

Family Worship  
Deuteronomy 6:4-9  
4/3/2016

Family worship has fallen on hard times. Most families don't even do it at all. Many families haven't even heard of family worship. "Family worship," they ask, "What's that?" If a family has heard of it, they will typically think of it as quite optional, usually getting crowded out first before anything else which is deemed to be of "greater" importance. I think most families would be completely, utterly flabbergasted to learn how the Puritans thought about family worship. As an important part of family worship, catechism was seen as so important in Puritan New England that the church would take away children from their parents' custody if the parents were not catechizing them! In Scotland, for many years, children were not allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper unless they could recite the entire Shorter Catechism. Also, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Old School Presbyterians rejected the idea of Sunday School, because they thought it would hinder family worship. Their argument was that families would start trusting the church to do all the spiritual instruction of the children, so that the parents would feel like they are let off the hook. Terry Johnson puts it this way, "If the consequence of the proliferation of Christian meetings has been the neglect of daily family worship, then the net spiritual effect of those meetings has been negative." What are the benefits of family worship? Again Terry Johnson has this to say:

If your children are in your home for 18 years, you have 6,570 occasions (figuring a six day week) for family worship. If you learn a new Psalm or hymn each month, they will be exposed to 216 in those 18 years. If you read a chapter a day, you will complete the Bible four and a half times in 18 years. Every day...they will affirm a creed or recite the law. Every day they will confess their sins and plead for mercy. Every day they will intercede on behalf of others. Think in terms of the long view. What is the cumulative impact of just 15 minutes of this each day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, for 18 years? At the rate of six days a week (excluding Sunday), one spends an hour and a half in family worship (about the length of a home Bible study), 78 hours a year...1,404 hours over the course of 18 years...When you establish your priorities, think in terms of the cumulative effect of this upon your children. Think of the cumulative effect of this upon you, after 40 or 50 or 80 years of daily family worship—all this without having to drive anywhere.

Should we do family worship? Deuteronomy tells us that we are to teach the commandments of the Lord diligently to our children day in and day out. Psalm 78 tells us that we should teach the praiseworthy deeds of God to our children. Paul tells Timothy that Timothy was taught by his mother and grandmother, and the

implication is that this was a very good thing. Ephesians 6 tells parents to bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. What is probably the most godly generation of Christians ever, the Puritans, made family worship one of the central things about their family life. Sabbath attendance, which we mentioned last week, was of the first and primary importance. But only slightly less important was family worship.

But what are the benefits, we might ask? The most important benefit of family worship is that we are fulfilling the reason why we were made. We were made to worship God. That is our chief end, as the first question of the Shorter Catechism tells us. Secondly, we will be teaching our children the ways of the Lord. We should not depend on the church to raise our children in the ways of the Lord. The church is a great help, but it is not the first line of defense against worldliness. That is first and foremost the parents' responsibility. Thirdly, we will be raising our children as theologians, if we instill in them the Shorter Catechism. In an age where people are irrational, mindless, entertainment junkies, we want our children to be thinkers who will do what is right, and believe what is true.

What is family worship? Well, there are several elements of what we should be doing in family worship. We're going to look at each element, and then briefly explain how to get started in each of these things.

The first and foremost element of family worship is Bible reading. There needs to be more method to Bible reading than just taking a devotional and reading a little snippet here and a little snippet there. You won't be growing much if you just dabble in the Bible. Read the Bible systematically through. Take a chapter per day, and read the Bible straight through. Discuss what the text says, and how it should be applied in our lives. Also, if you have children, read and discuss one Proverb every day. The Proverbs were written as an instruction manual in wisdom for young people. That is its entire purpose. So use the Bible's own instruction manual when it comes to giving your children wisdom.

If you need help in doing that, there are excellent study Bibles out there that can help, and if you need resources, see me after the service, and I'll be happy to point the way forward to some really great resources. But nothing helps our spiritual walk better than systematic Bible reading. But what if I don't understand what I'm reading, you might ask? That's a good question. Scholars don't always understand the text of Scripture either. But there will always be something for you in the text that you can understand and grasp, if you pray for the Lord to give you an open heart. This is one reason why we should pray over our Bible reading, so that the Lord will make that Word fruitful in our lives.

That leads us naturally into the next element of family worship, which is prayer. Prayer can seem very awkward, because many of us feel like we don't want to pray in front of other people unless we can pray eloquently. Don't worry about that. Remember that prayer is the other half of the conversation. The Bible is God

speaking to us, and prayer is us speaking to God. So tie your prayers to the Bible reading for that day. If the chapter reveals something about God, then praise the Lord for the kind, gracious, loving, holy, righteous, and just God that He is. If the passage has an obvious command, then ask the Lord's help to obey that command. If the chapter tells of a great deliverance, then thank the Lord for His delivering you from the pit. Pray the text back to God. You can also pray the well-known acronym ACTS. A is for adoration. We adore our God for all His many wonderful characteristics, and also for what He has done for us. C is for confession, whereby we confess our sins before Him, humbly asking Him for His full and free forgiveness. T is for thanksgiving, whereby we express our gratitude to God for answering our prayers and for giving us a Mediator in the Lord Jesus Christ. S is for supplication, whereby we petition God for the things we need to live the Christian life. Of course, most people simply skip the first three steps, and go straight to supplication, and usually supplication involves only prayer for people's medical needs. Pray for those, but pray for spiritual needs of you and those around you before you pray for medical needs, and more than you pray for medical needs. If you need help in prayer, then use the Valley of Vision, a collection of Puritan prayers arranged by topic. Or you can use Matthew Henry's Method for Prayer, which is exceedingly helpful in showing how to pray God's Word back to Him.

The third element is singing. Sing a hymn every day. Don't worry if you don't sound like opera singers. God is looking at your heart. The heart is where the singing really happens. Singing to the Lord is so important, for singing engages the whole person. It isn't just the brain, or the emotions, but all of it together. It is our natural response to learning about our great God and Father, who has saved us through His Son.

The fourth element of family worship is catechism. For children who have just begun to speak, you can use the children's catechism that is available in many places. It starts out with questions like "Who made you?" and the answer is "God." The questions are extremely simple, as are the answers. When children get to be about 5 or 6, they can start to memorize the Shorter Catechism. Some people might object at this point and say that the children can't understand the Shorter Catechism at that age, so why should they learn it? My response to that is that children might not understand all of it, but they can certainly understand some of it. And when they are older and can understand it better, they will already have it in their memories. They can grow into an understanding of it. Every family with children should be teaching the Shorter Catechism to their children.

What does it do? Well, the benefits of catechism are legion. Let me just tell you about a few of the benefits. It will help children understand what is going on in the service of worship. It gives children a small body of doctrinal knowledge that will act like pegs on which to hang future hats on. It will turn them into basic theologians. It will also give them a way of articulating the gospel to people later

on. In other words, it can give them a confidence in evangelism and answering people's questions about the Christian faith. It will also help children to read their Bibles better, and better understand what they are reading, since the Catechism is a summary of what the Bible says. It will help our children to start thinking well. Scotland is a country well-known for having taught their children (in past generations) the Shorter Catechism. John Stuart Mill, himself no friend of Christianity, said that Scotland produced entire generations of philosophers simply through their study of the Bible and the teaching of the Shorter Catechism. It will also help them develop their memories, so that they can memorize other things as well, such as passages of Scripture.

How do you teach the Catechism? This is the way we have done it in our house, and the children have been able to memorize each question in a little over a week per question. On the first day, you have them recite after you, phrase by phrase, the answer to the question. You do that twice. Then, you recite it together with them three times. So, on the first day, you go through the question a total of five times. On the second day, you recite it together with the children three times. Usually on the third day, the kids have most of the question down, only needing a little nudging here and there. You move on to the next question after they can recite it perfectly without any help. Make sure that you keep on reciting the previous questions so that they do not forget them. Reciting ten questions at a time as you get towards the end, is a good way of keeping the questions freshly memorized.

Lastly, we have to address the question of time. How much time does this involve? Fifteen minutes per day is all that it takes. Take five minutes for the Bible reading and discussion, three or four minutes for the prayer, three or four minutes for the hymn, and three or four minutes for the Catechism instruction. If we cannot afford fifteen minutes per day for something this important, then we need to re-examine our priorities in life. Of course, finding a good, consistent time can be difficult. It might be easier on some days to do it in the morning, and on other days in the evening. What is necessary is simply to schedule it and commit to it. Getting started is actually the hardest part. Keeping it going will not be difficult once you start to see the benefits of it, and when you start to get used to it, and don't feel so awkward about certain parts of it. There are a growing number of resources out there that can help you plan the whole thing. Probably the easiest resource to use is Terry Johnson's book, simply titled *The Family Worship Book*. Everything you need to get started is located in that book.

We said last week that unless there is a commitment to weekly Sunday worship on the part of every family member, it will be extremely difficult to keep worldly influences at bay. Similar things can be said of family worship. Add together the influence of weekly Sabbath worship and daily family worship, and you have a powerful tool to keep your children on the right path, and to combat

evil influences that will seek to twist your children into something that you do not want.

Add together these things: Sabbath observance, family worship, catechizing, and you have a recipe for spiritual vitality that will not be equaled by anything else, even summer camps, VBS, Sunday School, new members classes, or last ditch conversations or conferences with high-schoolers that are held in desperation because the family thinks that the high-schooler is going off the deep end. Take the old paths instead. Re-prioritize your lives so that Sabbath observance is fixed, a given, and non-negotiable. Make family worship your second priority. What are we really doing if we do this? We are putting our reliance in the gospel to do the work of sanctification. This is how to help our children grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This is how to combat worldliness in our children. We may not be 100% successful in fighting worldliness. But if we do these things, we have a much better chance of retaining our children in the faith.

So, so far in our studies on the family, we have focused entirely on worship. The family is all about worshiping God. If we begin to think that the family is about anything other than worship, then we will have serious spiritual problems in our families. Conversely, many family problems can be solved by re-orienting our lives around worship, both weekly, and the daily family worship.