

Family Worship Bible Guide

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Family Worship Bible Guide

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Introduction

How to Do Family Worship

Family worship has fallen on hard times. Parents often say they are too busy to do it. Or else they don't know how to do it because their parents never did it. This book was written to help you do family worship, and/or to do it better. I pray that you will find it to be a great help.¹

When my parents commemorated their fiftieth anniversary, all five of us children decided to express thanks to our father and mother for one thing without consulting each other. Remarkably, all five of us thanked our mother for her prayers and all five us thanked our father for his leadership of our special Sunday evening family worship. My brother said, "Dad, the oldest memory I have is of tears streaming down your face as you taught us from *Pilgrim's Progress* on Sunday evenings how the Holy Spirit leads believers. At the age of three God used you in family worship to convict me that Christianity was real. No matter how far I went astray

1. This book extracts the sections of Thoughts for Personal and Family Worship for each Bible chapter from *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014). As far as we know, it is a first book of its kind. You can now use it to accompany your Bible reading regardless of the Bible translation you use.

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in later years, I could never seriously question the reality of Christianity, and I want to thank you for that.”

Christians have long recognized that God often uses family worship to bring reformation and revival to the church. For example, the 1677 church covenant of the Puritan congregation in Dorchester, Massachusetts, included the commitment “to reform our families, engaging ourselves to a conscientious care to set before us and to maintain the worship of God in them; and to walk in our houses with perfect hearts in a faithful discharge of all domestic duties, educating, instructing, and charging our children and households to keep the ways of the Lord.”

Given the importance of family worship as a potent force in winning untold millions to gospel truth throughout the ages, we ought not be surprised that God requires heads of households do all they can to lead their families in worshiping the living God. As Joshua declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15). This word *serve* is translated as *worship* many times in Scripture.

Family worship will require some preparation. You should pray for God’s blessing upon that worship. Have your Bibles ready and a Scripture passage selected. Catechisms and books of questions and answers for children are very helpful. Sometimes you might read through a book like John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* or *Holy War* and discuss it together. Choose some psalms and hymns that are easy to sing. Pick a place to gather, such as the supper table or living room. Set the times for family worship, ordinarily at breakfast and supper but as it fits your family’s needs. Whatever times you set, carefully guard those times like a precious jewel.

During family worship, aim for brevity. Don't provoke your children. If you worship twice a day, try ten minutes in the morning and twenty-five in the evening. Be consistent. It is better to have twenty minutes of family worship every day than to try for extended periods on fewer days—say forty-five minutes on Monday, then skipping Tuesday.

Don't indulge excuses to avoid family worship. If you are tired, deny yourself out of love for God and your family. Even if you lost your temper a half-hour before family worship time, don't neglect it out of false humility. Instead, begin family worship by confessing your sins to your family and seeking their forgiveness in the presence of God. As A. W. Pink said, "It is not the sins of a Christian, but his *unconfessed* sins, which choke the channel of blessing and cause so many to miss God's best."

Lead family worship with a firm, fatherly hand and a soft, penitent heart. Speak with hopeful solemnity. Talk naturally yet reverently during this time, using the tone you would use when speaking to a deeply respected friend about a serious matter. Expect great things from a great covenant-keeping God.

According to Scripture, God should be served in special acts of worship in families today in the following three ways.

Daily Instruction in the Word of God

God should be worshiped by daily reading and instruction from His Word. Through questions, answers, and instructions, parents and children are to daily interact with each other about sacred truth. As Deuteronomy 6:6–7 says, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine

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heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

When those words were first written, most believers did not have access to a precious scroll of Holy Scripture. They had to teach their children from passages of Scripture which they heard and memorized! In this age most believers have the tremendous privilege of having the Bible in their own native language. Let’s take full advantage of this privilege by reading the Bible together. When reading and teaching the Bible as a family, consider these suggestions.

1. *Have a reading plan.* Read ten or twenty verses from the Old Testament in the morning and ten to twenty from the New Testament in the evening. Or read a series of parables, miracles, or historical portions. Just be sure to read the entire Bible over a period of time. As J.C. Ryle said, “Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.”

2. *Involve the family.* Every family member who can read should have a Bible to follow along. Set the tone by reading Scripture with expression, as the living, “breathing” book it is. Assign various portions to be read by your wife and your children. Teach your children how to read articulately and with expression. Don’t let them mumble or speed ahead. Teach them to read with reverence. Provide a brief word of explanation throughout the reading, according to the needs of the younger children.

3. *Be plain in meaning.* Ask your children if they understand what you are reading. Be plain in applying scriptural texts. The 1647 Church of Scotland Directory for Family

Worship wisely teaches us that if a sin is rebuked in the Word, then call the family to keep watch against it; if a judgment is threatened, warn them of it; if a duty is commanded, press it upon them; if a promise is offered, then urge them to trust it and receive its comfort.

4. *Encourage family dialogue* around God's Word in line with the Hebraic procedure of household question and answer (cf. Ex. 12:26–27; 13:14–15). That's where this *Family Worship Bible Guide* can help you. Read aloud with your family the thoughts for each Bible chapter each day. Dialogue about the thoughts expressed. Answer the questions asked. Especially encourage teenagers to ask questions; draw them out. If you don't know the answers, tell them so, and encourage them to search for answers. Have one or more good commentaries on hand, such as those by John Calvin, Matthew Poole, and Matthew Henry. Remember, if you don't provide answers for your children, they will get them elsewhere—and often those will be wrong answers.

5. *Be pure in doctrine.* Titus 2:7 says, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity." Don't abandon doctrinal precision when teaching young children; aim for simplicity and soundness.

6. *Be relevant in application.* Don't be afraid to share your experiences when appropriate, but do that simply and concisely. Use concrete illustrations. Ideally, tie together biblical instruction with what you recently heard in sermons.

7. *Be affectionate in manner.* Proverbs continually uses the phrase *my son*, showing the warmth, love, and urgency in the teachings of a God-fearing father. When you must administer the wounds of a friendly father to your children,

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do that with heartfelt love. Tell them you must convey the whole counsel of God because you can't bear the thought of spending eternity apart from them. My father often said to us, with tears: "Children, I cannot miss any of you in heaven." Tell your children: "We will allow you every privilege an open Bible will allow us to give you—but if we say no to you, you must know that flows out of our love." As Ryle said, "Love is one grand secret of successful training. Soul love is the soul of all love."

8. *Require attention.* Proverbs 4:1 says, "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding." Fathers and mothers have important truths to convey. You must demand a hearing for God's truths in your home. That may involve repeated statements at the beginning like these: "Sit up, son, and look at me when I'm talking. We're talking about God's Word, and God deserves to be heard." Don't allow children to leave their seats during family worship.

Daily Prayer before the Throne of God

Does not the command to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) include when we are with our families? Families eat and drink the daily provision of a gracious God at their tables. To do that in Christian way, a family must follow 1 Timothy 4:4–5, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

Again, let me offer some specific guidelines for leading the family in prayer.

1. *Be short.* With few exceptions, don't pray for more than five minutes. Tedious prayers do more harm than good.

Don't teach in your prayer; God doesn't need the instruction. Teach with your eyes open; pray with your eyes shut.

2. *Be simple without being shallow.* Pray for things that your children know something about, but don't allow your prayers to become trivial. Don't reduce your prayers to self-centered, shallow petitions.

3. *Be direct.* Spread your needs before God, plead your case, and ask for mercy. Name your teenagers and children and their needs one by one on a daily basis. That holds tremendous weight with them.

4. *Be natural yet solemn.* Speak clearly and reverently. Don't use an unnatural, high-pitched voice or a monotone. Don't pray too loudly or softly, too fast to be understood or too slow to hold attention.

5. *Be varied.* Don't pray the same thing every day; that becomes tedious. Develop more variety in prayer by remembering and stressing the various ingredients of true prayer, such as calling upon God to hear your prayers, adoring God for His titles and attributes, declaring your humble dependence and need, confessing family sins, asking for family mercies (both material and spiritual), interceding for friends, churches, and the nations, giving thanks for God's blessings, and blessing God for His kingdom, glory, and power. Use a prayer list to remember different persons and organizations on different days. Mix these ingredients with different proportion to get variety in your prayers.

Daily Sing to the Praise of God

Psalm 118:15 says, "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles [or tents] of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly." That is a clear reference to singing.

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Every Christian family should own a few copies of a good psalter (psalms set to meter and music) and hymnal from which to sing. If one of you can play the piano, all the better. But even recorded music is helpful. Use whatever means you can to assist your family to sing God's praises together.

1. *Sing doctrinally pure songs.* There is no excuse for singing doctrinal error no matter how attractive the tune might be.

2. *Sing Psalms* first and foremost without neglecting sound hymns. Remember that the Psalms, called by Calvin "an anatomy of all parts of the soul," are the richest gold mine of deep, living, experiential, scriptural piety available to us still today.

3. *Sing heartily and with feeling.* As Colossians 3:23 says, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Meditate on the words you are singing. On occasion discuss a phrase that is sung.²

Conclusion

Believers in Christ follow in the footsteps of Abraham's faith, and we must also follow in the footsteps of Abraham's obedient leadership of his family. "For I know him," God said, "that he will *command* his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19).

2. For more detail on how to do family worship, see Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2005). Much of this introduction is a condensed summary of this book.

John Paton served as a missionary over a century ago to a cannibalistic people in the islands of the south Pacific Ocean. Those people killed and ate the missionaries who had preceded Paton within minutes of their arrival. Paton faced enormous difficulties and sorrows. But he persevered in the name of Christ. One earthly means by which God prepared him for his labors was his father in Scotland. In later years John Paton looked back upon his father with great gratitude.

Paton's father worked out of a shop in their house. Their family had a small room in their home which was their prayer closet. John was deeply affected by his father's regular devotion to prayer in that room. He remembered, "Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and 'shut the door'; and we children got to understand...that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most High Place." The Paton children could sometimes hear their father's voice full of emotion, pleading for them before the throne of grace.

Paton also remembered of his father how, "When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in family worship, he poured out his whole 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 Savior, and learned to know and love Him as our Divine Friend."

When John Paton left his home to go to Glasgow to study theology and do urban evangelism, he had to walk forty miles before coming to a train station. His father walked the first six miles out with him. They spoke about the Lord, and his father gave him counsel. Then for the last half-mile

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they walked in silence. His father's lips still moved, but now in silent prayer for his son while tears streamed down his face. When they came to the place of their parting, father grasped son by the hand, and said, "God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you, and keep you from all evil." Overcome by emotion, he could say no more, but his lips continued to move in silent prayer. John Paton later wrote, while reflecting back on this experience, "I vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as He had given me."

May God bless this *Family Worship Bible Guide* to you so that you and I may increasingly become parents like that!

* * *

I wish to thank Michael Barrett, Jerry Bilkes, and Paul Smalley for assisting me in writing these family worship thoughts for most of the Bible books, and for co-editing with me various parts of this work. Any errors that remain are my responsibility. I also wish to thank the following contributors who have written a first draft of these family worship thoughts for the remainder of the Bible books: Geoff Banister, Charles Barrett, Brian DeVries, Ian Goligher, John Greer, Jerrold Lewis, Alan Macgregor, Andy McIntosh, Pooyan Mehrshahi, Colin Mercer, Gerald Procee, Maurice Roberts, David Silversides, John Thackway, and Malcolm Watts. May God bless all the labor expended on this labor of love.

—Joel R. Beeke

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis

Chapter 1

1. Consider the power of God in creation. If a computer were observing 10 million stars per second, it would still take 63 million years to count all the stars! Such is the power of the Almighty. Remarkably, the stars are the work of His fingers (Ps. 8:3) but salvation is the work of His right hand (Ps. 98:1). In a wonderful way God's work in making believers new creations in Christ Jesus demonstrates a power greater than commanding the world into existence. Let us be amazed at the wonder of creation; let us be overwhelmed with the wonder of grace. How does saving grace display even greater glory than creation?

2. Stand in awe of the power of God's word. God's word is the agency of creation. God said, "Let there be..." Christ demonstrated this power in the miracles both with people such as raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11) and with the inanimate creation such as calming the storm (Mark 4:35-40). God's word is still powerful today through the Scriptures. It is by the word of His power as well that He bears His created world along according to His purpose of providence (Heb. 1:3). The fact that God created gives Him the right to govern and to use His creation as He sees fit (Pss. 24:1-2; 95:5). Since creation, including man, belongs to God, all of creation, including man, is dependent on Him and accountable to Him. The theological implications of creation are far-reaching.

GENESIS 2

Chapter 2

1. Keep and cherish the Lord's Day (Isa. 58:13–14). The term "sabbath" means "cessation," thus the Sabbath is a day during which normal activity is to stop. In the New Testament, Christ's resurrection marked the end of His meriting salvation for His people, thus the term "Sabbath" is most appropriate to commemorate that momentous day. So the Sabbath has now moved to Sunday and is still blessed by God as the "market day of the soul." How can we guard this day as a special day of rest and communion with God?

2. Honor marriage as a divine institution and picture of Christ and His church. Our marriages should reflect the different roles that the Lord made for man and woman. The woman was made of the man and for the man. Her calling is to assist and support him in submission to his authority. Man was created first and received the commission and commandment of God. His calling is to lead the family in doing God's will and to love his wife as Christ loved the church—with humble and glad self-sacrifice for her good.

Chapter 3

1. Believe in the historic fall. The fall of man is just as literal as the rest of Genesis. Without a real Adam, a real garden, and a real serpent, there is no reason to believe in a real Christ, a real cross, and a real resurrection. The theology of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 in this regard is inescapable. These are real historical events. Redemption in Christ is predicated upon a literal fall of man in the garden of Eden.

2. Resist temptation. Like Eve we are tempted to sin by first listening to the lie of Satan, conversing in our minds with

the thought of sin, which is then conceived (James 1:15). We look, we desire, and we take. It is not a matter of eating, but of the heart (Matt. 15:11, 18). So begin the battle there.

3. Consider the horrible effects of the fall. Immediately, there was shame (v. 7), separation from God (v. 8), and guilt (v. 10). Consequently, according to God's sentence on the guilty, man now knows toil and hardship in work and women know suffering in childbearing. Yet, in the very statement of curse, God announces the first gospel message of a coming Seed who will reverse the curse itself. As soon as man needs a word of grace, God gives the word of grace. Only Christ can reverse this for He took the curse for sin. How believers should thank the Lord that He did not banish us as He has banished the angels that sinned! We have a Redeemer!

Chapter 4

1. Grieve at the results of the fall. Chapter 4 reveals the horrible consequences of Adam's sin—his children are infected with the pride, hatred, and deception of the serpent. Yet there is hope, for we also see here the fruit of God's promise (3:15). Satan has his seed among men, but God moves some to trust His promise and worship Him acceptably. Though the godly seed suffers persecution, it will triumph at last.

2. Marvel at God's patience. It is remarkable that God converses patiently with Cain and gives him ample opportunity to repent of his jealousy. Even though his offering was refused, Cain should have heeded the warnings. Murder is always in the human heart. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19).

GENESIS 4

3. Beware of the growth of sin. Once we harbor sin, it leads to worse sin, which affects others. Cain's initial sin leads to worse in his descendants, such as Lamech bragging about his murders. Like the godly line of Seth, we need to call upon the name of the Lord. What sins does this chapter teach us to pray against, and what graces should we seek from the Lord?

Chapter 5

1. By God's grace, strive to imitate Enoch. Enoch walked with God. Surely the secret of our Christian life is to abide in Christ: "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Spend time in the Word of God, praying, meditating, repenting of sin, and obeying God's laws. Just as God took Enoch to heaven, so walking with God on earth is the best assurance that we will walk with God in heaven. The children of God must bear their Father's image.

2. The repentance and faith of the godly does not exempt them from death, unless the Lord should come and take them home first (1 Thess. 4:16–17). Every generation from Adam onward has seen death as the bitter fruit of the fall. Though most people try to ignore death, we are not ready to live until we are ready to die. What is the best way to face death?

Chapter 6

1. From Noah we learn patience and faith. Noah took more than a hundred years to build the ark. He patiently worked and witnessed to the people who rejected his message (2 Peter 2:5). We live in similar days (Luke 17:26) and need to preach faithfully despite the mocking of men against the

gospel. The only safe place from the flood was the ark. The only safe place from God's eternal judgment is Christ.

2. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and walked with God. Significantly, Noah found grace before he was described as just and perfect. It is grace that enables faith, and God regarded Noah as just in consequence of that grace that caused him to believe and obey. May the Lord help us to walk with Him. Trust in Christ and obey Him, for then you will abide in His love (John 15:10).

Chapter 7

1. God's judgment upon the world of sinners is fearsome. The thought of millions of people drowning while water swept away all human constructions is horrifying. Yet it is a small thing compared to the burning wrath of God yet to come when the Lord Jesus appears with His holy angels. The flood brought death, but judgment day will bring eternal punishment in hell. Let us give sober consideration to this awesome and inevitable reality. How does the flood teach us to fear the Lord?

2. The Lord calls men, women, and children through the gospel to come into the ark of safety, Jesus Christ the Righteous One (Matt. 11:28; Luke 14:17). Just as the Lord shut Noah and his family into the ark and protected them during the flood, so the Lord will save all who trust in Christ alone from the wrath that is to come. After the flood came, no one was left except those in the ark. In the same way, the living church of Jesus Christ will be the only people to escape God's wrath. Therefore come to Christ now, and place your entire trust in Him.

Chapter 8

1. In the midst of overwhelming sorrows and dangers, we tend to think that God has forgotten us. But when the ark was a tiny speck floating in a vast sea of destruction, God remembered Noah. If we are in covenant with Him, He will certainly remember us too. Do not fear that God has abandoned you. His mercies will never forsake those who belong to Him, for His people are forever united to Christ. Christ is righteous; Christ has offered an all-pleasing sacrifice to satisfy God's justice; Christ will save His own.

2. The appropriate response to deliverance from trouble is worship. Noah might well have said to himself that he could not afford the time or resources to worship God after leaving the ark, but instead he built an altar and offered up sacrifices. From what evils, either physical or spiritual, has God delivered you? How are you worshiping Him for it?

Chapter 9

1. Thank God for the rainbow promise that He will never again flood the world. These are days of grace when God "now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). The covenant with Noah guards the first gospel promise of the Redeemer coming into the human race (Gen. 3:15). The flood destroyed humanity except for Noah's family, and it seemed like the promise was in jeopardy. But God assured the continuation of the human race. Not even the judgment of sin will frustrate God's redemptive purpose in Christ.

2. Noah's drunkenness is a warning against the dangers and consequences of intoxication. The Bible consistently

identifies drunkenness as sin (Gal. 5:21) and strictly forbids being intoxicated or under the controlling influence of any intoxicating drink (Isa. 28:7; Eph. 5:18). Drunkenness is linked to loss of self-control, immorality, and unseemly behavior (Prov. 23:29-35). Therefore, take diligent heed to the warnings and do not be deceived by wine or strong drink (Prov. 20 1). This principle applies to any narcotic substance used for the same kind of effects.

Chapter 10

1. God sovereignly distributes the human race among the nations (Acts 17:26). All the nations come from the three sons of Noah. No man is an island. We are all part of the family of man. There is really only one race: the human race, various colors and cultures notwithstanding. How then should we view other peoples and nations?

2. The Bible is not the property of one particular nation, but God's Word for all mankind. The Lord is the God of all flesh (Jer. 32:27). Jesus is the Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12). Therefore we must not arrogantly exclude people of other nations and ethnicities from the church. Nor may we foolishly say that every nation has its own way to God.

Chapter 11

1. God judges pride. How wicked and rebellious is the natural heart of man! It is not long since the flood, and yet man is again rebelling. Our own hearts will always naturally turn from the Lord's love and grace to our own schemes of self-exaltation. Yet such schemes always set us in opposition to God's purposes and lead to frustration and dishonor. How

GENESIS 11

can we recognize and defeat this satanic impulse of pride in our hearts?

2. We must never assume that large gatherings of people and great accomplishments by human ingenuity are good or pleasing to God. Concentrations of people may simply result in concentrations of evil. Though men seek outward glory, God often chooses to work through an unlikely individual following an apparently foolish call—like Abram. Pray for God to teach you how to live by faith and not by sight.

Chapter 12

1. God's covenant motivates missions. God called Abram to receive His blessing in order to be a blessing to all nations. How much more the new covenant in Christ's blood calls the church to make disciples of all nations. God's covenant people must be willing to give themselves to reach the world for Christ.

2. God blesses only believers. We must walk in the footsteps of Abram by following Christ in faith, obedience, and public worship. Abraham's faith sometimes faltered and he sinned; therefore we should not demand a great faith of ourselves before we can rest assured that Christ has saved us. Let us rather trust Christ to save us even through a weak faith and pray, "Lord, increase our faith."

Chapter 13

1. Abram is a model of peacemaking. Like him, we should respond to conflict by speaking directly and courteously to the other person, offering a reasonable solution to the problem, and deferring largely to his preferences. Such