

Text: Deut.11:1-7, 18-21

My purpose for this message: Help husbands and dads establish prayer as a normal way of life at home.

Delivered: Nov. 27, 2005 @ KEFC

Making [audible] Prayer Normal at Home

PRAY.

How many of you have seen Sight & Sound's "Noah?" Amazing production wasn't it? The theatrics, the animals, the scope of the props, the staging, it was riveting.

Do you remember Noah speaking to God in front of his wife and children as if God was a member of the family? Conversation with his wife seamlessly shifted to conversation with his God. There was little difference between prayer and talk with family members. I remember thinking "If this is anything like what it was like to be part of Noah's family, prayer was common and natural in the household; Noah made it normal. He urged the family to cry out to God, urged them to give thanks to God. The family thought it was normal."

I was convicted. Growing up, I was not accustomed to my parents praying with me. We didn't come together as a family to pray about things. While we've done better at *our* home than my childhood experience, it's certainly not been as "prayer-common" as Noah's might have been. And it's only been in recent years that my wife and I have begun to pray together regularly (by the way, a survey done by FamilyLife Ministries suggested less than 8% of Christian husbands & wives do this).

The title of my message today is "Making Prayer Normal at Home." In *your* Christian home, is prayer normal? Or occasional? Or rare? Or missing? What God has to say to us today can apply to anyone, but I'm especially eager to get the attention of husbands and dads who still have children at home. Moms, we'll need your help. And grandparents, you too can make a great contribution. Our children learned some things about prayer when they stayed overnight at Betty's parents and about 4:30 in the morning would awaken to the sound of grandma and grandpa praying for every member of the family.

But God holds us fathers accountable for our children's spiritual development and health. We are the shepherds of our wives and children (1 Cor.11:3, Eph.5:22-24). God holds us especially liable for the spiritual health of our homes. God's asking *us* to take the initiative in prayer so we can leave a legacy for our children no amount of inheritance money ever can.

1. **Assessment:** How would your children expect you to react to the following...
 - a. Calamity (death, serious illness, loss of job)?
 - Act like nothing happened
 - Cry
 - Yell, scream
 - Get moody & quiet
 - Become irritable
 - Go find someone to be with
 - Pray
 - b. Needs?
 - Physical, ailment: ignore it, immediately call the doctor, or immediately pray?
 - Financial: charge it, borrow it, or get an additional source of money—say, a second job, or pray?

- Something like a timing need (let's say you have an important business presentation to make in several days but the early chatter about an impending funeral sounds like your aunt will be buried about the time you're wrapping things up), will your children expect you to work the phones, cancel appointments, or pray first?
 - Emotional: will your children be more familiar with you shaking out pills from your bottle, or prayer from your heart?
- c. Wants
 - i. A new bike
 - ii. A little sister
 - iii. A friend to become a Christian
- d. Blessings
 - Something great happens; do you whoop and holler, take everyone out for dinner, or is prayer of thanksgiving what's your children have come to expect?

Don't misunderstand me, we may have *multiple* reactions to calamity: probably call somebody on the phone, cry, *and* pray.

If I'm sick enough, even though I pray, I'm going to make a doctor appointment. You may pray and *still* get a second job to help with the finances.

Or pray and *still* take you meds. Again, what I want us to ask ourselves this morning is, in our home, is prayer normal, occasional, rare, or missing altogether?

READ Deut.11:1-7, 18-21.

These verses probably sound familiar because we read them at P/C dedications. Parents, day in—day out, in the house, working in the fields, walking down the road, whether at dawn or dusk, tell your children about the things of God, show them the things of God, point them to the things of God. Instead of just imprinting their young minds with the latest TV shows, superior basketball skills, the latest fashions, and so on, imprint God on their minds.

Remember parents, what we do in moderation, our children will likely do in excess. Wouldn't prayer be something great thing for them to OD on? But for sure, once they're on their own, they're going to be inclined to mimic us. *They'll* likely respond the way we did to challenges, blessings, problems, needs. And because the *day* they are on their own appears so fast, we don't have all that much time to create patterns. One of the painful realizations that's hit me now that we have an empty nest, is that as far as my *children* are concerned, it no longer matters what I do or don't do. Their patterns have been *as* affected by *my* patterns, as they're going to be. Decisions I make today about what I do or what I avoid doing, will no longer have any impact on Chalon, Travis, or Cameron's patterns. It's too late for me to impact them any further in the matter of prayer; but not for some of you. How do you make prayer normal at home?

2. Suggestions

- a. Mealtimes: If you currently just pray silently, change that. Dad, tell the family that "starting tonight, we're going to pray out loud and I'm going to begin. Later you'll all share in leading." Then begin. Make your prayer brief and to the point; you're giving thanks for the food, not taking a tour of the mission field. Then after a month or two of modeling, have your wife and children take turns with you.

This is a great opportunity to make praying out loud normal for their children (#1 reason people avoid prayer meetings is that they are too shy to pray out loud). It's also good to have your toddlers learn the "God is Great" prayer or another, but do not let that rote prayer be the extent of your mealtime prayer. Have the little one pray, and then follow it up. As soon as possible—through your modeling and coaching—have that young child praying in their own words.

- b. Trips: Before pulling out, call family together and pray for safety, good weather, kind treatment of each other in the back seat (this can double as a lecture!), as well as thanking God for the opportunity, the money, and the time off to have this vacation together. Then together, thank God when you return, for answers.
- c. Holidays:
 - i. Easter: Before hunting for eggs, call children together and thank God for Jesus and the empty tomb (some parts of Europe where people paint eggs, they always paint one red to symbolize Jesus' blood. Also, the egg is a reminder that when it opens, hatches a chicken, so the tomb opened and Jesus emerged, alive!)
 - ii. Christmas: Before opening presents, perhaps read the Christmas story from Luke 2, then thank God for sending the best gift of all: His Son.
 - iii. Thanksgiving: Have the family turn off the TV at halftime and have each family member thank God for some things; sentence or two prayers (nothing extra spiritual about making things long and drawn out).
 - iv. New Year's Day: Thank God for the past year and it's blessings, and ask God to lead each of you in the coming year, that you might be used for his glory, that you might find great joy in Him, etc.
 - v. Memorial Day: Before you hang your flag out, or before you dig into the burgers, thank God for the freedom you enjoy in the USA.
- d. Need: Whether the need is for a child to do well on an difficult test, serious—or not so serious—sickness in family, some financial need, or a broken romance, pray with the person(s) as soon as they make it known. Make this SOP for your family and you will leave a legacy in the households of the next generation.
- e. Wants: If you or a family member has a desire (not just a need but a want) that is not evil, ask God for it out loud. Often. That way if and when God says "yes," there will be more people to rejoice in it, to praise God for it, and He will receive even greater glory as a result.
- f. Salvation of friends: Whether it is a friend of one of your children, a family member, a co-worker, find opportunities [before school, during devotional time, etc.] to continually plead with God for the person's salvation.
- g. Blessings: For any wonderful thing that happens (family marriage reconciled, dad or mom got a big raise; weather turns out perfect for vacation when it was supposed to be awful, test wasn't so bad

after all, engagement, college scholarship...), call family together to rejoice and thank God for His faithfulness, His goodness.

Concl:

Daryl Heald grew up in the home of a veterinarian. Then someone led his dad and mom to Christ. In the days ahead, each of the children came to Christ too. While Daryl was in elementary school, his father sold his vet business to become a fulltime missionary with the Navigators. The children saw that as a normal next step in their parents' spiritual journey. Then one Sunday Daryl's father called the family together for a special prayer meeting.

"Boys, our bank account is empty. We have no money. Let's call on the Lord to see what He'll do about that." The family all prayed.

Later in the afternoon, the phone rang. The relative on the other end had been skeptical when Daryl's dad decided to sell his veterinary practice. He was very curt and to the point, "One of my investments did extremely well. So well my accountant tells me I have to get rid of some money. I still don't understand why you left a good job to become a missionary but that's neither here nor there now. I'm going to be sending you a check for \$10,000."

You can imagine what kind of impact that had on a young boy. "This is our God. This is prayer at work. This is the God we serve."