

Men-2-Pray: Restoring the family altar

Statistics show that 81% of married couples who read the Bible together daily, stay together. These families also live together in greater peace. This percentage changes drastically where Christian couples do not do it.

In the business world and society today, it is quite challenging to get a family together for prayer and to discuss and meditate on the application of the Word. The most difficult place to be a Christian (with a few exceptions), is within your own family. Yet, our home is a place where we should feel safe and be ourselves. If it can work here, it can work more easily 'out there'. The following are a few guidelines to help you restore your family altar.

- Try to find at least two opportunities per week to gather for a time of prayer. It will not happen by itself. It is a choice. Some families find it easy to meet almost on a daily basis. Others prefer gathering in the morning and yet others in the evening. In the same way you plan your holiday in such a way that everything works out for everyone, you have to make decisions for your family altar to work!
- Make sure each family member bring his/her Bible when you come together.
- Usually the head of the home will read a part from Scripture and then present an opportunity for the others to share their thoughts. Family members can take turns to read from Scripture and facilitate a time of discussion. It helps if the responsible person for that day does a little preparation beforehand.
- When discussing a Scripture verse, try to ask practical questions on how it is applicable to real life. Often something will become clear that has been an issue that you as family or members in your family have struggled with in their own lives. This can become a point of prayer when concluding your time together.
- It is not wrong to have a special reading from another Christian book or a Daily Devotional, but reading from Scripture must remain central. We can easily shirk our responsibility of reading the Bible ourselves by relying on what others think and write about it.
- Give opportunity for prayer. First discuss some issues you want to pray about. It can be personal, about school, concerning a parent's work, an issue taken from the newspaper or praying for the country. Do not forget to pray for other countries, for the unreached and their needs. Each one can choose something to pray for to make sure all have a chance to pray.
- Pray for your local congregation, the spiritual leaders, for revival in the church, government, missionaries and the increase of God's Kingdom.
- It is a good idea to keep a prayer journal where you as a family can write down your prayer requests during the course of one year. Write down the request and the date on which you prayed. You will be surprised when going through these notes at the end of the year, how many of your prayers God has answered.
- Sometimes relationships in the family can be strained because of something that may have happened. First sit down and try to talk about those things causing stress and distance. Pray about it. Try not to accuse or preach to each other in prayer. No family can function properly without the words "I am sorry" and "Forgive me". Forgiveness is part of the essence of the gospel. Even when you differ and do not find a solution, pray and ask the Lord to show you a solution through the Holy Spirit.
- In many families there are one or two members who may not be fully committed to the Lord. Some may even be unsaved or very rebellious. Do not force them to pray or even read from the Bible, but do ask them to join the meeting. Do not judge them. They must never feel they are inferior or unworthy sinners that will end up in hell. Show them that you love them. If they ask questions just to be difficult, listen to them and if you do not have a good answer, admit it. Do not try to have all the answers. Do not become involved in an argument. Say that you will think and pray about it. Show compassion for them in the same way God shows mercy to you, and be patient.
- Remember, the family altar and times of prayer never replace your personal quiet time.