

Finding Christ in the Family Room

Scripture does not give us an imperative for family worship. This is important to say at the outset so that we are not laying down “sanctification” markers for each other. Having said that, however, we still need to acknowledge that God’s Word does command us to teach our children how to love the Lord (Deut. 6) and train them in his discipline and instruction (Ephesians 6:4).

Principles & Methods

Before looking at family worship, it is important to discuss how the Bible gives us principles that we are to take and wisely apply in our particular situation. We should not do this just to go along with the more “sanctified” crowd. No, we are to be realistic about ourselves, our children, our own family culture, our strengths and weaknesses, and then prayerfully and wisely make household decisions. So whether in education, entertainment, clothing styles, family activities, and so on, we look to Scripture for liberties and boundaries and make thoughtful, prayerful choices.

Sometimes, we may find that the choice we made doesn’t fit with our individual family, and we should adjust. Either way, when Scripture gives us principles, we should not use our particular application as a measuring rod for other people’s devotion to Christ, nor are we to hold it up as the only *godly* way of living out a particular Biblical principle. This is not relativism. This is called *grace*. We need to give each other grace to execute these principles differently in the context of our individual families. This is one of the differences between principles and methods.

“Family Worship”

I’ve prayed for my children throughout pregnancy, during delivery, and over them as babies. Even when we were nominal Christians, we prayed with our children before bed. But I remember distinctly the first time I saw what is known as “family worship.” We had just moved into a new neighborhood and began attending a small Reformed church when a dear family took us under their wings and began mentoring us. They invited us into their home, where we got to see a family living the life of faithful Christians.

I was a green-behind-the-ears stay-at-home mom, desiring to learn what this new role—which I had been kicking against and hoping to avoid—really looked like day in and day out. Even though I had just delivered our third child we felt “new” in our roles because we had at that same time decided to eschew feminism, careerism, and egalitarianism for “the traditional biblical model,” if such a thing was possible.

This family at the time was going through Starr Meade’s *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds*. Their love for each other and the responsiveness of the children to the parents was evident. And so we promptly bought the same book, which is a family devotional based on the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. After a few months, our mentor family moved away, but we

kept on going with our family worship. We did different books through different seasons. But things kept escalating until we arrived at the point where my husband wrote a family liturgy that we would recite—a liturgy that might be beautiful if done correctly in a church but not fit for family worship. In our zeal for “godliness,” we crushed our children with “family worship.”

Tools of Discipleship

Family worship is a tool, and if the parents are tethered to the gospel, it can be a wonderful discipleship tool in the home. However, if this tool is not used wisely it can become a joyless burden to the children. Discernment is required. We should probably think through a few guiding principles as we seek to use the tool of family worship in our homes.

1. A Merciful Perspective

First, we need to remember to be merciful to our children in the area of family worship. Many Christian parents love their children and desire them to grow into Christ followers. This is as it should be, and I praise God for it. But with this comes a temptation that we should be aware of and work to keep in check. We can be so driven by our desires to see our kids saved and sanctified we forget how God deals with us as *his* children. I think it is helpful to not only think of ourselves as parents but as children—Children of our heavenly Father. If we keep this thought at the forefront of our parenting, it will drive us to be more mindful of their perspective or *frame*.

*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our **frame**; he remembers that we are dust.* – Psalm 103:13–14

In this Psalm, God is compared to a father who shows compassion on his children. If we are not characterized by compassion to our children, this should cause us to do a 180 degree turn! Scrolling up to verse 8, we are told, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”

Do we give our children this kind of bountiful grace or do we call them on the carpet for every sin? Do we spend our time chiding them for their wriggly bottoms during family worship or do we adjust our expectations of these little souls remembering our own wriggly bottoms when the Lord is trying to teach us something? Psalm 130:3 says, “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.”

2. Acts of Gentleness

Let us take our parenting cues from our heavenly Father. Does your family have a two year old? Well, maybe he gets his own bedtime prayer and you wait until that little person is asleep instead of forcing a tired toddler to sit still in the lap to “participate” in family worship. A time of day when everyone is excited to be together and involved would be a good time to harness to use for building your children in the Lord (e.g. meal time, prayer time right before bed when

most children tend to be more open and willing to be gently shepherded).

Think back to how long suffering your heavenly Father has been with you. How many of your sins has he forgiven? How long has it taken you to get to where you are right now and how much more time will it take to be formed into the image of Christ? This should correct our expectations of our children and help us enact gentle kindness and long suffering patience toward them as we use the tool of family worship in our home.

3. Relentless Prayer

Next, we must remember that family worship is only *one* tool, not the *only* tool that the Lord can and will use in the life of your child. Don't let it be the end all and be all, which was my temptation and stumbling block. Our heavenly Father is so creative. Every day I am surprised at the manifold ways he works on my children's hearts.

The most potent tool for discipling and reaching the heart of your children is actually prayer. No "family this" or "family that" will ever have the power to transform the lives of the members of the family—only prayer in the name of Jesus. Let us be like the widow who was relentless and persistent, who wouldn't stop going to the judge. (Luke 18:1–8) Let us day and night bombard heaven with prayers for, and often with, our children.

Putting the Worship Back in Family Worship

Having said all this, I do want to note that the Lord does indeed use the methods of family worship. I certainly don't want to discount that, I just want to put it in its proper place. Family worship should not occupy the center. Jesus does. Family worship is a tool that I personally love and believe can bring depth to the spiritual life of a family, when used wisely.

In our case, we now use three different gospel-centered books for family worship. We have five children, and their ages range from 1 to 18. For us, we needed gospel-focused books that would work in a family that has kids of all ages. So we rotate between using *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally-Lloyd Jones, *The Gospel Story Bible* by Marty Machowski, and *Long Story Short* also by Marty Machowski.

We are not perfectionists about these books. Sometimes we do one lesson or story. Other times we do more. We give the kids who can read the Bible readings to read to the family. We put the baby to bed first so he isn't a distraction and so we're not spending all our time trying to keep him still.

We also allow the children to choose what they want to pray for. Usually the older ones will pray for global saints and churches, the middle prays for church family members on the church prayer calendar, and our 4 ½ year old just loves to pray for his baby brother.

Now, this is just an example of our method. Don't feel compelled to go follow it. Pray and consider the frame of your children. Maybe what is best for right now is a short prayer in the morning with a verse or something from *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. There was a time when

teaching and reciting the Children's Catechism was fruitful for us, and a time when it was good for us to look elsewhere. Explore different options and don't get caught in that harsh place where the perfect becomes the enemy of the good. Don't be too disappointed if something doesn't work out, keep trying.

Above all, remember that the goal of any of these discipleship tools is to draw that little person's (or big person's) soul to Jesus Christ. We don't need to prove our theological prowess to our children, we just need to show them the same kind of love Jesus shows us.

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For more resources on family worship check-out Winfield Bevin's [A Beginner's Guide to Family Worship](#).