

## THE HOME CONVERSATION

by J. R. Miller

Few things are more important in a home, than its *conversation*—yet there are few things to which less deliberate thought is given. We take great pains to have our house well-furnished. We select our carpets and pictures with the utmost care. We send our children to school that they may become intelligent. We strive to bring into our homes, the best conditions of happiness. But how often is the *speech* of the household left untrained and undisciplined?

The good we might do in our homes with our tongues, if we would use them to the limit of their capacity of cheer and helpfulness, it is simply impossible to state. That in most homes the best possible results from the gift of speech are not attained, is very evident. Why should so much *power for blessing* be wasted? Especially why should we ever pervert these gifts, and use our tongues to do evil, to give pain, to scatter seeds of bitterness? It is a sad thing when a child is born dumb; but it were better far to be born dumb, and never to have the gift of speech—than, having that gift, to employ it in speaking only sharp, unloving, or angry words.

While in all places and at all times our words should be well chosen, and should be full of the pure and gentle spirit of Christ—there are many reasons why the home conversation, pre-eminently, should be loving. Home is the place for warmth and tenderness: it should be made the brightest and sweetest spot on earth, to those who dwell within its walls. We should all carry there our very best moods, tempers, and dispositions. Especially by our *speech* should we seek to contribute to the enrichment of the home life, helping to make it elevating and refining, and in every way ennobling in its influence.

Home should inspire every tongue to speak its most loving words—yet there is in many families, a great dearth of *kind speech*. In some cases, there is no conversation at all worthy of the name; there are no affectionate *greetings* in the morning, or hearty *good-nights* at parting when the evening closes; the meals are eaten in silence; there are no bright fireside chats over the events and incidents of the day. A stranger might mistake the home for a deaf-and-dumb institution, or for a hotel where strangers were together only for a passing night. In other cases—it would be even better if silence did reign—for there are words of *miserable strife* and *shameful quarreling* heard from day to day!

*Husband and wife*, who vowed at the marriage-altar to cherish each other until death, keep up an incessant petty strife of words!

*Parents*, who are commanded in the Holy Word not to provoke their children to wrath, lest they be discouraged, but to bring them up in the nurture of the Lord, scarcely ever speak to them gently and in tenderness. They seem to imagine that they are not governing their children, unless they are perpetually *scolding* them. They fly into a rage against them at the smallest irritation. They issue their commands to them in words and tones which would better suit the despot of a petty savage tribe, than the head of a Christian household. It is not strange, that, under such "nurture," the children, instead of dwelling together in unity, with loving speech—only wrangle and quarrel, speaking only bitter words in their interactions with one another.

That there are many homes of just this type, it is idle to deny. That prayer is offered morning and evening in some of these families, only makes the truth the sadder; for it is *mockery* for the members of a household to rise together from their knees after morning devotion, only to begin another day of strife and bitterness!

Nothing in the home life needs to be more carefully watched and more diligently cultivated, than the conversation; it should be *imbued with the spirit of love*. No bitter word should ever be spoken!

The talk of husband and wife, in their companionship together, should always be tender. Anger in *word*, or even in *tone*—should never be allowed! *Chiding* and *fault-finding* should never be permitted to mar the sacredness of their speech! The warmth and tenderness of their hearts, should flow out in every word that they utter to each other. As parents, too, in their interaction with their children, they should never speak—but in words of Christ-like gentleness. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that children's lives can grow up into beauty— an atmosphere of strife! Harsh, angry words are to their sensitive souls—what frosts are to the delicate flowers! To bring them up in the nurture of the Lord, is to bring them up as Christ himself would do; and surely that would be with *infinite tenderness*. It is impossible to estimate the blessed influence of *loving speech*, day after day and month after month—it is like the falling of warm spring rain and sunshine on the garden. *Beauty* and *sweetness of character* will issue from such a home.

But home conversation needs more than *love*, to give it its best influence: it ought to be enriched by *thought*. The Savior's warning against idle words should be remembered. Every wise-hearted parent will seek to train his household to converse on subjects which will yield *instruction*, or tend

toward *spiritual and moral refinement*. The *table* affords an excellent opportunity for this kind of education. Three times each day the family gathers there; it is a place for cheerfulness. Simply on the grounds of *health*, meals should never be eaten in silence. Bright, cheerful conversation is an excellent *sauce*, and a prime aid to digestion. If it *prolongs* the meal, and thus appears to take too much time out of the busy day—it will, in the end, add to the years by increased healthfulness and lengthened life. In any case, however, something is due to *spiritual and moral* refinement, and still more is due to the culture of one's home life.

The *table* should be made the center of the social life of the household. There, all should appear at their best and brightest; gloom should be banished. The conversation should be sprightly and sparkling; it should consist of something besides dull and threadbare *commonplaces*. The idle gossip of the street is not a worthy theme for such hallowed moments. The conversation of the table should be of a kind to interest all the members of the family; hence it should vary to suit the age and intelligence of those who form the family circle. The events and occurrences of each day, may with profit be spoken of and discussed; and now that the daily newspaper contains so full and faithful a summary of the world's doings and happenings, this is easy. Each one may mention the event which has specially impressed him in reading or in discussion without. Bits of refined humor should always be welcome, and all wearisome recital and dull, uninteresting discussion, should be avoided.

Table-talk may be enriched, and at the same time the education of all the members of the family may be advanced, by bringing out at least one new fact at each meal, to be added to the common fund of knowledge. Suppose there are two or three children at the table, varying in their ages from five to twelve. Let the father or the mother have some particular subject to introduce during the meal, which will be both interesting and profitable to the younger members of the family. It may be some *historical* incident, or some *scientific* fact, or an event in the life of some distinguished man. The subject should not be above the capacity of the younger people, for whose special benefit it is introduced, nor should the conversation be over-weighted by attempting too much at one time.

One single fact clearly presented, and firmly impressed so as to be remembered, is better than whole chapters of information poured out in a confused jargon on minds, that tomorrow cannot recall any part of it. A little thought will show the *rich benefits* of a system like this, if faithfully followed through a series of years. If but one fact is presented at every meal, there will be a *thousand* things taught to the children in a year! If the subjects are wisely chosen, the fund of knowledge communicated in this way will be of no

inconsiderable value. A *whole system of education* lies in this suggestion; for, besides the communication of important knowledge, the habit of mental activity is stimulated, interest is awakened in lines of study and research which may afterwards be followed out, tastes are improved, while the effect upon the family life is elevating and refining!

It may be objected that such a system of *table-talk* could not be conducted without much thought, study, and preparation on the part of parents. But if the habit once were formed, and the plan properly introduced, it would be found comparatively easy for parents of ordinary intelligence to maintain it. Books are now prepared in great numbers, giving important facts in small compass. Then, there are encyclopedias and dictionaries of various kinds. The newspapers contain every week paragraphs and articles of great value in such a course. A wise use of scissors and paste will keep scrap-books well filled with materials which can readily be made available. It will be necessary to think and plan for such a system, to choose the topics in advance, and to become familiar with the facts. This work might be shared by both parents, and thus be easy for both. That it will cost time and thought and labor ought not to be an objection, for is it not worth almost any cost to secure the benefits and advantages which would result from such a system of *home instruction*?

These are only *hints* of the almost infinite possibilities of good which lie in the home conversation. That so little is realized in most cases, when so much is possible—is one of the saddest things about our current life. It may be that these suggestions shall stimulate in some families, at least—an earnest search after something better than they have yet found in their desultory and aimless conversational habits. Surely there should be no home in which, amid all the *light talk* that flies from busy tongues, time is not found every day in which to say at least one word that shall be instructive, suggestive, elevating, or at least, in some way, helpful.