

A Practical Guide to Family Worship

By Mike Thompson

As Christians we understand that worship is fundamental to a healthy relationship with God. But the practice of family worship has been neglected in modern times to our own detriment. This pamphlet is designed to give practical guidance to those who desire to bring this practice back into their home.

Family Worship should have some connection to Corporate Worship.

Why?

Because Family Worship prepares children for worship. It begins to train them to worship with God's people.

Corporate Worship is simply a larger gathering of God's people. The Family is God's basic unit for family worship.

Fathers must actively lead in family worship, if at all possible.

Mothers can and should be active as well, but when the man is home, he must take the lead to bring his family together to worship.

Why?

God has designed the man to be the leader. Even if he is a younger or less mature believer, he is still to take the burden and privilege of leadership.

If he does not, then the young men especially, but really girls as well, will learn that spirituality is not a manly thing. Satan has duped a lot of men into thinking this way, and as a consequence, men have chased after other pursuits.

Certainly, women, if your husband has no desire for family worship, or is absent, by all means, you may and should lead your children in worship.

Family Worship should be simple and yet meaningful.

Far too many Fathers have tried to do too much and only succeeded in exasperating their families.

Prayer: Shorter is better than longer.

Especially when children are very young, long prayers do not help anyone. If you must pray long, go into your personal prayer closet and pray long before you have family worship.

At the same time, you also help no one if you pray the same little prayer jingle every day. You ought to systematically pray for that which is on God's heart:

Prayers for the salvation of loved ones

Prayers for an increasing desire for our family to love and obey God

Prayers for missionaries that our church supports. It is fine to pray for other missionaries as well, but do not forget our own church's missionaries. If you do, then your family will have no connection with the work of our local church and their personal prayers.

Prayers for Daily needs.

Confession of sin: Children need to hear their parents confess specific and real sins.

Prayers of Thanks.

Prayers of Adoration.

You should not pray for all of these things every time you pray. But you should systematically pray "all sorts of prayers"

As the children grow, increasingly ask them to pray. Give them a specific thing to pray for. Thank them for praying.

Reading Scripture:

We used Children's Bibles for some time. Some are better than others. Be choosy and ask parents who have children older than yours to give you advice.

We found some Children's Bibles that we have since loaned to Robin's brother that were excellent. They had some engaging pictures. But they also had a good amount of Scripture. It was not cut down to a few sentences. They also included some very engaging application in the midst of reading the Scripture. I will do my best to find these again since I found them while at Seminary when our kids were younger.

As soon as possible, I recommend moving to an actual Bible. I also recommend reading through whole books. Do not pick and choose too much. Children need to gain a sense of what the whole Bible is saying.

I know that God has given me more Bible knowledge than some, but I really do not make this a prepared lesson. I simply read the text to my children. Sometimes no comments at all are said. Other times I will make some brief comments to help the children understand the context. Often, they will begin asking me questions. If I know the answer, I will give it. If I do not know the answer, I will tell them that I do not know the answer. There is nothing wrong with saying this. However, do try to search for the answer at another time. Ask others, read commentaries. What better opportunity to be an example to your children of a man who seeks the truth.

At present, we read regularly 1 chapter each night. Sometimes more. Rarely less.

Singing:

Get a Trinity Hymnal, even if you are not sure you like it all that much.

Our family regularly sings three hymns. We started singing only one hymn or two. We would often have a hymn of the month. We would sing the same hymn over and over so that the young children who cannot read could memorize a hymn. I really believe that our children learned to read singing hymns. We would use our finger as a cursor and have our children follow it across the page.

To learn some of the unfamiliar tunes in the Trinity Hymnal, there are websites and CD's that make a number of these tunes available. Ask me and I can direct you to some of these resources.

I would encourage the singing of contemporary choruses, but do not neglect the Trinity Hymnal.

Psalter: We have periodically used the Trinity Psalter. This has been a great blessing. My suggestion is to work on the Trinity Hymnal first. Then, use the same principles to begin singing Psalms.

How often should you have Family Worship?

We have tried to have it once each day.

We don't meet this goal and I don't feel guilty about it. I don't think you should either.

We regularly have family worship, as often as is practical.

Some men, when they finally tackle the responsibility of leading their families, in my opinion, go a bit hog-wild. I know that I did at times early on and still may on occasion. Men, it does your children no good if you are angry and mean all throughout Family Worship. We would get home late from some activity and the kids would be tired and I would want to make sure we got in our family worship. It took a while, but I began to learn that this was not the right way to go about things. If I wanted to have regular family worship, I was going to have to have less activities in the evenings. So, I talk often with Robin as to whether or not we can take on another activity. It is much better to say no to something and have an evening where you are not rushed and can have a quality time of worship, than to try to fill your whole day and then mash a time of worship into a ten minute block.

I do not try to have family worship after Praise and Prayer on Sunday Night.

I do not try to have family worship after our Monday Night Bible Study at the House.

Both Praise and Prayer and our Monday Night Bible Study include our children. If they did not, I might feel otherwise about them.

Robin has worship with the kids when I am at Youth Group. The other nights of the week, I try to keep free to have a time of worship.

This does not always work. I am flexible. But I always try to evaluate our lives as a family to determine whether or not the worship of God is central. On nights where other things have taken priority, I still either pray with the kids or encourage them to do so in bed.

How do you handle when your children do not like the time of worship and give you resistance?

Early on, I had to continually remind my children that our family was a Christian home and as such it is our duty, obligation, privilege, etc. to worship God. We did not worship God merely because we wanted to at the moment. God had created us and provided for all our needs, and ultimately is redeeming us. Therefore, he deserves our worship. To not give it to him would be wrong.

At the same time I would acknowledge to the kids that even though, in a general sense, I wanted to worship God, that I too had conflicting desires. There are plenty of times when I do not want to go to all the trouble. Every parent who has tried family worship knows that it can be more of a battle than a spiritual experience. Our kids need to know that we, as parents, struggle to “delight” in family worship.

Do not wait until your kids are ready to delight in family worship to begin requiring them to participate. I would often tell my kids, “I do not require you to like family worship, but I do require you to sit still and respect the time of worship.” What would happen if kids waited to start brushing their teeth until they really enjoyed doing it?

By mandating family worship, you are not making Christianity boring. You are communicating to your kids its great importance. Most of the really important things in life are required.

With the left hand you are telling your children that they must remain still and give their full attention, but with the right hand, you are continually expressing to them that God sees their heart and he requires more than mom and dad. He requires that they truly delight in him and in the worship of him. This is a great opportunity to answer the normal question that will come out of your children. If I don't want to really worship God, how can I get that desire? Bingo! You can begin to explain the gospel. Look to Jesus to forgive you for your lack of desire of him and look to him to give the Holy Spirit to all who ask.

When do you take time to instruct your kids? Catechism or Doctrine stuff.

We have typically taken a short time after meals to memorize Scripture or the Shorter Catechism. We keep this to 5 minutes or so.

Again, the same principle applies: We learn about God because he is worthy.

You are required to work hard at learning about him by me. God requires you to actually delight in him.

Robin has done various morning devotions with the kids.

Remember to bring Christ into your discussions throughout the day. Deut. 6.

What about personal Quiet Times?

This has been gradual thing.

Make sure your children see you spending personal time in prayer and Bible Study. You cannot give them a love for this, you must impart it to them.

When our kids wake up, I would simply prompt them to take a few minutes to read their Bible before they read something else or start their chores. I have never been harsh with this. I believe that if the other things are in place, this will happen. Just continually encourage it.

Make sure you periodically ask your children about what God is teaching them in the Word.