



The Implementation of Family Worship

By Dr. Joel Beeke

There are two extremes: trying to do too much, and aiming at too little. Hence it is worth pondering some suggestions that should prove helpful:

PREPARE FOR FAMILY WORSHIP

Plan what, where and when. There are suitable helps, many of which are available from Reformation Heritage Books. Reading through Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress or 365 Days with Calvin has much to commend it. Use the creeds and the catechisms, and sing suitable songs and Psalms.

Sitting around a table can be most beneficial, and make sure there are no distractions. Take the phone off the hook! The Westminster Directory says family worship ought to take place every morning and evening, but that is scarcely possible for some families. Often the time after the evening meal is the most suitable time, but each family will be different. Try to protect your time. Fight every enemy of family worship.

DURING FAMILY WORSHIP

Brevity is important. Richard Cecil stated: 'Let family worship be short, savory, simple, tender, heavenly.' Consistency is to be maintained, as twenty minutes each day is preferable to 45 minutes on Monday and nothing on Tuesday. Do not abandon family worship because you have lost your temper with a child thirty minutes beforehand. It is not hypocrisy to pray when you are struggling. Pray for forgiveness; your children will respect that.

Maintain a spirit of 'hopeful solemnity', and expect great things from a covenant-keeping God. Be natural and be reverent. Have a plan for what you are going to do. Account for special

occasions, as for example, when the Lord's Supper is going to be administered. If the family is facing distress through a prolonged trial, read Isaiah 40-66, or if a believer is dying, take up Revelation 21-22.

Involve the whole family, including the little ones. Teach them how to read appropriately. Also, encourage private Bible reading and study. Be plain in teaching and applying biblical texts. The Westminster Directory commends what it calls 'conference' but we might call family dialogue. This question-and-answer approach is found in Exodus 12; Deuteronomy 6; and Psalm 78. Especially encourage teenagers to ask question; draw them out. If you do not know the answers, tell them so, and encourage them to search for answers.

Be faithful to the text (Tit.2:7), relevant in application (be concrete, and don't be afraid to share your own experiences), and affectionate in manner. Regarding this third point, my father often said to us, with tears: 'Children, I cannot miss any of you in heaven.' J. C. Ryle pointed out that 'Soul love is the soul of all love.' At the same time, we are to demand attention (Prov.4:1), so children should not be allowed to be slovenly or to leave their seats, except for emergencies.

In praying, be short, be simple, be direct (name your children and their needs), be natural, and varied. God is to be adored, sins are to be confessed, family mercies to be pleaded for, and God is to be thanked. Question 116 of the Heidelberg Catechism says: 'God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them.' Matthew Henry commented that morning family worship is especially a time of praise and petition, while the evening worship should focus on thankfulness, penitent

reflections, and humble supplications.

Finally, sing heartily, as we are bidden (Col.3:23), singing what is doctrinally pure and appropriate for one's family. Make sure you make good use of the Psalms, and explain difficult or unusual words. For example, do not assume that your children will know all about a shepherd. Explanations can make singing much more meaningful. Pray that the Lord will bless your times of family

worship and make them life-giving times.

- Adapted from Joel Beeke's book on Family Worship (published by Reformation Heritage Books).

Dr. Joel Beeke is a well-known pastor, teacher and author, especially on Puritan matters.