

A Simple Guide to Family Worship

The idea of family worship is at once both attractive and intimidating. Believers may hear encouraging testimonies of the benefits of family worship from others, but the thought of beginning a new pattern of worship in the home can be overwhelming for those just beginning. This guide is written to address some of the most basic questions concerning family worship. We pray that you will feel more emboldened and more equipped to lead your family in worship through using this guide.

What does the Bible say about family worship?

Family worship as we know it is not explicitly commanded in the Bible, but the importance of the home in discipleship is prominent throughout the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, fathers are commanded to teach their children throughout the day, even if that training is informal: "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deut. 6:6-7). But more formal instruction is evident in passages such as Ps. 78:5-7: "He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." Clearly, the family is central in passing along the faith. When we turn to the New Testament, fathers are given the command to bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Timothy, a disciple of Paul, was discipled first by his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). Their impact went beyond mere example. Paul encouraged Timothy to continue in the faith found in the Scriptures. These Scriptures, Paul said, Timothy had learned from childbirth (2 Tim. 3:15). In summary, family worship in the Bible is rooted in the idea of responsibility. Parents, especially fathers, are primarily responsible for the spiritual instruction and vitality of their families. The task is great and weighty, but God's grace is greater and the eternal rewards are beyond anything this world can offer.

What are the benefits of family worship?

Isn't it enough to take my family to worship on Sundays? How can I do something in my home that exceeds what takes place on the Lord's Day? Quite simply, we can't replace what we do on Sundays. Indeed, that is not the point. Framing the question in this way obscures the many benefits of family worship that enhance (not replace) the value of what believers do on the Lord's Day. Among these benefits are the following:

Family worship brings glory to God

The ultimate goal of family worship is the glory of God. God is most glorified when His people value Him above all other things. Family worship is a visible reminder for all in the home that God is worthy of our time, attention, and affection. Furthermore, family worship glorifies God as His followers are conformed more and more into the image of Christ.

Family worship produces joy in the home

Jesus is an inexhaustible source of delight. The joy He brings to individuals He will bring to families who delight in His worship together. Furthermore, the love of Christ will more easily abound in a home where worship is central. As one 19th century pastor noted, family worship will "give true love toward those with whom we have to live: not an exacting, sensitive love, but a merciful love, which excuses and forgives, like that of God Himself; not a proud love, but a humble love, accompanied by a sense of one's own faults and weakness; not a fickle love, but a love unchangeable." That is the kind of love that produces lasting joy among husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters.

Family worship effects change in the world

Any change effected is by the grace of God, but consider both the short-term and long-term impact of family worship. In the shortterm, God may be pleased to work through the prayers of a family that prays nightly for the needs of people near and far. God may hear and answer the prayers of a four-year-old girl asking for the spread of the gospel among an unreached people group. In His sovereign response, missionaries may be sent, the Bible may be translated, and churches may be started. All because God determined to use the prayers prayed in a particular home by a particular family engaged in family worship.

Taking the longer view, think about the incredible value of family worship in the lives of children once they are grown. They've heard hundreds of passages read and explained, seen God answer countless prayers, sang so many songs of the faith, and memorized more Scripture than many Christians do in a lifetime. This is a foundation that will stand the test of time and will bear gospel fruit in generations to come.

What should we do during family worship?

The consistent refrain of those who have made a habit of family worship is this: keep it simple. Many believers are intimidated at the prospects of conducting a worship service in their home. But keeping family worship simple can relieve some of these anxieties. Along those lines, consider including the following simple elements as you worship in your home:

Read

Read a portion of the Word together, either chapter-by-chapter or a selection provided in a devotional guide. If children are present, allowing them to read can be of great benefit to them. Of course, you'll want to explain difficult words and concepts. After reading the Word together, work through a simple process of examining what has been read. First, what did the passage say to the original readers? Second, what does the passage mean for all time? Third, how does this passage apply to us as individuals, as a family, and as a church?

Pray

Of course, there is no set prescription for prayer in family worship. If you have a guide that encourages specific areas of prayer, you may follow that. Alternatively, you may pray through the acronym ACTS, voicing prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (prayer for needs). In any event, try to include everyone as you pray, even if this is on a rotating basis. Additionally, you may want to maintain a prayer journal that enables you to keep track of prayer requests and God's answers to those requests.

Sing

Sing together as a family. Again, songs may be suggested through a devotional guide or you may select your own. If someone in the family has musical gifts, they may learn to play several simple songs for family worship. However, if no one in your family is musical, either use a recording or sing a cappella.

Memorize

Whether a verse (or verses) is suggested or selected by a family member, work on it together. The beginning of the week may be spent both understanding and memorizing the verse. By the end of the week, allow everyone to repeat the verse. Review of verses may be carried out over the course of the year.

Frequently asked questions about family worship

1. What if the father is not a Christian?

The commands regarding family discipleship in the Bible assume a believing father in the home. Of course, this is not always the case. In those instances where the father is not a believer, the mother will need to assume this role. Donald Whitney rightly reminds us that this initiative on the part of the mother must be done in a non-offensive and non-threatening way.

2. What about a single parent family?

Again, in this case the responsibility falls to the single parent. This is a heavy burden to bear in addition to many other duties, but know that God will supply great grace and will more than make up for any natural deficiency we may perceive.

3. What if my kids are very young?

Having very young children will change the dynamic of family worship considerably. Remember, however, that the goal for every child in the family is not the same. With very young children, the goal is probably not understanding of all matters of doctrine. A more "modest" goal of impressing upon them the importance of family worship (and God) is more reasonable and beneficial at their particular age.

4. How do I keep things interesting if the age of my children varies widely?

For young children, try to include them as much as possible and appropriate. Of course, all members of the family can pray and sing (at least some songs). Furthermore, allow younger children to read when possible. For the older children, try including them in the teaching and application of the Scripture reading for the rest of the family and in the leadership of prayer and singing on occasion.

5. What time of day is best for family worship?

The time of day is not the most critical element of family worship. Some families prefer to worship as the day begins. For others, the morning hours are simply too hectic for family worship. In these cases, evening may work best. Many families prefer to adjoin family worship to the evening meal since all the family may be present at that time. In short, timing is far less important than consistency.