

Simplify Family Worship

A man who is like a spiritual father to me began what he called a "family altar" with his wife before they were married, and has faithfully continued the practice through the arrival of children and grandchildren for more than fifty years. Sadly, it seems that few men among even the best evangelical churches today could speak of daily family worship in their home. In the minds of some, active church involvement eliminates the need for family worship. For others, Bible reading, prayer, and singing praises to God together as a family have been crowded out by the television, the Internet, and a non-stop schedule that makes even meals together a rarity.

But the father (and in his absence, the mother) of the family has the responsibility from God to provide spiritual leadership for his household. As He did with Abraham, the Lord wants every father to "command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord" (Genesis 18:19). Each one should raise his children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Every husband should love his wife as Christ loves His bride—the church—and follow Christ's example of washing his wife with "the washing of water by the word" of God (Ephesians 5:26).

While it isn't the only way, the simplest method of applying all these texts in a steady, practical way is through daily family worship. This is how generations of Christians have understood them. For instance, both Baptists and Presbyterians in the 1600s saw this biblical teaching, and incorporated identical language about the expectation of family worship into the most influential confessional statements in their respective histories. To this day, many churches still maintain (at least officially) that, "God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and truth; as in private families daily."

Somehow, though, many men have gotten the idea that family worship is complicated, or that it requires time-consuming preparation. But it need not require any more preparation than your personal worship of God. And the entire experience can be reduced to three simple elements: read, pray, sing.

Read. The centerpiece of family worship is the Bible. Read a passage of appropriate length for your family, making any impromptu comments that come to mind. Those with younger children should emphasize the narrative portions of Scripture, and possibly the Proverbs. Eventually, most seem to work up to about a chapter a day, reading consecutively through a particular book of the Bible. I recommend that you ask a few questions to determine comprehension, or just ask the children to repeat what they remember.

Pray. Let the words of the passage you read suggest matter for prayer. The husband/father should pray, and perhaps one or all the rest of the family members. Most days this will be brief.

Sing. Use a hymnal and sing *a cappella*, or sing along to a recording, or let a family musician lead the way. Sing as little as one verse, or for as long as the family enjoys it.

Any order of "read, pray, sing" is fine. It doesn't have to be long to be effective. Be patient with the interest and attention span of the younger ones. Remember that you're not only fulfilling a responsibility to God by leading family worship, you're also introducing your children to Him. In these moments together, your children can see your love for God and for His Word, and some of the most teachable moments of their childhood will occur. So start family worship in your home today. It doesn't matter when you have worship. For some, early morning is best. For others, it's mealtime, and for still others, it's bedtime. Just start. Whether you've been married fifty years or newly engaged, just start. Keep it simple, and keep it up.

¹London Confession of Faith (Baptist) 22.6; Westminster Confession of Faith (Presbyterian) 21.6.

For more details on this subject, see *Family Worship: In the Bible, In History, and In Your Home* by Donald S. Whitney at www.BiblicalSpirituality.org

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