

A Resource for Family Worship

If “Jonathan Edwards” were a dictionary entry, we might find the following as part of the definition: preacher of what may be America’s most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God;” leader in the Great Awakening; author of sermons and

Confession, church elders were charged to hold every head of a household accountable for his family’s worship. Whitney cites examples of godly

books that continue to inspire and influence after 300 years; pastor; arguably the greatest thinker ever produced in America; early president of Princeton seminary; missionary to the Indians. Yet, above all these things, Jonathan Edwards’ “preeminent concern” was “care for his children’s souls.”¹ What Christian parent would not make the same claim? Whatever else we leave undone, we want to be sure that we have faithfully brought up our children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Yet as Donald S. Whitney asks in his recent book, *Family Worship in the Bible, in History, and in Your Home*, when do we actually do this? Whitney reminds us that faithful Christian nurture will not happen unintentionally. “Without some regularity and structure and purpose,” he writes, “it is one of those things that we assume we are doing but never actually do.”

Recently, a home school mom told me that teaching Bible to their children is one of the things most commonly neglected by home school parents. Since it is not one of those subjects that carries the pressure of keeping children up to grade level, she told me, it often gets pushed aside with the assumption that “we can easily catch up on that later.” In his book, Whitney quotes statistics indicating that, although most American parents believe they are responsible to impart religious beliefs to their children, the vast majority of them fail to discuss spiritual things or study religious materials with their families. For this reason and because, as Whitney says, “God deserves to be worshiped daily in our families,” he has written this small, quickly read book to motivate and help Christian parents.

Family Worship in the Bible, in History, and in Your Home presents its outline in its title. The book contains an introduction, five short chapters, and a few discussion guide pages at the end. Chapter 1, “Family Worship in the Bible,” quotes and briefly discusses the principal Scriptures calling parents to faithfully teach their children and lead them in the worship of God. Chapter 2, “Family Worship in the Church,” points out that both the Westminster and the Baptist London Confessions of faith explicitly set forth the duty of individual and family worship. Whitney points out that in *The Directory for Family Worship*, produced by the Westminster Assembly in the same year it published the

men through the centuries who regarded family worship as their most important calling as well as one of their highest privileges.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 offer practical help. “Elements of Family Worship” gives suggestions for what to include, with some tips on being effective. “But What If—?” addresses difficulties parents might face in leading worship in their homes. While Whitney only discusses four concerns, and those very briefly, he concludes the chapter by making the point that no family worship situation is unique, but all have been overcome through the centuries by parents committed to the spiritual nurture of their families and the worship of God. “We tend to think we have unique problems,” Whitney writes, “and our flesh wants to excuse us from family worship on the false grounds that our situation is an exception.” Chapter 5, “Start Today,” provides more motivation, additional clarification, and practical ideas on beginning.

Family Worship contains only fifty pages of actual text, with plenty of white space. The book’s very smallness is part of its value. Churches can make it available in their literature racks. Pastors can hand it to fathers, even to those who might not read a larger book, knowing they can easily read it in one sitting. *Family Worship* needs to get into the hands of many, and its concisely stated message needs to get into many hearts.

Starr Meade is author of Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism (P&R, 2000).

Family Worship is also available on CD. See BiblicalSpirituality.org for details.

NOTES

¹George Marsden, Edwards’ biographer, quoted in *Family Worship in the Bible, in History and in Your Home* by Donald S. Whitney (Shepherdsville, Ky.: Center for Biblical Spirituality, 2006).