



Leading the Family Altar

In a way that Leads to a Harvest of Souls

Many of our churches have a covenant that pledge to have family devotion. The sad truth many have broken that vow. Deuteronomy 6 charged the people of God to be sure to instruct their children in the ways of God from the rising of the sun until long after it set. That same charge is applicable to us today. I would even venture to say that the need is even greater with each passing day. The responsibility for this is left in the hands of parents and the church. Understanding that prayer is as much caught as it is taught. It is even more expedient for parents to model powerful and effective prayer before and with their children. Parents need to take their children praying. The commitment to a family altar is as much a commitment for a family of eight as it is for a family of one. Singles, widows, widowers, couples with no children, single parent homes, and homes with both parents need to have family devotions. A family that prays together will never have to be concerned about what they should pray about, there are always tremendous needs facing the family today. Praying for lost family members and friends is one thing that no one has to ask, "Should we do this?" Can you imagine what it would look like if every church encouraged every family to set one month aside to pray just for the lost?

For one month in 2009 Tennessee Baptist families are being asked to have family altars once a week to pray for lost family and friends. Families that have not been gathering for prayer like this are given an opportunity to renew or even start family altars by simply gathering around the need of the lost people that they love and care about. This prayer guide can be used by those just starting a family altar, those renewing the practice, or by those who have the long time habit of doing so. Depending where you are in this spiritual discipline will determine where you begin in this guide.

Beginnings:

1. Find a day and time to gather and make a family commitment to it. We are just asking that you set one day a week aside to pray as a family. The day and time will vary from family to family. Some will find it best after a meal in the evening and some will find it best before anything else is done on a morning.
2. Pick a place. The room that you gather for this should be a place free of distractions and able to hold the whole family.
3. Decide who will lead. This is not a time for preaching, correcting, or rebuking. It is a time for praying and loving on one another. Whoever leads should not try and do the praying for the family, but should call everyone to prayer. This person should remind the family that it is time to pray. The leader can take the lead by either assigning a verse to be read or can simply read a verse or two. The number of verses should be kept to an amount that doesn't consume the major amount of the time set aside for the family altar. Two or 3 verses are generally sufficient for this prayer time. The leader must call the family to prayer. The family will have a decision to make. They can talk about their prayer needs or they can pray their needs.
4. Decide the purpose of the family altar. There are many things that can be prayed about: sickness, crisis issues, personal needs, etc. Tennessee Baptist families are being asked to pray in

a way that leads to a harvest of lost souls coming into the kingdom during August. So during this time, we would ask that you focus on praying for the lost. Some helps for praying for the lost will be listed at the end of this guide.

5. Allow for freedom of God's Spirit and the wills of those from your family. Some may decide to pray out loud and some may not. Everyone must be encouraged to pray, but in a way that reflects who they are and not who the leader is. There may be times when the Spirit of God is strong and may be calling you to stay with Him longer than normal. If this happens, it would be wrong to leave His presence just because the time allowed was not adequate.
6. Allow for variety and movement. Not every person was created the same. I, personally, am very hyperactive and find that I pray best when my body is physically in motion. I can pray in a kneeling position for a while, but when I am walking I find I concentrate much better. My son is the same way, but my daughter and my wife pray better in one physical position either kneeling or sitting. I also have found that changing the form of the prayer time actually produce more focused prayer. A family that is praying for the lost in their community may want to take a drive through their community or a walk and to stop along the way and pray over the area. Many have found it very helpful to take their prayers to their neighbors or to those that they are praying for. For example, if my family has spent two weeks praying for some lost friends or neighbors, we may decide on the third week to go to a few of their homes to let them know that we have been praying for them, and to ask them if they have any specific prayer concerns, and pray with them. If a family has decided to have their prayer time at the evening meal, then they may choose to invite one of those that they are praying over for a meal. During the meal, the family could share that each week at this time they have been praying for them and would like to pray a prayer of blessing over them and not just the food. In this kind of setting, the family altar takes on a different form for that night.
7. Share personal needs. Regardless of what the agreed focus may be on for that evening, everyone enters a time of prayer with personal needs. To ignore these would hinder what God may have planned for your family. Share personal needs, pray for one another, and pray for the agreed upon needs. In other words, love on one another before you seek to love on others.
8. Pray. This may be understood, but I attend prayer meetings almost every week that do everything but pray. Don't just talk about needs, don't just list them, and don't just talk about prayer: PRAY!

Helps:

The Booklet: *5 on the Way* can be a helpful guide for focusing your prayers on a few that needs Him.

Every Home for Christ & Lighthouses of Prayer offers some very helpful resources.

Check out www.hopeministries.org

PRAY Magazine has several prayer bookmarks available on praying for the lost, youth, family and many more. These can be obtained by contacting *PRAY Magazine* by www.praymag.com

The Tennessee Baptist Convention has a couple of prayermarks: "*Praying for the Lost*" and "*Praying the Lord's Prayer for the Family*" that are free for the asking. Contact your local association or call 1-800-

558-2090 ext. 7909.

in Tennessee.