

A Parent's Guide to *Family Worship*

By Jay Younts

Family worship consists of at least six elements:

- **Bible reading and Bible study**
- **Bible Interpretation (teaching about the Bible passages read)**
- **Praise/Singing**
- **Prayer**
- **The Gospel**
- **Scripture Memory**

Incorporating these six elements into the time of family worship insures that this time will be most productive. Several passages teach the concept of family worship. In Psalm 78:4 we read: We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power and the wonders he has done.

Also notice Deuteronomy 11:19: Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Clearly these two passages teach Bible's direction that children are to be taught by their parents about the things of God. Doing this in an organized, regular fashion shows a commitment by the parents to the importance of Scripture. When at all possible, it is vital that the father take the active role in leading the family worship time. This place of religious instruction is given to him by God in Ephesians 6:4. Fathers who take this responsibility seriously not only strengthen their own families but their churches as well. Men who lead their families well are those who will lead their churches well. In addition, having a regular family worship program will help prepare your children for participation in corporate worship. To have regular family worship a time should be set aside each day for this purpose. When you first start, don't try to do too much! To start – brief is best. Once you become comfortable with this practice, the time for family worship may reach 20 minutes and will often be more. We will examine each of the elements in brief detail.

Bible Reading and Study

It is important to actually use the Bible as the cornerstone of family worship. There are a myriad of helps, character studies, retellings, picture books, etc., available. As useful as some of these may be they should not be the foundation of the worship time. Just think of how you would feel if the pastor's sermon was about what somebody else thought about the Bible instead of what he had learned from his own study!

Your children need the Word of God; nothing else is inspired, inerrant and specifically designed to meet their spiritual needs. It would be good to supplement the reading with the use of a Bible atlas or dictionary. Effort should be given to make the reading clear and interesting. Refer to maps, charts or other helps to clarify the passage's meaning. As the family grows older, have the older children look up the items under discussion. This practice builds good Bible study habits from childhood.

There is one study tool for parents where the word unique actually fits. It is the new Herein is Love commentary series written by Nancy Ganz. This tool fits under this section on bible reading and the next section on bible interpretation. Nancy Ganz has done a superb job in making the content of the Scripture accessible and understandable. This clarity enables parents to communicate God's truth to their children. If parents read what the commentary has to say about a particular portion of scripture before it is read to their children they will be able to read with more understanding and with particular application for children. The commentary has practical applications for making the biblical text relevant and alive for your children. This resource is a wonderful tool – use it! The commentary presently covers Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus. Numbers through Joshua are under development. These books are available from Shepherd Press at <http://www.shepherdpress.com>

Recommended tools:

- *Moody Bible Atlas* or similar
- *New Bible Dictionary*
- *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*
- Herein is Love – commentary series from Shepherd Press
- Commentary set or bible study help that your pastor recommends

Bible Interpretation

Next you must properly interpret what you have read. Some parents may say at this point, "Well, this is all very nice if you have a Bible degree! But what am I supposed to do?!?" You do the same thing that pastors often do. You should select a reliable commentary and do personal study about what you are reading. "Oh, right! This is not the Sunday Sermon and I am not the pastor. How am I supposed to find the time and money to get this done?" Good question!

Fortunately there are some viable alternatives. There is the *Herein is Love* commentary series mentioned above and there is *The Child's Story Bible* written by Catherine Vos. This work can serve as a commentary. Her work is theologically sound. Her husband was one of the leading Bible scholars of 20th century. If this volume is read along with the Bible, it serves as a competent guide for studying with and for children. For example, the sacrificial system as put forth in Leviticus is often confusing. Both Mrs. Ganz and Mrs. Vos cover these sacrifices in a straight forward clear manner.

By following teaching found in these two books you will find useful instruction and begin to build for yourself patterns of interpretation. This is useful whether you are new Christian parents or just starting to begin the important practice of family worship. As the children make progress more detailed and technical material can be used.

Recommended tools for younger children:

- *The Children's Story Bible* by Catherine Vos
- *Leading Little Ones to God* by Mariane Schooland
- *Herein is Love commentary series* by Nancy Ganz

for older children:

- *Survey of the Bible* by William Hendrickson
- *What to do on Thursday* by Jay Adams
- A commentary set that your pastor recommends
- Bible Note Cards by Ruth Younts
- *Herein is Love commentary series* by Nancy Ganz

Praise and Singing

Use the hymnbook or psalter of your church and learn selections that center on God's goodness and might. Hymns based upon Psalms are very useful. God commands us to praise Him. Psalm 100 contains a good pattern to follow in singing. Two to four selections are appropriate for a time of family worship. A good example of a contemporary blending of doctrine, Scripture and praise is found in the Judy Rodgers albums. Her music is specifically designed for children.

Recommended tools:

- *The Trinity Hymnal*
- *Go to the And and Why Can't I See God* (by Judy Rodgers)
- *Songs for the Heart* – Lucy Anne Adams
- Favorite hymns and songs from your church
- There are many musical resources that are now available. Look for those ones that have a high view of God and his honor and a high view of Scripture

Prayer

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. You should teach your children how to pray. Building on the Lord's prayer and other prayers found in Scripture begin to teach your children what to pray for and how to pray. Making a study of the prayers noted in Scripture is a safe guide to learn about prayer. During prayer time focus on areas where your children struggle. For example, "Lord, please help me to remember to obey quickly." Teaching your children to pray is one of your greatest responsibilities as a parent. This may seem intimidating, but if you look to Christ's example you will find help in fulfilling this task.

Luke 11 records that Jesus taught His disciples His prayer word for word. This is how you start with your children. Help them pray by teaching them word for word what to say to God. Teach your children to pray phrase by phrase, by repeating each phrase after you say it. Jesus didn't wait for His disciples to become spiritual enough to know what to pray and how to pray. He told them what to say and how to pray, word for word. Spirituality doesn't come by waiting for it to appear. Spirituality comes by teaching what the Holy Spirit has written at the time it is needed. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He taught them word for word—in the middle of their everyday lives. Jesus taught his disciples everyday prayer. Following Christ's example is always a good idea. Use his method for teaching your children how to pray.

The Gospel

What is the Gospel?

I Corinthians 15:3–4 says it consists of three parts: “. . . for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (NASB).

The first element is that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**. The Scriptures teach that man is hopelessly guilty before God from the moment of birth. God is a holy God who demands perfection. Christ is the only One who can satisfy God’s requirements for a perfect life. Therefore, Christian, when Christ died for your sins, God was satisfied.

The second element is that **by dying Christ actually paid the full penalty for our sins**. Christ, the man, died so that you and all men who trust in Him could live.

The third element is that **Christ conquered death when He was raised from the dead as God promised**. This gospel message is found throughout the whole Bible beginning with Genesis 3:15.

This is the good news. It is not complicated. It is centered on the work of Christ, not man. Only Christ can satisfy God’s demand for justice and perfection. God only requires that you and your children believe this by faith in order to know Him. He even provides this faith as a gift because we cannot produce faith in ourselves (Ephesians 2:1–8).

This is the gospel. This is what the Bible teaches about the gospel. This message of good news brings life and light to a dark world. This same message will bring life and light to your child. Parents, you should weave the theme of the gospel into all the areas of your life, not just in family worship. While you may not mention the gospel by name every time you have family worship, these underlying themes must always be present.

Scripture Memory

The psalmist says that we should hide God's word in our hearts so that we might not sin against Him. There is no better reason for learning Scripture. A Scripture memory program is vital to the well-being of a family. The following pattern is offered as one way to begin Scripture memory as part of family worship.

For families with children under 5:

Week One	Learn Ephesians 6:1-3
Week Two	Learn Proverbs 15:1
Week Three	Learn Proverbs 5:21
Week Four	Learn Proverbs 1:7
Week Five	Learn Phil. 2:14

Once these are mastered they may be repeated or new ones substituted.

For most families

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week One	Ps. 119:72 Psalm 119:11 119:133	Ps. 119:11 Ps. 119:133 Ps. 119:105	Ps. 119:133 Ps. 119:105 II Tim. 3:16-17	Ps. 119:105 II Tim. 3:16-17 Philip.4:8-9	II Tim. 3:16-17 Philip.4:8-9 Rom. 12:1-2
Week Two	Philip. 4:8-9 Rom. 12:1-2 I Thes. 5:16-18	Rom. 12:1-2 I Thes. 5:16-18 Jam. 1:19-20	I Thes. 5:16-18 Jam. 1:19-20 Prov. 15:1	Jam. 1:19-20 Prov. 15:1 Gen. 4:5-7	Prov. 15:1 Gen. 4:5-7 Rom. 12:1-2
Week Three	Gen. 4:5-7 Eph. 4:26-27 Eph. 4:29-32	Eph. 4:26-27 Eph. 4:29-32 Prov. 17:27-28	Eph. 4:29-32 Prov. 17:27-28 Prov. 18:2	Prov. 17:27-28 Prov. 18:2 Prov. 18:6-7	Prov. 18:2 Prov. 18:6-7 Prov. 18:13
Week Four	Prov. 18:6-7 Prov. 18:13 Prov.18:15	Prov. 18:13 Prov.18:15 Eph 6:1-4	Prov.18:15 Eph 6:1-4 Prov. 16:20-24	Eph 6:1-4 Prov. 16:20-24 Deut. 5:16	Prov. 16:20-24 Deut. 5:16 I Cor. 13:4-7
Week Five	Deut. 5:16 I Cor. 13:4-7 I John 3:16	I Cor. 13:4-7 I John 3:16 I John 4:7	I John 3:16 I John 4:7 Philip. 2:3-5	I John 4:7 Philip. 2:3-5 I Cor. 10:11-13	Philip. 2:3-5 I Cor. 10:11-13 Prov. 3:4-5

These verses are intended only as a suggestion. Use one or all of the verses listed as you see fit. It is assumed that families are daily dealing with areas of salvation and our need of Christ's redemptive work. These verses are intended to touch on areas of day -to-day living in order to give parents and children a foundation upon which to carry on biblical discipline and life.