just talk"? You will find this easiest if you spark conversation with a story from life—ancient or contemporary, historical or fictional. If the story involves your own religious experience, your personal encounter with God, it falls into a literary category of its own—"witness." And you will be realizing indirect benefits—the freedom to articulate your faith, and encouragement to your child to follow your example in Christian conversation.

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## HOME RELIGION—IMPLICIT OR EXPLICIT?

Because of massive tendencies in modern culture to depersonalize relationships, dehumanize persons, and secularize motives and values, the church everywhere today is lifting up the personal and interpersonal relations as the sphere of God's action and glory. Human beings are treated as holy, and human experience is viewed as the ground of, if not the reality of, experiencing God the Holy One. One notices an instant negative reaction to anything that would seem to manipulate the person, as though man were eternally an end in himself and never a means.

This emphasizing if not glorifying of human personality is motivated partly by the church's message and mission and partly by humanistic tendencies in the environing culture. Secular humanism fears that man may be lost in the midst of his work. Christianity shares this fear, but has a deeper one, namely, that God may be lost in the midst of man's glory.

How does this affect religion in the home? Currently it takes the form of a debate between what we may call "the naturalist" and what we may call "the regularist." An example of the former is Ruth Robinson's "Honest to Children," pp. 279-287 in *The Honest to God Debate*, Westminster Press, 1963, \$1.85: "To present Christ to a small child is precisely to let his love *be present* to the child in our love and for a time nothing more." As he develops "*at his own speed*" specific religious reality becomes "real for him because it corresponds to what he knows for himself and his own personal relationship . . . on the grounds that for a Christian the personal is of ultimate significance."

The regularist, who wishes to hear and incorporate what the naturalist has to say, insists that this is no either/or matter. The holy is of course implicit in parent and child and in the parent-child relationship. But explicit religious praxis—a specific time and place for daily family devotion—is not to be jettisoned on the ground that some use it "as an easy way out of a more demanding obligation." Abuse should point not to disuse but to true use, to daily family worship as celebrating the holy presence of God in the home and in the world, the blessing of God and his creation in gratitude for his works and in anticipation of his kingdom, and the centering of consciousness on God to the end that "our moments and our days" may be dedicated to his glory.

This rule (*regula*) of the regularist in home religion is to the spirit what exercise is to the body and education to the mind. It is a daily discipline by which we grow strong as soldiers of Jesus Christ and as a small unit in his army. And—a truth neglected by the naturalist—it is a daily recognition that our dignity as persons rests fundamentally and finally not on our being ends but on our being means, means to the glory of God. As in all true worship, family worship is basically, not something useful, something we do for ourselves, but something we do for God. In this season of the Holy Family, your family may again and again remind itself of what makes a family truly holy.

### . . . AND OTHER RESOURCES

Have you sometimes thought while reading: here is something I would like to share in family devotions! Or when something has happened during your day, have you ever thought of making a note of it, written or mental, for sharing when the family gathers to offer itself to God?

One such possible source is your DENOMINATIONAL LITERATURE. *United Church Herald* often has items which would be of general interest to the family, matters yielding to conversation and interpretation with even very small children.

In the *United Church Curriculum* a number of the 127 books are adaptable for use in family worship. Teachers are alerted to this possibility, and parents should have it in mind as they examine the books which children are given to take home. Of these, Betty E. Stone's *Here Begins the Gospel* (United Church Press, \$1.50) is a good example. It contains, in brief units suitable for family worship, selections from the Gospels in the New English Bible. Introductory statements and prayers connected with each section and the art work contribute to the effectiveness of this presentation of what must for the Christian always be mankind's holiest literature.

BIBLE COMMENTARIES might seem to be formidable fare for reading at this age-level, but some families have found an abiding fascination for the twelve-year-old in lively interpretations of some especially lively sections of Scripture. The editor's son of that age, for example, insists that we read ahead in William Barclay's *The Acts of the Apostles* (Westminster Press, \$2) when he is to be gone on a Boy Scout overnight hike. The notion that the Bible is a dull book derives not so much from its contents as from dull experiences we have had with it. Incomparable for revealing the life of man in the light of God, the Book should and can be approached eagerly, expectantly, joyfully.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

**January-February, 1965**

**WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, *Editor***

Published bimonthly by the Eden Publishing House and The Pilgrim Press, for the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries Division of Evangelism and Research. Second-class postage paid at St. Louis, Mo. *Editorial Office:* Room 915, 287 Park Ave., So., New York, N. Y. 10010, and 14 Beacon St., Boston, Mass. 02108. *Publication Office:* 1724 Chouteau Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63103.

## Religion Readiness

In a church parents' group someone asked why we of the present generation are so much less well informed on Bible, and religion, and church than former Christian generations were. Another suggested that competition for our attention has stepped up; we spread ourselves thinner, and so we give far fewer minutes per day to prayer, thinking about God, and learning about our faith and the work of the church near and far. Said a third person, "Sex used to be the hush hush subject in the family, but now it's religion. Maybe we think our parents talked too much about God and were anxious to chuck religion down our throats, but we have gone to the opposite extreme: religion is no longer a subject of conversation at all, either in or out of the house." A fourth volunteered that some of this hesitance comes from our feeling that psychology warns us against pressing abstractions upon the too young—and religion, conceptionally, is abstraction.

But what is "too young"? Here we are at the beginning of a new year. Are we ready for it? Whether we are or not, it is as though 1965 were saying to us, "Here I come! Ready or not!" So too religion comes at us and at our children.

We speak of "reading readiness": could there be such a thing as "religion readiness"? The question is taken up in detail by Harold Loukes in Pendle Hill Pamphlet 126, "Readiness for Religion" (Wallingford, Pa., 35c). The new curriculum in the United Church of Christ seeks to be sensitive to the developing stages of religious awareness. All this is to the good.

But to put it positively, at his own level and in his own light a child *can* become conscious of the presence of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The home is the first, most natural, and most real setting for the appearance of the holy in the child's awakening attention to life.

The primary aim of all worship is to offer praise to God in celebrating the presence of him who made all things and intends and works toward their good. On the human side, the first requirement in worship is the attitudinal stance of openness to this presence: here many a child is the clear superior of most adults! And the same God who is present and known in the home is present and identifiable in the child's other worlds—church and school, work and play, companionship and suffering, victory and frustration.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
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**March-April, 1965**

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## Family Devotions Can Be Boring

Of course you should stick with it even if the kids are bored stiff. They'll get something. Patience, if not also reverence.

But while you should be committed to sticking with the practice of family prayer, it's no sin to make it interesting. In fact, it's a sin to be unnecessarily dull.



Here are a few cues that may help prevent boredom or attack dullness when it occurs:

**1. VARIETY.** In this as in all other life-activities, human beings need a change of pace. How long since you've made any changes in the format of your family worship?

**2. RICHNESS.** Have you been doing anything more than merely reading the material in FAMILY DEVOTIONS? If not, you must have gone stale by now! How about adding a hymn, sharing an insight in the day's news, looking at a work of art in the light of the gospel?

**3. TIME.** Perhaps there really isn't a best time for worship in your family. Perhaps there are several good possibilities and right now is the time to shift to another time.

**4. LEADERSHIP.** Does the same person always take the major share of responsibility? This cannot always be passed around, but you can consciously seek to elicit from each his best participation.

**5. HUMOR.** No fundamental opposition exists between the devotional and the funny. Rather the opposite! Faith and humor provide divine perspective on the human predicament. When something strikes someone as funny, get mileage out of it.

The kingdom of God in the vision and action of our Lord is at the opposite extreme from dullness. It is love, joy, peace in the Holy Spirit. It is the model and can increasingly be the reality of your family worship.

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The drawing is from Ernest Ligon and Leona Smith, *The Marriage Climate: A Book of Home Dynamics*, Bethany Press, 1963, \$4.75.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

**May-June, 1965**

**WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, *Editor***

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## It Can Be Done!

You can find time for family worship if you value it enough. In extreme cases you may have to resort to extremes. The *United Church Herald* reports from William Genné of "a family that was really perplexed because both morning and evening their various schedules made it difficult for them to be together even at mealtime. How could they share ideas and develop a sense of oneness with God and with each other as they faced the daily round in their scattered situations?

"At various times those who could get together discussed this until they came up with the scheme which they are now trying. At the foot of the stairs on the first floor they arranged a little worship center. On it is an open Bible, a large central candle, and a smaller candle for each member of the family and the current issue of *Family Devotions*, a daily devotional guide for families.

"Each day the Bible is opened to the passage of scripture suggested in the guide. The guide is also opened to the day's reading. As each member comes down to face the day, he reads the guide and the Bible, offers his own prayer and lights his candle from the central candle.

"The light from the central candle is a beacon and reminder to each one who comes hurrying down the stairs. As one after another of the candles is lit, each knows that he is sharing the thought for the day, that each supports the other in his daily tasks and that the central source of light and truth is always available to guide each one in the decisions he or she must make that day."\*

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\* Reprinted from *United Church Herald*, the Division of Publication of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries.

## Center or Chaos?

Part of the price of freedom is the ever-present threat of chaos and anarchy. Another part is the need to struggle for a life-center. In our civilization, God is no longer automatically the center of life—even in the church, to say nothing of the world. If he is the center at all, it is because we will it so, for ourselves and our children, and we discipline ourselves, as persons and as families, to this life-orientation. In this, programmed family worship is the central symbolic action of the family's Christian pilgrimage.

In a quieter time of slower changes, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote a family prayer which you may profit from trying to rephrase for our time and your life:

"Lord, behold our family here assembled. We thank thee for this place in which we dwell; for the love that unites us; for the peace accorded us this day; for the hope with which we expect tomorrow; for the health, the work, the food, and the bright skies that make our lives delightful; for our friends in all parts of the earth, and our friendly helpers.

Give us grace and strength to forbear and to persevere. . . . Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind.

Bless us, if it may be, in all our innocent endeavors. If it may not, give us strength to encounter that which is to come, that we may be brave in peril, constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath, and in all changes of fortune, and down to the gates of death, loyal and loving to one another. Amen."

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

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## "Pray . . . More at Home"

President John F. Kennedy, faced with the meddlesome question of religion in public schools, was asked whether we would not become a godless nation if prayers and Bible reading were taken out of our public schools. His response was that we will be the kind of nation our homes form us into being. If we would be a godly nation, the only way we can possibly become that is to "pray a good deal more at home," he said.

Proposed constitutional amendments to get more religion into the public schools have justly failed, for their commendable intention to increase devotion to God would have been more than half offset by the effect of weakening the constitutional separation of church and state. It appears that the trend toward relegating more and more parental responsibility to the public schools is at this point stopped dead in its tracks.

Anyway, what sort of religion would a child receive in the public school with all the stipulations which our pluralistic culture would impose on religious instruction? Would not the effort to prevent the secularization of our schools end up in an even worse condition, namely the secularization of our religion? And what is to be said about churches that are so weak that they need government aid to foster spiritual values? What, indeed, is to be said about religion in those "Christian" nations where it is required that the Christian religion be taught in the public schools? Obviously, embarrassingly little religion is communicated by this forced feeding. Equally obvious is it that religion is reduced to one of a number of cultural values, and the sense of the essentiality of Christian community is lost. Judaism and Christianity seem able to survive hostility from the state better than patronage!

No, the home cannot escape responsibility to be the fundamental teacher of faith in God and the fundamental community of Christian love. And the fullness of this religious reality in the home exists only where love makes us present to each other, active in mutual service, and talkative about the things God, the world, and the self. Your own practice of family prayer can minister to these ends as you offer daily praise to God.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

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WEDNESDAY

September 1

## On Beginning Afresh

SALLY could not think of anything she could do to make up for her thoughtless words. It happened on the day of the school election. Out at recess, she said to a friend, "I don't really think Jean will make a good school president. She is too timid to carry on a good meeting of the Council." Just then, Sally turned around, and there was Jean standing right beside her. She had heard everything! At that moment the bell rang and Sally saw that Jean was crying. Jean and Sally had been friends since first grade. Now both felt miserable.

Sally was surprised to have Jean phone before school the next morning and ask her to come home with her for lunch. "Do you *really* want me? I'd like to come, but are you sure you want me to come?"

Jean replied, "We're still friends. What you said yesterday is probably true, but I'm still hoping I won the election. Even if I didn't we're still friends. Wait for me at noon."

What Jean did in accepting Sally back as a friend, even though Sally had hurt her, is what God is willing to do for us. We often hurt him and others, and he cannot take away the hurt, but he gives us a fresh chance, an opportunity to start over. He says to us, "I love you in spite of what you have done. Now try again."

Read 1 John 4: 7-17.

PRAYER: O God, we thank you for your forgiving love, ever ready to take us back and let us try again. We give you thanks that we can be forgiven. Amen.

## Reading to Your Children

A June 1963 U. S. Supreme Court decision forced half the nation's school districts to drop their religious exercises—the half that had them—putting the obligation for religious formation squarely where it belongs, namely in the home and the church.

As school reopens, we are reminded of this decision and of the parental responsibility for connecting, in the child's inner and outer life, the holy heritage with the holy here and now. This editorial suggests one means of addressing this responsibility.

Aside from the well established fact that parental reading to children is a highly significant stimulus to the development of their word power and their overall verbal sense, this practice tends to ingrain into children the parental attitudes and responses to life. The read-to child has a distinct head start in the appropriation of his heritage as well as in the language arts.

"We cannot teach our children to pray," says a Christian specialist in childhood. "We can only let them learn from us." Devotional reading—prayerful reading—is a practice parents can learn and children can profit from normally and naturally without the deadly repetition of said prayers or the poverty of "free" prayer—though repetition and spontaneity can be valuable when they do not monopolize family devotions.

Reading great literature, biblical and other, has distinct advantages. It assures that the child will be exposed to the heritage of spiritual greatness. It avoids the anxious pressing of religion on the child, for reading is indirect. If what we read is sometimes conceptually above the child's head, we do well to remind ourselves that there are many levels and dimensions of listening—and without a mature intellectual grasp the child will at least "hear the love in our voice."

What to read? We have received a number of reports of parents who have been reading, in family devotions, whole books of the *New English Bible*, which has a vitality and vividness unsurpassed by other versions (though the *Revised Standard Version* almost equals it in these respects). A family wishing to try this would do well to start with the earliest gospel, Mark.

*Experiment* is an important word here. Cynics have a saying that in religious leadership nothing works twice. Variety is important. This editorial is an appeal to parents who might do well to experiment more with reading to their children.

25

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

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## A Parent's Witness

O Lord, I sit in thy wide space,  
My child upon my knee;  
He looketh up into my face,  
And I look up to Thee.

In this quatrain of George Macdonald's are intermingled the feelings of Christian parents—joy, trust, heavy responsibility, expectancy, power, tenderness, creative love. Here too is the setting of family worship, in which God is praised, his grace is celebrated, and the family is put in eternal perspective.

As my children grow and I shrink in importance to them, above all things else I want them to know and love the One who is greater than I and evermore will be greater than they—my Father, and theirs.

Through the years our pattern of family devotion has changed often, partly with the change in family membership and partly from the dulling of the old pattern. We invite you to share with us your experiments in home worship. Here is one shape we found useful:

At his bedtime a child lights the two candles, one on either side of the Thorvaldsen statue of our Lord. After we sing the hymn, the same or another begins reading *Family Devotions*—leisurely, with conversational interruptions. When a scripture is called for, another member of the family reads it. The final action, kneeling prayer, takes many forms—usually beginning with silence, followed by the reading of the *Family Devotions* prayer, and then spontaneous prayer by one or all, and closing with the Lord's Prayer.

## Family Quotations

We here extend to *Family Devotions*, for at least this issue, a practice which has been very well received these past three Lents in *The Fellowship of Prayer*—the inclusion of pertinent quotations “For Further Meditation.” As in connection with that publication, we invite the reader to send quotations he believes will benefit others.

The family is God's intensive mode of community where the intimate and the ultimate meet. The family is the world in miniature. . . . I feel myself both more judged and more rewarded by God's grace in the family than anywhere else.

NELS FERRÉ

“Will you pray *with* and *for* this child?” Parents' vow at baptism of infant.

The world of reality is a fairyland, and a fairytale world is reality—and both are fascinating to children.

MARGUERITE K. FREY

“Teeners' greatest need is continuous communication with their parents,” said a major article on the youth sub-culture. True also for pre-teeners?

To whom do the children belong? They do not belong to the state, as the Communists believe. They do not belong to the schools, as some school philosophers and officials seem to think. They are not simply dehumanized consumer-producer economic units, as they tend to become in our modern industrial system that has been able to raise the standard of living but not the standard of life. The children belong to God. They belong to the family under God, and the Christian family belongs in the holy fellowship.

ROBERT S. WINEGARNER

“Each for the other and both for God.” On the wedding rings of the Comptons, whose four fabulous children established American history's most spectacular record in educational leadership.

Hear the word of the Lord, . . . families!

Jeremiah 2: 4

All depends not on the child's readiness to believe what he is told, but on his trust in the person who tells him. A child is born trusting implicitly in a friendly universe. His universe at first is small but his trust is infinite.

DAVID L. EDWARDS

The air of religion in the Pond household was so thick and fragrant that it soaked through Selene [a visitor] and changed [converted] her.

SINCLAIR LEWIS

126

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

**January-February, 1966**

VOLUME 7

NUMBER 1

**WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, *Editor***

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## A HOLY LEGACY

Most of mankind has had through the centuries no experience of choosing a religion, and some of mankind today (the communist world) is having the experience of being pushed toward not choosing a religion. The American experiment of religious pluralism, even though reaffirmed in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, is far from clearly a triumph. It is as the late President Kennedy said, an experiment still being tested. Home and church are still free to practice and teach religion. If they fail in their responsibilities the world will suffer a predictable spiritual impoverishment. If they succeed, the holy heritage will be a holy legacy for the children's children.

# Family Devotions

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## Repetition and Values

By a curious irony, home, church, and school have been abandoning repetition as an educational means at the very time its importance has been reestablished by the behavioral sciences and duly exploited by advertising.

A psychiatrist who specializes in working with unwed mothers addresses a group of clergy with the plea that they help people establish rituals—that is, repetitions—which will ingrain the great meanings and values, the truths of what it means to be and to become human. The parents of these girls grew up under a permissive way of life, living off the funded values of their parents. The girls' grandparents wrote in their copybooks twenty times such prudential slogans as "Honesty is the best policy" and "A penny saved is a penny earned." We now would emphasize other values, and might be more sophisticated in the use of repetition—but must we neglect the ritual introversion of value-habits?

It is a false alternative to say that family devotions can be either a bore or a joy if the implication is that repetition is a bore. Repetition, used imaginatively, can be a joy. And conversely, boredom is certainly not avoided by avoiding disciplined worship!

As for memory work, this can be great fun. A family can memorize a great sentence, a psalm of praise, a modern confession such as the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, to everyone's delight.

All that is human rests on ritual, and the disciplining of our attention to God—worship—should be the first, last, and fundamental of ritual living.

## Graces, Again

While we have published many table graces in past issues of *Family Devotions*, it is not convenient for us to include the music of singing graces. An inexpensive form including a number of these is "Songs of Many Nations," the twelfth edition planned and edited by a special committee of the United Church of Christ, obtainable for 30c for a single copy (25c a copy in quantities of 20 or more) from Specialized Ministries, Division of Christian Education, 1505 Race Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102. Singing graces are on pages 10 (second song), 27 (second song), 57 (second song), 59 (second song), 63 (second song), 67 (second song, especially the first stanza), 69 (second song), 72 (as doxology), and 92 (first song).

Incidentally, this is an excellent collection for fun singing, which is just about as rare now in the home as family devotions.

While we are at it, here are a few graces that have never before appeared in *Family Devotions*:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to  
God for these and all his gifts to us. Amen.

Before I eat, I bow my head  
And thank You, God, For daily bread. Amen.

Dear Father, I thank You for this food,  
And for your love that makes me strong. Amen.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

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## Who Writes Family Devotions?

From time to time we are asked, who writes *Family Devotions*? and we are able to answer that mainly it is those who use it regularly in their homes.

In the editor's travels—chiefly to lead clergy and laity retreats, with emphasis on pastor-and-wife retreats—*Family Devotions* frequently comes into conversation. This turns up a number of persons, present and beyond, who are in personal need of good material for use in family worship and are concerned enough about it to try their hand at producing it.

The resulting pool of authors is, consequently a mixed bag, varying widely in writing ability, religious opinions, theological maturity, psycho-social insight, and devotional feel.

While these many and widely different sources make a handling of the manuscripts an editorial nightmare, we are not unhappy with the situation. Yes, it would be easier to use fewer authors and choose only those of known competence in devotional writing for children. But the present arrangement has advantages outweighing its disadvantages:

1. *Variety*. The users of *Family Devotions* are just as much a mixed lot as are its writers. A particular series will meet the need and mood of a particular sector of our users, while the material just before it and just after it will meet the needs and moods of two other sectors.

2. *Democracy*. While *Family Devotions* is used somewhat outside the United Church of Christ, the latter is the source and the chief consumer. This denomination has in it a very wide assortment of family-devotional attitudes and praxes, and a wide variety in authorship tends to keep the periodical representative of this broad band.

3. *Participation*. Parents who lead family devotions need creative imagination no matter what printed material they may use. The kind of hard thinking the writing of a *Family Devotions* page requires is an experience we could covet for all users of the booklet. The effort serves both to stimulate creativity in the leading of worship in one's own family and to produce humility about writing devotions for families with children ages six through twelve.

Have you ever tried writing a devotional for your family? It is not impossible—just almost. And it is more than possible that if you were to try and were to submit your effort to the editor you might find yourself to have done something for more families than one.

29

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

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## God Be in My Ear

Imagine yourself for a moment as standing in another room of your house, watching your whole family at family devotions, noticing especially the pattern of sound and silence.

Is the pattern monotonous? Does one member of the family do all the talking, or most of it? Is there much silence, breaking the sound as surely as sound breaks silence? Is the sound all talk, or is there some singing? Is the talk mainly reading, or mainly spontaneous? Are any musical instruments used? Any recordings?

If family worship is to be a live and creative experience rather than a dull habit, there can be no escape from the spirit of questioning what you are doing and how you are doing it. To be truly useful, such questioning has to be objective — as though you were in another room, or even an outsider to the family circle. How easily one becomes defensive about one's rut!

In your readings you occasionally come across some suggestion which occasions your saying to yourself, "We ought to try that in family devotions sometime!" But follow-through on these fleeting impressions is apt to be inefficient: the good intention is buried under a thousand other impressions and actions, and somehow you never get around to experimenting out of your rut.

Well, here is one more suggestion, one which may help you to remember to try the good ideas that come to mind. Alongside the Bible and your copy of FAMILY DEVOTIONS, put a small notebook in which to list and evaluate "things we've tried" and "things we might try." The latter might be divided into two columns, sights and sounds.

*Your* list of "things we might try" is the one you will draw from, not someone else's list. But just to get you started, how about learning to use some great recordings as part of family devotions? A few minutes of listening to some great passage of music, meditative in spirit, may have unexpectedly rich effects in your worship. Or, if you are on vacation out-of-doors, how about a daily period in which the family is silent, so as to be aware of the world's sounds?

## Family in the Bible: Bible in the Family

### Bibliography

Webb Garrison's *The Biblical Image of the Family* (Tydings, 1908 Grand Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee, 1965, 75c) is a brief account—only 64 pages—of the range of Christian concern in marriage and family in biblical perspective.

Helen Hardwicke Sherrill's *Christian Parenthood: A Lifetime Guide* (Covenant Life Curriculum, Richmond, Virginia, 1964, \$1.75) is on "the relationship of parents with their children seen within the perspective of the Christian faith." This paperback is in the curriculum of five denominations. Using the new understanding of the person, the book strikes a healthy balance between the demands of the holy heritage and the need of the child as he strives to "become the person he needs to become." Mrs. Sherrill is the widow of the late Dr. Louis Joseph Sherrill, a master in the field of the Christian understanding of human development.

Roy W. Fairchild's *Christians and Families: An Inquiry into the Nature and Mission of the Christian Family* (Covenant Life Curriculum, Richmond, Virginia, 1964, \$2.25) is a 264-page text covering the world-and-church context of the family, not just the family itself. Its three parts are "The Christian Looks at the World's Family Values," "The Family: The School of Christian Relationships," and "Families in the Church and in the World." The author speaks from vast knowledge of actual existing Christian families—a knowledge expressed earlier in a big book, *Families in the Church: A Protestant Survey* (Association Press, 1961, \$5.75).

Richard F. Perkins' *The Image of a Christian Family* (Covenant Life Curriculum, Richmond, Virginia, 1964, \$1.25), 108 pages, focuses narrowly on "the special nature of a Christian family . . . to challenge families to take a new look at what it means today to be a Christian family in the home, and in the church, and in society." While it is designed for seven-minute sessions which might be in a family vacation church school, an individual family can profit from its study. It is set up for family study, not study by parents alone. Provision is made for children over four. The aim is to experience, not to study, the meaning of the Christian family. The material could be used effectively also for a church family camp, or a retreat for several families.

The "convictions" of the curriculum in which these last three books are texts bear repeating: "That basic nurture in faith for people of all ages takes place through home and family relationships; that the primary witness of the church to the community takes place as its families live and work in the community; and that families are under such serious pressures from the world around them that they are unable to bear effectively the burden of nurture or witness without continual ministry to them."

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
with School-Age Children**

**November-December, 1966**

VOLUME 7

NUMBER 6

**WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, *Editor***

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## Just An Empty Habit?

THE PHRASE, "Just an empty habit," has in it two disparaging words. "Just" means "nothing more than." But a habit is always something more than only, merely, a habit: it is always also a discipline and an opening. As for the other disparaging term, "empty," habits always have some content which shapes the imaginative life and the future of those who persist in practicing the habit.

Let's illustrate this with Christmas. Christmas is a habit. It is a discipline of remembering the incarnation, that God has come among us in Jesus Christ, the Christchild and our brother and Lord. It is an opening on the discipleship the incarnation offers all mankind, specifically those who practice Christmas—a discipleship of caring, of identification with need, of compassionate fellow-suffering, and of indiscourageable hope.

Christmas is a habit whose content is ambiguous. Do some include, in their Christmas rituals, overspending of present and future money? Do not also some spend *themselves*, in the sense that "the Christmas Spirit" moves them to unusual action for others? But let's come at this from another angle, the angle of the habit of *regular ritual*. People say of every form of worship and devotion and every observance of the church year, "What a burden! Why not give it up?"

The truth is, man is free to give up ritual only at the expense of his humanity. Such rituals as family devotions, Christmas, and whatever other holy habits we may have as persons and groups offer possibilities of deepening and enriching for the praise of God and the service of men.

In this connection, think of the habit of listening to radio. Of it, Gilbert Seldes more than thirty years ago (May 1937 *Atlantic Monthly*) said, "The high-minded do not like to face the actual situation in radio, which is that all of its desirable effects are based on the habit of listening which was created largely by programmes trivial and banal themselves." How true now also of TV!

Christmas, family devotions, and all our worship and ritual, will sometimes seem "trivial and banal." But without these holy habits, life would lose its opening *through* the trivial and banal *into* the depth of life and the intention of God for mankind.

## Hymns Beyond the Hymn Book

Last night in family worship we sang a space hymn! Our early teener, who is a space fanatic, was thrilled with the idea that a hymn could be *that* new and on the subject he's hot on!

But that should be no shock. Hymns ought to be on what's important now for people, on the timeless and timely themes that deeply concern us and our relations with the Creator and with all his creatures, including the works of our hands.

As parents look over such a hymnal as *Sing to the Lord* (Christian Education Press; \$2.15 from United Church Bookstores, 14 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass. 02108, or 1505 Race Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102), they do well to ask themselves what are the points of contact between a particular hymn and their family life, specifically the agonies and ecstasies of their children.

Yes, we are reminding you to use songs in your family devotions. But beyond that, we are suggesting that you use songs and hymns *not* in your hymnal. Are there songs your children like to sing? Make them a part of the family's offering to God, whether or not they seem to you to be "religious."

Then too, you might write to the Hymn Society of America (475 Riverside Drive, New York, New York 10027) for a list of hymns on subjects appropriate for family worship—say, space. Here is one from that source, to be sung to the hymn tune MELITA (or any other 8.8.8.8.8.8. hymn tune):

Great Ruler over time and space,  
Who holdest galaxies in place;  
Thou Maker of the master plan,  
Great Source of every hope of man,  
Creator of vast worlds unknown;  
Be Thou our guide, and Thou alone.

O Source of power for wheels and wings,  
O Key to undiscovered things;  
Thy children search the skies to trace  
The unsolved mysteries of space.  
Kind Father of each airborne man,  
Keep us harmonious with Thy plan.

In all the turbulence today,  
Within our hearts, or far away,  
Where'er we be, land, sea or sky.  
Help us to know that Thou art nigh.  
In future years, on paths untrod,  
We would walk close to Thee, our God. Amen.

—Mildred C. Luckhardt

Then there are hymns specifically about the Christian family, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick's "O God, who to a loyal home" (Published with music by the Hymn Society) and *Thirteen New Marriage and Family Life Hymns* (from the same source).

Musical instruments? The more the better! But if none, you can choose from the metrical index of the hymnal a tune you know so that you will not need an instrument.

The meanings? Reading the hymn before singing it is a practice that trains the whole family to sing "with the understanding." Of course most hymns are beyond the understanding of very small children. But the child experts are now telling us that we have underestimated children's ability to learn.

Let then the family lift in praise to God the great hymns and the new hymns some of which may become great. Let not the *singing* of praise be neglected.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
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**January-February, 1967**

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## The Education Pushmi-Pullyu

We had no more been told that education should never cease, that graduation should be given up so as to remove the illusion that our education is ever finished, that the new knowledge and the new leisure are pressing us toward education all the way to the grave—this had no more than hit us, I say, than pressure from the other end of life appeared in the form of President Johnson's announcement that public education ought to begin at age four!

Are we approaching cradle-to-grave education?

Life, of course, is more than education. It is, as we Christians see it, primarily praise. But worship, our continuous, lifelong self-offering to God, is to be "with all your mind." We are to live and worship intelligently, getting at each stage of life the best education we can manage, and providing the best for our children and for all our neighbors around the world.

Why the pressure to push public school down two more years? Because of the confluence of two facts: child research is pushing lower the age by which the child's basic life-responses are formed; and the decreasing ability of the nuclear family to provide a desirable environment for the child's growth. Add to this the increasing complexity of the society's demands, and the increasing awareness of the growing human being's aspirations and agonies.

Will all this lessen the need for family worship? Rather the opposite! Like it or not, the state is taking over from the family more and more of its traditional functions, including education. One function the state will not take over is religion. That remains in home and church—if it remains at all. May it remain and abide in your home this new year.

W.E.E.

## THE FAMILY: Permanence or Change?

More than 600 American and Canadian family life experts gathered early last summer for the Second North American Conference on Church and Family. They were sure that there was less they could be sure of than there used to be. In this time of radical change, much that our parents thought nailed down has come unstuck.

As for what is *still* nailed down, affirmative love as the creative and gracious center of personal reality must be set down as number one. And the Christian family, given the Christian devotional life and theological-ethical understanding, should center in this affirmative love.

But responsibility for what this concretely *means* has to be left with each family. The openness of the consultation found a parallel in the conviction that nobody, but nobody—no priest and no church and no social psychologist—can hand a family its norms ready-made. Every family is its own laboratory and church and mission base.

The conference leaders, in preparation for this event, put out a highly significant symposium entitled *Sex, Family, and Society in Theological Focus* (edited by John Charles Wynn, available from Association Press for \$4.95). This volume covers every aspect of what some are calling “the sexual revolution.” It would make an excellent discussion volume for a parents group.

As a participant in the consultation, the editor of FAMILY DEVOTIONS found himself fretting over the failure of the church to keep up with the changes in our cultural life. He is reminded of Bishop James Pike’s recent statement that “the church is being dragged kicking and screaming into the twentieth century.”

Must children drag their parents kicking and screaming into the new world? Or will parents "get with it" and update their thinking and feeling as a ministry to themselves, their children, and their neighbors? Will Christian parents achieve a stance over against the contemporary pressures for achievement, material possessions, and status so as to help God free their children from these entrapments?

Above all, will Christian parents be able to sustain the dialog when their children enter the teen subculture?

The Lord of history invites us to enter the new year and the new age with more faith than fear, with openness rather than anxiety, with expectation that "the new morality" will be better than the old. But *will* it be better? That will be determined by the extent to which we *live* our hopes and our prayers, with our children and God's children.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
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**WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, *Editor***

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## The Fish-bowl Family

Currently, it is popular among social scientists, theologians, and others, to distinguish between "the private sector" and "the public sector" of our common life. The family is, of course, in the private sector, "the world of residence," as over against the worlds of work, leisure, and the public sector.

But should we say "of course" the family is imprisoned in, limited to the private? The lines of relationship between home and the rest of the world are multiple for each member of the family. Furthermore, not only do the family's members go out into their worlds, out into the public sphere: the larger world comes into the home, borne both in the inner lives of the members as they return home and on the invisible waves of radio and TV, not to mention the deluge in print the mailman brings!

The thin, osmotic boundary between family and world is powerfully put at the end of Psalm 121: "The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in." All worlds are God's, and the "private" is not to be "privatized" from public responsibilities.

But also, from another angle, this boundary is a bridge and not a wall. To a greater extent than you may be aware of, the world knows "what goes with" your family. You are living in a fishbowl. And the corporate witness of your family for Jesus Christ is a real though imperfect witness.

A Christian TV station in Seoul, Korea, is making this Christian witness explicit. One of the most popular TV programs in that country, the dramatic series shows a family, a Christian family, living precariously (as all families do!) from crisis to crisis. How do Christians act under pressure?

How does your family act under the daily pressures within and from without? and what sort of witness is this to the world?

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
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## Pass the Cross Along!

With summer coming upon us, what will happen to our family's religion, its regular, scheduled, self-presentation to God? Will we become summer dropouts from Sunday worship? from daily family devotions? (A family's religiousness may linger after it drops ritual repetition—that is, after it gives up *religion* in the proper meaning of the term; but it will not linger long!). As the culture continues its slide down the permissive slope, churches are becoming more desperate to discover ways to hold families' attention on ritual worship in family and church.

Our church in Rush, New York, hit upon a powerful way to grab family **after** family, each for a week's focus on family religion. **From** Sunday to Sunday a cross passes from family to family on pledge that during its week with the cross a family will have family devotions each day. An artifice? Of course! But we need artificial reminders of our fundamental commitment. Regular worship is itself such an artificial reminder.

A controversy now rages over the functionality of ritual in life and especially in the family. Philosopher Whitehead observes that man is moving from ritual to interpretation. But it is our conviction that, to paraphrase the milk ad, you never outgrow your need for ritual.

# Family Devotions

**A Daily Guide for Families  
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## TV: Tool or Trouble?

As slowly but surely TV matures, programming is beginning to include material that serves truly human ends: dilating the psyche through the arts so that the imagination can be a better servant of man, stimulating the mind to its broadening awareness of the pains and joys and possibilities of the world, giving the spirit a fresh grasp of its responsibilities and powers.

The TV audience must mature, too. Mature not only in responding and replying to TV programming, but also in choosing what is to be viewed. Channels for informing the public ahead of time as to what will be worth viewing are beginning to appear. For no cost you may get the bulletins of Television Information Office (745 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10022), and your church's magazine (UNITED CHURCH HERALD or other) doubtless provides this coverage.

How can this choosing of and responding to TV programs gear in with the practice of family worship? In several respects:

1. You can choose a program with the intention of using it as a springboard for devotion. But what if the family watches, and nothing happens? The choice was poor, the family atmosphere was unfavorable—perhaps a combination of untowardnesses. Turn then to FAMILY DEVOTIONS for that day: don't try to squeeze a TV show for "spiritual values" that haven't emerged naturally from the family's experiencing of the program.

2. Or perhaps without planning, as the family is watching a program you realize that God is using this program to move his purposes in your family's heart. When the program is over, test in low key whether the family wants to discuss what the program means or where it leads. Or you may not need to take the initiative in this: some other member of the family may come forth immediately with a stout opinion, and off you all are on a discussion that's alive and promising.

Being TV-sensitive can aid family worship:

1. By providing variety. The editor of FAMILY DEVOTIONS, you might think, would be the last person to suggest that using FAMILY DEVOTIONS every day can be deadly! But it can be.

2. By breaking down the sacred-secular distinction. A so-called "Christian film" is not necessarily more "Christian" than a straight-out secular production: the tests are more subtle than the simple question, Was this done by the church? The holy is in the common as well as in the sacred (the "churchly"), and very often in what is of uncommonly high quality—higher than the church can pay for.

3. By assuring naturalness. TV now carries a feeling of everydayness, and to experience it as a channel of God's caring can take some of the artifice out of family religion.

TV is *trouble* for the family because of its very everydayness and omnipresence. But it can be a mighty *tool* for the higher human purposes—including worship.

# Family Devotions

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## Time for the Family?

In our American society, the middle-class family is under perpetual, tearing pressures that produce the feeling of always hurrying to get ready to do something—and never getting anything done! Such a family is always poor, always short on time. “There never seems to be enough time” just to be together and see, really see, each other, and together feel the rich texture of the living moment under God within creation. A well-known dramatic presentation of this dilemma is Emily’s after-death, invisible return, in Thornton Wilder’s *OUR TOWN*. *Sub specie aeternitatis* (from the vantage of eternity) she watches her hectic family in the kitchen one morning and says, “Doesn’t anybody ever really live life while he’s living it?”

Ironically, this frenetic flurry of activity within the middle-class American family stands out in multiple contrast—with the culture’s implicit assumptions as to what the striving’s about, with the “hippie” family, and with our ideal image of the leisure-revolution family. (Not to mention with the cultures of poverty and wealth.) Let’s look at these three:

1. Our culture assumes that our busyness will fulfill all our real needs. But its very pace abolishes opportunities for the unhurried peace and pattering we need to grow up as persons and to grow together as a family. Since the culture is against it, the family must provide talking time and dreaming time and musing time if such time is to exist at all for us. Yet for this the family must be well ordered—which, again, the culture militates against.

(Continued on page 63)

*(Continued from page 2)*

2. Hippie families threaten many middle-class values, but embarrassingly they underline one such value: the primacy of the family. The hippies slow-paced love-and-flowers philosophy of life stresses the relational rather than the acquisitive-aggressive desires. Timothy Leary's communal experiment will not permit the separation of parent and child even for education. FAMILY DEVOTIONS is not suggesting that we all "turn on, tune in, and drop out!" But we are averse to your meditating on a judgment of God coming through the odd in the light of your Christian profession.

3. This brings us, finally, to the third element: our ideal image of the family under conditions real and possible in this increasingly technological society. The leisure family of the future must be more than a human unit consuming products (the advertising image). The widening split between work and income is progressively depriving us of the illusion that the meaning of life can be found either in labor or in money, and thus God is pressing on us—at deeper levels—the question of life's meaning: What is life for? Our family's life? My life?

The practice of family devotions—Bible reading, hymn-singing, conversation, prayer—speaks directly to all three of the above concerns. More consciously than was ever before true in human history, the shaping of your family life is in your hands. As consciously as did your forefathers, put your family daily in the hands of God.

136

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## Celebrating "In Transition"

"You seem to be in transition around here," said I many years ago to a registrant of the University of Chicago as I was matriculating in that institution. Said he, "We are always in transition. If we weren't we wouldn't be the University of Chicago."

In the subsequent decades, *the world* has come into this state of permanent change. It was always true that "Everything's always changing," but now we're more aware of it because the pace of change is faster. Now its "exponential," "accelerating," "logarithmic" change! No wonder the rash of books on "the changing family." All the more need for having, at the center of your family's life, the celebrating of God's unchanging power and love.

In this my last editorial for FAMILY DEVOTIONS, I want to point to this celebrating. But first a word on the double *transition*:

1. Eden Publishing House, which has always been the printer of FAMILY DEVOTIONS, with the next issue becomes its publisher.

2. ROSALIND MARSHALL has been for years the editorial assistant on this publication and is thoroughly familiar with its highways and byways. When the press of other duties forced me to give up editing, Mrs. Marshall was the obvious choice of a successor. In addition to her intimate experience with this periodical, she is well fitted for the task by her previous editorial responsibilities and by her deep concern for family religion.

To continue the celebrative note, *celebration* is a term that's now "in" in worship. It focuses on event-in-the-world—for example, "a family celebration." In our common life—say, a birthday party—something special happens and our hearts are moved to "celebrate," to rejoice, to give thanks for life and particularly for this special occasion. We worship God, whose presence with us has brought into being "something worth celebration." We celebrate life in God's presence in Jesus Christ—in nature, history, and the present moment. Such celebration mixes gaiety and solemnity, grateful joy and sober dedication.

As your family daily celebrates God's presence and purpose, may you know increasingly what it means to be Christ-directed, hope-filled, future-orientated, and—in your concerns—world-inclusive. May yours be a pioneer and pilgrim home, stretching forward to the Coming One, toward what the Lord intends for his creation.

Finally, I wish to thank all those who have worked with me to make FAMILY DEVOTIONS a useful encourager of family worship. Especially among these I must mention Mrs. Dorothy Payne and Mrs. Rosalind Marshall.