

### Formative Discipline (Part 1): Family Worship

#### WHAT IS WORSHIP?

The essential concept in Scripture is service to God, with an attitude of fear and adoring awe and wonder.

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship” (Rom. 12:1).

#### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT FAMILY WORSHIP?

##### 1. Where?

“This is the command—the statutes and ordinances—the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, so that you may follow them in the land you are about to enter and possess. 2 Do this so that you may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life by keeping all his statutes and commands I am giving you, your son, and your grandson, and so that you may have a long life” (Deut. 6:1–2).

##### 2. How?

“These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. 7 Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates” (Deut. 6:6–9).

We learn from these passages that God’s will for his people is that they and their children worship him, meaning that they serve him with every fiber of their being, in an attitude of awe and love, and that this requires his word to be upon parents’ hearts so they impress these commands on their children everywhere they go, during every part of the day.

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### FAMILY WORSHIP REQUIRES DAILY TEACHING

#### 1. Formal daily teaching can be wise.

“[B]ringing up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord is not accomplished unintentionally and incidentally. Yes, it should and will happen throughout the day at unplanned, serendipitous occasions, but it should also happen purposefully. Without some regularity and structure and purpose, it is one of those things that we assume we are doing but never actually do. Consistent, father-led family worship is one of the best, steadiest, and most easily measurable ways to bring up children in the Lord’s discipline and instruction” (Donald Whitney, *Family Worship: In the Bible, in History, and In Your Home*, 7).

##### a. First Christians

“At an early hour in the morning the family was assembled and a portion of Scripture was read from the Old Testament, which was followed by a hymn and a prayer . . . . In the evening, before retiring to rest, the family again assembled, the same form of worship was observed . . . with this difference, that the service was considerably protracted beyond the period which could be conveniently allotted to it in the commencement of the day” (Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 9).

##### b. Martin Luther

He believed each family could be a house of prayer and a school for Christ. He said, “Such a house is actually a school and a church, and the head of the household is a bishop and priest in his house” (Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 30).

##### c. The Puritans

“The Puritans crusaded for a high view of the family, proclaiming it both the basic unit of society and a little church in itself, with the husband as its pastor and his wife as his assistant . . . It was the husband’s responsibility to channel the family into religion; to take them to church on the Lord’s Day, and oversee the sanctifying of that entire day in the home; to catechize the children, and teach them the faith; to examine the whole family after each sermon, to see how much had been retained and understood, and to fill any gaps in understanding that might remain; to lead the family in worship daily, ideally twice a day; and to set an example of sober godliness at all times and in all matters. To this end he must be willing to take time out to learn the faith that he is charged to teach” (J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, 270).

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d. Second London Baptist Confession of 1689

“God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself” (22.6).

e. Matthew Henry

“If our houses be houses of the Lord, we shall for that reason love home, reckoning our daily devotion the sweetest of our daily delights; and our family-worship the most valuable of our daily comforts . . . . A church in the house will be a good legacy, nay, it will be a good inheritance, to be left to your children after you” (Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 11). Regarding family worship he said, “Here the reformation must begin.”

“All agree that masters of families who profess religion, and the fear of God themselves, should, according to the talents they are entrusted with, maintain and keep up religion and the fear of God in their families, ‘as those who must give account’” (Matthew Henry, *Family Religion: Principles for Raising a Godly Family*, 29).

f. Spurgeon

“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 train them up in the fear of God by meeting together as a family for worship” (Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 13).

“I trust there are none here present, who profess to be followers of Christ who do not also practice prayer [i.e., family devotions] in their families. We may have no positive command for it, but we believe that it is so much in accord with the genius and spirit of the gospel, and that it is so commended by the example of the saints, that the neglect thereof is a strange inconsistency” (Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 3).

## 2. What should a family teaching-worship service be like?

a. Spurgeon

“I agree with Matthew Henry when he says, ‘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.’ There is a completeness in that kind of family worship which is much to be desired” (Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 18).

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### b. Bible reading

- i. Be age-appropriate.
- ii. Use Bible storybook for very young children.
- iii. Explain tough words or concepts.
- iv. Ask questions.

### c. Prayer

- i. Pray the passage
- ii. Pray ACTS prayers (adoration/praise, confession, thanksgiving, supplication)
- iii. Pray for personal salvation, holiness, and needs; family; church; world

John Paton: “How much my father’s prayers [when John left home] impressed me I can never explain, nor could any stranger understand. When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in Family Worship, he poured out his soul with tears for the conversion of the Heathen World to the service of Jesus, and for every personal and domestic need, we all felt as if in the presence of the living Saviour, and learned to know and love Him as our Divine Friend. As we rose from our knees, I used to look at the light on my father’s face, and wish I were like him in spirit—hoping that, in answer to his prayers, I might be privileged and prepared to carry the blessed Gospel to some portion of the Heathen World” (Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 25).

### d. Singing

- i. Consider using hymnals and song sheets.
- ii. Choose songs related to the passage.
- iii. Commit to learning a hymn of the week/month.

### e. Overall keys: brevity, regularity, and flexibility

## 3. Daily teaching certainly must be informal.

- a. God’s word is to be our constant subject of conversation (Deut. 6:6–9).
- b. It is not easy to keep God’s word as our constant subject of conversation, so we need reminders.
- c. If God’s word is to be our constant subject of conversation, we need to be together so that we can have those conversations.

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### FAMILY WORSHIP REQUIRES OUR OWN RADICAL CHANGE

1. **Teaching our children God's word 24/7, to train our children to have hearts that long for awe-inspired service toward God, is only truly done when we are simply passing on what is already overflowing in our own hearts.**

"Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Col. 3:16).

#### 2. Example of Timothy

"I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and now, I am convinced, is in you also" (2 Tim. 1:5).

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, 15 and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14–15).

#### 3. Parents as sponges

"Get masters of families to do their duty, and they will not only spare you a great deal of labor, but will much further the success of your labors . . . You are not likely to see any general reformation, till you procure family reformation" (Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 93).

### PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON:

- Read "Ways Parents Provoke" by John MacArthur at [gty.org/library/articles/A325/ways-parents-provoke](http://gty.org/library/articles/A325/ways-parents-provoke)