

# Family Worship

**Why and How?**



**God Centered Family**

Family Worship: Why and How?  
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*“Start a youth out on his way;  
even when he grows old he will not depart  
from it.”*

*Proverbs 22:6*

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# Introduction

Here's the sobering reality: if we don't fill our children's minds with the truth of God's Word, then the world will certainly fill them with lies.

If you're a Christian parent, training your children to know and treasure Christ is probably a no-brainer — you want that more than anything. But what does it actually look like to train our children in the fear of God?

Well, it doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, what Christian families have done for most of church history is the simple discipline of gathering together once a day to read the Bible, pray, and sing God's praises.

Read. Pray. Sing.

It's called **family worship**.

Parents, God has entrusted your children to you. He has commanded you to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. I want to help you obey that command faithfully and fruitfully. In this simple booklet, we'll walk through the *why* and *how* for family worship.

I have two goals for this booklet. First, for those of you who don't have a regular practice of family worship in your home, my hope is that this booklet would equip you with the tools you need to start a regular practice of family worship.

And secondly, for those of you who already have a regular practice of family worship in your home, I hope that this booklet both encourages you to persevere and helps you make your family worship times more fruitful.

# 1. Why Family Worship?

In this first chapter, we're going to discuss *why* to practice family worship in your home. I want to give you three reasons to start prioritizing family worship now.

## 1. Children learn through habits.

Have any of your children learned anything the first time you said it?

No matter how clear of a communicator you are, you've probably had to repeat some important things over and over and over again for your children to really understand.

Children (or any human, for that matter) never learn really important things with one quick take. And the most important lessons must be reinforced with habits and routines.

Teaching our children anything requires a lot of repetition. So let's make sure we prioritize God's Word enough for our children to understand it's priority.

When family worship is a daily habit, you are guaranteeing that your children will hear God's Word at least once every day. Gathering every day for family worship will constantly be teaching your children of the central place that God and his Word have in your home and in your lives.

If you want your children to learn and love God's Word, make it a daily routine for your family to read the Bible, pray, and sing together, so that your children will never know a day when God's Word was not proclaimed over them.

Make family worship a habit. Because that's the only way children learn the most important lessons.

## **2. Christians have *always* practiced family worship.**

While there is no command in the Bible that you must have family worship every night, Christians have been practicing family worship for the entire history of the church.

**John Chrysostom**, who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, spoke of every Christian family as a little church which necessarily worshipped together.

The Reformer **Martin Luther** picked up on that same idea. As the Scriptures became readily available in the common language again, Luther urged parents to bring it into their homes and to proclaim it over their kids. He said this: "Any godly and pious head of a household instructs his children. . . in godliness. Therefore such a house is actually a school and church, and the head of the household is a bishop and priest in his house."

The **Westminster Confession of Faith**, completed in 1647, demands that God be worshipped everywhere. The confessors wrote that "God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in

truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself.” Do you see what they’re doing there? The Westminster Assembly says that *family* worship is just as important as *private* worship or personal devotions. It’s just as important to read the Bible to your family and your children as it is to read the Bible by yourself!

**Matthew Henry** who lived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries explained that family worship has three distinct elements, just like we have today. He said, “They that pray in the family do well; they that pray and read the Scriptures do better; but they that pray, and read, and sing do best of all.”

**Charles Spurgeon** in the 1800’s believed that family worship was crucial for leaving a lasting legacy of faith in the lives of our children: “If we want to bring up a godly family, who shall be a seed to serve God when our heads are under the clods of the valley, let us seek to train them up in the fear of God by *meeting together as a family for worship*.” Spurgeon lived this commitment out by prioritizing daily family worship, despite his incredibly demanding ministry schedule.

This is an impossibly quick summary with just a few highlights. I hope it shows you that Christians, from every major era of the church and from various points along the denominational spectrum, have prioritized family worship. I hope we’ll prioritize it too.

### **3. God's Word never returns void.**

We know and believe that God's Word is powerful. God, through his Word, has brought us to salvation and taught us to fight sin in every form. If you want God to do that kind of work in your children, start by regularly exposing them to the wonderful Word of God.

God wants to do an incredible work in the life of your family and he's going to do it through his Word.

For God to work in your family doesn't require cleverness or excessive creativity from you — it merely requires you to open God's Word, which is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

If you make a regular practice of family worship, I can guarantee that God is going to do some incredible, miraculous things in the life of your family. Why can I guarantee that? Because God's Word never returns void. When God's Word is opened, lives are transformed. By leading our families in daily family worship, we get to play a part in that transforming work of God.

God wants to do an incredible work in the life of your family and he's going to do it through his Word as you open the Bible in family worship.

## **2. Getting Started with Family Worship**

In this chapter, we're going to discuss the three essential elements for family worship, so that you can start to craft a practical plan for implementing faithful family worship in your household.

The three elements are Read the Bible, Pray in Response, and Sing in Response. Let's discuss each of these in turn.

### **1. Read the Bible**

The first element of family worship: read the Bible. As we discussed in the first chapter, God's Word never returns void. Reading God's Word together is one of the most beneficial habits you can form in the life of your family.

No one has to preach a sermon, just read the Bible. Never let a day go by without your child having the Word of God proclaimed over them. This is the best way to build Bible literacy in our children.

At [GodCenteredFamily.org](http://GodCenteredFamily.org), we produce Family Worship Guides to help you know what passage to read. Consider these guides like a Bible reading plan for your entire family. We typically read through entire books of the Bible in manageable chunks (usually about a chapter a night), alternating between Old Testament and New Testament books.

Depending on the age and history of your children, the discipline of listening to Scripture may take time to develop. Be patient and gracious with your children, but also be sure not to give them excuses or allow them to ignore or disrespect the reading of God's Word. Like all habits worth having, the habit of hearing God's Word takes time to develop.

Our Family Worship Guides also include 3–4 discussion questions for each day's reading, to help your children understand and apply what was read.

These questions generally move from comprehension questions ("What did we just read?") to interpretation questions ("What did it mean? What does it reveal about God") to application questions ("What does this mean for my life?"). With that in mind, it makes sense to start with your youngest child and work your way up.

For toddlers, you can even ask more basic questions that repeat every day (For example, "What book of the Bible are we reading now?" "Who wrote this book of the Bible?" "Is this in the Old Testament or the New Testament?"). Even if your 18-month-old can't answer the questions, you're helping them start to form an important habit of careful reading and communicating that God's Word has value, even if it can't be fully understood yet.

Faithful family worship is centered on the reading of God's Word. The second and third elements come in response to God's Word.

## **2. Pray in Response**

Someone (usually the father) prays. When you pray, be sure to praise God for what he revealed about himself in the passage of Scripture that was read, pray for God's work in and through your family, as well as praying for the nations.

We want to root our prayers in the Scripture that we just read. This has the spiritual benefit of ensuring our prayers are rooted in God's desires, but it also has the practical benefit of making sure our prayers don't sound the same every day.

Our Family Worship Guides have three prayer points for every day: one for your family, one for your local church family, and one for the nations.

## **3. Sing in Response**

For many families, singing together seems like the easiest part to skip. Many believe that it will be awkward or a waste of time to sing together, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

Whether everyone in the family is a horrible singer or all of your children are musical prodigies, God is glorified when we sing to him.

It's important to choose songs that are rich in biblical truth. The best songs will reflect on themes from the passages we're reading that week, so that our singing is directly fueled by what we see in God's Word.

Our Family Worship Guides recommend two song choices each week, a classic hymn and a modern song. We recommend singing the same song for a full week so that everyone in the family can really learn and reflect on the words.

You can sing a capella, along with a recording, or along with an instrument (if someone in the family is able to play without being a distraction). You can sing out of hymnals or printed-out lyric sheets.

*How* you sing (or how *well* you sing) is not as important as the God we are singing to. He is worthy of our praise.

I hope you see the importance of each of the three elements of family worship and are starting to craft a plan for implementing each of these elements in your own home.

### 3. Three Ways to Kill Family Worship

I hope this booklet has already shown you the incredible fruit that God can bring about in your family's life through a regular practice of family worship. In this chapter, I want to expose three threats to family worship — obstacles that are threatening to undermine the discipline and fruitfulness of family worship. It's important we discuss each of these threats now so that you can have a plan to neutralize them.

#### 1. Overthinking It

The number one way to kill family worship is overthinking it.

I have seen this play out in countless families, including my own. Many parents think that family worship isn't worth doing unless it's done perfectly. We try to add unnecessary extra elements on top of reading, praying, and singing that make family worship too long, too difficult to plan, or too cumbersome to regularly practice.

During family worship, no one has to preach a sermon or lead a devotional. No one has to plan a craft or interactive activity. No one has to lead incredibly piercing application questions.

Crafts and sermons and devotionals and application questions are *all great*, but they don't need to be a part of every family worship time in your household.

All that you need is God's Word.

Overthinking it and adding additional requirements to your family worship time *will* keep your family from having a daily family worship time.

The Family Worship Guides from GodCenteredFamily.org will give you everything that you need. You don't need to overthink it. There are even some bonus activities included to encourage hands-on learning.

## **2. Not Prioritizing It.**

Family worship will be a powerful force in the life of your family, but it will not happen automatically. Family worship has to be a *choice* for your family every day.

Make the commitment now that you *will* practice family worship every day, no matter the cost.

This requires flexibility. Sometimes it means we have family worship in the car while coming home late; sometimes it means we keep our kids up a few extra minutes; sometimes it means changing our schedule and saying no to other activities so that family worship can be prioritized.

Family worship is not the time for multitasking. Put your devices away and have your children do the same.

God is at work in your family worship time. So let's prioritize it.

### **3. Not Planning It.**

Don't just make a vague commitment now to "do family worship." We need to pick a specific time and place to do family worship.

It doesn't matter what time you do family worship, but make it a routine — do it at the same time and in roughly the same format every day.

Use a time that works well for your whole family, a time when usually everyone (including both parents) is present and that other activities won't typically threaten.

After dinner is usually the best time, because most families have dinner together, it happens every night at roughly the same time, and the whole family is already gathered in one place, so you don't have to herd the cats twice.

So we have to plan *when* to have family worship, and we also have to plan *how* to have family worship. What will each of the three elements look like for your family?

At [GodCenteredFamily.org](http://GodCenteredFamily.org), we want to help you plan the *how* for your family worship time. Our Family Worship Guides include a passage of Scripture to read each day, questions to ask in response, prayer points, and song suggestions.

Failure to plan is a threat to family worship. So commit to a time and place, get a guide, and get started today.

## 4. Babies and Toddlers in Family Worship

When our first daughter was born, we had family worship together for the first time in the hospital. While we weren't perfectly consistent with family worship immediately, we knew it was valuable for our daughter to have family worship baked into the rhythms of her life from the very beginning.

When I tell new parents to start making family worship a daily habit for their family, they often reply with skepticism. They say things like, "Why spend time reading the Bible to your infant? It's not like they'll understand anything they hear."

No, they won't, but that doesn't mean family worship isn't worthwhile for families without older children. Because, just like older kids, babies have a lot to learn. And habits and repetition are the only way babies learn anything.

### Young Children and The Power of Habit

The only reason your child learned (or will learn) to say mama and dada is because you said those words to them *constantly*. The only way they will learn to brush their teeth is by *doing* it every day.

Many parents are complete sticklers for making sure their baby's bedtime routine is *exactly the same* every night,

because they know that having a daily rhythm will help their child sleep.

We understand the value of habits and repetition in every area of caring for a baby or toddler. Well, habits and repetition can have a positive impact on your child's *spiritual* life as well.

By making a daily habit of family worship, you're showing your children, even though they don't understand everything that's happening, that God's Word is valuable, that prayer is important, and that God is great and worthy of praise. We are, through habit, teaching our children that God is the center of our lives and our family.

Our hope is that our children would never know a day when God's Word wasn't proclaimed over them.

We're also equipping our children with the ability to sit and listen to God's Word. If listening to the Bible is a daily habit for your child from the beginning of their life, they're going to be much better equipped to read the Bible for themselves and listen to sermons when they're 5, 15, and 55.

Families with babies, I encourage you to make family worship a part of your bedtime routine. Bedtime happens every night in roughly the same way, so make family worship a part of it.

## **Teaching Truth to Toddlers**

Everything we said about babies applies to toddlers as well, who are still learning from our habits and routines. But toddlers

are also quickly becoming information sponges, soaking up *tons* of information.

You can introduce interactive elements to help your toddler learn that family worship is *for them*, just as much as it's for mom and dad.

We always ask our daughter "What book of the Bible are we going to read tonight?" This reinforces the idea that God's Word is valuable for her and it's also helping her learn the names of the books of the Bible.

You can also ask follow-up questions about the book of the Bible. For instance, if you're reading one of the Gospels, ask your child what the other three are. If you're reading Deuteronomy, ask your child who wrote it.

Your toddlers *will* learn this information if you help them along the way, so start investing in your child now.

Our Family Worship Guides include toddler Bible questions for each book of the Bible and an interactive listening guide to help toddlers stay focused. You can see a sample of our Family Worship Guides at [GodCenteredFamily.org/free](http://GodCenteredFamily.org/free)

God has commanded you, parents, to bring your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. I hope you'll take that command seriously, from the very beginning of your child's life.

## 5. Pre-Teens and Teens in Family Worship

Some of my earliest preparation for parenting came when I served my church as a middle school youth leader. When I first got involved in youth ministry, I thought I had to be really cool and culturally aware to reach kids for Christ.

A few years in, I realized how ridiculous that was. Pre-teens and teens don't need another adult who looks just like the world — they need God's Word, pure and undiluted, unleashed on their lives. It's not about making yourself cool and impressive, it's about showing them how cool and impressive Christ is.

For parents of teens, I have two tips to make family worship more effective.

### 1. Explain Family Worship

Parents of teens know that one of the best ways to make a difference in your child's life is to be real and authentic. If you're just starting out with family worship with a pre-teen or teen in the house, be sure to communicate the *WHY* behind family worship. Don't expect them to blindly follow you: explain to them the benefit you hope family worship brings them, so that they can participate accordingly.

If you need help communicating the importance of family worship to your teen, go back to the first chapter in this

booklet. The three reasons I shared for why to practice family worship will be a great starting point for your conversation.

Of course, while we want to explain our reasoning to our children, we still exercise a God-given authority over their lives. It's acceptable, and even necessary, to tell your teenage children to participate in family worship, even if they think it's a waste of time.

## **2. Make Space for Questions**

Typically, asking questions isn't a sign of rebellion, it's a sign that your children are making *your* faith their own, wrestling through really big, important topics.

Encourage your children to ask questions about the Bible and their doubts. Provide answers when you can, but also don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."

You shouldn't expect to know all the answers. You're not God and have not mastered the Bible. If you don't know the answer to your teenager's question, tell them "I don't know, but let's find out together." Take them on a journey to find the answer by turning to trusted resources and counselors.

Shepherding your child through their teenage years is an exciting adventure, with twists at every turn. I hope that you'll continue to prioritize family worship throughout this important stage of your child's life.

## Recommended Resources for Parents and Teens

### Answering Your Teenager's Questions:

- Your own pastors
- [\*The Apologetics Study Bible\*](#)
- [GotQuestions.org](#)

### For Your Teen to Read:

- [\*Jesus or Nothing\* by Dan DeWitt](#)
- [\*This Changes Everything: How the Gospel Transforms the Teen Years\* by Jackie Crow](#)
- [\*10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask \(and Answer\) about Christianity\* by Rebecca McLaughlin](#)

## 6. How Your Family Worship Will Change the World (Seriously)

Faithful family worship will not just change your household. It will change the world.

That's a big statement, but it's biblically warranted.

### God's Plan for the World

The Bible doesn't speak about God saving people randomly as opportunities come up; the Bible speaks about God saving a people for himself from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

That means that representatives from every distinct ethnic, language, and culture group will be born again throughout history and will spend eternity worshipping Christ.

This is the scene that the Bible paints for us in Revelation 5:9–10, where a great crowd praises Christ, saying “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood *from every tribe and language and people and nation*. You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

The good news: King Jesus *will* be praised by every tribe, tongue, and nation. It's a sure fact.

The bad news is that there are thousands of people groups — distinct ethnic/language/culture groups that have never heard the good news that King Jesus came to save and reign as the good and glorious King of the world. They cannot praise his name because they have never heard it.

That is a tragedy. Christ is not currently receiving the glory that he is due, because no one has ever praised his name among the Ngada tribe in Indonesia, or the A Che people in China, or the Abkhaz people in Turkey.

If Christ were to come back right now, there would, as far as we know, be no representatives from those tribes around his throne. Satan would be able to accuse God for all eternity that he was not worthy of praise from the Ngada or the A Che or the Abkhaz.

Not to mention that the individuals that make up these people groups would perish in hell for eternity. They have no escape from that divine judgement unless someone goes to tell them the good news of Christ.

## **Your Prayers: God's Plan for the Nations**

This is a big problem, but Christ gave a solution to this problem in Luke 10:2, “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.”

Christ's solution? Pray.

In light of all of this great need, Christ commands us to *pray* for the nations, asking God to send workers to tell them the good news of his Son, so that he would be glorified and so that the nations might be saved. We pray because we need *God* to do the saving, not us.

And I want to encourage you, not just to pray for the nations, but pray for the nations with your kids. We want our children to catch a global vision, to desperately long for Christ to be glorified among every tribe, tongue, and nation. We want our children, from the very beginning of their lives, to consider their own role to play in this task of making disciples.

Family worship can change the world because God works in response to our prayers to bring the good news of his risen Son to the ends of the earth.

To help you pray for the nations, our Family Worship Guides highlight a different unreached, unengaged people group every month — a distinct ethnic/language/culture group where Christ has never been named and has never been praised.

You can print out the People Group Focus sheet and put it in a prominent place in your home to help remind your children to pray for God's work among the nations.

Through daily family worship and our prayers for the nation, we are showing our children that God is a treasure worth laying down their lives for. And that kind of love for God and zeal for his glory might lead our children to the ends of the earth,

where they can proclaim the good news of his Son to those who will never otherwise hear it.

Family worship will not just change your household. It *will* change the world.

## 7. Family Worship and Evangelism

One of the often overlooked benefits of family worship is how it will necessarily create opportunities for evangelism in your home.

I've encouraged you throughout this course to make family worship a daily practice in your own home. One of the secrets to making family worship a habit is to practice it at the same time and in the same way each day.

What does this have to do with evangelism? Whoever is in the house at that time is invited to family worship. Believers or not, they are encouraged to join us for family worship.

At my house, we have family worship after dinner. Whenever we have guests for dinner, I explain family worship to them as we are wrapping up the meal and encourage them to join us.

This has led to incredible stories of Christians being built up and non-Christians asking good questions about the Bible reading.

You might think that you can't have family worship when non-Christians are in their home because it will be awkward. In my own experience, it actually isn't usually awkward, because I explain that this is just what our family does every night and we want them included today.

But even if it is awkward, it's worth it.

In the first chapter, I said that God's Word never returns void, that God wants to do an incredible work in the life of your family and he's going to do it through his Word as you open the Bible in family worship.

But the Bible doesn't just have power to change *your* life and the life of your children, it has the power to change the lives of the non-believers that you know.

God wants to do an incredible work in the life of your family *and through your family* and he's going to do it through his Word as you open the Bible in family worship.

I hope this booklet was helpful as you consider starting or improving your own habit of family worship.

Consider using resources from God Centered Family to help make family worship a daily practice in your own household. You can download a free week of family worship guides at [GodCenteredFamily.com/free](http://GodCenteredFamily.com/free).

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Start a youth out on his way; even when he grows old he will not depart from it." Every time you gather your family for family worship, you are planting seeds in the lives of your children that will, by God's grace, bear fruit for a lifetime. What a blessed opportunity!

Blessings to you and your family.