

# Four Core Practices that will Eternally Transform Your Household

By Brad Shedd

"Would you like your household to be functional and supportive? Would you like your children to 'turn out'?" With very few exceptions, parents respond with a hearty "Yes!" to those questions. And yet, so few parents have even the slightest clue of "how to get there."

Even more, as Christians, our goal is not just that our children would "turn out," but that they would become mighty men and women of God, turning their world upside down for Him. Yet with such a lofty ideal, most Christian parents have no idea what they can do to see this goal become a living reality.

The good news is this—there's hope, and there's help! There *are* simple, repeatable things you can do each day that, partnered with God's active intervention, will eternally transform your household. What's more—these principles apply no matter what your household looks like—children, no children, single parenting, multiple generations, extended family, etc. Throughout God's Word, He promised to impact our entire *oikos*—our household (see Acts 16:31). With that in mind, take a look at these four simple practices:

## ***1) Household Meal Table***

The first practice is simply to eat dinner together! As easy as that sounds, the household meal table has become almost extinct in our contemporary culture. One of the reasons that Thanksgiving is so special is because it's one of the few times that millions of Americans actually sit down at the table *at the same time* with the rest of their household and share a leisurely meal together.

Secular research has backed up the amazing benefits of eating together. In the book *The Surprising Power of Family Meals* by Miriam Weinstein, she writes,

" . . . eating ordinary, average everyday supper with your family is strongly linked to lower incidence of bad outcomes such as teenage drug and alcohol use, and to good qualities like emotional stability. It correlates with kindergartners being better prepared to learn to read. (It even trumps getting read to.) Regular family supper helps keep asthmatic kids out of hospitals. It discourages both obesity and eating disorders. It supports your staying more connected to your extended family, your ethnic heritage, your community of faith. It will help children and families to be more resilient, reacting positively to those curves and arrows that life throws our way. It will certainly keep you better nourished. The things we are likely to discuss at the supper table anchor our children more firmly in the world. Of course eating together teaches manners both trivial and momentous, putting you in touch with the deeper springs of human relations.

"When families prepare meals together, kids learn real-life skills. They assume responsibility, become better team members. (Where did we get the idea that the only teams are in sports?) Sharing meals helps cement family relationship, no matter how you define *family*. The word *companion*, which dates back to ancient Rome, means 'one who breaks bread with you.'"

Those are pretty incredible results from such a simple practice! Even more, Scripture places high value on eating together. Notice how many times people share a meal with each other. Abraham prepared a meal for the three visitors, Gideon rushed to fix dinner for his angelic guest, and Moses gave explicit instructions on celebrating the Passover—the most significant spiritual experience of the Old Testament, which is centered around the household meal table.

One of the highlights of Christ's ministry was the Last Supper He shared with His disciples, coupled with the command that this was to become a regular practice for His followers. Jesus revealed Himself in the moment of breaking bread in Emmaus, and He was the one who prepared the breakfast for the disciples who had stayed up all night trying to go back to fishing.

The Early Church was characterized by four basic practices, one of which was "breaking bread," which we later learn was "from house to house" (Acts 2:42,46). And the Corinthian church was known for sharing meals together. At the end of time, one of the primary events we will share with the Lord will be the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

As convincing as all of this is, why then do we not eat together more often? The answer is simple and complex—the "stuff" of life, and our refusal to prioritize such a simple practice. Dinner is one of the first things to go in the light of other "priorities." I challenge you, however, to reevaluate everything you are doing, and to radically prioritize the dinner time in your household. You may

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need to say no to some "good things" in order to share together in the "best thing." Moreover, start small (aim for two meals a week together) and build from there!

Further, purpose to make the household meal table special. Eliminate the TV and radio from the meal table environment, and replace it with soft, relaxing, uplifting music. Almost without exception, our household eats by candlelight (in fact, the children will remind us if we have forgotten to light them!). And . . . do your best as often as possible to remove the time constraint from the meal time—it doesn't help to eat together if you have to force down your food and rush out the door minutes later!

## 2) *Household Worship*

The second practice follows naturally after the first one—after feeding your bodies with nourishing food and your souls with engaging interaction, then take some time to feed your spirits with "food from Heaven." However, if eating together as a household is rare in our culture, sharing devotions together is nearly extinct. James K. Bridges writes, "The aroma of the Holy Scriptures is not pervading the atmosphere of many homes because the Bible is not being given a place in daily life. The upshot is that many are developing lifestyles devoid of a biblically informed conscience."

And yet, for those who determine that the Bible needs to be "given a place in daily life," the term "household worship" can sound so intimidating—how is it possible to reproduce what we experience on Sunday?

The answer, of course, is, "Household Worship is not *supposed* to look like Sunday Worship." God has shown us in Scripture that there is a place for worship in the home, and there is a place for worship as a gathered Body of Christ (see Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20) . . . and . . . the two *complement* each other, not *duplicate* each other!

Though Household Worship will look different for each home, there really are only two basic elements:

--Hearing *From* God (through reading and reflecting on God's Word)

--Responding *To* God (through worship and prayer)

First, the head of the household should simply break open God's Word and share it with the others. (It often works well to have each "reading" member of the household read a verse or two.) More importantly, it is crucial to ask two simple questions about the Scripture passage—1) What does this mean? (*i.e.* What is God saying here?), and 2) What does this mean *for us*? (*i.e.* How should we "live this out" in our home? Or, what does this "look like" in our home?)

Secondly, the head of the household should lead in a response of worship and prayer back to God (though the head of the household leads, it's great to have each member pray as well). It's wonderful to sing together (and it's truly okay if a few notes are out of tune! ☺), but the focus should be on your response to God's revelation, committing to obey what God has instructed and asking for His help and strength to "walk it out."

It's really that simple. And . . . it doesn't have to last 90 minutes! Start small (just a couple verses), start short (just 5-10 minutes), and watch how God will expand this time together, to the point that this becomes one of the most anticipated times for your household each day!

### ***3) Household Blessing***

A third core practice also naturally flows from the first two—the parents simply pray specific blessings over each child. The Bible is filled with fathers giving "the blessing" over their children—it was sought after and longed for (see Genesis 27, 48-49 for starters). God has designed the parents to be the ones to represent Him in speaking His words of blessing over their sons and daughters.

This can be done at any time throughout the day, but two of the most natural times are: 1) as Dad or Mom prays during Household Worship, and 2) as the children are being put to bed.

Once again, this does not have to be elaborate, complicated, or overly drawn out, but I have yet to have any of my children refuse a blessing from their father! There are two primary elements in a blessing:

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- Blessing a person's *identity* (affirming exactly who that person is in God's eyes)
- Blessing a person's *destiny* (affirming the special plan and purpose that God has for this person)

One of the best ways to bless both of these elements is speak the meaning of each child's name over them—inherent in their name is a unique identity and the promise of what they are going to become!

If I were to pray over my oldest daughter, I might say something like this, "Olivia, you are such a special person in God's eyes! Your name means 'Peace,' and you already bring such peace to all those who interact with you! Moreover, may God lead you to be a woman of peace all your life—may you become a beautiful woman of God, representing the peace of Christ in your future family and in all who will cross your path." I regularly do the same for each one—Sophia means "Wisdom," Stephen means "Crown," Ava means "Filled with Praise," Susanna means "Graceful Lily," and Laura means "Crowned with Honor." Take a moment to find out what each of your children's names mean (as well as your spouse and anyone else that is part of your household) . . . you will be blessed, and they will be even more blessed!

#### ***4) Daddy Time/Mommy Time***

The last practice is probably one of the most important—intentionally spending one-on-one time with each child at least once a week. According to a recent study, the average number of minutes per week that parents spend in meaningful conversation with their children is . . . three and a half minutes! This is obviously not God's plan, and yet our modern society with all of its distractions has conspired to remove the most basic interactions we can have with our children.

Proverbs 23:26 echoes throughout time, "My son, give me your heart" (see also Proverbs 1-4, especially the opening words of each chapter). Probably the

most important key to affirming, life-changing parenting is to *nurture a growing heart relationship with each child*.

In *Keeping Our Children's Hearts*, Steven and Teri Maxwell make these comments,

We want to have our children's hearts because we desire to direct those hearts to Jesus Christ. When we have a child's heart, we have the ability to influence that heart. . . . If we don't have the heart, the child will likely be lured and pulled to the attractions of the world. . . . Parenting by authority becomes more difficult and tentative as children grow older. *However, if we have their hearts, we find that we are able to influence our children on the basis of our relationship.* (emphasis mine)

When you "have your child's heart," then you can faithfully navigate each stage of a child's development . . . and *nothing in God's Word* says that your child must rebel or become distant from you! When you "have your child's heart," you can even make mistakes . . . but the relationship will be strengthened as you humbly ask your child to forgive you.

How can you "have your child's heart"? Well, first you must understand that this is the natural bent of your child from the very beginning—this is how God designed it! The issue is *keeping* your child's heart. And how is that done? Through the ongoing, intentional nurturing of your *relationship* with your child.

In our home, this takes the form of "Daddy Walks" and "Mommy Talks." One of my treasured times of the week is late Sunday afternoons, when I take a walk with each child around our neighborhood, often stopping to talk in the gazebo in the park. I usually ask the simple question, "How's your heart?" or "Was there anything that you wanted to talk about?" Sometimes I have something specific to share, but many times we just start by being together . . . and it naturally goes from there! My wife schedules her "Mommy Talks" throughout the week, but each time she begins the same way—simply by being together.

Find the routine that works for you . . . and fight for it! Refuse to let the busyness of our world rob you of one of the most valuable opportunities you have—to be in a heart-to-heart relationship with your children! And, by the way, don't stop your Daddy/Mommy times when your children reach puberty—in fact, your greatest Daddy/Mommy times are about to begin! Moreover, it goes without

saying that Husbands and Wives need this kind of quality time together with each other as well!

Four simple, easily repeatable practices, but with eternal, life-changing results . . . The choice is yours . . . will you begin to prioritize the household God has given you? God is waiting to partner with you, and today is the best day to start!