



# **Building a Household of Faith:** A 40-Day Journal for Family Renewal

*By Patricia J. David*

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This journal is not intended to replace your regular devotional times or to be a substitute for the voice of God. It is merely a guide to enhance your times of meditation and to prompt your heart as you seek to strengthen and revitalize your family. Daily activities range from meditating on passages of Scripture to reading and reflecting on short devotionals or answering questions designed to guide you in appropriating what God has been revealing to you. You will benefit from these activities only if your reading and answering are coupled with prayer and thoughtful meditation — plus a willingness to put into action the truths you learn. The words written here are not magic; they cannot change you or your family. But as you determine in your heart to obey the Spirit's prompting and to offer God free rein of your every attitude and action, your life and the life of your family will undoubtedly be changed. An open and humble heart yielded to His will is a prerequisite to positive growth in the family.

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## I. Introduction

### DAY 1

Forty days of prayer and fasting. Throughout the Bible godly men and women fasted and prayed as an expression of great concern and as a means of seeking God's guidance, strength, courage and wisdom. In the time of Esther, the Jews fasted for three full days to beseech God's mercy and protection from the plot of Haman to annihilate God's people (see Esther 4:115-16). When the people of pagan Ninevah learned that God would destroy their city in 40 days, they repented and fasted in hopes that God would show compassion (Jonah chapter 3). It was in the context of worship, prayer and fasting that the early church was directed by the Holy Spirit in the appointment of elders in the church (see Acts 13:2-3, 14:23). In answer to such expressions of earnestness, God was always faithful to empower His people and to lead them according to His will.

But why fast for the family? The family today needs the protection and mercy of God if it is to survive the struggles it faces. Parents need wisdom and guidance, along with a repentant and submissive spirit, as they seek to lead and nurture their families. Fasting humbles your heart before God and makes your will more yielding to God's desires and will for your life. It is through times of denying ourselves temporal pleasures that God can turn our hearts and minds toward eternal treasures.

Why 40 days? You may recall having read about many 40-day periods in the Bible: It rained for 40 days and nights during the time of Noah; Moses was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and nights (fasting the entire time) when he received the Ten Commandments; the spies sent out by Moses took 40 days to explore the land of Canaan; Elijah's journey to Horeb took 40 days; Jesus Himself fasted for 40 days and 40 nights at the outset of His earthly ministry, and He appeared to the apostles for 40 days after His resurrection. Forty days is associated with God's mighty acts of redemption and the critical periods accompanying them; it is a period of "fullness" that contributes to God's plan of redemption for mankind. Forty days of prayer and

fasting expresses our faith that God will bring redemption to our families; that He will perform a mighty act of unprecedented restoration and revival. During the next 40 days, as you commit yourself to prayer, fasting, and seeking God's wisdom, you can be assured that He will speak to your heart and mind, equipping you to follow where He leads -- and He will bring renewal to your family.

- **Take a few minutes right now to search your heart.** Are there any areas in which you have difficulty obeying God? Purpose in your heart that you will listen for God's voice and obey His every prompting.
- **Set aside a regular time each day for prayer and meditation.** Make your "appointment with God" a top priority in the coming weeks. Write down your "appointment" time here:
- **Determine when you will fast.** Whether it's one meal a day, all meals for one day a week, or just abstaining from certain kinds of foods, your special times of prayer will be enhanced by your willingness to deny "self." How often do you plan to fast? Write down your decision here:

Now you are ready to begin. These next 40 days could be the most important days of your entire life as your family is renewed and transformed into a household of faith.

## I. Introduction (con't)

**DAY 2**

The home. At the same time, it can be a castle, a fortress, a place of belonging, a refuge from the storms of life. "Home" conjures up pictures of families playing, laughing and singing together, sharing Sunday dinners, warming themselves by a cozy fire on a cold Winter's night. An ideal portrait is painted in our minds and we desperately strive to conform our families to it. But all too often, because of uncontrollable circumstances or carelessness, our families fall short of the ideal. Our homes are plagued with discord, apathy, and a "busy-ness" that threatens the unity of the family as each member goes his own way. We find that despite our most sincere efforts, our families are being gradually undermined and torn apart.

Maybe we're just off target. Could it be that we've been brainwashed by the media to believe an expensive home or car, stylish clothing, gadgets and luxurious vacations will bring joy and contentment to our homes? Many families are searching after material possessions or achievements to bring fulfillment and harmony. There is only one problem: it doesn't work. Striving to build the home on any other foundation than Christ Himself is futile. It is a vain attempt to achieve something beyond our reach.

**Psalm 127:1a** – "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain."

There are many proposed solutions for the ailing family. Numerous books today focus on better communication or cultivating a sense of freedom and understanding. But I am firmly convinced that if we focus on our relationship with Jesus Christ and seek to build a Christ-centered home, all the other elements will fall into place. We must stop trying to build our own houses by the standards of the world and allow God Himself to do the building. Christ must be exalted in our

personal lives and in our homes, since it is only through Him that we can ever hope to find true contentment and fulfillment.

This daily journal is designed to help you develop a household of FAITH, a home that relies on Christ Himself as the cornerstone. The success or failure of your family life is primarily dependent on the depth of your relationship with Christ and your commitment to following His will. Spiritual renewal in the home must begin with Christ.

- Is your family on target? What kinds of things are you striving for to bring fulfillment and happiness to your home? Is it working?
  
- What do you think? Is Christ really *that* important to the success of the family?
  
- In your own home, how much time do you spend working on the spiritual and religious aspects of family life?



## I. Introduction (con't)

**DAY 3**

What do you consider to be your family's greatest strengths?

What are some weaknesses?

If you could describe your family atmosphere in a single word, what would it be?

<input type="checkbox"/> hectic/chaotic	<input type="checkbox"/> active	<input type="checkbox"/> disagreeable
<input type="checkbox"/> understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Christ-centered	<input type="checkbox"/> happy
<input type="checkbox"/> peaceful	<input type="checkbox"/> tense/stressed	<input type="checkbox"/> other _____

Are you satisfied with your family life?

Do you think God is satisfied with your home life?

If you could change any one element in your home, what would it be? How would you go about changing it? Why haven't you changed it already?

## II. The Defense of the Family

### DAY 4

Reserve some time today to meditate on the following Scripture verses. Mull them over in your mind and pray for understanding.

**Ephesians 6:12** – "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

**1 Peter 5:8** – "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

**Nehemiah 4:14** – "...Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

- What is this "struggle" Paul says we encounter? How is it evidenced in our homes?
  
- When conflict arises in your home, do you tend to view it from a physical perspective or a spiritual one? Why?



## II. The Defense of the Family (con't)

### DAY 5

Building a household of faith begins by realizing that we are in a spiritual struggle for our families; we're in a war. We must be convinced that our families are worth defending and contending for if we hope to win the battle.

This conflict is really nothing new; it is as old as time itself. Adam and Eve, the first family, entered the battle when they disobeyed God by embracing the lie of the serpent. This was God's curse on the serpent:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers..." (**Genesis 3:15a**)

The ultimate reference in this verse is to the conflict between Satan and the Messiah to come, Jesus Christ. But every man born after Adam has been caught up in the conflict, the "enmity" initiated here. Darkness wars against light, the people of God are assailed by the people of the world, righteousness is accosted by wickedness. It is all a part of that initial battle. And the family is on the front lines.

Immediately following God's judgment in Genesis chapter three, we read of the conflict between Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's children, in chapter four. From the outset Satan attempted to destroy the family by sowing seeds of jealousy and hatred, which culminated in murder. Throughout the Old Testament this struggle is highlighted as we read of Satan's assault on families: Job's family was killed and his wife was embittered by Job's physical distress; Jacob and Esau were divided over their father's blessing; jealousy enticed ten of Jacob's sons to throw their youngest brother (Joseph) into a pit, sell him as a slave, and deceive their father into thinking he was dead; Pharaoh decreed that all male Hebrew babies would be thrown into the Nile, threatening a young family who knew they had "no ordinary child" (Moses). And the

list continues to include the families of Samson, Gideon, David, Solomon, and a host of others. Satan is well aware that the family is a stronghold that must be destroyed if he is to conquer the "seed of the woman." He seeks to ruin our witness in the world and to defeat us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The family is his primary target.

Make no mistake, the war is a spiritual one, not merely psychological or physical. "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." The onslaught of drugs, teen pregnancy, suicide, rebellion, pornography, and licentiousness are all a part of the enemy's strategy. We often think our family is immune to such catastrophe, and that is our prayer, but to assume that we can take our responsibility to prepare for the battle lightly and still win is to court disaster. We are in a war, and Satan desperately wants to defeat our families. We must begin to fight for the family and to make the defense of the family our highest priority.

We know the ultimate outcome of the battle: Christ is the decisive victor. And He has promised victory to us: "...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37); "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20). There is hope for the family in the war, in the spiritual struggle confronting us. But victory will only come through the power of Jesus Christ, as we determine to make our homes a "household of faith."

## II. The Defense of the Family (con't)

**DAY 6**

"The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you -- O Absalom, my son, my son!'" **(2 Samuel 18:33)**

Grief. The agonizing realization that all hope is gone, that your worst nightmare has become a reality, that the situation is both devastating and irreversible. The scene is the mighty King David weeping in the bitterness of his soul as he learns his son has been killed in battle. Satan had long been waging war on David's family. You can read about it in 2 Samuel 13-15. David's oldest son, Amnon, fell in love with David's daughter, Tamar, and eventually raped her. Two years later Absalom's hatred for his half-brother's detestable deed culminated in his murder. David mourned for his lost son every day. Absalom fled and was gone for three years, and though David's heart longed for his son, even after his return to Jerusalem, two years passed without any communication between the two. In time Absalom conspired to usurp the throne from his own father, forcing David to flee. And now, as if all that was not too much for one man to bear, David must deal with the dreadful realization that the relationship will never be reconciled, that the one he loved so dearly has been torn from him permanently. And so David mourns for his family.

Isn't this every parent's secret fear -- that their children will grow up to rebel and possibly be "killed" in the battle Satan is waging? Or maybe your children have already fallen victim to the enemy, and you've felt the anguish and grief over a divided family with strained relationships, or a loved one who has ruined his life and forfeited his soul. Or maybe deep down in the recesses of your heart you fear your family may be headed for tragedy, that Satan is crouching at your door readying to

devour your spouse or children at any moment. And you fear the worst.

David's family is an extreme example of what can happen in a family... or is it? Even though David was a "man after God's own heart," that was no guarantee his children would be victorious in the battle of life. And yet much of David's heartache could have been prevented or circumvented. When David was confronted by Nathan the prophet in 2 Samuel 12 concerning his sin (adultery and conspiracy to commit murder), David unknowingly prescribed his own penalty -- he would have to pay four-fold for his sin (12:5-6). And so he did: Bathsheeba's baby died, two of his sons were killed, and his daughter was left desolate. All this because of his own sin coupled with poor judgment in dealing with his family.

Most of us realize that our children will grow up to make their own decisions, regardless of our wishes and sometimes contrary to their upbringing. We resign ourselves to the sobering reality that our children (and our spouses) have a free will and are ultimately responsible for their own behavior and decisions. Some parents respond with fearfulness, realizing they don't know what to do to prevent tragedy and to protect their cherished loved ones. Others respond with a kind of fatalism and so do nothing to attempt to change what they fear is inevitable.

As we strive during these 40 days to renew our families, we must realize that we are in the midst of a vicious battle with eternal consequences. In order to avoid great catastrophe in our families, we must be ready to defend them. We cannot be fearful or apathetic. There is something we can do to equip our families for the conflict and something we must do to ensure victory: we must build a household of faith.

## II. The Defense of the Family (con't)

### DAY 7

What will it take to defend our families against the onslaught of Satan? Nehemiah's words to Israel concerning their physical struggle are particularly applicable here:

"...Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." (**Nehemiah 4:14**)

The battle grows more fierce with each passing day -- the time has come to begin fighting. We must be consumed by a determination to fight for our families, assuming an active defense and taking measures to protect the ones we love. Fear must be dispelled by faith as we realize that the God we serve is great and awesome, that His power is greater than the enemy's. For too long we have sat back and merely "hoped" that all would turn out well. Maybe we even prayed for our children and faithfully took them to church. But Nehemiah compels us to fight.

Our family is worth fighting for. God thought so -- and He sent His Son to die on our behalf to prove it. The issue is deeper than our children's educational choices, dating practices or taste in music. The battle is for their souls. Every single person entrusted to our care has an immortal soul that is of the greatest importance to God.

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of



them came to be." (**Psalm 139:13-16**)

The God of the Universe lovingly and purposefully fashioned each one of us. Never are these words more tangible or persuasive than when a tiny baby is first placed in our arms. Any parent will quickly testify to the overwhelming realization that, in the birth of their baby, a miracle had taken place. Perhaps this accounts for the overwhelming responsibility we feel as parents -- these tiny miracles were created and molded by God, and then entrusted to our care. We readily perceive the "specialness" of our children, and so seek to protect and train and care for them.

A family in the Bible felt the same way about their newborn child. Moses was born at a time when Pharaoh had ordered that every male child born be thrown into the Nile. Hebrews 11:23 explains, "By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict." They realized Moses was someone special, and they took life-threatening measures to save him from the destruction that inevitably awaited him. Our children today face a similar threat. Satan is crouching at the door, ready to devour them. Oh, the danger may not seem as imminent as the decree of death by Pharaoh, but it is every bit as real and life-threatening. We must determine to be like Moses' parents, acknowledging the supreme worth of our children and taking any measure to preserve them and see to their physical (and spiritual) well-being. The time has come to begin to actively defend our families, regardless of the cost.

## II. The Defense of the Family (con't)

### **DAY 8**

Take some time today to prayerfully evaluate your own family situation.

Describe your family right now. Are your children all following Christ? Are they obedient and respectful? Do they embrace the things of God as their dearest treasure?

What are some ways you can tell Satan is waging war against your own family? Are there some situations you attributed to "circumstance" that you now realize are the attacks of the enemy? Where is your family particularly vulnerable to his attacks?

In what ways have you been actively defending your family? What have you been doing right?

Are there things you wished you had done differently? Have you given up trying to influence your family? Do you firmly believe your family is worth fighting for?

Pray that God would open your eyes to the spiritual warfare you're engaged in and put a burning desire in your heart to defend your family at any cost. Ask Him to show you how you can begin to prepare yourself and your loved ones for the battle and trust Him to bring victory to your household. If you feel comfortable, write out your prayer below.

## II. The Defense of the Family (con't)

**DAY 9**

Read **Ephesians 6:10-18**. Write down some specific ways you can prepare to battle against the devil's schemes.

If your concern for your family's spiritual welfare has begun to wane, take some time right now to look at your family members through the eyes of Psalm 139. Reminisce about the day they were born (or if a spouse, when you first fell in love or the day you were married). Try to rekindle the love, adoration and wonder you first had. Write down your observations here:

Begin to pray for your family everyday. If the battle is won, it will be won on your knees. These 40 days of prayer and fasting are a wonderful opportunity for you to lift your loved ones before the throne of grace and invoke His protection and guidance for them. Write down your specific prayer requests for each member of your family here:

Pray for your family and for the courage to fight for them now.

## III. The Design of the Family

**DAY 10**

Meditate on the following passages of Scripture:

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9** – "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

**Deuteronomy 32:46-47** – ""Take to heart all the words I have solemnly

declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you -- they are your life...."

**Joshua 24:15** – "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose

for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

**Exodus 20:5** – "...for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the

children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

What is the fundamental purpose of the family?

Whose responsibility is it to impart the knowledge of God and His commands to your children?

Who makes decisions concerning the spiritual vitality of the home?

How do our decisions affect our households [ancient households were usually extended to three or four generations]?

## III. The Design of the Family (con't)

**DAY 11**

Hopefully by now you're beginning to see the tremendous need for defending the family. But in order to develop a successful strategy for defense, you must first understand how God designed the family. Perhaps an illustration would help.

The book of Job is probably the oldest of all Old Testament manuscripts and is undoubtedly familiar to you. The events recorded took place in the time of the Patriarchs (one of Job's friends may have been a son of Esau, Jacob's brother), and so it gives us an early example of the life of a non-Israelite family that sincerely worshipped God. Job was a righteous man beyond compare, a man of vast wealth and acclaim. God had blessed him with seven sons and three daughters...

"His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This was Job's regular custom." **(Job 1:4-5)**

Before the ceremonial law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the father of the household acted as the priest, making intercession for his family before God and atoning for their sins. Job made it his regular custom to sacrifice burnt offerings on behalf of his children to keep their relationship with God pure.

Today there is no need for priests, since Christ is our High Priest (**Hebrews 7-10**) and we ourselves, as God's people, are a royal priesthood (**1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 5:10**). But the principle of assuming responsibility for our children's spiritual well-being is still valid. Job didn't admonish his children to offer sacrifices; he didn't assume they were old enough to make their own decisions and let them do as





## III. The Design of the Family (con't)

**DAY 12**

In our culture we are obsessed with personal freedoms and choices, with most of us believing those rights are automatically conferred on our children. We mistakenly believe that if we push our kids too hard or "force" them to do something against their will, they will grow up to rebel against God and the church. And so we comfort ourselves with the delusion that our decision to let our children go their own way and make their own choices is ultimately wise and sound.

The Bible records the story of a family who bought into this modern-day philosophy. They had raised their son with great care and devotion to the Lord. But the day came when he tested the limits with this request: "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife" (**Judges 14:2**). God strictly forbid an Israelite to marry a Canaanite, and as godly parents, they should have been firm in their convictions. Instead, after showing only mild disappointment, they went with him to Timnah and approved of the wedding. The marriage is not the issue here, for Judges tells us that God wanted this young man to marry this woman. But from this moment on, Samson's life became one of moral and spiritual compromise. He was fully responsible for his own decisions and actions, but his parents' laxity and reluctance to stand up for truth and righteousness was undoubtedly a contribution to his own. The end results were disastrous; Samson's life ended in defeat.

God designed the family to be strongly bound together, with the parents setting the spiritual direction for the home. Moses instructed the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land,

"Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law." (**Deuteronomy 32:46**)

Parents are to command their children to obey, not allow them to make decisions they are too young or immature to make. We are the ones who make the decision that our families will be fully committed to the Lord -- and we are the ones who must see to it that they are. Christian parents must take on the courage of Joshua, who emphatically declared:

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

## III. The Design of the Family (con't)

**DAY 13**

Perhaps you're still unconvinced that this will actually work. Let's look at another example from the period when Israel was ruled by judges, an era similar to today when "everyone did as he saw fit."

Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phineas, were serving as priests in the tabernacle of the Lord. In **1 Samuel 2:12-25**, the author describes the wickedness of Eli's sons and Eli's own shortcomings as a parent and priest:

"Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord....[the] sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.... They slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting." (**1 Samuel 2:12, 17, 22**)

Eli was aware of the moral decay of the times and of his own family. First Samuel 2:22 records that he had heard about everything, and though he rebuked his sons in verses 23-25, his warning was much too late. They "did not listen to their father's rebuke" (2:25). He had lost his influence with his own sons. Since Eli took no measures to remove them from the priestly office, God put them to death. Eli's reluctance to discipline his children here is probably indicative of his parenting philosophy from their birth. He failed to command his children to obey the commands of the Lord. And so they grew to have no relationship with the God of their father and to flagrantly violate the Lord's commandments.

In sharp contrast to Eli's sons stands Samuel. He was faithfully ministering before the Lord (2:18) and growing in favor with God and with men (2:26). Samuel was just a boy (12 years old or possibly older) but his life of faithfulness and commitment to God was exemplary in a day when immorality was common place.

And he continued to be a mighty prophet of God throughout his life. The difference? Samuel had godly parents who determined even before his birth that he would serve in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. Hannah and Elkanah took him to the temple as soon as he was weaned (between ages 2 and 4) in fulfillment of Hannah's vow to God. There was never a question in that family's mind about the course for Samuel's life. He was never afforded another option. His parents were consistent in their commitment to God even though the sacrifice was costly. And so Samuel became a shining light of righteousness in a decadent world, privileged to anoint the first two kings over Israel.

God designed the family in such a way that PARENTS are to take the leadership and determine the spiritual fervor of the home. Job, Joshua, Hannah and Elkanah did it; we can too.

## III. The Design of the Family (con't)

**DAY 14**

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9** – "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

God intended the family to be the bastion of faith and religion. It would be in the home that children would learn about God's commands. Traditions and holidays were all designed as a vehicle to teach the children especially about God's gracious provisions, His might and mercy (e.g. Joshua 4:6-7). God's commandments were to be the focus of daily conversation and as tangible as physical symbols tied to their foreheads or written on their doorframes. God designed the home to be the purveyor of truth and righteousness -- to impress God's commands on the children.

Most families that are a part of the organized church (and many that aren't) recognize the need for religious and moral instruction for their children. This explains the high percentage of couples who return to the church (often after a lengthy absence) with the birth of their first child. We desperately want our children to know about God and to have the moral foundation to bring happiness and success in life. But many families err by assuming it is the church's responsibility to teach their children the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the miracles of Jesus or the great stories of the Bible. Church programs, though, are only a supplement to, not a replacement for, the home. Parents have a far greater impact on their children than any pastor or Sunday School teacher, and that is how God intended it to be. The

home is where they should see the commandments of God lived out in everyday life and where they should find the things of God a part of their daily conversations.

If you are still reading in this journal, then I am convinced you desire to build a household of faith. You want your home life to be centered around Jesus Christ and His commands. You want talking and teaching about God and the Bible to be as natural as discussing school or the weather or yesterday's headlines. If that is true, then stop right here and pray that God would help you to honestly evaluate your home and give you the courage to assume the responsibility for the spiritual depth of your household. Commit yourself now to paying whatever price is necessary to build a household of faith and to win the battle Satan is waging against your home.

## III. The Design of the Family (con't)

**DAY 15**

- How does modern society teach us children should be free to make their own decisions in life? List some examples:
  
- Do you think it was fair to Samuel for his parents to give him to the Lord's service at such an early age? Why or why not? What did his parents have to sacrifice in order to be faithful to Hannah's vow?
  
- What do you think Samuel's life would have been like if his parents hadn't raised him with such a purpose in mind? Would that alternative have been "fair" to the child?



- Do you think it is really possible to COMMAND our children to obey the Lord? How do right actions sometime precede right attitudes and affections? What are some benefits to having a righteous standard for the entire family?
  
- Are there any choices your children (or spouse) are making which you know are inconsistent with your faith in Christ?
  
- Are you afraid of turning them off to religion or to Christ Himself by imposing your religious convictions on them?

Pray for the courage and strength to do what is right and best for your family and to take on the responsibility for their spiritual growth. Determine that you will not let fear keep you from following God's design for the family.





## IV. The Dynamics of the Family

**DAY 17**

Take some time today to meditate on these Scripture passages. Choose one to memorize.

**Genesis 18:19** – "...I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just..."

**1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12** – "...but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us...For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."

**Colossians 3:18-21** – "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

- How do we direct our children to follow the Lord?



## IV. The Dynamics of the Family (con't)

**DAY 18**

So far we have learned about the fierceness of the battle and our need to defend our families. And we've taken a brief look at the design of the family and the necessity of parents assuming the responsibility for nurturing their children in the faith. Now we enter a crucial area -- the Dynamics of the Family. Some of the principles we will look at over the next several days will be challenging. But if we honestly desire to build a household of faith, it is imperative that we wrestle with some of these sensitive issues -- not so we feel defeated, but so we can humble ourselves before the Lord and make changes in our homes before it is too late.

Genesis 19 records the destruction of licentious Sodom and Gomorrah and God's gracious rescue of a man named Lot. When Abraham and his nephew Lot had parted company (Genesis 13), Lot chose to take his flocks and herds to the lush, verdant plain of Jordan. He pitched his tents near Sodom, where the men were sinning greatly against the Lord. When two angels revealed to Lot the imminent destruction of the city, he attempted to warn his family:

"Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking."

Tragedy visited Lot's household because he had lost his influence among his own family members. And is it any wonder? Chapter 19 finds him in the gateway of the city, suggesting he may have become a part of Sodom's ruling council. How could he have reasoned that friendship with the world would not affect his influence in his own home? When the men of Sodom insisted that Lot surrender the two men to them for sex, Lot countered by offering his two virgin daughters! The compromise in Lot's own life and his willingness to forfeit his own family cost him dearly. His wife even doubted the command of the angel by looking back over the smoldering city,

and so she became a pillar of salt. Later, Lot's two daughters got their father drunk with wine and had sex with him in order to bear children.

Influence. We cannot build a household of faith without it. Lot lost his influence because of moral compromise and so lost his entire family in the spiritual battle. If we desire to lead our household to follow God and to nurture our family in the faith, it will take consistent obedience to the will of God. Only then will we maintain an influence with our children that can guard them from certain spiritual catastrophe.

## IV. The Dynamics of the Family (con't)

**DAY 19**

We are Christians, people of God who revere His Word and worship His holy name. We attend church, sing in choirs, sit on administrative boards. And yet it is in the home where we meet our most stringent test of faith. Any flaw in our motives, priorities, character or temperament, though hidden from the world, is generally readily apparent to our families. Children notice inconsistency. They watch our every action and usually mimic them. In order to nurture and train our families, we must begin to model what we profess. I'm not referring just to moral inconsistency here, but to the attitudes and priorities we convey to our children.

Remember the Israelites in the desert? They were sentenced to wander for forty years in the wilderness because of their stubborn rebellion, until the entire generation (20 years old and older) died off. But the parents' disposition for continual grumbling and complaining was inherited by their children, who echoed the "I-want-to-go-back-to-Egypt" refrain.

"...they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!'" (**Numbers 21:5**)

Many in this generation had never eaten anything but manna and had never even seen Egypt. Their perspective on their circumstances was based almost exclusively on the attitude of their parents. It may not have been formally taught, but it was "caught."

Every day we are unconsciously passing on a value system to our children. They "catch" our attitude toward God, the church and the family by witnessing our priorities. They notice when we show greater joy and excitement over a sporting event than a church event, or when we offer them more praise and adulation for



their home run, touchdown, or report card than for the Bible verse they memorized. They can tell when our jobs are more important than family or when our hobbies or other interests (including family) are a higher priority than church and our worship of God. We don't do it intentionally, but we pass on these values through the way we spend our money (whether or not tithing is a priority), our time and our energies (reading the Bible, praying, involvement in church activities, etc.), what we watch on television, our conversation (edifying vs. gossiping), and our attitudes. Children want consistency and they desperately desire to learn what is important. They look to us to tell them. Children who are "forced" to miss sporting events or school activities because the family's commitment to the church's programs are a higher priority are in no way deprived of any enjoyment or opportunities. Instead, they learn what is truly important in life, and they grow up with a conviction that God is always a priority, no matter what the circumstances.

We may firmly believe in our hearts that God, family and church are our highest priorities, but we must ensure that our actions and attitudes convey that to our children, that they "catch" the truth. Think about how you spend your time, money and energy and about what excites you. Are these "hidden priorities" an accurate reflection of what you know to be God-ordained values? Pray that God would open your eyes to any inconsistencies in your priorities.

## IV. The Dynamics of the Family (con't)

**DAY 20**

Children inherit our attitudes and priorities; they also model our actions. Building a household of faith requires the preeminence of Christ in our homes. It mandates the surrender of every member to His will. Parents must live righteous, consistent lives before their children if they hope to develop a household of faith.

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." **Ephesians 5:3**

Not even a HINT of any kind of impurity! That's a demanding standard. Most of us, I am confident, are sincerely following Christ and striving for victory over sin in every area of our lives. We should never fear that our influence will be eternally lost if we slip and fall. It is often good for children to see their parents confess their sin, repent, and then restore their relationship with the family and the Lord. This is how they learn about receiving forgiveness from others and from God.

But sometimes the "hint" of impurity is not so readily perceived, and we pass along principles to our children which we never intended. For example, we would all agree that God's Word is our final authority, that it is unchanging and completely infallible, and that we are constrained to obey it (though we gladly and willingly do so!). But the principle we sometimes teach is arbitrary obedience based on convenience. Think about it: We justify breaking the posted speed limit because we're "in a hurry." When we do so, we teach our child that it is permissible to break the law, even though it's written on a sign and repeated every few miles! Laws become suggestions and compliance becomes optional. We can teach the same principle in the way we creatively prepare our income tax forms, when we ignore handicapped parking signs, when we disobey Scripture. Any time we show rebellion

toward authority, no matter how benign it may seem, we teach our children that authority and law are relative. When we fail to consistently discipline them for their wrongdoing, we unconsciously teach them that there is no punishment for sin. And we wonder why they don't respect authority or feel any compulsion to obey God's commands.

In order to build a household of faith, we must become people of faith. We must be careful to teach to our children what we truly believe. And if our actions are inconsistent with our beliefs, we must be quick to change our actions. We're in a war -- we must be careful not to give Satan a foothold.

Prayerfully consider how your actions may be sending a message contrary to biblical teaching. Are there any areas in your life where you are disobeying God or the clear teaching of Scripture? Our witness before our spouse and children is far more important than our witness in the world. Pray that God would keep you from any hint of immorality.

## IV. The Dynamics of the Family (con't)

**DAY 21**

So far in our brief study of the dynamics of the family we've focused on parental influence and how we teach attitudes and principles to our children via our lifestyles. But we must not overlook how we actually treat our children and spouses. Paul gives us the prescription for godly parenting in his description of his relationship with the Thessalonian Christians:

"...but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us...For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory." (1 **Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12**)

Even though parents decide the spiritual agenda for the home and determine the focus of the family, children must know they are respected and loved, and that the decisions of the household are for their benefit and well-being. Nothing is more disturbing than a Christian household ruled with an iron fist by an unyielding matriarch or patriarch. Paul describes a mother as gentle and caring, loving her children. It is out of the overflow of these genuine emotions that a mother (like Paul, Silas and Timothy) will share with her children the gospel of God and her life as well. Moms, our love for our children will naturally overflow to sharing the things of Christ and investing our very lives in our children.

The role of the father in the home is to encourage and comfort his children and to urge them to live lives worthy of God. There are certainly times for discipline and rebuke, but the overwhelming impression a father should leave on his children is

that of an encourager and comforter who exhorts, instructs and equips his children for their walk with God.

Building a household of faith requires developing proper relationships with your spouse and children. These Scriptures point out the necessity of proper family relationships that encourage mutual support and growth in Christ:

**Ephesians 6:1** – "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

**Ephesians 6:4** – "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

**Colossians 3:18-21** – "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

**1 Peter 3:7** – "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect...so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

## IV. The Dynamics of the Family (con't)

**DAY 22**

Building a household of faith requires an understanding of the dynamics of the family. One often-overlooked issue that has a profound effect on the dynamics of the home and also plays a large part in determining the success of parental influence is the issue of who is central in the home. Often in our zeal to protect and train our children we allow our homes to revolve around them; our children's desires and needs determine our family's agenda. Children soon realize that their position is one of power, that they control the course of all family activity. Our fear to command our children to obey the commandments of the Lord is a clear indication of who is central in the home.

But the husband-wife relationship was meant to be the central focal point of the family. It is the parents who set the directions and goals, who decide the family's spiritual and social agenda. Children must learn who is in control. Think of how we unconsciously teach them who is central. When mom returns home from a long trip she gives her husband a quick kiss and then runs to her children with outstretched arms, devoting the next couple hours to them (while ignoring her husband). But it is the children who should receive the quick kiss and be told that you need to spend time with Dad. Sometimes we allow our children to constantly interrupt our conversations when we should explain to them that parents need to talk and they must wait until you're finished. Our children should feel secure in their family position and should know they are loved immensely, but they should also know that the relationship between Mom and Dad is paramount -- it is the foundation of the family.

When children learn from the outset that the home revolves around Mom and Dad, they are much less likely to rebel against the decisions of the parents to serve the Lord as they grow older. They will understand their place in the home and realize the necessity of obedience. When children think they are in control they only fight to

retain it and rebel against your attempts to usurp it.

- How much time do you spend with your spouse? Do your children sometimes see you hugging or talking or sharing special times together?
  
- Do your activities center around your children or around the collective goals of the family?
  
- How can you begin to show your children that the family revolves around the desires and goals of the parents?

## IV. The Dynamics of the Family

**DAY 23**

How much influence do you have with your family members? Do they respect your opinions and heed your warnings?

What are some attitudes you have unconsciously passed on to your children concerning: other family members, the church, religion, God, school, work?

By the way you spend your time/money/energy, what do your children think is most important to you?

<input type="checkbox"/> job	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/sports	<input type="checkbox"/> self
<input type="checkbox"/> house	<input type="checkbox"/> friends	<input type="checkbox"/> material possessions
<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> church	<input type="checkbox"/> God
<input type="checkbox"/> family	<input type="checkbox"/> hobbies	<input type="checkbox"/> other _____



Think about it: What are your very highest priorities? List them in order of importance:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_

How can you begin to show your children that these are your most valued priorities?

How can you instill these priorities in your spouse and children?

## IV. The Dynamics of the Family (con't)

**DAY 24**

Are you modeling a pure and righteous life before your family?

In what areas are you struggling? Pray and ask God to help you overcome any areas of sin that may be setting a bad example for your family.

Describe yourself as a parent/spouse? List your good qualities below:

<input type="checkbox"/> caring	<input type="checkbox"/> instructing	<input type="checkbox"/> edifying
<input type="checkbox"/> affectionate	<input type="checkbox"/> comforting	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> gentle	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> encouraging	<input type="checkbox"/> loving	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

Is your relationship with other family members such that you feel free to challenge them to live lives worthy of God and to share the Gospel with them? If not, what could you do to create such a relationship?

## IV. The Dynamics of the Family

**DAY 25**

Choose one of your priorities. List five ways you can begin to teach your family the importance of this priority:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Are there any attitudes or actions you need to change in your own life in order to build a household of faith? List three that you will begin working on this week:

1)

2)

3)

Look through your daily schedule. Does your allotment of time reflect your priorities? What changes can you make to emphasize to your family what is truly important?

Take a few minutes to look through your checkbook. Is your use of money reflecting a balanced view of your priorities?

Share with a good friend or spouse some conclusions you have come to this week. Discuss together how you can show your spouse and children that you value them and God supremely. Brainstorm together some practical ideas and list them here:

## V. The Development of the Family

**DAY 26**

Take time to mediate on these Scriptures, seeking God's wisdom in applying them to your own family situation.

**2 Timothy 1:5** – "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."

**Proverbs 6:23** – "For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life..."

**Hebrews 12:11** – "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

**Colossians 4:2** – "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

**Philippians 4:6-7** – "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

How can we pass on a sincere faith to our children?

Why is discipline an important part of developing our families? Is it necessary? How is discipline different from punishment?

How can personal and family prayer help our families to be more Christ-centered?

## V. The Development of the Family (con't)

**DAY 27**

Building a household of faith will not just happen. We must begin to develop our family and mold it into God's design. Our goal is to build a Christ-centered home governed by an attitude of openness to talk about spiritual things. Remember that "Christ-centeredness" does not mean merely attending church services one or two times a week; it is a submission to God's will that permeates all of life. God described it this way:

"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many...." (**Deuteronomy 11:18-21**)

We cannot passively create such an atmosphere; it must be carefully developed.

Impressing God's commands on our children and fostering a sensitivity to spiritual things necessitates spending time with them. We are to teach our children by talking with them when we sit at home, walk along the road, lie down and get up. It is impossible to influence our children unless we spend quality -- and quantity -- time with them.

Most families today are being swept away by a whirlwind of activity. They are inundated with church, school, social and job-related activities. The quest for knowledge, expertise, recreation, fame and fortune has adversely affected the amount of time we spend together as a family. We are often willing to exchange the precious treasure of our families for fool's gold. The result of this perpetual pursuit of achievement and pleasure (for children as well as parents) is obvious: skyrocketing

divorce rates, teen pregnancy and suicide, widespread use of alcohol and narcotics. We cannot spend minimal time with our family and expect it to remain healthy.

The argument we often hear is, "It's not the quantity of time that counts, but the quality." Granted, time spent with our families should be quality time, BUT quality times can't always be planned; they do not conform to the dictates of our schedules. Quality times must be seized when they arise, and that requires spending a certain amount of quantity time with the family. In order to talk with our children when we sit at home or walk along the road, we must be with them during those times, always being conscious of the "teachable moment" when the opportunity arises to teach God's commands. Only then will we begin to develop our families into a household of faith.



## V. The Development of the Family (con't)

**DAY 28**

It was around 479 BC in the city of Susa, the Winter residence of the Persian kings. A Jew named Mordecai, distressed by the king's decree to annihilate his people, sought the help of his cousin, Esther. Because of God's gracious providence, Esther had become queen, and yet even she could not approach the king with such a request without the risk of death.

Notice Mordecai's response:

"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (**Esther 4:12-14**)

Mordecai had raised his lovely cousin -- she had neither father nor mother. Unlike many parents, Mordecai felt comfortable to approach his "adopted daughter" and to warn her about the consequences of her actions and to urge her to follow God's will for her life. He was able to confront her with the truth because he had established a household of faith:

"...for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up." (**Esther 2:20**)

The openness of their relationship and the freedom and "right" Mordecai felt to instruct Esther began much earlier. She had learned to obey and respect her "father's" authority all through her childhood. Developing our families necessitates exercising discipline. Loving, godly discipline does not drive our children from us;

instead, it produces healthy respect and (eventually) willing obedience, resulting in an atmosphere of openness.

Think of the consequences if Mordecai had not felt comfortable to speak so honestly of God's expectations. God's will would have been accomplished by someone else, and his "daughter" and her family would have faced certain death. Our children, too, are in an ominous battle, and unless we begin to develop our families and establish households of faith, we may lose the opportunity to confront them and influence them with saving truth when they grow older. We must begin to discipline our families -- lovingly, firmly and consistently. Children really do respect that; in fact, they crave it. They have no way of learning what is right or acceptable in God's eyes unless we teach them. And discipline is a necessary element in that process:

**Proverbs 22:15** – "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it from him..."

**Proverbs 23:13** – "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him...[you will] save his soul from death."

**Proverbs 29:15** – "The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother."

**Hebrews 12:9** – "...we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it...."

## V. The Development of the Family (con't)

**DAY 29**

"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." **(2 Timothy 1:5)**

This is our goal in building a household of faith: We want our faith to be sincere with the hope of passing it along to our children and grandchildren. Sometimes that proves more difficult than it sounds. Even though we begin to set a positive example and the thrill of being a Christian consumes us, our excitement and enthusiasm is not automatically embraced by the rest of our family. In order to develop our families, we must learn to impart a vision to them.

One can't help but marvel at King David, who imparted to his young son the desire and vision to build a glorious temple for the Lord –

"David said, 'My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it.' So David made extensive preparations before his death." **(1 Chronicles 22:5)**

After gathering most of the materials for the temple, David charged his son to build it and appointed all the leaders in Israel to help him. But I believe Solomon's vision for the temple wasn't automatic; it was part of the "preparations" made by his father. Maybe he accompanied King David as he gathered or inspected the piles of silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone. Or possibly they sat at the table together sketching floor plans and dreaming together about the finished product.

The point is this: If we want our children to grow to carry on our vision, they

must share in it now. All too often, as parents, we have our daily devotions, we write out the checks for our tithes and offerings, and we teach a Sunday School class or involve ourselves with some other ministry -- while our children watch. It is hard, if not impossible, for them to catch the excitement for the Christian life and ministry if they are only spectators. The vision is "caught" by sharing in the preparations for the temple.

Consider how your household might adopt a family ministry -- something you can do together so your vision -- and your sincere faith -- may be passed on to your children. You can teach children's church as a family, staff the nursery, write to a missionary family or sponsor a poverty-stricken child, sing a song, or teach a class. Allowing our children to share in the joy of service and ministry enables them to see Christianity in practice and to begin to understand the unsurpassed contentment that comes from serving God. In the process, our excitement for the things of God -- our vision -- will be "caught" by our children. We will begin to build a household of faith.

## V. The Development of the Family (con't)

**DAY 30**

Developing a household of faith requires spending time together as a family, building respect through godly discipline and imparting a vision by sharing in ministry together. But one element will tie the family together like no other; it will shape and develop your entire household, creating an atmosphere of openness and Christ-centeredness. That element is prayer.

It is through prayer that we are ushered past our earthly boundaries into the heavenly realms where the presence of God dwells; through prayer that we are humbled in heart and united in purpose. The family that prays together cannot in the next breath be resentful or hateful. The experience of petitioning God for guidance and seeking His wisdom in the household can only strengthen the family.

When we make family prayer a priority in our home, some very important things begin to happen:

- 1) **Our children begin to see that Christianity is real.** They see it through the importance we place on something as intangible as prayer, and they realize it as we celebrate together God's answers to our prayers.
  
- 2) **They begin to see their parents in a new light.** You become "worshippers of God" instead of just "attenders of church." When they hear your earnest prayers for your family and your own life, they begin to see you as people who care deeply for them and for your household. They begin to realize that you have faults and that you are striving to live a holy life pleasing to God. They understand that together you are partners in the Christian life, helping one another to mature and to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
  
- 3) **Your earnestness and transparency before God becomes their model.** Your

willingness to pour out your soul before God and to confess your sins and humbly seek His will impact your children to do the same. It may not happen immediately, but the attitude of your heart will soon be "caught."

**4) Your home will be thought of as a place where the presence of God dwells.**

Your children will view God as very near and accessible, and they will be more likely to turn to Him in prayer later in life when it is taught to them as "lifestyle" when they are younger. They will view God as a loving friend who longs to satisfy the desires and needs of His faithful followers.

**5) Your household will become a household of faith.** As you look for opportunities to pray with family members you will grow not only in your relationship with each other, but with God as well. The turmoil and frustration you sometimes feel will be replaced by the peace of God...

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (**Philippians 4:6-7**)

## V. The Development of the Family

**DAY 31**

True or False:

- My children often see me reading my Bible.
- Sometimes others in my family overhear me praying.
- I can often be heard singing a hymn or chorus.
- My conversation centers around what God is doing in my life, Sunday's sermon, a Bible passage I just read...
- Every family member feels comfortable to talk about spiritual issues and struggles and prayer requests.

Do you think you spend enough time with your children to positively influence them? What are some values being taught by school, textbooks, and TV and music that may be counterproductive to your goals for the family?

What are some activities you are involved in which take away from your time with your family? Are any of them expendable? Can you begin to spend more time together as a family?

What forms of discipline do you use with your children? Is your discipline:

\_\_\_ loving?

\_\_\_ firm?

\_\_\_ consistent?

\_\_\_ fair?

What are the benefits of creative discipline? Why are we sometimes reluctant to discipline our children? What can be the result of our failure to use consistent discipline? What does lack of discipline in the home unconsciously teach our children about God's discipline and punishment?



## V. The Development of the Family (con't)

**DAY 32**

How often do you pray with your spouse and your children? What are some hindrances to family prayer?

Choose from the list below some times when you could begin praying as a family. Determine to begin praying at least once a day with each family member.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> at mealtimes                        | <input type="checkbox"/> at bedtimes                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> before children leave<br>for school | <input type="checkbox"/> after dinner                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> before leaving for church           | <input type="checkbox"/> when you get in the car for a trip |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____                        |

Write below some of the changes that take place because of your commitment to family prayer over the next several days. Pray that God would prompt your heart to pray spontaneously (when an ambulance passes your house, when a child is upset or hurt, when angry feelings begin to brew, etc.). Begin to look for opportunities.

Make a list of ministries you could do as a family:

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1) | 5) |
| 2) | 6) |
| 3) | 7) |
| 4) | 8) |

Choose one that you can begin working on together during the next month. Write below what each family member can do to contribute to the ministry and how you think this ministry will create excitement in your family. Share with your spouse or close friend your idea and when you will begin.

## VI. The Discipling of the Family

**DAY 33**

Meditate on the following verses today. Choose one or two to memorize.

**Proverbs 22:6** – "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

**Proverbs 6:20, 22-23** – "My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching... When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is light..."

**Psalms 78:5-7** – "[God] decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them...and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands."

**Matthew 28:19-20** – "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

**2 Timothy 3:16** – "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..."

**Romans 15:4** – "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Why did God want parents to teach their children?

What kinds of things should we be teaching in our homes? Why is the Bible so important in the discipling of our families?

How can we begin to purposefully teach and train our children to obey God?

## VI. The Discipling of the Family (con't)

**DAY 34**

In Bible times there was no shortage of teachers. In fact, there were many philosophers and rabbis who gathered around them a great many disciples. These disciples followed their instructors, listened to and memorized their teachings, and mimicked their actions. The goal of the disciple was to spend enough time with his master that he actually became like him -- in his thinking as well as in his walk and talk. He was, after all, a "disciple" -- a learner. As Christians, we are to be Christ's disciples, spending so much time with Jesus that we become conformed to His likeness.

Our children are disciples, too. While our ultimate goal is for them to become disciples of Christ, their first understanding of who Christ is and what He taught is caught from us. They gather around us with the hopes of becoming like us and learning from us. In some senses, then, they are our disciples. We have the responsibility of discipling (teaching) our families.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (**Matthew 28:19-20**)

The command to go into the world to make disciples begins with our own families. We are responsible for teaching them to obey the commands of Christ.

**Proverbs 22:6** promises us that if we train our children to follow the Lord, even when they are old, they will not depart from it. It does not, as some mistakenly think, teach that after a period of inevitable rebellion they will eventually return to the Lord when they are older. God promises that if we are diligent in training and teaching our children, they will never depart from it -- even when they grow old! That is quite an incentive for investing the time in training and teaching our children.

The disciples who followed Jesus are a good example of the need for training. Although they learned much by just watching Jesus' life and by living with Him, there came a time when they had to be taught. Though they had heard Jesus pray on many occasions, they finally asked, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). We, too, must consciously take time to teach our children to pray, to learn the Scriptures, to live righteous lives. Much is "caught" as they live with us and adopt our attitudes and values, but active teaching must also take place. If we truly desire to build a household of faith, we will need to set aside specific times for training and teaching our children the Christian faith. There are some things that cannot be "caught" and must be deliberately "taught."

## VI. The Discipling of the Family (con't)

**DAY 35**

Jesus was a master teacher. He took a handful of ignorant, unschooled men and in the course of three years equipped them to turn the world upside down. Every day with Jesus was a learning experience. Sometimes Christ lectured from a boat or a mountainside, preaching unforgettable sermons. At other times He taught through object lessons and parables. Daily life always seemed to provide the stimulus for practical instruction. The disciples learned through His example and His careful instruction. They felt free to ask questions of Jesus. Though their understanding and faith were sometimes lacking, Jesus accepted them where they were and sought through His teaching to lead them into a deeper awareness of the truth.

Family discipling times should follow Christ's example. Many of us have tried time and again to establish a family devotional time or "family altar," only to find our spouse or children uninterested or resentful of the infringement on their time. Part of the problem is in our approach. Often Dad is placed at the head of the table to read a long passage of Scripture or a dated reading from a dusty devotional book. The family endures the experience -- for a while. Finally the grumbling and complaining and listlessness of the children take their toll and the family devotional time, which was begun with the best of intentions, is abandoned.

But discipleship times are for the purpose of teaching our families the treasures of the Bible. The goal is not to complete the devotional book or passage of Scripture, but to activate learning on the part of our family. To do that, a variety of methods should be employed. Like Jesus, we can use object lessons, parables and illustrations from daily life. Children should be encouraged to ask questions and to find applications. It must become a family learning experience where everyone contributes and everyone is benefitted. What we teach must also be age- and maturity-appropriate (small children shouldn't be expected to sit still for a 30-minute

discipleship time).

As parents who are concerned for the spiritual welfare of our children and who have taken on the responsibility for their training and instruction, we must seek to develop a discipling time that will engage our family's interest and participation. Will it take some work? You bet it will. But the investment in our family is worth any price, and our family will never be equipped to win the war without adequate training. When we make discipleship a priority in our homes, God will enable us to teach and train our children so they, like Jesus' disciples, will eventually turn the world upside down.



## VI. The Discipling of the Family (con't)

**DAY 36**

Perhaps you are a little uneasy at this point. If you are young in Christ, you may feel overwhelmed at the thought of having to teach your children something with which you are still unfamiliar yourself. Maybe you've tried all this before and failed. Or maybe you just find the idea of having to train your children frightening. What do you teach? Where do you begin?

First of all, keep in mind that your primary goal is not to teach theology or doctrine, but Scripture and its life applications. You need not have all the answers. Your discipleship times are opportunities for the entire family to learn and search for answers. You may be pleasantly surprised at the insights even very young children can have. Also keep in mind that a discipleship time or "family altar" will never work if you are not following the principles that have already been covered in this booklet. You must be modeling what you intend to teach. If not, you will have no more influence on your children than Lot did on his; your words will fall on deaf ears.

As you plan your daily (or maybe weekly at first) discipling times, include a short reading from the Bible, a time of sharing and prayer, adding other teaching helps as appropriate. You may want to buy a devotional book suited for the ages of your children or use their weekly Sunday School lessons as the focus of your weekly discipleship times. Whatever you choose, you should plan to include teaching on the following:

1) **STORIES OF THE BIBLE.** Teach your children about the great heroes in the Bible and about the miracles God performed to deliver His people from their enemies. Stories etched on the minds of our children can be the source of great guidance and comfort for years to come. The stories in the Bible are fresh, exciting, relevant and true. Train your children to be another Daniel, Moses, Joseph, or Paul.

2) THE LIFE OF CHRIST. Spend time teaching your family what Jesus did and what He said. They should know the miracles of Jesus, His parables, His great "I Am" statements. If our goal is for our children (and ourselves) to be like Christ, we must study His life, asking ourselves how we can walk in His steps.

3) PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS. As your children grow in their knowledge, you may want to teach them biblical history or study some of the epistles. No matter what you choose to teach, be sure to focus on the practical applications of what is written. Look for the general principles that can apply to life today so your family will learn that the Bible is not some outdated book written for people living thousands of years ago -- it is just as relevant and valuable for people today as ever before.

Your family devotional times can be a thrilling way to consciously impart truth to your children and to impress on them the commandments of the Lord. You can memorize Scripture together, act out stories and think up applications for each family member. It is your responsibility as parents to teach them and train your children in the way they should go. As you do, your household will develop unity of purpose and a common focus. Christ will soon be central in your heart and home. You will have developed a household of faith.

## VI. The Discipling of the Family (con't)

### **DAY 37**

Have you ever tried to have family discipleship times in your home? What did you enjoy most about them? What was most frustrating? Are you still trying?

What are some of the obstacles to having family devotional times in your home right now? [No time, schedule too hectic, no one interested, can't read, etc.]

How can you remove some of these obstacles or circumvent them by your flexibility and creativity?

What do you think would be the benefits of having a regular daily or weekly discipleship time?

How can you make these times appropriate to the age and interests of your children?

Pray that God would put the desire in your heart (and the energy in your body) to begin to disciple your family. Pray for wisdom and insight to creatively train them in the way they should go.

## VI. The Discipling of the Family (con't)

**DAY 38**

Are you *willing* to begin discipling your family? How often would you like to have your family altar times (once a month, once a week, or daily)? Is there a certain time each day (like after dinner) when you could meet as a family, or would you need to meet at different times on different days to accommodate everyone's schedule?

Determine in your heart that you will at least try to make regular family discipleship times a part of your household of faith. When will you begin? Write the month or date below. How long will your trial period be? [Don't give up too easily. Try it for at least a couple months. Be consistent and firm in your commitment to train your family.]

Take a calendar and decide what days and times you will share together as a family.

Look through your Bible and decide on the stories or topics you will cover during your

first four family devotional times. Write down what principle you want to teach and how each family member can participate.

1)

2)

3)

4)

Share with your spouse or a close friend the commitment you have made to begin discipling your family. Pray with each other for the strength and resolve you need in order to win the fight for your family. Ask someone to pray for your family during your first four family devotional times.

## VII. Conclusion

**DAY 39**

Look through the questions at the end of each section in this booklet. Many times you were asked to make commitments to change areas of your life or begin to implement changes in your family. List below some of the commitments you made along with the dates (if any) you determined to begin making changes.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

During these 40 days of prayer and fasting, what else has God been speaking to you about?

What changes have you seen in your own life during the past five weeks? What changes still need to take place?

Have there been any positive effects on your family? Is your household closer to becoming a household of faith than it was before you began? What changes still need to be made?

Purpose in your heart that you will continue to seek God's guidance for your family and pray that you will be equipped to fight the battle for your home. Also pray for an open heart and mind and be willing to follow wherever God may lead in the coming weeks and months.



## VII. Conclusion (con't)

**DAY 40**

It is no secret that the family is in trouble. Satan wages his assaults on every side. And yet we hold within our hands the secret weapon for successfully defeating the enemy: We can build a household of faith. But it will not be an easy task. Satan will fight long and hard to destroy your efforts and discourage you, because the stakes are high. He will make you feel like a failure in your spiritual example, he will make you believe it's too late to change your home life or that things are fine the way they are. The enemy is crafty and powerful. But praise God, because "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (**1 John 4:4**).

As you begin to put into practice all that you have learned during these 40 days of prayer and fasting, remember that God will give you the strength to do what He has called you to do. When you begin to feel discouraged or overwhelmed by the challenge before you, hold fast to these verses:

**Philippians 4:13** – "I can do everything through [Christ] who gives me strength."

**Hebrews 13:20-21** – "May the God of peace...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ...."

**2 Corinthians 12:9** – "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"

Remember also that your efforts will be rewarded -- Don't give up!

**Galatians 6:9** – "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time

we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

**Isaiah 55:10-11** – "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish,... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

May God bless you and your family richly. Go forth in the power of His Name. Live a life of righteousness. Pass along a sincere faith to your family. Take up your sword and fight the enemy. With God's help you can move any mountain and conquer every foe. You really can build a household of faith.

