

# **FAMILY PRAYERS**

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Family Prayers by William Wilberforce

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**WILLIAM WILBERFORCE**

**FAMILY  
PRAYERS**



# FAMILY PRAYERS

BY THE LATE

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, ESQ.

EDITED BY HIS SON,

ROBERT ISAAC WILBERFORCE, M.A.

VICAR OF EAST FARLEIGH, LATE FELLOW OF ORIENTAL  
COLLEGE.

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### ADVERTISEMENT.

As it is hoped that this publication may be useful, it is judged expedient to print it separately, rather than to unite it with some other pieces by Mr. Wilberforce, which, in process of time, will probably be presented to the public.

The Editor takes this opportunity of mentioning that a life of Mr. Wilberforce, compiled from his own letters and journals, will be published at as early a period as the magnitude of the task allows.

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## PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

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THE following pages supply a form, as the present remarks are designed to enforce the importance, of family devotion. To those who entered my father's domestic circle it is well known what moment he himself attached to the practice in question. His opinion on this subject cannot be better expressed than in the words of a passage which he often quoted with the utmost approbation; a passage, moreover, which from the high station of its author, from his good sense, his honesty, and his utter freedom from any overstrained warmth of feeling, is entitled in itself to especial attention. One principal part of religion, says Archbishop Tillotson, "consists in the setting up the constant worship of God in our families, by daily prayers to God, every morning and evening, and by reading some portion of the Holy Scriptures at those times, especially out of the Psalms of David, and the New Testament. And this is

so necessary to keep alive, and to maintain, a sense of God and religion in the minds of men, that where it is neglected, I do not see how any family can in reason be esteemed a family of Christians, or indeed to have any religion at all."

Certainly when we take into account how consistent this custom is with the principles of Scripture, how well adapted to the wants of our nature, how strongly urged upon us by good men, it is difficult to understand its omission by those who profess themselves to be Christians. To those, indeed, who avowedly give up the world to come, it is not surprising that this or any other holy custom should be distasteful. But how persons, who in other things lead christian lives, and respect the other ordinances of religion, can bring themselves to neglect this duty, it is hard, or, as the Archbishop implies, almost impossible to conceive.

Yet there are two considerations to which the conduct in question, even in well-intentioned men, may occasionally be attributed. The principles on which such persons act it seems particularly desirable to consider, because if the neglect alluded to be occasioned by a mistake in judgment, and not by a want of principle, we may anticipate good effects from temperate yet

earnest expostulation; or if, as is rather to be feared, the fault be one of the heart not of the head, it will be useful, even for the sake of others, to unmask those excuses by which men disguise their errors.

The first thing, which is said by these persons, is, that the tone and feelings of ordinary life are inconsistent with that state of mind, with which we should approach the throne of the Almighty. Conversation, they allege, especially between those not intimately acquainted, and the solemn offices of prayer and praise, seem to require such a different atmosphere, that to pass from the chillness of one to the warmth of the other is a painful transition. A certain time is needed before the mind can acclimate itself to its new state. The awful labours of devotion must not be entered upon unprepared.

To this, in some cases, it is added, that the habits and hours of modern life are inconsistent with that decent regularity which befits a religious service.

Of this last difficulty it may be said that, even if it should occasionally stand in the way of family worship in the evening, it need never prevent its morning celebration. But on this subject it is the less important to speak,