

seems about as realistic as signing a music contract with a major record label. Believers who were not raised in the church or in a singing home often finding singing very difficult. As with all things, begin with what you know. Start with familiar songs. As you progress to less familiar songs take advantage of electronic helps (e.g. www.hymnary.org). Remember, as a parent you are cultivating a singing or non-singing legacy!

Strive for Regularity Not Perfection

There was a time when I grew very frustrated when family worship didn't go as I hoped it would because I was expecting too much. Family worship is like building a friendship. Great friendships have their bumps. But they are forged through regular meaningful interaction. William Gouge observed that "as a nail that at one blow barely enters, with many blows is knocked all the way in." So it is with repetition in family worship.

Every home has an alter around which the family worships. The Scottish minister James Hamilton said, "The poor pagan, with his household gods and family alter, will rise in the judgment against some of this generation, and will condemn them." Why? Because they worship at their false alter with zeal, and regularity, and tears, and with joy. Too often, "the family alters," in the homes of God's people is used infrequently or with a lifeless formality hardly worthy of a false god.

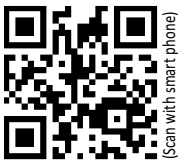
Through the gospel Jesus enters our lives and our families. Where he has entered he is to be worshiped. Where he is worshiped, we trust he will stay, and live, and work, and bless.



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"Overcoming Temptation"

February 16
{9:30 Service}



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PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic, Christianity
February 2014, Issue 56

REBUILDING THE FAMILY ALTER

RESTORING VIBRANT WORSHIP IN THE HOME

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

Long ago the Patriarch Jacob took a wife named Rachel. After the marriage Jacob stayed and worked with Rachel's Father, Laban. But, for a number of reasons, the relationship between the two men became strained. One day, while Laban was away, Jacob packed up his household and left Laban's home. Irritated, Laban pursued, caught up with, and scolded his son-in-law for his departure. His speech ends with these words: "But why did you steal my gods?" (Gen. 31:30)

Actually, his own daughter Rachel had stolen the gods. Doubtless she did so in order to remember the heart and soul of her family after she had moved away. Nothing could remind her of home more than the objects of her family's worship. When Rachel moved out she literally took her family religion

with her. The situation is no different today in our homes.

Every family has a god. Every parent should ask: Will our children leave our homes with the household gods of self-fulfillment, money, leisure, work, or ministry? Or will they leave with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and the Father of our Lord Jesus? To a large extent, these questions are answered by who, and how, our families worship in the home.

Defining Family Worship

A simple definition of Christian family worship is, *the regular use of Scripture, sing-*

ing, and prayer, by a family unit guided by the head of household.

Family Worship is Worship

Without pressing the matter too far, it seems preferable to favor the phrase "Family Worship" over "devotions"



because it better gets to the heart of the matter. This sacred gathering of members of a family is not merely a religious discipline; it is a meeting with the triune God in which we rightly respond with adoration!

As services of worship, family worship has certain elements or ingredients, the most basic of which are Scripture, song, and prayer.

First, families worship God through Scripture. When we read the Bible, God declares a powerful message that is chiefly about himself and the indescribable gift of his dear Son to a needy world. This message is not just for information but for exultation. Scripture reading in the home should activate worship. Toward this end, family members should jointly reflect on the riches of God and his wisdom which he reveals in his word.

Second, families worship God through singing. One cannot read the Bible without becoming acutely aware of the fact that God's people sing. The 150 Psalms use the words "sing" or "song" over 125 times! The New Testament direction to teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs applies well in the context of the home.

Third, families worship God through prayer. Since prayer is the chief way in which we show thankfulness to God (H.C. Q/A 116), we must be sure that our prayers are worshipful and not merely formal. Family prayers should reflect some of the shepherding themes and the deep pathos of Jesus' high priestly prayer (John 17).

Family Worship Is Regular

As illustrated by the practice of the early church weekly congregational worship is insufficient for families that

have been touched by God's grace (2:47; 5:42). The day is God's most basic unit of time. Naturally, believers have always recognized that daily worship best conforms to the divine schedule (Ps. 92:2). Establishing a daily family worship routine is difficult for many families. But we tend to stick to the routines that we value.

Family Worship Is Covenantal

Before God established worship in the tabernacle, his people worshiped in family tents. Psalm 118:15 says, "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous..." God touts Job's piety in terms of his regular practice of family worship (Job. 1:5). Paul cannot speak of Timothy's faith without mentioning his mother and grandmother; when these two or three worshiped together Christ was with them, receiving and blessing their worship (Matt. 18:20). Believers must spend time alone with God in their prayer closets (Matt. 6:6). But to imagine a family of Christians *not* worshiping together is absurd.

Defending Family Worship

Scripture Requires Family Worship

Specifically, God requires heads of household to lead their families in the worship of God (Josh. 24:15). In our day of egalitarianism and sovereign personal choice, we should recall what God said about Abraham. "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice..." (Gen. 18:19). Like a good shepherd, Abraham saw to it that his dependants grazed in God's pastures. Consider also the example

of Cornelius. God calls him "a devout man and one who feared God with all his household..." (Acts. 10:1). It is no surprise, that when God sent Peter to tell Cornelius how to believe the gospel (v. 6), Cornelius rallied his household to hear the message. When Peter arrived, Cornelius said, "We are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God" (v. 33).

Family Worship Yields Spiritual Growth

Family worship is an indispensable instrument for raising children with a consciousness of the Lord, his word, and our call to worship. It is no stretch to call family worship the foundation of biblical child-rearing.

Is it a coincidence that many of the churches which are losing their young people often lack a culture of thoughtful, heartfelt, practical, family worship? Conversely, churches in which family worship has historically been practiced, tend to retain young people. In research for a recent book, George Barna demonstrates that parents who pass along to their children the baton of spiritual maturity and vitality have one thing in common. These parents "take God's words on life and family at face value, and apply those words faithfully and consistently."

Joel Beeke tells a touching story of a missionary named John Paton who was forged in godliness partly through the family worship led by his father. Paton wrote: "When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in Family Worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears...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."

Children will quickly notice if worship is only a once-a-week activity. But history demonstrates that God often works powerfully in young lives whose souls are warmed with the incubator of daily family worship.

Developing Family Worship

Many families are convinced of the need for family worship but struggle in implementation. In such cases, what can be done?

Study Family Worship as a Family

Some time ago, our family spent a month reading Joel Beeke's booklet, "Family Worship." We only read a few pages per night so we could save time to discuss what we were learning. It was greatly useful because we were learning together.

Stick to a Plan

Haphazard Scripture reading rarely edifies over the long haul. Families should include variety in their plans and adjust them over time. But following a regular Scripture reading plan helps us read the Bible the way it was meant to be read; as a cohesive history of God's redemptive work.

Select a Time that Works

Unless worship is "codified" in a family's schedule it will likely be supplanted by other pressing matters. Some families will flourish with early morning worship. Others will better meet after dinner time or just before bed. But families that can find no time in their schedule for worship need to adjust their schedule.

Sing!

For some of us, the thought of introducing singing into our family worship