

# *Family Worship*

*"A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all storms." - Thomas Brooks*

"The majestic triune God didn't model Himself after our families; rather, He modeled the earthly concept of family after Himself. Our family life faintly reflects the life of the Holy Trinity. That's why Paul speaks of "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:14–15). The love among the persons of the Trinity was so great from eternity that the Father determined to create a world of people who, though finite, would have personalities that reflected the Son. Being conformed to the Son, people could then share in the blessed holiness and joy of the Trinity's family life." – Joel Beeke

## **The Idea of Representative (Federal) Headship**

Joshua 24:15 "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

"In daily life, parents represent children, a father represents his wife and children, church officebearers represent church members, and legislators represent citizens. In spiritual life, every person is represented by either the first or the last Adam (see Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15). This principle of representation surfaces everywhere in Scripture. For example, we read of the godly line of Seth, and of Noah and Job offering sacrifices on their children's behalf (Gen. 8:20–21; Job 1:5). God organized the human race through families and tribes, and dealt largely with them through the headship of the father. As God said to Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3)." – Joel Beeke

## **The Father as the Pastor of His Family**

"Family religion, which depends not a little on the household head daily leading the family before God in worship, is one of the most powerful structures that the covenant-keeping God has given for the expansion of redemption through the generations, so that countless multitudes may be brought into communion with and worship" of the living God in the face of Jesus Christ. – Douglas Kelly

Gen. 18: 17 And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,

18 "since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

19 "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

“The Mosaic economy continued the principle of the father representing the family in worship and fellowship with God. The book of Numbers particularly focuses on God’s dealing with His people in terms of families and their heads. The father was to lead the family in Passover worship and instruct his children in its meaning.” – Joel Beeke

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 " Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

6 " And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

7 "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Deut. 4:9 " Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren,

10 "especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'

Deut. 6:20 " When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?'

21 "then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand;

22 'and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household.

23 'Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers.

24 'And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day.

25 'Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'

Joshua 4:21 Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?'

22 "then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land';

Deut. 11:16 "Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them,

17 "lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.

18 " Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

19 "You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

20 "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,

Prov. 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.

“The relationship between worship and family life continued in New Testament times. Peter reaffirmed the promise to Abraham, the father of the faithful (Rom. 4:11), when he declared to the Jews in his Pentecost sermon that “the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off” (Acts 2:39).”

Eph. 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise:

3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

1 Thess. 2:10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;

11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,

12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

### ***What If the Father isn't Able to do it?***

“The New Testament church, which included children with their parents as members of the body (Eph. 6:1–4), and the experience of individual believers such as Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5, 3:15), affirm the importance of faith and worship within families.” – Joel Beeke

2 Tim. 1:5 when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.

2 Tim 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

2 John 1:1 THE ELDER, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth,

2 because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

## ***Consequences of Failing to Conduct Family Worship***

Judges 2:7 So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

8 Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died when he was one hundred and ten years old.

9 And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.

11 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals;

12 and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger.

*Isn't that EXACTLY what is going on today?*

### ***From the American Directory for Worship:***

“Besides the public worship in congregations, it is the indispensable duty of each person, alone in secret, and of every family by itself in private, to pray to and worship God.”

“*Secret* worship is most plainly enjoined by our Lord. (Matt. 6:6; Eph. 6:18.) In this duty every one, apart by himself, is to spend some time in prayer, reading the Scriptures, holy meditation, and serious self-examination. The many advantages arising from a conscientious discharge of these duties are best known to those who are found in the faithful discharge of them.”

“*Family* worship, which ought to be performed by every family, ordinarily morning and evening, consists in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and singing praises.”

“The head of the family, who is to lead in this service, ought to be careful that all the members of his household duly attend; and that none withdraw themselves unnecessarily from any part of family worship; and that all refrain from their common business while the Scriptures are read, and gravely attend to the same, no less than when prayer and praise are offered up.”

“Let the heads of families be careful to instruct their children and servants in the principles of religion. Every proper opportunity ought to be embraced for such instruction. But we are of opinion that the Sabbath evenings, after public worship, should be sacredly preserved for this purpose. Therefore we highly disapprove of paying unnecessary private visits on the Lord's day; admitting strangers into the families, except when necessity or charity requires it; or any other practices, whatever plausible presences may be offered in their favor, if they interfere with the above important; and necessary duty.” (American) Directory for Worship, chap. 15<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hodge, A.A., Charles Hodge, and A.A. Hodge. The Confession of Faith : With Questions for Theological Students and Bible Classes. With an Appendix on Presbyterianism by Charles Hodge. I 1992 Banner of Truth reprint., Pages 279-280.

## ***Getting Started***

Do you wish you and your family were having regular family worship, but aren't? Wondering how to get started? We would like to make the following recommendations to help you along.

1. *Remember, there is nothing to getting started like actually getting started.* Doesn't sound helpful? We're making a point - like everything else that is valuable but requires discipline and sacrifice (losing weight, stopping drinking, getting an education, staying married, attending worship services), it finally comes down to doing it. Start! Do it!
2. *Settle on a routine that will work most days of the week.* For example, at the breakfast table, or at the dinner table, or at bedtime, etc. Let it become as regular and habitual as brushing your teeth. The older authors (eg. J. W. Alexander in *Thoughts on Family Worship*)<sup>2</sup> strongly suggests a fixed time throughout the week, for example 6:30 each morning or 5:30 each evening.
3. *Adjust for irregularities.* If Monday and Thursday nights one of you is out, then have your family worship in the mornings on those days. Plan ahead and make this adjustment a part of the routine. Thus, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, family worship might be in the evenings. Monday and Thursday it might be in the mornings. Sunday it is at church morning and evening. This irregular schedule may not be as desirable as the fixed time, but it may be the best that can be done in today's world.
4. *Persevere.* If you miss once, don't despair, but don't miss twice, either. Persist and your routine will become routine!

Admittedly the matter of discipline and routine is neither common nor popular today. Yet Scripture urges us to “redeem the time, for the days are evil” (Eph 5:16). The Psalmist exhorts us to “number our days” (Ps 90:12). Time is a gift of God. We have been given a limited amount of it. Once it is past it is gone. Consequently sound stewardship requires that we make every day count that God gives to us. Such is only possible if we bring order to our lives and plan for our priorities. Life must be lived *intentionally*. We will never regularly do what we don't set out intentionally to do. J.I. Packer's summation of the Puritan (ie. Biblical) outlook on order in family life is right to the point:

Puritan teachers thought humane family life, in which Christian love and joy would find full and free expression, could not be achieved till the ordered pattern they envisaged - the regular authority-structure and daily routine - had been firmly established. Their passion to please God expressed itself in an ardor for order; their vision of the good and godly life was of a planned, well-thought-out flow of actives in which all obligations were recognized and met, and time was found for everything that mattered: for personal devotion, for family worship, for household tasks, for wage-earning employment, for intimacy with spouse and children, for Sabbath rest, and whatever else one's calling or callings required.<sup>3</sup>

If this “ardor for order” is characteristic of us as well, we will find time for daily family devotions.

## **Suggested Elements**

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<sup>2</sup>J.W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (1847), was bound together with B.M. Palmer, *The Family in its Civil and Churchly Aspects* (1876) and published as *The Family* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications), 1981.

<sup>3</sup>J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990). p. 273.

We are convinced that family worship ought to be *worship*, not games, not entertainment, not a discussion (though discussion may occur), not "family time" (though the family is together), but a devotional exercise. Consequently, even in a family with young children, the elements in family worship ought to be those of public worship (minus the sacraments) adapted for the more informal family setting, but still predominantly serious and substantial. Furthermore, such an approach will have the salutary effect of family and public worship reinforcing and building upon one another. Family worship that employs the commonly used elements and forms of public worship (eg. Creed, Doxology, Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, etc.) will hasten memorization and enable active participation of small children on the "family pew" at a very young age.

The follow list of elements provides an outline of the kinds of things that you might do, adapting the particulars to the needs of your family (ages of your children, etc.).

1. *Singing* - Start to sing Psalms and hymns to your children on the day you bring them home from the hospital. By age two they will begin to pick up the tunes and some words; by age four they will be able to sing a host of hymns and Psalms such as those being suggested in this work. On Saturday sing the Sunday hymns in preparation for the Lord's Day. Section VI. of this work provides a selection of the best hymns and Psalms for family use. For a larger collection, our recommended songbooks are:

*Trinity Hymnal*<sup>4</sup>  
*Trinity Psalter or Trinity Psalter Songleader's Edition*<sup>5</sup>

2. *Prayer* - Teach them to bow their heads, fold their hands, and 1) pray ACTS, the whole range of **A**-doration, **C**-onfession, **T**-hanksgiving, and **S**-upplication ("Our Father in heaven, we worship you, we praise you... we confess our sins... we thank you for Jesus who died for our sins... bless Mommy and Daddy," etc.); and 2) pray the Lord's Prayer, which by age four or so they should be able committed to memory. For examples of family prayers, see the following:

Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer* (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), pp 214-241.  
*The Directory for Family Worship*, Section LX (Found in Appendix 3 of this work).

3. *Confession of Faith* - Begin with the Apostles' Creed; once mastered, go on to the Children's Catechism, then the Shorter Catechism (the catechisms may be found in Section VI of this work). The Law of God and the Beatitudes may be used either as preparation for prayer or an affirmation of faith.

4. *Teaching* - Get a good Bible story book as a guide and read or tell the stories in such a way as makes them live. Remember that much of the Biblical revelation is in the form of stories. Use them. As children get older, move from children's versions to adult. We have found the following to be useful and edifying children's "Bibles." They are listed in order of sophistication, from the simplest to the more mature:

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<sup>4</sup>Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Great Commission Publications, Inc., 1990.

<sup>5</sup>Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Crown and Covenant Publications, 1994; Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 1998.

*Read-Aloud Bible Stories*, Vols. 1-4 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982 - 1995).

Twenty basic Bible stories, beautifully illustrated, appeals to all ages, even the very youngest. Ages 1-4.

*The Beginner's Bible* (Sisters, Oregon: Questar Publishers, 1991).

Provides good overview of Bible stories, through the happy-face pictures to undermine themes of sin and judgment. Ages 2-6.

*The Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1956).

Combines texts written by the *Living Bible's* Kenneth Taylor with beautiful artwork from previous generations. Contains 184 stories which when read in combination with suggested Scripture reading are very effective. Ages 4-12.

*The Children's Daily Devotional Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996).

Two-hundred sixty Scripture portions, Contemporary English Version, organized for fifty-two weeks, five readings per week. As with the others, beautifully illustrated. Ages 4+ (when read aloud).

*The Children's Story Bible* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1935).

A classic, written by Catherine F. Vos, wife of Princeton theologian Gerhardus Vos. Ages 8-12.

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These suggestions are not exhaustive and no doubt other excellent alternatives are available. It needs to be said as well, that most reading of the (adult) Bible itself, has still proven to be the most edifying of devotional exercises for our family. The children's editions tend to edit-out controversial or "negative" matters (e.g. divorce) from which some of our most stimulating discussions have come.

By using these elements in daily family worship you will be providing regular spiritual instruction for your family as well as preparing them for the public worship services of the church. At an early age, your children will be able to join in with the congregation and repeat the parts that they have learned at home. In the process, the public worship service becomes the focal point of your week. Your family devotions lead up to it. The service itself becomes a "family time," when parents model public devotion to God and children learn to worship Him.

## **The Young Man's Guide to the Harmonious Development of Christian Character**

**by Harvey Newcomb, 1847**

### **BEHAVIOR AT FAMILY WORSHIP**

All well-regulated Christian families are assembled, morning and evening, to worship God. Seeing we are dependent on him for all things, it is suitable and proper that we should daily acknowledge our dependence—by asking him for what we need, and thanking him for what we receive. That we should do this as a family is highly proper. But if it is our duty to worship God as a family, it is the duty of everyone in particular. It is as much your duty as it is your father's. You must, therefore, not only make it a principle to be in your place punctually at the time, but to

enter heartily into all the exercises. Some children and youth appear as if they had no interest in what is going on, at this most interesting household service. But this is not only showing great disrespect to your parents, but great irreverence toward God. It will help you to right feelings, on these occasions, if you imagine Christ Jesus present in person. God is present spiritually, and in a peculiar manner, at such times, to bless the families which call on his name. When, therefore, the family is assembled for prayers, you should put away all vain or wandering thoughts. When the time arrives, and the family are assembled for devotion, seat yourself, in a serious, reverent manner; and if there should be a few moments' delay, do not engage in conversation, nor in reading newspapers, or anything calculated to divert your mind; but direct your thoughts upward to God, and seek a preparation for his worship. Do not allow your mind to be occupied with anything but the service before you. Let not your eyes wander about, to catch vagrant thoughts. Let not your hands be occupied with anything, to divert your attention or to disturb others. Have your Bible, and take your turn in reading. Be attentive and devout, during the reading of God's holy word, endeavoring to apply it to your heart.

If the family sings, enter into this sweet service, not only with your lips, but with your heart. When prayer is offered, place yourself in the posture which is taken by your father and mother. If they kneel, you kneel also—in a reverent posture. Shut your eyes, and keep your heart. Let your heart embrace the words of the prayer, and make them your own. Remember that the devotional habits you form at the family altar, are the habits that will follow you to God's house, and probably adhere to you through life. And what can be more shocking than to see people pretending to gentility, who do not know how to behave with propriety before the great God who made them! If you were in company, and should treat the person that invited you with as much indifference as you treat God by such conduct, you would be considered a very ill-bred person. He has invited you to come to his mercy-seat to converse with him, and to receive favors at his hand; and yet, by such conduct as I have named, you show no interest at all in the matter.

Family devotion, when rightly improved, is a very important means of grace. If you attend upon it seriously and reverently, you may hope that God will bless it to your soul. It tends, also, to tranquillize the feelings, and prepare you to engage in the duties of the day with serenity and cheerfulness.