

Jonathan Edwards & Family Time

“In his family, he practised that conscientious exactness, which was conspicuous in all his ways. He maintained a great esteem and regard for his amiable and excellent consort. Much of the tender and affectionate was expressed in his conversation with her, and in all his conduct towards her. He was often visited by her in his study, and conversed freely with her on matters of religion; and he used commonly to pray with her in his study, at least once a day, unless something extraordinary prevented. The season for this, commonly, was in the evening, after prayers in the family, just before going to bed. As he rose very early himself, he was wont to have his family up betimes in the morning; after which, before they entered on the business of the day, he attended on family prayers; when a chapter in the Bible was read, commonly by candle-light in the winter; upon which he asked his children questions, according to their age and capacity; and took occasion to explain some passages in it, or enforce any duty recommended, as he thought most proper.

He was careful and thorough in the government of his children; and, as a consequence of this, they revered, esteemed, and loved him. He took the utmost care to begin his government of them, when they were very young. When they first discovered any degree of self-will and stubbornness, he would attend to them, until he had thoroughly subdued them, and brought them to submit. Such prudent discipline, exercised with the greatest calmness, being repeated once or twice, was generally sufficient for that child; and effectually established his parental authority, and produced a cheerful obedience ever after.

“He kept a watchful eye over his children, that he might admonish them of the first wrong step, and direct them in the right way. He took opportunities to converse with them singly and closely, about the concerns of their souls, and to give them warnings, exhortations, and directions, as he saw them severally need.” The salvation of his children was his chief and constant desire, and aim, and effort concerning them. In the evening, after tea, he customarily sat in the parlour, with his family, for an hour, unbending from the severity of study, entering freely into the feelings and concerns of his children, and relaxing into cheerful and animated conversation, accompanied frequently with sprightly remarks, and sallies of wit and humour. But, before retiring to his study, he usually gave the conversation, by degrees, a more serious turn, addressing his children, with great tenderness and earnestness, on the subject of their salvation; when the thought that they were still strangers to religion would often affect him so powerfully, as to oblige him to withdraw, in order to conceal his emotions.—“He took much pains to instruct his children in the principles and duties of religion, in which he made use of the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism: not merely by taking care that they learned it by heart, but by leading them into an understanding of the doctrines therein taught, by asking them questions on each answer, and explaining it to them. His usual time to attend to this was on the evening before the sabbath. And, as he believed that the sabbath, or holy time, began at sunset, on the evening

preceding the first day of the week, he ordered his family to finish all their secular business by that time, or before; when all were called together, a psalm was sung, and prayer offered, as an introduction to the sanctification of the sabbath. This care and exactness effectually prevented that intruding on holy time, by attending to secular business, which is too common even in families where the evening before the sabbath is professedly observed.

“He was utterly opposed to every thing like unseasonable hours, on the part of young people, in their visiting and amusements; which he regarded as a dangerous step towards corrupting them, and bringing them to ruin. And he thought the excuse offered by many parents, for tolerating this practice in their children,—*that it is the custom, and that the children of other people are allowed thus to practise, and therefore it is difficult, and even impossible, to restrain theirs,*—was insufficient and frivolous, and manifested a great degree of stupidity, on the supposition that the practice was hurtful and pernicious to their souls. And when his children grew up, he found no difficulty in restraining them from this improper and mischievous practice; but they cheerfully complied with the will of their parents. He allowed none of his children to be absent from home after nine o’clock at night, when they went abroad to see their friends and companions; neither were they allowed to sit up much after that time, in his own house, when any of their friends came to visit them. If any gentleman desired to address either of his daughters, after the requisite introduction and preliminaries, he was allowed all proper opportunities of becoming thoroughly acquainted with the manners and disposition of the young lady, but must not intrude on the customary hours of rest and sleep, nor on the religion and order of the family.”¹

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1*, ccxxviii (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008).