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FOR JESUS' SAKE:

These words are the words we teach our children from the day they are able to speak. As the family sits around the table, all eyes upon the toddler, the words are said in it's typical babyish fashion. From that day onward the child is taught to talk and walk in the way of the Lord. Why? For Jesus' sake alone. It is for Jesus sake that we live, work and play. It is for Jesus' sake that we teach our children. It is for Jesus' sake that we join the believers in worship. It is for Jesus' sake that we celebrate Christmas and it is for Jesus' sake that we look forward to the new millennium.

Two thousand years ago, the fulfillment of the Seed promised to the mother of all living came to pass. The Father had guided and led His people through the centuries until the time had come for the Redeemer and Saviour to be brought before man. Mankind had gone through much and the time was full. The Child born of woman, born in the flesh, would grow in wisdom and stature and in favour so that He could redeem all His children as His bride. His time and cup had to be filled. His cup had to be full, full of our misery, full of our sins. His birth was to that end. In His birth, our children and we receive a new birth. We, with minds clouded by sin cannot begin to comprehend the depth of the work of our Saviour. Only by faith can we respond. We are now required in obedience to follow our Lord and to train and instruct the children of the covenant in His way.

The Child written about in the books of the apostles is the same Child written about in the book of Revelation. The attack on the Child by the

evil one has taken place and failed. The Child, born of woman, had taken the cup and emptied it. All that was left for the evil one to do was to turn his attack to the seed of Christ, His Bride, His children. It is for Jesus' sake that we must resist and arm ourselves in faith against the attacks. We are His Bride and we await the coming of our Bridegroom.

As we labour toward that great day, we are to be faithful in nurturing our children and ourselves in the faith. In this issue of HORIZON we can read about our promise and obligation to nurture the spiritual lives of God's covenant children. As we promised in the September issue of HORIZON to continue in further issues to look at how Bible study takes place within our societies, an article has been written for our further study as well as a letter in response to the article in the previous issue "A Look at Inductive Bible Study". The purpose of this discussion is to build one another up as we endeavour to seek out the biblical response to our mandate to search the Scriptures diligently within our societies. Our work is to be done for God's glory alone and we may lay it all before the Father's throne in the birth, the blood, and the resurrection of our Saviour.

For Jesus' sake alone.

Shirley Broekema



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NATURE AND NURTURE

Understanding Children in the Light of the Covenant

Children need direction! Parents of young children have many arguments to settle as children struggle with the me, myself and 'I' syndrome. You know ...when a child has a choice of which piece of cake he looks desperately for the biggest piece. When bowls of ice cream are left on the counter the one with the most will be sure to go first... or inevitably, an argument starts over the fact that one bowl has slightly more than the other. It's not fair! Has anyone's child ever uttered the words "Yeah, but he hit me first" to defend his actions. How many children do not say "Mine" as one of their first words. Yes our human nature seems to say "I'm looking after numero uno... the rest of you can have what's left." It is only through God's Word and Spirit that we are able to serve God and our neighbour instead of ourselves.

If we understand the nature of children this will help us in nurturing them. What we think of our children determines how we bring them up.

In this introduction, we will discover what God's Word reveals to us about the nature of our children and how we are to nurture them. We will do this under the following theme:

As gifts from our Heavenly Father, we nurture our children by:

- 1. Respecting the power of sin.**
- 2. Realizing the power of grace, and**
- 3. Reaffirming our teaching by living in the joy of faith.**

Respecting the power of sin

When parents receive a child from the Lord, they stand in awe of His great power. It is a miracle when a new life is knit together in the womb of its mother.

When we consider how many people live on the earth, we see the greatness of our God that no two people on this earth are alike. Every child is different.

However, the Bible teaches that all these children are the same in one respect. They are all sinful.

Ps 51:5 says "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." The pollution of Adam was passed on to us, like a hereditary disease. Man became totally depraved, totally inclined to all evil and incapable of doing any good. (Art. 14 Belgic Confession)

As we read in Romans 3:9ff "...all men, both Jews and Greeks are under the power of sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one..."

When parents receive a child from the Lord, they are inclined to think that such a small, helpless, adorable little person could not possibly be sinful. So unspoiled by the world; so unaware of his/her surroundings; so dependent on others for his/her care.

If we speak in such a way, we begin to sound like the Pelagians who taught that man was born good. He believed mankind sinned by imitating the bad example of others. Pelagius rejected the doctrine of the total depravity of man. Such thinking sparked the writing of the Canons of Dort. It was a response to the Arminians who taught whether or not man is saved depends on his own free will. Man with sinful pride thinks he is not all that evil. With the gentle nudge of the gospel man's goodness which may lie hidden will come out. The fall into sin did not corrupt his will but only hinders it.

We can so easily fall into this type of thinking about our kids. We think that our children are only following the bad example of others. We look to point the blame on someone else for the difficulties we have with our children rather than deal with the problems. We find it difficult to accept criticism or concern from another member of the church about our children. We should never say "My childrenThey don't do that!." We should not look to point the blame on the other parents children. Blaming others is the oldest trick in the Book. It denies the

power of sin. It does not have to mean poor upbringing but a demonstration of the power of sin even in a child of God.

We need to teach our children how to deal with failure in a Christian manner and not how to escape blame.

The Bible teaches that Adam and Eve transgressed the law of God by their willful disobedience. They lost the glorious position given to them and became totally corrupt. Romans 1:21 says " Their thinking became futile and their senseless minds were darkened." Adam and Eve produced children in their own image (Gen 5:3). Eph 2:3 says "We were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." . Let's have a healthy respect for the power of sin so that we can deal with it properly.

Realizing the power of grace

Is our comfort now gone? Should we "throw in the towel" because of our respect for the power of sin? Of course not!

God in his mercy did not give up on mankind. He did not turn his back on us (which he had every right to do because of our sinful disobedience). God made promises to his believers and their seed.

A child born of wealthy parents is considered by the world to be born with "a silver spoon in his mouth". Such parents will be used to dispense their wealth on the child as he grows up. Their children have benefits and opportunities that those of poor parents simply do not have.

However, for us, a child born of a believing parent is born "with a silver spoon in his mouth". Such parents will be used to dispense the grace of God on the child as he grows up. The child therefore has benefits and opportunities that those of unbelieving parents simply do not have. This means that those who have received it have an obligation to use it wisely.



Children belong to the covenant without their knowledge. The form for baptism says that "Although our children do not understand all this, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism. Just as they share without their knowledge in the condemnation of

Adam, so are they, without their knowledge, received into grace in Christ." This speaks volumes about the grace of God. A child can receive it without even knowing it! This shows clearly that this an undeserved gift from our heavenly Father.

How do we know that children of a believing parent belong to the covenant?

First, in the Old Testament, God's promises were to Abraham and his descendants. Later, when God gave the ten commandments to His covenant people he included the fifth commandment "Honour your father and your mother". The book of Proverbs is filled with encouragement for children to heed their parents instruction. The teaching of mother and the instruction of father are dominated by the covenant. To honour parents is to give heed to their covenantal instruction.

Second, in the New Testament, Paul speaks directly to the children, showing clearly that they belong to the church. He describes the fifth commandment as being the first one with a promise. (Eph 6:2) They belong to the Lord, together with their believing parents (1 Cor 7:14) who will instruct them in the faith and have them instructed in it.

The requirement of faith and the need for regeneration applies to our children. Having salvation in Christ is never an automatic thing. When they grow up and become increasingly able to hear and understand the gospel, the Lord will increasingly require that they believe and obey. If they do not do this but live in sinful indifference they are breakers of the covenant and will lose what they have in Christ.

The idea that children only become responsible when they have made public profession of faith is totally wrong.

Chapter iii/iv Article 9 of the Canons of Dort places the blame for those who are called and do not come, on themselves. Some do not accept it in their hearts and turn away.

Members of the church who commit the unpardonable sin are those who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God but reject it (Hebrews 6:4-6). They harden themselves in sin and will not repent. Sinning against the Holy Spirit is not daily sins and weaknesses but it is living and hardening oneself in sin without any remorse.
(Unspeakable Comfort - pg 161,162)

Chapter iii/iv Article 10 explains that those who do come may boast not of themselves but of the Lord. When a child in the covenant does believe and loves the Lord his God, we can only say this is the pure and sovereign undeserved grace of God in Christ. He who boasts, boasts in the Lord. (I Cor 1:31) To him belongs the glory.

In other words, God works faith. The cause of unbelief lies with the self, but the source of faith is God. All credit for faith goes to the Lord alone.

Douglas Wilson contends in his book "Standing on the Promises" that as children grow up in a faithful covenant home, they will come to a genuine profession of faith as a matter of course. He seems to blur the lines of covenant and election. In our churches' history there are many times when this particular aspect of the doctrine has been misunderstood.

The liberation of 1944 was caused when Synod endorsed Kuypers view that only elect children belong to the covenant and deposed those who held to Schilder's view. When immigrants arrived here from Holland in the early 1950's they could not in good conscience join the Protestant Reformed Churches. Their Declaration of Principles supported the view that only the elect receive anything in the way of a promise from God in their baptism as infants.

In both of these instances they did not teach that the covenant promises are conditional on faith. The promise is sure for every child and comes with the certainty of blessings in the way of faith (read Deut 28: 1-14) alongside of the certainty of cursing in the way of unbelief (Deut 28: 15-28). (or Deut 29: 18-21)

We must on the one hand be careful not to lose this doctrine of the covenant and on the other hand avoid the pitfall of presumptive regeneration.

The covenant must be a living and functioning key to our daily faith. If our children appear to be committed to worldliness, if they delight in worldly activities and amusements, if they only attend church with extreme pressure by parents. If they rarely read from scripture and pray, and do not show any genuine repentance when they sin, we cannot assume God will make all things work out. We may not suppose that they were baptized and therefore God won't let them go. We must not separate covenant from faith and obedience.

Our children belong to God; they must respond. The covenant is the basis on which we approach them with rebuke, correction, and demands for obedience.

The other pitfall is called presumptive regeneration. Reformed Christians have always believed in infant baptism. However, the reason has not always been clearly understood. Some have considered baptism because we may presume that our children are regenerate.

The problem with this is that it gives a false sense of security about the spiritual well-being of our children. As a result, parents do not respond well when faced with disobedient and unbelieving children. The call to repentance seems irrelevant. When our children sin it is dangerous to assume that all will work out and do nothing or, on the other hand, to wring our hands and wait for some experience to bring about the conversion of our children. Children of every age sin; God has established ways to deal with sin. Those ways always include repentance and conversion.

We need to show by example what it means to belong to the covenant of grace.

Reaffirming our teaching by living in the joy of faith

The call to repentance and faith is not restricted to adults. In fact, to fail to call children to repentance and faith is a grievous sin. And to fail to live the same in your own life as a parent is hypocritical!

1 Timothy 4:7,8 says "Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." Staying physically fit does not come easily. It requires training, good eating habits and exercise. The same is true about staying fit in faith.

Godliness is to direct all of our life toward God. It is to show reverence to the Lord, to respect His Word and to hold to sound doctrine. Godliness transforms our attitude, our outlook on life and our involvement in the communion of saints. It is developed through good habits (such as personal and family prayer) and training in the Word. Diligence in church attendance, consistent Bible study, meditation on a personal and communal level, instruction in the doctrine of the church and reading good books and magazines. All of these things allow us to live in the joy of faith.

We should make good use of every opportunity we as parents have to discuss a Biblical worldview with our children. Always focus our discussion on God's Word as the basis for determining His will. Dinner table discussion is an excellent time to talk specifically about what God is saying to us in our Bible reading. We need to allow time in our busy schedules to assist our children in making practical application of the Word.

God wants the children of his people to live in an environment conditioned by His Word. God wants thorough and biblical instruction to occur all the time. This means that their formal education must also be in accordance with the Word. There is no such thing as neutral teaching. This fact is recognized by our Church Order where the consistory is required to "ensure that parents, to the best of their ability, have their children attend a school where the instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the confessions". Since we have already discussed how important our children's understanding of the covenant is, then I ask you, What better place to recognize the obligations of the covenant than to be involved in and support our own school? What better expression is there of the communion of saints? Children need to be "sheltered" by their parents in such an environment until they have been properly prepared for encounters with those who hate God.

The covenant of God demands that we pray for our children and teach and show them how to respond to sin. It demands that parents show clearly their own desire to know scripture and to do what it says.

How is this in our homes? Do our children see parents who have a true love for the communion of saints? Do they see parents who search God's word as they would for silver and gold? Do they see parents who view everything that happens in the world through a biblical worldview? Do they see parents who go to church with the knowledge that they are going to be in the presence of God? Do they see parents who live out of thankfulness?

In this life we can never produce enough fruits of thankfulness. There is always room for growth in the service of the Lord.

God assigns the primary responsibility for the nurture of children to parents. We must remember to deal realistically with the nature of our children. They will sin. Pray for them, remind them of the rich promises and the obligations of faithfulness in the covenant, and live in the joy of faith.

**Calvin & Lynda Lodder
Fergus, ON**

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THE FAMILY CALLED TO WORSHIP

It is taken for granted that believing adults belong in the worship service because they have been redeemed and sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ, and thus not only are able to worship God, but also required to do this. But what about the *children* of believers? Must they too be present, when they often understand so little of what is going on? And if so, what can parents and the congregation, since it too is responsible for covenant children, do to train the children to attend church meaningfully?

We believe that covenant children belong to the household of God by virtue of their believing parents; they are holy, set apart from the world. This is signified and sealed in their baptism. The Triune God entrusts His little ones to us; they belong to Him. The God who institutes, redeems, and sanctifies the family wants to be worshiped by the family.

God created the family. And He made it to fear Him and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). One command was the cultural mandate, part of which was the institution of the family. After the fall, God renewed His covenant with Adam and Eve, and later with others: Noah (Gen. 8:21,22) and Moses (Deut. 29:10-13), just to name two. To Abraham and his offspring God gave the covenant sign and seal of circumcision. The old covenant was fulfilled and made new in the offspring, Jesus Christ, who was the One who willingly gave Himself to redeem God's children. The new covenant in His blood is even richer and more glorious than the first (Jer. 31:31). Through the new covenant relation with God, the Christian family is made holy (1Cor. 7:14). The redeemed family is called to worship its Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, the Triune God, together in church and at home.

Whereas certain things have changed since Old Testament times, the spirit of God's laws and ordinances have not. In Deut 31:13 Moses

called the whole congregation, men, women, little ones and foreigners, to listen to the reading of the law of God once every seven years. This Joshua did in Joshua 8:30-35. After the return from exile, Ezra called the people together for the same purpose of recalling God's commands to His people. II Chronicles 20:13, Ezra 8:21, and Nehemiah 12:43, all tell of gatherings of God's entire congregation which include the little ones. The New Testament also includes children. Think of the way in which the Lord Jesus accepted them saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14). Paul includes children when he writes to them exhorting them to obey their parents (Col. 3:20). As children were part of the old covenant, so they belong to the new.

As in the old covenant, parents were instructed to train their children in godliness and in the fear of the LORD (Deut. 4:1-15, 6:1-9; Prov. 22:6, etc.), so in the new covenant no one is allowed to hinder God's children from coming to know and love him. In fact, if so "...it would be better for [that man] to have a millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). God instructed His Old Testament people to train their children in the fear of His name, for "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge" (Prov. 1:7, Ps. 111:10), and that from generation to generation He might be their God. We cannot impress upon each other enough the necessity to teach, talk with, and train our children in godliness at every opportunity. When we read Deuteronomy 6:1-9 we notice that God teaches His people that love and obedience to Him flows from the heart. "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (vs. 5). Worship of God is something that begins in the heart and in the home. As parents live a sober and joyful life, awestruck by the holiness, faithfulness, steadfast love and mercy of God, the stage is set for the proper worship of God. Our knowledge and therefore also our fear of God must be more profound and our training be done with greater diligence than that of our Old Testament brothers and sisters since our lives are bound up in God's new covenant of grace.

Let us teach our children that they belong to God's people; they may receive His covenant blessings and must fulfill their covenant obligations. One of these blessings is attending church to receive His grace, of which a primary means is the preaching of the gospel. Our children, too, must learn the Law of God, so that they will know how great their sins and misery are. They, too, must hear how they are delivered from their sins, and how they must live a life of gratitude. They must be led, by God's grace, to confess their faith in God.

Let us help our children understand what is happening in church, and that the minister is shepherd of the whole congregation, even of the children. Tell the children what the subject of each sermon is, what is the meaning of the sacraments, and teach them the songs we sing. Throughout the week recall the sermons by reading related Bible texts. We can sit with the children for quiet times during the day reading Christian books with them which teach them about God and godliness, and getting them used to sitting quietly. Let us prepare ourselves physically and spiritually for the Sunday on Saturday and allow the children to be part of those preparations. Children can also have their own special book(s) to bring to church, and notebooks in which to write preferably meaningful things. Let's make Sunday a special day.

Training is not always pleasant, for while the parent can look beyond the frustration of discipline knowing its fruit - the salvation of the child's soul (1Tim. 4:7,8) - the child may be at a stage in which he does not understand or appreciate the significance of discipline. Let us press on toward the upward goal, since our children are God's children.

Annelies Faber

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BIBLE "STUDY"?

Study defined

We tend to call what we do at our societies, Bible "study". What is study? The dictionary defines it as, "the act or process of applying the mind in order to acquire knowledge, as by reading, investigating, etc." We have been taught to break things into small pieces for study. Then, somehow, we try to make sense of that and reassemble the parts. But is this really possible? Has something not been lost in this exercise? When something has been broken apart, is it possible to reconstruct it and regain the wholeness of its original form? No, for the meaning of the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts. We must be able to "see" the whole before we begin to examine the parts. The parts have no meaning if they are not seen in context and true relationship to the whole.

Bible Study Societies in the Past

So what has been happening in Bible "study" over the years and how can we increase the value of our time together as society members, members of Christ's body and of one another? In the past, the idea of a society was for one member to present a proposal or introduction. This proposal or introduction was written after a great deal of reading and thought. The proposal was offered for consideration and discussion. Meanwhile, the other members of the society had also spent time reading and thinking about that section of God's word. When the society met, these thoughts were pooled, the proposals examined and talked about, where after everyone returned home with even more food for thought but also encouraged and enabled by the insight of others to work out God's word in their own lives. As the years went by this idea became misunderstood. People began to feel that an introduction, or "essay" as it came to be called, was a retelling

of the passage in their own words or that it must contain answers to all anticipated questions. It was by no means uncommon to hear the comment that the essay was so good there were no questions left. At the same time many people did not take much time to familiarize themselves with the passage and came to the meetings unprepared. It became difficult to find questions and the discussions lagged or went off topic.



A different way of studying

Today we often see a great reluctance to write "essays" and people also find it difficult to come up with questions. Some societies have turned to a different method of Bible study. In this method, no introductions are written and the basis for discussion is a set of questions organized and determined by the writer of a booklet who generally also gives a broad outline and some comments of the Bible book under discussion. "Homework" then consists of studying the passage, then by logic and reasoning, with some help from commentaries, writing the answers to the questions. One question we might ask ourselves is whether we can establish truth by analysis.

Learning defined

How do we best use our time of looking at God's word together? It might be of value to think of what we are doing there as learning rather than studying. Whereas studying means to accumulate knowledge, learning means to actively acquire ideas to guide in the practice and exercise of life. When a person studies, she is more of an observer while a learner is very personally involved in the process of learning. When we are learning, we continually practice and review our life as a child of God. God has given us His word as a guide for our life and we must be constantly busy with it. It is always amazing how one can read a passage many times and continually get new meaning from it. This is because our life experience is also part of the process of learning.

Learning from God's Word



Then how do we approach God's word? Let's first of all be aware that we should not be taking the facts written in the Bible and applying them to our lives. We should, rather, be looking for the revelation and idea God gives in this passage so we can work with that. The only way we can understand the revelation and idea meant for us is to be thoroughly familiar with the context of each

passage. Be familiar with the whole before you begin to examine the parts. If we wish to live closely to the Lord and have the mind of Christ, (1 Cor. 2:16) we will wish more and more to understand what God has to say to us. We will be full of questions: how does this fit? why is this so? what does this mean? etc. Sometimes it seems as if we have programmed our minds to give prearranged answers to questions that arise. We either do not dare or do not know how to question what something really means, particularly in our lives. You can only become more spiritually enriched by asking and thinking about even simple and supposedly self-evident questions. C. J. de Ruyter writes [\[1\]](#) that we seem to be much better at reading Scripture as Bible study than with a view to a personal experience of faith. He feels this is related to an underdeveloped spirituality. We often seek to find something in our Bible study which we can take and apply in our lives. But we are spiritual beings and may live our lives from the inside out, from that well-spring of knowledge which God has developed in our hearts and minds through His interaction with us.

Some people seem to be afraid to become too active in the learning process. They feel they know very little, their thoughts are contaminated by sin and their contribution is of negligible value so they would rather listen to and learn only from "experts". But can we really learn if the questions are not our own? And can we really form questions if we do not have a close and loving relationship with our God and Father who has revealed Himself to us in His creation and in His word?

As God's children who bear His image, have His Word inscribed in our hearts and His Spirit within us as guide we have been given the most

excellent tools to learn about our life as God's children. He has given us the added benefit of the communion of saints in which we aid one another along the way. We may even make use of the written thoughts and discoveries of others who are not present at our meetings. But we ourselves must be fully active in this learning and living relationship with our God and Father.

M. De Gelder
Flamborough, ON

[\[1\]](#) The article by C.J. de Ruyter was in Diakonia Volume IX, No. 1, p 6.



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

We are writing as society in response to the second article in your September 1999 issue of Horizon by sister Visscher on [Inductive Bible Study](#).

First of all we would like to state that we recognize with sister Visscher the importance of Bible study and the knowledge of God's Word, which should lead to lives of glory directed to God's praise.

We have a concern however about the entire discussion of "inductive" Bible study as a method. We found it confusing as the author seems to suggest that benefit can only be derived if societies use the inductive method, and yet she herself concludes "method will not do it".

A clear definition of "inductive" is somewhat lacking also. What exactly does sister Visscher understand "inductive" study to be. Through our own study, we as society concluded that proper reformed hermeneutics would involve both inductive and deductive methods of study (as per dictionary definitions).

Another concern would be the promotion of other study material . The board of a society has a great responsibility in choosing proper study aids to accompany a particular Bible book; if it indeed feels the society must have an aid. Do we not underestimate the dangers presented by many of these other study materials? Also if the I.L.P.B's mandate is to provide outlines and study guides for the Canadian Reformed Men's, Women's and Young People's societies and the Horizon is a publication of the Women's societies, then is it not a conflict of interest to propagate this material?

T. Ravensbergen, Secretary for the Women's society "To the Praise of His Glory" Smithville, Ontario



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YOU ASKED?

Several years ago, Sharon Bratcher asked Rev. G. VanDooren a question dealing with prayer at mealtime. As editorial committee of the HORIZON, and with permission from the late Rev. VanDooren's family, we would like to share his response with our readers.

What is the point of praying both before and after every meal? I grew up in a non-Reformed tradition where we just had a "devotional" time at some time during the day perhaps at the table, or perhaps seated in the living room, wherein there was Bible reading, prayer, and



sometimes singing. At the meals, we said only a brief prayer of thanks. Could you help me understand this way of doing things?

In many families "family worship" has come to a low level; also that there are those who have a problem with praying before and after the meal

and are inclined to follow the Canadian custom of only one prayer. Your brief remarks make very clear that you grew up in a different tradition. What follows is a brief summary of what I have published on this topic in previous years.

The form of family worship as found in faithful Reformed homes is based on the Reformation of church and family in the 16 th century. You find a reflection of this in the Book of Praise of our churches. The Reformers gave leadership to the "laity" that had just escaped from the Popish church. Thus they prepared "models" of prayers for various occasions. In addition to a number of prayers fit for church use, there are a number for home and personal use i.e. A Prayer before Meals, Thanksgiving after Meals (p.647 and 648 of the Book of Praise). They also added a "series" of brief commentaries on our prayer life in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45 -52: a yearly course in prayer!

Now it becomes clear, how throughout the generations Reformed families have adhered to this set-up of family worship. I do not say (I would not dare!) that every one did it in a perfect way, or that no one had problems with it. Most often, from pastoral experience, the question was, especially from mothers who had to lead the worship during the absence of the head of the family, "how can I, when I have to pray before and after, avoid vain repetition? Is it, then not better to pray only once?" I have tried to develop, in the course of years, the following answers:

1. In most families there is, at least once a day a being together at the table. The table is more than an object on which you can put your meal. If that would be the case you could easily do without a table. Each picks some food from here and there, and eats it on his own, in his corner. This is the curse in many families. In the Bible, the table is more. It is the place of union, of unity in the family. It is the place where you eat, yes, but also where you share with each other the happenings of the day. It is the centre of family communication.

2. Although I cannot see anything wrong in the way you are accustomed to do it in the living room, you must understand that in the Reformed tradition the table (breakfast, lunch or supper) has always been the centre for the family. Around that table developed "family-worship".

3. Now, what about the order of this kind of home worship? I have suggested that following (all very simple but essential):

a. Prayer before the meal: In this prayer we should not primarily pray for a blessing over the food as though the LORD has to add some supernatural vitamins and calories. But we thank Him that He has been with us, gave us strength and now has brought us together again around this table, decked with His bountiful gifts. Amen.

b. The meal: The meal has been received in gratitude and in interspersed with family talk i.e. how was it in school, what did the boss say? Any opportunities to speak about the LORD?

c. Opening of the Scripture: Here much could be said about proper methods of Bible reading, i.e. every member has a Bible, and most important, discussing what has been read. My mother always started by asking a question and then father asked one of us "what do you think?" These "tabletalks" are a rich heritage and a natural development of Bible discussions.

d. Prayer after the meal: The second prayer is essential different from the first. The head of the family hooks on to what we just heard from the mouth of the LORD. Every prayer will be somewhat different. In this way we can overcome the problem . of many prayers, all known by heart, that do not mean something. Our prayers should be an Amen to what the LORD just said. Based on that is the prayer for the blessing, that is; that we may believe Him in His Word, that we may use the energy given to us to His honour and the benefit of our neighbour, that He may guide us, and that we may in everything depend upon Him, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

e. Singing: Singing then concludes the family worship. If there are children, they may have, their preference. Some use a daily guide that gives a Psalm or Hymn for every day. At our home we always sang a lot.

Reformata Semper Reformanda

The devil, with many helpers, attacks and undermines family life. It is a matter of to be or not to be, that this Reformed family worship be re-formed and re-activated, to keep the family together and to turn it into a bulwark against the devil. (Psalm 8)

I hope that I have succeeded in convincing you that there is room, even a need for two, and then two different prayers within the framework of Reformed family worship. May the Lord bless you.