



FAMILY WORSHIP

A few years ago, I was a part of a small bible/book study. I met with two other guy friends. We met weekly and discussed either a book that we would choose to read through or a specific book of the Bible. We would usually meet for breakfast for about an hour and a half and discuss what we were reading and other personal matters.

One book we read together was *Family Worship*, by Donald Whitney. Whitney is a professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

I knew I needed to lead my wife and 3 kids in their relationships with the Lord, but I never really knew how to or what that looks like. Some questions I had when I first heard about this idea of *Family Worship* were; What elements should it include? How long should it be? When is a good time to schedule it? How do you adjust it for little ones? How do you keep it from being too formal? What if I say something wrong? All these questions were either answered in the book or just by simply doing *Family Worship*.

Donald Whitney states, “While there is no direct, explicit commandment in Scripture about family worship, the Bible clearly implies that God deserves to be worshiped daily in our homes by our families. Also, its practice is evident throughout the Bible” (15). For example, in Deuteronomy 6:4–7, we read, *4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*” These verses describe a lifestyle of engagement and worship together as a family. In fact, if you read a little further in Deuteronomy, parents are commanded to write the words of this command “*on the doorposts of your house and on your gates*” (Deut 6:10).

In chapter 3 of his book, Whitney provides what elements we include in family worship. His outline is simple:

- Read
- Pray
- Sing

Read together, Pray together and Sing together. While he notes other elements can be added (e.g., Scripture memory, journaling, catechism, etc.), these three elements are the basic building blocks for family worship.

Read. Reading scripture should be the centerpiece of family worship. Read a passage of appropriate length for your family, making any 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. You could also ask a few questions to determine comprehension, or just ask the children to repeat what they remember. Read enthusiastically and interpretively. Explain any words that they may not understand, don't read from your phone.

Pray. Let the words of the passage you read suggest matter for prayer. The leader of the family should pray, and perhaps one or all the rest of the family members should spend some time praying out loud. Some people keep a prayer list. Pray about at least one thing suggested to you by the Scripture passage you have read.

Sing. Use a hymnal and sing a cappella, or sing along to a recording or video, or let the family musician lead the way. Sing as little as one verse, or for as long as the family enjoys it. You can sing the same song each time for a week so everyone can learn it.

It doesn't have to be long to be effective. Whitney says it can be done in 10 minutes, our family (3 kids, 2 adults) we go for about 30 minutes. Family worship doesn't have to be complex or long and drawn-out. Whitney presents a simple plan made up of three elements that any family can use: read, pray, sing. Read the Bible (or a children's storybook version of the Bible), pray together as a family, and sing together. That's it. 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 who God is. 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, or living with your parents, just start. Keep it simple, and form habits and keep it consistent.

Ephesians 6:4, says, *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instructions of the Lord.”* As leaders in the household we must take some things into consideration.

- First, be brief. This is wise especially for families with younger children.
- Second, be regular and consistent. Inconsistency in family worship can frustrate a family and widen the gap or progress you have tried to create by

beginning family worship. Regularity will form habits, structure and appreciation.

- Third, be flexible. Families can and should work together to find what works for them.

So, if and when you do family worship consistently, you may not see the fruit of it for many, many years, but you are consistently bringing the Gospel before your family. How blessed is that family where God is being worshiped, honored, glorified together and Christ is discussed day after day. The Bible clearly implies that God deserves to be worshiped daily in our homes and by our families.

A survey by the Barna Research Group states...

“Eighty-five percent of parents with children under age 13 believe that they have primary responsibility for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters. However, a majority of parents don’t spend any time during a typical week discussing religious matters or studying religious materials with children...Parents generally rely upon their church to do all of the religious training their children will receive.”

- Donald Whitney adds,

“Yes, having your family in a Christ-honoring, gospel-centered, Bible-teaching local church is crucial to Christian parenting. But it is not enough for conveying to your family all you want to teach them about God. It is also unlikely that exposure to the church once or twice a week will impress your children enough with the greatness and glory of God that they will want to pursue him once they leave your home.”

Read the Bible, Pray together, and Sing to the Lord!