

**Bible Text:** Psalm 128:3; Proverbs 15:17

**Preached on:** Sunday, February 12, 2006

**Trinity Protestant Reformed Church**

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The Scripture reading this morning is that psalm, Psalm 128. We are going to look at one part of the third verse there as well as a verse from Proverbs chapter 15. Proverbs 15 verses 16 and 17 and the verse text is verse 17.

Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.<sup>1</sup>

And Psalm 128 verse three.

“Thy children like olive plants round about thy table.”<sup>2</sup>

Beloved, there is a reformed tradition of longstanding that is fast losing its place in reformed and Christian homes. That is the practice of family worship or mealtime devotions. There are reasons that it is losing place. We live in a fast paced society and there are all kinds of excuses that people will use at least in their own minds to justify the fact that there isn't this practice of mealtime devotions.

Many will say, “Well, there is not enough time. We are too busy. It is very difficult to get the family all together, especially when the children become teenagers and they have to work. And they do have to work, don't they?” is the argument. And there isn't any more this consistent practice of mealtime devotions and instruction with the children.

Now part of the reason that these devotions, family devotions aren't happening is that families are not eating together like they should.

We are being swept along with a culture in the age in which we live, a culture of TV dinners and microwave ovens. And that is having its influence in the Christian home. Families aren't eating together anymore. And we want to see this morning from these verses that God tells us that we should be eating together and worshipping God together in our families.

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 15:16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 128:3.

At one time in reformed families—and it wasn't so long ago—family devotions was considered a fixed and a sacred practice, more important than eating itself. And fathers would see to it that every one of the family members were there, that nothing would stand in the way of family devotions and if the children didn't have time to eat that was ok, but they needed to be there for family devotions.

There is nothing that could stand in the way of it. And it was something practiced not just once in a day, but twice and perhaps three times in a day.

This important practice came out of the reformation. One of the hallmarks of the protestant reformation was restoration of the biblical covenant home. And with that the practice of family worship.

One of the groups of protestants, the Scottish reformers considered this so important that along with their creeds like we have our creeds in the back of our Psalter, along with their creeds and their forms—we have forms, the form for baptism—they had as well an entire form or directory for family worship. And the influence of that thinking in the continental and British reformation came even to our own land so that in 1677 a congregation in Dorchester, Massachusetts made this resolution and it was officially adopted by the council or the session of this congregation. And I quote.

“We make this resolution to reform our families, engaging ourselves to a contentions care to maintain the worship of God in them and to walk in our houses with perfect hearts and a faithful discharge of our domestic duties, educating, instructing and charging our children and households to keep the way of the Lord.”

It was seen as a very important practice. And we might ask: Why was it considered so important? And the simple answer is that where the home is strong the Church is strong. And this is something that the reformers understood and they saw that if worship fell apart in the home then certainly worship would fall apart in the Church. If there was no instruction in the home, then certainly there wouldn't be any listening to instruction in the Church and that a strong home means a strong Church and the falling of a home and the failing in the area of parental instruction of children means the failure also of the Church.

John Knox, one of the English reformers, recognized this connection when he was forced to leave his congregation and go into exile because of persecution. He was confident that the Church could remain faithful without his work there as a pastor and a preacher because or in the way of the fathers taking leadership in their homes. As he is leaving he says, not to the elders teaching the church, but he says this to the men in their homes, “You men,” I quote, “You are bishops and kings in your homes. Your wives and children, servants and family are your bishopric and charge. Of you it will be required how carefully and diligently you have instructed them in God's true knowledge. And, therefore, I say, you must make them partakers in reading, exhorting and in making common prayers which I would in every house were once a day practiced at least.”

And certainly that connection between what goes on in the home and the faithfulness of the Church is a biblical connection. In the book of Judges you remember the period of the judges. The children from catechism will remember this. The period of the judges was a period of lawlessness. Every man did what was right in his own eyes. It was a period of ignorance. No man knew God and what he had done for them in the land of Egypt.

Judges two verse 10 says a generation arose “which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.”<sup>3</sup>

And what is the explanation? Why was it that the nation, the Church of God in the Old Testament at that time departed and left the ways of God? Why didn't they know about them? It was because the parents weren't teaching the children in their homes. There wasn't a regular practice of family devotions, instruction and worship.

And this morning we want to see that that ought to be an important place. It ought to have an important place in our covenant homes.

Looking at these two verses, Psalm 128 verse 3b and Proverbs 15 verse 17 we take this theme: Mealtimes in the covenant home.

I notice three things. First the table, in the second place the menu and finally the blessedness or the fruit that comes from these mealtimes.

We should see, first of all, that it is important for families to gather together for mealtimes around a table. This is not just a nice idea that somebody came up with during the time of the reformation and said, “Now this is a good practice and it is a nice idea.” But this is a biblical and a scriptural practice and that is what we want to see this morning.

The covenant home is built around mealtimes and a table. And two verses that we look at this morning emphasize that point. In Psalm 128, the last part of the verse this is one of God's blessings on the godly man that his children will be “like olive plants round about thy table.”<sup>4</sup>

“Thy children like olive plants round about thy table.”<sup>5</sup>

And obviously the psalmist is talking here about how a home is built. Children are like plants. He talks about a fruitful wife and then she brings forth these children and these children are like plants that are planted in the ground and olive plants were plants that would be planted around the walls of a house. And now when the psalmist is talking about the building of this house and the building of this home he says not they will be like olive plants round about the sides of the house, but around the table. And the idea is this that as the family grows and is planted, it grows around the table, central to the

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<sup>3</sup> Judges 2:10.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 128:3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

family life and the growth of the family in a way that receives God's blessing and approval is the table and children gathering around that table. That is because the table is placed where they are fed with the things, not just physical food, but spiritual food that will cause them to grow.

Proverbs chapter 15 verse 17 also emphasizes the importance of the table in the Christian home.

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”<sup>6</sup>

And now this psalm is talking about or this proverb is talking about dinner. And a dinner is the time when people gather together and eat with one another. And when Solomon says here or the Spirit says here that a dinner of herbs is better than a dinner with a stalled ox where there is hatred, it is not saying that the dinner where there is a stalled ox and hatred is ok, acceptable, but this is better. But it is creating a distinction. And it is saying a stalled ox where there is hatred is worthless dinner. But this one is not only better, but this is good. God calls a dinner of herbs where love is a good thing. And that is the word there literally. Good is a dinner of herbs where love is.

And so God is saying this is good. It is good to have dinner together. It is good to have dinner in covenant home where there is love between the members of the family. God is saying this is good.

Are we going to say that what God calls good is not worth doing in our homes, not worth practicing? A bad thing? That is what we say when we don't have our mealtimes with one another.

Now we might wonder why the Holy Spirit singles out mealtimes as he discusses family growth in Psalm 128 and as he discusses love in the Christian home in Proverbs 15. The Holy Spirit is going to talk about love and the importance of love in the Christian home. Why doesn't he just talk about it is better to have a house where there is lots of love than a house where there are many possessions? Why doesn't he put it like that?

You see, the Holy Spirit is emphasizing one central and important aspect of the home which reflects everything else that goes on in the home. What goes on at mealtimes is representative of everything else that goes on in the home. Families that sit together and eat together with love and peace are families which in the rest of their life in the home are able to live together in love and peace. And where a husband and wife and children can't sit together at a table and eat and fellowship, where that creates tension, then obviously there is other problems in the home.

So he is talking about something that is central and something that is representative of the rest of the family life.

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<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 15:17.

It used to be on family visitation that ministers and elders would drop in unannounced at homes during the evening meal. And that was done by the elders and the ministers so that they could get a real flavor for what goes on in the home. When we do a family visitation we sit in a kind of sterile, static environment in the living room and everybody is nervous and everybody is on their best behavior.

Now what if the elders and minister would come at the meal time. What would they find? Would they find that you actually eat together? Would they find that there is love and unity in the way that the children behave towards each other and respect in the way that parents treat their children so that they can actually eat together?

Certainly there is... we see that that is representative, then, of the entire family life and even of the true spiritual character of the home, how we eat and our mealtimes.

Now, of course, there are going to be differences in mealtimes in different families. Some of them are going to be quite formal. Children are going to wait their turn to speak because this is the way father and mother want it to be done. They are going to listen to their parents with respect and so on where maybe in other families there is somewhat of a chaotic atmosphere and if you go there you get a headache watching what is going on and there is seven conversations and noisy children and food flying around, whatever. But somehow everybody gets fed and at the end when it is time to read the Scriptures there is quiet.

There is going to be differences, yes, but God expects us to have these mealtimes together as families.

And now if we look at the Scripture we see that the table is an important symbol of fellowship and even of covenant life. There are examples of that in the Scripture. Abraham opened his table to angels unawares. Men came to him and he offered them food and they sat with him and ate. And the book of Hebrews tells us that we even should be hospitable that way, that we should open the inner sanctum of our home, the table to guests so that others can share the fellowship that we have. And that is what we ought to do and that is what we do do in our fellowship with one another as believers. And that is a good thing.

The Scriptures talk about Joseph inviting his brothers to eat with him. David shows his kindness to Mephibosheth, a descendant of Saul by letting him eat at his table. And later on when Solomon becomes king David commands him in 1 Kings two verse seven, "But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table."<sup>7</sup>

This is how you must show kindness to them. Let them come to your table.

In 1 Kings 13 the young prophet came and spoke against Jeroboam in the altar and he went home and the old prophet chased him and invited him to his house to share some

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings 2:7.

fellowship with him. And this was something that the young prophet was told he shouldn't do. You shouldn't fellowship with anyone there. So the table is a symbol of fellowship. And certainly that is true even of how unbelievers eat together.

Jezebel had at her table 400 prophets of Baal and she was showing the union of the kingdom of Israel with the ungodly nations and the worship of Baal in doing that.

You find in the New Testament there are examples as well. Jesus ate with publicans and sinners and demonstrated by that his fellowship with them and that they were his disciples as well.

In John chapter 12 Jesus you find has a very close relationship with the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus and they invite him in to eat with them.

As well in the Scriptures you find that there are certain tables that believers should not eat at. In 1 Corinthians 10 we are told that we cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and the table of devils. And because of that Christians are commanded in 1 Corinthians five and verse 11 that... and Paul says this.

“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”<sup>8</sup>

And he is saying, “Don't fellowship with that sin by eating food with those people.”

So, you see, the table has an important idea in Scripture and it symbolizes this fellowship. Now that fits with the whole idea of the covenant and our homes being what we call covenant homes.

The covenant begins with God and it begins with God's own fellowship with himself between the three persons of the trinity. There is a perfect communion and agreement between the three and nothing ever comes between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is always this perfect agreement in the godhead. And that covenant life God expresses in the salvation of his people so that we are called the family of God and we call God our Father and we are made to be the sons and daughters of the living God. And that is the whole idea of covenant life and we become the friends of God, have this fellowship with him.

And now God even in the revelation of that covenant life uses the table. In the Old Testament tabernacle there were two tables, one with bread and one with the other instruments and furniture of the tabernacle sitting on them and the purpose of those tables was to show God's fellowship with his people in the tabernacle. And that certainly is carried over into the New Testament into the sacrament of the Lord's supper, the Lord's table. And Jesus sat with his disciples at a table and partook of the meal, the Passover meal which was a family meal with them. And then instituted the Lord's supper, a table.

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:11.

And that shows that in salvation there is this fellowship between God and his people. And Jesus even speaks of eating of this table in the kingdom to come. The table will be represented somehow in the kingdom of heaven.

But now it is God's will that this covenant life, this fellowship be reflected in our homes by our eating together around a table.

That is the idea in those two passages in Psalm 128 and Proverbs 15. It is good for us to do this. This is where families are built. And in Proverbs 15 the idea of love and of covenant communion is connected with the dinner table.

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is.”<sup>9</sup>

And covenant life is expressed by this eating together at a table.

In the Christian home we have to set priorities and fathers, especially, have to take the leadership in setting these priorities and this certainly must be one of the priorities that we have set meal times in our homes and that our family life is structured around this time when we eat together at the table. This is non negotiable in the Christian home. This is non negotiable on the time table and the calendar of the Christian home. We must eat together and have meals together as families.

Now from the text that we read it is clear that what is on the menu at those mealtimes isn't really important.

In Proverbs chapter 15 there is a comparison drawn between two different homes. One is a home in the second part of the verse where there is a stalled ox and hatred therewith. A stalled ox is a fatted calf or a calf or a cow or an ox that has been put in a stall and fed with the particular purpose of being eaten. It is fattened up so that the family can have a feast on this good piece of beef, beef roast or something like that.

And certainly that indicates not just that the family has good meals, but this indicates that in this one family in Proverbs 15 there is a level of luxury. This home eats well. This home has the latest of everything. These are wealthy people. They eat in a lovely dining room. They have nice furniture to eat on and to eat from. There is a large kitchen where the food can be prepared and that goes into the rest of the house. There is furniture and there is every latest appliance and whatever you could want in the home and there is a great big garage attached and toys for fathers and toys for children and whatever you could want in this stately home.

There is something wrong in this home. There is no love. There is hatred. This is a home where the father comes home in the evening and from work and he is not happy. He is not happy with his work and he is not happy with his home. And from the moment that he sits down to eat even though he has a great and a luxurious meal to eat, he complains, complains about the way this is prepared and the way that is prepared and the children are

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<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 15:17.

not only rowdy, but complaining themselves and never happy with anything that they receive and it is because the Father creates this atmosphere in the home. And the wife, she complains and she is not happy in her calling either and there is no love. There is only hatred and it gets so bad that eventually the family realizes it is a waste of time to sit down together and eat. We can never get on with one another at the family table. So let's not do it.

And you children go and sit by the TV and eat this. And I am going to eat before you come home from work and that whole mealtime is lost in the family home because of the hatred that there is. And the problem isn't mealtime, but the problem is there is no love in the home.

That is the one home in Proverbs 15 and the other is a home in which the meal is simple, a dinner of herbs.

What is for supper, mom?

Just some vegetables, a few vegetables that we picked from the garden.

This home doesn't have much. The furniture is old, but adequate. The house is old, but the family fits. It keeps them warm. But there is something right about this home. There is love. Despite the meager meal and despite the small amount of possessions that this family has, the children and the parents. They love to be with one another and they can't wait for suppertime. It is a time of sharing. There is something sacred about their mealtime. It is a time of communion and fellowship and growth together as a family as they share their day and their pleasures with one another instead of destroying.

Instead of the mealtime destroying the home, the mealtime brings growth into the home and promotes love and unity between the members. And God says that is better. That is good. That is a good home. And it is not good because they have less, because they have nothing. There is nothing virtuous about that in itself, but it is good because there is love there. And that love, we have to understand, is a real biblical Christian love and communion between the members of the family. The family is built around the love that is revealed in the gospel.

At the last supper when Jesus is eating with his disciples, promoting communion through that table, promoting love between them by washing their feet and telling them that they should do likewise, Jesus says this.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”<sup>10</sup>

That is the kind of love that is talked about here in Proverbs 15 which is in this home where there is this dinner of herbs. These Christians, these believers in this home know

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<sup>10</sup> John 13:34.



the love of God in the gospel. They experience that love. They express that love in their lives with one another.

In the book of Romans in chapter five we learn what that love is and even what the experience of that love is.

In Romans chapter five and verse eight we read this.

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”<sup>11</sup>

What kind of love is that? It is a self sacrificing love. It is a serving love. It is a love that shows concern for others and interest in them and their problems and difficulties in understanding love. That is the kind of love that God has for us and it cost him. And that love we read in the same chapter “is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”<sup>12</sup>

This is a love that believers know. They have an experiential knowledge of the love of God as they put their faith in Jesus Christ and the gospel and the cross. The cross represents God’s love to us. It is something that we know in our heart of hearts. And then that is the way that Jesus loved us when Jesus says, “As I have loved you, love one another.”

And in the Christian home that is the way parents behave towards children and children towards parents, husbands and wives toward one another. And even though there is barely a thing to eat on the table, that doesn’t matter. That is not important. What is important is that they know the love of God and they show it in their behavior toward one another.

The menu isn’t important. What is important is Christian love and a knowledge of the gospel that promotes that love in hearts and minds of family members.

And so what we need when we gather at our tables isn’t so much a stalled ox and a good meal that will fill us up, but what we need is that which will promote this Christian love between family members. And what will do that? God’s Word.

Certainly the Scriptures tell us that God’s Word is more important than the food that we eat. Job says, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”<sup>13</sup>

And Jesus says to Satan when he is tempted to turn the stones into bread, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 5:8.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 5:5.

<sup>13</sup> Job 23:12.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 4:4.

And if we say that we ought to be sitting together and eating meals together, fellowshiping over food, then certainly we ought to be sitting together and fellowshiping over this spiritual food having devotions and family worship with one another. That fits with the whole idea of the table and of eating with one another at the table. It is a family thing.

In Joshua chapter 24 verse 15 Joshua says, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”<sup>15</sup>

And that word “serve” is worship. And there are some things to recognize from that verse. As for me and my house we will worship the Lord. And the worship of the Lord, he is saying, is something that belongs to the house and the home. It is something that ought to go on in the Christian home. And as a father Joshua is taking responsibility for that.

“As for me and my house,”<sup>16</sup> he is saying, “we will serve the LORD.”<sup>17</sup>

He is making a resolve as a father to see to it that this family worship goes on in his home and in his family.

Now we want to say, to recognize some basic things about this family worship. And the first thing is this, that as far as the content or the elements of family worship are concerned, we ought to be biblical in our worship in the Church of Jesus Christ. We are very careful that our worship is governed by the Word of God so that when we worship him here as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, we worship him in no other way than he has commanded in his Word. And as we do that in the Church certainly that pattern ought to be reflected in the way that we worship God in our homes.

Now that doesn't mean that our family devotions have the official status of a worship service, but it does mean that we ought to seek and strive to be biblical in the way that we worship God in our homes. And that means that we will use the Bible as the primary textbook or instrument for family worship. We will read the Bible with our children. We will teach our children from the Scriptures.

Now there are many different books and so on that people use for devotions and they are not all bad. But we mustn't let them replace the Scriptures. It is safe to say that when they replace the Scriptures in family devotions, the worship of God is on the way out the door in that home. In one generation there is the reading of the Scriptures. In the next generation there is no reading of the Scriptures, but instead just some simple devotional literature. And in the next generation the importance of family worship is lost because God's Word isn't seen as important and central in the worship in the home.

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<sup>15</sup> Joshua 24:15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

So we ought to be reading the Scriptures with our children and in our family worship. And we don't have to do that from cover to cover repeatedly again and again. That is a good practice especially when the children get some years and some understanding. We read the entire Scripture. We become familiar with all of it. But we can read different sections of the Scriptures that the children can understand depending on their age we can adapt our family worship to their level of understanding. So we read the gospels and the narratives of Scripture, the Judges and the Exodus and the book of Genesis and the record of the kings to our children when they are young. Maybe we can even do that concurrently with what they are learning in school or catechism so that we reinforce the same things.

And then the children are learning when they get older. Perhaps then we could read the epistles and talk about eschatology and predestination and some of those other things. But we need to lay the basis when they are young, teach the children at their level.

That must be... and that means our family worship must be a time of instruction, instructional time. Not just simply reading a passage, closing the book, praying. What we do in family worship must get into the minds of the family members. Do we understand what the Scripture is saying here? Let's go and find out what the Scriptures are saying here and talk about it next time we get together. What does that word mean? What happened here in Jerusalem? Where was the kingdom of Assyria? [?] so we understand the Scripture as we read it.

Now we should see that family worship doesn't need to be long. It can be rather brief. It doesn't need to be hours long, not even a half an hour long. We don't need to read all 64 verses of a chapter. We can read a smaller passage and make sure that we understand it. It is not important that it goes on and on every time, but what is important is that it something that is done regularly, that there is some continuity in the instruction that is given in family devotions, that what we learn in and what goes on is intelligible to all the family members.

So it will be a time of brief instruction on Scripture and prayer and perhaps singing.

And this is something that should go on in homes even when there are no children or after the children are gone. We said families that gather together around the meal table and are able to gather with one another around the meal table reflect a love that characterizes all the life of the family. And if husbands and wives can't do this together when they are alone then that will be reflected in the rest of their relationship. Husbands and wives ought to do this. This is a time of bonding. Families that pray together stay together. And this ought to be the continued practice in homes even where there are no children. And certainly, devotions ought to be part of the life of those who are single as well, a regular systematic continuous study of God's Word.

Now we see from Scripture that the duty of family worship falls especially on the fathers. In your families, fathers, John Knox said, "You are the bishops. You are the heads. The people in the home are under your spiritual care. You are the prophet in your own home."

In the book of Ephesians chapter five the apostle Paul points that out with respect to not only husbands toward their wives, but also fathers towards their children.

In Ephesians chapter five and verse 26 the apostle Paul says this.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.<sup>18</sup>

And the husbands love their wives by sanctifying them through reading the Word to them, their duty.

Ephesians six verse four.

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”<sup>19</sup>

And there you have got the idea of a plant again. You have to nurture a plant. Your children are like these olive plants around the sides of your table and you have to give them food from that table that will cause them to grow in the Lord. Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This is the father’s responsibility. It ought to be his resolve with Joshua.

“As for me and my house we will serve the LORD.”<sup>20</sup>

Now perhaps there is a sense of inadequacy. I am not good at this. I don’t know how to do it. Well, one of the things that the Scripture teaches about sanctification and about any good work that we do is that we improve in it. We become better at it the more that we do it. So don’t let your sense of inadequacy stand in the way of your doing it. Do it anyway.

Read the Scripture. Ask the question. Do we know what this means? Pray with your family.

The Scriptures tell us that this family devotion and this family worship ought to be something that really comes quite naturally to the parents. In Deuteronomy chapter six there is another passage which brings before parents this responsibility to be busy teaching their children and we read that in response to the law.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:  
And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of

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<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 5:25-26.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 6:4.

<sup>20</sup> Joshua 24:15.

them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way,  
and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.<sup>21</sup>

And you get the idea there that is something that comes very naturally in the Christian home. It is not just that in the structure of family worship after the mealtime, suddenly the parents are talking to their children about things spiritual. But it flows out of their whole life. They see the world as God's world. They see the events that happen in family life and in church life as coming from God's hand. They see the gifts that we receive, the things that we have as gifts from God. And the parents having that spiritual outlook on things find many opportunities in all of their life with their children to speak to them of the things of God when they rise, when they sit, when they are in the home, when they are out of the home, when they are going by the way, when they are out in God's creation. All opportunities to speak to their children of the things of God and that comes... when that comes naturally in the rest of life, certainly leading in devotions at the supper table isn't seen as such a difficult thing.

So this ought to be characteristic of our whole life with our family, with this set time for instruction.

God blesses that. Out of it comes fruit. Certainly this is a practice that we do in faith. There are difficult things about getting the family together for a meal and for family worship, difficult hurdles to overcome and sacrifices that have to be made as we do that, of our own interest, of our own... other aspects of our life to make this possible. But we do that because we do it in faith, because we know that God will bring fruit on us. He says do it so we do it despite the obstacles in the way.

The blessing is children and families and husbands and wives who know God and his love as they hear that from the gospel and who express that in their life together, that is the blessing.

In Psalm 128, "Blessed is the man..."

And this is the blessing that his children are round about his table like olive plants and God is saying when he says there blessed, he is saying, this is a happy man. That comes out even in the second verse of Psalm 128.

"Happy shalt thou be."<sup>22</sup>

This is the way to true joy in the Christian home and the family that we do this, that we have these meal times with one another where we hear the gospel and the love of God and learn it and learn to express it ourselves toward one another.

And certainly if there are problems in the home if there isn't love like there should be between parents and teenage children, if there isn't love between a husband and a wife

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<sup>21</sup> Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

<sup>22</sup> Psalm 128:2.

like there should be and it is very difficult for them to sit across a table from one another. Certainly this is one practice which will work toward the restoring of love in the home.

One of the first things that a pastor should tell somebody who comes to him with marriage problems, oh, this is what you need to do. Have your meal times together and pray together and read the Word of God together and let it speak to you.

The teenage children, too. Sit at the table. Let there be conversation and understanding between parents and children, fellowship over God's Word how God's Word speaks to our life and the circumstances of our life. We should do this. It is a gift from God that we have a table in our home. It is a gift from God that we have children to sit around the table. It is a gift from God that we have a husband or a wife to eat with. It is a gift from God that we have food before us. It is a gift from God that we have the Scriptures which we can open and read together for spiritual food. Let us not despise these gifts of God, but let's see them as good as God himself calls them good. And let's use them. And let's continue this practice for the good of the Church. Strong home and a strong Church and God's blessings will be on us. Amen.

*Father in heaven, we thank thee for the mealtimes that we have and for the tables that we have and for the love that there is shed abroad in our hearts through the gospel and the Spirit and that we can express this ourselves in our covenant homes and life together. We pray that we may see the importance of this, continue it ourselves with our children and with one another as husband and wife and that through this thou wilt continue to bless our homes in the Church. We pray it for Jesus' sake. Amen.*