



The essence of Family

By Martie du Plessis

Lately I have been advising parents to focus more on building into the spiritual wholeness of their children rather than on choice of curriculum. Following this I suggest they put resources into buying a large table for family meals and times of family fellowship. It is around the table where parents can shape the lives of their children and grandchildren.

"All you who fear God, how blessed you are! How happily you walk on his smooth straight road! You worked hard and deserve all you've got coming. Enjoy the blessing! Revel in the goodness! Your wife will bear children as a vine bears grapes, your household lush as a vineyard, the children around your table as fresh and promising as young olive shoots. Stand in awe of God's Yes. Oh, how he blesses the one who fears God!" (Psalm 128: 1-4 MSG)

God gives us instruction about sitting around the table and has also given a promise of being a blessed man. So often we opt for sitting in front of the television with no interaction or opportunity for growth, and this is the farthest away from God's heart. One of the better deci-

sions I made in my life was to get rid of the television in my home about 15 years ago - today I cannot even imagine what a life would be with a television!

The Origin of the Mealtimes Table is in Heaven

"People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places in the feast in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13: 29 NIV).

"And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one to me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22: 29-30 NIV).

God is serious about the setting of the table, but many of us limit ourselves purely because it requires effort, a change in values and a giving up on something that is considered more important at the time. One of these 'important things' is our perception that our children must engage in sufficient extra-mural activities; this turns the average mom into a mere taxi driver who is left with little capacity to also prepare a meal table.

Preparing a meal creates a wonderful atmosphere and welcoming warmth to our homes. The role of the mother around the table is of cardinal importance - here she nurtures not only her family's physical needs, but has a direct input into their spiritual well being. Hence the preparation of meal table should never be considered a lesser task.

The meal table is also a sanctuary - a safe place away from the world of strife. This is a place where family members can sit together and talk cheerfully or seriously, all the while being an atmosphere in which everyone can grow by contributing into the lives of one another. Instead of jumping up after a meal so that each one can get back to doing their own thing, time should be spent on finding out how different members in the family experienced their day and to share their challenges and their joys.

The table not only nurtures our soul but also our spirit; it is a place where God wants us to enjoy food but also enjoy Him. Ultimately the table is a means to satisfy our physical and spiritual appetites. Nancy Campbell remarks that, "God wants to be part of your family meal table" (The Family Meal Table and Hospitality, 2007). I recall mealtimes as a child (other than the meal times at boarding school); my dad read the Bible, prayed for us and we sang hymns. One does not

always appreciate traditions like those until you discover how empty life is without it. Someone once said, "A family that prays together, stays together." How true! Children should learn from a young age to pray for different members of the family.

The family table can be a place for training, teaching, togetherness, affirmation, and a way to create a special atmosphere. The attitude of our hearts will determine the atmosphere of our home that will affect the actions of our family - here the mother is key in creating an atmosphere for an inspiring meal.

Most times when it comes to evening meal times the mom has no capacity left for any great exploits. She wants to "knock off" from her duties. However, the meal table asks for constant heart preparation, which includes more than just the meal, in order for it to be a blessing to all.

The table is a place of binding and building, and the mother is the binder of the home. The family meal table is one of the greatest building tools in building a stable home. "By wisdom a home is built, and through understand-

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ing it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures" (Proverbs 24: 3-4). I am further encouraged by Proverbs 14:1, *The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears her down.*

When I heard my daughter is expecting her fifth child, the first thing I did was to make sure there would be a big enough table for all of them when they visit my house. I spend many hours around the table with my grandchildren, even if it is a small table in the kitchen. This is where we connect and I get to understand them better and they also get to know me better.

The table is a place where the family can bless one another, and here the father plays a critical role. Members of the family want to hear from their dad that he is proud of them, and even mom needs the affirmation from her husband. The table is a place of listening, a place of laughter and encouragement, and a place of loving. We demonstrate our love when we think about how we can make the table look attractive for the family. We should want our family to feel joy at our table. What kind of banner do you have over your table - one of strife or one of love?

The word of God encourages us that younger women should learn from older women. One such is Nancy Campbell from America, who has raised six children and has 41 grandchildren. She gives clear guidelines in her book, *The Family Meal Table And Hospitality*, on how families can keep their family meal times closer to what God intended for it to be. ■

Martie du Plessis, an educational consultant, home education specialist and remedial therapist, brings hope nationwide to dedicated families and educators in this educational crisis. Martie helps educators to follow principles that guarantee effective learning. Martie helps parents to design a learning path for their family and so equip them for real life.

Nancy Campbell, *The Family Meal Table And Hospitality* is available from www.eirenehealth-shop.co.za for R186.00