

Family Worship

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Preacher: Jim Spencer

[0:00] Well, so good to be here with you tonight.

And if I could ask you to stand for a moment with your Bibles! and turn to Psalm 78. Psalm 78.

I'd like to just read Psalm 78, 1 through 7, as a backdrop to our time together this evening.

Psalm 78, a mascal of Asaph. Give ear, O my people, to my teaching. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and His might and the wonders that He has done.

[1:10] He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.

Father, we do come humbly before You tonight, and Lord, I just thank You for the cross of Jesus.

Lord, I thank You for Your mercy toward a sinner like me and sinners like us.

Father, thank You for atoning for our sins, Lord, through Your Son's blood being shed on the cross for us. Father, we give You thanks tonight and exalt the name of Jesus Christ, and we lift high Your name this evening, Father, as we gather together.

Lord, I pray that You will be glorified in this place tonight. Lord, as we come to Your Word this evening, as we consider, Father, the subject of family worship, Lord, would You give us grace, and I pray that Your Spirit would teach us, Lord, and Lord, that You would bless this time.

And Father, we do desire that You would be glorified in it. So we commit this to You, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. You can be seated. So yeah, I'd like to visit this evening about family worship.

[2:55] That's at the heart of our ministry. I was telling Jason many years ago, we had a young couple who came to our house to visit one evening, and we were doing family worship regularly in our home.

And so as they came over one evening for dinner and to spend the evening with us, we asked if they wouldn't mind when it got around bedtime, we asked if they wouldn't mind if we do family worship, and then the kids can go to bed and we could continue to visit.

And a couple weeks later, the young gentleman asked me if he could bring a friend and his wife over and if they could kind of see the same thing.

And that's where this ministry was born out of, the Family Worship Resource Center. I think that family worship has maybe fallen on hard times a little bit in recent decades.

But we see, as we look at history and as we look at Scripture, we see that family worship is not a new thing at all. It's not a new idea.

[4:08] And so we'll look at that a little bit tonight. And then I want to just share some practical ideas for doing family worship as well that I hope will be helpful to you.

So let me share with you just a basic definition of family worship. Family worship is that time of day where the father, or where the father is absent or for some reason unable, the head of the home calls together all who dwell therein for a time of focus, Bible reading, prayer, and singing.

That's family worship simply. You may call it family devotions or have some other title for it. But it's just that time of day where the father of the home calls together all who dwell therein for a time of focused, Bible reading, prayer, and singing.

I mentioned that it's not a new idea. Martin Luther, one of the fathers of the Protestant Reformation, he's quoted as stating, Abraham had in his tent a house of God and a church.

Just as today any godly and pious head of a household instructs his children in godliness. Therefore, such a house is actually a school and church.

[5 : 30] And the head of the household is a bishop and priest in his house. Matthew Henry, whose name you might be familiar with in relation to his commentaries on all the books of the Bible, he stands out as one of the shining lights in the history of family worship in the church.

Regarding family worship, Matthew Henry warned, If you have not a church in your house, it is to be feared Satan will have a seat there.

When he says church, he's speaking of family worship. Not replacing our corporate gatherings together, but family worship. If you have not a church in your house, it is to be feared Satan will have a seat there.

It's been said of 17th century Scotland, In no country has the light of the dwelling burned more brightly. Probably no land in proportion to its inhabitants ever had so many praying families.

Charles Spurgeon, that great English pastor of the 19th century, said, If we want to bring up a godly family who shall be a seed to serve God when our heads are under the clods of the valley, let us seek to train them up in the fear of God by meeting together as a family for worship.

[7 : 10] A.W. Pink, the English evangelist and Bible scholar of the late 1800s, early 1900s, wrote, Nothing must be allowed to interfere with this duty.

All other domestic arrangements are to bend to it. Under no circumstances should family worship be omitted. If we would enjoy the blessing of God upon our family, then let its members gather together daily for praise and prayer.

Them that honor me, I will honor, is his promise. You know, at least one thing that all of these individuals that I just quoted would have in common is a deep appreciation for the biblical call for parents, and particularly fathers, to train their children in the ways of God and to lead their homes spiritually.

A key passage that they would have been very familiar with is Ephesians 6, verse 4. Ephesians 6, verse 4.

Where Paul instructed fathers in the church at Ephesus, Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction or the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

[8 : 44] Now certainly we understand that both mothers and fathers play a key role in the spiritual development of our children.

Right? I mean, just before that, in Ephesians 6, there's the call for children. Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.

Honor your father and your mother. Proverbs 1, 8 and 9 says, Hear, my son, your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching.

Right? So it's understood here that mothers as well as fathers will teach and train their children. But in Ephesians 6 where we just read, Paul turns his instruction directly to fathers.

Why does he do this? Well, throughout Scripture, we see that God has given fathers and husbands a unique and sobering place of spiritual stewardship and leadership and sacrifice and ministry within the home.

[10 : 14] He's ultimately placed upon fathers and husbands in submission to Christ the responsibility of the spiritual oversight and care of the family.

Consider this. Ephesians 5, 25-27 says, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy and without blemish.

Paul is speaking here of Christ and the church and he's saying, Husbands, this is the standard.

Right? This is how you're to love and care for your wife spiritually as Christ does His church.

And then as we've seen already in Ephesians 6-4, Fathers, bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

[11 : 46] Speaking to the men for a moment, men, God has purposed for you to be the spiritual leader of your home.

To minister to your wife through the word of God. And to bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Family worship throughout history has been a key way that fathers and husbands have at least in part given themselves to this task.

You'll remember that Joshua in the book by his name, chapter 24 and verse 15 declared, As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Right? If no one else does, we will. 2 Samuel 6, 18-20 records that after David blessed the people in the name of the Lord, he returned to bless his household.

[12:59] in Psalm 96, the psalmist in the call to worship beckoned, Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the people, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. J.W. Alexander, the 19th century pastor of the Dwayne Street Presbyterian Church of New York, comments, it was doubtless recognized in regard to spiritual as well as in regard to temporal things that if any provide not for his own, 1 Timothy 5, 8, and especially for those of his own household, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. You know, we usually think of that passage in regard to caring for our families physically. But what about spiritually? And regarding Christ's disciples, Alexander said, that spirit of social prayer which led disciples to join in supplication or praise in upper chambers, in prisons, in the stocks, and on the sea beach could not but have manifested itself in daily household devotions.

How could it not? And Alexander's assumption finds scriptural basis in the Ephesians 6 mandate fathers bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

There's no question here that what Paul is talking about would be an assumed activity of the home.

Right? Fathers, bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

[14:57] The primary context for that would be the home. So going back to Ephesians 6 4, let's just unpack the meaning of this passage a little bit real briefly this evening.

Paul instructed fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. What does he mean? What does he mean by that? The Greek word here for provoke is *paragizo* and it literally means to irritate beyond measure.

Paul is saying fathers, do not irritate your children beyond measure. anger. Do not provoke your children to anger.

It's interesting the Greek word here for anger is also a form of the same word that we just saw *paragizo* and it translates to anger beyond measure. So what Paul is saying here is fathers, do not irritate your children beyond measure angering them beyond measure but but what?

Do this. Don't irritate them beyond measure. Don't anger them beyond measure but bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

[16:35] You know, there are many ways that we might find ourselves guilty of provoking our children to anger. but one way it seems for sure that we will frustrate them as Christian fathers is if we neglect to bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

Fathers, God has put within your children a unique and innate longing and desire and need for your spiritual love and care and direction and oversight and training and discipleship.

and if we neglect this, if we neglect this, it will be frustrating. It will be irritating to our children.

A child left without discipline and instruction is a child who will be out of sorts, confused and angry.

You'll note, we also see from Ephesians 6.4 that we're not called to bring up our children in just any kind of discipline and instruction.

But look how Paul defines the type of instruction with which we're to disciple our children. In the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

[18:19] So what does that look like? How do we bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord? First of all, 2 Timothy 3.16 and 17 explains all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent, complete, equipped for every good work.

If we will bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, our discipleship of our children must be centered on the Word of God and the Gospel.

You know, God has given us a wonderful example of what this looks like.

In the Old Testament, He gives us a great example of what the activity of bringing up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord might look like. Would you turn to Deuteronomy?

Deuteronomy chapter 6. Probably a familiar passage to you. We find Moses instructing the people of Israel regarding the law and he says in chapter 6, verse 4 and following, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[19:54] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children. And shall talk of them when you sit in the house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

So as we think of Paul's instruction in Ephesians 6, we gain great insight looking at it through the lens of Deuteronomy 6.

Right? There are three primary elements that we draw out of this passage in this regard. If we will bring up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, it will happen as first, we love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and might and as the word of God is on our hearts first of all.

[21:18] Right? And then number two, it will happen as we faithfully speak of God in the extemporaneous activities of our day.

It's what I call along the way discipleship. Right? And we're really going to be most effective at along the way discipleship and what that is is just as we go about our day and we see a beautiful sunrise and we point our children to it and then we point them to God and say look what God has done, look what he made.

Or we deal with a sin issue that comes up during the day. And look to the word and point our children to God. Along the way type of discipleship unplanned.

We didn't plan to have that conversation but God has brought circumstances into our lives where we can turn our children's gaze to God. Right? Along the way discipleship and that's going to happen most effectively the more that that first element is happening where we love the Lord our God and his word is on our hearts and dwelling richly within us.

It's when our cups are full spiritually right? And with the word of God that it's going to just naturally spill over into our conversations throughout the day.

[22:49] So really important that we're nurturing our lives spiritually, that we're spending time personally in the word of God, growing in relationship with God and in understanding the word of God.

And then that's going to flow over into the along the way type of discipleship throughout the day. But then number three, if we'll bring up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, it will happen through times of diligent teaching.

It will happen through times of diligent teaching. Deuteronomy 6-7 helps us see that. And it's with the understanding that bringing up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord will happen in part through diligent teaching that those from history who I spoke about earlier, Matthew Henry, Charles Spurgeon and others, understood the importance of fathers leading their homes in times of daily planned family worship or family devotions.

Charles Spurgeon said this, to teach your children is a personal duty.

To teach your children is a personal duty. We cannot delegate it to Sunday school teachers or other friendly aides. These can assist us.

[24:27] It's not that Sunday school is wrong. These can assist us but cannot deliver us from the sacred obligation. Fathers, to train our children in God's ways is indeed a personal duty.

duty. And the point there is we must not neglect it. We must not turn it over to somebody else. Who did God call to bring up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?

Fathers. God give us grace to do that. To give ourselves faithfully to that and to not neglect that.

So with the time remaining, what I'd like to do, as I mentioned before, is to just offer some practical ideas in doing family worship. You see that God is calling us to it.

He's calling us to the diligent teaching of our children in his ways. And family worship provides a context for that to happen.

[25:50] So as you think about doing family worship, let me encourage you with three primary elements that if you'll keep those at the center of your times of family worship, I think you'll find your times together very focused and profitable.

And those are, first of all, reading God's word together. Every time that you gather for family worship, plan to open God's word.

You may have a regular reading plan that you want to go through. You may just pick a book of the Bible and open God's word each day. We work through books of the Bible at a time where we'll some nights read a chapter, a full chapter from one of the gospels, or we might just read one of the little subheadings under a chapter.

But we'll read some verses of scripture together. I encourage you to keep the word of God central in your times of family worship. The reason we want to do this, let me give just a simple definition of worship.

worship is reflecting upon God primarily through his word and responding to him in biblically appropriate ways.

[27:18] And so in order for us to effectively worship God in our times together, we need to focus on God. The way that we focus on God or reflect upon God is through his word.

So each time that you gather for family worship, read scripture together. Another element, plan to sing together. And this is probably one of the more challenging ones for some families where you may feel like you just can't do that, lead your family in singing.

Well, maybe there's someone else in your family who can do that and help facilitate that. Maybe you've got someone who plays an instrument and they can accompany you or you can just sing acapella or maybe you've got a favorite CD that has some great spiritual songs on it that will help you to focus on God as well.

Put those in and sing along with them. But strive to sing together as well. It's one of the ways that God has given us to encourage one another, right?

To edify one another as we sing spiritual truths from the word of God. And then lastly, plan to pray together. Every time you gather for family worship, maybe read God's word to begin, sing a song together, whatever order you want to do, but then always pray together.

[28:44] Maybe let the word of God that you've read that day be a springboard for your prayer. You might write down some prayer requests that as a family you want to be praying for, some missionaries or a family member or somebody that you're burdened for with the gospel.

Sometimes we'll take a bowl, this wooden bowl that we have, and we'll print out prayer requests and cut them into strips and just put them in the bowl.

And then we'll, for a week or two weeks or three weeks, pass that bowl around and have current prayer requests in it. And each of the kids get to grab one out and we go around and everybody will pray for one of those prayer requests.

Then the next night they grab from the bowl again and they probably get a different prayer request and it just keeps us rotating through some fresh prayer requests for people. And then we strive to remember how God answers so that we can also praise God and give thanks.

And it's just a great time for our kids to see God answer prayer. Father, let me encourage you as well in your times of prayer and family worship to pray for the salvation of your children.

[30:07] To let them hear you crying out to the God of all creation, the God of grace and mercy, that he would have mercy upon them.

Crying out to him for the salvation of their souls. When I think of it, what greater expression of love could your children experience than to hear their father calling out to God for mercy upon them for their salvation.

So, read, sing, pray. Every time you gather together, keep those three elements in mind and incorporate them into your times of family worship.

And I think you'll find it very helpful. You know, one of the biggest challenges that I hear from families and from guys is just the issue of doing family worship consistently.

Finding it difficult to do it consistently. So let me share with you just a few suggestions that I think will help you in this area. number one, set the goal and expectation of doing family worship daily.

[31:34] God is worthy of that, isn't he? He's worthy of our worship when we gather together corporately one, two times a week, but isn't he worthy of our worship daily, every day?

he is. Strive to or set an expectation that we're going to do family worship daily. We're going to strive to do it every day.

you might not always make it, but strive towards that. Set that goal, set that expectation in your family.

So maybe it hasn't been something that you've been doing and you and your wife can sit down with your children and just explain that we realize this is something that's really important and some

other things might have to be moved around a little bit, but we're going to strive to worship God daily in our home.

Just set that expectation. Everybody knows that's our plan. That's what we're going to strive to do. Also, if you're finding it a struggle to be consistent, let me encourage you to keep it simple.

[32:50] Jason and I were talking about this earlier as well. That can be one of the big hurdles in even getting started in doing family worship is if you're thinking, how am I going to prepare?

Where am I going to find time to put together a service every day for my family? Right? We know I don't know a person who leads their home in family worship regularly who really spends any time at all preparing.

It's helpful to have a plan. This is kind of the way we're going to do things. We're going to be reading through this book of the Bible or we're going to be singing this song. When we started doing family worship years ago, we just took a hymnal and in most hymnals, there is a verse under the title of the song and we would just take a hymn and sing that for seven days, for a week, every night, before bed and we would, by the end of the week, have the hymn pretty well memorized.

We would use that verse as a scripture verse to memorize and then we would just use that verse to talk about as well. And it would bring to mind other scriptures and whatnot and you'd be surprised at how conversation would begin to flow around that without any preparation.

You just know, okay, every night this week for the next seven days, we're going to sing How Great Thou Art, we're going to memorize this verse together, recite it every night and work on memorizing it and we're going to pray together.

[34:30] We're going to talk about that verse a little bit, talk about the verses in the hymn as well, talk about the great spiritual truths that are written there. So that's one way that you can do things very simply.

That's why we developed the Children's Scripture Memory song CDs with that idea in mind and that's how that started was in our own family worship where we would take one of those songs and we'd just do it for seven days and there's no preparation or anything.

You can as well if you're say you're out some evening, if you're doing family worship before bed, be flexible with doing family worship.

So you might be out somewhere and driving home, you know it's going to be late when you get home that night and you can just sing and pray and keep your eyes open while you're praying and driving and have one of the kids pray but be flexible with it.

But keep it simple. Keep it simple. Don't overwhelm yourself with it. You can find a plan like that and keep it very focused without any preparation.

[35:42] strive to establish a set time of day to do family worship. And what I encourage people to do is to try to find an activity that you're already doing that you can tie family worship to.

So years ago when we began doing family worship we decided okay we go to bed every night so we're not going to go to bed until we spend some time together in family worship.

And it's worked really well. It's just been a really consistent thing for us. Breakfast might work better for you. So if your family eats breakfast together every day just plan okay we're going to spend some time in the word together around breakfast or supper time if the evening meal is when you get to spend time together as a family every day.

Try to tie it to something you're doing already and that'll help you I think in being consistent in doing family worship. Let me just share with you a couple of common objections that might be running through your mind.

If you're not doing family worship already you might be thinking something like this but I don't have time for family worship. I don't have time for it.

[37:12] We're busy. You know the reality is if we'll be honest we can make time for the things that are really important to us. We do that all the time don't we?

We make time for the things that we really value. Remember scripture says where your treasure is there your heart will be also.

I think a good question to ask is do we see the discipleship of our children as the treasure that it really is? Do we value the spiritual maturing of our children the way that God values that?

We make time for what is truly important or of value to us. And as I mentioned before it might take some rearranging of priorities and schedules.

But we'll gladly do that for the things that we value. Another objection might be but I'm not qualified to lead in family worship.

[38:23] To that let me say you are. Who did God call to train your children? children. You don't have to be a Bible scholar or some great theologian.

Just a father. A Christian father. Husband. That's who God called to bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Matthew Henry in regard to this from his sermon, church in the house exhorted, do not plead your own weakness and inability to perform family worship.

Make use of the helps that are provided for you. Do as well as you can when you cannot do so well as you would. And God will accept it of you.

Right? God will accept it of you. just a couple of closing thoughts. First of all, think about this. Jesus called his disciples to make disciples.

[39:38] Matthew 28 reads, go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

As disciples, we're called to make disciples. Right? What greater discipleship opportunity do you have than with your own children?

I point out in my little booklet in the introduction, it's a missionary's dream. Right? What other opportunity do you have to spend 18 years or so in intimate relationship with a captive audience whose hearts are innately bent toward wanting to know what you believe and to know the things that you know?

Their hearts are, as a young child, already desiring that. Right? What greater discipleship opportunity do we have? Will you engage yourself in the work of making disciples?

Not only on the other side of the world, which we should be, right? But like Jason mentioned, at home, with our children.

[41:12] Secondly, as you think of doing family worship, I would encourage you to have a multi-generational mindset. A multi-generational mindset.

What do I mean by that? Simply understanding that the investment that you make in your home today will impact not just your children's lives, but by God's grace, their children, and their children's children, and their children's children, and so on, and so on.

How we invest in our homes today will have an impact on literally hundreds, if not thousands, of lives in the generations to come.

Have a multi-generational mindset. have a vision for the generations to come, and think not only if your children will be faithful then to disciple their children, their children, their children, not only your children and grandchildren, but what about all the lives that they're going to impact, right, in their sphere of influence?

We can't calculate the impact that it could have. We're having an impact one way or the other, either for the Lord or not. At the outset, I read Psalm 78, a song of Asaph.

[42:58] Remember, Asaph explained that the Lord established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn.

That's the vision that we should have. And arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

You know, Asaph didn't just write these words, breathed out by God. He lived them.

Consider his example. He ministered as a Levite at the tabernacle and served under David. When Israel returned to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon almost 400 years after the dedication of the temple, who do you think it was who was found fit and who was called upon still to serve the Lord?

It was the sons of Asaph. Have a multi-generational view of the impact that your faithfulness to bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord could have.

[44:38] It's the impact that God intended for it to have. Isn't it? Will you, like Asaph, impact the coming generations through a life of faithfulness, in leading your home spiritually, and leading your family in times of family worship?

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

God will give you the grace to do that.