

Worship (39) Worship in the Home - Family Worship

Since God created the family before He created the church, it must mean He expected worship to be occurring in families long before it was occurring in the corporate meetings of God's people. God wants worship to be happening where it is most natural and familiar – in the home.

You will always feel a jar to your soul if nothing like worship happens at home, and then you have to come to God's House and suddenly 'switch on' worship. It will seem odd, even uncomfortable. And so it should. God expects families to be worshipping during the week, and then bringing their enthusiasm into the house of God. Someone has said, 'If your Christianity doesn't work at home, it probably doesn't work at all.' And if your family worship is broken, your corporate worship probably will be as well. God expects the two to feed into each other.

That is not to say that if you are a single person, or if your husband or father shows no desire to lead the family spiritually, you cannot enjoy corporate worship. Indeed, it's one of God's mercies that you can come and be revived and refreshed and strengthened in the absence of it at home. Nevertheless, the ideal is to have both.

Just like Sunday School cannot make up for parents who do not teach their own children the Word of God, so corporate worship cannot make up for a family which does no worshipping of its own. The home sets the tone for the church, and the church is supposed to feed back into the home. But the corporate worship services of the church will always be limited if nothing like worship happens at home.

In fact, we see very early examples of family worship in the Old Testament. In Genesis, God makes a comment about Abraham.

Genesis 18:19 *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, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.*

God knew that there was family worship happening in Abraham's household. Indeed, it was because of Abraham's faithfulness at home that God felt He could share with Abraham His plans to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

And later on, we read of Joshua's famous statement of single-minded family worship.

Joshua 24:15 *And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

So what does it mean to worship in the home? How do we worship as families?

1. Worship as a family by honouring the roles He has given us.

God has given very specific roles to each member of a family - husbands, wives, children, fathers and mothers. But this is what is important. When God instructs us about these roles, He makes sure He connects His own person to our role.

Look in Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, **just as Christ also loved the church** and gave Himself for her,*

Ephesians 5:22 *Wives, submit to your own husbands, **as to the Lord.***

Ephesians 6:1 *Children, obey your parents **in the Lord,** for this is right.*

Ephesians 6:4 *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition **of the Lord.***

Do you see that being a husband, wife, child or parent is something to be done as to Christ, in the lord, unto the Lord, of the Lord? In other words, God giving us these roles is more than simply moral instruction – it is an expression of God Himself. The family is a microcosm of God's order - marriages reflecting Christ and the church, parenting reflecting the Father and His spiritual children - all serving each other, sacrificing their own needs to lovingly care for the others.

When we obey these roles, we are reflecting the glory of God to one another, to our children, and to others who observe our families. God is glorified through the harmony and beauty of a Christ-Centred family. This is the primary way we worship as families, because this is the thing which God gives most attention to in His Word. Husbands, be loving leaders. Wives, be respectful, submissive helpers. Children, be respectful, obedient sons and daughters. Parents, be gentle but firm shepherds.

God gets more glory out of a family quietly carrying out His plan for the family, than the one which noisily has family devotions but where each is serving themselves and neglecting the others.

2. Worship as a family through conversation that turns to Him continually and naturally.

Deuteronomy 6:7-9 *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

These words come right off the greatest commandment. Israel was commanded to teach their children diligently to love God supremely. But the implication of this verse is that the teaching times would not only be set times, but it would be continuous - in the house, or travelling; at the end of the day, at the start of the day.

The Lord seems to say, 'Let the knowledge of loving Me be saturated into your day. Let it be something you're thinking of when you look at your hand, or when you just look at anything, when you enter your property or when you leave it.'

What one gathers is that God expected families to be naturally discussing the things of God as a matter of course. The sight of a butterfly, observing an argument between people, dealing with a sick animal, experiencing drought, getting the fire going, trading with neighbours – all of life could become object lessons.

And so it should be with us as families. Life is an object lesson. When we are driving, or sitting around the table, or in the garden, or walking in the mall, or washing dishes together or just relaxing on the couch – let your conversations often turn to the Lord and His truth. It needn't be contrived or faked – the more you grow in love for God, the more naturally it will happen - giving thanks, mentioning something that needs prayer, admiring the wisdom and

beauty of God, talking about one of the works of God, talking about a recently learnt Biblical truth.

Family worship is conversation which turns to Christ, the way a compass turns to magnetic north.

If this isn't natural to you, then start slowly. You needn't say something so wise that it must be written down and taught to future schoolchildren, you just have to be wholly sincere.

3. Worship as a family through special times of worship.

While the bulk of our worship is made up of being like Christ to each other, and talking freely and naturally about the things of God, there is to be allowance made for consecrated times. That is, special times of being before God as a family. Some have called it the family altar or family devotions.

I think one could take the words, 'In your house' to mean, 'Teach your children at a specific time in the home.' Certainly the Jews would do that.

The concept of a family altar or family devotions is simple. Have a regular time to be before the Lord as a family. There is no laid down law as to what to do. But I suggest a simple formula - have a mini-service - sing, read, pray.

1) *Sing* a hymn you know. Learn new hymns. Aim to know five hymns off by heart in a year. Singing so often puts our hearts in the right frame of mind to receive the Word. If you feel you cannot, or are tired on a particular day, then perhaps listen to a piece of sacred music together.

2) *Read* together. You might read a chapter or more from the Scriptures; read a devotional piece. You might read a biography. Variety is important as well.

Meditate on it together. Share some thoughts on your understanding of it. Dad - correct, reprove and instruct in righteousness.

This is also an opportunity to hold one another accountable. You get to talk about spiritual progress, about your spiritual goals.

Keep it on the level for all to understand – consider their understanding, their concentration level. When very young, use material which they will understand.

3) *Pray* together. It is a time to thank the Lord for His mercies, to praise Him for His goodness. It should also be a time of confession, if there has been wrong done to one another.

Then, there should be intercession – praying for needs within the home, for ministry needs, for other believers, for the church, for the unsaved and even for missionaries. Your prayer time might be different on different days – depending on how structured a person you are – you might want to pray for different things on different days – or you may be disciplined enough to mentally keep a record of how you are praying. You might take turns, or Dad might just lead everyone.

Be regular, but be flexible. Aim to have it as often as your schedule allows. If you have small children or infants, you may have to work around where they are. For some, first thing in the

morning, or immediately after breakfast, works best; for others, after supper. You may even find yourself switching it in different seasons of life. Late work hours, visiting or doing discipleship in the evenings may sometimes crowd it out. Don't despair, just pick up where you left off and keep going. If you want a perfect time every time, and to not miss a day in a month, you are setting yourself up for frustration. Determine to be regular, be willing to be flexible.

Be serious, but natural. Don't let family devotions become a flippant, meaningless exercise, because you will teach everyone that that is how you see the devotional life. Take it seriously. At the same time, be natural. That is, do not try to be something you aren't. Don't pretend with your family. Don't insist upon an hour's time every time you meet. Rather be short and thoughtful. Respect the abilities of those in your home, while seeking to increase their concentration. Sometimes, the rule that less is more really applies in family devotions.

4. Worship as a family through your standards of holiness as families

As a family, you should have standards. Standards that emerge from clear Biblical principles and precepts. But to worship as a family is to live those standards out in your interactions between yourselves, and with others - because at some point, your children are going to be exposed to others' standards, and other people are going to be exposed to yours. It will be those comparisons which serve to underline the glory of God and His holiness.

Joshua said, 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' In so doing, he worshipped God. He said, 'You do what you want to do with your families – but my family, we will be following God.'

So this becomes an important part of family worship. As a family, you decide how the TV, video and DVD player are to be used. What won't you allow? What amount of time will you allow?

What about the places you go for leisure? What places will you not go to? As the children grow older, what about who they spend time with? Who is allowed to sleep over, who is not, who can they visit, and who are they not permitted to visit? What about drinking, smoking? What about the way we address each other and speak to each other in the house, the tone of voice?

As you do these things, people will observe and ask why? They may criticise. They may say you are sheltering your family from the real world, and your family will be anti-social and out of touch; that you are legalistic and your children are losing out on fun and won't be normal, and that they will be deprived. They may tell you that you belong to a sect or a cult, and need to loosen up.

Just remember Joshua – *'and if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD...choose you this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'*

5. Worship as a family by serving together.

There is an interesting pattern in the New Testament that comes up at the end of Paul's epistles.

Romans 16:10-13 *Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household. ¹¹ Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord. ¹² Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord. ¹³ Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.*

1 Corinthians 16:15 ¹⁵ ¶ *I urge you, brethren -- you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints*

Notice, 'The household of...'. These were families in service together. Stephanas' family was very clearly devoted to the service of God's people. In other words, it is worship when families serve together.

Do not allow the spectator mentality to sweep over your family. Serve in the local church together. Serve God's people together.

I thank the Lord for the examples we have in our church of families that serve together. Worship is service. Establish habits of serving together. It can be basic help in church. It can be teaching, like Priscilla and Aquila were used to instruct Apollos; discipling other families or couples. It can be visiting people as a family – visiting the elderly, the sick. It can be carrying tracts together and giving them out to strangers or to friends and family. Very importantly – hospitality is a form of family ministry. Inviting people over, refreshing the saints is a wonderful avenue of service for the whole family.

6. Worship as a family by honouring the Lord's Day and keeping feasts and traditions together.

God took great care to institute daily, weekly, monthly and yearly routines that would imprint upon the minds of the Israelites the truth of the Word of God. And He also made sure that these festivals, feasts, celebrations and Sabbaths were memorable and even enjoyable. He wanted them to be interesting, to provoke questions and answers and to provide memories that would never fade.

Exodus 12:24-27 *And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. ²⁵ And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. ²⁶ And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? ²⁷ That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.*

The Israelites had the morning and evening sacrifice, the weekly Sabbath, Feast of Trumpets, Yom Kippur, Feast of Tabernacles, Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks. These were not merely national feasts – they were family feasts. God wanted families to rejoice in them.

Deuteronomy 16:11 *You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.*

Now as believers in the New Covenant, we are not instructed to celebrate any feasts or days. In Romans 14 we are specifically told that one man regards a day, another man does not regard a day.

But I want to suggest that the Old Testament example is one of which we would do well to take heed. Traditions are powerful things. When based on biblical truth, when symbolizing eternal things, they can be sources of great wonder and awe for little eyes, and tremendous bonding events for families.

I am not going to say you must celebrate Christmas, Good Friday, Resurrection Sunday or Passover. According to Romans 14, you have the freedom to regard a day to the Lord, and you have the freedom not to regard it to the Lord. Don't mandate it for other Christians, and don't forbid it either.

But recognize the possibility and the opportunity they present for good, for instilling powerful lessons about Biblical truth. And since God saw fit to make sure His people's lives were filled with the colour of many symbolic feasts, and since God knows human nature all too well, I do believe we, as Christian families, need to make sure we have traditions which regularly teach truth.

But there is one tradition which every family should keep – and it is the weekly celebration of the Lord's Day.

Exodus 20:8-10 *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰ But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:*

Let us face it, Jews and Seventh Day Adventists often shame Christians when it comes to this subject of one day a week consecrated to the Lord. Orthodox Jews will have the lighting of the candles, head off to the first synagogue service on a Friday night, come back, bless the children, eat the meal, and perhaps sing. In the morning they will go to the morning synagogue service where the rabbi gives a sermon, come home, eat a meal, and enjoy a restful afternoon walking, studying some rabbinic writings. They will then go to an afternoon synagogue service, with prayers and readings from the sages. The family will come home, eat their third Sabbath meal and later return for the concluding evening service. Now, we know that this is not based upon truth, but if this is what you grow up with, it is part of you. It is imprinted in you. It is not that easy to turn your back on that.

Why is it easy for so many Christian youth to turn their backs on Christianity? Firstly, because they were never truly saved, but secondly, there isn't a deep sense of meaning and culture and reverence that could be put there by at least a weekly remembrance of the Lord's Day.

Look forward to it. Build anticipation. Make your preparations Saturday night. Be up early enough to avoid rushing and the inevitable tension and conflict it brings. Make the most of your fellowship opportunities. After the service there is opportunity to fellowship with one another, have people over to your home or even just go home and rest. Make Sunday lunch a special time. Instead of switching on the box, take time to meditate on the sermon, discuss it with the family, read Christian books you don't usually get a chance to read, and then finish the day in the Lord's house for an evening service.

If orthodox Jews attend four services for something that is not true – what is our excuse for barely making one service in a week?

Sunday should be a consecrated day which our families never forget. One way your children will learn to choose not to work on Sundays or take weekend after weekend away from the house of God is by instilling upon them a sacred routine.

Worship as a family. Obey the roles. Let the conversation turn to the Lord frequently and naturally. Have special times of family devotions. Set standards which you keep. Serve the Lord together as a family. Honour the Lord's Day and keep family traditions which teach the truth of God's Word.