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A CURRICULUM TO TRAIN THE PARENTS AT CHRIST
CHAPEL BIBLE CHURCH IN FORT WORTH, TEXAS,
TO PRACTICE FAMILY WORSHIP

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APPROVAL SHEET

A CURRICULUM TO TRAIN THE PARENTS AT CHRIST
CHAPEL BIBLE CHURCH IN FORT WORTH, TEXAS,
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I dedicate this project to my wife, Holly Barnum, who is the best possible partner with whom to lead our children, Noble, Adler, Iris, and Deacon, in family worship.

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PREFACE

Before I began delving into the Scriptures and into the works of many others who have written on family worship, the practice of worship in my home was sparse and hollow. While my family is still maturing into the practice, we are now making our home a place of worship and discipleship. This journey would not have happened without the influence and input of several people.

First, I would like to thank the two men responsible for making me aware of this matter. My faculty supervisor, Dr. Donald Whitney, cast a vision of the necessity and the beauty of family worship. His teaching, example, and passion influenced me deeply to explore this topic. His influence shapes not only my home, but the homes of many in my church. Additionally, the encouragement and resources that have come from Dr. Joseph Harrod have made my project better. Both men have given me vision and help along the way for which I am deeply appreciative.

Second, I would like to thank my wife, Holly. Her patience and grace extended to me during our entire marriage, but especially during this project, have been instrumental in its completion.

Third, I would like to thank Christ Chapel Bible Church in Fort Worth, Texas, in their enduring support of this project. Their commitment to equipping the pastoral staff is a blessing beyond measure. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Bill Egner for the permission and support to embark on this journey, as well as Dr. Doug Cecil for his kind guidance in the development of this project.

My prayer is that the Lord would use this project as a catalyst to bring many other families to practice and enjoy family worship, and that generations to come would be impacted by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Micah Barnum

Fort Worth, Texas

December 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures charge parents with the privilege and responsibility of spiritually developing their children (Deut 6:7). However, many parents make no place in their busy schedules for teaching their children the counsel of God. While this is understandable—children require much time and energy simply for their physical care—Scripture makes the discipling of children a priority for parents (Deut 6:7, Ps 78:1-8, Eph 6:4). For parents to embrace this charge, they need a clear understanding of what God has called them to, as well as a functional understanding of how to help their children grow. With this ministry project, I intended to develop a curriculum to train parents how to use family worship as a means to disciple their children.

Context

This ministry project took place at Christ Chapel Bible Church (CCBC) in Fort Worth, Texas. CCBC has long placed an emphasis on the evangelization and discipleship of its children. In part because of the 4–14 window,¹ and also because a quality children’s ministry aids church growth, CCBC places great importance on having a first-rate program for children. As a result, each week an army of staff and volunteers teach the Bible with the goal of children steadily growing in maturity. The excellence of the children’s ministry has attracted many families to CCBC.

The children’s ministry has undoubtedly been a tremendous blessing to the church and to its families. However, one downside to such an excellent children’s program

¹The term “4–14 window” describes the increased receptivity of the gospel in children between the ages 4 and 14.

is that it has unintentionally created a divide between parents and children regarding shared spiritual experiences. Every Sunday the sanctuary is largely absent of anyone college-aged or younger due to the church's age-targeted services (i.e., children's, youth, and college services). While these services allow for worship and teaching adapted for specific ages, which we believe to be a great benefit, participation precludes the opportunity for families to enjoy a shared spiritual experience at church. Parents check their kids into the children's ministry, only to pick them up an hour later having had no coinciding worship or teaching. Sadly, the spiritual lives of far too many children exist independent of their parents. This worship model does present challenges, but ones that can be overcome by parents making opportunities for spiritual conversations and experiences in the home.² Calling parents into the great responsibility to disciple their children requires a clear and consistent message. This is a message that the church leadership has failed to communicate.

In recent years, the children's minister and the previous Life Stage 3³ pastor have identified this gap and made efforts to address it. Each Sunday the children's ministry sends home a summary of that day's lesson, giving parents an easy opportunity

²Many at this point would argue that the solution would be to cancel auxiliary programming and have everyone attend the worship service together. For example, see Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). However, I am not advocating a change in our church's model of worship service for three reasons: (1) I do not see a biblical mandate for this method of worship, (2) the problem is greater than simply having families sit together in worship, and (3) this change could not be made at CCBC for both practical or philosophical reasons; thus, I sought a solution that is possible in my context. My goal in raising this particular point is that our current model leaves parents and children spiritually separated, which can be addressed in other ways.

³The elders at CCBC have divided the church into six "life stages" to help with the organization and pastoral care of its parishioners. Life Stage 1 consists of students from fifth grade through college; Life Stage 2 is made up of young adults with no children. A couple enters Life Stage 3 when they have their first child and move to Life Stage 4 when their oldest reaches fifth grade. A person is designated as Life Stage 5 when their oldest graduates high school, and Life Stage 6 when he or she reaches retirement. Since the life stage model is based on the progression of children, it presents difficulties for singles to find their place in our church. Since Life Stage 3 is primarily made up of young parents, the main areas of focus is on marriage and parenting.

to discuss and further apply the Scriptures. Additionally, for several years CCBC has facilitated a quarterly worship service oriented toward children that gives families an opportunity to practice family worship. The idea is to employ a simple “Read, Pray, Sing” model so that parents would import this practice into the routine of their family life.⁴ This service does a good job at showing *how* to do family worship, but does little to communicate to parents *why* family worship helps them fulfill their calling to disciple their children. While these steps are in the right direction, there is much still lacking by means of training parents toward this end.

Encouragingly, there is a growing interest in addressing this problem. The children’s ministry is eager to provide their knowledge of resources and to use their influence to call parents into the discipleship process; thus, they become excellent potential partners in a training program for parents. Also, CCBC parents show increasing interest in learning how to provide spiritual input for their children. I often have conversations with parents on the topic of discipleship and am frequently recommending resources or making suggestions on strategies to families who are trying to get started. Additionally, the church has offered a few standalone trainings on the topic of family worship, and the classes have been well attended. These dynamics point to the fact that both the leadership and laity have identified the need to train parents and are ready to incorporate this as a core part of parent training.

Rationale

CCBC’s founding verse is Colossians 1:28, which sets the mission of the church to “present everyone mature in Christ.” Based upon this commitment to spiritual growth, the current ministry context reveals the need to teach parents the role God has placed upon them as disciplers of their children and to train them to do that work. Given that

⁴For a good explanation of how to use the “Read, Pray, Sing” model, see Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), chap. 3.

discipleship can take many forms (Bible study, classes, mentoring, serving, etc.), the particular form to be employed for this program was to train parents how to practice family worship in the home in order to teach the scriptures and model Christian behavior. The term *family worship* carries with it many of the same practices as *corporate worship*, in that both contain a time of prayer, worship through song, and the reading of Scriptures, with the chief difference being that family worship is done in the context of the family unit. This time of worship serves both as an opportunity to introduce the unconverted to Christ, as well as encourage growth in the life of the Christian.

The impetus for this program arose from both biblical and practical concerns. First, the Scriptures clearly teach that parents are to play an active role in the discipleship of their children that extends far beyond simply bringing them to church (Deut 6; Ps 78; Eph 6). Therefore, CCBC must faithfully call parents to assume this responsibility as a part of their own obedience and spiritual growth.

Second, due to the limited time that children are on the church's campus, and given the vast influence that parents have, it makes sense that they must assume this mantle of discipleship. Parents need to take an active role in the spiritual formation of their home by creating both an intentional time for discipleship as well as capitalizing on "along the way" teachable moments. Additionally, since the Sunday worship experience is divided, it is important that parents foster a spiritual climate at home making matters of faith a common topic of conversation.

Third, with the number of young families joining CCBC, the church needs a program that has the capacity to train large numbers of parents. The hope was that as parents begin to assume the responsibility of discipling their children, they would, along with their children, enjoy spiritual growth.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a curriculum to train parents at Christ Chapel Bible Church in Fort Worth, Texas, to practice family worship.

Goals

The following goals guided the implementation of developing a family worship program at Christ Chapel.

1. The first goal was to assess the current activity of family discipleship among active CCBC families who have at least one child younger than fifth grade.⁵
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum to train parents how to use in-home family worship as a means of discipling their children.
3. The third goal was to equip parents to disciple their children by teaching the curriculum on family worship.
4. The fourth goal was to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum by administering an evaluation three weeks after the training.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current activity of family discipleship among active CCBC families who have children younger than fifth grade. This goal was measured by administering a survey adapted from Timothy Paul Jones's Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey (FDPPS)⁶ on the first week of the training. The goal was considered successfully met when 40 responses were collected from families who would be a part of the training process, and the data was analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the discipleship practices among CCBC families.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum to train parents how to use in-home family worship as a means of discipling their children. This three-week curriculum used a "Read, Pray, Sing" model that could be adapted to cover a variety of ages. Further, the curriculum covered basic discipleship issues such as modeling character, how to teach the Bible, and developing a family plan for spiritual development. The goal was measured

⁵The particular role in which I serve is designated to families whose children are birth to fourth grade. This age demarcation has no significance beyond the fact that this is the area for which I have pastoral oversight.

⁶Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 202. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁷ The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to equip parents to disciple their children by teaching the family worship curriculum. This goal was measured by the successful completion of all three weeks of the training, while maintaining attendance records allowing for the collection of post-survey data to produce a paired t-test. The goal was considered successfully met when all three training sessions of the family worship curriculum have been presented and there was a complete record of those parents who completed each week of the training.

The fourth goal was to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum by administering an evaluation three weeks after the training. This goal was measured by administering a post-survey that was used to measure the change in the perceptions and activity of family worship. The goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Family worship. I have adopted Jason Helopoulos's definition of this term:

“Family worship is that sphere of worship which incorporates those living under the same roof in a time of worship together.”⁸

⁷See appendix 2.

⁸Jason Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 26.

Discipleship. I have adopted Timothy Paul Jones’s definition of discipleship as “a personal and intentional process in which one or more Christians guide unbelievers or less-mature believers to embrace and apply the gospel in every part of their lives.”⁹ Family worship was used as the vehicle by which the discipleship process was realized.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the initial survey was given only to parents present at week 1 of the training. Second, training was given only to parents who have at least one child younger than fifth grade. Finally, the project was limited to twenty-one weeks.

Conclusion

God designed parents to be the primary disciplers of their children, which is not only a responsibility, but a great privilege. Too many parents, though, have never been presented with this charge from Scripture, nor do they feel equipped to lead their children toward spiritual maturity. A quality curriculum communicates the biblical mandate as well as gives the practical skills necessary for parents to engage into the spiritual lives of their children through the practice of family worship. Parents who take up this mantle will see fruit in their own lives and in the lives of their children.

⁹Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 17.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR
PARENTS DISCIPLING THEIR CHILDREN

The Bible instructs parents to disciple their children. A look at biblical material reveals the role parents should play in the disciplining of their children and gives various instructions on how this may be accomplished. While the term *family worship* does not appear in Scripture, family worship is a natural expression of the commands given in the following passages.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

As the Hebrews move from Egypt toward the Promised Land, God delivers the law through Moses defining the manner in which his people will relate to him. In Deuteronomy 5-12, Moses gives the Torah, establishing the foundation of Hebrew religious and social life. In a brief sermon address in chapter 6, Moses charges the people to remember God’s law and to remain obedient to it. Deuteronomy 6:1-9, the most theologically and historically significant section of the address, deals with three topics: the danger of forgetfulness in a land of blessing, the solution to overcoming forgetfulness, and the means people are to employ in order preserve faithfulness to God.

Moses Warns of Forgetfulness

In verses 1-3, Moses reminds the people that living long in the land is inexorably connected to obedience. He begins by reminding the people that his words are weighty—they are to be received as “commands, decrees and laws,” which echoes the words used in 5:31.¹ Moses impresses upon the people that God requires faithful obedience to his

¹Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville:

commands. On the cusp of entering the Promised Land, God's people must remember that living long in the land is conditioned upon their obedience, Old Testament scholar Gordon McConville explains, "Yahweh as Lord of creation is always implied in the connection between commandment-keeping and well-being."² Moses understood the ease in which God's people can fall away from his commands and thus makes an urgent appeal that the people might listen. Moses's use of the word "hear" in verse 3 marks an important appeal to the Hebrews. Old Testament scholar E. H. Merrill writes, "'To hear,' in Hebrew lexicography, is tantamount to 'obey,' especially in covenant contexts such as this. That is, to hear God without putting into effect the command is not to hear him at all."³ Moses implores God's people to listen carefully to the commands of God.

Yet, why is Moses so concerned that the people will fail to embrace these commands? Surely all the miracles God's people witnessed in the exodus would establish an unwavering loyalty to God. Standing on the border of the Promised Land, Moses knew that the real danger did not lie only in the entrenched pagans, but also in the dangers of God's blessing. In surveying the situation, theologian Walter Brueggemann explains that Moses grasped that "satiation produces amnesia, and amnesia is the great threat to a community whose defining relationship is grounded in a concrete, nameable memory."⁴ If the people forgot what God had done, they would forget and ultimately abandon their deliverer. God's people must remember that the source of blessing comes not from a land, not from the strength of the sword, not from pagan gods, but from the "God of your fathers" (v. 3). This theme is picked up again in verse 12 where Moses reminds them not

Holman, 1994), 161.

²J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 145.

³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 162.

⁴Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 86.

to forget who “brought you out of slavery.” Moses must instill in his people this call to remember that they might overcome forgetfulness, which in Hebrew life was seen as the chief spiritual malady.⁵

The Solution to Overcome Forgetfulness

Verse 4 marks the beginning of the שמע (Shema), a six-verse distillation of the central message of the law into a simple response: love God with all your being. Yet, this important section of Scripture does not begin with a command, it begins with a statement about the nature of God, namely, that God is one. Professor Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary, Patrick Miller, asserts, “The initial function of the Shema is to identify the one who for this people will be the center of being and value and to begin to characterize the nature of the relationship between God and people.”⁶ Unlike the myriad of gods that the pagans worship, and unlike the fickle nature of those gods that places worshipers under a deity prone to whims, the God the Hebrews worship is singular, faithful, and knowable. In this revelation, Merrill explains, “the Lord is indeed a unity, but beyond that he is the only God.”⁷ From his singular nature comes a singular response from his people—love. Biblical scholar P. C. Craigie contends, “The fundamental truth has to do with the nature of God as one (v. 4); the fundamental duty is the response of love which God requires of man (v. 5).”⁸ In this declaration of truth, not only does one learn about God’s essence, but also about the nature of faith, because, as commentators Lange, Schaff, and Schröeder explain, “faith, which is the basis of the [*sic*] life, cannot be

⁵James C. Wilhoit and Dallas Willard, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 114.

⁶Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation (repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 98.

⁷Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 164.

⁸Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 168.

required, but only awakened. Before God commands He gives; before He demands faith, He discloses or reveals Himself to it.”⁹ God’s self-disclosure should rouse love from his people.

In the *אמרי*, Moses commands the people to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (v. 5). This response is foundational for the followers of YHWH. However, Moses expands further what it means to love God by calling for the preservation of this message. Moses declares that “these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” (v. 6). Merrill proposes that the truth about the nature of God and the commands he has given are “to be in one’s constant, conscious reflection,”¹⁰ meaning, the Hebrews should set their highest affection unwaveringly on God. Their devotion should be exclusively given to YHWH—they are to love God with their heart, soul, and might (v. 5). Merrill explains, “Israel must love God with all its essence and expression.”¹¹ God does not look merely for obedient people—he looks for people who follow him from a heart brimming with love.

As Moses has called for the place of highest affection from the Hebrews, he then turns to the passing along of that faith to their children. Verse 7 commands, “You shall teach them diligently to your children.” A part of obedience to YHWH by his people is teaching the ways of the Lord to one’s children. Even though God had done marvelous works in delivering the Hebrews from Egypt and had gifted his people with the law so that they might rightly relate to him, Moses knew that without frequent reminders of the Lord’s deeds, the ensuing generations would forget their deliverer and forfeit his blessing. It is imperative that each generation remember that “the wealth and

⁹J. P. Lange, P. Schaff, and W. J. Schröeder, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Deuteronomy* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2008), 92.

¹⁰Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 164.

abundance of the land is not a flat, irreversible given, but depends upon attentiveness to Torah,”¹² as Brueggemann observes. To accomplish this task, he instructs parents to take up the responsibility of preserving faith in the next generation. In verse 7, he prescribes that parents are to “teach diligently” the commands he has given. Merrill states that Moses charges parents to take up the task of an “engraver of a monument who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches a text into the face of a solid slab of granite. The sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done the message is there to stay.”¹³ Thus, Moses places upon parents the responsibility to teach their children the ways of God.

The Means of Preserving Faith

With the command given, Moses goes on to define the way parents are to pass on faith. In verses 7-8, Moses instructs that the laws of God should be an everyday topic of conversation, and that physical representations of the Scriptures should be placed in the most common of places to constantly spark memories of the law. The teachings of the law are to be central in day-to-day conversations—“Talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (v. 7). The reminders of the law should be centrally visible in the home: “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” (vv. 8-9). Why did Moses require that the things of God occupy such a central space in the rhythms of families? He knew that if the law is to “reach the hearts of the children,” as Lange, Schaff, and Schröder write, “it must be sharpened (taught diligently) upon their hearts, rigorously commanded, for mere words secure only a mere recollection.”¹⁴ God requires more than

¹²Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 89.

¹³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

¹⁴Lange, Schaff, and Schröder, *Deuteronomy*, 95.

mere recollection, he requires fervent affection; thus, parents are to assiduously teach their children the commands of God.

Ancient and modern parents alike must realize that preserving faith is more than a process of recitation. McConville argues, “They [God’s commandments] are likewise to be passed on to the next generation, not simply by enforcing them as a law code, but by making them the fabric of life and conversation.”¹⁵ Young children will learn these stories, and as they grow they will begin to inquire as to their meaning, and in anticipation of that day, Moses prepares parents on how to give sufficient answers to their questions. In verse 20, Moses poses a question that a future generation will ask: “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?” Moses’s response demonstrates how a parent attuned to teach should respond. The child asks a question about the command that the Lord has commanded “you,” but the wise parent reminds the child that these are the commandments that God has commanded “us.”¹⁶ Parents who love God will make every opportunity to invite their child to become a part of the family of faith.

Summary

Moses instructs parents to make use of every opportunity for the instruction of children so that faith may be passed along to the next generation. While this command encompasses conversations that happen broadly throughout a child’s life, family worship sits comfortably inside of this command as one of the ways parents can disciple their children. Family worship—the regular gathering of the family to engage in the Scriptures, song, and prayer—does contribute to the overall goal of impressing faith onto children.

¹⁵McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

¹⁶Michael Fishbane, *Text & Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 81-82.

Psalm 78:1-8

Psalm 78 functions as a literary ebenezer calling the Israelites to remember all that God has done in her past. The opening verses in this psalm establish three principles for the community of faith: the risks of forgetting YHWH and his ways, the great blessing in remembering YHWH, and the role of parents to teach the commands of God to children.

The Structure of Psalm 78

Psalm 78 does not follow the typical pattern of other psalms—it does not address God—there are no cries for help, offerings of praise, or prayers of repentance.¹⁷ Rather, this Psalm is addressed entirely to Israel as a reminder of the repeated accounts of their forefather’s evil and of God’s faithfulness. In this psalm, the second longest in the book of Psalms, is found a sweeping history of the people of God—but this is not history for history’s sake. Theologian Marvin Tate reports, “Psalm 78 does not seem interested in presenting a mere list of the events of Israel’s past. . . . It presents history not as a recital but as a subject for meditation.”¹⁸ The goal is not to inform, but instead to persuade.

Asaph’s psalm opens with an eight-verse preamble revealing the intent of the writing, that through the retelling of the history of Israel the next generation would hear of God’s faithfulness and follow him. As this history is faithfully passed down from generation to generation, he is confident it will result in faithfulness to YHWH. The remainder of the psalm, verses 9-72, details the accounts of God and his people. Asaph structured each story to reveal the darkness of the sins of Israel and highlight the exceptional grace of God. Old Testament professor John Goldingay writes, “Each of these narrative sections follows the same sequence, relating God’s marvelous acts of grace,

¹⁷John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 479.

¹⁸Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Zondervan, 2015), 284.

Israel's repeated rebellions, and God's restorative chastisement."¹⁹ Such an honest look at the failures of God's people could easily lead to despondency were it not for the grace of God; it is in this message that readers, both ancient and modern, find hope. British Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner asserts, "Israel's record is her shame, God's persistent goodness emerges as her hope (and ours) for the unfinished story."²⁰

Remembering the Failures of Israel

The psalm opens with the phrase "give ear" (שָׁמַע), which carries the idea that listening leads to responding. Although the author does not use the word שָׁמַע (hear) as found in Deuteronomy 6, the intended impact is the same. Essentially, Asaph says "Everybody, listen up, this is important." The summoning to listen is necessary because the stories about to be retold will not be flattering to the people of Israel—their generational failures will be on full display for all to see. However, the stories contain hope found in the faithfulness of the Lord. In retelling the "dark sayings from of old" (v. 2), Kidner explains that the author seeks to use the past to "hold up a mirror to the present, and bring its dark sayings, or riddles (NEB), to light—for the true pattern of history is not self-evident."²¹ The tendency for selective memories and faulty judgments of the present can only be resolved by learning from the failures of Israel's past. Old Testament scholar Hans-Joachim Kraus observes that these stories reveal the darkness of Israel's nature by exegeting the "thankless greed that heedlessly passes the gifts of God by—of the unbelieving, mistrusting challenge to Yahweh."²² Goldingay identifies a three-step

¹⁹Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 480.

²⁰Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 316.

²¹*Ibid.*, 311.

²²Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 130.

process of learning in verses 3-4. First, the elders recount the stories of Israel's past, retelling the story of the sins of their forefathers. Then the descendants take time learn and embrace their history, with the final step being the community heeds the lessons learned from their errors.²³ Remembering the sin of Israel, paired with remembering the grace of God, is the pattern for a changed heart leading to obedience to YHWH.

Extolling God's Gracious Actions

In verse 4, Asaph transitions his focus from the failures of Israel to the compassionate activity of God—a theme repeated not only throughout Psalm 78, but in the entirety of the psalms. Kraus states that he celebrates the loving-kindness of God by detailing “the wonders of the basic historical activity of God. The history of salvation lives in the report, in the proclamation. Transmitted from generation to generation, it approaches the present in the world.”²⁴ Remembering grace kindles affection.

After highlighting the wondrous deeds of God in verse 4, he reminds the people of the law given to them. Tate comments that Israel's interactions with God are based on the Torah, yet the law was not the first interaction of God with his people—Israel's first encounter was divine deliverance. For God's people to relate to Yahweh properly, they must remember both the exodus and the law.²⁵ While verse 4 reminds Israel that there are many “dark sayings,” these are overcome by the “glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.”

In verse 5, Asaph's goal begins to come into focus; he reports of God's actions, “He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children.” Not only are God's people to remember his

²³Goldingay, *Psalms, 42-85*, 485.

²⁴Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 130.

²⁵Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 289.

gracious deeds and live with a sense of affection for God, they are specifically commanded to teach their children of his commandments.

The Necessity of Teaching Children

Verse 6 opens with the word *וְזָמַרְתָּ* (that), which is a transitional phrase demonstrating purpose. God has given these commands with the expectation that parents will instruct their children so that the children will embrace him. Asaph describes the righteous result of faith in the next generation, that they would set their hope in God, not forget his works, and would keep his commandments. Kidner reports that these commands form a “threefold cord of faith, as personal trust, informed and humble thinking, and an obedient will.”²⁶ The conjoining of remembering and obedience cannot be overlooked. Tate explains,

Torah is a combination of story and commandments; the commandments are understood in the context of the story and the story is incomplete without the commandments. Only by understanding the old traditions can the present generation avoid repeating the sins of the previous ones.²⁷

In verse 11, Asaph laments again the forgetfulness of Israel: “They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them.” For God’s people, forgetfulness leads to abandoning YHWH. Verse 7 marks the critical issue for the author; Kidner explains, “For if redemption itself is forgotten (in Israel’s case, the exodus; in ours, the cross and resurrection), faith and love will not last long.”²⁸ The act of remembering carries with it a responsibility for individual reflection and active recitation from which others might learn. In each household, parents are to recite to their children the gracious acts of God that their redemption would not be forgotten.

²⁶Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 312.

²⁷Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 289.

²⁸Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 314.

Summary

Forgetting God's kindness and his commandments leads to the abandoning of God and his ways. God has ordained parents to teach their children the way of faith that enduring fidelity may be preserved. Family worship provides a simple means for children to hear of the faithfulness of God to both stir the affections and to form a biblical foundation, so that they would "put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands" (Ps 78:7).

Proverbs 4

The wisdom in the book of Proverbs has stood the test of time and gives aid to people across cultures and generations. However, Proverbs 4 gives unique insight to parents through a real-life portrayal of a father disciplining his son. Solomon demonstrates how a wise parent purposely uses his or her influence to guide a child in the ways of the Lord. D. A. Garrett, professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, explains that in this chapter "the father (and mother), not the professional teacher or the pastor or government official, has the most profound responsibility and opportunity to lead a young man in the right way."²⁹ The depth of parental love provides a unique opportunity to influence the child toward following the Lord.

Solomon, the loving parent, assumes the responsibility to shape his son to become a lover of God, just as he learned from his own father. Old Testament professor C. R. Yoder describes the impact of this generational wisdom:

When the father refers to and quotes his father (4:3-9), he signals that the authority of his teaching rests not primarily on his life experience or position in the family but on the generations before him. The father passes on information, beliefs, and customs that the community has tested and reclaimed time and time again.³⁰

²⁹Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Holman, 1993), 86.

³⁰Christine Roy Yoder, *Proverbs*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 52.

Solomon instructs his son to be fully devoted to the Lord and his ways, just as he received the same admonitions from his father.

However, given the powerful lure of the ways of the world, can the teaching of a parent ultimately be successful? Can he give enough instruction to ensure that his son will love the Lord? Quite simply, he cannot.³¹ However, the unique position as a father gives him the opportunity to teach both through his words as well as through his life. Theologian Sun Myung Lyu posits, “How can we teach desire? The answer is, we cannot teach it. But we can hope to induce desire by showing what is desirable.”³² A father and mother have the unique opportunity to both teach as well as show the goodness of following the Lord, and this is exemplified through the actions of Solomon in Proverbs 4.

Solomon Gives Generational Wisdom (1-9)

Solomon begins his instruction by building a connection to his son.³³ While today he is the father giving instruction, at one time he was the child receiving instruction from his father, King David. He also was once in the humble position of learning from his father, and in the same way he received his father’s instruction, he now looks for his son to be receptive.

³¹Solomon’s son Rehoboam is found in 2 Chr 12:1: “When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.” Does Rehoboam’s departure from faith show that parental discipleship is ineffective? Did Solomon fail as a parent because his son departed from the law of the Lord? To be certain, parents would love to find a way to ensure the fidelity of their children, and while discipling children through family worship does help to hide God’s word in their hearts (Ps 119:11), it offers no guarantees. Ultimately, the reasons parents should disciple their children is not because it offers a certain outcome, but because the Lord has commanded it, and because he frequently uses this teaching to influence children to faithfulness.

³²Sun Myung Lyu, *Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 63.

³³There is much discussion regarding the plural use of the word *son* in v. 1 (בָּנָיִם). Some commentators believe this word signifies that Solomon is addressing students rather than his son. However, given the additional uses of “son” in the singular, which is the more typical use, this use of the plural does not diminish the paternal implications of the text.

Solomon appeals to the efficacy of generational wisdom that he will pass down to his son by connecting it to the wisdom of the grandfather. Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman notes the increased influence Solomon has by the appeal to his own father in order to “bolster the authority of his message to the son. The quality of the father’s advice stands on the fact that it is not new to him, but rather something that he received from his father.”³⁴

The importance of his instruction is not subject to Solomon’s own opinion but carries the strength of generational learning. It is noteworthy that Solomon’s primary appeal is not for obedience, or to subscribe to generational values, but rather to pursue wisdom. Solomon demonstrates a deep desire to cultivate a son who is committed to growing in wisdom by taking the time to pass down the wisdom he himself has received.

Solomon’s encouragement to pursue wisdom comes directly from his father. Catholic scholar Roland Murphy expounds, “The father was pressured by his father to keep the ‘commands’ and to pursue wisdom, which stands in parallelism with the ‘words’ from the grandfather’s mouth.”³⁵ Solomon’s love for wisdom is both intergenerational as well as theocentric; Garrett concludes, “Wisdom is not abstract, secular, or academic but personal and theological. To reject wisdom is to reject God.”³⁶ Additionally, the loving father knows that in imparting wisdom, the effect will bring life to his son (4:4, 9).

Solomon Appeals to the Path of God (10-19)

By introducing his instruction with a recollection of his own time of learning, Garrett notes how influencing his words would have been, because “these teachings have

³⁴Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 151.

³⁵Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 27.

³⁶Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 72.

stood the test of time. Although several major themes of Proverbs are mentioned in this chapter, the emphasis here is on the love that causes a father to plead with his son to stay in the right way.”³⁷ Not only are these words filled with paternal care, they are words of wisdom guiding both David, Solomon, and now Solomon’s son. He describes in verses 10-19 the choice between two paths, and Longman comments on how the imagery of the “‘the two-path’ theology is reminiscent of the teaching of Psalm 1.”³⁸ Solomon demonstrates how a nurturing father carefully instructs his son in the way of wisdom, so as to help him stay on the right path.

Commentator Bruce K. Waltke notes that, in verses 10-11, the affectionate nature of the father-son relationship is displayed through the use of the “‘I-you’ relationship, encouraging the son to identify with his father.”³⁹ In verses 10-19, Solomon makes repeated appeals to “hear and accept my words,” “keep hold of instruction,” “do not enter the path of the wicked,” and “avoid the evil path.” The paternal concern for his son is clearly seen in the pleadings for his son to follow the ways of God. This instruction goes beyond mere communication of information and is an example of how a godly parent seeks to lead a child into the blessings of God. The example of Solomon shows that instruction is a natural outpouring of paternal love.

Solomon Fosters a Heart for God (20-27)

In the final section of chapter 4, Solomon moves from the imagery of choosing the right way, to preserving the right heart. Not only is Solomon concerned that his son might do the right things, he wants there to be a deep-seated affection for YHWH. From

³⁷Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 86.

³⁸Longman, *Proverbs*, 153.

³⁹Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 287.

his elderly vantage point, Solomon sees the importance of dedication to the Lord and the desires that his son would respond appropriately. Garret writes,

This passage illustrates how wisdom is an inheritance that may be passed from generation to generation. It can preserve a whole family line through the passing of years. It is, however, an inheritance that each generation must choose to receive. If the chain is broken and the way of wisdom is rejected, the results will be disastrous for the family.⁴⁰

Regarding verse 23, Garrett attests that one can see “the importance that the father gives to the heart in this verse. It is most important that the son preserves the integrity of his heart. It is from the heart that life derives. . . . An evil heart is a dead heart.”⁴¹ The intent of the father is that his son’s heart would be devoted to God because he knows that “from it flow the springs of life” (v. 23); if his heart is devoted to YHWH, then everything else will be as it should.

Summary

Solomon shows that, in Garrett’s words, “the home is the primary place of education, especially moral education.”⁴² The example of a father giving intentional, careful, godly instruction to his son should serve as a model of the commands found in Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78, and Ephesians 6. While the intentional passing along of wisdom is important for parents, as seen here, Proverbs 4 is not a direct equivalent of “family worship.” Since the scope of Proverbs 4 is limited to a father passing along wise instruction to his child, how does this chapter speak to family worship? At a basic level, this passage demonstrates Solomon’s effort to convey his own love of God to his son. He accomplishes this by speaking words of wisdom to his son with the goal of directing his heart toward God. So, while Proverbs 4 is not a direct equivalent to family worship,

⁴⁰Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 86.

⁴¹Longman, *Proverbs*, 154.

⁴²Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 87.

family worship does give a father the means by which to put into practice Solomon's example of spiritually shaping one's children. Kidner argues, "Faith will be transmitted mainly by personal influence, along the channels of affection."⁴³ When applied in the context of family worship, Solomon's opening words become powerful: "Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding." A father who calls his family to family worship powerfully brings together the strong bond of the parent, the Word of God, and the heart of the child.

A Summary of Additional Old Testament Examples of Families Practicing Faith

The preceding passages lay the foundations for God's commands to pass along faith to children. Yet, there are additional passages in the Old Testament of families practicing their faith. Each of the following passages gives evidence that spiritual forefathers utilized the home as a place to worship and to teach faith to their children.

Genesis 18:17-19

God selected Abraham and intended that he would use the home as a place of promulgating the worship of YHWH. Verse 19 reports, "He will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." God intended for Abraham to use the home as the vehicle to plant the seeds of the Jewish faith. Given that Abraham was the first to enter this covenantal relationship with YHWH, there was no community of believers nor designated center for worship, but the family itself served as the community of faith. Genesis 22 shows Abraham's practice of incorporating his son into the worship of God by involving Isaac in offering the sacrifice—something with which Isaac demonstrates familiarity ("Where is the lamb?"). He knew something was missing

⁴³Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 63.

because he knew how to worship the Lord. While the passage is principally about Abraham testing Isaac, Isaac participated, and was familiar with the worship of YHWH. Abraham worshiped with his family.

Joshua 24:15

As Joshua's life was drawing to an end, he assembled the leaders of all the tribes of Israel to call for their allegiance to YHWH. Reminding them of the great things God had done for his people, he made an appeal for a sincere and faithful devotion to God. Specifically, this meant that they were to "Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD" (v.14). How were these foreign gods being worshiped amid the tribes of Israel? Were there places of worship built among the camps? Were there public assemblies to worship these idols? No, these were idols being worshiped secretly in the home, and Joshua called his people to repent. They were to choose whom they would serve, and Joshua's choice was clear—he and "his house" would serve the Lord. His home would contain no idols, no foreign gods; it would be dedicated to the worship of YHWH.

Job 1:1-5

The first verses of the book of Job report of a family life marked with celebration and community. Job's children regularly gathered to celebrate and enjoy the fruit of their abundance. As their family would worship and feast together, verse 5 reports that Job would rise early in the morning to offer sacrifices on behalf of his children because Job feared that his children may have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. The Scriptures report that Job did this continually.

While the text does not reveal what these potential sins may have been, the text is clear that Job wanted his children to be upright before God. Old Testament professor,

Robert Alden describes Job’s role as “a priest to his own family,” and “like Abraham, he was not dependent on another to make sacrifices.”⁴⁴

Why did Job do this? Job was an upright man who shunned evil (v. 1), and he knew the need for continual worship and repentance before a holy God. The concern he had for his children led him to spiritually engage in their relationship that they would be consecrated to God, thus he led his household in the worship of YHWH.

Summary

These passages demonstrate a long tradition of fathers incorporating worship into the lives of their families. While none of these passages speak of family worship as a time to “read, pray, sing,” they clearly paint the picture of a godly family engaged in worship at a household level.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Paul instructs husbands to treat their wives in the same manner Christ has treated the church, with love, and to do this toward the same goal Christ has for the church—her sanctification. Husbands are to care for the spiritual well-being of their wives and to lovingly lead them toward spiritual maturity.

The Command: Love in the Same Way

In Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Paul gives his household code detailing the way the Christian home should operate. After instructing wives to submit, Paul gives a lengthy instruction to husbands on the manner in which they are to treat their wives. Theologian Andrew Lincoln observes, “After the exhortation to wives to submit, with its depiction of husbands as heads, what might well have been expected by contemporary readers would be an exhortation to husbands to rule their wives. Instead, the exhortation is for husbands

⁴⁴Robert Alden, *Job*, New American Commentary, vol. 11 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 52.

to love their wives.”⁴⁵ Paul does not go on to install a husband as the dictator of the home, he makes a surprising turn of the paradigm by stressing the husband’s obligations rather than his rights.⁴⁶

This instruction to love would have been a foreign concept to its ancient audience. Commenting on the cultural state of marital relationships, New Testament scholar M. D. Roberts notes the absence of exhortations for men to love their wives were in Greco-Roman culture. Roberts even goes so far as to say that there were no instructions for husbands to love their wives before Paul.⁴⁷ What makes Paul’s commands so radical is that they move the marriage relationship out of the realm of procreation or social construct and into something relational and spiritual. The husband must love his wife deeply and sacrificially, seeking to meet her needs from a heart of deep concern. New Testament commentator Mark Thielman observes, “The husband’s love for his wife should be so broad and long and high and deep that it includes the sacrifice of his own social prestige and well-being, indeed his life, for the sake of his wife.”⁴⁸

Jesus’s love as model. Paul goes on further to direct husbands to love—he commands them to love in the same way Christ loved the church. Paul says in verse 26 that Jesus loved the church “that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” Jesus’s model not only gives insight into the way a husband should love his wife, but also a specific goal. Australian New Testament scholar Peter T. O’Brien purports, “Paul proceeds to spell out the goal of Christ’s sacrificial love

⁴⁵Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 373.

⁴⁶Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 540.

⁴⁷Mark D. Roberts, *Ephesians*, The Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 203.

⁴⁸Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 382.

for the church by means of three purpose clauses: that he might ‘sanctify her’ (v. 26), ‘present her to himself’ in splendour (v. 27a), and enable her to be ‘holy and blameless’ (v. 27c).”⁴⁹ A part of a godly husband’s love for his wife is a concern for his wife’s sanctification. The model must not be overextended—the husband is not the savior of the wife, but a part of his love for his wife is to help bring about her sanctification. Fuller Seminary professor R. J. Erickson writes that Christ’s goal “is the welfare and blossoming to full potential of the people in the new family,” and that as a result, a husband should sacrifice “his own interests for his wife’s sake, not if she will start to make some self-improvements, but so she may grow toward maturity (v. 28).”⁵⁰

Jesus’s goal: To sanctify. Paul argues that Jesus gave himself up for the church ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ. The word sanctify comes from the root ἀγιάζω, which means “to cause one to have the quality of holiness.”⁵¹ Jesus’s work brings a new quality into the nature of the church, which, as Lange, Schaff, and Schröder write, is the “positive activity, effecting the ethical form and demeanor which is well-pleasing to God.”⁵² Christ’s motive was more than simply to come and save, it was also to present the bride holy and blameless. O’Brien observes,

Christ gave himself to the church to make her holy by cleansing her. This cleansing was effected by a spiritual washing brought about through Christ’s gracious word in the gospel. His love for the church is the model for husbands in its purpose and goal, as well as in its self-sacrifice (v. 25).⁵³

⁴⁹Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 420.

⁵⁰R. J. Erickson, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. W. A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 1031.

⁵¹James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages w/ Semantic Domains: Greek (NT)*, 2nd ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2001), n.p.

⁵²Lange, Schaff, and Schröder, *Deuteronomy*, 199.

⁵³O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 423.

Husbands, then, are to follow Christ's example and lovingly care for the spiritual formation of their wives.

Jesus's mode: Washing of water with the word. The phrase καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι presents many interpretative difficulties. The word καθαρίσας carries the notion of spiritual purification, and according to the *Lexham Theological Workbook*, in every use of καθαρίσας “the person is cleansed from impurity and restored to a purified state.”⁵⁴ It is clear that Jesus cleanses the church, but what is the nature of that cleansing? Many interpret λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος as a direct reference to the waters of baptism, thus baptism accomplishes an actual washing on some level.

Lutheran scholar R. C. H. Lenski takes the following position:

The act of sanctifying and the act of cleansing are synonymous, the one is positive: to separate unto God, the other is negative: to remove sin and guilt. Both take place in baptism, the only bath of which we know in which water and the spoken word are combined.⁵⁵

But does λουτρόν refer to baptism? The *Lexham Theological Workbook* reports on λουτρόν: “In nonbiblical literature this term refers to the place where one bathes. This word occurs twice in the NT and seems to use the imagery of baptism to describe moral cleansing (Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5).”⁵⁶ It is possible that λουτρόν does not directly refer to the waters of baptism, but rather to the ceremonial washing of a bride before her wedding.

Additionally, ἐν ῥήματι poses difficulties. What “word” is Paul referencing here? If one holds that the washing refers to baptism, then “word” may refer to the words of the baptismal formula spoken over the candidate. If this is not a specific reference to

⁵⁴Douglas Mangum et al., eds., *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), n.p.

⁵⁵R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 632.

⁵⁶Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

baptism, then “word” may be a generic reference to the cleansing power of the gospel in one’s life.

While ultimately these nuances may be insignificant,⁵⁷ I interpret the passage to mean that the water here refers not to baptism since Paul uses βαπτίζω as his preferred word for baptism, but instead refers to a ceremonial washing. Additionally, “word” speaks not to the baptismal formula but as a global reference to the changing power of the gospel. I agree with Thielman’s assessment that the passage “describes the substance that bathes those who receive this bath: they receive ‘the water bath in the word,’ which is the gospel. Christ died, then, to sanctify the church by cleansing it with a water bath in the gospel.”⁵⁸

The Application: Family Worship

What, then, is a husband to do in order to treat his wife in this way? Put simply, he is to endeavor to lovingly lay down his life, not just to make her happy, not to fashion her into the image of a wife that pleases him, not to give her the best possible life, but rather to help her grow in her relationship with Christ. Anglican Pastor John Stott exhorts husbands to have a similar goal:

His headship will never be used to suppress his wife. He longs to see her liberated from everything which spoils her true feminine identity and growing towards that “glory,” that perfection of fulfilled personhood which will be the final destiny of all those whom Christ redeems.⁵⁹

For a husband to respond properly to this passage, he must follow the model of Jesus in the manner he treats his wife (love), the aim of that treatment (sanctification), and the method of that treatment (washing of the word). He is to lovingly display care in the

⁵⁷Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 376, comments, “On either of these interpretations, this writer sees the Church’s cleaning from the moral pollution of sin being carried out not through baptism only but through baptism accompanied by the word which points to Christ. Sanctification take place through both water and the word.”

⁵⁸Thielman, *Ephesians*, 385.

⁵⁹John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984), 235.

circumstances of daily life, but also to make use of God’s Word for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). Professor Donald Whitney asserts,

As Christ cleansed his bride, the church, by the washing of the water of the Word of God, so husbands are exhorted here to love their wives in like manner. And one of the best ways that husbands can bring the pure water of the Word of God into their homes is through the spiritually cleansing and refreshing practice of family worship.⁶⁰

Family worship brings the ministry of God’s Word into the home in ways that fulfill this command. It is a loving sacrifice for the husband to take the time to read the Scriptures, allow them to impact him, and then share words of encouragement to his wife. O’Brien writes that as a husband considers how to lovingly care for his wife he can be reminded, “In the light of Christ’s complete giving of himself to make the church holy and cleanse her, husbands should be utterly committed to the total well-being, especially the spiritual welfare, of their wives.”⁶¹

Summary

Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Following this command would have significant impact on Christian homes and even the broader culture. However, while this command is widely known, husbands are less in tune to the call to spiritually nurture their wives. This should be a multidimensional concern for a husband—he should pray, serve, help, and minister to his wife throughout each day, but making a time of family worship provides special opportunity for teaching and communing with God together. Family worship does provide a meaningful opportunity to minister to children, but a husband should also use family worship as an opportunity to lovingly minister to his wife.

⁶⁰Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 24.

⁶¹O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 424.

Ephesians 6:4

The apostle Paul affirms the responsibility of parents to disciple their children in the book of Ephesians and further clarifies the manner in which parents are to raise their children. In the middle section of his Household Codes, he gives this charge: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Paul’s Command to Parents

Paul begins his address by charging fathers (πατέρες) with the responsibility of bringing up their children. Commentator Clinton Arnold observes that in this command Paul is communicating that “fathers have the ultimate responsibility of raising their children in such a way that they will be trained in understanding the essence of the Christian faith and that they will be instructed and admonished on how to live this out.”⁶² The responsibility for fathers to rear children would not have been unexpected in ancient Greek culture because fathers already carried the responsibility for their general education. Lincoln comments that Greek cultural norms dictated that even though a tutor may be employed for the education of a child, the responsibility for education remained with the father.⁶³ Thus, Paul’s addressing the father as the primary instructor of his children is in step with the cultural educational norms for children.

It must be considered whether this specific address to fathers should be interpreted that the instruction does not apply to mothers. Paul opens this charge by using the word πατέρες, which could be interpreted that he intends this responsibility to be uniquely paternal. Yet, this interpretation should be rejected because by placing this responsibility with the husband, it does not exclude the mother’s participation, because

⁶²Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 418.

⁶³Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 400.

her submission to his leadership (Eph 5:22) means she assumes this responsibility as well. Lenski writes, “The commandment itself places the mother beside the father, and Paul himself has presented the close relation existing between them. What is said to the fathers thus applies also to the mothers.”⁶⁴ While fathers bear the responsibility to ensure their children receive proper care, both parents share in the outworking of raising children in the way Paul prescribes.⁶⁵ Pastor and Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe notes that the importance of parental care is highlighted: “Nowhere in the Bible is the training of children assigned to agencies outside the home, no matter how they might assist. God looks to the parents for the kind of training that the children need.”⁶⁶

Do Not Provoke Your Children to Anger

In a society that gave fathers ultimate authority over their children,⁶⁷ ruling the home with an iron fist was far too often a reality. Undoubtedly, even the most loving parents faced situations that led to harsh discipline, but this was not to be the case among Christian parents. Rather, as theologian John Muddiman asserts, “Fathers must avoid provoking their children to anger, for anger, as 4:26f. has already claimed, gives the devil room to incite even worse offenses.”⁶⁸ The phrase μή παροργίζετε means do not provoke

⁶⁴Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles*, 650.

⁶⁵This position is not universally held. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 417, concludes, “Although it is possible for ‘fathers’ (πατέρες) to be understood here in a generic sense with reference to both parents . . . Paul is most likely focusing here on the men. If both mothers and fathers were in view, Paul would have probably used the typical word for ‘parents’ (γονεῖς).” I hold to the position that Paul is appealing to the father, not because he desires to exclude the mother, but because he is placing it as a top priority for the family which is then distributed to the mother. Further, it would not make sense that mothers would be permitted to provoke their children to anger or bear no responsibility to their spiritual rearing.

⁶⁶Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2001), 2:54.

⁶⁷Fathers in ancient Greek life had absolute control over their children, much like a king would over his subjects. He had legal right to discipline his children in any way he deemed fit, including beatings, locking his children up, etc. Paul seeks to limit the heavy-handed parental discipline in this injunction Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 794.

⁶⁸John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries

to anger, and with this command, Arnold explains that Paul “provides restraints on paternal authority, guarding against its abuse, and focuses instead on the Christian training fathers are to provide.”⁶⁹ In order to protect the hearts of children, Paul commands parents to not exasperate them. This injunction gives children the greatest chance to do what they are called to do in the preceding verses, which is to honor and obey that they might experience the Lord’s blessing (6:1-3). Lenski observes,

Unjust, improper parental treatment angers the child so that it cannot honor the parent. A long list of parental faults may be drawn up under Paul’s summary which would include arbitrary, inconsistent, foolish, harsh, and cruel treatment. Parental authority is easily abused.⁷⁰

Out of a concern for the heart of children, Paul admonishes parents to demonstrate patience and thoughtfulness so that abusive parental anger would not confuse the message of grace.

Bring Them Up Well

Paul’s concern extends beyond the proper treatment of children in that he instructs parents to “nourish” them in order to promote their spiritual and physical flourishing. Paul instructs parents to “bring them in up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord,” which carries broad application for parents. The verb ἐκτρέφετε, which means “to rear, bring up,” also carries with it the aspect of nourishment as seen in Ephesians 5:29.⁷¹ Christian parenting is to be more than simply passively allowing children to grow up—there should be intentional care given to the meet physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of a child. This is what it means to “nourish”—if parents gave only part of what is needed, flourishing would not be realized. Parents must also use their own lives as opportunities for instruction because in parenting the old adage rings true “more is caught

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 276.

⁶⁹Arnold, *Ephesians*, 402.

⁷⁰Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles*, 650.

⁷¹Arnold, *Ephesians*, 407.

than taught.” Stott explains that as parents seek to nourish the needs of their children, they model the heart of God in that they “care for their families as God the Father cares for his.”⁷²

Paul gives further insight into “bring them up” by adding “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” The exact distinction between the words παιδεία (discipline) and νοουθεσία (instruction) is difficult to determine with certainty,⁷³ but a close look at each will help parents understand the manner in which they are to train their children.

“Discipline” (παιδεία) carries the meaning of correction through chastisement or rebuke. Lenski observes that discipline “measures according to the laws and regulations of the Christian home, the transgression of which brings chastisement, yes, spankings when necessary. This is the proper opposite to provoking to anger.”⁷⁴ Although Paul has just directed parents to not provoke their children to anger, this does not mean that children are to go without correction. As children behave in ways that do not conform to the command they have received from Paul (i.e., obey your parents, 6:1), it is the responsibility of parents to bring corrective action. J. Muddiman explains,

The word in Greek for schooling (*paideia*) when used by New Testament writers often picks up the Old Testament connotation of physical discipline and chastisement (see esp. Heb. 12:5–11); Paul uses it in this way at 1 Cor. 11:32 and 2 Cor. 6:9 and calls the Law a ‘pedagogue’, probably in this disciplinary sense, at Gal. 3:24f.⁷⁵

Paul here reaffirms the use of chastisement (see Prov 13:24, not sparing the rod) as a component to nourishing children.

In addition to upholding the place of discipline, Paul also calls parents to give instruction to their children. The elements of discipline and instruction play important roles in the training of children, but each makes use of a different medium. Lange, Schaff, and

⁷²Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 245.

⁷³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 798.

⁷⁴Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles*, 651.

⁷⁵Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 276.

Schröder write, “The former [discipline] consists in work, the latter [instruction] in word.”⁷⁶ Instruction here takes on the role of providing explanation and enlightenment regarding the ways of the Lord. This aspect of “bringing up” comes through teaching, modeling, and discussion, which provides a foundation for the child to begin to internalize the ways of the Lord and not merely follow out of fear of chastisement. If discipline refers to the “rod” of Proverbs 13:24, then instruction refers to the “diligent teaching” commanded in Deuteronomy 6:7. While many parents see the direct benefit of discipline (i.e., order in the home), they must not forget the great good of biblical instruction, which gives opportunity to teach children of the message of the gospel. This notion of giving instruction provides the greatest compunction for parents to disciple their children from Ephesians 6:4. If parents work to create a home that meets the needs of their home (nourishment) and teach their children proper ways to behave (discipline) yet fail to teach them the ways of God (instruction), then they have failed to do what God has called them to do. It is in meeting this responsibility that parents must take the time to disciple their kids through words of instruction. Teaching is a necessary component of parenting.

In the final phrase of the verse, “of the Lord,” Paul seeks to ensure that the training given is consistent with the heart of God. This concluding phrase comes from the Greek word κυρίου, and functions here as a genitive of quality designating the model that discipline and instruction should follow—it should be discipline and instruction that the Lord prescribes.⁷⁷ For the Christian parent living in the midst of a pagan Greek culture, the model of discipline should not be based on the cultural norms and practices of the time, but instead should be based on Christ. The same is true for Christian parents today. According to biblical scholar F. F. Bruce, parents must look to Christ’s example in their

⁷⁶Lange, Schaff, and Schröder, *Deuteronomy*, 212.

⁷⁷Arnold, *Ephesians*, 408.

discipline and instruction “with due regard to his ‘meekness and gentleness’ (2 Cor 10:1), as well as putting into practice his precepts.”⁷⁸ The same grace professed and practiced in the church should be demonstrated in the home. The discipline and instruction given to children should be “of the Lord” in every moment of teaching, correction, rebuke, and encouragement.

Summary

Paul continues in the tradition of Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78 in his concern that parents would pass along faith to their children. Christian parents should bring their children up in such a way that it points them to Christ. Arnold captures this well when he writes, “Ultimately, the concern of parents is not simply that their sons and daughters will be obedient to their authority, but that through this godly training and admonition their children will come to know and obey the Lord himself.”⁷⁹ This godly training comes about as parents make regular opportunities to speak of the scriptures and to demonstrate faithfulness to their children. Family worship provides a vehicle by which parents repeatedly engage in the activities of the faith, giving opportunity for the Word of God and the Spirit of God to bring about maturity in these young lives.

⁷⁸F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 398.

⁷⁹O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 446.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL SUPPORT

The Scriptures call for parents to disciple their children, yet, as I show in the coming pages, many Christians do not follow this command. This presents the necessity for church leaders to call parents to a more biblical model of parenting. To this end, I intend to analyze the state of family worship and offer two means to install this discipline in homes—namely, creating vision and offering training.

Is the Modern Home a Place of Discipleship?

Research on Family Practices

Does the typical Christian family today make the home a place of discipleship? Quite simply, no. In an article released in 2009, Lifeway Research concluded that there is a growing drift from biblical parenting toward a secular worldview promoting morality, yet seeking to find happiness apart from a meaningful relationship with God. The study reported on the most common definitions of successful parenting as reported by parents: “good values (25 percent), being happy adults (25 percent), finding success in life (22 percent), being a good person (19 percent), graduating from college (17 percent), and living independently (15 percent).”¹ The article goes on to report that only 9 percent of parents identified a growing faith in their child as an important aspect of successful parenting.

In 2013, the research division of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church surveyed its own parishioners about discipleship that happens in the home. While this survey was

¹Lifeway Research, “LifeWay Research Looks at Role of Faith in Parenting,” March 24, 2009, accessed September 29, 2018, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2009/03/24/lifeway-research-looks-at-role-of-faith-in-parenting/>.

limited to a specific denomination, the findings reveal that even though their denomination values parents disciplining their children, parents were not practicing family worship. According to their findings of North American families, 29 percent of respondents said they “never” participated in family worship and an additional 17 percent said the participation was less than once a month.² With nearly half of the respondents in this survey reporting minimal to no expression of family worship, one wonders how typical these homes are to a broader sampling of Christian households.

Timothy Paul Jones, pastor and associate vice president at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, explores the topic of family worship in the congregations he surveyed. According to Jones’s research, over 90 percent of parents surveyed affirm the notion that parents, not the ministers, should take the lead in the discipleship process of children; yet, the parents’ spiritual involvement of the discipleship process ranged from “sporadic to nonexistent.”³ Though desiring to see their kids grow, it seems that parents “have slipped into a supporting role. Earlier generations of Christians understood what contemporary Christians seemed to have missed: Families are the first and most effective small group of all, and every parent is a teacher.”⁴ Lamenting the state of spiritual nurturing that happens at home, especially as it relates to the passivity of fathers, Kara Powell and Chap Clark, coauthors of *Sticky Faith*, note that “when it comes to matters of faith, mum’s usually the word at home.”⁵

²Adventist Research, “Is the Home Circle Breaking: Family Devotions in the Global Church,” accessed September 29, 2018, <http://www.adventistresearch.org/blog/2017/08/home-circle-breaking-family-devotions-global-church>.

³Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2011), 99.

⁴Ibid., 154.

⁵Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 71.

Further, data shows the extent to which children raised in Christian homes are failing to maintain their faith into adulthood. Barna reported in 2012, that 6 in 10 young adults will leave the church permanently or for an extended season of time. Trends suggest that this exodus from faith begins as early as age 15—an age when the young person is still living at home.⁶

Additionally, in a study published in 2018, by Religion, Brain & Behaviors, researcher at the Atheist Research Collaborative, Joseph Langston, found a significant correlation between the spiritual decisions a child takes as he or she moves to adulthood with the frequency and quality of spiritual influence from the parent. Stated simply, this study found that a child’s movement from a religious perspective to an atheistic one is connected to the spiritual influence (or lack thereof) from the parents. The researchers surveyed 5,153 atheists regarding their journey to atheism. In particular, they were concerned with the ages of these respondents when they made their steps toward atheism, and what religious factors were present in the home. They concluded, “The extent to which parents faithfully model their own religious beliefs to their children (i.e. CREDs [credibility-enhancing displays of faith]), works in tandem with other processes to produce unique trajectories of the timing at which one becomes an atheist.”⁷ While the display of faith from the parent is not the only contributing factor to the ongoing faith of a child, it does play an important role in the faith development of their children. The researchers found that when parents engaged in more CREDs, such as treating others kindly or caring for the poor, their children became atheists at a later point in life than parents who did not provide as many credibility-enhancing displays to their children. The implication to parents

⁶Compiled by Eric Reed, “Six Reasons Young People Leave the Church,” CT Pastors, accessed September 29, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2012/winter/youngleavechurch.html>.

⁷Joseph Langston, David Speed, and Thomas J. Coleman III, “Predicting Age of Atheism: Credibility Enhancing Displays and Religious Importance, Choice, and Conflict in Family of Upbringing,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, July 30, 2018, accessed October 5, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2018.1502678>.

is clear—the greater the positive displays of faith in the activities of parents, the greater the likelihood that the faith will be passed along to their children.

If it is the case that parental influence is so influential, yet parents are failing to engage their children in matters of faith, then church leaders must ask themselves why parents do not regularly engage their children on spiritual matters. Christians have worshipped corporately in churches and worshiped privately in individual Scripture reading and prayer, but worshipping together as a family is widely unknown, even though the Scripture command it. This absence stems from a lack of vision for family worship.

Parents Lack Vision for Family Worship

Family worship is not a reality in most homes because parents lack the vision for it. Jones reminds parents, “In God’s good design, your children and mine will raise children who will in turn beget more children. How we mold our children’s souls while they reside in our households will shape the lives of children who have yet to draw their first gasps of air.”⁸ The truism holds here: “You make time for what is important to you.” For parents to see family worship as important, they need to understand the crucial role family worship plays in the spiritual development of their children. What follows are four insights parents must see in order to develop a biblical vision of this practice.

Family worship is commanded by God. As seen in chapter 2, the Scriptures clearly lay responsibility for the spiritual nurturing of children at the feet of the parents. To fail in this area is to fail to follow the commands of God.

Families are a vehicle of discipleship. The family is the basic unit of teaching, modeling, and nurturing; however, too many parents have decided that “professional ministers ought to be the primary faith trainers in their children’s lives.”⁹

⁸Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 102.

⁹*Ibid.*, 96.

While they may affirm their position as the primary discipler, their actions reveal something different. Rather than seeing the opportunity for daily interaction that home-life affords, parents all too often abdicate the discipleship of their children to “the professionals,” forgetting the immense opportunity they have in the home. Nineteenth-century Presbyterian pastor J. W. Alexander comments,

A word fitly spoken, at such a time, is an apple of gold. A psalm, rightly chosen, and sung with the spirit and understanding, may bear up all hearts to God. A prayer, “in the Holy Ghost,” though issuing from one who has not the lips of the eloquent, may go more deeply into the soul of the prodigal son, or the careless neighbour, than all the sermons of the year.¹⁰

Parents will miss the greater opportunity to instruct, encourage, rebuke, and form their children if they defer their childrens’ spiritual formation to anyone outside the home.

Parental faith greatly influences the faith of their children. Culture is a powerful influence on children, but parents must remember that their influence is powerful as well. Douglas Kelly, Professor of Theology Emeritus from Reformed Theological Seminary, contends,

Remember this significant fact, a few direct, simple, and heartfelt words from one’s own parent make far more impression on any child than the most eloquent flow of fine instruction from an outsider. Our real problem as parents is not our lack of ability in praying, reading, or commenting, but is rather our underestimation of the immense power and influence God has given us to shape our offspring for His glory by simple virtue of the representative covenant relationship that is ours as parents who are “in Christ.”¹¹

Parents maintain the great privilege of being the primary influencers of their children, yet often fail to engage them in their spiritual development. Christian Smith, a sociologist from the University of Notre Dame, agrees: “Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most

¹⁰James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Louisville: GLH Publishing, 1847), 6.

¹¹Douglas F. Kelly, “Family Worship: Biblical, Reformed, and Viable for Today,” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, ed. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman (Fellsmere, FL: Reformation Media & Press, 2006), 120-21.

important social influence in shaping young people’s lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents.”¹² Parents have influence—they should use it for the spiritual formation of their children.

Family worship protects and preserves the church. As culture presses against the truths of Scripture and the positions of the church, family worship strengthens the family’s devotion to God. Alexander writes, “It is highly honourable to family worship, as a spiritual service, that it languishes and goes into decay in times when error and worldliness make inroads upon the church.”¹³ Alexander here celebrates the powerful influence of family worship by concluding that churches are more resilient to the diluting influence of the world when the home is a place of worship. Conversely, the absence of solid biblical teaching leaves children to form their own misguided worldview. Tedd Tripp, president of Shepherding the Heart Ministries, explains, “When children live without a clear, consistent presentation of biblical reality, their sinful nature will read and interpret reality for them. Their hearts will cut a path that satisfies their lusts and desires to serve themselves.”¹⁴ When parents cultivate faith in their children, it preserves not only their hearts but also the future of the church.

The Current State of Faith in Young Adults

If parents fail to engage in the spiritual formation of their children, then one would expect to see young people easily influenced away from the faith of their childhood as they leave the home. Unsurprisingly, trends show this to be happening. The data of young adults abandoning their Christian faith paints a foreboding picture of the power of

¹²Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

¹³Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 10.

¹⁴Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995), 26.

secular influence. A 2016 Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) study found that the greatest growth of religious designations are to those who are unaffiliated. PRRI reports, “Nearly one in five (19%) Americans switched from their childhood religious identity to become unaffiliated as adults, and relatively few (3%) Americans who were raised unaffiliated are joining a religious tradition. This dynamic has resulted in a dramatic net gain—16 percentage points—for the religiously unaffiliated.”¹⁵

As children, untrained in a daily exercise of faith, step into a world hostile to the claims of Scripture, it should be no surprise to see a high number of young people abandon their faith. The study goes on to show,

Nearly four in ten (39%) young adults (ages 18-29) are religiously unaffiliated—three times the unaffiliated rate (13%) among seniors (ages 65 and older). While previous generations were also more likely to be religiously unaffiliated in their twenties, young adults today are nearly four times as likely as young adults a generation ago to identify as religiously unaffiliated. In 1986, for example, only 10% of young adults claimed no religious affiliation.¹⁶

George Barna, Executive Director of the American Culture & Faith Institute, found similar results in a 2006 study reporting that even teens who had high degrees of engagement during their teen years were susceptible to abandoning their Christian heritage. The data suggests that “six out of ten twentysomethings were involved in a church during their teen years, but have failed to translate that into active spirituality during their early adulthood.”¹⁷

Additionally, Kenda Creasy Dean, the Mary D. Synnott Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary, interprets the findings of the

¹⁵Betsy Cooper, “Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion—and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” accessed August 21, 2017, <https://www.ppri.org/research/ppri-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Barna Group, “Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years,” accessed August 10, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years/>.

2003-2005 National Study of Youth and Religion. She distills her findings by saying, “American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith—but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school. One more thing: we’re responsible.”¹⁸ She continues,

The problem does not seem to be that churches are teaching young people badly, but that we are doing an exceedingly good job of teaching youth what we really believe: namely, that Christianity is not a big deal, that God requires little, and the church is a helpful social institution filled with nice people focused primarily on “folks like us”—which, of course, begs the question of whether we are really the church at all.¹⁹

Dean’s concerns come from a desire to recover a biblical faith that cannot be addressed simply by better programs at church. She further emphasizes the role of parents in the role of passing along deep authentic faith. Her concern though is crystal clear—the next generation of Christians are not embracing a deep love for Jesus rooted in biblical faith, and parents must be a significant part of the solution to that problem.²⁰

Such trends should cause great pause as church leaders and parents consider current methodology in passing along faith to the next generation. PRRI concluded from their research that “the reasons Americans leave their childhood religion are varied, but a lack of belief in teaching of religion was the most commonly cited reason for disaffiliation.”²¹ And the second most cited reason for leaving was that “their family was never that religious when they were growing up.”²² There was a lack of doctrinal teaching and there was a failure to demonstrate spiritual practices. To be certain, family worship is only a part of the solution in passing along faith to the next generation, but it directly

¹⁸Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 11-12.

²⁰*Ibid.*, chap. 6, “Parents Matter Most.”

²¹Cooper, “Exodus.”

²²*Ibid.*

addresses the two greatest reasons this study found for people abandoning their childhood faith.

A Strategy for Change

If it is the case that families are not widely practicing family worship, and the absence of that practice is harmful to the faith of families, how does the church go about addressing this issue? Jones summarizes his findings: “When all the data was brought together, lack of time, lack of training, or both factors together accounted for 90 percent of the parents who had disengaged from their children’s spiritual development.”²³ Essentially, Jones identifies two fronts: creating vision and equipping parents—these are the areas the church must focus on to bring about change. What follows are two goals to address these issues.

The first goal of this project was to develop a vision for family worship. God calls parents to engage in the spiritual formation of their children (e.g., Deut 6, Ps 78, Eph 6), but most today have largely disregarded this call. The community of faith must remember that, as pastors Ligon Duncan and Terry Johnson have written, “Christian parents have covenantal responsibilities toward their children that God is pleased to use as a means of those covenant children’s spiritual birth and growth.”²⁴ Thus, parents should be inserting the gospel message into the daily rhythms of life, as well as carving out places for intentional discipleship because the Lord has commanded it. However, not only does he command it, he also uses it in the lives of children. Theologian Peter Schemm offers,

We practice these habits [various aspects of family worship] together because we long for gospel-centered relationships where the grace of God is rehearsed in our households. Home is the place where we are most often our true selves—whether in

²³Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 111.

²⁴J. Ligon Duncan III and Terry L. Johnson, “A Call to Family Worship,” in *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 321.

gladness or anger, honesty or deceit, love or ill will. It is by God’s design, then, that learning and living the gospel at home brings a depth to spiritual formation that is otherwise unlikely if not impossible.²⁵

Christians identify the home as a place that fosters love, safety, and nourishment—the Christian community needs to recover the idea that it is also a place for spiritual formation.

How is this done? To achieve this, I drew from the deep well of one of the most influential groups of evangelical forefathers, the Puritans, who displayed a fervent commitment to family worship based on a rich understanding of the gospel.

The second goal of this project was to equip families for family worship. Parents need training on how to practice family worship because the practice has fallen so far out of the norm of Christian homes that most have little or no experience in this arena. In the coming pages, I intend to give tools to help parents not only practice, but also enjoy, family worship with their children.

Goal 1—Developing a Vision for Family Worship

Families today are beyond busy—whether it involves transporting kids between soccer and piano practice, sorting out homework, or simply managing all the duties the home requires, families have little margin today. Church leaders should exercise great discernment regarding the integration of the church’s programs into the schedule of families, only promoting items that are helpful in the formation of disciples. However, the practice of family worship is of such great spiritual importance that church leaders should boldly call parents to make this activity a regular part of home life. But will parents, already saddled with an overflowing daily calendar, actually add worship to their daily routine? Quite simply, the only way it will happen is if parents have a compelling vision of family worship. The issue, though, is not whether they have time for family worship, but whether they will make time. This happens only if their hearts have become convinced

²⁵Peter R. Schemm, Jr., “Habits of a Gospel Centered Household,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 191.

of the great value of family worship—both as an issue of personal obedience to God, as well as the great opportunity for spiritually disciplining their children.

How can church leaders impart such a vision for family worship? To accomplish this goal, I drew from a group of people who both had a grand vision for family worship, but also skillfully wrote about this vision—the Puritans. Although their name today, as it was in their time, is more often spoken as a term of derision, this group of faithful brethren saw the beauty of family worship, and this vision is needed today.

Who Were the Puritans?

Anyone unfamiliar with the Puritans may scoff at the notion of emulating them—history has not dealt kindly with the Puritans. As theologian J. I. Packer reports in his book *A Quest for Godliness*, “Pillorying the Puritans . . . has long been a popular pastime both sides of the Atlantic, and most people’s image of Puritanism still has on it much disfiguring dirt that needs to be scraped off.”²⁶ Even as late as the twentieth century, American journalist H. L. Mencken famously quipped that Puritanism is “The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.”²⁷ However, what if becoming “puritanical” meant nothing that the modern hearer might assume?

The rise of Puritanism. The Puritan era extends from the late-1500s until the 1700s—beginning in England and closing in Colonial America. King Henry VIII began the Church of England when he split from the Catholic Church in 1532, so he could divorce his wife and remarry in hopes of producing a male heir to the throne. As England defined its new ecclesiology, the theology and practices of Luther and Calvin were introduced to England. However, when Mary Tudor ascended to the throne she wielded

²⁶J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 21.

²⁷H. L. Mencken, *A Mencken Chrestomathy: His Own Selection of His Choicest Writing* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 624.

her power to reverse any Protestant influence—England was once again Catholic, causing many to flee the country due to religious persecution.²⁸ When Queen Elizabeth took the throne in 1558, many Protestants who had fled England returned hoping for new freedoms, but these hopes of religious tolerance were not fully realized. Queen Elizabeth required strict uniformity in the church and adherence to a state-endorsed liturgy did not settle well with many in the Church of England.²⁹ Cambridge professor Thomas Cartwright convinced many through compelling lectures to follow a Presbyterian ecclesiology. In 1586, a Scottish work, *Book of Discipline*, influenced many pastors to adopt new patterns for worship, preaching, and the administering of sacraments. Seeking to suppress this new movement, Queen Elizabeth passed the *Act against Puritans* in 1593, attempting to snuff out those practices not approved by the state; yet the undercurrent of diverse religious expression had taken root. William Perkins, the “Prince of Puritan Theologians” at Cambridge, and Laurence Chaderton, often called the “pope of Cambridge Puritanism,” trained many of the future leaders of Puritanism.³⁰ The Puritan movement had begun.

Over the coming decades, Puritans experienced seasons of freedom followed by seasons of persecution depending on the ever-changing opinions of those in power. Under the reign of King Charles, William Laud brought a season of increased scrutiny over Puritan practices, which led many Puritans to flee to The Netherlands or New England, in the hopes of finding religious freedom. Religious persecution of the Puritans abated under the reign of Oliver Cromwell, but these freedoms were short-lived, and by

²⁸Religious persecution in England was nothing new. The Lollards, led by John Wycliffe in the era preceding the Reformation, received brutal treatment from the English throne. John Coffee, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England 1558-1689* (New York: Longman, 2000), 78.

²⁹The first rumblings of discontent began to be heard in the early 1560s as the government insisted the clergy wear gown reminiscent of Catholic garbs, but zealous Protestants wanted to eschew anything that could be deemed popish. Laurence Humfrey and Thomas Sampson, both heads of Oxford colleges, led an organized effort to protest these decisions, to the great horror of Queen Elizabeth. *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁰The 1590s saw the spread of Puritanism with Oxford and Cambridge producing scores of Puritan preachers who effected great impetus for Puritan thought. Allen Carden, *Puritan Christianity in America: Religion and Life in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 53.

1662, Charles II's enforcement of the *Act of Uniformity* required ministers to renounce any measure of Puritan practices and return to the state-approved religious code. Although many Puritans lost their official ministries, suffered imprisonment, and fled in search of religious freedoms, they continued to influence many through their faithful preaching and through their pens.

Theological concerns of the Puritans. When Henry VIII separated from the Catholic Church, many saw an opportunity to make improvements in the new church. The Puritans, wanting to capitalize on this opportunity to bring change, were vigorously committed to the budding church; although, as historian John Coffee observes, “The government did not always appreciate their zeal for the Protestant faith.”³¹ This commitment to improving the new church led to conflict between a state wanting to maintain a measure of control of the church, and a laity interested in worshiping according to their conscience.

The goal of the Puritan movement was marked, as historian Horton Davies comments, by a “concern that the Reformation should proceed according to the norm of the ‘pure’ word of God further than it had already done in England.”³² More specifically, they were concerned with emphasizing themes such as grace, communing with God, the Holy Spirit, the sufficiency of the Scriptures, the role of preaching, and the Sabbath among others.³³ They aimed to diligently integrate the truths found in the Scriptures into the whole of their daily lives.

³¹Coffee, *Persecution and Toleration*, 93.

³²Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, vol. 1, *From Cranmer to Hooker* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 41.

³³Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason, eds., *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 23-32.

Accomplishments of the Puritans. Packer comments on what could be seen as an overwhelming failure of the Puritans to accomplish their goal—they lost every public battle they fought, they did not change the Church of England as they hoped to do, nor did they engage large numbers of people for spiritual renewal. In short, they did not do much more than “hang on by the skin of their teeth.” However, he applauds their sterling character because of their ability to remain “sweet, peaceful, patient, obedient, and hopeful under sustained and seemingly intolerable pressures and frustrations.”³⁴ Enduring the suffering of religious persecutions, the Puritans produced a remarkable number of skilled preachers and writers further developing the ideas of grace and holiness for generations of believers. Works such as John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Richard Baxter’s *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, *Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* by John Owen, and countless other works have withstood the test of time as cherished and helpful treatises on the Christian faith.³⁵

One facet of the Puritan’s contribution that is of particular interest to this project is their great concern for rearing children in godliness. The Puritans vigorously sought to nurture children both in their spiritual and physical well-being, with the goal to educate them for “sober, godly, socially useful adult living.”³⁶ The Puritans embodied maturity—a maturity that Packer describes as a “compound of wisdom, goodwill, resilience, and creativity,” and a life marked by a glorious amalgamation of a “clear-headed passion and a warm-hearted compassion.”³⁷ The Puritans have much to teach modern parents in the areas of passion for God and passion for discipling children.

³⁴Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 23.

³⁵For a list of important Puritan works see Kopic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*.

³⁶Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 25.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 22.

The Puritan Vision of Family Worship

To understand Puritan diligence, one must grasp their compelling vision. The Puritans were not merely people who displayed herculean discipline, they were people who happily lived out what Paul commands in Colossians 3:2, to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” Cotton Mather,³⁸ a New England Puritan minister, gives insight into the Puritan vision of the spiritual life in a sermon addressed to parents:

What is your main concern for your Children? PIETY in you, will make it your main concern that they may have a Pious Mind Enlightening and Inclining of them. If your main concern be, to get the Riches of this World for your Children, and leave a belly-full of this World unto them, it looks very suspiciously, as if you were yourselves the People of this World, whose Portion is only in this Life. Most certainly, you are Earthly Minded ones, if your main concern for your Children be, that they may have the fine Things of the Earth heaped upon them, and if in your Thoughts for them you only Mind Earthly Things. Your own heart is not Right in the Sight of GOD, if you are not thoroughly perswaded [sic] of this, That for your Children.³⁹

The Puritans did not believe that money was evil in itself, they simply believed people were made for something greater, and if people were made for something greater, then they should vigorously pursue greater things—the things above—and train children to do the same.

³⁸Cotton Mather (1663-1728) grew up in a home ideal for the nurturing of learning and leadership. The son of Increase and Maria Mather, and grandson to Richard Mather, Cotton was born into a line of faithful Puritan ministers. Cotton entered Harvard at the age of eleven having already read a variety of Greek classics such as Virgil, Plato, Homer, as well as the Greek New Testament. Displaying a call toward ministry early in his life, he preached his first sermon at the age of sixteen but was cautious in pursuing ministry due to a speech impediment. Overcoming this difficulty, Mather accepted a position at Second Church in Boston where he served as an associate pastor to his father. When Increase died in 1723, Cotton assumed the role of senior pastor. As a pastor he yearned for his people to experience the Holy Spirit through prayer meetings, he taught frequently on the eschatology, and showed great administrative acumen by organizing lay people to perform many ministry functions. His heart for missions led him to develop works to the Jews and Native Americans. History reports that Mather played a supporting role in the Salem Witch trials, much to the chagrin of his father Increase. Mather was no stranger to suffering having lost two wives and having only two of his thirteen children survive him. Some of Mather’s notable works are *Magnalia Christi Americana*, the *Psalterium Americanum*, and *Essays To Do Good*. For more information, see Barrett Wendell, *Cotton Mather: The Puritan Priest* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963); David Levin, *Cotton Mather: The Young Life of the Lord’s Remembrancer, 1663-1703* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³⁹Cotton Mather, “What the Pious Parent Wishes For,” accessed August 27, 2017, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N01908.0001.001>.

Matthew Henry,⁴⁰ most known for his widely-used biblical commentary, makes a plea to the parents in his congregation for training children in devotion to God:

Consider what your children are designed for, we hope, in this world; they must be a “seed to serve the Lord,” which shall be “accounted to him for a generation.” They are to bear up the name of Christ in their day, and into their hands must be transmitted that good thing which is committed to us. They are to be praising God on earth, when we are praising him in heaven. Let them then be brought up accordingly, that they may answer the end of their birth and being.⁴¹

Henry’s admonition to parents is simple: bring children up in the way that is in full congruity with the reason for their birth and their being—that they would serve the Lord with a full devotion. This, in part, means abandoning the pleasures of this world, but not because pleasures are bad, but rather because God made humanity for a better pleasure—one that can only be found in Christ.

Such devotion does not come naturally to the saint and thus must be transferred from the mature to the immature. One way this happened in Puritan homes was through family worship, especially in the area of Bible knowledge. The Puritans believed that man’s chief enemy was ignorance, especially ignorance of the Scriptures; therefore, knowing and embracing the scriptures became the foundation for Christian living.⁴² As a result, the Puritans held the Catholic Church in great contempt, in part because of its

⁴⁰Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was born to Philip and Katharine Henry, near Whitchurch, England (now Shropshire) in 1662, into a country torn by religious upheaval. Henry began showing promise at the age of three when he began reading the Bible for himself. His piety also took root at an early age—as a child he barely recovered from a life-threatening illness, which gave rise to a life-long concern with prayer. He began preaching at the age of twenty-three and spent most of his ministry as the pastor of the Presbyterian church in Chester, England. As a pastor he was diligent in all his responsibilities, a faithful student of the Bible, and was known to frequently rise as early as four o’clock in the morning allowing him to maximize his time in study and pastoral duties. Some of Henry’s most well-known works are *A Communicant’s Companion*, *Directions for Daily Communion with God*, and *The Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. For further reading see J. B. Williams, *Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1786); Kapic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*.

⁴¹Matthew Henry, *Family Religion: Principles for Raising a Godly Family* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008), 37.

⁴²Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England*, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 89.

failure to teach the scriptures to its parishioners, which resulted in an uninformed devotion. American historian Edmund Morgan reports, “The Puritans rested their whole system upon the belief that ‘Every Grace enters into the Soul through the *Understanding*.’ Upon this premise, it followed naturally that ‘The *Devotion of Ignorance*, is but a *Bastard* sort of *Devotion*.’”⁴³ A devotion based on sentiment or passion, but not understanding, is hollow; therefore, instruction in the Scriptures was a critical component in the raising of children. Thus, education in the Scriptures, both formal and informal, was woven into the fabric of the Puritans; Morgan observes, “For a people who believed in predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God, the Puritans ascribed an extraordinary power to education. By the instruction of the parents, they believed, a child could be led away from the evil to which he was naturally prone.”⁴⁴

Using Mather’s language, what would the modern parents’ “main concerns” be for their children? How often do parents display a greater concern for education that leads to financial reward over spiritual reward? How often do parents cart kids to soccer practice with the greatest of faithfulness, while neglecting their spiritual development? How often do parents go to great lengths to make sure their children are thoroughly entertained, and yet fail to do the good work of discipling them? Mather’s words call parents to think anew—do Christian parents strive to ensure that children will be well-placed to have earthly things heaped upon them, or strive to incline their hearts toward faithfulness to God? This is the vision needed today for the next generation.

The Puritan Practice of Family Worship

Not only can one glean from the Puritan vision of family worship, but also from their practices. The Puritans viewed the family as a “seminary, a nursery, a church,

⁴³Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 89.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 94.

a society, a parish, and a flock,”⁴⁵ and looked to take full advantage of each role. Puritan pastor Richard Baxter⁴⁶ posits, “Prayer and praise are so necessary parts of God’s service, that no family or person can be said in general to be devoted to serve God, that are not devoted to them.”⁴⁷ Baxter believed the home was to be devoted to prayer and praise, in such a way that it fostered Christian devotion.

History shows the Puritan family’s deep commitment to discipling their children. Pastor and senior editor for *The Gospel Coalition*, C. Jeffrey Robinson, reports that it was the expected duty of the Puritan father to nurture the faith of his children. This was accomplished by twice a day prayers and the use of catechisms paired with the Scriptures on Sundays.⁴⁸ Even in the pre-industrial age when cows had to be milked with a pail, fields plowed without machines, and clothes sewn by hand, the expectation was that the father would hold family worship (i.e., teach the Scriptures, pray, and praise) twice daily. The matter was not whether he was “too busy,” but rather, he was to make time for what was important. Should the father abdicate such an important duty, the church would step

⁴⁵Tyler Durham, “The Puritan View of Family Worship” (unpublished paper, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 1-2.

⁴⁶Richard Baxter (1615-1691) was born in Rowton, Shropshire (a town northwest of Birmingham, England). As a young man he was involved in church life and began his ministry at the age of 26, when he was called to replace a morally unqualified pastor. Baxter’s ministry coincided with an exceptionally unstable religious period in England. During the constraints of the *Act of Uniformity* of 1662, Baxter emerged as the leader for the conservative branch among the nonconformists even though he was not prone to engaging in disputes. While matters of theology were important to Baxter, he remained committed to the unity of the family of God throughout his twenty-year ministry in Kiddenminster. Baxter endured through two incarcerations because of his religious convictions and was a prodigious writer publishing 135 books. His devotional classic *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest* was one of the most widely read books of the century. He reviewed the *Book of Common Prayer* and produced a new liturgy named *Reformed Liturgy* in a matter of two weeks, and his *Christian Directory* contains over one million words. His work, *The Reformed Pastor*, is widely read today. For more on Baxter’s life, see Frederick J. Powicke, *A Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter 1615-1691* (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd, 1924); J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

⁴⁷Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2008), 1:419.

⁴⁸C. Jeffrey Robinson, Sr., “The Home Is an Earthly Kingdom: *Family Discipleship among Reformers and Puritans*,” in Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 21.

in with an aim to remind the father of the great value of family worship. The “Directory for Family Worship,” a document affirmed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647, states,

If any such family is found [where a father refuses to lead his family in family worship], the head of the family is to be first admonished privately to amend his fault. If he continues to be negligent, he is to be gravely and solemnly reprov'd by the session. If he still neglects family worship, for his obstinacy in such an offence he is to be suspended and debarred from the Lord's Supper, being rightly regarded as unworthy of participation in the sacrament until he rectifies the situation.⁴⁹

What lessons can one learn from such an example? The Puritan family would daily make time in their schedule to teach the Scriptures, pray, and sing hymns with their children. There was an intentionality to discuss spiritual truths frequently and deeply, so that spiritual formation would take full effect in the hearts of their children. This practice was so important that should a father neglect it, the church would make appeals for change. In their actions, the Puritans testify to the great blessings of family worship.⁵⁰

The Puritan Delight in Family Worship

Critics of the Puritans may read the previous section and find only confirmation of their existing notion—that the Puritans were superlative Bible thumpers. This conclusion would be sadly mistaken. Indeed, they displayed a zeal for the outworking of their theological convictions, but this zeal came not from a steely commitment to a moral code, but from a joy that comes from communing with God. Henry expounds,

⁴⁹Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009), locs. 645-51, Kindle.

⁵⁰The Puritans were not the first Christians to practice family worship. However, they do serve as excellent examples of this devotion in the family. Lyman Coleman, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church* (London: T. Ward & Company, 1842), 165-66, writes,

At an early hour in the morning the family were assembled, when a portion of Scripture was read from the Old Testament, which was followed by a hymn and a prayer, in which thanks were offered up to the Almighty for preserving them during the silent watches of the night, and for his goodness in permitting them to meet in health of body, and soundness of mind; and at the same time his grace was implored to defend them amid the dangers and temptations of the day, to make them faithful to every duty, and enable them in all respects to walk worthy of their Christian vocation.

Nothing [is] more agreeable to a gracious soul than constant communion with a gracious God; it is the one thing it desires, to dwell in the home of the Lord; here it is as in its element, it is its rest for ever. If, therefore our house be houses of the Lord, we shall for that reason love home, reckoning our daily devotion the sweetest of our daily delights, and our family worship the most valuable of our family comforts.⁵¹

Additionally, the Puritans saw the opportunity for a family to gather and plead for God's mercy to be of such rich reward that the practice became an essential part of the day. Baxter exhorted his people to make family prayer a daily discipline, encouraging them to pray every morning to give God thanks for his past provisions (especially for the grace given for sin), beg for provision for the coming day, and ask for God's help to remain devoted to him and his ways.⁵²

Family worship was truly an opportunity to receive blessing and to enjoy communing with God in the presence of family, and although the goal in frequency may seem today to be a bit rigid or legalistic, it was from a heart of devotion, not duty. Though not a Puritan, pastor John Newton's arrival into ministry places him shortly after the Puritan era,⁵³ and he encouraged his congregation to practice family worship because of its great benefit: "He [God] requires us to acknowledge him in our families, for our own

⁵¹Henry, *Family Religion*, 50.

⁵²Richard Baxter, *The Godly Home*, ed. Randall J. Pederson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 94.

⁵³John Newton (1725-1807) was nurtured by a Christian mother until her death when Newton was only seven. Left to the care of his sea-faring father, his life took a dramatic turn for the worse. After enduring a tumultuous season as youth, Newton came to work on a slave ship as a young man but found conditions in this life hard and decided to change his fortunes by returning to England. On this return trip the ship encountered a tumultuous storm at sea, and in a moment of humble helplessness, he cried out to God for salvation—both physical and spiritual. It was on this day, March 21, 1748, that God acted to save the "African blasphemer," as Newton referred to himself in his later years. Upon his conversion he was a changed man and pursued ministry in the Church of England. In 1764, he began his forty-three years of ministry for the Church of England, first at Olney, then at St. Mary's Woolnoth in London. Newton described himself as a pastor of "habitual tenderness" seeking to dispense God's grace wherever he could. He also described himself as a Calvinist but was careful to use Calvinistic ideology as an opportunity to sweeten the message of Christ. Newton's most well-known work is his hymn, "Amazing Grace." Upon recognizing the life he lived before he encountered grace, it is easy to see why the lyric "saved a wretch like me" highlights the great power to reclaim even those deeply stained with sin. Some of Newton's well-known works include *Out of the Depths*, and *Letters of John Newton*. For further reading on Newton's life, see Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton*, in *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985).

sakes; not because he has need of our poor services, but because we have need of his blessing, and without the influence of his grace (which is promised to all who seek it) are sure to be unhappy in ourselves and in all our connections.”⁵⁴ This benefit of conferring with God is what powered such high commitment to family worship.

It is essential to see that the Puritan family found their joy, rest, and closeness by focusing heavenward. While modern families today often seek these benefits from blankly staring at a screen, the Puritans found their delight in joining together to commune with God in the home.

The Puritan Hope in the Gospel

As much as the Puritans maintained a high commitment to family worship, they did not look to it to do something it could not—to save their children. Only the gospel can save, and the Puritans held family worship in its proper place. Family worship was not the means by which salvation was accomplished, yet its importance remained high because this was one of the tools the Lord often uses in bringing children to faith. In Henry’s words,

I know you cannot give grace to your children, nor is a religious conversation the constant consequence of a religious education; . . . but if you make conscience of doing your duty, by keeping up your family doctrine; if you teach them the good and the right way, and warn them of by-paths; if you reprove exhort and encourage them as there is occasion; if you pray with them, and for them, and set them a good example, and at last consult their soul’s welfare in the disposal of them, you have done your part, and may comfortably leave the issue and success with God.⁵⁵

The Puritans, while maintaining a very high view of family worship, simultaneously held it in proper position. While it was a means that God often used to bring faith alive in their children, their hope still remained in God and the gospel. Their efforts would not ensure the salvation of their children, but that was not their goal—their

⁵⁴John Newton, “Letters of John Newton: Family Worship” accessed September 29, 2018, <http://www.gracegems.org/Newton/04.htm>.

⁵⁵Henry, *Family Religion*, 38.

goal was to entrust themselves to God and to keep their faith in Him. This commitment to the gospel must remain true for families today. Nelson and Jones write,

The gospel is what changes people—not programs or practices; not models or methods; but solely and only the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Healthy families are not . . . the goal. To place anything as the church’s goal besides the glory of God experienced through the gospel is to create an idol, and the idol of family ministry is no less loathsome to God than the orgiastic shrines of Canaan or the pantheon of ancient Rome.⁵⁶

As glorious an opportunity as family worship is, and as committed as parents today should remain to this important practice, it offers no guarantees. Yet, Christian parents should not practice family worship because of a guarantee; rather, they should worship from a heart of obedience and faith. In this, the Puritans serve as excellent models.

Goal 2—Practical Training for Family Worship

Vision serves as the fuel for family worship, but planning serves as the roadmap—without a good plan, even the best intentions can be laid low. To accomplish goal 2, I address many of the common issues that can cause families frustration over the mechanics of having a good family worship time together. Joel Beeke, pastor and president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, speaks to the importance of preparation: “Even before family worship begins, we should privately pray for God’s blessing upon that worship. Then we should plan for the what, where, and when of family worship.”⁵⁷ What follows are practical points for parents to consider as they prepare for this spiritual service.

Prepare for a Marathon Not a Sprint

From the outset, managing expectations will be a critical component of family worship. What family worship looks like will be dependent upon every family, shaped by

⁵⁶Bryan Nelson and Timothy Paul Jones, “The Problem with Family Ministry,” in Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 28.

⁵⁷Beeke, *Family Worship*, locs. 234-37.

every day's experiences, and sometimes be an example of an epic tragedy—and that is okay. Managing expectations is a must. Duncan and Johnson write,

You have this picture of a Puritan family sitting around the table attentively and reverently reading the whole book of 1 Chronicles at a sitting, singing half the Psalter from memory, and praying for ninety minutes, and then you look around your table and your wife is rolling her eyes, your two-year-old is throwing leftover spaghetti around the kitchen, your eight-year-old is making faces at her sister, and your teenager would rather do calculus. Do not let the gap between the ideal and the reality stop you.⁵⁸

When does anything with children go as planned? In the event that one night of frustrated kids and parents turns into three, simply remember that it is a journey and continue to lean into family worship, always celebrating wins as they come.

Oftentimes busy schedules truly overshadow even the greatest commitments to family worship, and a family may look up and find that it has been several days since family worship has been observed. Rather than a resignation that “we’re just too busy,” parents must continue to give themselves grace and begin anew. Pastor and blogger Jason Helopoulos offers encouragement to parents: “Whenever you realize that your family worship hasn’t been regular and consistent lately, remember that it is a means of grace, not a burden to bear, so just pick it back up and start again.”⁵⁹

Keep It an Occasion for Joyous Worship

In corporate worship, an appropriate level of solemnity and order shows reverence to the Lord and other worshipers, but family worship is different. While there does need to be a measure of order and direction, family worship should be marked with a greater freedom and opportunity for expression. Children approach worship from a different place than adults, and family worship is a great place to accommodate them. What follows are elements to consider to keep family worship a happy occasion.

⁵⁸Duncan and Johnson, “A Call to Family Worship,” 326.

⁵⁹Jason Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 71.

Keep it an appropriate length. Whether it be Bible reading, singing, or praying, keep each element at appropriate lengths. Beeke, adding comment to Richard Cecil, Anglican priest from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gives great insight: “‘Let family worship be short, savory, simple, tender, heavenly.’ Family worship that is too long makes children restless and may provoke them to wrath.”⁶⁰ The age, maturity, and immediate fatigue of children should factor into the length of time parents aim for family worship. Theologian Andrew Fuller agrees: “In general, it is right to avoid long prayers, especially in the family, and in the church, which are not only wearisome to men, but offensive to God.”⁶¹

Keep family worship something you “get” to do, not “have” to do. Without a doubt, this endeavor is easier said than done, but parents must work to make family worship something that is not cold, drab, and laborious. First, build a joyous expectation of communing with God. Author Dorothy Martin identifies the biblical theme of preparing one’s heart with rejoicing at the opportunity to worship (Matt 5:12; Zech 9:9) as an important aspect of family worship.⁶² Family worship is not a chore, it is an opportunity to draw together as a family and worship the Heavenly Father, and parents should communicate this in their words and actions.

Second, parents have the opportunity to demonstrate to their children their own joy in family worship, meaning, parents do not hold family worship only for the benefit of their children, but also for their own spiritual joy and growth. Baxter exhorts,

Let it be the principal part of your care and labor in all their education to make holiness appear to them the most necessary, honorable, gainful, pleasant, delightful, amiable state of life and to keep them from apprehending it either as needless,

⁶⁰Beeke, *Family Worship*, locs. 283-85.

⁶¹Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller: With A Memoir of His Life, By Andrew Gunton Fuller*, rev. with additions by Joseph Belcher (repr., from the Third London ed., Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), 1:527.

⁶²Dorothy McKay Martin, *Creative Family Worship* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 69.

dishonorable, hurtful, or uncomfortable. Especially draw them to the love of it, by representing it as lovely.⁶³

Children will pick up on the cues of the parents. If family worship is something “we have to hurry up and do before bed,” or if it is rushed as some unpleasant chore to be accomplished, then children will naturally descend to the same assumption. Yet, if parents exhibit a sense of joyous opportunity, this anticipation will transmit to their children.

Third, parents must remember that the goal is to “win children to holiness by kindness rather than try to force them to it by severity,”⁶⁴ as Morgan describes the methodology of the Puritans. While parents may be able to force their kids to make their bed or eat their green beans, they cannot force them to worship. The goal is to lead them to this time of worship because it is good, not because they have been coerced.

Creating Time for Family Worship

Of all the barriers that prevent families from having family worship, a perceived lack of time is one of the most challenging. Families are busy. Families are too busy. Even the greatest intention for family worship will be thwarted unless parents address the issue of creating time. However, in looking deeper, the problem really is not a lack of sufficient time, it is a lack of sufficient priority. While embracing the Puritan vision of family worship is compelling, unless parents appropriate that vision over the calendar, the vision will be choked out by a host of lesser activities. Jones’s insights are poignant: “Until the gospel drives even our scheduling priorities, families will continue to default to the values of the culture around them, and parents will remain too busy to engage in intentional discipleship with their children.”⁶⁵

⁶³Baxter, *The Godly Home*, 189-90.

⁶⁴Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 31.

⁶⁵Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 105.

One of the competitors of family worship is the amount of time children spend in recreation, be it on the soccer field or in front of a screen. Certainly, a parent’s work schedule can impede worship, but often, it is the time spent in amusement that is the main competitor of worshipping together.⁶⁶ This is nothing new to families—even the Puritans dealt with wanting their children to have recreation, but recreation must be held in balance. Baxter asserts,

For sports and recreations, let them be such and so much as may be needful to their health and cheerfulness, but not so much as may carry away their minds from better things and draw them from their books or other duties, nor such as may tempt them to gaming or covetousness.⁶⁷

With the explosion of select sports leagues, the competitive worlds of dance or music, or the ever-pervasive draw to screen time in video games or social media, children today spend exorbitant amounts of time recreation. This competition for time spent together as a family must be placed in check. Much more has been said on this topic than can be written here,⁶⁸ but Beeke offers a helpful reminder to parents who object to family worship because they are too busy:

[Busy parents may say] Our family doesn’t have time for this. If you have time for recreations and pleasures but no time for family worship, think about 2 Timothy 3:4–5, which warns about people who love pleasures more than God; they have a form of godliness, but deny the power of it. Time taken from family activity and business to seek God’s blessing is never wasted. If we take God’s Word seriously, we will say: “I can’t afford not to give God and His Word priority in my family.” Samuel Davies once said: “Were you formed for this world only, there would be some force in this objection, but how strange does such an objection sound coming

⁶⁶Jones writes, “For a significant minority of parents, it was children’s sports and school activities that trumped family time when it came to scheduling priorities. Nearly one-third of parents agreed that they were willing, at some level, ‘to do whatever it takes for their children to succeed in certain sports or school activities.’” *Ibid.*, 101. Jones notes that not one single item hit the majority of family schedules, but sports was a significant barrier to families who see themselves as too busy.

⁶⁷Baxter, *The Godly Home*, 192.

⁶⁸For helpful books discussing the increase of recreation in the modern family, see Nicholas Kardaras, *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Our Kids-and How to Break the Trance* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016); Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Ben Sasse, *The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis-and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2017).

from an heir of eternity! Pray, what is your time given to you for? Is it not principally that you may prepare for eternity? And have you no time for what is the greatest business of your lives?⁶⁹

If a family truly believes they do not have time for family worship, they need to prayerfully consider how to reduce the number of activities or the time spent on them in order to have more family time to spend with God.

Cultivating Parental Faith

Substantive, durative, family worship cannot be fabricated—it must be full of meaning or it will not last. Unless parents tend to their own spiritual nourishment, they will try to share with their children something they themselves do not possess—a growing faith. Pastor Jerry Marcellino comments that for the practice of family worship to be effectively realized in a family, both father and mother must maintain a family worship as a top priority: “Worshiping God together as a family must flow from the individual hearts that truly desire to see Jesus lifted up in their homes. The establishment of family worship in the home begins with a conviction and then moves to action.”⁷⁰ Tripp expresses the same sentiment: “Our love for God is the foundation for anything we have to say. . . . If God’s Word is dear to us, it will be important to our children. We must be dazzled by God. We cannot give away what we don’t have.”⁷¹ Given that children live in close proximity to their parents, they will detect the substance of the faith of the parent, and children, just like adults, will not tolerate the hypocrisy of one who claims belief but does not live it.

George Whitefield, the great British preacher from the eighteenth century, commented on why parents so often miss the opportunity for family worship: “The only

⁶⁹Beeke, *Family Worship*, locs. 468-65.

⁷⁰Jerry Marcellino, *Rediscovering the Lost Treasure of Family Worship* (Laurel, MS: Audubon Press, 1996), 9.

⁷¹Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 40.

reason why so many neglect to read the words of Scripture diligently to their children is because the words of Scripture are not in their hearts; for if they were, out of the abundance of their heart the mouth would speak.”⁷² For family worship to be genuine, it must be led by people who actually believe what they are teaching. Parents must cultivate their own faith if they are to help cultivate the faith of their children.

Finally, the father plays a unique role in the practice of family worship. Alexander writes, “There is no member of a household whose individual piety is of such importance to all the rest, as the father or head; and there is no one whose soul is so directly influenced by the exercise of domestic worship.”⁷³ The Scriptures make the father responsible to pass on faith (Ps 78, Eph 6), and the history of the church reflects this responsibility. The Westminster Confession declared that family worship was to be a part of the normal ritual of the family, and actually stipulated in a corresponding document the expectation for fathers to lead regular family worship, defining the consequence for a failure to do so. As cited earlier, the “Directory of Family Worship” held the father directly responsible for the holding of family worship—the father is to take the lead. Does this mean the role of the mother is insignificant or that she has no role to play? Absolutely not, but in the end, the father bears a direct responsibility from God for the oversight of the spiritual formation of the family.

A Simple Method

How then is family worship to be accomplished? What exactly is a family to do? While the Scriptures are clear that parents are to disciple their children, there is little direction given to the manner to be employed. Newton reminds parents that “You will do well to pursue such a method as you shall find most convenient to yourself and family,

⁷²George Whitefield, *The Godly Family: Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children* (Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), 36.

⁷³Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 13.

without scrupulously binding yourself, when the Scripture has left you free.”⁷⁴ Parents should seek a method that fits the family yet still points the participants heavenward. What then are the matters that can and should be employed in family worship? Marcellino posits that there are three essential elements to family worship: song, scripture, prayer.⁷⁵ The formula is simple—the family gathers and reads the Scriptures, prays, and sings songs of worship. Charles Spurgeon, the great British pastor from the nineteenth century, attests, “I agree with Matthew Henry when he says, ‘They that pray in the family do well; they that pray and read the Scriptures do better; but they that pray, and read, and sing do best of all.’ There is a completeness in that kind of family worship which is much to be desired.”⁷⁶ These three are important because, as Whitney explains,

When you examine a list of the activities the Bible says to do in worship, only three things on that already short list are equally as appropriate in family worship or in private worship as in congregational worship. Those activities are reading the Bible, praying, and singing.⁷⁷

A family that practices these things together will find great opportunity to enjoy the blessing of family worship.

Conclusion

Families need to worship together. The command from God and the benefits enjoyed should secure its position as a regular activity in the home—yet few families today enjoy this activity together. The good news is that the church can help families see this grand vision of family worship, as well as help train parents to realize this vision.

⁷⁴Newton, “Letters of John Newton: Family Worship.”

⁷⁵Marcellino, *Rediscovering the Lost Treasure*, 11.

⁷⁶Charles Spurgeon, “The Happy Duty of Daily Praise,” 1, accessed August 30, 2017, <https://www.spurgeongems.org/vols31-33/chs1902.pdf>.

⁷⁷Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 47, Kindle.

Puritan Pastor Samuel Davies⁷⁸ offers a passionate plea that serves as a fitting call to parents to make regular practice of family worship:

If you would have your children make their houses the receptacles of religion when they set up in life for themselves; if you would have religion survive in this place, and be conveyed from age to age; if you would deliver your own souls—I beseech, I entreat, I charge you to begin and continue the worship of God in your families from this day to the close of your lives.⁷⁹

May parents heed this call to practice the regular practice of family worship that they would regularly discover the beauty of the gospel in their home.

⁷⁸Samuel Davies (1723–1761) was born in New Castle County, DE, to David Davies and Martha Thomas Davies. His early years were spent as a part of the Baptist denomination but in switching to the Presbyterian denomination he adopted a Calvinistic theology that played a significant part in his theological underpinnings for the rest of his life. Davies studied at Fagg’s Manor in Chester County, PA, in preparation for ministry, and upon completion of his education, became a licensed Presbyterian minister in 1747. Shortly after his licensing, his wife and unborn child died due to complications of pregnancy. He later remarried and the couple bore six children. Davies himself struggled with health issues (tuberculosis) but proved to be a tireless preacher of the gospel in “New Light” Presbyterianism. In regard to the preaching ability of Davies, Marlin Lloyd-Jones exclaimed to a group of American students, “Samuel Davies is the greatest preacher you have ever produced in this country.” One of Davies’s most well-known parishioners was Patrick Henry, who claimed he [Henry] was “first taught what an orator should be by listening to Davies preach.” Davies left Virginia for Princeton in 1759, where he was appointed the fourth President of the College of New Jersey. Some of Davies’s important works include *The Impartial Trial, Impartially Tried, and Convicted of Partiality* and *The Curse of Cowardice*. For more on the life of Davies, see Dewey Roberts, *Samuel Davies: Apostle to Virginia* (n.p.: Sola Fide, 2017); R. Isabela Morales, “Princeton & Slavery,” Princeton & Slavery, accessed October 2, 2018, <https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/samuel-davies>; Joseph Charles Harrod, “‘The Divine Life in the Soul Considered’: Theology and Spirituality in the Works of Samuel Davies (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

⁷⁹Samuel Davies, “The Necessity and Excellence of Family Religion,” in *Sermons* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1864), 2:86.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS

Christ Chapel Bible Church (CCBC) has seen remarkable growth over the past twenty years, becoming the largest church in Fort Worth. One of the main elements attracting young families has been the exceptional children's and student ministries. Although parents can be confident that their kids will hear the gospel message while at church, they can be lulled into a false confidence that their children receive from church all that is necessary for their spiritual growth. The goal of this project is to give parents a vision of the role they should play in discipling their children, as well as to equip them to use "Read, Pray, Sing," as a family worship model of that will help them fulfill this mandate.

Specific Considerations for CCBC

Several contextual dynamics at CCBC have yielded decisions in the program format that will be noted here. What follows is an explanation of several decisions made to make the project a fit for CCBC.

CCBC's Life Stage Model

When CCBC reached 1,500 in weekly attendance in the late 1990s, the church elders divided the congregation into "life stages" so as to ensure every parishioner could have clear access to a pastor. This life stage model has remained the basis on which people are organized for pastoral care, but also age-appropriate events and communications. The Life Stage 3 Pastor's role is to provide pastoral care for young families, which is loosely defined as a family with a child from birth through fourth grade. While this age delineation is somewhat arbitrary, it results in over 7,000 adults designated as "active" in Life Stage 3

between the two campuses. Providing adequate pastoral care, spiritual formation opportunities, and family events for such a large group has proven difficult; however, one benefit is that it allows for a very specific focus in the nature of each role. Given that a significant number of families meet this criterion, and the scope of the ministry responsibility is focused on this age division, the curriculum was written to specifically target a young demographic.¹

A Discussion-Based Sunday Class

CCBC's primary training model is to offer Sunday classes in conjunction with the worship service. This format serves the practical benefit of connecting with parishioners while they are already on campus, as well as makes childcare available. While CCBC is exploring the possibility of using different media platforms to capture classes in order to make them available online for ongoing viewership, this project has remained geared toward a class-based Sunday morning audience.

Additionally, over the years, parents who attend the weekly Adult Bible Fellowship consistently express their desire to have discussion-based classes for two primary reasons.² First, the class participants will have just sat through a worship service with a thirty-five-minute sermon, meaning, they sat as passive participants in the previous service and would prefer a different teaching model for the class that follows. Second, an Adult Bible Fellowship allows for discussions of the lesson and pertinent Scriptures with other couples, providing both a variety of insights as well as the opportunity for building

¹The primary way this consideration impacted the training was in session 3, which dealt with the more practical matters of family worship. While the first two sessions dealt with biblical and historical matters, the last session offered suggestions on having family worship and possible resources geared to younger families.

²The name of this class is Ignite, and the importance of discussion-based classes has been raised by class members for the past several years when the class holds an annual review of the class. Ignite is made up of young parents, and although the project was intended to be held for people broader than just the Ignite class, the participants in this class represent a subset of the target audience; thus, their opinion held weight in the design of the project format.

relationships. While a discussion-based class does pose some difficulties to move through large quantities of material efficiently, it does allow class participants to process through the content in a more discussion-oriented manner. Given this desire from the target audience (young parents), the project's format made use of discussion whenever possible to introduce new concepts and allow opportunity at the tables for participants to interact with the material. Once participants had a time of discussion, summary and applications were made from the pastor.

Developing a Training Model That Will Last

A third concern in the implementation of this process was to create a training that is easily repeatable. With so many active Life Stage 3 parents that worship at two campuses over a variety of hours, this training had to be built in such a way that it could be repeated frequently over the coming years. To increase the repeatability of this training, the curriculum was designed to be only three weeks, bringing two significant benefits. The first benefit was in regard to scheduling. Facility limitations at CCBC make it increasingly difficult to find space on Sundays for classes.³ The larger the block of weeks required to hold the training, the more difficult to find an available slot. Additionally, as CCBC continues to add multi-site locations, longer training sessions will put additional strain for me to be away from the Fort Worth campus, which is the location of my primary responsibility. A shorter curriculum increases the likelihood that the class is repeatable.

The second benefit of a three-week curriculum is that it increases the likelihood that parents will participate in all sessions. Due to the nature of parents missing church due to sick kids, combined with the difficulty of attending longer classes, keeping the

³The availability of class space is a growing difficulty at CCBC. Although this project did not explore the use of home groups to administer the project, the design of the curriculum would easily allow its use in that arena.

curriculum shorter increases the likelihood that parents will hear the complete offering of classes. Because of these concerns, a training of three weeks in duration was decided upon.

Deciding Against Weekly Family Worship Resources

One element of consideration was the possibility of a weekly family worship guide. While this model does have many benefits, this was decided against for two reasons. The first reason is a practical matter—CCBC already distributes two weekly resources for further study. One resource is a list of discussion questions printed on the back of the sermon notes for individuals, families, or home groups to process the sermon further. The other resource is a distribution of discussion questions from the children’s ministry for parents to further process that week’s Sunday school lesson. To distribute a third communique to parents would have created more clutter for parents. The second reason for deciding against ongoing family worship resources stems from a philosophical position that parents should be able to hold family worship simply with their Bibles as their primary resource. While a weekly guide does give the benefit of helping direct families, it runs the risk of creating a dependent relationship on the pastor to supply the necessary material. It would create a point of failure for family worship centered on the pastor. If the pastor fails to prepare the necessary resources, parents will have lost a resource they have come to depend on. Due to these concerns, it was determined that the project would include no weekly guide.

Developing the Questionnaire

Timothy Paul Jones created a survey to help identify parental perceptions and practices in regard to family worship.⁴ The questions in the survey help surface the salient matters of family worship in regard to awareness and practices. In trying to help

⁴See “Worksheet A: Family Discipleship and Perceptions and Practices Survey.” Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 202-3.

drill down to more specific matters, I adapted the survey to ask parents about their specific understanding and practices in regard to Scripture, prayer, and worship in song in the home. The goal was to discover not only the parents' general understanding of their role in discipling their children, but to see if the training helped the targeted elements of reading, praying, and singing.

Project Implementation Weeks

This section describes the development of the sixteen-week family worship project which began on February 4, 2018.

Weeks 1-3

The first draft of the curriculum was completed. The project began with the writing of the curriculum based on the research completed in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2, the theological and biblical support, gave rise to session 1, expounding on the scriptural foundation for family worship. Chapter 3, the historical and theoretical support, gave rise to session 2, taking a look at the Puritan writings on family worship. Session 3 took shape explaining the “Read, Pray, Sing” model with both a description of the model and age-specific ideas and resources for parents with young kids. The methodology for this division comes from the belief that the difficult part in helping families practice family worship is to first give them a compelling vision of why family worship should be a priority. The more practical matters of how a family holds family worship are clearly important training elements, but the bulk of the teaching was intentionally geared at communicating the “why” of family worship.

At this point, the curriculum existed in the form of a teaching handout, which was a detailed outline of all points needing to be covered and a corresponding handout that would be received by all class participants.

Training schedule. The project required three consecutive weeks of meetings. March 11 and 18, 2018, posed scheduling conflicts due to frequent travel over spring break.

March 25 was not a potential start date due to Easter being April 1. Thus, the training was scheduled for the earliest possible dates: April 8, 15, and 22, during the class for young families. Essentially, this class stopped its teaching schedule to allow three weeks for this project to take place. Many of the class members of the existing class participated in the project.

Initial promotion. Initial promotion for the class came about primarily through word of mouth invitation to people who had previously expressed interest in the topic of family worship. Through conversations with key leaders and families, there was an initial interest raised in the project.

Weeks 4-6

Curriculum review. The initial draft of the curriculum (the teaching outline and the class handout), as well as the evaluation rubric, were sent to the expert panel of three people: CCBC pastor, Doug Cecil; president of Singapore Bible, Rick Griffith; and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary adjunct professor, Matthew Haste. Their replies led to several improvements in the curriculum (see appendix 3). First, the feedback suggested a clarifying of each lesson's main objective with the content that followed. The initial drafts needed revisions to make clear the connections between the stated goal and the following material. Second, the feedback called for greater elaboration on specific steps and resources to implement family worship. These panel reviews were helpful and improved the clarity and usefulness of the project.

One element of feedback not incorporated from the panel was from Griffith and Haste around the category "the lesson provides adequate consideration for a wide age range of kids." If the training were to be given to a group of parents covering a broad age range of children, this feedback would be accurate. However, as having already described the Life Stage model and the narrow focus that brings, keeping the material geared toward parents with younger children was in step with the focus of the Life Stage Pastor

role. Additionally, Cecil, who is most familiar with the target audience, gave a high score in this category because he is familiar the narrowness of the target audience.

Formal promotion. Promotion of the project began in week 4. To best promote the training, it was branded as the next in a series named “Topics in Parenting.” This topical parenting class is a series of quarterly classes offered at CCBC that has a good name recognition with Life Stage 3 families. The specific title of the series was called “Bringing Worship Home,” which conveyed the notion of family worship in a simple and memorable title. Promotion was accomplished through e-mail, TV screens across the Fort Worth campus, and social media posts notifying people of the class. Additionally, repeated announcements were made in person to the Life Stage 3 Adult Bible Fellowship, which is made up of the target audience. The promotion was also linked to CCBC’s fall and spring pulpit series on discipleship, entitled “Be One, Make One.” The goal in this connection was to capitalize on the recent sermons series calling people to make disciples. While that series did not capitalize on the opportunity parents have to disciple their children, it provided a helpful backdrop around the discussion of making disciples.

Weeks 7-9

Content reduction and layout review. Upon completion of the content review of the expert panels, it was determined that there was too much content to be taught in the allotted time. Thus, there were two main reductions from the initial teaching outline. First, the original curriculum contained a discussion in session 2 about the frequency of young people leaving the faith as they transition into adulthood. Although these statistics are important and parents need to be aware of the trends of young people, holding family worship from a place of fear is a lesser motivation than holding family worship from a vision of its goodness. Thus, this section was removed from the curriculum. The second reduction came from having too many selections from the Puritans. While the citations originally included were helpful, their length and overall quantity made it necessary to

cull down the number of quotations. Additionally, the initial layout of the handout was discarded for a more aesthetically pleasing and clearer handout style.

Final promotion. Final promotions were made via all available communication methods to recruit participants.

Weeks 10-12

Session 1. Week 10 marked the beginning of the three-week curriculum. Session 1 began with participants filling out the adapted Family Worship and Practices Survey. This survey established a baseline of the current perspectives of families regarding family worship. A total of 58 surveys were completed and received. Upon completion of the survey, parents were taught three passages that discuss the importance of family worship: Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Psalm 78:1-7, and Ephesians 6:4. The goal of this session was to communicate the biblical imperative for parents to disciple their children. In order for families to begin the process of family worship, the homework for each parent was to discuss these three passages in some capacity with their children.

Session 2. The goal of session 2 was to communicate the rich view of family worship held by the Puritans. The Puritans offer a compelling vision for family worship, and their example serves as a means of encouraging parents to engage in the practice. Citing selections primarily from Richard Baxter, Samuel Davies, and Matthew Henry, the material explained certain points made about the value and beauty of family worship.

Although the Puritans offer a richness rarely duplicated by modern authors, the curriculum needed to introduce the Puritans because the majority of the participants were largely unfamiliar with their writings. Thus, trying to connect a modern audience to a group of people who lived hundreds of years ago needed to be done deliberately. To effectively engage with Puritan writings, the curriculum used a fictitious question-and-answer session with the Puritans. The curriculum raised pertinent questions that modern parents ask,

making use of the sage answers from the Puritans. Since modern families deal with the same type of issues that pre-modern families dealt with, the fit was natural.

Homework for week 2 was for parents to share a verse with their children that was meaningful to them, whether from a recent Bible reading or a verse memorized long ago. The intent was to call parents to begin a discussion with their children around the Scriptures.

Session 3. Session 3 offered the most practical teaching of the class in that it addressed specific practices of family worship, as well as offered a variety of resources to parents. One of the benefits of the “Read, Pray, Sing” model is its simplicity, so the explanation of the model was relatively succinct. Next, parents were given various ideas, resources, and options available to parents to cover both a variety of ages as well as family dynamics.

The “Read” portion of the training covered the role the Scriptures should play in family worship. While a simple reading of the Scriptures was promoted as the goal for “Read,” select resources were recommended in order to cover the of ages of children of Life Stage 3 families (e.g., storybook Bibles, devotions for young children, advantages of certain Bible translations, etc.).⁵

The “Pray” section covered ideas such as journaling, praying through the Psalms, and using prayer guides for missions.

The “Sing” selection offered different ideas and resources for singing. This session anticipated that singing would be the most uncomfortable aspect of family worship for parents, especially fathers. To help alleviate this tension, each family left with two

⁵The primary distinctions of young kids revolve around three basic developmental abilities: able to sit still, able to read, able to discuss. Resources were suggested ability level.

CDs—a worship CD written and produced by CCBC⁶ and a Seeds Family Worship CD⁷—as a starting resource for singing together as a family. The goal was that even the most musically uncomfortable parent can play a song on their phone and sing with their children.

Weeks 13-15

Weeks 13 and 14 were a waiting period to allow parents to process through the teaching on family worship and to begin the practice at home.

Upon reviewing the attendance records of each class, a total of 103 people attended at least 1 session, 44 attended 2 sessions, and 23 who attended all 3. Surveys were sent out at the beginning of week 15 to those who completed all three weeks of the classes and were the identical to the surveys given at week 1 to offer an equal comparison with an attempt to measure the effectiveness of the class. Post-surveys were sent out via an online survey tool.

Weeks 16-18

Weeks 16 through 18 were spent analyzing the survey results looking for any statistically significant change in perspectives on family worship.

Conclusion

The training was geared to give a succinct understanding of why family worship was important, both from a biblical and historical perspective. These perspectives formed the foundation of parents discipling their children. Next, the parents were taught a simple method of “Read, Pray, Sing” in order to bring about family worship in their homes.

⁶The content of this CD is filled with songs well-known by children at CCBC. The quality of production is high both for the music and the richness of lyrics. This CD can serve as a great resource to any parent who plays it for their children.

⁷Seeds Family Worship is a collection of scriptures put to song. While they are geared for children, parents and children alike will memorize scripture as they listen to these songs.

The expert panel reviews helped to clarify the areas that needed improvement to the teaching material. The suggestions brought for the curriculum helped provide valuable improvements.

While the numbers of those completing all three sessions were less than hoped, there was still a sample large enough to review for any statistically significant change. Additionally, the amount of staff participation in this project was low, with only one other staff couple in attendance. Perhaps, as this training is offered again in the future, additional staff will participate and be able to speak of the importance of family worship in their respective areas.

Each of these sessions was recorded with the hopes of making them available online. However, the format of the class being so discussion-centric, and the difficulty that brings in trying to capture audio from a room full of people, the audio content will not be made available online.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter evaluates the successful completion of each goal, the strengths and weaknesses of the project, and offers theological and personal reflections. Finally, it examines possible changes to improve the material for any future implementations.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a curriculum to train parents at Christ Chapel Bible Church in Fort Worth, Texas, to practice family worship. Fostering family worship is important to the life of the church because it recognizes the priority role of the parents in the process of discipling children in a way that is independent of the excellent children's ministry at CCBC. While there is a strong emphasis on discipling children at CCBC, the primary locus of concern is the Sunday classroom experience. While every child that attends one of these classrooms will hear a gospel-centered message that methodically teaches through the Bible every three years, there is little along the way of pastoral encouragement to parents to disciple their children.

This project attempted to fill that gap by training parents to practice family worship. Upon reviewing the statistical data as well as anecdotal feedback along the way, the project made a positive impact on the people who participated in all three sessions. While the long-term success of family worship in these homes will be contingent upon parents remaining committed to the tenets learned, the data shows a statistically significant difference in the perceptions and practices of the parents who completed the curriculum.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the current activity of family discipleship among active CCBC families who have at least one child younger than fifth grade. This goal was accomplished by administering a survey to all participants on week 1 of the training. The survey had four sections that sought to examine the understanding of family worship and those corresponding practices. The first section aimed to gain insight into the parents' perspectives on their roles as the primary disciplers of their children, and the next three sections explored the areas of Scripture reading, praying, and singing. What follows are insights that stood out from the pre-survey administered to every class participant of week 1.

In section 1, the participants were asked to respond to the following statement, "I believe that the Scriptures give a mandate for parents to disciple their children." While I anticipated a high response to this question, the result came back higher than expected. The average of the 58 responses was 5.86,¹ meaning the overwhelming majority of respondents strongly agreed with this statement. This was encouraging news in that parents began with an understanding of their role. While this response was remarkably high, the response to, "I am confident that I can lead family worship with our children," came back at 4.53, which while still higher than I expected, does represent a confidence level that is lower than their realized expectation of the Scriptures.

Additionally, in response to the statement, "I believe I am regularly engaging my children in their spiritual formation (making appropriate consideration for their age)," the average response was 4.55, a midpoint between "Agree" and "Strongly Agree." This also was higher than I had expected. While a multitude of questions could delve into the

¹The survey used Likert scale with six options (strongly disagree, disagree, disagree slightly, agree slightly, agree, and strongly agree). The response were converted to numerical values from 1 to 6 to allow for numerical comparison.

specifics of what these parents are doing, they at least felt confident that they were regularly engaging in discipling their children.

The survey inquired as to the regular Scripture reading habits of parents. These results came back lower than expected, scoring a 3.55, which is near the midpoint between “Disagree Slightly,” and “Agree Slightly.” While this number reminds me of the need to call people to faithfully read the Scriptures, the disparity of Bible reading in this question and the much higher frequency of reported engagement with children in their spiritual formation is interesting. How can parents regularly engage in discipling their children if they themselves are not reading the Bible? What are they discussing with their children? This result reveals the need to continue to call parents to use the Bible as their main fountain of spiritual engagement personally and with their children.

The survey also inquired as to the use of singing as a means of family worship, both in regard to the frequency of singing as well as its use as a tool to teach the Scriptures and theology to their children. The results revealed that singing was infrequently used in homes. When asked to respond to the statement, “We use songs as a means to help our kids memorize scripture,” the average response from the class was 3.5, which is the midpoint between “Disagree Slightly,” and “Agree Slightly.” This result helped me focus on the singing portion of the curriculum, explaining the importance of singing in family worship as well as resources to equip families to make use of song.

While the general result of the survey results showed a high understanding of the calling of parents to disciple their children, each of the following sections showed that the practices of parents (i.e., reading Scriptures, praying together, and singing) do not follow at the same level. This data helped inform the final lesson on the more practical elements of family worship.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop a curriculum that would train parents how to use in-home family worship as a means of discipling their children. The goal was to be

considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion from an expert panel using the curriculum rubric met or exceeded the sufficient level.² With a twenty-four-question rubric between all three respondents, if more than two responses came back as “insufficient” or “requires attention,” then the goal would not be considered successfully met. I received four marks of “requires attention,” which means this goal was not successfully met.

While conceding a failure of this goal is disappointing, one aspect of the feedback might have skewed the responses down artificially. Both Haste and Griffith, while experts in their fields, are unfamiliar with the nature of the divisions for the Life Stages. I failed to communicate that the target audience was limited to families with elementary school children and younger, thus they were evaluating the content assuming a broader range of children’s ages. They each marked the category of “The lesson provides adequate consideration for a wide age range of kids” as requiring attention.

In examining the data of class participants, the predicted younger demographic of children was correct. The average age of the children represented by the class participants was 4.96 years old. Thus, focusing ideas and resources on parents with younger children was the right choice. If I could do it again, I would have informed the examiners more fully and not changed the teaching material. While these scores did make the goal unsuccessful, had I communicated more clearly that intended audience, I believe the scores would have been higher.

Goal 3

The third goal was to equip parents to disciple their children by teaching the family worship curriculum. This goal was measured by the completion of all three weeks of the training and maintaining attendance records, allowing for the collection of post-survey data in order to produce a paired t-test. The goal was to be considered successfully

²See appendix 2 for curriculum rubric.

met when all three training sessions of the family worship curriculum had been presented and there was an accurate record of those parents who completed each week of the training.

Goal 3 was marked successful in that each of the three sessions was held as planned and the attendance was registered, allowing participants to complete all three weeks of the training. Attendance for the training was 72 for week 1, 59 for week 2, and 68 for week 3. While attendance was not as steady as I had hoped, a sufficient number of participants completed all three weeks to allow for a *t*-test analysis.³

Goal 4

The fourth goal was to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum by administering an evaluation three weeks after the training. This goal was measured by administering a post-survey, which was used to measure the change in the perspectives and practices of family worship. The goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. I analyzed the results using a Paired Two Sample for Means *t*-test with a hypothesized mean difference of 0 and an Alpha of .05. Using these settings, table 1 shows a non-random statically significant difference after the training.

The results in table 1 reveal that the mean score increased after the training was given ($M = 68.29$ to $M = 74$). Additionally, when considering all the data as a whole, the training made a non-random, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey results regarding the parents' perspectives and activity of family worship (t Critical two-tail = 2.11, $p = .001616971$). In short, the training was successful in that it made a statistically significant difference. Parents' perceptions and practices of family worship made improvements due to the effectiveness of the curriculum.

³Though overall attendance was strong, a small number attended all three sessions. Only 17 of the attendees attended all sessions and completed the necessary pre and post surveys.

Table 1. Pre and post-project questionnaire answer statistics

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	68.29411765	74
Variance	69.59558824	72.5
Observations	17	17
Pearson Correlation	0.728535126	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	16	
t Stat	-3.786852953	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000808485	
t Critical one-tail	1.745883676	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001616971	
t Critical two-tail	2.119905299	

More can be learned by exploring the data further. Table 2 shows that the data can be reviewed per section, which helps to see where specific changes were realized. When separated per section, it can be observed which topics in the training saw the greatest improvements in responses, and where the material requires tweaks from weaker scores.⁴ The “General” section showed a significant improvement in scores⁵ with the greatest amount of change came from question 3, “I am confident that I can lead family worship with our children.” This result is an important marker of success because parents already demonstrated from question 2 that they believed that the Scriptures mandated the discipling of their children, but that they needed a measure of confidence that they were, in fact, able to lead family worship.

The “Read” section did not show to have made a statistically significant change.⁶ It is difficult to determine why this was the case. A significant portion of the

⁴The next section includes *t*-tests for each section of the survey: “general,” “read,” “pray,” and “sing.”

⁵The t Stat (-3.27) had an absolute value greater than the t Critical two-tail (2.11) with p value of .004 shows a non-random statistically significant change.

⁶The t Stat (-0.92) had an absolute value less than the t Critical two-tail (2.11), thus the data shows there was no statistically significant change in this section.

training was spent conveying the truths from the Scriptures, as well as covering a number of helpful resources, and I would have expected to see a greater change in this area. However, it should be noted that the scores in this section began relatively high with average scores of 3.7, 5.5, and 5.2. With two of the three questions scoring between “agree” and “strongly agree,” perhaps the minimal increase was due to scores that were already high. The lowest scoring question, “I regularly read my Bible for personal growth at least four times a week,” reveals the need for our people to be reminded of the importance the discipline of Bible reading.

Likewise, the “Pray” section did not show a statistically significant change in this section.⁷ In considering why this was the case, I believe this section was the weakest of the “Read, Pray, Sing” topics. This was in part due to time constraints of speaking, but also due to simply speaking to the importance of prayer and less to some creative ideas on how to pray with children. I highlighted the importance of prayer but should have spent more time on some practical mechanics.

The questions with the greatest pre- and post-test changes came about in the “Sing” section with a *t*-test showing a statistically significant improvement.⁸ The improvement can be tied to intentional matters of purpose and options in regard to singing as a family. As noted, I anticipated at the beginning of the project that singing would be the greatest area of skepticism, which was confirmed by the baseline of the full set of surveys. This reticence toward singing is understandable. Generally, the only time people sing with others is at church. Additionally, many are self-conscious as to the quality of their singing. As a result, asking people, even families, to sing together will likely make them feel uncomfortable.

⁷The *t* Stat (-1.94) had an absolute value less than the *t* Critical two-tail (2.11), thus the data shows there was no statistically significant change in this section.

⁸The *t* Stat (-3.14) had an absolute value greater than the *t* Critical two-tail (2.11) with *p* value of .006 resulting in a non-random statistically significant change.

In order to overcome this reticence, I gave extra time to explaining the great value of singing as a family, as well as equipping them with resources to help families sing together.⁹ As seen by question 14, “We use songs as a means to help our kids memorize scripture,” the teaching and resources made an impact, moving the total score for this question from a 59 to a 76.

Table 2. Pre- and post-test answers summed by question

Question	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference
General			
1	87	86	-1
2	100	101	1
3	74	86	12
4	88	93	5
5	75	85	10
6	93	98	5
Read			
7	63	68	5
8	94	93	-1
9	90	91	1
Pray			
10	89	90	1
11	68	79	11
12	55	62	7
Sing			
13	68	79	11
14	59	76	17
15	58	71	13

Strengths of the Project

This project had a few key strengths that contributed to its success. First, the curriculum connected in substance and manner with the target audience. Each of the three sessions had robust conversation around the tables engaging with the material.

⁹As noted in the previous chapter, the resources given were a Seeds CD and a CD of kids worship songs produced by CCBC.

Additionally, as summary answers were shared from each table with the entire room, those who shared displayed clear understanding and engagement with the material. The scriptural material covered in the first session conveyed the key biblical passages regarding family worship, and the second session explored Puritan writings on the topic of family worship. Allowing parents the opportunity to process through this material with others in a discussion format resulted in a more thorough digestion of the content.

Another strength of the project was the emphasis in week 3 on the more practical matters of holding family worship. The thrust of the first two weeks conveyed the impetus of family worship, and the third focused on more practical methods. Each parent received a resource list for family worship that gave specific ideas for each aspect of the “Read, Pray, Sing” model. Thus, as parents understood that family worship is something they should do, the training gave them practical tools to accomplish it.

Another strength is that it was well-focused on the age ranges of the children represented in the room. The identification of struggles in family worship, ideas to help make family worship successful, and resources given were in line with the ages represented in the room. While the Life Stage model at CCBC does have its drawbacks, it did allow the curriculum to be targeted to a very specific demographic.

The “Read, Pray, Sing” model was also a strength because of its simple elegance. If parents have their Bibles and their kids, that is all they need to have a meaningful time of family worship. While some resources can aid families, especially with young kids, the simplicity of this model allows for parents to conduct family worship with just their Bibles.

Weaknesses of the Project

Although there were many strengths of the project, the project was not without its low points. First, the attendance for those who attended all three sessions was lower than expected. The format of the project was intended to return a high rate of attendance to every session being that it was scheduled right after the worship service and that there

were only three sessions to complete. Whether this lower-than-expected percentage reflects a lackluster quality in the material presented, or is due more to the fact that much of the congregation does not come on a weekly basis, is difficult to discern. This reduced attendance is complicated by the fact that since the material was taught primarily in the context of table discussion, recording the session for those who missed but wanted to listen to the audio later, was not an option.

Second, while the table-discussion format served the purpose of allowing participants to process through the material in a personal way, both with their spouses and with other couples, it did present difficulties in trying to cover all the material due to time constraints. Each session had an undercurrent of hurrying to get through all the material. This sense of hurriedness was especially visible in attempting to cover material from the Puritans in week 2.

What I Would Do Differently

The purpose of this project was to develop a curriculum that would be repeated over the coming years. Thus, having the initial run of the program completed, I will change several things to bring improvements for future offerings of the curriculum.

First, I will be bolder in asking people to make a commitment to attend each of the classes. While some parents may, for a variety of reasons (travel, work responsibilities, sick kids, etc.), choose not to come, directly requesting parents to participate in each session could raise the percentage of parents who attend all three weeks.

Second, I would send a follow-up e-mail after each week that would include a summary of that week's lesson, a reminder of the next steps to be accomplished that week at home, and a reminder of the upcoming class. Additionally, I would extend an invitation to parents to contact me with questions or concerns about how to best bring about a successful time of worship. I think an encouraging touch during the week would help raise the overall impact of the project.

Third, to help those who miss a week of the training, I would record a stand-alone teaching of each lesson that covers all the points of the material. While this would not be in the context of a table discussion, it would allow for people who missed a week to still interact with the content.

Fourth, the section on prayer in the third session needs to be improved. While the results showed growth in the area of prayer, more needs to be spoken of in regard to praying as a family than what the material covered.

Theological Reflections

This substance of this project impacted me not only as a pastor, but as a husband and father as well. How should I help equip parents to disciple their children? How am I doing in bringing about the practice in my own home? Until this project, I was not asking these questions. What follows are the theological reflections that have come about as I processed the substance and impact of the project.

First, the church needs to call parents to disciple their children. Many parents simply do not know that the Bible calls them to this practice. Although the parents in our church typically disciple their children in many good ways—taking their kids to church, praying over meals, listening to Christian music—they far too often do not go beyond these actions. Why is this the case? In part, this is because the church has failed to call parents further into this practice. As a pastor to young families, the call to make the home a place of consistent discipleship must be frequent and compelling. While navigating specific topics for parenting is important (e.g., discipline, screen time, anger, and others), these issues arise because of a spiritual condition, and family worship seeks to address the underlying issue of the heart.

Second, the church needs a balanced philosophy in regard to children's and student ministry. While every church should pursue a robust ministry for each age—taking every opportunity to teach the Scriptures well and to foster age-appropriate expressions of disciple-making—churches should also be careful to communicate to

parents that those ministries do not take the place of the discipleship in the home. The church-wide gathering of the saints for worship is an important part of discipleship, but specifically in regard to children, public worship must be a supporting, not the primary role.

Third, when parents assume the role of discipling their children, the parents end up growing as a result. One frequent concern I hear from parents, especially dads, is that they are struggling to grow in their own faith. Part of this is because they have allowed their attendance at so many worship services, so many Bible studies, so many accountability groups, to incline them toward the passivity of merely becoming Christian consumers. While their desire to take in God's Word is healthy, they have neglected to put into practice the very things they are studying. As parents begin to assume the mantle of leading family worship, the very practice of discipling their children leads them to places of personal growth as well.

Fourth, the survey revealed a need for parents to increase their personal Bible reading. The average response to the question "I regularly read my Bible for personal growth at least four times a week," in the pre-survey was between "disagree somewhat" and "agree somewhat." While this project was geared to train parents to disciple their children, it revealed a need to call parents to their own personal study of the Scriptures.

Lastly, pastors should execute their duties of equipping the saints by training parents to lead family worship. Paul says in Ephesians 4:11 that church leaders have been given gifts in order to "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." Too often pastors simply labor that *they* might do the work of the church rather than equipping others to do so. Training parents for family worship is part of the work of equipping that churches should be doing for every parent.

Personal Reflections

This project has impacted me personally as well. Having participated in the church since birth, and having been a parent for eleven years before the start of this project,

I failed to perceive that part of my parenting responsibility was to disciple my children. Discipline, love, affection? I understood those to be a basic part of my parental responsibilities, but regularly teaching my children the faith that I embrace was not something I included as a part of my duty as a father. This project impacted my home life in many ways.

Spiritual conversations have now become a part of our family's regular dialogue. Because we are reading through books of the Bible together and going through family devotionals, we find ourselves discussing the content and implications of the Bible more regularly. While there are still many opportunities for growth in this area, we now talk about the Scriptures and how we might live out the teachings as a family.

Because of this project, I have grown in my appreciation of reading the Puritans. Reading works from this era requires effort, but I now see that the benefit outweighs the effort. As this project comes to an end, I will continue to return to the rich fountain of Puritan writings.

Lastly, I have been reminded that as I seek to lead my wife and children well, I also experience benefit in my own spiritual life. This growth comes from both being accountable to a group of others (my family) in regard to a regular coming together for worship, and from being reminded to pray for my family, have spiritual conversations with them as family problems arise, and speak of grace often to my children. The means of grace that impact my children have also impacted me as we discuss them as a family. While my initial intent was to see my children grow, I myself have grown as a result.

Conclusion

Parents discipling their children should be the norm for Christian families. This statement is true for a variety of reasons, but chiefly because the Scriptures command it. Yet for this practice to be realized, pastors must lead the way in calling for parents to practice worship in their homes. This project has been the beginning of this change at CCBC. While those who participated in the project have gained a deeper insight into family

worship, there is much work to be done at CCBC in regard to calling families to disciple their children.

The end goal of family worship is to make disciples—both of the children and the parents. As a family grows together spiritually, it helps to pass along the “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), faith from one generation to the next, which is an essential need and perpetual responsibility for every Christian community. A failure to do this will result in what New Testament commentator D. A. Carson warns against: “One generation believes the gospel, the next one assumes it, and the third one denies it altogether.”¹⁰ May family worship continually refresh the faith in the lives of the saints in every Christian home, that every generation of Christian families would be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 26-27.

APPENDIX 1

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTION AND PRACTICES SURVEY (FDPPS)

The following instrument is the Family Discipleship Perception and Practices Survey (FDPPS).¹ Some general questions are followed by a sixteen-question survey with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose was to assess each participant's present understanding and practice of family worship.

¹Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011). Used by permission.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTION AND
PRACTICES SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the current understanding of family discipleship at Christ Chapel Bible Church. Micah Barnum is conducting this survey for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Section 1

The first section of the survey will obtain some demographic information about the individuals taking this survey.

Directions: Answer the following questions by filling in the blank space provided.

1. What is your current age? _____
2. Would you consider yourself a born again Christian?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No
3. How long have you attended Christ Chapel Bible Church? _____
4. Do you have children fifth grade or younger living in the home?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No
5. Are you a part of a CCBC small group?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

Section 2

The second section of the survey will ask questions specific to your understanding and practice of discipleship and family worship.

Directions: Please circle the response that best corresponds to your feelings to the following statements using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree.

General

1. I believe I am growing spiritually.
SD D DS AS A SA
2. I believe that the Scriptures give a mandate for parents to disciple their children.
SD D DS AS A SA
3. I am confident that I can lead family worship with our children.
SD D DS AS A SA
4. I believe my children are at a place developmentally to begin practicing family worship.
SD D DS AS A SA
5. I believe I am regularly engaging my children in their spiritual formation (making appropriate consideration of their age).
SD D DS AS A SA
6. I believe leading family worship will improve my own walk with Christ.
SD D DS AS A SA

Read

7. I regularly read my Bible for personal growth at least four times a week.
SD D DS AS A SA
8. If I come across a spiritual question I do not know the answer to, I have the resources to be able to find the answer most of the time.
SD D DS AS A SA
9. I am comfortable having spiritual conversations (e.g., the Bible, theology, convictions, etc.) in the home whether with my spouse and/or child.
SD D DS AS A SA

Pray

10. Prayer is a regular part of my personal life.

SD D DS AS A SA

11. We pray regularly as a family (outside of meals).

SD D DS AS A SA

12. When a problem occurs in the home (e. g. kids fighting, a difficult family problem, someone loses their temper, etc.), our kids see us stop and pray for that situation.

SD D DS AS A SA

Sing

13. Our family sings together, perhaps in the car or when the television is turned off.

SD D DS AS A SA

14. We use songs as a means to help our kids memorize scripture.

SD D DS AS A SA

15. We use singing as an opportunity to explain theology to our kids.

SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was sent to three family worship experts in order to evaluate the Family Worship Guide for review and improvement. The panel was comprised of people who, by their education and/or ministry experience, are able to provide useful critique.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Family Worship Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Chapter Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The material is theologically sound.					
The material is faithful to the Bible’s teaching on parental roles of discipleship.					
Clarity					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					
Practicality					
The lesson gives helpful instruction.					
The lesson gives sufficient instruction to begin implementing the concepts taught.					
The lesson provides adequate consideration for a wide age range of kids.					

APPENDIX 3
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRICS
FROM EXPERT PANEL

The following rubrics were received from the expert panelists Dr. Doug Cecil,
Dr. Rick Griffith, and Dr. Michael Haste.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC FROM DR DOUG CECIL

Family Worship Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Chapter Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The material is theologically sound.				X	I appreciated that the passages were put into Biblical context
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on parental roles of discipleship.				X	
Clarity					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.			X		Lesson #3 (although similar) is a bit different between the handout and the teaching curriculum
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.				X	I got a bit confused in lesson #2 following the curriculum with the outline
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				X	
Practicality					
The lesson gives helpful instruction.				X	
The lesson gives sufficient instruction to begin implementing the concepts taught.				X	
The lesson provides adequate consideration for a wide age range of kids.				X	

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC FROM DR RICK GRIFFITH

Family Worship Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Chapter Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness				X	Good passages to study
The material is theologically sound.				X	Show the modern parallel to Israel's Exodus in Ps 78
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on parental roles of discipleship.				X	Nice to see that you take Eph 6:4 as relating to dads
Clarity			X		Often confusing whether you are summarizing or quoting as quote marks are missing
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.				X	Good to see the Big Idea at the start of each lesson
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.			X		Yes, but make the Main Points indicative (not questions)
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.			X		Some parents may feel there are too many Puritan quotes
Practicality			X		More principles than examples
The lesson gives helpful instruction.			X		Would be good to show the small groups the amount of discussion time (e.g., 10 minutes in your small group)
The lesson gives sufficient instruction to begin implementing the concepts taught.		X			Good outline but needs an actual example
The lesson provides adequate consideration for a wide age range of kids.		X			Annotate which devotional books help which age groups

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC DR. MATTHEW D. HASTE

Family Worship Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Chapter Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The material is theologically sound.			X		I saw no issues here
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on parental roles of discipleship.			X		Your plan is well-researched. You might consider providing a list of top 3-5 suggested resources for the class based on your preparation.
Clarity					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.			X		Clear plan for each lesson
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.		X			There are a couple times when the points do not seem to flow well (see below)
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.			X		For the most part. I wonder how all of those quotes will work in a teaching setting but you know your audience best.
Practicality					
The lesson gives helpful instruction.			X		Very practical in lesson 3.
The lesson gives sufficient instruction to begin implementing the concepts taught.				X	Lots of good examples.
The lesson provides adequate consideration for a wide age range of kids.		X			This might be good to address. Your options seem to lean toward younger children.

APPENDIX 4
TEACHING HANDOUTS

Topics in Parenting | Life Stage 3

Week 1 | April 8, 2018

Bringing Worship Home

a look at the biblical discourse on family worship

Micah Barnum

Main goal for today:

Discover what the Scriptures say to us as parents about discipling our children.



Table Talk

Take about 10 minutes at your tables to discuss one of the following passages.
Select someone to share your answers with the large group.

Passage One

Deuteronomy 6:1-9—Love God. Teach your children.

- What are some of the specific commands in verses 4-9?
- How are parents to teach their kids? How do we do this today?

- What are some of the challenges to doing this well?

- How does the following quote apply to both a people about to move into a land flowing with milk and honey, as well as to us today?

"Satiating [having everything you need] produces amnesia, and amnesia is the great threat to a community whose defining relationship is grounded in a concrete, nameable memory."

NOTES:

Passage Two

Psalm 78:1-7—Remind your children of God’s faithfulness.

- What are Asaph’s goals for this Psalm as in verses 2-4?
- What is the intended result as found in verses 6 and 7?
- How does a parent today tell of the “glorious deeds of the Lord” (v. 4)?
- How does the following quote help crystalize the importance of teaching our kids?

*“One generation believes the gospel, the next one assumes it,
and the third one denies it altogether.”*

NOTES:

Passage Three

Ephesians 6:4—Bring them up in God’s ways.

- What do “discipline” and “instruction” mean? How might these terms be similar/different?
- Why would giving both discipline and instruction be important?
- What does discipline and instruction “of the Lord” mean?
- How does the following quote help remind parents of the ultimate goal of parenting?

“Ultimately, the concern of parents is not simply that their sons and daughters will be obedient to their authority, but that through this godly training and admonition their children will come to know and obey the Lord himself.”ⁱⁱⁱ

NOTES:

What's the bottom line?

1. God commands you as a parent to teach God's word to your kids.
2. "Bringing worship home" means you become the primary discipler of your kids.
3. We grow when we help our kids grow.



Home Work

1. Read these passages to your kids and discuss with them what they mean.
2. Pray that God would give you a vision for discipling your kids.

ⁱWalter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 86.

ⁱⁱD. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 26-27.

ⁱⁱⁱPeter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 446.

Week 2 | April 15, 2018

Bringing Worship Home

a look at family worship done well

Micah Barnum

Main goal for today:

To learn from the Puritans about the beauty of worshiping as a family.

What does it mean to worship as a family?

- To teach our children about God, his Scriptures, and his goodness.
- To enjoy the blessing of communing with God as a family.
- To engage in the elements of corporate worship, except in the context of the family unit.

Who were the Puritans?

- By reputation: Superlative naysayers.

"Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy."

H. L. Mencken

- In actuality: People who deeply loved Jesus.

How can they help us today?

- They faced many of the same issues we do: a busy schedule, kids that won't sit still, parental fatigue.
- Yet, their vision for family worship was so grand, it captured their hearts, their minds, and their schedules. When we see what they see, it will help us make family worship a priority.



Table Talk

For each question below, take about 10 minutes at your tables to discuss the following items below.

Q&A With the Puritans

Question 1:

Q: Is family worship *really* that important?

A: Why, yes it is. Each day presents so many challenges, we need God's grace just to get through.

Experience proves that family sins were committed daily and family mercies received daily; further, family necessities occur daily. Thus reason tells us, first, that it is seasonable every morning to give God thanks for the rest of the night past; second, to beg direction, protection, provisions, and blessings for the following day; third, our minds are freed from weariness and worldly care."

Richard Baxter, The Godly Home

1. What squabbles, failures, or family feuds most frequently show your need for daily mercy (e.g. fighting over who picks the next t.v. show, unwillingness to do chores, an overall sour attitude, etc.)?
2. When things get hard at home, what are some of the ways that you frequently try and get through (e.g. by going out to dinner, turning on the TV, getting more “time away”)?
3. How might family worship help you receive the mercies that God gives us every day?

Question 2:

Q: I know we should do this, but we’re really busy. How do we keep family worship a priority?

A: Remember what is important and make that the priority.

- We were not made for this world.

“Consider what your children are designed for . . . ; they must be a ‘seed to serve the Lord,’ which shall be ‘accounted to him for a generation’. They are to bear up the name of Christ in their day, and into their hands must be transmitted that good thing which is committed to us. They are to be praising God on earth, when we are praising him in heaven. Let them then be brought up accordingly, that they may answer the end of their birth and being.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Matthew Henry, Family Religion

- Family worship reminds us of what brings us life.

"Prayer and praise are so necessary parts of God's service, that no family or person can be said in general to be devoted to serve God, that are not devoted to them."^{viii}

Richard Baxter, The Practical Works of Richard Baxter

1. What stands out to you about Henry's quote?
2. According to Henry, what were our kids (and ourselves) made for? How might this impact the way we parent?
3. If we're honest, there are many things that can so easily compete with God's design for our lives, but we were made for something better. What are some things you are currently doing to remind them of what they were designed for?
4. Do you agree with Baxter's quote? Why or why not? Why is carving out time to tend to spiritual matters so difficult?

Question 3:

Q: What practical help can you give?

A: See below:

- Remember, it's the gospel that saves your kids, not family worship.

I know you cannot give grace to your children, nor is a religious conversation the constant consequence of a religious education; . . . but if you make conscience of doing your duty, by keeping up your family doctrine; if you teach them the good and the right way, and warn them of by-paths; if you reprove exhort and encourage them as there is occasion; if you pray with them, and for them, and set them a good example, and at last consult their soul's welfare in the disposal of them, you have done your part, and may comfortably leave the issue and success with God."^{iv}

Matthew Henry, *Family Religion*

- Family worship won't happen unless you make room in your schedule. Where can you make some room?

"For sports and recreations, let them be such and so much as may be needful to their health and cheerfulness, but not so much as may carry away their minds from better things and draw them from their books or other duties, nor such as may tempt them to gaming or covetousness."^v

Richard Baxter, *The Godly Home*

1. According to Henry, what is our part in leading family worship? What is God's part? How do these work together to bring both motivation as well as rest?
2. Baxter identifies recreation as a competition for time in family worship. Do you feel your amount of recreation is a competitor for your family time be it sports, television, or video games?
3. What changes would you need to make to begin curtailing busyness to carve out room for family worship?

What's the bottom line?

1. The Puritans remind us that we make time for what we think is important. Our biggest barrier to family worship is not busyness—it's not thinking it's important.
2. Family worship is a marvelous place for us to worship God along with our children.



Home Work

1. Three times in the coming week, share a verse of scripture with your kids that you've either read this week, or a verse that is meaningful for you.
2. Talk with your spouse about the greatest challenges you'll face in having regular family worship.
3. Pray that God would give you a vision for discipling your kids.

ⁱ Richard Baxter, *The Godly Home*, ed. Randall J. Pederson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 94.

ⁱⁱ Matthew Henry, *Family Religion: Principles for Raising a Godly Family* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 37.

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2008), 419.

^{iv} Henry, *Family Religion*, 38.

^v Baxter, *The Godly Home*, 192.

Week 3 | April 22, 2018

Bringing Worship Home

a practical method for family worship

Micah Barnum

Main goal for today:

To learn how the Read, Pray, Sing, model provides a simple and easy way to practice family worship.



Table Talk

Take about 10 minutes at your tables to discuss this question:
How are you feeling about implementing family worship in your home?

Families need a model that fits real life.

- We need a model that is simple.
- We need a model that is meaningful.
- We need a model that is enjoyable.

Read | Pray | Sing

Read—Taking in the Word of God.

- Reading as a family helps us know God’s Word.
- Discussing as a family helps us practice God’s Word.
- Resources:
 - o A good translation
 - The Message
 - The New Living Translation
 - English Standard Version
 - o Storybook Bibles
 - *My First Message*, Eugene Peterson
 - *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, Sally Lloyd-Jones
 - *The Biggest Story*, Kevin DeYoung
 - o Other resources
 - *The Action Bible*, David C Cook
 - *Family Worship Bible Guide*, Joel Beeke
 - *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing*, Sally Lloyd-Jones
 - *Exploring Grace Together*, Jessica Thompson
- Take opportunities to discuss your readings throughout the day.



Table Talk

Take about 5 minutes at your tables to discuss this question:
Share any resources, tips, or tricks you have found helpful in reading the Scriptures to your kids.

Pray—Speaking to the heart of God.

- It brings great spiritual fruit to your family.
 - o It trains everyone to take their concerns to God.
 - o It gives practice in praying with others.
 - o It gives you insight into what items are on your kids' hearts.
 - o It gives you an opportunity to pray for people outside of your circle.
- It gives your family good practices in prayer.
 - o Your kids will listen to your prayers.
 - o Let them put items on the list to pray for.
- Ideas
 - o Praying through the Psalms
 - o Journaling
 - o CCBC Mission Passport
 - o Prayer guides
 - o *Every Moment Holy*, Douglas Kaine Mckelvey

Sing—Rejoicing in our great God.

- Why sing?
 - o Singing uniquely connects our heart to God.
 - o Kids enjoy singing.
 - o Singing a marvelous tool for memorizing Scripture.

- What should we sing?
 - o Seeds Family Worship
 - o Kids Kamp Songs
- What if I'm not musical?

Closing Encouragements

Family worship is a glorious yet messy journey.

"You have this picture of a Puritan family sitting around the table attentively and reverently reading the whole book of 1 Chronicles at a sitting, singing half the Psalter from memory, and praying for ninety minutes, and then you look around your table and your wife is rolling her eyes, your two-year-old is throwing leftover spaghetti around the kitchen, your eight-year-old is making faces at her sister, and your teenager would rather do calculus. Do not let the gap between the ideal and the reality stop you."¹

- When does anything with kids go as planned?
- Don't let your expectations be the death of your family's worship.

Don't be frustrated if you miss several days, weeks, or even months.

"Whenever you realize that your family worship hasn't been regular and consistent lately, remember that it is a means of grace, not a burden to bear, so just pick it back up and start again."²

- Don't let a long stretch of not having family worship discourage you from starting back up again.

Family worship begins in your heart.

Our love for God is the foundation for anything we have to say. . . . If God's Word is dear to us, it will be important to our children. We must be dazzled by God. We cannot give away what we don't have."³

What's the bottom line?

1. You get to shape the faith of your children! Don't miss out on the great privilege and responsibility to cultivate a heart of faith in your kids.
2. "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."
Galatians 6:9



Home Work

1. Start family worship!
2. Fill out the survey that will come two weeks from now.

¹ J. Ligon Duncan III and Terry L. Johnson, "A Call to Family Worship," in Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011), 326.

² Jason Helopoulos, A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home (Scotland, U.K.: Christian Focus, 2013), 71

³ Tedd Tripp, Shepherding a Child's Heart (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995), 40.

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ABSTRACT

A CURRICULUM TO TRAIN THE PARENTS AT CHRIST CHAPEL BIBLE CHURCH IN FORT WORTH, TEXAS, TO PRACTICE FAMILY WORSHIP

Micah Lance Barnum, D.Min.
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The purpose of this project was to develop and implement a curriculum to train parents at Christ Chapel Bible Church in Fort Worth, Texas, to practice family worship. Chapter 1 details the scope of the project in light of the ministry context, purpose, and goals of the project, and details the project's methodology.

Chapter 2 provides a biblical foundation for the project by examining Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Psalm 78:1-8; Proverbs 4; Genesis 18:17-19, Joshua 24:15, Job 1:1-5 (summaries); Ephesians 5:25-27; and Ephesians 6:4.

Chapter 3 gives historical and theological support of family worship by interacting principally with recent research done on the faith of young adults as they transition into adulthood, as well as writings on family worship from the Puritans.

Chapter 4 explains the development of the curriculum and the implementation of the curriculum over the duration of the project.

Chapter 5 reviews the strengths and weakness of the project in light of the goals in chapter 1 as well as through personal and theological reflection.

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