

# Encouraging Christian Education in the Home

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About three hundred years ago a young British clergyman named Richard Baxter was called to serve the small carpet weaving town of Kidderminster. Few fields could be more discouraging. The impoverished people of Kidderminster were noted for their ignorance and laxity in morals. Previous worldly-minded pastors had caused the little congregation to dwindle.

During the nineteen years Baxter served this humble field a spiritual renewal swept this town. An empty church had to be expanded several times to accommodate the crowds. The parish grew in size to over eight hundred families. Before Baxter arrived few homes read the Bible. When he left, there were only a few homes on every street where the Bible was not regularly read.

Why was Richard Baxter so successful in such an unpromising field? Modern church growth experts would flock to Kidderminster to discover the answer. Did free balloons and a good busing program bring the crowd? Did people throng to hear a famous choir or soloist? Did Baxter offer the promise of a nameplate beneath a piece of glass in a multimillion dollar cathedral? Richard Baxter would have none of this. He went, straight and simple, to the homes of the people and taught them to read the Bible in the home. God's promise of success through the Word held true. "(My Word) shall not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

The purpose of this paper is to help the pastors of this conference do more to encourage Christian education in the homes of their people. The condition of many homes is similar to the condition of the homes in Kidderminster. The Bible is not being read regularly. The percentage of Bible-based evangelical Lutherans who read the Bible in the home is disproportionately low. It is my prayer that this paper and the ensuing discussion will be used by the Holy Spirit to help us repair the home altars which have been broken down.

The first section of this paper will establish a Scriptural foundation for Christian education in the home. In the second section we will look at how the Bible was used in the home during certain periods of history. The third section will deal with the practical aspects of educating children in the home, through the Word of God. The fourth section will offer suggestions to help pastors encourage Christian education in the homes of their members.

## **A Scriptural Basis For Christian Education In The Home**

Holy Scripture contains over three hundred references to the family and its members.<sup>i</sup> Surely we can find passages that speak directly to our topic from an exhaustive supply of information on the family.

An overview of the Old Testament will quickly convince us that God's way of educating His people was primarily through the home. The Lord used teaching in the home to preserve the promise of a Savior. To help the ancients in the work of passing on the promise, the Lord gave them extra long lives. Ancient patriarchs were able to teach scores of descendents the good news that a Savior was coming who would declare unrighteous people righteous so they could again be accepted by a holy and righteous God. Noah was such a preacher of righteousness (II Peter 2:5). He faithfully led his family to worship the true God. (Genesis 8:20).

Abraham was another patriarch concerned about teaching the Word of God in his home. The pattern in his life was “pitch a tent, dig a well and build an altar.” The Lord had these complimentary words to say about this family man: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him. (Genesis 18: 19)”

Christian education in the home was also present in the family of Jacob. Seventeen year old Joseph did not give in to the alluring vices of Egypt and the advances of Potiphar’s wife, What gave him the strength to say: “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? (Genesis 39:9)” Was it not a deeply rooted love for the Lord and an appreciation of God’s grace which would send a Savior? He learned this in the home of his father Jacob and his mother Rachel.

What kept Moses faithful to the Lord when he was called to the home of Pharaoh’s daughter? Hebrew 11:24-26 says of Moses: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” Was it not faithful instruction in the home, even in the earliest years, which led Moses to value the kingdom of Christ more than the wealth and power in Egypt?

God’s plan to keep the nation of Israel faithful to Himself involved an intensive program of education in the home. God gives the details of the remarkable plan in Deuteronomy 6: “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you, lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (6:6-9)” The Hebrew word for teach (*shanan*) is used in the *piel* to show how the Lord expected the people of Israel to be totally dedicated to teaching the Word of God in the home. Teaching was to take place whenever the opportunity arose. The Word was to stand out in their lives as if it were tied to their foreheads, nailed to the door posts and written on the hands. Alfred Edersheim said, “From the first days of its existence, a religious atmosphere surrounded the child of Jewish parents.”<sup>ii</sup>

A careful study of the Old Covenant or Sinaitic Covenant will show that the Lord depended on home education to keep this covenant alive in the hearts of His people. The multitude of kosher laws, sacrifices and Sabbath regulations would lead even the least curious child to ask its father why these laws had to be kept. Such questions would give the father the opportunity to explain how God had chosen them as His people and given them the special function of preserving the promise of a Savior until Jesus was born (Galatians 3:24). The burdens of the Old Covenant would drive the father to carry out his function as a priest in the home as he showed his children the purpose of the covenant.

It must be emphatically stated that the foundation of saving faith in every true Israelite was not the Sinaitic Covenant but rather the Abrahamic covenant of grace. The real heart of education in the Jewish home was centered in the grace of God which was guaranteed by the righteousness of a future Savior. True sons of Abraham followed in the patriarch’s footsteps and believed the promise through which they were credited with the righteousness of Christ (Genesis 15:6). When members of a family failed to keep the Sinaitic Covenant (sanctification) the father would then have to remind them of God’s grace guaranteed in the covenant to Abraham

(justification). Likewise today, the foundation of Christian education in the home is what God has done for us, not what we are to do for the Lord.

Where ever God's plan for educating children in the home was carefully followed blessings abounded. God told His people: "In all places where I record My name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee. (Ecclesiastes 20:24)" Joshua heard the Lord tell him; "This book of the law shall not depart from thy mouth. (Joshua 1:8)" Joshua considered use of the Word of God in his home the number one objective as he entered the promise land. He said: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)"

Not all were faithful home educators as Joshua. At the end of the book of Judges we hear that God's plan was forgotten when everyone returned to his tribe and family, and did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25) Some fathers even taught their children to worship Baal (Jr. 9:14). But there were always the shining lights like Manoah and his wife who were happy to assume the privilege of teaching their children. After the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Samson, these model parents humbly prayed: "Teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. (Judges 13:8)"

Psalms and Proverbs offer valuable advice on teaching children in the home. Psalm 78 sets forth this goal for every Christian parent: "We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generations yet to come, the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He hath done." The Holy Spirit fills Christian parents to proclaim the wonderful works of God to their children, just as Peter preached to the crowd on Pentecost. Faithful proclamation of God's grace to our children is a spiritual gift more valuable than a thousand tongues or special abilities to heal people. Psalm 127 reminds us that children are a gift from the Lord: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord." God's gifts need special care, and that special care begins with teaching them about the Lord who created them and wants them as his children.

Proverbs tells us; "Train up a child in the way that he should go and when is old, he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)" The child who receives Bible training in the home will have this with him for as long as he lives. C.F.W. Walther once told his students how valuable the training he had received from his father was in later life. Walther told how he had fallen under the influence of the pietists who created uncertainty in his heart by turning his faith inward toward himself. He said that it was the early training he had received at home which emphasized the Bible as true, which, helped him to turn to the Word and away from his subjective feelings. The book of Proverbs also offers help on disciplining children when it says: "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son, but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes. (Proverbs 13:24)"

Turning to the New Testament we discover that our Savior's example encourages the Word of God in the home. Jesus often went into the homes of friends, publicans and even Pharisees to teach the people about Himself. There is the devout example of Mary who eagerly listened to the Lord teach her in her home. She is a reminder of the one thing needful in every Christian home. The home of Zacchaeus became a haven of comfort for conscience torn sinners.

In the book of Acts we see that mission work often began in the homes of people. In Acts 2, we hear that the early Christians continued breaking bread from house to house. In Acts 16, the households of Lydia and the jailor of Philippi were blessed by the Word and by Baptism. In Acts 20:20, Paul says that he taught "publicly from house to house." Timothy learned the Scriptures in the home from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (II Timothy 1:5), The people at Colosse were encouraged to let the Word of Christ dwell in them richly, (Colossians

3:16). The Greek word for dwell is *enoikeo*, which literally means live or dwell in the home. The Word of God is to live in the home, not sparingly but richly.

Good advice for every Christian father is given in Ephesians 6:4: “And ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” The New International Version *parogizo* (provoke) as “exasperate.” According to Jay Adams, children can be exasperated by under disciplining, over disciplining, and inconsistent disciplining by the parents. A Christian father will want to nurture or (*ektrepho*) his child like a tender plant. Discipline and careful instruction (*nouthesia*) will help a child build on Christ the solid rock. The gates of hell will not prevail against the child. The father’s foremost prayer will be answered when he sees his son or daughter before the throne of Lamb of God.

Let Scripture convince us that Christian education in the home is not an option but a requirement every redeemed parent will gladly follow. Let Scripture also convince the pastor that part of the work of his ministry should include the encouraging of the use of the Word of God in the home.

### **An Historical Overview Of Christian Education In The Homes Of People**

A brief look at the pertinent events in history will show that where a deep appreciation of God’s grace was evident, there Christian education also flourished in the home. A strong church results from the Word of God in the home.

It appears that the early Christian church held services and Bible readings in the homes of people. Already mentioned was the breaking of bread from house to house (Acts 2) and the Word in the homes of Lydia and the jailor (Acts 16). In his greeting to Philemon, Paul included a few to the “church in his house.” Such home worship by a group of Christians would help encourage the use of God’s Word in the family setting.

Then the church began to change. It became a more institutionalized and less dependent on the home as a place of worship and study in the Word. Opposition gradually developed against the Bible in the home as the clergy became more protective of its power. Finally the Roman Church taught that the Bible need not, in fact should not, be read by the people. Gross darkness quickly followed the decline of the Word in the home.

It should be noted that the first six centuries of the church saw many pious church fathers encourage the Word of God in the home. St. Augustine pressed for more translations of the Bible. Gregory the Great rebuked his people for not reading their Bibles. Gregory the First recommended it without limitation.<sup>iii</sup> But as the Roman Church departed more and more from Scripture, it placed greater restrictions on the use of the Bible in the home. Gregory VII (1074-1085) feared that the Bible might be understood by the lay people. In 1199 the notorious Innocent III prohibited the private use of and, possession of the Bible. One wonders if the Dark Ages would have occurred if the Bible had remained in the homes.

During the Dark Ages there were occasional voices who called out from Zion’s wall encouraging people to read the Bible. The despised Waldensians were avid Bible readers and publishers who committed whole books of the Bible to memory. John Wycliffe of England challenged the authority of the pope by offering the people a translation of the Bible in their own language. Fearlessly he issued the challenge that when his translation was completed and published, the plowman in England would know more about the Bible than the pope in Rome. After dying from palsy, John Wycliffe was not allowed to rest in peace. His body was exhumed

and burnt. Its ashes were cast into a river. Such was the venomous treatment for a man who wanted the Bible in the homes of people.

These outrages against the Bible were of course inspired and engineered by Satan. History can teach us that Satan tries desperately to separate people from the Word of God. He knows that the bride of Christ can be robbed of her glory and strength if the Bible is taken from her. Like a termite that detests light, Satan cannot endure the crippling light of “Thus saith the Lord.

The triumphant victory of Christ’s church which we see in the Revelation of St. John is always connected to His Word. The Book of Revelation, often neglected, sometimes feared, yet richly comforting, carries on its pages the promise that there will always be messengers to carry the everlasting gospel (Revelation .14:6). In Martin Luther we have one of the champions the Lord raised up to re-establish salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ. The Reformer was also a champion of Christian education in the home. In Luther we clearly see how a deep appreciation of God’s grace led to a desire to have the Bible used in the home.

Luther’s superlative translation of the Bible is evidence of his desire to put the Bible into the home. His first edition of the New Testament was quickly sold out. It was carried on angel’s wings into the homes and hearts of the German people. Here is what Luther said about personal Bible reading: “You should diligently learn the Word of God and by no means imagine that you know it. Let him who is able to read, take a psalm in the morning, or some chapter of Scripture, and study it for a while. This is what I do. When I get up in the morning, I pray and recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer with the children, adding one of the psalms.”<sup>iv</sup>

Luther showed his love for Christian education in the home by placing the truths of Scripture into a simple catechism which the head of the house could use to instruct his children. He prefaced the parts of the catechism with the words: “As the head of the family should teach them in all simplicity to his household.” Luther wanted fathers to teach their children the wonderful works of God in the home. The home life of Martin Luther is a model for every Christian family. When he was no longer able to preach publicly because of ill health, Luther prepared sermonettes of “Hauspredigten” for his home. He said, “I preach in my home, because of the office I hold and for my conscience, simply because as a family father, it is my duty to preach to my family.” These family sermons were recorded. They are rich in comfort because of their simple exposition of the Scriptures.

In a popular booklet, “A Simple Way to Pray,” Luther helped his barber, Peter Beskendorf, with his family responsibilities. He showed his barber how the father of a family is instructed by God to lead his family in prayer.

Luther’s love for leading his own children into the truths of the Bible can be seen in the songs he wrote and sung for his home. Christmas was always a happy time in the Luther home. Let the words of this Christmas carol show us how determined Luther was to impart truths of the Scripture into the hearts of his children.

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,  
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,  
Within my heart, that it may be  
A quiet chamber kept for Thee. (TLH # 85)

Other examples from history can be cited to show how the Word of God was encouraged in the homes of people. The introduction of this paper brought our attention to Richard Baxter, a Puritan minister in the seventeenth century who helped his people read the Bible. In spite of

lingering illness which made him live on the brink of death, Baxter wrote the equivalent of seventy volumes (twenty-four million words and with a quill pen). He was hailed as one of the great preachers of his day. Yet, in spite of his prolific writing, some of it on horseback, he was able to take the time to personally visit the eight hundred families of his parish regularly. He devoted two days a week to visitation. His book, *The Reformed Pastor*, urges the pastors of his day to personally visit their people and encourage them in the Word.

A study of the Sunday school movement in England reveals that there were some bishops who feared that the Sunday school might usurp authority from the home. An American Episcopalian bishop had this to say about the decline of education in the home: "In the mother church (of England), when the Sunday school was begun, there was no room for them and no need of them as religious organizations. Every parent, himself religious, took care to instruct his children in religion."<sup>v</sup> In fairness to the Sunday school movement it should be said that many churches were deficient in teaching children and helping parents instruct children in the home.

History shows that there were saints in the past who faithfully read the Bible in the home. Richard Mounce says: "The picture that comes before our mind is that of the great saint of yesteryear rising before dawn for an uninterrupted period of prayer and insisting that the family go without breakfast rather than miss morning devotions."<sup>vi</sup>

Jumping another century in history we come to the efforts of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to encourage Christian education in the home. In the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries we see the presses of Concordia Publishing House pounding out tons of quality Christian literature which could be used in the home. The sermons of C.F.W. Walther were published so fathers could read them to the family. Devotional books were published for use in the home, such as the comforting *Brosamlein* by Zorn. A popular commentary of the Bible written by P.E. Kretzmann was published not only for pastors and teachers, but also for use in the home. Even Luther's works were published in a popular edition so that lay people might make use of them.

Hilton C. Oswald said this about the popular edition of Luther's works: "The earliest German edition (of Luther's works) in America was a popular edition produced for the nonprofessional reader. One of the first invitations for laymen to subscribe to the St. Louis edition, printed in *Der Lutheraner*, read, 'A large number of our brethren in the Free Church in Germany—miners with slender means who have large families but small homes and very little furniture—do own an edition of Luther's works...' Luther is and remains the greatest and best teacher of the church after the prophets and apostles."<sup>vii</sup>

More recently we have seen the Northwestern Publishing House of our synod emerge to provide quality devotional materials and educational books for the home. We can thank God's grace which has moved the hearts of our people to pursue the writing of material for the royal priesthood to which our synod is responsible. There is an awakening desire to provide instructional materials people can understand in today's language. Interest is strong in Bible translations which will help bring the Word of God into the homes of our people. *Meditations* and the many new publications from Northwestern Publishing House will help us bring the Word of God into the home and teach parents to teach their children.

History can teach us much about Christian education in the home. Where the church has been strong and appreciative of God's grace, there has also been present a solid commitment to the Word in the home. From history we can also learn that one of Satan's most vicious attacks on the church is unleashed on the home when he tries to rob it of the Bible.

## The Practical Aspects Of Christian Education In The Home

After establishing a scriptural and historical basis for Christian education in the home, we are ready to consider some practical ways to bring the Word of God into the home. First we should realize from a practical viewpoint how important the home is for educating the child.

The Lord has designed the home as the primary learning center for a child. 16% of a child's time is spent in school, 1% in church and 83 % at home. "The home exerts the strongest and most effectual influence on the child, it does this because the influence is continuous. There is no institution that can take the place of the family, and there is no influence so effective and telling as the influence of the home."<sup>viii</sup>

It is obvious that the teaching of God's Word in the home, or the lack of it will have a powerful influence on a child. Vieth says: "No where else may religion be taught so easily and with such abiding results as in the home."<sup>ix</sup> Another educator says, "Education goes on in every home and all the time, and that of the most abiding and effective kind. Members of the family are teaching each other constantly. The children inevitably learn from the parents, and the parents pass on to the children practically all that they have known and experienced in human living. Religion, or the lack of religion, is unavoidably passed on to the children. The home was the first school and continues to be the most vital and real school in the lives of human beings."<sup>x</sup>

The Word of God can be brought into the home formally and informally. Most of the religious education which takes place in the home is done in an informal way. In Deuteronomy, the Lord suggests that we make use of every opportunity to teach diligently, walking, sitting, talking, rising and whenever possible. (6:7) Gloria Gaither, in a recent article in *Moody Monthly*, suggests that parents learn to recognize teachable moments in the life of the child. She says: "Children are learners, They learn everywhere. They learn sitting down and standing up. They learn wide awake and half asleep. They take in knowledge through their eyes, ears, nose, taste buds, fingers, feet and skin. They learn while their parents are teaching and they learn when the parents hope they are not teaching. They learn from hot, cold, work, play, comfort and discomfort...No knobs, turn off their little minds." From this she concludes that every moment with a child can be a teachable moment in which he or she can learn from the Word of God.<sup>xi</sup>

These teachable moments are then the heart of informal education in the home. A parent can be prepared for these teachable moments as Gloria Gaither writes: "If I can spend the day's first moments alone with God, girding my mind with silence, feasting on the Word, listening, I am ready to greet the day and my family. God and I have a head start on them."<sup>xii</sup>

The Christian parent can prepare for these teachable moments of informal education by growing in grace and growing through personal reading of the Bible. Daily renewal in the Word will help the parent be prepared for these sometimes difficult teachable moments. A spirit of praise and appreciation of God's grace is necessary in the life of a Christian parent. The religion of children is taught and it is caught. A grumbling and complaining parent who constantly lives as if Jesus had never risen from the dead gives a bad example to the child, detracting from the triumphant victory which is ours in Christ. Let the children see a love for the Lord reflected in their mom and dad. Such love comes from the daily appreciation of the basics of our Christian faith, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save of whom I am chief" (I Timothy 1:15). God's Word personally read by Mom and Dad will daily renew them for their work as parents. The Word of God will also give them the right Words to speak at the right time.

What are some teachable moments which a parent can anticipate and prepare for? One of the best opportunities to teach the central doctrine of the Bible, justification by faith, arises when

a child has sinned. Satan would love to have a parent moralize after a child has said “I am sorry.” From the Word, the parents will learn to announce forgiveness to the penitent child just as Jesus did when He cried from the cross, “It is finished.” They will thrill to tell their children about the robe of His righteousness.

Other teachable moments will arise in the life of a child which need a good application of the Word. When death strikes the home, or near the home, the well-grounded parent will be able to draw from a wealth of promises in the Bible which assure the Christian that death is but a sleep. Such teaching will never be forgotten. How sad though when parents fail to clearly show this hope from the Bible. When tragedy strikes the home the parent who is daily renewed will not find it difficult to say with confidence, “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Another teachable moment might be the family outing, hiking, fishing or a camping trip. The father can use these contacts with nature to show the children how wonderfully God has made everything, thus offering the children proof His grace and giving them positive evidence that the theory of evolution is wrong. Parents might even study some books of nature to learn more about God’s glory in creation.

Bedtime provides the parent with golden opportunities to apply the Word to the problems a child is likely to unburden at this time. A parent will actually see questions as an opportunity to teach, rather than an annoyance. Many more teachable moments could be added to this list. Bible classes, sermons, books, and above all the Bible itself will help the parent handle the informal education of the child.

The formal aspects of Christian education in the home need to be mentioned. By formal education we mean home devotions or home Bible reading. A Christian man and wife will not wait until they have children to begin home devotions. Let the young couple learn to sit down together, close to each other, and read God’s Word together. Each could read several verses and pause for discussion until an entire chapter is read. Several translations could be used alternately. Bible dictionaries or introductory notes from commentaries could be read at the beginning of each book. A daily Bible reading schedule is helpful such as our synod published during the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

After the young couple has children, efforts will need to be made to bring the Word of God to the little children. Stories from the Bible and picture books can be read to the little ones. Religious pictures can be hung in the room to reinforce the teaching from the Bible. As the little ones grow it will be necessary for the family to gather for the reading of lessons from Scripture. Larry Christenson tells of many years when Bible lessons simply didn’t seem to reach the children. Then he began using books that tell the lessons in a lively way.<sup>xiii</sup> A father might also add his comments to a Bible lesson that is read and perhaps ask the children questions about the lesson aimed at applying the lesson. Little children can develop a loathing for God’s Word if the Bible is read chapter after chapter with little comment or questioning.

What shall the father do when the children get older and are able to read by themselves? Rather than have the father do all the reading, I would suggest that each child be given a Bible so that they might read sections and follow along as the Word is being read. This simple procedure might eliminate the complaint which I have heard, that the children seem to lose interest as the father reads. As each child and the parents read sections, pauses could be made for questions and comments. Once again a commentary such as Kretzmann could help the father interpret passages for the children.



Excellent devotional materials may be used such as *Meditations*. Lives of people could be read to add to the Bible reading. All devotional materials should supplement and not supplant the reading of the Bible in the home.

Consider some of the blessings which comes to the home in which the Word of God is read and also taught informally. These blessings can motivate us to encourage the Word of God in the home.

1. The Bible makes the family wise unto salvation. (II Timothy 3:15) If parents could have one passing glimpse of the horrors of hell, they would become quickly convinced that they must do whatever possible to teach their children about the way to salvation. Through the Bible a child can become convinced that his righteousness is unacceptable to God and his hope can only be built on the righteousness of Christ.

2. The Bible helps preserve the family in saving faith. Jesus said: "MY sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (John 10:27,28)" Parents have prayed their children will not lose their faith. When lambs hear the voice of the Shepherd in His Word, they will not be plucked from His hand. Perseverance in faith is contingent upon hearing the Word, and that can be heard effectively in the home.

3. The Bible produces families that are not ashamed to live for Jesus. In homes where the Word is used, children will develop a deep appreciation of God's grace. Serving will be a blessing not a burden. The Word will give the certainty of God's grace and the hope of eternal life. With that comes a desire to flee sin and seek others for the Savior. Oscar Feucht says this about the home where God's Word rules the hearts: "The Christian home itself is an exhibit for Jesus. The family that not only works and plays together, but also worships and prays together witnesses to its faith... Every day is lived in faith that the heavenly Father will provide for all our needs, that Jesus will forgive all our sins, that heaven will be our eternal home. The children of such a home will rise up to bless their God-fearing parents (Proverbs 31) and the whole community will feel its beneficent influence."<sup>xiv</sup>

4. The Bible in the home equips the family to stand up against the false teaching surrounding us. In these last days, "many false prophets shall rise up and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11). With the devil masquerading as an angel of light and aping Christ's kingdom a solid foundation is necessary to test the spirits whether they are from God. With a better knowledge of the Word, our families will become convinced that our Lutheran church is teaching God's Word the way it should be taught. So often our Lutherans are intimidated by Christians from other denominations who seem to be more energetic about what they believe.

5. The Bible in the home will enable members of the family to comfort and help each other in time of tragedy or death. Yes, there will be sorrow, but in the midst of the sorrow, the family well-grounded in the Word will be able to lift itself up and support itself with the unfailing promises of God which it has come to know so well.

In view of these five blessings and there are more, we can see how important it is for a pastor to be encouraging the Word of God in the homes of his people. Satan knows how valuable Bible reading in the home is. Desperately he works to turn the potentially fertile ground for the operation of the Word into a desert wasteland. Luther said that where God builds a church, the devil builds his chapel nearby. We might say that where God builds a Christian home through His word, the devil builds his shack nearby, that he might rob it of that precious incorruptible seed.

Under our consideration of practical aspects of Christian education in the home, we should consider some of the major obstacles Satan presents to block the family from using the Word. We have all experienced how a lack of time can rob us of time for the Word. C. Munding says: “With the coming of the machine in the modern factory system, first the working man was taken out of the home, then the working child, and now the working woman. Father and Mother and the children do not live and work and play together as they did in olden times.”<sup>xv</sup> He goes on to say, “It is impossible for a mother to be occupied all day away from the home by a strenuous job and then come home to adequately care for her household duties and especially spend time with her children.”<sup>xvi</sup> Time is needed by the mother to make the most of her teachable moments.

The schedule of the modern American family during a typical day leaves little time for the Word of God. Family members are continually running in and out of the house on the way to activities outside the walls of the home. The home takes on the appearance of a gas station where the family members fuel up, clean up and then rest, only to renew themselves for more activities beyond home. The time left for operation of Christ’s kingdom through the Word is often only minimal.

Satan has other obstacles to place in front of the Word of God in the home. Television is used to eat up the little crumbs of time that remain for the family. Most Christian families do not realize how much they watch TV. If a note pad were placed above the set and viewing time were carefully recorded, most Christians would admit to being guilty of video gluttony. The average spends twenty hours a week watching TV. The average set is on eight to nine hours a day. The graduating high school senior will have watched 15,000 hours of TV.

TV can have a bad effect upon on spiritual life, which should not be minimized or rationalized. The mind-bending power of television can be seen in the programs which can teach the little ones to count, recognize colors, and say the alphabet. If all input from TV were harmless, there would be little danger. Much viewing today goes contrary to what the Bible teaches. Should we be doing more to warn about the dangers of TV? Have we learned to control TV watching in our lives or is it still controlling us and our families?

Another obstacle Satan uses to block the use of the Word in the home is the fallacious thinking that the church has the primary responsibility for educating the children. Parents are often willing to relegate the training of their children to the church or the school. Vieth says, “The home has abdicated as a purposeful Christian teacher. Most, if not all of the responsibility has been shifted to the church. The Sunday school was never intended to supersede the home as a teacher of religion.”<sup>xvii</sup>

We certainly face this danger in our synod with our excellent system of Christian education. Guidance is needed from the churches and schools to help parents continue educating their children in the home. The faith of our children is under the risk of being institutionalized. One shudders with horror at how Satan can use the excellent system of education we possess in to undermine the use of the Word of God in the home. As we shall see later there are ways the school and the church can help parents overcome this obstacle.

Let the Christian pastor familiarize himself with all the practical aspects of Christian education in the home. Let him observe how God’s Word in the home has helped families in his parish. Let him study to learn practical ways to help people with devotions and home Bible reading. It is easy to complain about the lack of Bible reading among people, but it is better to help parents fulfill their responsibilities. This brings us to the final point of our paper.

## **The Pastor's Responsibility In Encouraging Christian Education In The Home**

God has charged every pastor with the responsibility of feeding His flock and equipping His saints for the work of the ministry. The pastor who sees the flock of God feeding only from his hand is missing an important part of his work. The Lord has called him to help people feed themselves from the Word and grow in grace within the wall of their own homes, not just within the walls of the church.

A right understanding of the royal priesthood of all believers is necessary for encouraging the Word in the home. Parents are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Their primary area of service is not in the church but in the home. Luther understood this. A properly trained father can do more to train his children than a pastor. Thus a pastor will think of feeding his flock by helping the flock to feed itself. This will produce better witnesses, better stewards of His gifts and mysteries, and better listeners of His Word.

How can the pastor help the flock feed itself in the home? First, it seems that the pastor's own example to his flock is very important. If he takes the lead, like Joshua, and makes faithful use of the Word in his home, his example will serve to lead the congregation.

A pastor's busy schedule will therefore include time with his family. It takes time with the family to make use of the teachable moments which we mentioned earlier. Time spent with the family will actually help and not hinder our work in the congregation.

If the pastor does not spend time with his family, his children may develop a loathing for the Word and for the Lord. Consider the example of one 3-year-old boy who resented that his father was such a busy member of the church, there was little time for him. One night as the father prepared to leave for another meeting, the little fellow blurted out with tears in his eyes, "I hate Jesus, Daddy." Shocked the father asked, "Son why did you say that?" The boy replied, "Because He always takes you away from us and we never see you." Care needs to be taken so that our children do not resent the many hours devoted to the flock entrusted to our care.

A pastor will also seek to help his wife grow in her knowledge of the Word of God and in appreciation of His grace. A pastor's wife needs to hear more than the problems of the day. She can be renewed with a comforting thought from Scripture which was discovered or the special joys of that day. Her problems need an application of the soothing Word, just as the problems of the members. Here is what one Christian wife said of her husband who was a professor at a Christian College: "I am concerned for my own spiritual life, but even more, I am concerned for the sons God has placed in our care. Yes, I have devotions with them and read the Bible stories. But the whole thing is left up to me. If I were a spiritual giant it would not be so bad, but I am weak and I fear for them. What chance have they to see Christ in me when my lamp is not trimmed and burning brightly? My husband is in constant fellowship with the Lord. And he has led hundreds of others to fall deeply in love with Jesus. But he could just as easily lead his willing wife and sons on the same path if it would only dawn on him to try."<sup>xviii</sup>

A pastor's love for the Word of God in his own home will greatly help him to encourage Christian education in the homes of his people.

Another way of encouraging the Word in the home is through the office of preaching and teaching. Clear, expository sermons will help the family connect what is heard in the sermon with what has been read in the home. Good illustrations will reinforce points of the sermon so that they might be remembered and rehearsed by the family during the week. The theme and parts may be forgotten by Monday, but an effective illustration will stick with the family. From the pulpit and classroom the pastor will encourage the reading of the Bible in the home. Such

exhortations should be evangelical also contain practical suggestions. The pastor's Bible information class is an excellent place to begin helping the new Christian form good habits of daily Bible reading. The strength of the course *Wonderful Works of God* by Paul Eickmann, lies in its method of introducing people to the Bible.

Personal visitation of members and prospects is another way to help people read the Bible in the home. We visit the sick, the troubled and the new prospect, but what about the regulars who are in church every Sunday? We could visit them more and include in our visits an encouragement to read the Bible in the home. A pastor does not have to be ashamed to ask his people whether they are reading God's Word regularly. Perhaps he could even visit the family and conduct an example devotion for them. He could show the family some of the new translations which are easier to read. Often Bible reading falters because too much is read at first. A pastor could encourage one chapter, half a chapter, or only a few verses for the start the Bible reading program. Easier books could be suggested such as Mark, as well as the reading of a psalm. I have found it helpful to leave prospects with a list of Bible readings scribbled on a sheet of paper. On the next visit they could be asked for their thoughts on the verses which were read.

After reading the book *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter, I became more convinced of the necessity of visiting our members to encourage them to use the Word in the home. Baxter visited 800 families regularly with the help of several people from his congregation. A larger congregation could conduct an every member visitation using trained people from the congregation. The purpose of this EMV would be to *only* encourage the reading of the Bible. Too often the main emphasis of an EMV is financial; the encouragement to read the Bible is only casually mentioned as an important part of one's stewardship time. We might be happily surprised how renewed interest in Bible reading would elevate the level of stewardship in giving, witnessing and hearing the Word.

The Christian day school and the Sunday school can be used to encourage the reading of the Bible in the home. The Christian day school teacher can conduct devotions which open the Bible for the children. The teacher can also personally encourage home devotions from the classroom and in personal visitation with the parents. The pastor will help the teachers carry out this work. These encouragements from the classroom will reach unchurched families who send their children to the school. It will help lead the family to the Savior.

The Sunday school teachers will also have opportunities to encourage the use God's Word in the home. Children can be asked to tell their parents what they have learned in the lessons. Teachers might personally visit the homes of the parents to encourage them to review the lessons with their children. Here is what the introductory remarks from our Sunday school lesson material says about Christian education in the home: "The home is the best place for thorough Christian education and training. That is why God gave this responsibility to parents...The home still has the greatest influence upon the attitudes character, and beliefs of the children. Spend some time every day with your child in reading and studying God's Word. Use the Bible lessons contained in this booklet as a basis for your discussions. You may wish to read other portions from your Bible and discuss them."<sup>xix</sup>

Confirmation instructions can be used to bring a discussion of the Bible into the home. Parents can be encouraged to help their children with memory work and Bible reading. Through this the ice can be broken to discuss the Word where it previously was not discussed. Consultations with the parents of those receiving instruction might emphasize parental responsibilities in helping the child learn the Word of God. I am convinced that the drop out rate after confirmation would go down if more parents would assume the responsibility of instructing

their children in the Word. We focus our attention on keeping the youth in the church. Maybe more attention should be given to helping parents keep their children in the Word, thereby keeping them close to the Savior.

A church library is another way God's kingdom of priests might be helped in their work. The library would provide reading books for the children. It might also provide books which help the parents educate themselves in the Word and better equip themselves to function in the home. Many new books are being printed by Northwestern Publishing House. These new books could be promoted through a library, and eventually people might purchase them for use in the home.

I was asked to check what other churches are doing to promote education in the home. Some liberal churches such as the Lutheran Church in America and the United Presbyterians have been surprisingly active in adopting church wide programs to encourage education in the home. But, their emphasis is on "dealing with the whole man" and consequently the importance of the Bible in the home is forgotten. I also read one copy of *Family Home Evening* from the Mormon Church. One is amazed at how well organized they are and how they can solicit the cooperation of the entire church in this program. One evening a week is spent at home. The family studies and discusses material published by the Mormon Church. As one would expect, the material is shot through with salvation by works. The family is encouraged to do the best it can to win a higher sphere in the celestial realms of glory. It would be very difficult to glean any useful programs from this well oiled but corrupt system of educating the family.

Our motivation for encouraging the Bible in the home stems from a love for the righteousness of Christ which He has imputed to us. We seek to have people read their Bibles to grow in appreciation of this righteousness which has been given to them. Without this solid foundation, every program and method for promoting Christian education in the home will fall prey to legalism.

A pastor has important responsibility when he is called to shepherd the flock of God which is entrusted to his care. The flock was purchased with Jesus' blood. It is precious to the Lord and therefore also to us.

Nearly 2500 years ago, a lone prophet stood on a dusty and hot mountain to call his people back to the Lord. He rebuilt that altar of God which had been broken down. The Lord used that altar to give the people a convincing display of His glory, God's altar has been broken down in many homes and it needs to be restored that God's glory may come to His people through the Word. May our ascended Lord and King help us to do the work of the ministry. May He help us to encourage Christian education in the homes of His people for the glory of His eternal Kingdom.

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<sup>i</sup> *Moody Monthly* (August, 1961) p. 14.

<sup>ii</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 1 (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1969), p. 227

<sup>iii</sup> Theodore Laetsch, *The Abiding Word Vol. I* (Concordia: St. Louis, 1958) p. 88. (Article by A.F. Mueller, "The Use of the Word of God in the Home.")

<sup>iv</sup> Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says* (Concordia: St. Louis 1959) p. 79.

<sup>v</sup> H. Clay Trumbull, *Yale Lectures on the Sunday School* (John D. Wattles: Philadelphia, 1885, p. 149)

<sup>vi</sup> "Are Family Devotions Still Feasible" *Eternity* (July 1971) p. 49.

<sup>vii</sup> "Luther in Our Language," *Lutheran Witness* (June 6, 1976) p. 38.

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- viii *Christian Education* p. 25 (Unable to relocate author)
- ix Paul Vieth, *The Church and Christian Education* p. 163.
- x John Price, *A Survey of Religious Education* p. 351.
- xi “Those Teachable Moments,” *Moody Monthly* (September, 1978) p. 91.
- xii “Those Teachable Moments,” p. 92.
- xiii See Larry Christensen’s book, *The Christian Family* for more help on conducting family devotions.
- xiv Oscar Feucht, *Helping Families through the Church* (Concordia: St. Louis 1971) p. 91.
- xv Laetsch, *Abiding Word* Vol. 1, p. 497.
- xvi Laetsch, *Abiding Word* Vol. 1, p. 498.
- xvii Vieth, *op. cit.* p. 171.
- xviii “A Christian Woman’s Forgotten Family” *Moody Monthly* (January 1962) p. 35.
- xix *The Story of God’s Love* (Northwestern: Milwaukee 1969) the opening introduction for parents p. 1)