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EQUIPPING THE PARENTS AT EAGLE HEIGHTS BAPTIST
CHURCH IN STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA, FOR FAMILY
WORSHIP

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
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May 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

**EQUIPPING THE PARENTS AT EAGLE HEIGHTS BAPTIST
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WORSHIP**

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For the glory of God

In memory of Stephen Goforth, who loved me well by regularly leading me to worship
God.

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PREFACE

The completion of this project will be due to the support and encouragement of many individuals that the Lord has placed in my life. First, I am thankful for God's gracious mercy in rescuing me from my sin through Christ. In light of that truth, seeking to equip parents for family worship is a joy that has deepened my love for the gospel.

I also want to thank Eagle Heights Baptist Church for supporting me as I pursue this project. The backing of the elders has been affirming as I have stepped forward into a new endeavor. In particular, Brent Prentice and Ryan Smith were helpful in deciding on a topic that would glorify God and benefit the local body.

Further, I want to thank my parents, Stephen and Sharon Goforth, for raising me in the fear and admonition of the Lord and encouraging me to continue my education. This pursuit is largely due to them passing on their faith as well as their continued joy and reassurance in my studies. My father was always incredibly excited for me to pursue doctoral work. His support was key in my decision to take this step.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Anna-Kate, for coming alongside me and allowing me to take the time necessary for this project. She is truly a treasure. These years of preparation and study have profoundly benefited our marriage and faith. I pray that we will continue to press one another in sanctification and develop habits of family worship that strengthen our family for generations.

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Stillwater, Oklahoma

May 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Eagle Heights Baptist Church (EHBC) is glorifying God by trusting Jesus and obeying all his commands. God has called his people to declare his glory from generation to generation (Ps 145:4-6). Specifically, parents are given the task of speaking and teaching the truths of Scripture to their children regularly (Deut 6:1-9). Seeking to obey the Lord, believers should have family worship present in their homes. Parents will grow in sanctification, knowledge and wisdom, and children will be equipped and guided by truth. Therefore, EHBC desires to equip parents to lead in faithful family worship.

Context

EHBC is located in Stillwater, Oklahoma, placing it within a transitional academic community. Oklahoma State University is the primary employer in town, bringing in a large number of people through hiring and studies. Because of the college and its specialties, the culture is highly academic, emphasizing engineering and agriculture, making use of the land surrounding the mid-sized town. The members of EHBC are a good representation of Stillwater's demographics. Many young individuals stay at the local church throughout their university education and then move on to a new town. In contrast, the families with children are those who are employed in the area, whether it be in academia, engineering, or agriculture and are deeply rooted in the community.

The families at EHBC share an academic culture yet bring a variety of parenting philosophies with them. There is a strong homeschooling community, several

parents who are professors, working professionals who have their families plugged into the local church, and a mixture of each. However, due to Stillwater's setting, there is a general leaning towards academics in town, which sees families looking to the local schools, trade or University, to train the coming generation. Combined with being located in the Bible-belt, this pattern sees parents relying on their local church as the primary means of spiritual training and upbringing.

By God's grace, EHBC is a local body that is continuing in sanctification. Humble leaders and a Word-centered approach help bring about needed growth and correction. This faithful leadership has had a positive impact on the trajectory of the student and children's ministries in particular. Through years of faithful guidance, families at EHBC have come into contact with healthy ecclesiology, biblical teaching, and resources for further growth. However, there are still weaknesses in the theological training of parents, the willingness of parents to have difficult conversations, and family discipleship at home.

Families at EHBC are regularly exposed to biblical teaching, leadership, and theology. Within the student ministry, parents are pointed to beneficial material that helps them individually and as a family. Every week an email is sent out, including what their children have been taught, regular updates, and a new recommended resource. The recommendations can consist of books, articles, sermons, and personal reflections from the student minister. If the ongoing opportunities are seized, parents at EHBC have a plethora of information that is being made accessible to them.

Despite the many instances of God's mercy at EHBC, the parents struggle to take advantage of all that is available to them. Rich doctrine is left to leadership, hard conversations are avoided, and family discipleship is handed off to the local church. As in many churches, the members of EHBC, including the parents, can live in a manner that leaves depth of biblical study to the elders and ministers. They are thankful for a church that teaches Scripture, but having their own desire to address the rich doctrine within is

still a discipline that needs development. Growth opportunities are rarely taken, and complicated truths are left untouched. Continued patterns of avoidance demonstrate a lack of theological foundations in EHBC members' lives and set a concerning trajectory for what will be passed on to the coming generation.

Failing to address deep material at home likely stems from the lack of education on the topic. Many of the parents of EHBC come from a local church background that focused on simplicity over substance. That pattern has now passed on into their households. The avoidance of depth has been amplified by a continued lack of intentional growth or training. Since rich theology was not a priority for them growing up, it likely will not be a priority in the home today. For example, if parents do not feel comfortable talking about the doctrine of election because of lack of experience or fear, they are not likely to bring it up with their families. Multiple factors are working together to limit the amount of healthy biblical conversation in the homes of EHBC members.

In addition, some families have demonstrated an apprehension towards confronting the sin in their household. Whether the issue is the outright pursuit of foolishness or the confusion of worldviews, parents are bowing out of their responsibility to lead. In neglecting this duty to lead, some parents claim that their child is close to being an adult, meaning that they are past the point of needing instruction and just need to be loved until they figure out what is right. This passive approach to family discipleship is leaving children trapped in sin, failing to protect youth from the deceit of the world, and diminishing the biblically mandated role of parents.

With doctrinal and conversational struggles in mind, the most pressing weakness facing families at EHBC is the lack of spiritual disciplines applied by families in their homes. Unfortunately, the concept of family worship is foreign, intimidating, and almost entirely absent. Many godly members of the local church are seeking to serve and teach their family well by only committing to making sure their children attend on Sundays and Wednesdays while providing occasional encouragement to their children at

home to pursue disciplines and morals. These are well-intentioned brothers and sisters in Christ who are working to care for their families in the best way they have been taught. This in itself, reveals the significant issue EHBC is facing.

Rationale

The primary role of discipleship in the life of children is a task given to parents by the Lord (Deut 6:1-9). They are to pass truth from one generation to the next regularly (Ps 78:1-8). Thus, parents should be embracing the call to train and teach their children the ways of Jesus Christ (Eph 6:4). Where there is a current absence of family discipleship, there should be great commitment and joy in the regular worshipful devotion that parents get to participate in with their families. Unfortunately, many homes are not participating in regular family worship. Therefore, the first issue facing EHBC is a lack of parents embracing their God-given role.

Secondly, families are not aware that they are neglecting their duties. The membership of EHBC includes well-meaning parents who are content in leading their families in faith by dropping off their children on Sundays and Wednesdays and having minimal discussions throughout the rest of the week. A priority that was biblically given to families is being handed off to the staff of the local church. Still, God is continuing to be gracious through the work of the student and children's ministries. Even so, the most significant fruit will be seen in children's lives when parents rightly embrace their God-given task to worship regularly within their homes. However, it is unlikely that families will pursue a task they do not know exists. Individuals often include practices in their own homes that they grew up witnessing themselves. Patterns from their childhood households become patterns in their parenting. Unfortunately, most of the current parents at EHBC did not grow up with regular family worship as a habit in their homes. Faith may have been passed down, but faithful practices were not. The idea of reading, praying and singing as a family is a concept that parents have not been taught about or trained to

include in their family lives. Consequently, a major reason for the lack of family worship at EHBC is a lack of education on the topic.

Thirdly, family worship has not been talked about with any clarity within the local church. Parents at EHBC are missing a vitally crucial biblical mandate and receiving no focused training to equip them to lead rightly. When knowledge and practice of godly disciplines are absent within the homes, the local church should be concerned. EHBC is in such a position. Seeing the need for parents to worship in their homes, the church should desire to see parents equipped to fulfill their God-given expectations rightly. The local church must teach families how to lead their children faithfully.

Finally, as the issue persists, the coming generation suffers. Effects are visible within the student ministry at EHBC. Students are continuing to face immense pressures from culture to bend on morality and belief. As outside voices regarding feminism, sexuality, purity, and the reliability of Scripture apply pressure to students, they are struggling to cling to what is true. If children do not have a healthy foundation in Scripture and doctrine, he or she will be much more susceptible to the deceit of the world. EHBC students who only receive biblical teaching and encouragement on Sundays and Wednesdays build a feeble foundation to stand on as they face temptations to bend on truth. Family worship is needed.

Training parents to lead their families rightly will open the door for future health in children and the local church. Regular discipline in the household will prepare the coming generation to know what is right and stand for what is true according to Scripture. Consistent time in the Bible together will encourage family discussion on faith and a willingness to ask about and think through difficult questions. Children who are led to study, pray through, and sing Scripture regularly will be more prepared in wisdom, knowledge, and faith to bolster them in Christ through the societal storms they will face. There is a gap in household leadership within the local church that would be helped by focused training in family worship. The current and future members of EHBC will

benefit from a return to historical and biblical practices of faith regularly applied within the household.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to equip the parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma to regularly lead family worship.

Goals

Three goals were pursued to promote the regular practice of family worship by parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church.

1. The first goal was to evaluate the current knowledge and practice of family worship among parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church who are regular attendees.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to teach and prepare parents to adopt consistent habits of family worship.
3. The third goal was to increase the knowledge and practice of family worship among parents by using the family worship curriculum.

Each goal has a defined means of measurement to evaluate the overall success of the project.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal was to evaluate the current knowledge and practice of family worship among parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church who are regular attendees.¹ This goal was measured by administering Timothy Paul Jones's Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey (FDPPS) to EHBC member families who regularly participate in the youth or children's ministry.² This goal was considered successfully met

¹ 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.

² Several evaluative items were added to the post-survey with PDS approval in order to best

when ten families complete the FDPPS and the results were evaluated, demonstrating a clearer picture of the current family worship practices among EHBC families.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum that would equip parents to lead regular family worship. The curriculum included biblical foundations, historical practices, practical applications, recommended resources, and opportunities for questions to be answered. Further, each session featured a walkthrough of what a time of family worship would look like in a different format, giving visual examples that apply in a variety of settings. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the curriculum over biblical accuracy, teaching methods, material covered, and applicability. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluated material met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge and practice of family worship among parents by using the family worship curriculum. This goal was measured by administering the FDPPS after the eight-session family worship curriculum, to the same target of families that took the survey in the first goal. The information gathered helped measure the success in training and equipping parents for regular practices of family worship. This goal was considered successfully met when ten families who took the initial survey and attended part of the implemented family worship curriculum completed the FDPPS and the t-test results demonstrated a positive increase from the results seen prior to the eight-session curriculum.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Family Worship. Family Worship was defined as “The regular and intentional

evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum.

gathering of a household to worship God and to make disciples in the home.”³ The definition has been chosen because it includes the elements of regularity, gathering in homes, and discipleship that this project will emphasize.

Discipleship. Discipleship was defined 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.”⁴ Jones’s thorough definition aligns with the manner in which parents will be encouraged to personally and intentionally invest in the faith of their children in this project.

Parents. With the scope of the project targeting the children’s and youth ministries at EHBC, Parents were defined as those who have children at home between the ages of birth and twelfth grade.

Students. Used to refer to older households, Students were defined as children between sixth and twelfth grade.

One limitation was in place for this project. The author was responsible for overseeing the children and student ministries at EHBC, which encompasses birth through twelfth grade. The group surveyed was limited by the ages within those ministries at EHBC. Although young couples, grandparents, and college houses could benefit from family worship, the scope had to be narrowed. Therefore, the focus of the project was narrowed to the children’s and student ministry to align with current structures and provide project clarity.

One delimitation was applied to this project. Only eight weeks of family worship curriculum were developed. The selected length of curriculum allowed for a long enough course to include needed material and effectively measure results while being

³ *Guide to Family Worship 2015* [PDF file], accessed January 5, 2021, <http://forgodsname.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/guide-to-family-worship-2015.pdf>

⁴ Timothy Paul Jones, Mark DeVries, and W. Ryan Steenburg, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 17.

short enough for consistent commitment.

Conclusion

God has given parents the primary responsibility of discipling their children through the discipline of regular family worship. The following chapters demonstrate how parents are commanded and able to faithfully lead their households in reverent devotion to the Lord, and how beneficial doing so can be to the coming generations and the Church. Chapter 2 will focus on the biblical support for family worship, and chapter 3 will show the history, present need, and spiritual benefit of family worship.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR EQUIPPING PARENTS FOR FAMILY WORSHIP

Christian families are unlikely to commit to practices of family worship if they do not find them taught in Scripture. Scott Brown helpfully notes, “You won’t find the words ‘family worship’ in the Bible, but you can trace its principles and practices from Genesis to Revelation.”¹ Throughout the Bible, parents are commanded to bring up and instruct their children in the ways of the Lord.² However, the clarity of parental leadership does not necessarily imply clarity towards the practice of family worship.³ Nonetheless, when rightly interpreted, family worship is not forced into the Bible, but faithfully applies what is taught to parents throughout the pages of Scripture.

Fathers and mothers must be taught that these practices are presented in the Bible. To demonstrate the biblical and theological basis for family worship, the four passages of Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Psalm 78:1-8, Ephesians 6:1-4, and 2 Timothy 1:3-5 will

¹ Jeff Pollard and Scott T. Brown, eds., *A Theology of The Family: Five Centuries of Biblical Wisdom for Family Life*, ed. Jeff Pollard and Scott T. Brown (Wake Forest, NC: The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, 2014), 43.

² Thomas Doolittle, “The Word of God and Family Prayer,” in *A Theology of The Family*, ed. Jeff Pollard and Scott T. Brown (Wake Forest, NC: The National Center for Family Integrated Churches), 69. Thomas Doolittle concludes, “No man that will not deny the Scripture can deny the unquestionable duty of reading the Scripture in our houses, governors of families teaching and instructing them out of the Word of God.”

³ James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Morgan, PA, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 3. Observing patterns of family worship in the Bible and in history, James W. Alexander concludes, “It is not our purpose to make any ingenious efforts to force into our service the history of the Old Testament, or to search for family worship in every age of the world. That it has existed in every age I do not doubt; that the Old Testament was intended to communicate this fact is not so clear. But without any indulgence of fancy we cannot fail to discern the principle of family worship, appearing and re-appearing as a familiar thing, in the remotest periods.” His statement appears to discount the validity of family worship being found in the Old Testament. However, his point is that there is a lack of explicit wording in the Old Testament about the regular practice of family worship. Family worship is clearly seen in the Old Testament.

be discussed in detail. Additionally, a collection of other scriptural references will be briefly detailed to reveal the Bible's frequent and clear teaching on family worship.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

The primary location turned to in order to teach family discipleship is Deuteronomy 6. Voddie Baucham Jr. claims, "God has not left us to wander aimlessly in the wilderness as we raise our children. He has given us a blueprint for multigenerational faithfulness. That blueprint is expressed throughout the Bible, but there is one place where it reads like a how-to manual. That place is Deuteronomy 6."⁴ These nine verses present instruction that highlights individual faith and the command to consistently teach children.

Now This Is the Commandment (vv. 1-3)

In the first three verses of this passage, Moses establishes the context for the great commandment he is about to deliver.⁵ Before declaring his powerful parental instruction, he makes sure the people of Israel rightly understand what is about to be given to them. He presents the content, purpose, and imperative.

The first half of verse 1 clarifies what instruction is going to be delivered. Following his communication of the ten commandments in the preceding chapter, Moses now stands before the people to present the statutes they will carefully observe (Deut 5:7-21, 31-33). Now, in chapter 6, this is the commandment they are to follow. Further, just like the ten commandments, Moses clarifies that these statutes are from the Lord. Moses

⁴ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 10.

⁵ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, Word Biblical Commentary 6A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 136. Establishing context, Christensen summarizes, "These three verses function as a bridge, to conclude the larger section on the "Ten Words" (4:44-6:3) and to introduce the next major section (6:4-7:11), which contains what Jesus called the "first and greatest commandment," to love God (Matt 22:37-38)." He adds, "They also call attention to the primary function of the book of Deuteronomy in the life of ancient Israel: religious education."

is not offering his best recommendation on worship and family but delivering what the Lord commanded him to teach. In this section, Moses is demonstrating the lesson he is delivering to the people of Israel. They must obey the command of the Lord to teach those placed in their care. Moses is following the decree of the Lord and teaching his people.

The purpose of this command is so that the people of Israel will be obedient, possess the land they are going to, and fear the Lord for generations (Deut 6:1-2). Although the language is singular, pointing to the people as a whole, families are clearly in mind, as Moses highlights that the fear of the Lord will be seen in “you and your son and your son’s son” (Deut 6:2).⁶ How will families accomplish these purposes? Moses instructs that they will achieve the purpose of God’s teaching “by keeping all his statutes and commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life” (Deut 6:2). Great reward is found in faithful obedience. Therefore, Israel must hear and be careful to obey the commandment Moses is about to declare (Deut 6:3).

The Greatest Commandment (vv. 4-6)

Moses starts with “Hear, O Israel,” summoning the people to listen intently to what the Lord is commanding.⁷ John D. Currid aids in understanding the context of Moses’s words by explaining, “The verb ‘to hear’ in Hebrew not only means to listen but also carries the idea of obedience. Action is required on the basis of what is heard.”⁸ With their ears tuned in, Moses delivers what is still an important confession for Jews, the

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Ambassadors to the World: Declaring God’s Love* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 43. Commenting on the six uses of “Hear, O Israel” in Scripture, Christopher Wright notes, “It is . . . a constant reminder that Israel is a people summoned by God to hear God’s Word.”

⁸ John D. Currid, *Deuteronomy*, Evangelical Press Study Commentary (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006), 163.

Shema (Deut 6:4-5).⁹ The words of these two verses declare monotheistic allegiance to the one true God demonstrated through devotion.¹⁰ Following God is seen in love that passionately permeates heart and soul.¹¹ Christopher J. H. Wright declares, “There are no limits on loving God. You can never say you have loved him enough.”¹² The Lord commands whole-being worship from his people.¹³

Then, “these words” that are commanded should be on the hearts of people.¹⁴ Having them on their heart means that genuine love for the Lord, in response to the *Shema*, must saturate their entire person.¹⁵ This command to love the Lord is corporate and individual. Moses is speaking to the people of Israel as a community that is to be characterized by devotion to the one true God. But his words are also a call to individuals to strive to live a life driven by love and commitment to God alone.¹⁶

⁹ Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2012) 181. Block notes the current practices of this text, saying, “The Shema is one of the most important symbols of Judaism. To this day, orthodox Jews recite verses 4-5 twice daily as part of their prayers.”

¹⁰ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 182. Block adds, “Answering to the Supreme Command, by uttering the Shema the Israelites were declaring their complete, undivided, and unqualified devotion to Yahweh. This is not strictly a monotheistic confession (cf. 4:35, 39) but a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment that defines the boundaries of the covenant community.”

¹¹ Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013), 310. Emphasizing the doctrinal importance of this passage, Lundbom explains, “It is agreed that this credo [The Lord our God is one Lord] is affirming the oneness (or unity) of Yahweh God, where ‘one,’ referring to Yahweh, contrasts with ‘many,’ referring to other gods.”

¹² Wright, *Ambassadors to the World*, 49-50.

¹³ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 143. Christensen describes loving the Lord with all one’s heart, soul, and might by explaining, “In terms of modern depth psychology, we would say that our love for God is to embrace the whole of our mind, both conscious and unconscious. Self-discipline is required, in that we are to love God with all our might as well.”

¹⁴ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 311. Lundbom helpfully notes, “‘These words’ could refer just to the Shema (vv. 4-5), but more probably refer to the entire Deuteronomic law.” His conclusion further establishes the truth that parents should be pointing their children to all of Scripture, not merely memorized phrases like the *Shema*.

¹⁵ Ajith Fernando, *Deuteronomy: Loving Obedience to a Loving God*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 259. Describing the response of the follower of God, Fernando explains, “We respond to this revelation of the beauty of God by loving him back.”

¹⁶ Currid, *Deuteronomy*, 164. Currid elaborates, “When the text uses the second person, ‘you/your’ it is in the singular. The reason for this is clear: not only is each individual Hebrew to love God in this way, but Israel in covenant, as one body, in unity, is to love God with such intensity and fervour.”

Teach Your Children Regularly (vv. 7-9)

After issuing the great commandment and urging the people of Israel to have it on their hearts, Moses's focus turns to the coming generations. Recognizing the importance of verse seven, Tad Thompson notes, "The first specific mention of family discipleship appears in Deuteronomy 6:7."¹⁷ These truths that take deep root in the parents must be taught to their children. Additionally, devotion to the Lord should be visibly apparent in their lives and within their homes.¹⁸ Love for God must impact all of a believer's household, both verbally and visually.¹⁹

Particularly, Moses emphasizes that the instruction of children is to be delivered diligently and regularly. Kerry Ptacek explains, "The word 'diligently' is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to speak of repeated action in sharpening a metal tool."²⁰ John D. Currid agrees, adding, "The common Hebrew verb 'to teach' is not used here, but rather we see the Hebrew term *shaman*, which means 'to sharpen, hone.'"²¹ Parents are not called to occasional simple instruction. God, through Moses, is commanding parents to repeatedly and passionately work to shape and sharpen their children with biblical instruction. In the same way that striking a piece of metal once or twice a week would never result in an axe head, it is doubtful that children who are spoken to about the Lord twice a week will be shaped into followers of Christ.²² Joel Beeke concludes,

¹⁷ Tad Thompson, *Intentional Parenting: Family Discipleship by Design* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 57.

¹⁸ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 315. Lundbom explains, "Today the mezuzah is to be affixed to the entrance of every Jewish home and to the door of every living room in the house (excluding bathrooms, storage rooms, etc.)."

¹⁹ John MacArthur, *Ephesians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 308. Discussing Deuteronomy 6:7-9, MacArthur concludes, "In other words, there was always to be both verbal and visible commitment to the Word of God in the home."

²⁰ Kerry Ptacek, *Family Worship: Biblical Basis, Historical Reality, Current Need* (Birmingham, AL: Covenant Family Fellowship, 1994), 9.

²¹ Currid, *Deuteronomy*, 165.

²² Fernando, *Deuteronomy*, 264-65. Fernando claims, "The teaching is to be done 'diligently,' which, again, has the idea of repeating. This is not an occasional thing that parents do; it is a regular part of the life of the family."

“Moses wasn’t suggesting a little talk, but diligent conversation and diligent instruction that flow from the burning heart of a parent.”²³ God-honoring parents are marked by diligence in the instruction of their children.

Then, Moses communicates that teaching should take place throughout the entire day. Baucham observes, “Moses makes it clear that multigenerational faithfulness is an all-day, everyday process. We must teach our children at all times.”²⁴ The language used reveals that regular conversations about God should be present within the schedules of godly families.²⁵ Parents must commit to making the most of every opportunity to train their children to know and love the Lord.²⁶ Speaking of a family that follows these words, Jonathan Williams concludes, “This is a family saturated with the Word of God. This is a family who invests in the spiritual growth and health of their home in the morning, afternoon, and evening. This is a family that grows daily.”²⁷ Regular instruction is a means the Lord uses to bring about devoted children.

Family Worship Application

Moses’s teaching clearly calls parents to holiness and the consistent instruction of their children. Despite the command being directed to the plural people of God, the content within has implications for individual believers. Chap Bettis helpfully summarizes, “Did you catch the instructions for parents? 1. Delight in the commands of

²³ Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 11.

²⁴ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 109.

²⁵ Fernando, *Deuteronomy*, 265. Fernando summarizes, “The picture we have is of constant input into the lives of children.

²⁶ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 184-85. Addressing children coming to know and love the Lord, Block identifies, “This is to be accomplished by ‘impressing’ these words on children (vv. 4-5). This means repeating them constantly, when God’s people sit in their homes and walk on the road, when they lie down and when they rise up. In this case, every adult Israelite is to be a teacher, seizing every opportunity for instruction.”

²⁷ Jonathan Williams, *Gospel Family: Cultivating Family Discipleship, Family Worship, & Family Missions* (Houston: Lucid Books, 2015), 13.

God. 2. Teach the commands of God. 3. Talk about the commands of God. 4. Tattoo the commands of God to you.”²⁸ Bettis’s order is helpful as parents look to care for their families obediently. Individually, they must delight in and follow God.²⁹ Then, that love for the Lord must pour out in teaching and speaking about him regularly.³⁰

Moses’s words plead for regular family worship. Although the specific structure is not detailed, the emphasis on consistent and rigorous teaching would best be seen in families spending time reading, praying, and singing together. Rightly applying this passage is vital for parents seeking to follow Christ. Peter C. Craigie urges, “Nothing is more important to the future of God’s people than the communication of ‘these words.’”³¹ These patterns must take place to establish generational faithfulness (Deut 6:2).³² Seeking to apply these verses, Jerry Marcellino concludes, “In a general sense, family worship should be going on all the time in a spiritually healthy home.”³³ The practice of this passage through consistent family worship effectively points children to fear of the Lord.

²⁸ Chap Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent: A Comprehensive Guidebook for Raising Your Children to Love and Follow Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Diamond Hill, 2016), 134.

²⁹ Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home through Time, Moments, & Milestones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 65. Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin highlight, “Caring for your own soul is the first step. Your spiritual health is imperative to the health of your family.”

³⁰ David Michael, *Zealous: 7 Commitments for the Discipleship of the Next Generation* (Minneapolis, MN: Truth78, 2020), 70. Michael notes the importance of parental holiness, commending, “Reaching the heart of the child begins with the heart of the parent and teacher. Remember the order of discipleship that Moses outlines for Israel in Deuteronomy 6:6-7. First, ‘these words that I command you shall be on your heart.’ Then, ‘teach them to your children.’”

³¹ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 168.

³² Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 313. Returning to the purpose of the text, Lundbom maintains, “The importance of teaching children the commandments is so that they will come to fear Yahweh, an important Deuteronomic theme.”

³³ Jerry Marcellino, *Rediscovering Family Worship* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2011), 14.

Psalm 78:1-8

Parents have the responsibility of passing biblical truth to the next generation. In Psalm 78, Asaph urges the people of God to speak of the glories of the Lord to those who come after them.³⁴ To bolster his argument, he reminds them of their history, revealing a rebellious people and a justly wrathful God.³⁵ If a better future is to be had by their offspring, they must teach them the ways of the Lord.³⁶ Noting the future-minded call on families, Baucham claims, “Perhaps the most passionate and poetic plea for the perpetuation of God’s people is found in these lines [verses 2-8] from Psalm 78.” Fathers and mothers must see that they hold the responsibility of teaching the ways of the Lord to the coming generation.

We Will Not Hide Them (vv. 1-4)

Parents are urged to tune in to the words of Asaph. Allen P. Ross summarizes, “The first four verses form a didactic poem that explains the purpose of the entire psalm. The psalmist calls the people to listen to his words and proclaim them to their children so that the LORD will be praised from generation to generation.”³⁷ Similar to Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78 begins with a call to listen to the instruction that is about to be given (Ps 78:1). Once again, parents are particularly called on to make sure they hear the words of the Lord. They must listen because Asaph is about to speak of beneficial teachings from of old (Ps 78:2).³⁸

³⁴ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 22.

³⁵ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, 42-89, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 649. Allen P. Ross explains, “Psalm 78 is a historical psalm, which is basically a descriptive praise psalm in that it rehearses the marvelous works of the Lord on behalf of his people—in spite of their constant rebellion.”

³⁶ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 14. Parents have the weighty task of training up those who will come after them. Looking to these verses, Ptacek argues, “Psalm 78:1-8 is a strong statement of God’s view of generational responsibility.”

³⁷ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:653.

³⁸ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 15. Ptacek observes, “There are a number of indications that this

The deeds of the Lord that Asaph discusses in Psalm 78:9-72 are “things that we have heard and known that our fathers have told us” (Ps 78:3). The people of God should have heard of the ways of the Lord. Additionally, fathers, in particular, are supposed to communicate truth to their children.³⁹ The expectation for God’s people is that they know and pass down the truths of Scripture.⁴⁰

Asaph then declares that the work of the Lord will not be hidden from the coming generation. Ptacek strongly claims, “A father has two options: either he teaches his children about God’s dealings with His people or he hides them from his children. There is no neutral ground for the believing father.”⁴¹ Two choices lay in front of Christian parents. They can leave God’s glories behind a veil for their family, or they can “tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might and the wonders that he has done” (Ps 78:4).⁴² William S. Plumer urges, “If in God’s mercy we are made acquainted with weighty truths involving the divine glory and human salvation, let us not conceal them, but faithfully transmit them to others; especially to the young

Psalm was intended for use with children. The Psalmist says that he will speak a ‘parable’ and in ‘dark sayings’ (78:2). These are both terms used in Proverbs 1:6 in speaking of the instruction of ‘a young man.’ Indeed, the word parable is also translated ‘proverb,’ a simple lesson from comparison or simile. ‘Dark sayings’ is otherwise translated ‘riddle,’ a ‘hard question’ used to test someone (1 Kgs 10:1). This too is a device of instruction found in Proverbs.”

³⁹ Martin S. Rozenberg and Bernard M. Zlotowitz, *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation and Commentary* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1999), 481. Rozenberg and Zlotowitz provide historical context by explaining, “According to the Talmud, a Jewish father has four obligations to his son: (1) to teach him Torah; (2) to teach him a trade; (3) to get him married; (4) to teach him to swim. The purpose of each of these responsibilities was to assure a viable life for the son. Torah preserves his spiritual life, a trade guarantees him a livelihood; marriage keeps him from succumbing to lasciviousness, and swimming can save a person’s life in a time of danger.” A father’s biblical instruction was for the good of his children. Now, through Christ, it is clear that a father’s biblical teaching is for the eternal good of his children.

⁴⁰ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*. 2nd ed., ed. Art Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 607. Noting that Psalm 78:4 indicates that the knowledge of Scripture starts with fathers and is passed down, MacDonald offers, “Just as our parents passed down to us a record of the past, so we are obligated to pass on to the next generation an account of the Lord’s dealings with His people in grace and government.”

⁴¹ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 15.

⁴² Rozenberg and Zlotowitz, *The Book of Psalms*, 481. Summarizing the weight of the command that is built on the deeds of the Lord, Rozenberg and Zlotowitz declare, “Every generation is under obligation to tell the tale of Israel’s encounter with God.”

committed to our care.”⁴³ Rather than hide them, parents are called to declare the glorious deeds of God to the next generation.⁴⁴

So That Generations Might Hope in God (vv. 5-8)

Asaph continues and drives home application that coincides with the teaching in Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Looking back to that instruction, he begins by explaining that this expectation of parental education was established as a law in Israel.⁴⁵ Asaph then presents a series of purpose statements in verse five.⁴⁶ Parents must teach their children the ways of the Lord so that generations to come would know God, remember his works, and keep his commands (Ps 78:6-8).⁴⁷

Verses 5-6 present a multigenerational picture of faithfulness. David Michael notes, “When Psalm 78:5 speaks of declaring the ‘testimony’ to the ‘next generation,’ at least three generations are specified, two of which did not yet exist.”⁴⁸ Fathers are to tell

⁴³ William S. Plumer, *Psalms*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2016), 757.

⁴⁴ David Platt, “Psalm 78,” in *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 51-100*, by David Platt, Jim Shaddix, and Matt Mason, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 255. Emphasizing the content of biblical instruction, David Platt identifies, “We teach the next generation what God has done. The last part of verse 4 mentions the ‘wondrous works he has performed.’ The rest of this psalm recounts all that God has done in the history of his people. The psalmist wants God’s people to tell future generations about the plagues, about God’s provision of manna and quail from the sky, and the rest of God’s faithful and powerful provisions for his people from generation to generation.”

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, ab. David C. Searle (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 371. Looking back to how parents were commanded in Deuteronomy 6:1-9, John Calvin comments on Psalm 78:5 by explaining, “The law in Israel refers to the written law which God had ordained fathers should teach to their children.”

⁴⁶ Platt, Shaddix, and Mason, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 51-100*, 258. Platt recognizes, “We proclaim God and his mighty acts to the coming generation for specific purposes. Notice, for instance, the words ‘so that’ and ‘then’ in verses 6-8. This is not teaching and telling and warning and exalting simply for the sake of information but for the sake of transformation.”

⁴⁷ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 607. MacDonald summarizes the content of Psalm 78:1-8 into four primary desires. He states, “God’s desire in all this was fourfold: That His people would set their hope in Him. That they would not forget His glorious works. That they would be obedient. That they would learn from the past and not repeat the rebellions of their forefathers.” This paper approaches the passage with the same ideas but combines the last two into the one concept of keeping the commands of the Lord. Additionally, this paper emphasizes the importance of the passage for children.

⁴⁸ Michael, *Zealous*, 17.

their children who are then to tell their unborn children who should then go and tell their children (Ps 78:5-6). Faithful biblical instruction is not supposed to only impact families in the present. Teaching now should prepare future generations to set their minds on rising up and telling their children as well.⁴⁹ Parents who hope to establish a lineage of faithfulness must commit to teaching their families the deeds of the Lord.⁵⁰

Biblical instruction must come with a primary objective of salvation. Asaph identifies that the instruction of fathers and mothers should take place so that children will be saved, or “set their hope in God” (Ps 78:7). Jason Helopoulos asks parents, “Isn’t the psalmist’s hope in verse seven our greatest hope for our children?”⁵¹ Declaring the glorious acts of the Lord carries with it the incredible opportunity of seeing children place their hope in God. Addressing the goal in teaching truths to the coming generation, Ross declares, “The purpose of this should be obvious—to carry on the faith.”⁵² If parents want to see their children come to know the Lord personally, then they must declare his glorious and wonderous acts.

Additionally, as modeled by Asaph, teaching God’s mighty works helps the coming generations remember them. As biblical literacy declines, God’s Word in Psalm 78 offers a beacon of hope for families. Family instruction is a mercy the Lord gives through parents so that children will not only know and trust him but remember his ways. Ross claims, “The purpose of this praise for God in his acts in history is that the people of

⁴⁹ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:655. Ross identifies, “The carrying on of the tradition is strengthened by the use of the verb ‘arise’: in verse 5 God established (the *hiphil* meaning ‘cause to stand, establish’; s.v. Ps 3:1); then in verse 6 each generation is to rise up, meaning take action, to pass the covenant on to their children.”

⁵⁰ Gene Edward Veith Jr., and Mary J. Moerbe, *Family Vocation: God’s Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 154. Parents must place truly worthwhile information before their families. By God’s grace, valuable truth can be planted in a family that God can use to pass down a truly a valuable inheritance. Veith explains, “Part of the educational task of parenting is to pass down the elements of their heritage that are worth keeping to the next generation.”

⁵¹ Jason Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 36.

⁵² Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:655.

God never forget his benefits.”⁵³ The coming generations will have trouble remembering the mighty deeds that they never, or rarely have, been taught. However, if they are instructed as commanded in Scripture, they will be prepared to call to mind a firm foundation for generations to come.⁵⁴ In contrast to forgetful disobedience, children who are taught the Word will be characterized by obedience driven by their knowledge of the greatness of God.

By keeping the commands of the Lord, the coming generation can set themselves on a different trajectory than their fathers before them. Asaph advises that sound teaching helps children live differently than the stubborn and rebellious people who came before them (Ps 78:8).⁵⁵ The words of Scripture reveal a mighty steadfast God and an unfaithful wavering people.⁵⁶ As the narrative of the Bible is taught to children, similar to Asaph’s practice in the remainder of Psalm 78, the foolishness of sin is declared, and the greatness of God is revealed.⁵⁷ Biblical truth prepares the coming generation to live holy lives.⁵⁸

⁵³ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:650.

⁵⁴ Platt, “Psalm 78,” 256. When families teach their children the glorious deeds of the Lord, Platt notes, “From generation to generation, God’s Word will never fade. It is a rock on which our children and their children and their children can stand for eternity.”

⁵⁵ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalm 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary 20 (Dallas: Word Books 1990), 289. Tate emphasizes the importance of teaching the children the deeds of the Lord as Asaph does in Psalm 78 by suggesting, “Only by understanding the old traditions can the present generation avoid repeating the sins of the previous one.”

⁵⁶ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 15. Family Worship practices help to reverse dangerously problematic patterns. Ptacek notes, “The failure to carry out this instruction responsibility demonstrated what the Psalmist called ‘a spirit...not faithful to God’ (Ps 78:8). Stronger rebuke can scarcely be imagined.”

⁵⁷ Platt, “Psalm 78,” 254. Platt claims, “The church should tell the next generation what the Bible teaches about God and his salvation in order to warn them against sin and encourage them to entrust their entire lives to Jesus Christ.”

⁵⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, vol 1, con. David Otis Fuller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940), 332. Spurgeon recognizes that instruction during the years of youth helps to develop faithfulness in old age. He claims, “Disciples in youth will prove angels in age. Use and experience strengthen and confirm in any art or science. The longer thy child hath been brought up in Christ’s school, the more able he will be to find out Satan’s wiles and fallacies and to avoid them. The longer he hath been at the trade the more skill and delight will he have in worshipping and enjoying the blessed God. The tree when it is old stands strongly against the wind, just as it was set when it was young.”

Family Worship Application

Christian parents have been impacted mightily by the gracious work of the Lord that is worth sharing.⁵⁹ Repeated instruction on the ways of the Lord works to develop a heritage of faith.⁶⁰ David Platt helpfully states, “Psalm 78 is a reminder that we want to lead our children to know and to trust in God.”⁶¹ The clear command of the Psalm is that faith must be passed from one generation to the next.⁶² God uses biblical teaching to build habits of obedience that correct patterns of rebelliousness and forge a new path for future generations.⁶³ Like Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Psalm 78:1-8 makes it apparent that parents have the responsibility to teach their children the ways of the Lord.⁶⁴

Fathers and mothers must work to pass their faith to their children. Seeking to provide application from Psalm 78:1-8, Platt recommends, “One practical way to put this psalm into practice is through regular times of family worship.”⁶⁵ Regular family

⁵⁹ Jonathan Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship: Richard Baxter’s Timeless Encouragement for Today’s Home* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 112. Responding to the work of God through Christ in our own lives, Jonathan Williams urges, “The Lord has moved in our lives. He has saved, forgiven, provided, healed, restored, delivered, and blessed. He has answered prayers beyond anything we could have imagined. Now let us be faithful to share these stories with our children...” He then quotes Psalm 78 verses 4 and 7 as demonstrating this parental outpouring of worship.

⁶⁰ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:653. Ross speaks to the faithful application of Psalm 78:1-8 by identifying, “By rehearsing the marvelous works of the LORD the heritage of the faith will be preserved.”

⁶¹ Platt, “Psalm 78,” 254.

⁶² Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:653. Ross summarizes Psalm 78:1-8 by explaining, “The people of God must hand down the history and understanding of the works of God so that subsequent generations of believers will remain faithful.”

⁶³ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 314. MacArthur looks to the multigenerational family trees of faith and notes, “The opportunities and freedoms we have to live and practice our faith were won by our forefathers centuries ago and passed on to us by those in between. Children raised in Christian families are blessed with the fruit from spiritual trees planted many years earlier by parents and grandparents. Conversely, it takes three or four generations to reverse the effects of one wicked group of fathers (cf. Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14:18; Deut 5:9).”

⁶⁴ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (1975; repr., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 311. Comparing Psalm 78:1-8 to the passage in Deuteronomy 6 in their instruction on parental obligations, Kidner says, “For the classic passage on teaching this faith to one’s children see Deuteronomy 6:6-9, for Scripture has no room for parental neutrality.”

⁶⁵ Platt, “Psalm 78,” 259. He continues, “This would apply to families with children as well as families without children. It could also apply to singles who may have the opportunity to regularly spend

worship, by God’s grace, can help families to pass faith from one generation to the next. Time spent working through all of Scripture in reading, prayer, and song helps children hear, remember, and apply all of God’s Word.⁶⁶ The greatest desire of parents should be that they see their children and grandchildren come to worship the Lord. Commenting on Psalm 78, Helopoulos asserts, “This must be our true heart’s desire: that our children might set their hope in God and that they would teach their own children in turn. And that they would set their hope on God and teach their children and on and on it goes. If that is our desire, then family worship should have real appeal. How can it not?”⁶⁷ If parents hope to see generations follow Christ, they must regularly teach them the glorious deeds of God.⁶⁸

Ephesians 6:1-4

The parental patterns established in the Old Testament continue in the New Testament. Baucham Jr. identifies the continued thread of family instruction by noting, “The clearest link in the New Testament to the family discipleship pattern of the Old Testament is Ephesians 6:1-4.”⁶⁹ In this theology-rich section, Paul follows his instruction to wives and husbands by turning to children and fathers.⁷⁰

time with other believers.”

⁶⁶ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 80. As parents work to be faithful to apply Psalm 78 in their households, Jonathan Williams sees a multi-generational benefit to family worship. He encourages, “Through family worship—including teaching the Word of God, praying together, and singing praises with one another—heads of households have the great opportunity and privilege passing on the gospel to their children and their children’s children.”

⁶⁷ Helopoulos, *Family Worship*, 36.

⁶⁸ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 332. Spurgeon recognizes healthy practice and commends obedience by urging, “What happy hours and pleasant evenings have children had at their parents’ knees as they have listened to some ‘sweet story of old.’ Reader, if you have children, mind you do not fail in this duty.”

⁶⁹ Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds*, 23.

⁷⁰ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 31. Highlighting the surrounding context, Ptacek explains, “Ephesians 5:22-6:9 goes into greater detail on the Christian family than any other part of the New Testament.”

Obey Your Parents

Paul begins by addressing children with the explicit teaching, “obey your parents” (Eph 6:1).⁷¹ This instruction is not remarkably profound, as Kent R. Hughes acknowledges, “Virtually every culture and every society recognizes and is indeed built on the premise that children are to respect and obey their parents.”⁷² However, the command to Christian children is different than what would have been culturally normative. Paul’s use of “obey” was not calling for blind obedience to any and every action or desire that a parent presents.⁷³ Instead, John Stott explains, “Children are not to obey their parents in absolutely everything without exception, but in everything which is compatible with their primary loyalty, namely to their Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴ The command for obedience necessitates instruction that is worth following.⁷⁵ Although children should be respectful no matter their circumstances, the command in Scripture is to be obedient to the teaching of godly parents.⁷⁶

Paul’s initial reason that children should obey is simple. He says, “for this is

⁷¹ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 147. Tony Merida points out, “The fact that Paul mentions children in such an important letter demonstrates the value the early church placed on children.” The instruction of the coming generation carried value historically for the people of God and should continue to today.

⁷² Kent R. Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 196.

⁷³ William Barclay, “Patria Potestas,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. M. Cary. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 653. William Barclay provides historical information about the authority of fathers in particular, detailing, “A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.”

⁷⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 242.

⁷⁵ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 148. Acknowledging the implied call for parental modeling, Merida posits, “Though Paul does not say, ‘Set an example for your children,’ in 6:1-4, this point is implied based on the previous chapters of Ephesians and the focus on ‘teaching children.’ What are children learning? They are learning basic Christian living by watching their parents.” He adds, “They know if their parents are dazzled by God’s grace or not.”

⁷⁶ Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, in *The ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 11, *Ephesians-Philemon*, ed. by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 104-5. Speaking to the weight of the Greek term translated as “obey,” Benjamin L. Merkle identifies, “The verb ‘obey’ is stronger than the command given to wives to ‘submit’ (5:22), indicating absolute obedience (though certainly some exceptions must be allowed).”

right” (Eph 6:1).⁷⁷ Obedience to godly parents is the right path for Christian children to pursue. Further, this habit of obedience develops reverence for the Lord. Parents teach their offspring to follow their commands, which also trains them to follow their heavenly Father.⁷⁸ Therefore, Scripture explains disobedient children as a mark of unholy times.⁷⁹ If children are reluctant or hesitant to follow their earthly parents, it is unlikely that they will listen to the commands of the Lord. Obedience to parents is good and right.

Paul continues his instruction with a similar command followed by a purpose statement in Ephesians 6:2-3. Looking to the Ten Commandments, he again speaks to children, urging them to honor their fathers and mothers (Eph 6:2). Beyond obedience, children must respect, admire, and highly esteem their parents.⁸⁰ Then, once again, the reverence that they show their earthly fathers and mothers reveals their reverence for their heavenly Father.

Additionally, Ephesians 6:3 offers grounding for the command, establishing if sons and daughters honor their parents that this command comes with a promise of

⁷⁷ J. Steven Wilkins, “Children Obey,” in *Family Practice: God’s Prescription for a Healthy Home*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 96. Observing Ephesians 6:1, J. Steven Wilkins notes, “Paul does not mention the many benefits that come to obedient children, nor does he mention the benefits parents derive from obedient children. He simply points to the ultimate reason we are to do anything—because it is right. It is God’s will that you honor your parents. Yes, great blessings come to you (and to them) when you honor them, but the primary reason to do is that God requires it.”

⁷⁸ Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 150. Liefeld observes that the submission and obedience within Ephesians is comparable to the believer’s interaction with the Lord. He states, “Therefore as 5:22 instructs wives and 6:5 instructs slaves that when they submit and obey respectively, they should do this as to the Lord, so should children.”

⁷⁹ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999) 441. Addressing what a lack of obedience reveals, O’Brien observes, “Although children’s duty to obey their parents was taken for granted in the ancient world, disobedience to parents, according to the apostle, was indicative of Gentile depravity (Rom. 1:30), or a sign of the evil of the last days (2 Tim. 3:2).”

⁸⁰ James B. Jordan, “That You May Live Long,” in *Family Practice: God’s Prescription for a Healthy Home*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 78. Establishing the expectation for children in honoring their parents, James B. Jordan defines, “Biblically speaking, honoring is the opposite of repudiating God himself states in Exodus, ‘He who curses [literally, repudiates] his father or his mother shall surely be put to death’ (Exod. 21:17). Here we see how strongly God feels about this matter. He makes wonderful promises to those who honor their parents, but those who repudiate and reject them he threatens with severe judgment.”

blessing.⁸¹ Thielman notes that Paul’s claim would not have been understood to assure health and wealth, but rather “children who took to heart the wisdom of those who cared for them had a better chance of doing well and living long than those who despised their parent’s instruction (Prov 15:5; 20:20; 30:17; cf. Prov 6:20-22; 13:1; 23:22).”⁸² If obedience to parents is wise, then the opposite is true of disobedience. Hughes concludes, “For children, for teenagers, and for collegians, there is truth here that can only be ignored to their detriment. A conscious decision to respect and obey one’s parents will change the direction of one’s young life—for the better!”⁸³ Disobedience is foolish. Obedience is wise.

However, it must be understood that Paul’s encouragement for obedience to parents is not promising physical well-being. Biblical wisdom is generally beneficial for life, as seen in proverbs, but never guarantees health, wealth, and happiness. Rather, obedience to godly parents holds eternal value.⁸⁴ Children do not receive salvation through their parents, but are pointed to Christ. Through Jesus, children receive eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. They truly “live long in the land” (Eph 6:3). Therefore, wise children will seek to obey parents who point them to Jesus.

⁸¹ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) 399. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 443. Further discussion could be had over the statement in Ephesians 6:2 that “Honor your father and mother” is the first command with a promise. The length and nature of the discussion would not benefit the overall purpose of this paper. However, looking at the reliability of Paul’s statement in the text, O’Brien and Thielman note that the natural reading of Ephesians 6:2 does not express that this is the first commandment in matter-of-importance. Instead, Frank Thielman explains that Paul would have understood “That this is the first command in the Mosaic law specifically attached to a promise.”

⁸² Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401. Thielman detailed how Paul’s words would have been an encouragement to children and families in the midst of a culture where life expectancy was low. Yet, there was great wisdom to be found in making the most of their days.

⁸³ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 196.

⁸⁴ Veith Jr. and Moerbe, *Family Vocation*, 182. The God-honoring obedience of children is a truly valuable part of the Christian home worth encouraging. Veith Jr. and Moerbe argue, “So a little boy who honors his parents—being grateful to them, doing his chores, showing them respect—is performing a greater work than the heroic exercises of monks and nuns, including those of the Carthusians, the order of hermits, with their vows of silence, their solitary isolation, and their refusal to interact with any ‘neighbors.’” Simply having obedient children is not better than true devotion to the Lord. But, their point demonstrates the great worth in children honoring the Lord by honoring God-fearing parents.

A Message to Fathers

In the same way that Paul identifies his audience in Ephesians 6:1 by addressing “children,” he begins Ephesians 6:4 by speaking to “fathers.” Before proceeding into the instruction in the rest of the verse, it is important to clarify to whom Paul is speaking and why it matters. The interpretation of his target affects the family application of this passage.

Although many translators use the word “fathers,” some scholars acknowledge the legitimacy of understanding the verse to apply to both fathers and mothers. Looking to the surrounding context, John Stott argues, “Certainly it is parents, both father and mother, who are referred to in verses 1-3, so that it is entirely legitimate for GNB to put ‘parents’ in verse 4.”⁸⁵ Because Paul just finished commanding children to obey both of their parents, it would naturally follow that he was continuing on to give instruction to both parents. However, Ptacek pushes back, “Some commentators go to considerable lengths to assert that the word ‘fathers’ in verse 4 means ‘parents.’ In reality, the structure of the passage, usage in the New Testament and the Old Testament, and the cultural context make it certain that when Paul said ‘fathers’ he meant fathers.”⁸⁶ Paul’s Spirit-inspired choice of wording was intentional and should be taken into consideration regarding application.

It is legitimate to find both options to be correct. Paul’s teaching specifically calls fathers to leadership but provides a framework parents should desire for their household. Tony Merida helpfully summarizes, “Both parents need to teach the kids. While the father bears primary responsibility for training and instruction, both share in the task of making children disciples of Jesus.”⁸⁷ Fathers and mothers must work to make their home a place that trains their children in godliness.

⁸⁵ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 245.

⁸⁶ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 36.

⁸⁷ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 151.

However, Paul’s teaching clearly places a greater weight on fathers.⁸⁸ The expectation in Roman society and Jewish culture was that fathers would take on the primary responsibility in teaching their children, particularly in religious matters.⁸⁹ Paul urges fathers to embrace their God-given role as spiritual leaders in the home.⁹⁰ As families work to develop a Christ-centered household, the father plays a unique and important role. In fact, it is his most important role.⁹¹ For the father, all other earthly obligations must become subservient to the godly upbringing of children. This is true for mothers as well, but as many men turn to work and distractions, Paul calls them to prioritize what is truly important.

Bring Them Up in the Lord

Paul’s command to parents, and particularly fathers, is delivered in the two-part structure of a negative and positive instruction. They must not provoke their children to anger. They must bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Beginning with the negative, Paul calls fathers not to provoke their children to

⁸⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit: In Marriage Home & Work—An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18-6:9* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1973), 290. Emphasizing the massive task that fathers have been given in raising godly children, Martyn Lloyd-Jones asks, “In business and in professions men are well aware of the great responsibility that rests upon them in the decisions they have to take. But are they aware of the infinitely greater responsibility they bear with respect to their own children?”

⁸⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 400. Andrew T. Lincoln details how in Roman society it was important for fathers to take over as teacher and companion to their sons in a more profound way after around seven years. Addressing Jewish culture, he added, “Within Judaism the emphasis was heavily on the religious upbringing of children, and this was seen as ultimately the responsibility of the father. Again, children were taken to school by their fathers from the age of seven, but ideally the real center of education remained the home. At the heart of the instruction was the Torah, which itself enjoined the teaching of the commandments to children.”

⁹⁰ Jay E. Adams, *Christian Living in the Home* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1972), 104. Explaining how Paul addresses the role God has given to fathers, Jay E. Adams identifies, “In addressing the fathers, he is addressing the one in whom God has vested His authority for discipline. The father is the head of the home. The father is the one who ultimately must answer to God for what happens in his home.”

⁹¹ Flavius Josephus, *Josephus: Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 610. Although Josephus is presenting a Jewish perspective, the approach to raising children would have directly impacted the parents in Christian culture. He declares, “Our ground is good, and we work it to the utmost, but our chief ambition is for the education of our children We take most pains of all with the instruction of children, and esteem the observation of the laws, and the piety corresponding with them, the most important affair of our whole life.”

anger. Addressing Paul's use of "provoke," Jay E. Adams clarifies, "The term means to take the wind out of them; to take the wind out of their sails, we'd say today. Don't take the heart out of the child."⁹² Parents must be wary of how their interaction with their children can lead them into sin or be so overbearing that they run from helpful reproof.⁹³ Ptacek concludes, "The point is this, fathers are being told that they should not provoke their children to wrath by violating God's law."⁹⁴ Paul's command is for fathers to strive to raise their children in a way that leads them to godliness and not frustration.

Turning to the positive instruction in Ephesians 6:4, parents can avoid pressing their children towards anger and wrath by bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.⁹⁵ Paul's imperative to families contains four elements that provide clarity to God's desire for Christian households. They are to bring up, discipline, and instruct their children, all in the way of the Lord.

Parents must "bring up" their children. Paul's language does not leave room for passivity. They cannot stand idly by as their children gain insight and instruction from the world around them.⁹⁶ Fathers and mothers have the responsibility to raise their children. Further, Merida posits, "The phrase 'bring them up' does not really do justice to

⁹² Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, 106.

⁹³ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 277. Lloyd-Jones urges parents to strike a balance in the way that they discipline and instruct their children. He argues that the wrathful upbringing warned about in Ephesians 6:4 can be avoided through habits of consistency, listening, fighting punishing children for selfish reasons, avoiding overly severe discipline, looking for growth and development, and keeping the goal of respect for parents in mind. He summarizes, "In other words, we must exercise the discipline in such a manner that we do not irritate our children or provoke them to a sinful resentment."

⁹⁴ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 37.

⁹⁵ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 198. Acknowledging how easy it can be for parents to turn their children towards frustration, Hughes looks to Paul's instruction and offers, "What a fragile flower a child is. He (or she) can be so easily crushed by his parents, or he (or she) can be made to blossom beyond expectation, bringing untold joy to his parents and himself. Paul provides the formula for prospering a child with his positive, concluding admonition: 'bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord' (v. 4b)."

⁹⁶ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 249. Commenting on Paul's call for parents to actively raise their children, John Stott notes, "One popular contemporary fashion is to urge parents to be totally 'non-directive' and to leave their children to find their own way. Paul is of a different mind."

the notion expressed by the verb.”⁹⁷ Paul uses the same term that he did in Ephesians 5:29 to describe how everyone cares for and feeds their own body. Benjamin L. Merkle explains, “The verb ‘bring up’ (ektrepho) was used in 5:29 to refer to the love the husband has for his own body as he ‘nourishes’ (ektrepho) and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.”⁹⁸ In the same way that an unhealthy diet paired with unhealthy habits will lead to a degenerating body, a healthy diet and healthy habits will help to promote a well-nourished life. Parents bear the responsibility of spiritually bringing their children up to maturity in the ways of the Lord, regularly pouring into them with a desire for growth.⁹⁹

Children need to be brought up in God-honoring discipline by their parents. As seen in Paul’s negative command, fathers and mothers must approach this topic carefully, or they will bring about more harm than good.¹⁰⁰ While working to avoid developing frustrated children, the English use of “discipline” can cause confusion about Paul’s intentions. Merkle again provides clarity by explaining, “The first term, ‘discipline’ (sometimes translated as ‘training’), although it can refer more specifically to chastisement, probably has the sense of comprehensive education or training.”¹⁰¹ This imperative to households in Scripture involves regular and rigorous structure and shaping. Parents must passionately work to ensure that their families are characterized by consistent discipline.

⁹⁷ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 153.

⁹⁸ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 106.

⁹⁹ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 37. Commenting on the term for “bring up” in Ephesians 6:4, Ptacek adds further context by explaining, “Although ektrepho is found only twice in the New Testament, it is used extensively in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. It can be applied to many examples of nurture, even of a plant or the ewe lamb in Nathan’s parable (2 Samuel 12:1-12), as well as child rearing. In all cases an intimate nurturing to maturity and growth is in view.”

¹⁰⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 276. Lloyd-Jones warns, “Discipline is essential and must be enforced; but the Apostle exhorts us to be very careful as to how we exercise it, because we can do more harm than good if we do not do it in the right way.”

¹⁰¹ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 106.

Comprehensive training must be paired with intentional instruction.¹⁰² Continuing after his definition of “discipline,” Merkle adds, “The second term, ‘instruction,’ refers to the training that takes place through verbal correction (i.e., exhortations, warnings, and rebukes).”¹⁰³ Once again, Paul indicates that parents must play an active role in their child’s upbringing. They cannot expect their children to learn what is right and worth following naturally. Fathers and mothers must commit to instructing them.

The terms “discipline” and “instruction” can more helpfully be understood as “education” and “warnings.” In a sense, it is the reverse of the natural English reading. However, although their original meaning carries the definition of the other term, the meaning of the command carries on. Parents must comprehensively and intentionally train and correct their children.

Paul’s final words in Ephesians 6:4 bring the passage into the Christian home. Martyn Lloyd-Jones declares, “‘Of the Lord’ is the most important addition to that phrase.”¹⁰⁴ He continues, “This is where Christian parents engaged in their duty towards their children, are in an entirely different category from all other parents.”¹⁰⁵ The command for parents is not merely to make sure that discipline and instruction take place in their household. Their discipline and instruction must be God-centered. Peter T. O’Brien sums up, “In other words, it is truly Christian instruction.”¹⁰⁶ Christian fathers

¹⁰² Paul David Tripp, *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 117. Often, parents approach their child’s holiness by making sure they follow a specific set of rules and habits. Paul David Tripp warns parents, “Notice that you are called not just to ‘discipline’ but also to instruction.” Children need both.

¹⁰³ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 106.

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 291.

¹⁰⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 291.

¹⁰⁶ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 447.

and mothers must train and guide their families according to God’s Word.¹⁰⁷ Parents, and particularly fathers, are not left to their own ideas on how to train their children.¹⁰⁸ The way they bring up their children needs to be of the Lord.¹⁰⁹

Family Worship Application

The expectation of God-centered family teaching carries over into the New Testament.¹¹⁰ Paul emphatically declares that parents have the responsibility to bring up their children in the way of the Lord. Instruction in truth is not only a local church matter but has a central role within the home.¹¹¹ Therefore, Paul’s words continue to carry forward the great weight established for godly parents throughout Scripture.

Fathers and mothers must recognize that they have specifically been given the task of training their children spiritually.¹¹² By doing so, parents lead their children in

¹⁰⁷ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 38. Commenting on Ephesians 6:4, Ptacek concludes, “Very likely the use of the Bible in the instruction of children is what Paul has in mind.” Speaking to both discipline and instruction, he adds, “In both activities, the Bible is the content for instruction.”

¹⁰⁸ Joel R. Beeke, *Bringing the Gospel to Covenant Children* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 11. Writing on Paul’s command to parents, Joel Beeke advises, “We are not to raise them according to our own ideas of nurture and admonition but according to ‘the nurture and admonition of the Lord.’ He continues, “God says that we must train our children in every respect—spiritually, morally, socially, emotionally, and physically—on His behalf and according to His Word.”

¹⁰⁹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 447. Helping with the proper application of the phrase “of the Lord,” O’Brien advises, “‘Of the Lord’ is probably a genitive of quality, indicating that the training and instruction is in the sphere of the Lord or has him as its reference point.” Presenting how this would look in the household he concludes, “Accordingly, learning Christ and being instructed in the truth that is in Jesus occur not only within the Christian community as a whole, but also and particularly within the family, coming from fathers whose lives are being shaped by this Christ-centered apostolic tradition.”

¹¹⁰ Robert L. Plummer, “Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord,” *The Journal of Family Ministry* 1, no. 1 (2010): 20. Noting that the commands to family continue throughout Scripture, Plummer remarks, “The ‘newness’ of the new covenant was found in the Messiah’s consummated work of salvation and in the regenerative work in the Spirit—not in any radical alterations in parent-child relationships.”

¹¹¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 408. Recognizing that Paul’s word indicates household instruction, Lincoln notes, “The learning Christ and being taught in him spoken of in 4:20; 21 is to be an activity that takes place not only in the Christian community in general but also specifically in the family, with the fathers as those who teach their children the apostolic tradition about Christ and help to shape their lives in accordance with it.”

¹¹² Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 292. Speaking to the critical responsibility given primarily to parents, Lloyd-Jones urges, “First and foremost, the bringing up of children ‘in the nurture and admonition of the Lord’ is something which is to be done in the home and by the parents. This is the emphasis throughout the Bible.”

way that makes the commands in Ephesians 6:2-3 worth following. By teaching faithful obedience, God can use parents to bring up a generation trained to fear the Lord.¹¹³ Christian households cannot delegate their responsibility for training to anyone else. The responsibility belongs to parents.¹¹⁴

Parents only have a limited amount of time to impact their families. Recognizing the weight of Paul's words to fathers and mothers, Hughes identifies, "The realization that we have only a brief time to raise our children gives us huge motivation to make the most of it and makes Scriptural advice about raising children pulse with importance."¹¹⁵ God-honoring parents have the opportunity to be obedient to their responsibility to and discipline and instruct the coming generations in faith. The importance of that opportunity cannot be overstated and must not be neglected.¹¹⁶ Fathers and mothers should prioritize the spiritual upbringing of their children. John MacArthur concludes, "A child can have no greater inheritance than the godly teaching and example of his parents."¹¹⁷ Parents must make the most of the days they have to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Family worship helps accomplish all that the Lord commands through Paul.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 446. God can use patterns of family worship to draw children to obedience to their heavenly Father. Parents obey the words of Scripture while longing for and trusting in the Lord to save their family. O'Brien concludes, "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."

¹¹⁴ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 248. Urging parents not to neglect their duties, John Stott encourages, "Christian parents should jealously guard their responsibility, delegating some of it indeed to both church and school, but never entirely surrendering it. It is their own God-given task; nobody can adequately or completely replace them."

¹¹⁵ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 196.

¹¹⁶ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 69. Looking at the frequent neglect of parental duty, Ptacek questions, "How is Christ our Lord if God's one New Testament instruction to fathers, in Ephesians 6:4, is ignored?"

¹¹⁷ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 314.

¹¹⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 301. Lloyd-Jones promotes family worship as a primary application of Ephesians 6:1-4. He recommends, "Have what is called a family altar, which means that once, at least, every day you should meet together as a family round the Word of God. The father as the head of the house should read a portion of Scripture and offer a simple prayer. It need not be long, but let

The consistency facilitates regular nourishment. Regular Bible-saturated content provides rich education for the family. Constantly treasuring the commands of Scripture instructs and admonishes children in godly ways. Teaching, prayer, and music guided by the Bible ensure that all elements truly come from the Lord. Parents, and particularly fathers, can lead their families faithfully by committing to regular habits of family worship. Families must see the importance of family discipleship for their children's future obedience and faithfulness and move to action. Men need to step up and lead their households in patterns of God-honoring discipline. Paul's words in Ephesians 6:1-4 direct parents to the practice of family worship.

2 Timothy 1:3-5

Family worship is biblical and possible within households that have broken family shapes. Single mothers or fathers may fear that their lot in life has left them without the option to faithfully and effectively participate in family discipleship. Additionally, families with only one Christian parent might worry that their ability to pass on faith has been nullified. Paul's second letter to Timothy begins with thanksgiving that offers hope to hurting families seeking to be faithful.

I Thank God Whom I Serve (v. 3-4)

Timothy's faith leads to rejoicing. Denny Burk presents an outline of Paul's instruction, summarizing, "Verse 3 tells us to whom Paul directs his thankfulness. Verse 4 tells us what Paul longs for as he thanks God. And verse 5 tells us the reason he thanks God. So in these three verses Paul unfolds the who, the what, and the why of his thanksgiving."¹¹⁹ Paul thanks God as he remembers and longs to see his faithful brother,

him acknowledge God and let him thank God for the Lord Jesus Christ. Let the children hear the Word of God regularly. If they ask questions about it, answer them. Give them instruction as you are able to do so. Be wise, be judicious. Do not make of it something distasteful, hateful, or boring; make it such that they will look forward to it, something they will like and in which they find delight."

¹¹⁹ Denny Burk, *2 Timothy*, In *The ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 11, *Ephesians-Philemon*,

Timothy.

Paul's thanksgiving is demonstrated through regular prayerful remembrance. He thinks back to the heartfelt bond he and Timothy shared, even recalling the tears shed for him by this beloved brother. Thinking on their friendship, Paul longs for the two to joyously be reunited.

Within his writing on brotherly affection, Paul introduces themes of family devotion. As he begins, his thanksgiving for Timothy is directed to God. Paul then immediately notes that he serves the Lord and does so with a clean conscience.¹²⁰ His life is characterized by faithfulness to the Lord. But, as he acknowledges his devotion to God, Paul mentions that his ancestors also served the Lord. He communicates his own faithfulness but also indicates that he has received an inheritance of reverence for the Lord from those who came before him.¹²¹ Paul is looking to his spiritual parents who paved the way for his obedience.¹²² As Paul notes his imitation of his ancestors, Hulitt W. Gloer concludes, "He has followed in the footsteps of his Jewish 'ancestors' and the God they worshiped and served—a statement that sets the stage for his upcoming reference to Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice."¹²³ Paul emphasizes the generational impact of faithful parents.

ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 458.

¹²⁰ Kent R. Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 183. Paul identifies that his conscience sets him apart from those who are unfaithful. Chapell connects, "Paul's clear conscience was in contrast to that of Hymenaeus and Alexander."

¹²¹ Burk, *2 Timothy*, 459. Denny Burk explains, "Paul is serving God 'as did my ancestors' (lit, 'from [my] ancestor'). He has received from his forefathers a pattern and example of faithfulness. This remarkable statement gives us a glimpse into the way Paul thinks about his Jewish forebears."

¹²² William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 468. William D. Mounce offers the simple clarification, "The word for ancestor can mean parents." Therefore, it is fair to understand Paul looking to those who came before him and shaped in the same way parents have the opportunity to shape their children today.

¹²³ Hulitt W. Gloer, *1 & 2 Timothy-Titus*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), 219.

Lois and Eunice (v. 5)

Paul then turns to Timothy's faith.¹²⁴ Timothy's devotion to the Lord is genuine and authentic.¹²⁵ His life demonstrates that he truly knows and trusts in Jesus. However, Paul does not stop and credit Timothy for his own patterns of discipline. Timothy's faith dwelt first in his mother and grandmother.

The absence of a godly father figure in Timothy's life is apparent. The passing on of religious truth, which would have primarily been the role of the male leader in a household, is attributed to two prominent women in Timothy's life. Little is mentioned of his father. In Acts 16:1, Luke writes that Timothy is "the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek." There appears to be a clear contrast between his believing mother and Greek father. Bettis argues, "While we may not know much about Timothy's father, we can certainly conclude that he was no spiritual leader. This home was deeply flawed. Nevertheless, the gospel of grace came into this brokenness through Eunice."¹²⁶ Timothy did not come to know the Lord through a godly father, but through godly women.

Timothy's sincere faith was passed down to him by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois.¹²⁷ Observing this family discipleship, Howard Hendricks observes, "The spiritual training began with a godly grandmother who communicated God's Word to her daughter, who in turn communicated truth to her son."¹²⁸ Paul notes that Timothy

¹²⁴ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018) 352. Marking the transition within the text, Robert W. Yarbrough notes, "Paul recalls not only Timothy's tears (2 Tim 1:4) but also Timothy's faith (v.5), particularly in the forms it assumed "first" in Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice."

¹²⁵ Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 42. Looking at Paul's description of Timothy's faith, Bettis explains, "Sincere is the first word that Paul used to describe the faith Timothy had seen. The Greek word literally is 'non-hypocritical.' The examples that Timothy had seen were non-hypocritical, authentic, and genuine."

¹²⁶ Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 50-51.

¹²⁷ Burk, *2 Timothy*, 459-60. Noting that Timothy's faith was not seen in his father, Burk identifies, "Timothy's father apparently was not a believer and had no Christian influence over his son (Acts 16:11). These women, however, have made their mark on Timothy."

¹²⁸ Howard G. Hendricks, *God's Blueprint for Family Living* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible,

received an inheritance of faith that first resided in the women in his life. Gloer reasons, “Timothy’s faith ‘lived first’ in Lois and Eunice. ‘Lived’ literally means ‘to be at home,’ indicating the depth and extent to which their faith had become an integral part of their lives. No doubt, Timothy had been deeply impacted by their faith.”¹²⁹ Their faith was no minor part of their life.¹³⁰ These godly women passed a true and genuine trust in Christ down to Timothy.¹³¹ They prioritized their faith and the transmission of that faith to their offspring.

Further detail on Timothy’s upbringing is clarified in 2 Timothy 3:15 as Paul urges Timothy to continue in biblical truth that he knows and reminds him, “how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Timothy’s childhood was characterized by biblical instruction. Connecting the two sections, David Michael claims, “Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:15 imply that Eunice and Lois taught their young son and grandson, and it can be assumed that it was these women of sincere faith who first acquainted Timothy with ‘the sacred writings’ that he had known from childhood.”¹³² Paul’s introduction identifies the influences in Timothy’s life, and his later statement highlights their family practices. Lois and Eunice were committed to the regular and faithful instruction of their child.¹³³ They did not merely hope that Timothy figured out

1973), 24-25.

¹²⁹ Gloer, *1 & 2 Timothy-Titus*, 221.

¹³⁰ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 2176. Explaining the sincerity of Lois and Eunice’s faith, Macdonald expresses, “Notice that faith is said to have dwelt in Lois and Eunice. It was not there as an occasional visitor, but as an abiding presence with them. Paul was persuaded that this was the case with Timothy also.”

¹³¹ Burk, *2 Timothy*, 459. Recognizing the rich faith that Lois and Eunice had left to Timothy, Burk claims, “These women have not handed to Timothy a false gospel but have passed on the true one. They have handed on no hypocritical way of life but a real one. Paul is grateful to God for the integrity of faith that Timothy inherited from his mother and grandmother.”

¹³² Michael, *Zealous*, 39.

¹³³ Tony Merida, “2 Timothy,” In *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida. Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 141. Lois and

faithfulness. Their instruction made sure that he was well-acquainted with truth.¹³⁴

Family Worship Application

Family worship is possible and fruitful within broken homes. If there is only one believing parent in the family, spiritual responsibility still falls on him or her.¹³⁵ No matter the circumstances, the call to family discipleship remains. Looking at the impact of Lois and Eunice, Gloer claims, “Timothy’s case makes it clear that both women and men are crucial to the chain of tradition.”¹³⁶ Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 6:4 places a particular responsibility on fathers and families to teach their children. However, his thanksgiving for Timothy’s faith in 2 Timothy 1:5 imparts hope to parents whose homes may not have those capabilities.

Therefore, single parents and those with unbelieving spouses must not neglect their opportunity to pass faith on to their children. Gloer notes, “Certainly the role of the family in faith formation cannot be overstated.”¹³⁷ This family impact is true of all parental figures. So, mothers and fathers who find themselves alone as a parent must still commit to bringing their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Regular family worship can be practiced by single parents.¹³⁸

Eunice’s instruction was genuinely faithful! Tony Merida states, “Before they were believers, they taught Timothy the Old Testament (3:15), but now their understanding of the Scriptures was Christ centered.”

¹³⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *Come Ye Children*, (repr., Coppel: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2020), 53. Noting that Lois and Eunice had taught Timothy the Scriptures, Charles Spurgeon claims, “This was to young Timothy one of his best safeguards. His early training held him like an anchor, and saved him from the dreadful drift of the age. Happy young man, of whom the apostle could say, ‘From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus!’”

¹³⁵ Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 175. Baucham calls parents, particularly mothers, to embrace spiritual leadership in their families by declaring, “Regardless of the extenuating circumstances, a single mother must recognize that the primary responsibility for shepherding her family lies with her.”

¹³⁶ Gloer, *1 & 2 Timothy-Titus*, 221.

¹³⁷ Gloer, *1 & 2 Timothy-Titus*, 225.

¹³⁸ Williams, *Gospel Family*, 40. Williams gives beautiful examples of single parents practicing discipleship, declaring, “I have seen a man lead his family, modeling Christ for his home, even when his wife refused to trust Jesus with her life, children, or health. I have seen a woman discipling her

However, Nancy Wilson recognizes, “Christian women today are hard-pressed to find a pattern of godly motherhood to emulate in popular culture.”¹³⁹ Isolated Christian parents struggle to find a model to follow. But, they can turn to the example of Timothy. Donald Whitney encourages, “If you are a woman in this situation, remember to ask the Lord to make you a grandmother like Lois or a mother like Eunice.”¹⁴⁰ God has provided an example of sincere faith and family discipleship in the lives and disciplines of Lois and Eunice.

Further Instruction

God’s Word points parents to their responsibility to teach the coming generation the ways of God. Lloyd-Jones concludes, “First and foremost, the bringing up of children ‘in the nurture and admonition of the Lord’ is something which is to be done in the home and by the parents. This is the emphasis throughout the Bible.”¹⁴¹ The call for family discipleship echoes throughout the pages of Scripture. Beyond the detailed passages above, the Bible regularly presents a theme of parental instruction. To demonstrate a theme of family training, Genesis 18:19, Joshua 24:15, Job 1:5, Psalm 145:4, Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 28:18-20, and 3 John 4 will be briefly discussed.

Genesis 18:19

God chose Abraham and his household to be a people identified by loving and living for the one true God. Prior to this passage, God had promised to bless Abraham and all of his descendants (Gen 12:1-3). In Genesis 18:19, God communicates that

children, pointing them to Jesus, even when her husband hid from his responsibility to shepherd the home. One woman in our church prayed for her husband’s salvation for more than 20 years. Now, they serve together, as a Christian couple, leading a local missions ministry in our church.”

¹³⁹ Nancy Wilson, “The Woman as Mother,” In *Family Practice: God’s Prescription for a Healthy Home*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2001), 53.

¹⁴⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 53.

¹⁴¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 293.

obedience is necessary “so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” If Abraham and his descendants are going to serve the Lord faithfully, the decrees of the Lord must be known by his family.¹⁴² God chose him, not merely to call him to individual obedience, but “that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice” (Gen 18:19).¹⁴³ Abraham’s role as father to his family and his people involved intentional instruction in the commands of the Lord.¹⁴⁴

Joshua 24:15

Observing the idolatrous worship in the land and the commands to fear the Lord, Joshua issues the challenge to the people of God to “choose this day whom you will serve” (Josh 24:15). Demonstrating his devotion to God, Joshua declares, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15). Donald Whitney posits, “Regular family worship of some sort would have been a part of carrying out Joshua’s resolve.”¹⁴⁵ The claim that family devotion is associated with Joshua’s charge is interesting because Joshua “has no wife, no children—not even siblings.”¹⁴⁶ Joshua is pronouncing what will be the pattern of all those who follow under his leadership. However, within that devoted people there are devoted families. Joshua was urging

¹⁴² Richard Baxter, *The Godly Home*, ed. Randall J. Pederson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010) 73. Richard Baxter argues that a New Testament example of Abraham’s family instruction is visible in the faithful practices of Lois and Eunice seen in 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:15.

¹⁴³ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1B (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 223. Noting that God’s choosing of Abraham includes household responsibilities regarding faith, Kenneth A. Mathews explains, “The consequence of Abraham’s election includes his instructions to his household to observe the ‘way of the LORD’ (*derek yhwh*)...The ‘way of the LORD’ indicates a life whose conduct conforms to the prescriptions of the Lord.”

¹⁴⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 371. Connecting the expectations of parents in Psalm 78 with teachings throughout Scripture, Calvin looks to Genesis 18:19 and claims, “Abraham knew it was a father’s duty to teach his children.”

¹⁴⁵ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 20.

¹⁴⁶ David Reimer, *Joshua*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 2, *Deuteronomy-Ruth*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 503.

families to imitate his service to the Lord. Observing Richard Baxter’s study of Joshua’s instruction, Jonathan Williams summarizes Baxter’s conclusion, “that families who serve the Lord will enjoy worshiping, praying, and praising together.”¹⁴⁷ Parents must choose who their household will serve and then act in light of that declaration.

Job 1:5

Job was a man who “was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Part of his faithfulness was seen in how seriously he took his role as family priest.¹⁴⁸ Job would regularly “rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all [his children]” (Job 1:5). He worked to make sure his children were consecrated and not left in their sin. Although the text is a bit unclear, his children might have been present for his God-honoring practice.¹⁴⁹ Job’s schedule demonstrated the priority of the holiness of his children. Further, there is evidence that his family would participate in and be impacted by his intentional leadership. Attempting to help readers picture the scene, Christopher Ash’s description follows:

We can imagine Job doing this for them one at a time: “This one is for you,” and he lights the fire, and the animal is consumed. And the son or daughter watches the holocaust and thinks, “That is what would have happened to me if there had not been a sacrifice.” And then the next one: “This one is for you.” And so on until all the children were covered by sacrifice.¹⁵⁰

He taught his offspring well through example. Job modeled family discipleship by

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 76.

¹⁴⁸ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 70. Observing the consistency of Job’s family practices, John E. Hartley expresses, “It is clear that Job took his role as the family’s priest very seriously, and this ritual of sacrifice was an expression of the entire family’s contrite attitude toward God. As priest of his family he interceded for each member lest any thought disrupt their relationship with God.”

¹⁴⁹ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 69. Convinced that Job’s children observed his sacrifices, Hartley claims, “No doubt his children were present the next day when Job, acting as the priest of his family, sacrificed burnt offerings for them.”

¹⁵⁰ Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 35.

consistent faithfulness seen in practice.

Psalm 145:4

Similar to Asaph's instruction in Psalm 78, David implies patterns of generational instruction. His language indicates that passing on faith should be a part of Christian living. Parents, who represent one generation, shall declare the mighty acts of God to another generation. Plumer translates, "Literally, generation to generation shall praise."¹⁵¹ Families declare the glorious deeds of the Lord to their children so that they will live and pass on lives of worship. Williams concludes, "The purpose of every home is to bring glory to God. This should move us to be families that worship together."¹⁵² The glory of God moves fathers and mothers to declare his greatness from generation to generation.

Proverbs 22:6

Parents are instructed that it is wise to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov 22:6). To train them, they must commit to raising their child with intentionality.¹⁵³ But that discipline must be godly. Comparable to Paul's command to teach children in ways "of the Lord" (Eph 6:4), wisdom calls fathers and mothers to train a child "in the way he should go" (Prov 22:6). Godly instruction serves families well. Children are prepared to face the trials of life and bolstered in truth that will sustain them.¹⁵⁴ A lack of biblical training gives parents no confidence for their children's future.

¹⁵¹ Plumer, *Psalms*, 1189.

¹⁵² Williams, *Gospel Family*, 15.

¹⁵³ Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (1964 repr., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 139. Commenting on the word "train," Derek Kidner details, "The stress is on parental opportunity and duty. Train means elsewhere to 'dedicate' a house (Deut. 20:5, temple (1 Kgs 8:63, etc.))"

¹⁵⁴ Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 203. Observing the surrounding context, Bruce Waltke explains, "Verse 5 implicitly admonished the youth to stay clear from the sinister road the perverse travel; now its pair implicitly admonishes the educator, especially the parent to start him on the

However, regular faithful instruction makes it more likely that the next generation will cling to their faith even in their old age.¹⁵⁵

Matthew 28:18-20

Although Jesus does not mention families in the final verses of the book of Matthew, he does stress making disciples. In fact, Chap Bettis argues, “The foundational parenting text is not Ephesians 6:1-4 or Deuteronomy 6:4-9, as important as they are, rather it is Matthew 28:18-20.”¹⁵⁶ The great commission calls Christians to go and make disciples, baptizing and teaching them. For parents, this mission starts in their homes. Fathers and mothers must labor to make disciples. Explaining the task, Daniel M. Doriani details, “The commission is to ‘make disciples,’ not talk about Jesus, preach the gospel, make converts, or start churches, although his commission assumes all of these. To make disciples is to make converts and to lead them in the arduous journey to maturity.”¹⁵⁷ Christian parents are given the duty of leading their family in discipleship so that their children would know and treasure the Lord.

3 John 4

John repeatedly refers to Christians in his letters as “little children” (1 John 2:1, 12-14, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21; 2 John 1, 4; 3 John 4). Believers are portrayed as those who need guidance and instruction as they continue to grow. In his third letter, John rejoices at the demonstrated faith of the growing Christians (3 John 3). Watching his spiritual offspring live godly lives, John declares, “I have no greater joy than to hear that

right way to steer him clear of danger.”

¹⁵⁵ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 69. Ptacek argues that if families practiced regular times of family worship, Proverbs 22:6 would be closer to a promise. This claim is helpful to motivate families to equip their children well, but also dangerous, as it places hope on works rather than the regenerative work of the Lord.

¹⁵⁶ Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, in *The ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew-Luke*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 442.

my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4). The most important news that he could hear about his children is that they are living out their faith. John was specifically speaking about Christians, and particularly Gaius, but his parental affection is helpful for fathers and mothers. As John desired to see believers remaining steadfast, parents should have no greater joy than to see their children walking in truth.¹⁵⁸ However, it is difficult for children to walk down a path they have never been shown. Regular family discipleship will help fathers and mothers see their offspring standing firm in their faith.

Salvation Belongs to the Lord

Doctrinal clarity protects parents from unnecessary grief and frustration. Although God clearly commands family discipleship in his Word, adherence to those practices does not guarantee the salvation of children. The belief that parents could save their sons and daughters through the observance of family worship would be placing hope in works. God alone saves through the work of Jesus Christ applied by the Spirit, according to the plan of the Father. God may use the teaching of his Word by a faithful mother to draw a child to him. The Spirit may bring a daughter to repentance and salvation as she observes the passionate prayers of her father. Songs of praise may be used by the Lord to make the gospel of Jesus Christ clear to a wayward son. Family worship involves participation in beneficial and commanded practices. So, there is blessing that comes with Scripture intake, prayer, and praise. But, salvation always and only belongs to the Lord.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Parent’s and Pastor’s Joy,” Sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on December 21, 1873, Spurgeon Gems, accessed September 23, 2021. <http://spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1148.pdf/>. Speaking on 3 John 4 to parents, Spurgeon challenged, “When a man’s heart is really right God and he, himself, has been saved from the wrath to come and is living in the light of his heavenly father’s countenance, it is certain that he is anxious about his children’s souls, prizes their immortal natures and feels that nothing could give him greater joy than to hear that his children walk in the Truth of God. Judge yourselves, then, Beloved, this morning, by the gentle but searching test of the text. If you are professing Christians, but cannot say that you have no greater joy than the conversion of your children, you have reason to question whether you ought to have made such a profession at all!”

¹⁵⁹ Phil A. Newton, *40 Questions about Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic,

Conclusion

Scripture teaches that parents should love God and lead their children to do the same. Andres Köstenberger asserts, “God’s express will for his people Israel is still his will for God’s people in the church today. Christian parents have the mandate and serious obligation to instill their religious heritage in their children.”¹⁶⁰ Fathers and mothers must seize every opportunity to teach their offspring with regularity. Generational faith should be prioritized and promoted through the declaration of the glorious deeds of God. Parents, and particularly fathers, have the responsibility to bring up their children in the way of the Lord. Yet, if a household does not have two believing parents, the faithful father or mother can lead effectively and with hope. The whole narrative of Scripture points to parents as the primary disciple-makers in the lives of their children. The message of the Bible to families pleads for practices of family discipleship. Regular family worship helps families be obedient to God’s Word and establish generational patterns of trust in the Lord.

2021), 88-89. Addressing the benefits of intentional family discipleship, Phil A. Newton offers a final doctrinally-rich encouragement by explaining, “Does that mean if you have children, all will become Christians? We don’t know. That’s a sovereign work of God. But it does mean that by God’s wisdom in the gospel, understanding in its outworking and the amplification through knowledge of gospel truth, you’ve laid a solid foundation for their lives.”

¹⁶⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger with David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 100.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORY, MODERN PRACTICE, BENEFIT AND NEED OF FAMILY WORSHIP

Considering that regular family worship is a faithful application of biblical principles, it would follow that consistent practice within households would be immensely beneficial. Families throughout history demonstrated a pattern that placed a high value on family discipleship. Spiritually healthy churches and families taught and practiced family worship.¹ However, there were ups and downs in the widespread embrace of these practices that are presently in an alarming decline. Despite the biblical mandate and overwhelming benefit of family worship, it is rarely taught in pulpits or applied by parents in their homes. This chapter will trace the history of family worship, the present family patterns, and evaluate the benefit of family worship, all to argue for its present need.

The History of Family Worship

The difficulty for the modern church is getting its members to see that a lack of family worship is not the norm but an anomaly. It is easy for believers to see the validity and structure of personal and congregational worship as they learn from the present models and teachings in their local church. However, the practice of family worship is an area that is left a mystery for modern parents. This was not the case in the past. Jason Helopoulos identifies, “In the history of the church and the history of God’s people in

¹ Ken Coley and Blair Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship* (Nashville: Randall House, 2021), 19. Ken Coley and Blair Robinson look to the past to encourage readers that, “Faithful pastors, fathers, and mothers throughout church history have provided powerful testimony of ministry in the home for us to consider today.” The family discipleship practices of history provide a valuable example for parents today.

Scripture, there have always been three clearly defined spheres of worship: secret worship, corporate worship, and family worship.”² Family worship was a part of the Christian life. Building their practices out of the biblical mandates for parents, the upbringing of children in the faith was centered in the home. Kerry Ptacek succinctly concludes, “Family Worship is a historical reality.”³ Therefore, the modern church should seek to recapture healthy practical theology by looking to the family ministry of the past.

The Early Church

Patterns of family discipleship were evident within the early church. Although what was practiced would not have been the exact structure of family worship emphasized in this project, the first generations that sought to apply the words of Scripture to their family did so through leading them in regular patterns of discipline. Although the records are not as frequent and clear as later periods, the evidence is still present.⁴ Ignatius wrote on Ephesians 6:4, explaining the application to be that fathers must teach their families the ways of the Bible.⁵ Tertullian identified couples worshipping together through Scripture and singing.⁶ Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian

² Jason Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 21-22.

³ Kerry Ptacek, *Family Worship: Biblical Basis, Historical Reality, Current Need* (Birmingham, AL: Covenant Family Fellowship), 5.

⁴ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 46. Acknowledging what can appear to be a lack of evidence, Ptacek posits, “It is likely that Biblical patterns of family worship persisted without publicity in isolated areas of ‘Christendom.’” This statement is especially relevant to the discussion of the early church. The pieces of evidence that we do have are likely indicators of a greater practice.

⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, “Epistle to the Philadelphians,” In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 81. Ignatius comments, “Fathers ‘bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;’ and teach them the holy Scriptures, and also trades, that they may not indulge in idleness. Now [the Scripture says] says ‘A righteous father educates [his children] well; his heart shall rejoice in a wise son.’”

⁶ Tertullian, quoted in Phillip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 20-21. Tertullian writes, “What a union of two believers—one hope, one vow, one discipline, and one worship! They are brother and sister, two fellow-servants, one spirit and one flesh. Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit. They pray together, fast together, instruct, exhort, and support each other. They go together to the church of God, and to the table of the Lord. They share each other’s tribulation, persecution, and revival. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids, neither annoys the other. They delight to visit the sick, supply the needy, give alms without restraint, and in

recommended that families, referring to children being involved as well, begin their mornings and evenings in prayer.⁷ Observing the work of John Chrysostom, Phillip Schaff notes, “Chrysostom urged that every house should be a church, and every head of a family a spiritual shepherd, remembering the account which he must give even for his children and servants.”⁸ Schaff is identifying that the language used by Chrysostom carries some of the same tone and direction as that of later teachings on family training and instruction. The practice was present. Although it was not always practiced helpfully, the leaders of the early church saw that family discipleship should be a priority in the Christian life.⁹

The Middle Ages

Following the years of the Early Church, family discipleship saw a decline. Several factors contributed. Celibacy became associated with piety, diminishing the value of family.¹⁰ Additionally, literacy grew less common, so the ability to take up and read was rarely available. Further, Christian instruction and understanding was primarily handed over to trained clergy. Family discipleship waned. As a result, “No major

daily zeal lay up their offerings before the altar without scruple or hindrance . . . Psalms and hymns they sing together, and they vie with each other in singing to God. Christ rejoices when he sees and hears this. He gives them his peace. Where two are together in his name, there he is; and where he is, there the evil one cannot come.”

⁷ Jonathan Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship: Richard Baxter’s Timeless Encouragement for Today’s Home* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 59. Looking to Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian as part of Richard Baxter’s own development of theology, Williams identifies, “Examples from both Scripture and early church life strengthen Baxter’s view that Christian families have opportunities for praying together.”

⁸ Phillip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, vol 3, (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 545.

⁹ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 40-41. Ptacek identifies that many families were so zealous for family discipleship that they would take commands to rise morning and evening literally, waking their families up at midnight to read, pray, and sing together, or some would bring home elements from the Lord’s Supper to practice with their family.

¹⁰ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 41-46. Ptacek helpfully traces the decline in family discipleship that preceded the Reformation, identifying that the rise in the prioritization of celibacy began to hurt family ministry. If being celibate was righteous, then raising a family was a less righteous endeavor, so the practices of family discipleship saw a decline in prominence and importance.

medieval theologians seem to have produced any works exclusively devoted to the subject of spiritual training in the context of family.”¹¹ However, despite the dampened outlook on family discipleship, voices continued to urge church leaders and parents forward in faithfulness. Thomas Aquinas produced catechetical material that encouraged local church instruction for youth. Jean Gerson created a resource for churches and families as he sought to bridge the gap between church liturgy and at-home training. Caesarius and other local church leaders, such as John Bromyard, urged parents to teach doctrinal statements and prayers to their children so that future generations would know the Lord. Although the priority of family had lessened amongst Christians, patterns of family discipleship continued.¹²

The Reformation

The Middle Ages saw family discipleship reduced to an ember. However, tracing the history of family worship, J. H. Merle D’Aubigne notes, “If we leave the humble dwellings of the primitive Christians, it is true that we shall find the practice of family worship becomes less and less frequent; but how gloriously it reappears at the epoch of the Reformation!”¹³ Family discipleship erupted back into prominence during the Reformation. Ptacek claims, “Family worship was a natural development of the Reformation and in a sense its precondition, if understood as present in family Bible reading. The revival of family worship in the Reformation should be located in that most important cause of the Reformation in general: the dissemination of the Bible to ordinary

¹¹ C. Michael Wren Jr., “Among Your Company at Home: Family Discipleship in Late Ancient and Medieval Households,” 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), 105.

¹² Wren, “Among Your Company at Home,” 101-114. C. Michael Wren Jr. explains the decline of family ministry, acknowledges the absence of many works on family discipleship, but identifies that the emphasis was still present throughout the Middle Ages. He helpfully summarizes the work of Thomas Aquinas, Jean Gerson, Caesarius, and John Bromyard and their impact on the church during that period.

¹³ J. H. Merle D’Aubigne, *Family Worship* (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2001), chap. 1.

people.”¹⁴ The return to Scripture brought about a return to family worship. Connecting the two, Coley and Robinson assert, “When Scripture returned to the hands of individuals in the congregation, family worship began once again to flourish in the home.”¹⁵ Martin Luther, capturing the voice of the reformers, urged families to keep their homes filled with the Word of God.¹⁶ J. W. Alexander concluded, “Family Worship in its fullness was coeval with the first reformation period.”¹⁷ Church leaders once again treasured family devotion and emphasized the importance of parental leadership.¹⁸

The Puritans

Building off of the patterns of the reformers, family worship experienced its greatest period of growth and clarity among the Puritans.¹⁹ Looking to Scripture and regaining the importance of secret, corporate, and family worship, puritans believed, “The advance of godliness requires the biblical observance of all aspects of worship.”²⁰ These practices were established on the understanding that the primary purpose of the family was to bring glory to God.²¹ So, the best way to glorify God in the family was to make much of God within family practices.

¹⁴ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 46.

¹⁵ Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 22.

¹⁶ Donald Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 30. Whitney describes Martin Luther as a busy pastor who recognized, prioritized, and spoke of the need for family discipleship.

¹⁷ James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 9.

¹⁸ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 8. Recognizing the care of the reformers for the family, Alexander concludes, “Whatever may be the practice of their degenerate sons, the early reformers are universally known to have set great value on family devotion.”

¹⁹ Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 28. Noting the difference between the puritans and the decline of family practices before the reformation, Coley and Robinson express, “As the Catholic Church concealed knowledge of the gospel and the Scriptures, the Puritans responded by educating and training their households, which essentially served as the very antithesis to the Catholic Church.”

²⁰ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 48.

²¹ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 73.

Family worship was a biblical and cultural stronghold for the Puritans. Coley and Robinson summarize as follows: “Puritans were adamant of the practice of family worship in the home for two primary reasons: 1) it was a command and blessing to the households of God’s people according to the Word of God, and 2) it was a direct response to the secular assaults experienced by families of the day.”²² Their two-point summary of the Puritan approach is helpful for the modern church. A return to Scripture should point families to devotion. Further, family worship is a helpful response to the attack on families today.²³ Joel Beeke notes, “The more their public efforts to purify the church were crushed, the more the Puritans turned to the home as a bastion for religious instruction and influence.”²⁴ The response of the church was not to adapt to cultural norms and abandon the family, but rather to strengthen the church by strengthening the family.

These beliefs began to take form in writing as the development of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the London Baptist Confessions, and the Directory of Family Worship included clarity on the subject of family worship. The Westminster Confession of Faith states, “God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself.”²⁵ The chosen language implies the importance and necessity of the practice. The Puritans believed that a lack of family worship could serve as “evidence of an unconverted life.”²⁶ Alexander notes, “The

²² Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 26.

²³ Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 73. Looking to the perseverance and devotion of the puritans, Leland Ryken concludes, “The age of the Puritans was no stranger to societal assaults on the Christian family-Faced with the same pressures that confront us today, the Puritans formulated a theory of the family that offers some attractive possibilities to our own age.”

²⁴ Joel Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017), 65.

²⁵ “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” 21.6, Ligonier Ministries, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith/>.

²⁶ Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism*, 66.

faithfulness of private Christians, in regard to this duty, was made a matter of inquiry by church courts.”²⁷ Both the Westminster Confession and the Directory of Family Worship emphasize that fathers should be held accountable if not practicing family devotion. Not only was family worship present and important in history, but it was also guarded with church discipline. If family discipleship was absent from the home, it was seen as evidence that the parents, and the father in particular, did not truly value the Lord, or they would be diligently teaching his Word to their children.²⁸

Although the London Baptist Confessions do not include a specific section on family worship, it is implied. However, the preface of the Second London Baptist Confession warns, “And verily there is one spring and cause of the decay of religion in our day, which we cannot but touch upon, and earnestly urge a redress of; and that is the neglect of the worship of God in families, by those whom the charge and conduct of them is committed.”²⁹ Family worship was seen to be profoundly important.

The work of the Puritans also provides clarity regarding the way family worship is to be practiced. Houses, similar to the teaching of Chrysostom, were to be as little churches.³⁰ Within their homes, “Daily and indeed twice daily, the Puritans recommended, the family should hear the word read, and pray to God.”³¹ Additionally,

²⁷ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 10.

²⁸ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 48. Explaining the practice of church discipline in relation to family worship, Ptacek describes, “In the event that any families were found negligent in practicing family worship, responsibility was placed directly on the shoulders of the head of the family. If first a private warning, and second a meeting with the session did not correct this problem, he would be barred from taking part in the Lord’s Supper. That such discipline was envisioned is a token of how widespread family worship was among the Scottish Presbyterians. If such discipline were undertaken today, few men would be present on communion Sunday.”

²⁹ “The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith,” The 1689 Confession, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.the1689confession.com/>.

³⁰ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 65-70. Williams details how several puritans saw the family as a church in the home and how the thought remains helpful for practical theology despite the disagreement from theological leaders today over the use of the term “church.”

³¹ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 255.

catechism was elevated as a beneficial and faithful way of worshipping the Lord and preparing family members to stand on truth.³² General obedience in family discipleship was refined into clear practices. Families were to regularly gather under the Word through reading, praying, and singing, as well as be bolstered by clear catechism.

Two of the voices that captured the Puritan view of family worship were Richard Baxter and Matthew Henry. Baxter devoted his life to equipping saints to glorify the Lord and did so by emphasizing the importance of a godly home. In his view, family worship was an essential and attainable element of a faithful household.³³ He believed that the call to family discipleship was evident throughout Scripture, calling families to a high standard of child-rearing.³⁴ In his work on the subject, he interacts with over fifty passages of Scripture, “demonstrating that it is not an insignificant discipline or minor theme of Scripture.”³⁵ To Baxter, family devotion was a vital practice.³⁶

Baxter was so moved by biblical evidence, his father’s example, and conviction of the importance of family worship that he would devote hours to teaching the subject.³⁷ Williams explains, “Baxter’s conviction that family worship is God’s will

³² C. Jeffrey Robinson Sr., “The Home Is an Earthly Kingdom,” 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), 124. Jeffrey Robinson observes that Puritan efforts led to a “golden age of catechisms and devotional works designed to be used in the teaching of children and in family worship.”

³³ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 25-26. Williams explains, “At the heart of Baxter’s encouragement for family worship is his belief that family worship is God’s will for the home and that families are blessed with many occasions for worshipping together.”

³⁴ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 25. Williams describes Baxter’s biblical conviction by stating, “Baxter saw a call for family worship woven throughout Scripture. He did not believe it was a topic dealt with infrequently, with only a few supporting verses sprinkled throughout the Bible. Instead, Baxter understood that the Word of God provides a robust defense of family worship, championing this discipline time and time again. He was driven by his conviction that the Bible not only commanded it but also offered numerous examples of families practicing such in their homes.”

³⁵ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 2.

³⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Godly Home*, ed. Randall J. Pederson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 119. Baxter argues, “The proof is undeniable: God appoints parents to teach their children the doctrine of his Holy Word before they come to the public ministry. Thus, parents’ teaching is the first teaching; and parents’ teaching is for this end, as well as public teaching, even to cause faith, love, and holiness.”

³⁷ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 17. The faithful practices of his father

led him to equip families through preaching, home visits, catechesis, church discipline, and counseling.”³⁸ Home visits would involve regularly traveling with his assistant during the week to privately sit with, observe, and coach families on their practice of family worship.³⁹ His personal investment had a dramatic impact on the habits of the people. Joel Beeke captures God’s blessing on Baxter’s endeavors by noting, “When Baxter came to Kidderminster, scarcely one family on each street among the 800 families honored God in family worship. By the end of his ministry, there were streets on which every family did so.”⁴⁰ Baxter was convinced of the biblical significance of family worship and its importance for strengthening the church and moved to action. Observing Baxter’s life and ministry, Jonathan Williams encourages the modern church to follow his example: “While Baxter’s culture and ours prove widely different, the biblical mission to lead our families in family worship has never changed. It is a call that reaches every generation, for family worship is a timeless discipline. It blessed the families in Baxter’s church, and it continues to bless families today.”⁴¹ Richard Baxter embodied the Puritan desire for family devotion, living as an inspiring model for families today.

Matthew Henry likewise believed and taught that the family was where true spiritual reformation must be prioritized.⁴² He continued to press into the imagery of the

influenced Baxter himself. Noting how family discipleship shaped Baxter’s own life, Williams observes, “Baxter’s father introduced Richard to the Scriptures, encouraging him to read the historical books of the Bible. While he did not initially understand the doctrine he was reading, it did acquaint him with a love for God’s Word from an early age.”

³⁸ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 83.

³⁹ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 89. Describing Baxter’s home visits, Williams summarizes, “Baxter and his assistant invested two days, Monday and Tuesday, in privately catechizing fifteen to sixteen families every week of the year.”

⁴⁰ Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 64.

⁴¹ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 7.

⁴² Matthew Henry, *A Church in the House* (Shawnee, KS: Gideon House, 2015), 2. Matthew Henry claims, “Now I know not any thing that will contribute more to the furtherance of this good work than the bringing of *family religion* more into practice and reputation. Here the reformation must begin. Other methods may check the disease we complain of, but this, if it might universally obtain, would cure

houses of believers as family churches. Henry was not making an ecclesiological claim but rather urging that homes be filled with the Word of the Lord. He charges parents with the following:

Keep up *family doctrine*. It is not enough that you and yours profess to own the truth as it is in Jesus; care must be taken and means used that you and yours be well acquainted with that truth, and that you grow in that acquaintance, to the honor of Christ and his holy religion, and the improvement of your own minds, and theirs who are under your charge.⁴³

To the Puritans, as voiced by Henry, it was not enough for parents to simply know the truth of the gospel themselves. They must use the means available to them to promote family religion. Therefore, he urges, “Keep up family worship.”⁴⁴ Henry saw the regular practice of reading, praying, and singing to be of immense benefit to the individual and the church. He set out to encourage families to see their ability to serve the Lord and to return to family worship or begin the practice for the first time.⁴⁵ The Puritans championed and strengthened the church’s efforts towards family discipleship.

Early America

Family worship continued to be a part of the church through the transition to the Americas.⁴⁶ As the Christian faith faced opposition, “The revival of family worship was a key strategy in the Great Awakening.”⁴⁷ If Christianity was going to be revived, the efforts within the home must increase. Jonathan Edwards championed this belief, urging

it.”

⁴³ Henry, *A Church in the House*, 5-6.

⁴⁴ Henry, *A Church in the House*, 10.

⁴⁵ Henry, *A Church in the House*, 27-28. Henry urges, “Let those who have kept up family-worship formerly, but of late have left it off, *be persuaded to revive it*.” Further, he encourages, “Let those who are *remiss and negligent* in their family-worship be awakened to more zeal and constancy.”

⁴⁶ Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 26. Observing that these efforts to maintain family worship were built off of the work of the early church and the reformers, Coley and Robinson conclude, “For Baptists, these family worship convictions survived through the seventeenth century, and were established across the colonization of America.”

⁴⁷ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 54

the return to the Puritan ideals of a church in the house.⁴⁸ Ptacek notes, “Edwards held such a high view of family religion in part because he believed that it was one of the ‘chief means of grace,’ without which ‘all other means are likely to prove ineffectual.’ He asserted that the heads of families must instruct and admonish their children lest the curse on Eli fall on them.”⁴⁹ Similarly, George Whitefield preached on the great duty that Christian parents hold to bring up their children in the instruction of the Lord.⁵⁰ Family discipleship was viewed as an important mercy of the Lord for his people.

The Directory for Family Worship continued to be a directing text but received editing in 1788 to accommodate the changing trajectory of the church. Of greatest importance, matters of church discipline were removed from the document.⁵¹ Family worship was still explained and encouraged, but the seriousness to which it was upheld was dwindling.

Penning an important work on the subject in the mid-1800s, J.W. Alexander published his *Thoughts on Family Worship*. He believed that the practice of family worship was vitally important for the health of the church. Alexander claims, “From what has been said, it is manifest that the universal voice of the Church in its best periods has been in favor of family worship.”⁵² His argument is that the church has seen its greatest

⁴⁸ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 55. Ptacek details, “In a ‘Farewell Sermon’ fifteen years after the Great Awakening, Edwards reminded his former congregation how he had emphasized the Puritan ideal that every family should be ‘a little church.’”

⁴⁹ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 55.

⁵⁰ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 73. Impacted by the family ministry teaching of George Whitefield, Baucham argues, “One of the most persuasive arguments for family worship I’ve ever encountered is that of George Whitefield in his sermon “The Great Duty of Family Religion.”

⁵¹ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 55. Addressing the editing of the Directory for Family Worship, Ptacek explains, “Perhaps the most significant difference that resulted from the editing involves the matter of discipline. The Church of Scotland required that elders in their regular visitation of the homes of the church make inquiries about family worship. If found to be negligent in this practice, the head of the household was held accountable and was subject to discipline. The Synod of Philadelphia also spoke of family worship in connection with pastoral visitation. However, the 1788 ‘Directory for Secret and Family Worship’ does not mention discipline or visitation.”

⁵² Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 14. Alexander continues, “The reason for this has

strength during times when family devotion has been prioritized. Alexander builds his case by presenting the numerous benefits of family worship, detailing how a family's commitment to the practice, through the Lord's work, will serve to strengthen the children, parents, local church, and universal church. He saw family worship to be the best setting for teaching children the Bible as well as preparing them to resist doctrinal decline.⁵³

Alexander's sentiments were echoed by other voices in the coming years who championed the patterns of history. Arthur Pink urged families not to ignore the gift and duty of family worship.⁵⁴ Continuing the teaching of the Puritans, Charles Spurgeon encourages, "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."⁵⁵ In his missionary endeavors, John Paton wrote of the converted members of a tribe naturally moving forward and being sanctified in their faith towards a

also become apparent. It is a service due to God, in regard to His bountiful and gracious relation to families as such, rendered necessary by the wants, temptations, dangers, and sins of the family state; it in the highest degree fit and right from the facilities afforded for maintaining it by the very condition of every household."

⁵³ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 60-61. Commenting on Alexander's work, Ptacek notes, "Alexander would agree with Richard Baxter that family instruction is the best setting for teaching the Bible to children." He adds, "Alexander considered family worship as the best method for resisting doctrinal decline."

⁵⁴ Arthur W. Pink, "Family Worship," in *A Theology of The Family: Five Centuries of Biblical Wisdom for Family Life*, ed. Jeff Pollard and Scott T. Brown (Wake Forest, NC: The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, 2014), 47. Arthur W. Pink charges, "It is not enough that we pray as private individuals in our closets; we are required to honor God in our families as well. At least twice each day, in the morning and in the evening the whole household should be gathered together to bow before the Lord—parents and children, master and servant to confess their sins, to give thanks for God's mercies, to seek His help and blessing. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with this duty: all other domestic arrangements are to bend to it. The head of the house is the one to lead the devotions, but if he be absent, or seriously ill, or an unbeliever, then the wife would take his place. Under no circumstances should family worship be omitted. If we would enjoy the blessing of God upon our family, then let its members gather together daily for praise and prayer. 'Them that honour Me I will honour' is His promise."

⁵⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Happy Duty of Daily Praise," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 32, repr. (Pasadena: Pilgrim, 1986), 64.

practice of a form of family worship in the morning and evening.⁵⁶

Family discipleship continued as a priority within the church in America. Ptacek explains, “However, family worship was not merely a transplanted practice. For Reformed people it became a focus of their strategy for spiritual revival under the conditions of the American frontier.”⁵⁷ Family worship was viewed as important for the bolstering and spreading of Christianity. Further, Ptacek notes, “Even without church discipline family worship persisted due to the preaching of individual pastors and the traditions of Reformed families in the new nation.”⁵⁸ Without the accountability of church discipline, the maintenance of family worship rested on the faithful teaching of pastors and generational practices of God-fearing families.

However, these efforts would not be enough. Family worship was present in church history but never perfectly followed. As church discipline faded, the signs of the decay of family religion began to spread throughout the establishment of faith in the Americas. Ptacek observes, “Despite this evidence of the persistence and even thriving of family worship in the early decades of the 19th century, by the middle of the century there were already signs of its decline.”⁵⁹ The spiritual leaders of the time sought to address this trend. Alexander’s work was a plea for families to see the benefit of family worship and return.⁶⁰ Spurgeon’s words warned of the neglect of family worship and its

⁵⁶ John G. Paton, “Heathens and Christians,” in *A Theology of The Family: Five Centuries of Biblical Wisdom for Family Life*, ed. Jeff Pollard and Scott T. Brown (Wake Forest, NC: The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, 2014), 102. John G. Paton describes, “The next step, and it was taken in a manner as if by some common consent that was not less surprising than joyful, was a form of Family Worship every morning and evening. Doubtless the prayers were often very queer, and mixed up with many remaining superstitions; but they were prayers to the great Jehovah, the compassionate Father, the Invisible One—no longer to gods of stone!”

⁵⁷ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 54.

⁵⁸ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 56.

⁵⁹ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 57.

⁶⁰ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 61-62. Noting the decline in family practices, Ptacek explains, “Indeed, family worship and biblical orthodoxy declined together in the century after Alexander wrote his book.” He adds, “By 1847 J. W. Alexander had detected a decline in the practice of Presbyterian men leading their families in worship. In a century family worship would be only a memory among

impact.⁶¹ Unfortunately, a dramatic disappearance of family discipleship had already begun.

Before addressing the decline of family worship, it is crucial to recognize the presence of family discipleship practices throughout church history. Thompson concludes, “The idea that fathers and mothers should be the primary agents of discipleship in the lives of their children is hardly a ‘new and creative norm.’ It is a scriptural and historical norm.”⁶² Baucham agrees, adding, “The common understanding seems to be that children can be disciplined only by sophisticated programs led by persons having years of training. However, this is a far cry from the biblical and the historical model.”⁶³ Parents serving as the primary disciple-makers in the lives of their children was the historical model. Further, that model was manifested, taught, and practiced through families regularly reading, praying, and singing together. The historic position of the church held family discipleship practices as biblically faithful and God-honoring parts of a Christian parent’s life.

The Modern Practice of Family Worship

As the church pressed on into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the practice of family worship began to fade away once again. Changes in culture and church practice paved the way for a reshaping of the Christian family. Shifts in how churches

Presbyterians. In recent years it has not even been a memory.”

⁶¹ C. H. Spurgeon, quoted in *A Theology of The Family: Five Centuries of Biblical Wisdom for Family Life*, ed. Jeff Pollard and Scott T. Brown (Wake Forest, NC: The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, 2014), 103. Spurgeon encourages and warns, “Happy is the household which meets every morning for prayer! Happy are they who let not the evening depart without uniting in supplication! Brethren, I wish it were more common, I wish it were universal, with all professors of religion to have family prayer. We sometimes hear of the children of Christian parents who do not grow up in the fear of God, and we are asked how it is that they turn out so badly. In many, very many cases, I fear there is such a neglect of Family Worship that it is not probable that the children are at all impressed by any piety supposed to be possessed by their parents.”

⁶² Tad Thompson, *Intentional Parenting: Family Discipleship by Design* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 10.

⁶³ Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 63.

taught and equipped families led to less preparedness. Improvements in technology and vocational expectations provided the backdrop for diminished parental involvement. Tragically, the last century has created a steady decline in the practice of family worship that has led to a generation that rarely, if ever, participates in a tradition that once was vitally important in the life of the church.

The Start of a New Decline

A primary cause in the decline of family worship was a shift in the understanding of parents, and particularly fathers, as the primary disciple-makers in the life of their children. Prior, Scripture and tradition had been utilized to maintain the understanding that parents were to play the central role in the spiritual education of their families. However, modern innovation began pushing the responsibility outside of the home.

One of the often-cited factors in the decline of family discipleship is the rise of Sunday School.⁶⁴ Tracing the decline of family worship practices, Terry Johnson recounts, “During the 19th century, as Sunday Schools began to be introduced in North America, resistance was encountered in a number of traditional Presbyterian churches. Their argument? That as the Sunday School was established, it would result in parental neglect of their responsibility for the spiritual training of their children.”⁶⁵ Living through the shift, L. J. Wilson adds, “On Sabbath morning they are hurried off to Sunday-school where the teacher strives for thirty to forty minutes to teach them lessons they ought to

⁶⁴ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 62. A healthy look at the practice and impact of programs like Sunday School would greatly benefit local churches. Ptacek asserts, “Among the possible causes for the decline of family worship among Presbyterians, one was advanced in the 19th century that should shock evangelicals today: Sunday School.” His sentiment is helpful. Sunday School being in a list of potential causes of a decline in a biblically faithful practice is shocking. If his assertion is correct (which research appears to indicate it is), then families and church leadership should seek to reevaluate how they are teaching and equipping children and families.

⁶⁵ Terry L. Johnson, *The Family Worship Book: A Resource for Family Devotions* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009), 8.

have been taught at home during the week. And this is all the religious instruction the little ones get. What will be the effect upon the coming generation? It is a sad subject to contemplate.”⁶⁶ Parents recognized that they take their children to the provided resources of the church for regular spiritual instruction. Their children were being taught, so they felt no need to do the training themselves.⁶⁷ As these patterns grew in prominence and acceptance, Ptacek notes, “By the end of the 19th century a denomination which had led in family worship and instruction had come to treat the family as an auxiliary to a non-Biblical institution, the Sunday School.”⁶⁸ Family discipleship sat behind church programming. The resistance to Sunday School had rightly predicted the results.

However, it must be stated that Sunday School in itself is not a problem. Importantly, Sunday School was not developed with the intention of replacing the family. In fact, the programming came about to help provide the spiritual education that family discipleship brings to children who did not have the ability to receive that teaching at home. Losing sight of that goal could cause problems.⁶⁹ Addressing the misuse of Sunday School as a replacement for family discipleship, B. M. Smith charges:

The work of religious instruction in the family derives great aid from well conducted Sabbath-schools. These schools are not designed to be substitutes for home teaching, when parents are capable of performing their duties. That too many misuse them, has led some to depreciate their value. But this is wrong. Rather let the

⁶⁶ L. J. Wilson, *History of a Southern Presbyterian Family* (Madison, WI: Whittet & Shepherdson, 1900), 102, quoted in Kerry Ptacek, *Family Worship: Biblical Basis, Historical Reality, Current Need* (Birmingham, AL: Covenant Family Fellowship, 1994), 65.

⁶⁷ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 64. Commenting on the result of the relationship between parents and Sunday School, Ptacek summarizes, “Family practices declined as parents failed to combine their home duties with Sunday School.” They simply chose one or the other, leaning towards the option that was easier for them.

⁶⁸ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 65.

⁶⁹ Ernest Price Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South: 1607-1861* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963) 465. The Nashville Synod of the Presbyterian Church in 1854 notes the benefit of Sunday School outreach while recognizing the danger of the option being abused to take the place of family practice and warns, “...and we might also regret that they are not confined more closely to those limits. The result of schools in churches is often, though not necessarily so, that the old plan of catechetical instruction by parents has been almost entirely discontinued.”

fault of parents be checked.⁷⁰

Sunday School was intended to be a helpful resource to those in need and a useful supplement to household practices. The mishandling rested on the shoulders of the parents for neglecting their duty and the church for supporting their actions rather than upholding the discipline patterns of the past. Ptacek concludes, “Therefore, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that sin was the ultimate motive; the desire to be ‘morally’ freed of a responsibility.”⁷¹ Rather than cooperating with the church to aid the coming generations, parents began to give away their biblical assignment to spiritually prepare their families.

As programs became the pattern, more options rose that continued to move regular family discipleship outside of the historical norm.⁷² The rise in adolescents who were struggling with their faith was addressed by the rise of student ministry.⁷³ Expressing his concern with the increase of student ministry, Smith laments, “Far from the notion that the fathers should be the teachers of their children, ‘older children’ now could be employed in teaching the younger children.”⁷⁴ Women no longer experienced the regular benefit of family worship and were left to seek spiritual nourishment completely outside of the home. Ptacek observes, “The same period that witnessed the rise of church programs for children who were no longer part of family worship and

⁷⁰ B. M. Smith, *Family Religion, or The Domestic Relations as Regarded by Christian Principles* (1899; repr., Greenville, SC: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1991), 186.

⁷¹ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 64.

⁷² Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 65-66. Ptacek notes, “By the end of the 19th century it had become the norm for children in the church to be instructed by in the Bible apart from their parents.” He continues, “The decline of family worship turned children over to church programs.”

⁷³ Brian H. Cosby, *Giving Up Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry from an Entertainment Culture* (Phillipsburg, P&R, 2012), 93. Discussing the impact of student ministry on the American church, Brian Cosby observes, “Over the last fifty years or so, the growth of youth groups in America can be traced proportionally to the decline and breakdown of the family. In many respects, the youth pastor is a result of the failure in the home to bring children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

⁷⁴ Smith, *Family Religion, or The Domestic Relations as Regarded by Christian Principle*, 187.

instruction also witnessed the emergence of programs for the wives, who now lost this spiritual tie to their husbands.”⁷⁵ These household struggles were observed, but addressed by more programs. Ptacek bemoans, “Men who were marginal in the spiritual lives of their families also lost interest in the church. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a growing awareness of this problem. However, it was met by creating separate programs for men, apart from their families, just like the programs for youth and women.”⁷⁶ The individual units of the family were fracturing, and the church was seeking to solve the problem by being the answer itself.

The belief was that a lack of church-provided resources had left the family malnourished. In reality, the absence of discipleship in the home was a key factor in developing the struggles faced by the church. Ptacek identifies, “With the eclipse of family worship, the families of church members gradually ceased to be distinctively Christian. This reality was masked to some extent by the assumption that conservative social values were Christian values.”⁷⁷ The call to Christian families was no longer to bring up their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord themselves. Rather, parents were seen as faithful if they pointed their children towards morality and brought them to church programs with some regularity.⁷⁸

The Modern Decline

The trends that started in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have continued with force into the twenty-first century. Passing parental responsibility to the church has

⁷⁵ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 66.

⁷⁶ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 67.

⁷⁷ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 68.

⁷⁸ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk With God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 97. Noticing the continuing turn to church program attendance as the sign of effective parenting, Baucham mourns, “Just a few generations ago a man was considered spiritually responsible if he led his family before the throne of God in prayer, read and taught the Scriptures at home, and led family devotions (among other things). Today parents are considered responsible if they find the church with the best-staffed nursery and the most up-to-date youth ministry.”

developed into even more of the norm. Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin argue, “We live in a day and age where it is far too easy to put off or pass off the Christian discipleship of our children.”⁷⁹ Church programs have almost entirely replaced family discipleship. Looking at current patterns, Brian Cosby claims, “For many teenagers today, the church is not just another place to receive biblical guidance and instruction; it is the only place.”⁸⁰ The church has continued to make it easier for parents to relinquish their responsibility, and many parents have seized the opportunity to do so.

Age-based programming has maintained importance with the continued rise in the prioritization of career and success.⁸¹ The surrounding culture prioritizes professionalism. Chandler and Griffin note, “In many ways, culture has convinced parents that it is better to outsource the education and training of their children to professionals. We send them to teachers, counselors, tutors, coaches, and churches to learn and develop.”⁸² Outsourcing training is a common practice, so the church has sought to follow the trend by providing options for families.⁸³ Voddie Baucham observes,

As a result of this growing professionalism, there’s a general idea that anything that needs to be done for the advance of the mission of the church has to be done by a paid specialist. The consequences of this attitude are myriad. And there’s perhaps no area of the Christian life that has been affected more negatively than the ministry of the home. As the number of paid religious professionals has risen in recent decades, there has been a corresponding decline in the urgency and consistency with which parents—and particularly fathers—have viewed themselves as the principle

⁷⁹ Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home through Time, Moments, & Milestones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 35.

⁸⁰ Cosby, *Giving Up Gimmicks*, 93.

⁸¹ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 154. Baucham notes, “Businessmen, lawyers, doctors, ministers—it is not unusual for men in our society to sacrifice their families on the altar of success. Even the great Billy Graham admitted in his autobiography that his success as an evangelist was often purchased with his failure as a father.”

⁸² Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 51.

⁸³ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 114. Identifying the church’s borrowing from culture, Baucham notes, “One of the areas where Christians adopt a cultural rather than a biblical perspective is the area of discipline and child training.”

disciplers of their children.⁸⁴

Parents have been provided with growing reasons not to take responsibility for themselves. They can quickly find a program within reach that claims to prepare their children spiritually and then affirms them as faithful parents for participating.

Replacing parents as the primary disciplers in the lives of children will never provide lasting results. God has not designed it to be that way. John Piper clarifies, “The Biblical pattern is for parents, especially fathers, not to relinquish their role as the primary teachers and shapers of their children’s mind and heart—not even to the church.”⁸⁵ Although the care of the church for families is a gift, it will never replace the role and efficacy of parents.⁸⁶ Kurt Bruner and Steven Stroope compare parents turning to the church alone for spiritual nourishment to someone holding flowers in their hands and trying to have them watered.⁸⁷ In the same way that those flowers would not actually be watered, children will be left malnourished if spiritual food is not found in the home. However, this pattern has been perpetuated by spiritually neglectful parents and complacent churches.

Modern parents are carrying forward the destructive patterns of the past. Scott Aniol argues that the families have naturally reacted and adapted to the segregated program-based development within the church.⁸⁸ The bar for faithful Christian parents

⁸⁴ Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 186.

⁸⁵ John Piper, “One Generation Shall Praise Your Works to Another,” in David Michael, *Zealous: 7 Commitments for the Discipleship of the Next Generations* (Minneapolis, MN: Truth78, 2020), 127.

⁸⁶ Paul David Tripp, *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 30. Urging parents to utilize the church but not hand over responsibility, Tripp maintains, “Your church was not designed to replace you, but to assist and equip you for this essential work.”

⁸⁷ Kurt Bruner and Steven Stroope, *It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide to Nurturing Lifelong Faith* (Chicago: Moody, 2020), 17.

⁸⁸ Scott Aniol, *Let the Little Children Come: Family Worship on Sunday (And the Other Six Days Too)* (Conway: Free Grace Press, 2021), 30. Addressing the trend towards abdication of responsibility, Aniol argues, “I believe this shift arose hand-in-hand with the problem of churches segregating children into special discipleship programs. As philosophical changes in the broader culture influenced Christians to believe that trained ‘experts’ were better equipped to educate children than their

has continued to be lowered. Baucham argues that “the paradigm seems to have shifted away from parental responsibility, and the standard has been lowered considerably.”⁸⁹ The definition of a godly family is shifting towards one who identifies and then brings their children to the right programs.

However, these parents are simply building off of the pattern shown to them.

George Barna identifies:

American parents—even those who are born-again churchgoers described by their church as “pillars”—are generally doing what their parents did with them: dropping off the kiddies at church and allowing the religious professionals to mastermind the spiritual development of the young people. . . adults tend to revert to what was modeled for them, noting that carting the kids to church and occasional religious events is sufficient. “After all” explained one mother, echoing a sentiment that has become a very common reply emerging from our research, “that’s what my parents did with me and I turned out pretty good.”⁹⁰

Just as their parents had grown in embracing programs over family discipleship, modern parents are pursuing the same path. Tony Evans laments, “We are witnessing a generation of parentless people who, either through neglect, abuse, or simple absence, are becoming parents themselves. And so the cycle continues.”⁹¹ Distant or absent spiritual parenting was and continues to be the model passed down.

However, blame cannot be removed entirely from the parents themselves. Cultural patterns and church failures may not have made the path easy. Nonetheless, Thomas Manton argues, “But indeed the source of the problem must be sought a little higher: it is bad parents that make bad children! We cannot blame children so much for their unruliness, for the greater weight of the blame lies in our own negligence in their

parents, resulting in elaborate children’s programs at church that separated children into ‘age-appropriate’ peer groups separate from the rest of the congregation, parents began to buy in.”

⁸⁹ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 97.

⁹⁰ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church’s #1 Priority* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 40-41.

⁹¹ Tony Evans, *Raising Kingdom Kids: Giving Your Children a Living Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014) 10.

education.”⁹² Modern parents have largely failed to lead their children according to biblical instruction. Jerry Marcellino posits, “The lifelessness experienced in so many churches in our day can be traced directly to the multitudes of families in those churches which contain Sunday-morning Christians only.”⁹³ Jesus is not the Lord of their homes, but only the parts of their lives that involve church programs. Confessing his own struggle with living this example before his children, Baucham admits, “We were showing them that Jesus owned our Sundays and our Wednesdays, but not our home.”⁹⁴ Christian parents have largely lost the priority of faith in their own homes. Tad Thompson concludes, “The hard fact is that fathers and mothers are not taking on the responsibility to disciple their own children, and churches are doing very little, if anything, to challenge this reality.”⁹⁵ Parents must take the weight of their biblical responsibility on their own shoulders, but the church must also recognize its shortcomings.

The church has failed to rightly hold fathers and mothers accountable for the spiritual training of their children. Few have been taught the biblical responsibilities of parents, and rare examples of faithfulness to learn from have been placed in front of them.⁹⁶ The standard of excellence has been consistently lowered to the bare minimum. Further, the absence of church discipline of any form, or even concern over the neglect of

⁹² Thomas Manton, “Epistle to the Reader of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms,” in Terry L. Johnson, *The Family Worship Book: A Resource for Family Devotions* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009), 109.

⁹³ Jerry Marcellino, *Rediscovering Family Worship* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2011), 9.

⁹⁴ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 141.

⁹⁵ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 7.

⁹⁶ Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 1. Beeke argues that many parents are not being taught about family worship, stating, “I believe one major reason for this failure is the lack of stress upon family worship.” Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 25. Helopoulos adds, “Most evangelical Christians are aware of the importance of secret and corporate worship, but few have even heard of family worship.”

family discipleship, has led to complacency. Jason Helopoulos identifies, “We have allowed the center of the Christian family to drift, and the church has suffered.⁹⁷ The church has contributed to its own injury through omission. Men and women have not been equipped or pressed by the church to rightly embrace family discipleship. As a result, faithful parents are a growing rarity. Therefore, Marcellino concludes, “The Bible tells us that one of the major reasons for this grievous decline is that our churches, in general, are void of men who have resolved, like Joshua, to lead their families daily in the worship of the living God.”⁹⁸ When family discipleship is not a priority in the church, members of the church will not prioritize their own homes and patterns of negligence will continue.⁹⁹ As churches have followed trends and failed to equip parents to lead in their households, fathers and mothers have been lulled into complacency, and family worship has declined.

The Modern Practice of Family Worship

Current trends have led to a culture that sees very little practice of family discipleship.¹⁰⁰ Parents are faintly aware that the faith of their children is their responsibility, but their focus is directed elsewhere.¹⁰¹ Thompson observes, “The plain

⁹⁷ Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 99.

⁹⁸ Marcellino, *Rediscovering Family Worship*, 11.

⁹⁹ Michael McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church* (Nashville: Randall House, 2019) 8. Looking at the modern church and the impact of parental patterns, Michael McGarry estimates, “If parents truly are the greatest spiritual influence on their children as many recent studies have found, the spiritual negligence of parents has surely caused much harm to both the emerging generations and the future of the American Church.”

¹⁰⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit: In Marriage Home & Work—An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18-6:9* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1973), 293. Already noting the trend in families, Lloyd-Jones claims, “The whole idea of family life has somehow been declining; and this, alas, is partly true in Christian circles also. The family’s central importance that is found in the Bible and in all the great periods to which we have referred seems to have disappeared. It is no longer being given the attention and the prominence that it once received.”

¹⁰¹ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 13-14. Donald Whitney notes that modern research reveals, “Eighty-five percent of parents with children under age 13 believe they have primary responsibility for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters. However, a majority of parents don’t spend any time during a typical week discussing religious matters or studying religious materials with their

truth is that many parents teach children to be disciplined students and disciplined athletes, but when it comes to spiritual disciplines, the expectations are far lower and the emphasis greatly reduced.”¹⁰² Earthly success triumphs over spiritual growth. Addressing research that shows how much parents value education, Baucham laments, “Unfortunately, the aforementioned study found that only half as many parents (whether Christian or not) considered their children’s having a relationship with Christ as important as their child’s education.”¹⁰³ Parents believe it is more important to play a role in equipping their children in worldly manners than in the truths of Scripture.

Making time for extracurricular activities is incredibly common. Baucham asserts, “There seems to be an increasing emphasis on our children achieving the ‘American Dream’ at the expense of any sort of costly Christian commitment.”¹⁰⁴ With that goal in mind, busyness is no issue. Parents commit to sports, clubs, and extra academics at the expense of anything else in the way. However, this pattern leaves families outside of their biblical mandate. Writing on modern ministry to students, Michael McGarry states, “Allowing one’s family to become so busy and overloaded that family discipleship falls by the wayside is an entirely unacceptable option for the Christian family, and yet this is where many find themselves.”¹⁰⁵ This busyness even goes beyond the activities of children. Paul David Tripp observes, “It’s possible for a mom to be more worried about stains on her couch than the soul of her son, or for a dad to be more focused on the shine and maintenance of his new car than the heart of his

children...Parents generally rely upon their church to do all of the religious training their children will receive.”

¹⁰² Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 44.

¹⁰³ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 43-44.

¹⁰⁵ McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 111-12.

daughter.”¹⁰⁶ The pursuit of success and self has largely replaced the pursuit of biblical parenting.¹⁰⁷ Parents have allowed so much in their schedules that they claim to, or appear to, have no time for family devotion.¹⁰⁸

Yet, as Michael McGarry expressed, this structure of parenting has no place in the Christian household. The pursuit of worldly success has led to spiritual failure.¹⁰⁹ Using a modern family that was prioritizing their son’s sports as an example, Baucham notes, “What they didn’t realize is that they were teaching Thomas to prioritize baseball above the Fourth Commandment. They were teaching Thomas that he should honor the Sabbath and keep it holy unless it’s baseball season.”¹¹⁰ The example of Thomas’s parents could apply to many Christian households and manifest itself in relation to any other prioritized activity, for the children or adults. In general, Christian parents have lost sight of their responsibility in regard to the faith of their children. Michael S. Beates

¹⁰⁶ Tripp, *Parenting*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Evans, *Raising Kingdom Kids*, 27. Explaining modern trends, Evans summarizes, “Unfortunately, today many parents have lost sight of the long-term impact their children will one day make. As a result, some parents spend more time training their dogs than they do their kids. They rarely play with them, study the Bible with them, take them to church, discuss what was taught, correct them when they are wrong, give them a vision and a dream, develop their character, instill godly virtues, and so on. They don’t do any of these things—or they do them halfheartedly—and then they wonder why their children turn out the way that they do. Rather than reaping the generational cycles of victory Asher and his wife experienced, they wind up with generational cycles of collapse passed on from their kids to their grandkids and so on. Instead of positive patterns being transferred, they transfer a DNA of defeat.”

¹⁰⁸ Chap Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent: A Comprehensive Guidebook for Raising Your Children to Love and Follow Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Diamond Hill, 2016), 28. Noting how changing of family priority and the pursuit of personal success is drawing parents away from their children, Bettis mourns, “So just at the time when teenagers most need engaged parents to help them work out a whole series of big questions about what they believe, think, value, feel, are committed to, and want to be and become, in many cases, their parents are withdrawing from them.

¹⁰⁹ R. Kent Hughes and Barbara Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 13-14. Addressing how such behaviors come to be so common, Kent and Barbara Hughes suggest, “How do such attitudes come to dwell in Christian hearts? First, many people are captive to a culture that defines self-worth and fulfillment in terms of contribution, name, education, and money. Society applauds the person who designs a building more than it does the one who attends to the architecture of a child’s soul. Our culture values a face that is known to the public far more than it does a countenance reflected in a child’s eyes. The world sets a higher priority on attaining a degree than on educating a life. It values the ability to give things more than it does giving oneself. This approach to self-worth has been relentlessly sown by modern culture and has taken root in many Christian hearts, so that there is no room for another self—even if it is one’s own child.”

¹¹⁰ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 37.

comments, “We have allowed the temporal and the cheap to rank above the eternal and the priceless.”¹¹¹ The temporary glimmer of earthly gain has blinded parents to the lasting treasure of faithful discipleship. Baucham describes, “It is as though Christian parents in America have been lulled to sleep while the thief has come in to steal, kill, and destroy our children right under our noses.”¹¹² Extracurricular activities and personal success are not evils, but have been elevated to levels of importance that have led to the absence of family discipleship.¹¹³

As a result, biblical and historical patterns of parenting have mostly faded. Jason Helopoulos points out, “What is it that was part of the DNA of the Christian family in previous centuries, but seems to have all but vanished in this past century? Family worship.”¹¹⁴ The practice that was given to families and upheld by the church for ages has slipped out of the lives of many Christian families.¹¹⁵ Helopoulos continues:

It’s gone! Or, at the very least, it is rarely seen or heard. If it were an animal, it would be on the endangered species list. We have not only stopped *doing* it, but we have stopped *talking* about it. We hear few sermons or pastoral exhortations that attend to it. We find few fathers and mothers encouraging one another to pursue it. Christian publications seem to have forgotten about it altogether. And yet, in the history of the church, it has been one of the Christian family’s strongest characteristics.¹¹⁶

Helopoulos’s dark description, unfortunately, paints an accurate picture of current

¹¹¹ Michael S. Beates, “The Father as Priest,” in *Family Practice: God’s Prescription for a Healthy Home*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 35.

¹¹² Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 14.

¹¹³ Howard G. Hendricks, *God’s Blueprint for Family Living* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible, 1973), 71. Identifying the prioritization of earthly schedules, Hendricks offers, “One of the milestones on the road to maturity is the recognition that good things can be the greatest enemy of the better things.” Families must see that entertainment and accomplishments are graces to the family from the Lord but must never stand in the way of eternal matters that hold far greater value.

¹¹⁴ Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 13.

¹¹⁵ Johnson, *The Family Worship Book*, 10. Commenting on the state of the family, Terry Johnson presents, “Not only have we given up a proven method of transmitting the faith to the next generation, one that has a built-in format for Bible study, prayer, and singing, but we have done so for alternatives that add to our already hectic pace of life and take us away from our spouses, children, and neighbors.”

¹¹⁶ Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 186.

Christian practices.

Family worship is a modern rarity. Such scarcity is why Beates can ask his readers, “Do you know any families who faithfully conduct daily worship in the home?”¹¹⁷ This is the same practice that used to be checked on for matters of church discipline. At that time, the question would have been seeking any family that did not practice family worship, hoping to encourage them towards faithfulness. Instead, family worship is an oddity or extra-pious practice that exists in the life of few Christians and outside of the mind of many. Beeke and Jones note, “Many Christians today view family devotions. . . as a matter of Christian liberty. They do not see them as a divinely commanded duty but an opportunity to excel spiritually above what is absolutely required by God.”¹¹⁸ A common practice of history has descended into obscurity, leaving many parents missing out, and often unknowingly so, on a valuable and faithful resource.

The Benefits of Family Worship

The choice to ignore family worship is not a costless decision. An immensely valuable grace from the Lord is left untouched. It is comparable to a family in significance financial strain ignoring the stack of money that would more than cover their debts that was sitting right on their dinner table. Family worship is avoided at great loss and pursued with great gain.

Arthur Pink says it well. He claims, “The advantages and blessings of family worship are incalculable.”¹¹⁹ It is worth clarifying again that family worship does not guarantee salvation. However, God’s Word is clear that there is blessing and joy in obedience. There is reason that J.W. Alexander notes, “From what has been said, it is

¹¹⁷ Beates, “The Father as Priest,” 32.

¹¹⁸ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 866.

¹¹⁹ Pink, “Family Worship,” 48.

manifest that the universal voice of the Church in its best periods has been in favor of family worship.”¹²⁰ Believing Alexander’s claim to be accurate, multiple authors throughout the years, especially of late, have sought to encourage families to embrace the practice by listing out the advantages. The Lord mercifully uses family worship for his glory, growth in piety, growth in holiness, growth in biblical knowledge, strengthening parents, help in pursuing generational faith, family openness and unity, growth in intellect, preparation for suffering, evangelistic opportunity, the good of the community, and the good of the local church.

For the Glory of God

Christians seek to glorify God with all of their lives. Parents should have the same goal in their child-rearing. Seeing family worship as a means to this end, D’Aubigne posits, “Why practice family worship? First: to bring glory to God.”¹²¹ Helopoulos agrees, “Primarily, we want to engage in family worship because it honors and glorifies God.”¹²² This is the driving purpose behind making time to gather the family together for regular discipleship. Family worship is a faithful application of the charges to parents in Scripture to honor God in the raising of their children. Regular and intentional patterns aid in this work. Providing a structured resource to help families, Jonathan Gibson explains, “This liturgy of daily worship aims to help us toward the goal of glorifying God and enjoying him in a time of personal or family worship each day.”¹²³ Family worship is a benefit to Christians because it brings glory to God.

¹²⁰ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 14.

¹²¹ D’Aubigne, *Family Worship*, chap. 2.

¹²² Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 41.

¹²³ Jonathan Gibson, *Be Thou My Vision: A Liturgy for Daily Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 35.

For Growth in Piety

The Spirit works in people to bring about regeneration and sanctification. Yet, the Lord uses earthly means to strengthen and guide believers. The consistent intake of Scripture, prayer and unified musical worship greatly benefits the soul. Alexander notes, “Observation shows that families which have no household worship are at a low ebb in spiritual things.”¹²⁴ He then later concludes, “Daily worship, in common, encourages children to acts of devotion.”¹²⁵ Care must be taken with Alexander’s argument. There are godly families that may not practice family worship and have, through the mercy of the Lord, raised children who glorify God mightily. However, Alexander is claiming that, in general, there is a noticeable difference in the piety between families that do and do not practice regular family worship. Richard Baxter even challenges his readers to compare the families they know on either side to see which households abounded in faithfulness.¹²⁶

These arguments are no surprise when considering what family worship brings to the home. Encouraging families with the benefits, Joel Beeke endorses, “It offers greater knowledge of the Scriptures and growth in personal piety for yourself and your children.”¹²⁷ Agreeing with Beeke’s claims, Helopoulos explains, “A family that reads the Bible, prays together, and sings praise to God will begin to have its actions, thoughts, and words shaped by this daily event.”¹²⁸ The Lord uses regular family worship to sanctify families.

As parents obey the commands of Scripture, their family experiences the blessings of the Lord. Bettis acknowledges, “Research data backs up the effectiveness of

¹²⁴ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 17.

¹²⁵ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 20.

¹²⁶ Baxter, *The Godly Home*, 83.

¹²⁷ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 44.

¹²⁸ Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 48.

the biblical command for parents to teach their children.”¹²⁹ Confirming this claim, DeVries observes, “The particular family experiences most tied to greater maturity were the frequency with which an adolescent talked with his mother and father about faith, the frequency of family devotions and the frequency with which parents and children together were involved in efforts, formal or informal, to help other people.”¹³⁰ Research supports the claims of Scripture. As families commit to the intentional discipleship of their children, they pave the path for spiritual growth. This sanctification is all the Spirit’s work, but largely seen in beautiful union with obedience. Alexander notes, “It is worthy of observation that there is something in the very temper engendered by family worship which favors persistence in the faith.”¹³¹ Family worship benefits Christians by promoting devotion to the Lord.

For Growth in Holiness

Following growth in piety and reverence, family worship tends to promote the application of Scripture in life. After encouraging families to pursue the practice for the glory of God, D’Aubigne offers, “Second: to protect your children from sin.”¹³² He continues, “Domestic piety will prevent all these evils.”¹³³ The language in his conclusion is unhelpful as it appears to promise purity in homes that practice family discipleship. However, the argued benefit stands in line with Scripture. God is merciful throughout, giving discipline, which develops devotion, which aids in the war against sin. That is why Matthew Henry concludes, “Now the way to keep sin out of the house is to keep up

¹²⁹ Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 131.

¹³⁰ Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 84.

¹³¹ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 78.

¹³² D’Aubigne, *Family Worship*, chap. 2.

¹³³ D’Aubigne, *Family Worship*, chap. 2.

religion in the house, which will be the most effectual antidote against Satan's poison."¹³⁴
The Lord has provided family discipleship as a combatant against sin.

Regular family worship fills the lives of children with the words of Scripture. Biblical truths are discussed and presented to their minds. Reliance upon the Lord is demonstrated in regular prayer, showing his power and his way to be more trustworthy than the offers of the world. Theologically rich songs ring in their heads, keeping what is worthwhile in their thoughts as they go about their days facing joys, trials, blessings, and temptations. Parents that commit to family worship are utilizing God-ordained means to equip their children for spiritual warfare. Otherwise, Baucham warns, "A family without a commitment to the God of the Bible has no hope of stemming the tide of cultural onslaught."¹³⁵ Practicing family discipleship regularly acquaints the members of the household with the Lord and his Word. Families are living out the call of Psalm 119:11. Family worship benefits Christians by consistently and abundantly hiding God's Word in their hearts so that they would not sin against Him.

For Growth in Biblical Knowledge

Families that are regularly reading, praying, and singing, will naturally be more knowledgeable of the stories and words of Scripture. The truths of the Bible and songs of God's glory become familiar concepts rather than abstract and distant ideals that are only for vocational ministers. Jonathan Williams embraces this benefit, claiming, "It's singing worship songs and hymns as a family so that our kids are more familiar with 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' than 'Let it Go,' the song from the Disney movie *Frozen*."¹³⁶ Their knowledge of truth grows with continued family practice.

¹³⁴ Henry, *A Church in the House*, 20.

¹³⁵ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 35.

¹³⁶ Jonathan Williams, *Gospel Family: Cultivating Family Discipleship, Family Worship, & Family Missions* (Houston: Lucid Books, 2015), 150.

Family worship regularly presents children with truth. Alexander argues, “Family religion is therefore eminently conservative, and stands among the barriers on which we most rely against an inundation of errors.”¹³⁷ Teaching truth helps protect against the flood of lies. In a world where social media and cultural pressures allow for false doctrine to be spread rapidly into the lives of children, biblical knowledge is immensely valuable. If children do not know the content of Scripture or how to read and study for themselves, then they are prone to the capsizing waves of culture. In response, Howard Hendricks commends, “In our home we have used family worship time to teach the children how to study the Bible for themselves.”¹³⁸ As children study the Bible with their family and grow on their own through learned methodology, they are filled with truth and prepared for trials. The world may be a rising storm, “But as we pass along to our children a sound Christian worldview, we equip them to navigate the waters of our humanistic, postmodern culture.”¹³⁹ Growth in God-centered wisdom through understanding of the Word and the truths within strengthens a household. Family worship benefits Christians by promoting growth in biblical knowledge.

For Strengthening Parents

Family worship is primarily considered as a tool to strengthen the health of children. However, it is often overlooked that regular family discipleship is also beneficial for the parents. David Wegener notes the parental benefits of the practice: “Nothing will spur a father toward godly, spiritual discipline in his own walk with Christ more than leading his family in worship. In order to teach his wife and children, he will have to study the Scriptures on his own. A godly woman will be encouraged and inspired

¹³⁷ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 79.

¹³⁸ Hendricks, *God’s Blueprint for Family Living*, 64.

¹³⁹ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 47.

as she sees her husband take responsibility and lead in family worship.”¹⁴⁰ This benefit of personal growth combats one of the common obstacles to family discipleship.

Many parents do not feel theologically equipped or spiritually strong enough to lead their families. Family worship will help make them stronger in those areas. Times of biblical discussion benefit the members of the family, “And by instructing, you are learning the material yourself.”¹⁴¹ Bettis continues by encouraging parents, “God is working in our lives even as he is using us in the life of our child.”¹⁴² Primarily speaking of fathers, Beates adds, “Though a father shoulders the burden of priesthood in the family, performing the task will unavoidably take him further in his own spiritual journey.”¹⁴³ Discipleship practices naturally press the entire family forward in their faith. Fathers and mothers are additionally bolstered and sanctified through the Spirit’s work in spiritual disciplines. Therefore, family worship is a benefit to parents by strengthening them in their own faith.

For Pursuing Generational Faith

In light of Psalm 78, parents should pray for and pursue faith that passes from generation to generation. Regular family worship is a means of commending the works of God to the next age. Joel Beeke condenses the helpful work by Douglas Kelly on the subject:

Family religion, which depends not a little on the household head daily leading the family before God in worship, is one of the most powerful structures that the covenant-keeping God has given for the expansion of redemption through the generations, so that countless multitudes may be brought into communion with and

¹⁴⁰ David Wegener, “A Father’s Role in Family Worship.” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 3, no. 4 (November 1998), <https://cbmw.org/1998/11/01/a-fathers-role-in-family-worship/>.

¹⁴¹ Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 131.

¹⁴² Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 131.

¹⁴³ Beates, “The Father as Priest,” 35.

worship of the living God in the face of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁴

Family discipleship is a gift from the Lord to pass on truth. Developing a habit of consistent family worship would help reform the common pattern today of devotional absence.

Many families do not have family discipleship practices because they never saw it in their homes growing up. Showing how the patterns that parents establish can shape the future of a family, Richard Baxter articulates, “The language you teach them to speak when they are children, they will use all their life after, if they live with those who use it. And so the opinions that they first receive and the customs that they are used to at first are hardly changed afterward.”¹⁴⁵ The actions of parents now, by God’s grace, will have an impact on the household habits and faith of their children and their children’s children. Family worship is a benefit to Christians as they pursue generational faith.

For Family Openness and Unity

Parents often long for closeness within their homes yet find that busyness and technology leave their families in disarray. Commending family worship as a helpful resource, Williams encourages, “In a culture that seems to leave families in a constant battle for their schedules, we rejoice over one blessing that family worship brings—time together.”¹⁴⁶ As the family is gathered, they are naturally spending more time with one another. Time together is a rare commodity in the modern family. Williams continues, “Family worship cultivates a pattern that invites everyone in the home to push aside all distractions, take a break from all media, and just be still in the presence of God and one

¹⁴⁴ Douglas Kelly, “Family Worship: Biblical, Reformed, and Viable for Today, in *Worship in the Presence of God*, ed. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992), 110, Quoted in Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 6. Beeke explains that this quote is his condensed version of Kelly’s summary.

¹⁴⁵ Baxter, *Godly Home*, 119.

¹⁴⁶ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 113. He adds, “A family that prays together, sings praises together, and enjoys reading the Bible together will inevitably find themselves blessed with more time together.”

another for a few minutes every day. It simultaneously strengthens our relationship with the Lord and our relationships with our spouse and children.”¹⁴⁷ Family worship offers a regular activity that brings the family together.

However, these times are not merely spatial gatherings that benefit the family through proximity. Due to the content of these endeavors, Williams notes, “Family worship does not just produce family time. It produces meaningful family time.”¹⁴⁸ The family is not only together, but is gathered to glorify God through Scripture, prayer, and song. Truth is heard, weighty matters are lifted to the Lord, and glorious doctrines are sung in unison. Those times are precious opportunities to invest in and encourage each other in eternal matters.

As a pattern of practice develops, gathering and unifying the family around the Lord can impact the way family members see and care for one another. Jonathan Williams explains, “When families worship together, families receive the rare and precious gift of hearing and seeing one another’s hearts for Christ.”¹⁴⁹ Parents must lead the way in openness, but then the effect can wash over the whole family. As fathers and mothers confess sins and ask for prayer for application, children see their partnership in the gospel and the importance of obedience. As passages call for love and forgiveness, honest apologies and proposed applications drive away bitterness and welcome unity. This is why Alexander argues, “Family peace is a blessing which cannot be overrated; and I desire to show that it is directly promoted by family worship.”¹⁵⁰ Jason Helopoulos agrees, “You will be amazed by the impact that family worship can have upon the peace

¹⁴⁷ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 113.

¹⁴⁸ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 114.

¹⁴⁹ Williams, *Gospel Family*, 146.

¹⁵⁰ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 48.

of your home.”¹⁵¹ Regular time in the truths of Scripture helps to unify the family.

Family worship offers a bonding pattern and salve for the current disjointed habits that are so common. Making time for family discipleship will not burden the family. Rather, Matthew Henry argues, “A church in the house will make it very comfortable to yourselves.”¹⁵² Therefore, Helopoulos concludes, “As you worship together, you will know each other better and love each other more fully.”¹⁵³ Family worship is a benefit to families as it builds patterns of openness and unity.

For Growth in Intellect

Although family worship is primarily emphasized for its spiritual benefits on the individuals who participate, there are practical effects that come with the practice. Alexander devotes a whole portion of his work to the intellectual impact that regular family discipleship has. Arguing for the usefulness of family worship, he declares, “Surely we need not prove to Christians that the perusal of the Scriptures is good for the understanding.”¹⁵⁴ Continuing, he posits, “In a word, I cannot think it possible for any family to enjoy, twice every day for all their lives, the privilege of hearing the Scripture read at domestic worship without, by that very means, rising perceptibly and greatly in knowledge and intellectual force.”¹⁵⁵ Even if done only once a day, regularly hearing and discussing Scripture, praying through application and in light of the character of God, and then singing truths will stretch the mind. Families may view the commitment to discipleship time as pulling their children away from studies or practices that will prepare them for life. The thought should be the opposite. Regular family discipleship will

¹⁵¹ Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 45.

¹⁵² Henry, *A Church in the House*, 21.

¹⁵³ Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 46.

¹⁵⁴ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 42.

¹⁵⁵ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 44.

strengthen and prepare their minds. Family worship is a benefit to families because it tends to the increase in intellect.¹⁵⁶

For Preparation for Suffering

Family worship prepares those involved to encounter hardships. The elements of reading, praying, and singing will bring forth understanding that bolsters individuals in the midst of trials. The character of God in his sovereignty, faithfulness, steadfastness, power, and goodness are seen and declared in the words of Scripture, prayer, and song. The reality of suffering is seen and discussed, presenting a realistic view of the brokenness of this world and the glories of the next. Seeing the benefit of family worship in heartache, Alexander points out, “Every house must, sooner or later, become a house of mourning. The blessedness of worshipping God in our family capacity is never more evinced than when death has struck his blow.”¹⁵⁷ Families that are consistently rooted in truth are bolstered against the coming waves. Elizabeth Elliot recounts the family discipleship practices of her parents:

Because we had known from earliest childhood the Holy Scriptures and been taught and encouraged in every possible way to surrender our lives to Christ, the adolescent years, so much dreaded by many parents today, were not nearly so dangerous for us as they would have been without the spiritual care that had been so earnestly given. We had “anchors.” We had, as the soldier said to whom my father had offered a pocket Testament, something to “tie us down.”¹⁵⁸

Family worship benefits families in preparing them for suffering by helping to build a firm and faithful foundation.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 46. Asking a rhetorical question based on his argument for the intellectual benefit of family worship, Alexander presents, “Let us compare two men of equal capacity and otherwise alike in their circumstances. One of these has passed a lifetime without prayer. The other has, at stated hours, ten thousand times solemnly addressed himself to the worship of God. Is it possible to believe that such a difference in habit can exist without a corresponding difference in intellectual development?”

¹⁵⁷ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 62.

¹⁵⁸ Elisabeth Elliot, *The Shaping of a Christian Family: How My Parents Nurtured My Faith* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 227-28.

¹⁵⁹ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 44. Combining family unity and comfort, Joel Beeke offers,

For Evangelistic Opportunity

Family worship regularly brings the gospel of Jesus Christ into the home. The habit of reflection upon Scripture through discussion, song, and prayer will have creation, sin, redemption, and restoration placed before a family time and time again. Such a practice is an invaluable gift towards any efforts of proselytizing family members. Families must seize these opportunities.¹⁶⁰

A door for sharing the gospel is opened to parents every time they have their family gather for worship. Time in the Bible allows for them to prioritize God's Word, clarify truths, address questions, magnify the Lord, emphasize the weight of sin, and faithfully lead their children to see in all of Scripture that Jesus is the only hope in life and death. Prayer that is guided by Scripture demonstrates a response to God's Word, a passion for the gospel seen in prayers for salvation which may even be for children who are present, and a dependence on the Lord in all things. Worshipping through songs continues to proclaim the truths of who God is while revealing hearts that are joyously thankful to the Lord for his mercy in their own lives. The elements of family worship, when practiced faithfully, will regularly press the claims of the gospel upon unbelieving children. Moreover, these gospel benefits are also true for an unbelieving spouse. The consistent and God-honoring practices of a family in front of a parent who does not believe in Jesus will display and declare the gospel of Jesus Christ time and time again.

Further, family worship promotes an evangelistic mindset among participants. Helopoulos asserts, "A family that is truly worshipping God together will naturally find itself looking outward and engaging more and more with people beyond their home."¹⁶¹ The gospel of Jesus Christ and the need for salvation will more regularly and verbally be

"Family worship helps promote family harmony in times of affliction, sickness, and death."

¹⁶⁰ Marty Machowski, *Leading Your Child to Christ: Biblical Direction for Sharing the Gospel* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012). For further practical and biblical recommendations on sharing the gospel with children, parents should turn to Marty Machowski's short work.

¹⁶¹ Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 75.

brought to the mind of family members. The consistency of reverence and goal of glorifying God will help to promote evangelistic zeal. Hearing parents speak about the hope found in Jesus and pray with passion for the lost can leave a lasting impact on the compassion of their children. Further, family worship provides a natural opportunity to present Christianity to guests. When company is over, the rhythms of family discipleship should not change. Rather, observers are invited to participate with the family, hearing the gospel and watching truth be celebrated. These opportunities may seem awkward, but are incredible opportunities to practice humility and honor the Lord.¹⁶² As parents make much of the gospel to guests, children are shown a model of faithfulness in prioritizing the proclamation of the gospel. Family worship benefits Christians by encouraging evangelistic efforts and providing household opportunities to share the gospel.

For the Good of the Community

Family worship does not only benefit the household that practices it. As more and more families build patterns of discipleship, the impact spreads beyond their walls. Alexander argues, “And it may turn out to be true that a nation in which all the families shall thus be employed will derive from this very peculiarity a character conducive to public strength.”¹⁶³ He builds his position by concluding, “Every Christian household is a school of good citizenship.”¹⁶⁴ Alexander’s description of a Christian household is one that is filled with family worship. The regular commitment to the study and application of Scripture, through the Spirit, will indeed tend towards building model citizens. If not

¹⁶² Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 73. Reflecting on the parent who is nervous to lead family worship in front of others, Alexander encourages, “It may sometimes be the case that a man of humble station and defective culture of mind may be called upon to perform this duty in the presence of guests or strangers, whom he regards as much superior to himself; and this doubtless be a trial to his faith. But let him not shrink from the service of God. In a majority of instances, those very persons will go away with a higher estimate of his character for this very act of duty.”

¹⁶³ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 92.

¹⁶⁴ Alexander, *Thoughts om Family Worship*, 94.

through character, at the least through the times of specific prayer.¹⁶⁵ Matthew Henry commends, “Religious families are blessings to the neighborhood they live in, at least by their prayers.”¹⁶⁶ Families that commit to regular prayer will likely commit to lifting up local needs to the Lord. In doing so, and through the regular teaching of Scripture, God-honoring and wise citizens can be developed. Family worship is a helpful witness to the world as it benefits the community as well as the families who practice.

For the Good of the Local Church

Family worship strengthens the local church. Henry claims, “A church in the house will contribute very much to the prosperity of the church of God in the land.”¹⁶⁷ The patterns of family discipleship train family members in the common elements of corporate worship. This is why Coley and Robertson encourage parents, “Keep in mind that we are preparing our families for corporate worship in our local churches each week as we set our hearts and minds on the Lord every day (not just Sundays).”¹⁶⁸ Family discipleship does not serve as a substitute for local church gatherings, but rather serves as an additional endeavor that improves the corporate practice.¹⁶⁹

The elements of family worship serve to prepare faithful church members. Children and parents who regularly sit under and study the Word will grow as listeners, more prepared to feast upon the meal of the Word that is preached. Consistent and fervent prayer observed and practiced bolsters the efforts of the church. Henry asserts, “If every

¹⁶⁵ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 96. Declaring the benefits of family worship to the community, Alexander adds, “We have still to consider the great and crowning favor which family worship confers on the commonwealth: it brings down heavenly blessings from the prayer-hearing God.”

¹⁶⁶ Henry, *A Church in the House*, 24.

¹⁶⁷ Henry, *A Church in the House*, 23.

¹⁶⁸ Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 109.

¹⁶⁹ Gibson, *Be Thou My Vision*, 29-30. Gibson explains, “Of course, the aim is not to replace corporate worship on the Lord’s Day; rather, it is to help prepare us for corporate worship on the Lord’s Day by improving our personal or family worship each day.”

family were a praying family, public prayers would be the better joined in, more intelligently and more affectionately, for the more we are used to prayer, the more ready we shall be in that holy and divine art of ‘entering into the holiest’ in that duty.”¹⁷⁰ Habits of singing in the home will familiarize children with songs and build comfortability with musical worship. Jerry Marcellino ponders, “In fact, if more families sang the praises of God together in their homes, just think how much our congregational singing on the Lord’s Day might improve!”¹⁷¹ Singing families help to build a singing church. Observing the local church benefit of the elements of family worship, Helopoulos summarizes:

Family worship provides the added benefit of training our children for corporate worship. As they sit and listen to the Word of God, hear prayers, or sing hymns, the same elements found in corporate worship at church will take on a new meaning. The value of this cannot be overestimated. As our children learn to pray at home, they will participate more readily in corporate prayer at church. As they learn the hymns or songs of the faith in family worship, the same hymns and songs will resonate with them on Sunday mornings.¹⁷²

The simple elements of family discipleship help children learn and master the rhythms of corporate worship.

The practices of families improve the health of the local church. Richard Baxter claims, “A holy, well-governed family prepares for a holy and well-governed church.”¹⁷³ By the work of the Spirit, parents who regularly participate in worship at home with their children are preparing their households to more faithfully join in worship in their local church. As others look in, they will see the attentiveness, observe the prayers, and hear the voices and be encouraged and edified. Family worship benefits the local church.

¹⁷⁰ Henry, *A Church in the House*, 24.

¹⁷¹ Marcellino, *Rediscovering Family Worship*, 16.

¹⁷² Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 47.

¹⁷³ Baxter, *The Godly Home*, 109.

We Need Family Worship

The word “need” captures the current state of the family. Even outside of Christian perspectives, the destruction of the family is apparent. Recognizing the abundant difficulty, Donald Whitney identifies, “First, things are really bad when the government believes that the family is in trouble.”¹⁷⁴ Further, Christianity is facing increased pressure, and children are abandoning the faith at alarming rates.¹⁷⁵ Ptacek notes how the patterns of recent years have led to present conditions:

After a century without family worship, today’s Christian families grow progressively weaker and less resistant to worldly pressures. In the past these pressures seemed to be less of a threat, since a form of pro-family traditionalism was upheld by the general culture. Today, the dominant culture and government policies have abandoned that stance and have become in many ways hostile to the Christian family.¹⁷⁶

Christian families are in a dire position.¹⁷⁷ In response, Voddie Baucham charges, “We cannot stand idly by while our children leave the faith in droves. We cannot simply shake our heads and accept defeat. We must fight for our sons and daughters.”¹⁷⁸ Sadly, current efforts to fight for the family have only exacerbated the problem.

Modern patterns are largely, if not entirely, ineffective. Tad Thompson advises:

For one thing, we must recognize that a few hours a week of consumer-oriented

¹⁷⁴ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 11.

¹⁷⁵ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 176. Mourning the current state of the Christian family and drawing attention to the problem, Baucham identifies, “The church in America is in trouble. Teens are abandoning the faith in astounding numbers. Birth rates are plummeting as our attitude toward children continues to sour. The overwhelming majority of those who call themselves Christians do not think biblically, and the answer given most often is better youth ministry. In case you don’t think this is a major issue, consider the following statistics. With a birth rate hovering around two children per family, a biblical worldview rate below 10 percent, and about 75 percent of our teens leaving the church by the end of their freshman year in college (using the more optimistic estimates from Chapter 1), it currently takes two Christian families in one generation to get a single Christian into the next generation. ‘Houston, we have a problem.’”

¹⁷⁶ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 293. Even fifty years prior to now, Lloyd-Jones was noticing the decline in family practice. He laments, “The whole idea of family life has somehow been declining; and this, alas, is partly true in Christian circles also. The family’s central importance that is found in the Bible and in all the great periods to which we have referred seems to have disappeared. It is no longer being given the attention and the prominence that it once received.”

¹⁷⁸ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 31.

church events cannot successfully compete for the hearts of young people if those hearts are not being attended to spiritually in the home. The spiritual futures of children must be placed as a matter of primary importance back into the hands of the people who have the greatest opportunity to influence them for the Kingdom of God—their parents.¹⁷⁹

More programs will not solve the family crisis. Revival must begin in the home. Richard Baxter promotes, “Family reformation is the easiest and most likely way to a common reformation, or at least to send many souls to heaven and train up multitudes for God if it reaches not to national reformation.”¹⁸⁰ Reformation begins by reforming the family. Baucham declares, “We will either win the culture one family at a time or will continue to lose the culture one family at a time. Either way the family is the key.”¹⁸¹ Christians must prioritize godly homes.

A redirection is needed. Although programs are helpful as the church comes alongside families, they have come up short in truly benefitting parents and children. Marcellino recommends, “What can offer hope to a nation of families that are in utter disarray? Answer: A return to the old paths.”¹⁸² The old paths lead to the practice of regular family worship.¹⁸³

Conclusion

Prioritizing the discipleship practices of families can be used by God to reshape the trajectory of the church, the nation, and even the world. Joel Beeke argues, “As goes the home, so goes the church, so goes the nation. Family worship is a most decisive factor in how the home goes.”¹⁸⁴ Many Christians want to see and pursue large-

¹⁷⁹ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 9-10.

¹⁸⁰ Baxter, *The Godly Home*, 113.

¹⁸¹ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 216.

¹⁸² Marcellino, *Rediscovering Family Worship*, iii.

¹⁸³ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 14. After detailing the history of family worship, Alexander concludes, “From what has been said, it is manifest that the universal voice of the Church in its best periods has been in favor of family worship.”

¹⁸⁴ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 2.

scale change by emphasizing and targeting local churches or denominational leadership. These efforts are in good faith but are missing a vitally important step. Also, wanting to see biblical change, Helopoulos offers, “But we cannot speak about the Christian faith impacting our world, our country, or our community if it is not first impacting our homes—and few things will bring our Christian faith to bear in the home more than family worship.” Change must start in the home.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, Christians need to return to the richly beneficial practice of family worship. The Bible teaches it, history affirms it, and current trends demand it.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 98. Alexander beautifully captures the hope of family worship as an antidote to the current family epidemic by charging, “The true way to bring health to a diseased nation is to carry the cure to every house.”

¹⁸⁶ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 36. Expressing the dire need for a return to family discipleship, Chandler and Griffin urge parents, “With all your family has going on, you may think you don’t have time for family discipleship. The truth is, with all your family has going on, you can’t afford not to be dedicated to family discipleship.”

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Scripture establishes parents as the primary disciple-makers in the lives of their children. Family worship is a faithful application of that truth. Historically, family worship was a practice that the Church treasured. However, the discipline has faded from prominence within Christian homes. In many cases, families are not spending time in worship because they have never heard of the practice or been taught how to do it. These convictions drive this project. EHBC is filled with families who desire to love the Lord but are not participating in family worship. The purpose of this project is to equip the parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma, to regularly lead family worship

The paragraphs that follow will detail the formation and implementation of this project. First, I will explain how I assessed the current family discipleship practices at EHBC. Then, I will describe the development and approval of the Family Worship Curriculum (FWC).¹ Next, I will briefly summarize the eight sessions and their implementation. Finally, I will discuss how I measured the impact of the project.

Assessment of Current Family Discipleship Practices

Before the development of any curriculum, the current practices of the parents at EHBC needed to be evaluated. Based on recommendations from the Professional Doctoral Studies (PDS) office at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), Timothy Paul Jones's Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey (FDPPS)

¹ See appendix 2 for the full FWC.

was chosen as the means of assessment.² Timothy Paul Jones was contacted and gave his permission for the FDPPS to be used in this project.³

Gathering Data

The FDPPS was made available in paper and digital formats. A PDF of the FDPPS was sent out in the weekly student ministry email on June 1, 2022, so it could be printed and returned. Additionally, the email informed parents that paper copies were available in the EHBC office. Parents were asked to place their name on the form or decide on a four-digit code they would remember if they wanted to remain anonymous. The prompts were then to be answered as honestly as possible, selecting an option from a six-point Likert scale. Reminder emails and mass texts were sent out each week, and several surveys were handed out in person during weekly gatherings.

After a month of gathering surveys, it was announced within the office that the elder who oversaw the children's ministry would be accepting a position at another local church. Initial discussions indicated that those responsibilities would be transitioned to me, the youth minister, changing my role to family ministry. Therefore, contact was made with the PDS office and Shawn Wright about expanding the scope of the project to include all parents, bringing children's ministry into the assessment as well.

Once I received approval from both parties, the FDPPS was once again sent out in the weekly student ministry email, but also sent in the children's ministry email on August 25, 2022. A deadline of September 25, 2022, was set and communicated. Encouragements to fill out the survey were emailed and texted out alongside consistent, in-person reminders until the deadline.

Once the second deadline had been reached, twenty-five surveys had been

² Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011). 201-3. Used by permission.

³ See appendix 1 for a copy of the FDPPS as used to gather data before the FWC.

gathered, and their information was inputted into a spreadsheet to evaluate responses, average, median, and standard deviation.

Analyzing the Results

The specifics of the FDPPS will be discussed in further detail in chapter 5.⁴ The initial data was encouraging. All families except for one indicated that family devotional or worship times were a priority within their schedule. Additionally, there was a general understanding that parents had a primary role in the spiritual upbringing of their children rather than passing them off to the church. Although discipleship was happening in the homes, there was room for growth and indication that the church could do more to equip families to lead. Results were positive and pointed towards EHBC families benefiting from being trained for family worship.

Developing the Family Worship Curriculum

Based on the biblical, historical, and modern precedence for family worship combined with results from the FDPPS, I proposed a four-week family worship training. However, the PDS office helpfully noted that a four-week training would not allow enough time for a measurable development of discipline and a more thorough covering of needed material. Upon that insight, an eight-week FWC was pursued in order to effectively teach the content and allow families the time to develop habits of implementation. Each session would begin with a modeled form of family worship, having the participants read, pray, and sing together, followed by a lecture on the weekly topic. Therefore, the eight-week structure of the FWC would introduce family worship, present a biblical basis, evaluate historical and modern practice, celebrate the benefits, further explain reading in family worship, further explain praying in family worship, further explain singing in family worship, and encourage perseverance in family worship.

⁴ See goal 1 in chapter 5.

Expert Evaluators

Once written, I selected four field experts to evaluate the FWC. Shawn Wright, who is the advisor for this project, is Professor of Church History at SBTS, serves as an elder at his local church, and has sought to faithfully live out family discipleship in his own home. Matthew Haste is the Director of the PDS office, an associate professor of Biblical Spirituality and Biblical Counseling at SBTS, and a father who desires to disciple his family. Jonathan Williams, the founder of Gospel Family Ministries and author of *Gospel Family* and *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, continues to produce resources to teach and equip households for family worship, has his Ph.D. in Family-Ministry and Biblical Counseling from SWBTS, is an adjunct professor at SWBTS, and is a father who strives to lead his family spiritually. Ryan Smith was the elder at EHBC who provided oversight to the student and children's ministry when the FDPPS was sent out and the FWC was developed. He now serves as lead pastor of Arrow Heights Baptist Church in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, has a Doctorate of Ministry from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in apologetics, and strives to bring up his children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. These four men were chosen because they are experts concerning church history, spiritual disciplines, and family ministry, and have personal experience seeking to disciple their households.

Each expert was sent a copy of the FWC and Curriculum Evaluation Rubric (CER). Once completed, the CERs were scanned and sent back, all giving the FWC sufficient or exemplary ratings along with additional thoughts. Matthew Haste recommended switching the third and fourth sessions, which would have the benefits of family worship discussed before the history and present practices. This change would provide the opportunity for more buy-in from participants before launching into the back half of the FWC. The other three experts agreed, and I made the change.

Although the project's scope was expanded and additional surveys were gathered, the FWC was still sufficient to teach and equip families. Very few minor edits

were made, meaning the initial approval of the expert panel still stood for the quality and preparedness of the FWC.

Implementing the Project

Once assessment was complete and the FWC was developed and approved, implementation had to be carefully worked into the regular rhythm of EHBC. Several staff, elders, and church members worked to make this take place smoothly and effectively. For implementation, the project was announced and taught. Following a description of how the FWC was promoted, I will present a detailed look at each of the eight sessions.

Announcing the Project

The first hurdle was figuring out what time of the week the FWC would be taught. After deliberation and striving for an option that would fit with EHBC's schedule and best serve families, Sundays from 4 to 5pm were chosen with the hopes that families could eat, have naps, and come back up for the teaching. The children's ministry staff proposed offering childcare, allowing parents to come together and not have to worry about watching their children. An eight-week course schedule was chosen, which would actually last nine weeks, taking a break on the Sunday before Thanksgiving.

One of the elders at EHBC worked to design a family worship logo that was then attached to an image that I could use to advertise each session individually. Additionally, a sign was printed with the developed logo and the statement, "EHBC will be hosting an 8-week family training that will meet once a week to model, teach, and encourage participants to regularly practice family worship in their homes. This course is for all people! Single, married, with children, grandparents, etc." This sign was placed on a table along with a large collection of family worship and family discipleship books, drawing the eye and promoting helpful resources. Additionally, two sign-up sheets were placed on the table that gave the titles for the eight weeks of the FWC and had blanks for

names, phone numbers, and the number and ages of children needing childcare. The bottom included information about a number that individuals could text to sign up for regular reminders about the FWC.

In the fall of 2022, EHBC preached a series through the second half of the book of Ephesians titled “Walk Worthy with One Another,” urging Christians to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel in the different spheres of their life. On October 2, 2022, I was given the opportunity to preach through Ephesians 6:1-4, urging the body to walk worthy in their homes. As part of the application, I introduced the concept of family worship and announced that EHBC would be teaching an eight-week course with the hopes of equipping them to practice the discipline. They were pointed to the sign-up table that was placed in the front hallway in a location that would be passed on Sundays and Wednesdays as families entered and exited.⁵ Following the sermon, the FWC sign-up table was left out and promoted through email, text, and announcements until the afternoon of October 16, 2022.

Once the time for sign-ups had been completed, the gathered information was used for messaging and organizing childcare. All of the provided phone numbers were added to a mass messaging group so that they could receive reminders about the course and encouragement throughout the week. All of the ages and amounts of children were sent to the children’s ministry so that they could prepare the right number of workers to serve during the FWC. The registration table was moved into the room where the FWC would be taught and the sign-up sheets were replaced with a sign-in sheet that would be updated each week in order to keep track of which families attended. The family worship and family discipleship books were left on the table so attendees could continue to have helpful resources placed in front of them throughout the course.

⁵ Although the scope of the project was targeting parents of children and youth, all church members were encouraged to sign up for the course with the hope that family worship would fill the homes of grandparents, young couples, and college students alike.

Teaching the FWC

In order to promote attendance, regular reminders were sent out to families. A mass text message was sent out several times during the weeks of the FWC to remind participants about the upcoming FWC session and encourage them to plan to attend. Additionally, weekly EHBC update emails would include the promotion image for the upcoming session of the FWC and a link to the previous week's video. Announcements were made on two Sunday mornings to encourage families to participate.

Each session began with a demonstrated model of family worship. I would read a passage and lead a discussion over its contents. A time of prayer was then guided based on the contents of the studied portion of Scripture. Finally, a time of musical worship would follow in response to the reading and praying.

All of the FWC was aided by projecting the hymns, main points, and quotes from all sessions on screens for the attendees. Additionally, audio and video for each session were recorded and uploaded.⁶ The recording would start after the time of singing; thus, the recordings only included the lecture portions of the FWC. A link to the video was texted out the same day it was recorded, emailed to youth parents during the week, and emailed to all of EHBC along with the promotion for the upcoming week.

Additionally, a giveaway was offered as an incentive for participants. If any family had at least one member attend all eight weeks of the FWC, their name would be placed in a drawing to win a collection of family discipleship resources.⁷ This was announced during the first session and readdressed throughout the weeks.

Session 1: What Is Family Worship?

Session one began with a modeled family worship time that involved reading

⁶ See appendix 5 for links to all eight sessions of the FWC.

⁷ The giveaway included *Our Hymns Our Heritage* by David and Barbara Leeman, *Parenting* by Paul David Tripp, *Disciplines of a Godly Family* by Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Gospel Family* by Jonathan Williams, and *Family Worship Bible Guide* by Joel Beeke.

and discussing James 1:1-18. This passage was chosen so that starting a book could be demonstrated and theology, particularly related to joy in trials, could be seen. Following a prayer based on the conclusions from James 1:1-18, I played bass and led the singing of “It is Well,” showing how music in family worship is most often led in my home.

After pointing to the example of family worship that was just modeled, attendees were told that the hope was that this type of reading, praying, and singing would be brought into their homes. The definition of family worship chosen was, “The regular and intentional gathering of a household to worship God and to make disciples in the home.”⁸ Each part of the definition was unpacked and used as a guide for the remainder of the session. Family worship is to be regular, be intentional, involve the gathering of a household, and be comprised of content that is intended to worship God and make disciples. The final section included a brief discussion of the primary elements of family worship: reading, praying, and singing. As families were sent out, they were reminded that this topic was not taught to make them feel guilty, that family worship is attainable, and that they should start by targeting a short amount of time. The session concluded with the challenge for families to target one family worship time in their household during the coming week.

Session 2: Is Family Worship Biblical?

Session two began with a modeled family worship time that involved reading and discussing Psalm 1. This passage was chosen so that working through the genre of wisdom literature was demonstrated, and encouragement towards faithful spiritual disciplines could be seen. Following a prayer based on the conclusions from Psalm 1, “Come Thou Fount” was sung acapella to show another way that music could be led during family worship.

⁸ *Guide to Family Worship 2015*, For God’s Fame, accessed January 5, 2021, <http://forgodsname.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/guide-to-family-worship-2015.pdf>

Four primary passages were discussed to demonstrate that family worship is a faithful application of Scripture. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 shows that parents are to pursue generational faith by regular and intentional instruction. Psalm 78:4-8 declares that families should deliberately seek to pass on their faith from one generation to the next. Ephesians 6:1-4 continues to reveal that parents, and particularly fathers, must commit to bringing up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Second Timothy 1:3-7 was discussed to point to how Timothy's love for the Lord was helpfully built by the faithfulness of his grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice. No matter their structure, households should look to these godly women and strive to make family worship a part of their lives. Additionally, it was shown that outside of those four passages, family discipleship is seen throughout the Bible. This was accomplished by rapidly addressing Genesis 18:17-19, Joshua 24:15, Job 1:5-6, Psalm 145:4-6, Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 28:18-20, 2 John 4 and 3 John 4. Families were then challenged to participate in family worship twice during the week. Additionally, a handout with family worship discussion questions was passed out to attendees to prompt further dialogue at home.⁹

Session 3: The Benefits of Family Worship

Session three began with a modeled family worship time that involved reading and discussing 1 John 1. This passage was chosen so that working through the genre of a general epistle was demonstrated, along with an example of talking through theology, the gospel, and personal holiness. Following a prayer based on the conclusions from 1 John 1, "In Christ Alone" was led vocally and on an acoustic guitar by the music minister at EHBC to show another way that music could be practiced during family worship.

After defining family worship and presenting it as a faithful application of Scripture in the previous sessions, participants were taught how beneficial the practice

⁹ See appendix 6.

could be for the individual, family, and local church. Eight benefits were highlighted. Attendees were taught that family worship strengthens the spiritual health of parents, strengthens the spiritual health of children, protects sound doctrine, promotes academics, helps build family unity, promotes evangelism, strengthens local church worship, and regularly places the gospel in the lives of a family. Statements were added at the end to again clarify that family worship does not guarantee salvation or sanctification, but is a beneficial means of grace that God has given so that in hearing the gospel, families may come to know and live for Christ as Lord. Families were again challenged to target two family worship times in their homes during the coming week.

Session 4: History, Present, and Need

Session four began with a modeled family worship time that involved reading and discussing Genesis 3. This passage was chosen so that working through another genre was demonstrated along with an example of addressing sin and how the Old Testament points forward to Christ. Following a prayer based on the conclusions from Genesis 3, “Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me” was led vocally and on a piano by a mother who is a member at EHBC to show another way that music could be practiced during family worship.

A look at the modern practices of family discipleship was detailed, highlighting how priorities have been given to extracurriculars, many church structures have taken the place of parents, and the church has generally failed to equip families for family worship. Church history in relation to family discipleship patterns was then rapidly overviewed to show that the absence of family worship is not the norm, but an oddity. Teaching walked through the early Church, Reformation, Puritans, and early America, leading up to the Sunday School movements that largely saw family discipleship begin to be passed over to the local church. Families were encouraged to be history makers, shift the pattern for their family, and target three family worship times for

their household during the coming week.

Session 5: Reading in Family Worship

Session five began with a modeled family worship time that involved reading and discussing Amos 4. This passage was chosen so that working through the genre of a minor prophet was demonstrated along with an example of talking about suffering and God's sovereignty. Following a prayer based on the conclusions from Amos 4, I played bass and led the singing of "He Will Hold Me Fast" to continue to model how musical worship could be practiced within families.

Sessions five through seven were detailed looks at the primary three elements of family worship. Session five covered reading by teaching families what to read, what parts of Scripture to read, how to read, and what to do during discussion after reading. Families were encouraged to read all parts of Scripture, adjusting their approach or guiding resource based on the ages of the members of their household, and to read passionately, followed by helpful text-driven questions. I then opened the floor for families to suggest or discuss what has worked well or been difficult in their homes in relation to reading in family worship. Participants were then challenged to target three family worship times in their homes during the coming week.

Session 6: Praying in Family Worship

Session six began with a modeled family worship time that involved reading and discussing Luke 3:23-28. This passage was chosen so that working through a genealogy portion of Scripture was demonstrated, showing the attainability of reading through all parts of Scripture. Following a prayer based on the conclusions from Luke 3:23-28, a video with lyrics for the song "Christ the New and Better" was played and projected, modeling how families can use technology to musically worship in their homes.

Session six continued the examination of the primary elements of family

worship as it covered praying by teaching families why they should pray during family worship, how they should pray, and what they should pray. Participants were encouraged to pray because it works, using the words and applications from Scripture to pray for current events, requests, their local church, evangelism, and missions. Further, families were advised to pray with brevity, variety, and the desire to teach the coming generation how to pray. I then opened the floor for families to suggest or discuss what has worked well or been difficult in their homes in relation to praying in family worship. Participants were then challenged to target three family worship times in their homes during the coming week.

Session 7: Singing in Family Worship

Session seven began with a modeled family worship time that involved reading and discussing Judges 21. This passage was chosen so that working through a historical narrative portion of Scripture was demonstrated, showing how to discuss and navigate difficult narratives. Following a prayer based on the conclusions from Judges 21, “Behold Our God” was led vocally and on a piano by a member at EHBC to show another way that music could be practiced during family worship.

Session seven continued the discussion of the primary elements of family worship by covering singing, starting with the acknowledgment that it can be the most difficult to bring into the home, so the content addressed several common concerns and recommended practical solutions. First, the statement that singing together at home is really awkward was reworded so participants would more optimistically hear that singing at home can be awkward for a time. The more it is incorporated into family worship, the more natural it will become. The absence of musical talent can be combatted by utilizing technology, rejoicing in the reality that the family will improve musically with practice, and parents seizing the opportunity to learn an instrument in order to lead their homes.

The argument that singing in family worship is unnecessary was combatted by

discussing Colossians 3:16 and the many benefits of singing. Attendees were shown that incorporating musical worship is worthwhile because of music's power to instruct and encourage, it equips family members to doxologically respond to truth, those involved will grow in their knowledge of faithful songs, families will be instructed in doctrine, their love for one another will increase through vulnerability paired with helpful lyrics, and the practice at home will strengthen local church worship. Finally, participants were encouraged to teach their families why they sing, to choose biblically faithful songs, not to be afraid of repeating songs, and to urge the whole family to join in. I then opened the floor for families to suggest or discuss what has worked well or been difficult in their homes in relation to singing in family worship. Participants were then challenged to target family worship four times in their homes during the coming week.

Session 8: Perseverance in Family Worship

Session eight began with a modeled family worship time that involved reading and discussing Revelation 22. This passage was chosen to demonstrate teaching apocalyptic literature and end the course on a joyous note. Following a prayer based on the conclusions from Revelation 22, "Holy, Holy, Holy" was sung acapella to demonstrate again that music could be led at home without any particular gifting or instrumentation.

The final session encouraged participants to persevere in family worship, explaining that the hope in the FWC was not eight weeks of assignment completion, but the establishment of generational habits. Obstacles that can arise in the way of regular discipline were addressed. Families that had not started yet were told that it is never too late to begin and not to let feelings of guilt drag the problem out further. The feeling that families do not have enough time should be countered by prioritizing and planning their schedules around family worship, planning ahead for continuing family worship during vacations, and being flexible without abandoning the practice altogether. Households

with members that refuse to participate should make absence punishable, rejoice at any level of involvement if present, and press on in faithfulness when spouses do not want to participate. The feeling that family worship is having no impact can be avoided by realizing that there is often a deep impact that is not always visible and that habits of discipline will speak volumes to children even when it appears they do not care about any of the content.

Attendees were then charged to encourage one another, regularly checking on the family worship practices of fellow EHBC members, and to make a plan to persist in their own discipline. I then opened the floor for families to suggest or discuss any final thoughts or questions regarding what had worked well or been difficult in their homes in relation to family worship. After concluding thoughts, the FWC ended with the drawing for the family resources. Post-surveys were announced and placed on the table to be picked up on the way out.

Gathering Post-FWC Data

Upon approval from the PDS office, the post-FWC FDPPS included several additional evaluative items.¹⁰ These additions allowed data to be gathered on whether or not participants took the first survey, how many sessions were attended or watched, and any additional comments from parents. Following the conclusion of the FWC, the FDPPS was sent out in the student and children's ministry emails, reminding families to complete and return them. Text messages were sent out in the family worship and student ministry mass text groups as regular encouragements with the same goal. Additionally, the children's ministry team passed out the FDPPS in person to help gather more data. Surveys were collected until January 11, 2023, allowing extra time because of the holiday season.

¹⁰ See goal 3 in chapter 5 for exact additions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project is to equip the parents at EHBC to lead their homes in family worship. I pursued this purpose through the research, development, and implementation of the FWC. The results of the initial FDPPS revealed a need for growth in knowledge and practice. Therefore, an eight-week curriculum was determined to be a helpful resource for the parents at EHBC. Once the FWC was developed, an expert panel approved the content, making minor edits. The schedule was set, EHBC was informed, and the eight weeks of the FWC were taught. Parents were taught what family worship is, why it is biblical, how beneficial it is, its history, its modern practice, and the need for it. Recommendations were given for reading, praying, singing, and overcoming obstacles in order to persevere. A post-survey was then issued to measure the impact of the FWC. All of these efforts were aided by the help of other EHBC staff, elders, and members.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter evaluates the implementation of the FWC at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma. This evaluation is accomplished by assessing the project's purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses, followed by recommendations for what could have been done differently. Lastly, I offer concluding theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

This project's purpose was to equip the parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma, to regularly lead family worship. The witness of Scripture declares that parents, and primarily fathers, are to be the primary disciplers in the lives of their children. One of the best applications of this truth is the practice of family worship. However, many fathers and mothers are not leading their homes spiritually. Family worship, in many cases, has vanished. Instead, parents are passing off the responsibility of family discipleship to the local church. Unfortunately, many are unknowingly avoiding this part of their calling as they seek to be faithful in the only ways they have been shown and taught, which is the case with families at EHBC. This burden falls both on the parents and the local church. Therefore, the FWC was implemented to fill this void, helpfully teach the biblical basis for family worship, and provide abundant practical application.

The approved FWC included visible demonstrations, clear definitions, biblical foundations, encouraging benefits, and numerous recommendations for each of the primary elements of family worship. Combined, the content, examples, and additional

material provided the parents at EHBC with the tools necessary to build a habit of family worship in their homes.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The project was guided by three goals, which were also utilized to determine its effectiveness. The first goal was to evaluate the current knowledge and practice of family worship among parents at EHBC who are regular attendees. The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to teach and prepare parents to adopt consistent habits of family worship. The third goal was to increase the knowledge and practice of family worship among parents at EHBC by using the family worship curriculum. The success of each goal was measured by an assessment survey, an evaluation rubric, and a post-course assessment survey. After the curriculum was taught and data was gathered from the surveys, all three goals were determined to have been successfully met.

Goal 1

The first goal was to evaluate the current knowledge and practice of family worship at EHBC in members who are regular attendees. This goal was measured by administering the FDPPS to parents at EHBC. Email, text groups, and in-person interactions ensured that those who received the survey were regularly attending families. For this goal to have been considered successfully met, ten surveys needed to be completed and returned. When the deadline to turn in a completed FDPPS was reached, twenty-five surveys were received.

Items 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 were reverse-scored. The results of the initial FDPPS, which utilized a six-point Likert scale, are as follows: Item 1: "I prioritize consistent family devotion or worship times in my family's schedule." Out of twenty-five responses, the average was 4.88, which was surprisingly high. This result was encouraging but can also be explained by the word "devotional" within the prompt, allowing a lot of family practices to fall into this category without much definitional clarity.

Item 2: “I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.” The average was 4.84, showing families were willing to admit that although they had some busyness, they would likely have time to add habits of discipline.

Item 3: “The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.” With an average of 5.24, a knowledge of parental responsibility in relation to the church was demonstrated. However, there was still room for growth with the median of responses being 5.

Item 4: “When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.” An average of 5.6 showed that parents were happy to take on a part of the responsibility for guiding their children spiritually.

Item 5: “I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together. Similar to the previous prompt, Item 5 also received a 5.6. Parents saw value in making sure that their homes spent quality time together, even under the pressure of extracurricular activities.

Item 6: “Parents—and particularly fathers—have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.” Encouragingly, the average was 5.04. Although there was still some hesitancy, there appeared to be a leaning toward understanding the weighty responsibility that God has given parents.

Item 7: “Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.” With an average of 5.6, parents acknowledged that the church does not have the primary role in the discipleship of their children.

Item 8: “My church helped me to develop a clear plan for my child’s spiritual growth.” The average was 4.48, with a median of 5 and a standard deviation of

1.29486164, showing that there are varying opinions and parents were not fully convinced that EHBC was helping them know how they should seek to disciple their family.

Item 9: “Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children?” With an average of 4.76, parents at EHBC seem to be making prayer a fairly consistent part of their home.

Item 10: “How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?” Encouragingly, the average was 4.76, with a median of 5. Data showed that most households were striving to have digitally disconnected meal times. This habit is beneficial because mealtimes are excellent and natural opportunities to implement family worship.

Item 11: “How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?” The average response was remarkably high, with an average of 5.6 and a median response of 6. Biblical discussion already has regular inroads in the lives of EHBC families.

Item 12: “How many times in the past MONTH have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?” Similar to item 11, a high average of 5.52 painted an encouraging picture of parents who are willing to make the most of opportunities and discuss their faith with their children.

Item 13: “How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?” This item was potentially the most important on the survey, as it asked about regular patterns of family worship. An average of 4.32 was positive but left desired room for improvement, especially with a time frame of two months.

Item 14: “How many times in the past TWO MONTHS have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children’s spiritual development.” The high average of 4.76 showed that the conversation around family discipleship is happening,

revealing a fertile ground for teaching and training.

Item 15: “How many times in the past YEAR have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?” The average result was 2.48. Although this practice can have a profound impact on children and their discipleship, this question was less pointed toward the content of this project. However, an increase in evangelistic zeal would hopefully be an outcome of regular family worship.

Item 16: “How many times in the past YEAR has any church leader made contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child’s spiritual development.” With a fairly low average of 3.28, this item was informative. The leadership at EHBC needs to be more intentional in teaching and speaking with parents about family discipleship.

The results of the FDPPS helped to evaluate the current knowledge and practice of family worship at EHBC. A healthy parenting direction was detected in the responses. However, there was still great room for growth in discipline, understanding, and local church partnership.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to teach and prepare parents to adopt consistent habits of family worship. This goal was completed by writing a course, the FWC, that would introduce the parents of EHBC to family worship, its biblical foundations, benefits, and history, along with recommendations for each primary element and a concluding encouragement to navigate obstacles and persevere. All of the sessions began with a modeled time of family worship that used different genres of Scripture and musical practice. The FWC was then reviewed by a panel of experts who used the CER in order to evaluate the biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality of the material in relation to the project. Comments and recommendations were received, and edits were made. For this goal to be considered

successfully met, a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluated material needed to meet or exceed the sufficient level. The results of the CER were scored at sufficient or above. Therefore, the second goal was successfully met.

Goal 3

The third goal was to increase the knowledge and practice of family worship among parents at EHBC using the FWC. This goal was measured by administering the FDPPS after the FWC to the same group of families that received the survey in the first goal. In order to be considered successfully met, ten families who took the initial survey and attended part of the FWC needed to complete the FDPPS, and the t-test results needed to demonstrate a positive increase from the results seen prior to the FWC.

The FWC was taught at EHBC with attendance tracked at each session. The first week had 50 attendees, made up of 32 different families. The second had 62 attendees, made up of 33 different families. The third had 58 attendees, made up of 34 different families. The fourth had 34 attendees, made up of 20 different families. The fifth had 37 attendees, made up of 18 different families. The sixth had 37 attendees, made up of 23 different families. The sixth had 35 attendees, made up of 22 different families. The final session had 33 attendees, made up of 20 different families. As expected, attendance decreased over time but held steady through the final sessions at an encouraging number. However, recordings of each session were made available and sent out weekly to all children's and youth ministry families with the hopes that they would make up missed weeks. During the final session, the FDPPS was announced and handed out to families to complete.

Several items were added to the post-FWC FDPPS in order to more helpfully evaluate the knowledge of parents at EHBC regarding family worship. Because the survey was sent out to all children's ministry and youth ministry families, a statement with a "Yes" or "No" option was added that said, "I filled out the initial Family

Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey.” To track if the parents had attended the FWC or utilized links to watch the FWC, another item stated, “I (or one of my family members) attended _____ sessions in person and watched _____ sessions online of the 8-week Family Worship Course at EHBC.” Lastly, following item 16, an open space was left after the prompt, “Any additional comments and feedback related to the 8-week Family Worship Course at EHBC.” These three items helped bring extra clarity to the gathered results.

Out of the twenty-three participants that returned the post-FWC FDPPS, seventeen had attended the FWC. Of those seventeen, ten had turned in the initial FDPPS, achieving the necessary number of pairable surveys. The results were analyzed using a Paired Two Sample for Means *t*-test with a hypothesized mean difference of 0 and Alpha of 0.05. Table 1 shows the results of the *t*-test. The mean increased from 76.4 to 82.2, showing a significant increase. Importantly, the results communicated that the FWC made a statistically significant difference in equipping the parents at EHBC to understand and lead family worship ($t(10) = -2.854, p = 0.018$).

Table 1. FDPPS paired two sample for means results from FWC attendees

	Pre-FWC	Post-FWC
Mean	76.4	82.2
Variance	50.711111	23.066667
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation	0.4749642	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	-2.854377	

	Pre-FWC	Post-FWC
P(T<=t) one tail	0.0094767	
t Critical one-tail	1.8331129	
P(T<=t) two tail	0.0189534	
t Critical two-tail	2.2621572	

Additionally, the other gathered surveys continued to point to the positive impact of the FWC. Although there were only ten surveys that were collected from participants who took the initial FDPPS and attended the FWC, there were seven additional surveys from families that participated in the FWC. Even though these responses could not all be paired, the average responses reveal a helpful glimpse of the family discipleship perceptions at EHBC before and after the FWC. Table 2 shows the average responses before and after FWC to each of the sixteen items on the FDPPS. The Post-FWC Average is from the seventeen surveys from FWC attendees.

Table 2. Average FDPPS results before and after the FWC

Item	Pre-FWC Average	Post-FWC Average	Difference
1	4.88	5.17647059	0.29647059
2	4.84	5.29411765	0.45411765
3	5.24	5.41176471	0.17176471
4	5.6	5.58823529	-0.0117647
5	5.6	5.58823529	-0.0117647
6	5.04	5.88235294	0.84235294
7	5.6	5.47058824	-0.1294118
8	4.48	4.58823529	0.10823529

Item	Pre-FWC Average	Post-FWC Average	Difference
9	4.76	4.47058824	-0.2894118
10	4.76	5.05882353	0.29882353
11	5.60	5.70588235	0.10588235
12	5.52	5	-0.52
13	4.32	5.52941176	1.20941176
14	4.76	5.23529412	0.47529412
15	2.48	2.41176471	-0.0682353
16	3.28	3.58823529	0.30823529
Total	76.76	80	3.24

What is immediately apparent is that the overall average is significantly higher, with an increase of 3.24. On average, those who attended the FWC had a more positive understanding and practice of family discipleship. Although there were six items that returned with a lower mean response, they are easily explainable or do not impact the effects of the teaching.

Items 4 and 5, which asked about answering children’s theological questions and prioritizing sports and activities, both had an average that was lower after the FWC. However, they were both an average of 5.58823529, only 0.0117647 lower than prior, showing that the answer was positive, almost the exact same, and could be attributed to differences in family schedule or perceptions of the local church as an important part of theological education.

Similarly, item 7 related to church leaders being primarily responsible for discipling children. The average decreased from 5.6 to 5.47058824. This change is not a concerning drop and could occur because of growth in embracing the partnership that should exist between parents as the primary disciple-makers and the local church as

healthy and available support.

The decrease in Item 9 would be concerning, as it shows a drop in the frequency of praying aloud with children. However, one of the participants, whose child is an infant, explained to me when they turned in their FDPPS that they scored this item at a 1 because their child could not pray aloud with them, although they had been doing so frequently. A shift in that one score would change the result completely.

The largest and most surprising negative shift was on item 12. This item dealt with discussing biblical or spiritual matters with children during day-to-day activities. A decrease of 0.52 is pretty significant. But, with an average of 5, the response is still positive. Plus, the emphasis of the FWC was on family worship, not necessarily seizing opportunities throughout the day to turn toward biblical conversations. Further, this item may have scored higher initially because prior to thinking about the option of family worship, parents saw these conversations during their regular rhythms as the primary means of passing on faith.

A final decrease was item 15, which asked parents about witnessing to non-Christians with their children. The initial response was already low at 2.48, lowering to 2.41176471 after the FWC. That is a minor shift, but still reveals an area that, although it was not the focus of the teaching in this project, should be addressed.

On the other side, the positive changes were significant and related to the targets of the FWC. The ten items that had an increase in average are worth briefly noting when thinking about the effectiveness of the project.

Item 1, on prioritizing family devotionals or worship, jumped from 4.88 to 5.17647059. The hope was that families would leave the FWC and seek to make family worship a priority in their lives. An increase in the average response is ideal.

Part of the FWC taught on the attainability of family worship and encouraged parents to pursue brevity. Item 2 related to families wanting to have worship together but being too busy. The average increased by 0.45411765. This change does not mean that

families have miraculously gotten less busy. However, there is a growth in the recognition that they do, in fact, have the time and can make time, even in the midst of their ever-flowing schedule.

Item 3 spoke of the church being the primary place where children should receive Bible teaching. As a major emphasis of the FWC, it was encouraging to see the average increase from 5.24 to 5.41176471. Even though there was already a high sense that the home should be the primary location for biblical instruction, it is positive that the understanding increased further.

Item 6 is of major importance to the heart of the project. It reads, “Parents—and particularly fathers—have the primary responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.” The average response dramatically increased from 5.04 to 5.88235294. Out of the seventeen responses, only two chose a 5 rather than a 6. It is encouraging that those who attended the FWC walked away seeing parents, and primarily fathers, as the primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.

Item 8 related to how the local church has helped parents develop a plan for their child’s spiritual growth. An increase of 0.10823529 is minor, but another favorable response that shows that the families at EHBC feel they are being pointed in the right direction when raising their children.

Item 10 spoke of eating meals together as a family. A substantial increase of 0.29882353 brought the average over 5, showing that families are more willing to stop, sit down, and spend undistracted time together. These times are ideal for discipleship and worship.

Item 11, which asked about the frequency of reading or discussing the Bible with children during a month, also increased. With this being one of the primary elements of family worship, it is positive that this average came back higher.

Item 12 is potentially the most important average to note. It reads, “How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or

worship time in our home?” This question captures the desired application of the FWC, so the results are worth noting. The initial response was 4.32, which was positive, but had lots of room for growth. The average response increased by 1.20941176 to 5.52941176, which was the largest growth of any item. In the Lord’s kindness, a high percentage of those who attended the FWC are spending time worshipping in their homes.

Item 14 asked how many times participants had spoken about their children’s spiritual development to their spouse or close friend. The average response was higher by 0.47529412, showing that parents are talking about family discipleship more. These conversations will hopefully lead to greater intentionality, practice, and generational fruitfulness.

Lastly, item 16 asked how often any church leaders had contacted parents about their child’s spiritual development. The increase of 0.30823529 is significant because EHBC wants parents to know that they are striving to partner with them to help pass on their faith from generation to generation.

Although these are not entirely paired results, the average results from EHBC members who attended the FWC are incredibly encouraging. They point to an increase in family worship, prioritizing family time, understanding the role of parents and the local church, partnership with the local church, and conversations related to family discipleship. The results of the t-test showed the project to be a success. Furthermore, the average results of the two surveys further point to positive growth in parents of EHBC in knowledge and practice. All three goals were successfully met.

Strengths of the Project

Strengths of the project included the material within the FWC, the promotion and communication for the course, the attendance, how family worship was demonstrated, the accessibility, and how it laid groundwork.

The content of the FWC served to equip parents intellectually and practically

in a logical order. Clear definitions were presented, biblical foundations were convincingly laid, benefits were dynamically outlined, numerous practical applications were offered, and reassurances on how to overcome obstacles and persevere concluded the time. All the sessions were bolstered by quotes and resources from scholars, providing further credibility to the call to family worship and clarity to the theological and practical instructions. Parents were presented with thorough, attainable, and encouraging teaching.

Leaders at EHBC were kind enough to allow for the FWC to be effectively promoted. I was given the opportunity to preach, having the gathered body on Sunday hear about the FWC as an application to the call from Ephesians 6:1-4. A space in the hallway by the door that everyone enters and exits through was given to the family worship table where the sign-ups were so that it was seen over and over. Emails and texts were sent, making sure this opportunity had every chance of being seen by members at EHBC. By the time the FWC was going to start, forty-two different families had signed up and given their information for updates. Then, as the course continued, weekly emails, texts, and social media posts were utilized for communicating with participants and reminding them of the upcoming sessions and topics.

The attendance at the FWC was incredibly encouraging. Although it followed the common trend of numbers starting high and dropping off, the number of families that made the time to come was positive. Even at the end, twenty different families were attending. An amazing curriculum can be prepared and practiced, but the content has nowhere to land if no one attends. By God's grace, the FWC maintained a consistent group of families.

Choosing to start each session with a modeled example of family worship helped demonstrate the teaching and involved the participants. Various church members got to be a part of the process because a different style of music was shown each week. Participation became a regular part of the FWC since the class got to discuss, pray, and

sing together. Further, the actual goal of the course was demonstrated in front of them as a group time and time again. This process was unifying and educational.

Technological advancements make access to curriculum even more accessible. Being able to record a video of each session was an immense blessing. I was hesitant to make the videos available because I did not want participants to decide they could just as easily stay home and watch the videos on their own time. However, the video option did not discourage involvement, but provided a resource to those who were busy, wanted to rewatch a session, or desired to share the curriculum. Additionally, these recordings now last beyond the length of the course and continue to be available to the families at EHBC.

One of the major strengths of the project is how it has laid the groundwork for continued growth in family discipleship at EHBC. The purpose of this project was to equip the parents at EHBC for family worship. As a result, conversation about family worship is far more frequent among members. Questions to staff about materials and methods for teaching children Scripture are more common than before. The FWC further opened the door for EHBC to develop resources, speak of family worship as an application during teaching times, and partner with parents for family discipleship.

Weaknesses of the Project

Though the project had its strengths and benefited the people of EHBC, there were areas that were not as excellent as others. Some weaknesses of the project were the survey questions, survey participation, and scheduling.

The FDPPS was a high-quality resource that served me, the project's purpose, its goals, and the families well. However, the items were intentionally broad. The content pointed more to family discipleship in general than family worship in particular. Elements of family worship are asked about, but worded in a way that could be inside or outside of a specific and intentional gathered family time. So, parents could rate themselves highly on many prompts while still not pursuing regular family worship.

Part of this weakness was due to the wording of some of the items. They would give two options, veering away from specificity and opening the door for more positive answers from parents. For example, item one stated, “I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family’s schedule.” Because of the options given, a family that never worships together but reads an excerpt from a devotional, or potentially even less, could feel comfortable scoring well.

Or item 11, which asked, “How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?” Although this question asks about a key element in family worship, it also leaves room for parents that have not read the Bible with their children but have talked about spiritual matters to respond with a high number. Although most of the items were helpful and the results were clarifying, the prompts overall could have been stronger.

Another weakness was the survey participation. Even though the needed number of participants was met, there was room for more data to be gathered. Looking at the attendance numbers, there should have been more responses.¹ Families were contacted time and time again and through multiple sources, yet it was not easy to get them to return the FDPPS. Then, out of the twenty-five who returned a survey, only ten committed to attending the FWC.

Yet, the attendance was still very encouraging. However, there were seven additional families who attended the FWC who had neglected to fill out the initial FDPPS. Their average responses were positive, but it would have been even more helpful if they had chosen to participate in the first survey. Additionally, there were other parents who attended the FWC and did not fill out the FDPPS at any point, even though they appeared committed to the course and its content and had the survey presented to them in person and through multiple avenues of communication. The data that was gathered is

¹ See goal 3 in chapter 5 for the attendance at each session.

confirming and positive, but there was the potential for even more feedback, which would have likely bolstered the results further, that was unfortunately missed.

Lastly, scheduling was a weakness that negatively affected the FWC and FDPPS because of its dates and time of day. The first difficulty was working on advertising and placing the eight weeks of the FWC within EHBC's schedule wisely and naturally. So, the course continued to be delayed as the opportunity was discussed with elders. Their guidance was not a hindrance, but finding the right time to announce and teach the course in the midst of a new semester and within a local church that was encountering a major staffing transition was difficult.

It was decided that I would preach Ephesians 6:1-4 and promote the FWC, but the date got pressed back until October 2, 2022. Starting the process on that Sunday meant there still had to be time given for sign-ups, pushing the start of the FWC back even farther. This schedule had the course running from October to Mid-December. Although these dates technically worked, they were inconvenient for participants. Thanksgiving was around the middle of the course, producing two Sundays when many families were understandably out of town. The course was also lengthened to nine weeks by this addition, asking for a further commitment from participants. Also, the start date had the FWC end on December 11, 2022. Parents were around during this time, but they were then asked to complete the FDPPS during the holiday season, which made the process even more difficult. The FWC was taught, well-attended, and positively received, but the dates were not ideal.

Further, the time of day the sessions were held was not as good as it could have been. Another difficulty in planning was deciding when to offer a family course that would fit within the life of EHBC and be ideal for parents to attend. Since EHBC was recently pushed to two Sunday morning services because of a lack of space, adult core groups, small groups similar to Sunday school, meet during both services. Therefore, a Sunday morning course could not be offered, as it would not be available to all families.

Wednesday nights do not have a primary teaching time, but focus on youth and children's ministry while some core groups meet. Again, families would have been pulled from their core groups and volunteer opportunities.

Avoiding days outside of Sunday and Wednesday because families had enough extracurriculars to manage throughout the week, left later on Sunday as the only option. In the past, EHBC has struggled to get members to attend gatherings on Sunday afternoons or evenings. So, I wanted to avoid that timeframe but had no other choice. I did not want to target evenings because parents would have to avoid the FWC in order to put their children to bed. Therefore, Sunday afternoons at 4pm was decided. However, even once the time was chosen, it was only made truly effective because one of the children's ministers at EHBC graciously worked to put together childcare for all of the sessions so that parents with young children could attend more easily. Unfortunately, even though there was not really another option, the chosen time of day did not allow the FWC to reach as many parents as possible.

What I would Do Differently

If I was given the opportunity to refine this project and implement it again, I would approach it differently by refining the survey, improving the surveying process, scheduling the FWC more effectively, and reducing the number of sessions.

Although the FDPPS is well-written and accomplished the desired goal, a project on family worship practices would benefit from more specificity. I would, with permission, edit several prompts so that they would be more specific, then add additional items that asked participants to define family worship, whether or not they grew up with family worship, how equipped they feel to lead family worship, and their frequency of singing in worship at home. These added items would have strengthened the initial responses and helped demonstrate growth in the understanding and practice of family worship more clearly in the final results.

More responses and more data would have been more helpful. Therefore, a reminder would be given at the start of the FWC that all parents would be expected to complete a FDPPS at the end of the eight weeks. Because FWC attendance was tracked, those names would be used for specific contact to ensure that more responses were returned. These efforts would allow for more paired data.

Another way I would strengthen the project would be to schedule the course earlier in the semester. An eight-session teaching that finished in November, a month earlier than it did during this project, would make it far easier for families to attend. August and early September could be used for promoting the FWC. Then the sessions would run from mid-September to mid-November. Major holidays would be avoided and the whole course would be completed well before the end of a semester. Further, even though Thanksgiving would be close to the end of the course, gathering post-FWC surveys would still be far easier. Improved response-gathering methodology, as discussed above, and the avoidance of the long and busy Christmas break would greatly help with the process.

Lastly, I would try to reduce the FWC to a six-week course. Eight weeks worked well, and I would gladly do that again, as it does allow longer for patterns of discipline to be built. However, eight weeks is a major commitment for any family. Additionally, that gives more time for attendance to dwindle and a reduced zeal for the information taught. Weeks five through seven were packed with practical recommendations for reading, praying, and singing.² However, the deep dive into each topic for a whole week made it feel like the course had slowed down some. I believe that the content could be faithfully compressed into six weeks, still covering the same subjects and offering quality content. Additionally, it would be easier to fit into a calendar and

² See sessions 5, 6, and 7 under goal 2 in chapter 4 for summaries of these sessions. The full sessions can be viewed in appendix 2.

still give parents plenty of time to build a habit.

Theological Reflections

Studying this subject and implementing this project has been an absolute joy. The time spent in this endeavor has shown me that Scripture clearly calls parents to be the primary disciple-makers in their children's lives, that family worship is a faithful application of God's instruction to parents, that family worship is attainable and Spirit-empowered, that the local church must come alongside and train parents, and that Christian community is a great means toward sanctification.

The overwhelming witness of the Bible is that God has given parents the great privilege of being the primary ones who spiritually disciple their children. This truth is even more relevant in a society that is regularly looking for convenience and quick fixes. The Lord has graciously provided the local church, parachurch ministries, and extra resources that children can encounter so that they would come to know Christ and grow in sanctification. However, the primary and beautiful call is for parents to commit to the long and arduous journey of bringing up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The spiritual weight and impact of their voice and actions in their children's lives can hardly be overstated.

Family worship is a grace God has given to families so they can faithfully apply the teachings of Scripture. The Bible clearly calls parents to pass on Scripture and its meaning, pray with and for their families, and communicate a joyous and passionate response to the glories of the Lord. Family worship is an incredible means of pursuing these ends. Family worship is not the only way to practice family discipleship, but it is a strong application of Scripture that allows parents to place wise habits and the gospel of Jesus Christ before their children consistently and cheerfully.

The daunting task of family worship was not given to scholars, vocational ministers, or the elite, but to parents in general. Parents can rest in knowing that this road

is attainable, as God has merely called them to read the Word he graciously gave, pray the truths he has wisely spoken, and sing in response to his abundant mercy. Further, their hope is not in their perfect execution of the practice. Rather, the Spirit blesses faithfulness and works through the Word. No matter the response from their children, parents can trust in the sovereignty of God while pursuing obedience, knowing that it is not their efforts that can save and sanctify. But rather, as they practice these realistic means of grace in reading, praying, and singing, they trust the Lord to work in the lives of their family.

However, great responsibility lies with the local church to equip the saints for this ministry. My heart breaks as I think of how many parents feel unequipped to disciple their children while also feeling like their church has done little to nothing to prepare them for the weighty responsibility in front of them. The leadership of the local church must make an effort to encourage and equip parents for family discipleship. Churches must teach families about the joys and benefits of family worship and the how it is a genuinely attainable practice. God has given the local church the wonderful task of equipping and empowering parents to faithfully pursue their calling to make disciples within their families.

Further, the Lord has built the local church to come alongside one another in sanctification. Parents are so encouraged and motivated by genuine partnerships with other parents. Fathers and mothers are beautifully empowered when others pursuing the same practice talk about their successes, struggles, and what has and has not worked for them. As parents are pressed forward in biblical practices, their efforts will be strengthened by other members of their church walking beside them to encourage and be encouraged by them.

Personal Reflections

This project has shaped me as well. I have grown in my desire to equip the

local church, my heart for a theology of parenting, my love for the practice of family worship, and my desire to have children.

So much of the absence of family worship falls on the local church. Tragically, very little has been done to teach and equip parents how to bring it into their homes. If those efforts are made, the results are so encouraging. After the FWC, one father at EHBC expressed to me how encouraged he was by this new practice of family worship in his home. He then explained that some idea, habit, or practice like this had always been in the back of his mind, but that the FWC was that clarifier and push that he needed to actually begin. Conversations like that, feedback on the FDPPS, and watching families exhibit growth in sanctification and hunger for faithful discipleship have further built a desire in me to do what I can to teach and equip parents for the glorious task they have been given.

As I have studied passages that point towards family worship and served in a staff position that has me regularly interacting with families, I have a growing desire to develop a more robust theology of parenting. God has given so much clarity on this topic in Scripture, from the way he interacts with his people to the many examples of earthly parents who rise to the task or leave generations of damage after them. There is a plethora of detail within the pages of Scripture to continue to learn from and observe. Such an endeavor would equip me further for personal obedience and more effective teaching and training within my ministry.

Many times, extended research can make a subject lose its luster. The opposite has been the case with family worship for me. In the Lord's kindness, my wife and I have continued to worship together and grown as a couple through encountering biblical truths, praying richly for one another, the church, and missionary efforts, and singing with each other in worship. Our love for the Lord has grown. Our love for one another has grown. Our love for the church has grown. Additionally, we find ourselves further bolstered against sins and struggles. I have loved experiencing that reality and then

hearing the impact family worship has had in our local church. I pray that, by the Spirit, we and the members of EHBC would embrace this practice for generations.

Lastly, this project has furthered my own desire to be a father who leads my household well. Parenting and the opportunity for discipleship within the home is a beautiful kindness from the Lord. My wife and I long for children and look forward to the day, Lord willing, we can practice family worship with them. Getting to labor alongside families, and watching parents speak of the joys of reading, praying, and singing together has my heart even more burdened and excited to start that journey myself. These wonderful years with my wife are still an incredible and undeserved gift. The times of family worship with the two of us are sanctifying and building habits, knowledge, and faith that we can carry into parenting. In that way, this project hopefully impacts parents at EHBC and my own home for years to come.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma, for family worship. This purpose was successfully accomplished through the completion of all three established goals.

Chapter 1 established the context at EHBC and showed parents who desire to raise their families well but often pass off their responsibility to the local church, mostly because they have not been taught to do otherwise. Chapter 2 laid the biblical foundation for family worship by primarily looking at Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Psalm 78:4-8, Ephesians 6:1-4, and 2 Timothy 1:3-5. Additional passages were covered to demonstrate further the consistent witness of Scripture that parents, and particularly fathers, are primarily responsible for regularly leading their children to worship the Lord. Chapter 3 traced the history, present practices, many benefits, and current need of family worship, showing that the modern absence of the practice is an unhealthy anomaly rather than an unimpactful norm. Chapter 4 then detailed how the three goals were pursued by

surveying parents, developing curriculum, teaching the sessions, and then gathering final data. Finally, chapter 5 evaluated the results of the project, demonstrating the completion of the goals and positive impact on the parents at EHBC.

This project was successful in equipping parents at EHBC to lead in family worship. Its impact can already be seen. The implementation of this project has laid the foundation for continued family discipleship efforts. Following the FWC, parents have started to speak with one another about and encourage each other in habits of family worship. EHBC has produced a whole page on their website dedicated to explaining family worship and pointing parents toward helpful resources.³ The lead pastor, music minister, family minister, and one church member who is passionate about family worship, have partnered together to develop resources for families. Trying not to replace Bible reading in family worship, these four EHBC members are working together to produce six to eight family worship guides monthly that walk biblically through a hymn, historic or modern, so that families will learn and sing the hymn together and then hear the hymn sung three to four times that month at EHBC. I pray that labors like these continue at EHBC and that parents will confidently and joyously lead their homes to regularly worship the One who is worthy of all worship and praise, building habits in their homes that last for generations.

³ <http://eagleheights.com/family-worship>.

APPENDIX 1

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES SURVEY

Developed by Timothy Paul Jones, the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey is structured to acquire an honest evaluation of current practices and knowledge regarding the topic of family discipleship.¹ The information gathered aided in the development of relevant curriculum on family worship. Several additional evaluative questions were added to the post-survey with PDS approval.²

¹ Timothy Paul Jones, Mark DeVries, and W. Ryan Steenburg, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 201-3.

² The post-survey included 3 additional items: 1. I filled out the initial Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey. 2. I (or one of my family members) attended _____ sessions in person and watched _____ sessions online of the 8-week Family Worship Course at EHBC. 3. Any Additional Comments and Feedback related to the 8-week Family Worship Course at EHBC.

THE FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES SURVEY

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the perceptions of family discipleship practices held by parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma. This research is being conducted by Parker Goforth for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you place a check mark in the circle that most honestly fits your response to each prompt. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Participant Name: _____

(Or a created 4-digit numerical code if anonymity is preferred)

Part 1: Parental Perceptions						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my schedule.						
2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.						
3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.						
4. When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.						
5. I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together.						
6. Parents—and particularly fathers—have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.						
7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.						
8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth.						

Part 2: Parental Practices						
	Never	Once	A couple times	Three or four times	Five or Six Times	Seven or More Times
9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past WEEK have I prayed aloud with any of my children?						
10. How many times in the past WEEK has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?						
11. How many times in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?						
12. How many times in the past MONTH have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?						
13. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?						
14. How many times in the past TWO MONTHS have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?						
15. How many times in the past YEAR have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?						
16. How many times in the past YEAR has any church leader made contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?						

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

APPENDIX 2

FAMILY WORSHIP CURRICULUM

The following is the developed and approved eight-week family worship curriculum that was implemented at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Family Worship Curriculum

Context

- Introduction to Family Worship course taught at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in person.
- Participants are primarily the parents of children aged birth through twelfth grade at Eagle Heights Baptist Church.

Content

- A general introduction to the practice and practicalities of family worship. Each week will begin with an example of family worship being modeled in a different format and then shift into instruction. This course will focus on: (1) What family worship is and what it involves; (2) the benefits of family worship; (3) historical and modern trends in family worship; (4) practical means of practicing and persevering in family worship.

Lesson Plan

1) **What is Family Worship?**

- Week 1 will introduce the concept of family worship by defining the term and addressing current practices. A basic understanding of family worship will be detailed, challenging families to begin to practice on their own.
- ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will understand a foundational definition and practice of Family Worship.***

Outline

1) **Demonstration of Family Worship**

- Read: James 1:1-18 and lead a short discussion
- Pray: Pray in light of James 1:1-18, emphasizing the content of the text
- Sing: It is Well

2.) **What is Family Worship?**

- This is a helpful question, because this terminology is foreign to many of us.
 - The two words individually are familiar, but their appearance together may be confusing/undefined.
 - My prayer is that you will leave today with a knowledge of what family worship means and how you can incorporate it into your own life.
- What you just participated in was an example of what family worship could look like.
- As we gathered together, we read and discussed God's Word, prayed in light of those truths, and sang in response to those truths.
- The primary difference is, our example took place here in this group of individuals taking a course in hopes of growing in their knowledge.
 - Family worship should take place within your homes.

- A helpful definition of family worship is: “The regular and intentional gathering of a household to worship God and to make disciples in the home.”¹
 - Let’s break down that definition.
 - Regular
 - There is an element of consistency that must be present.
 - If you wanted to become stronger, would working out once a week, maybe even twice and sometimes skipping do much to build your strength? No, of course not!
 - Will having your children read, pray, and sing Scripture once, maybe even twice a week and sometimes skipping do much to build their spiritual strength? No, of course not!
 - Patient consistency is key.
 - Kurt Bruner explains, “Spiritual formation at home is a little-by-little, long-term process rather than a one-time event.”²
 - Chandler and Griffin echo, “Don’t be surprised if radical changes in your family do not happen overnight. Personal heart change and sanctification, in you as well as children, can be remarkably slow. Many of the transformations the Lord works in this world are imperceptibly incremental, progressing degree by undetectable degree. Only a fool plants an acorn in the evening and comes back in the morning looking for an oak. Your work to cultivate that change will be painstaking and gradual, unfolding over a lifetime.”³
 - Family discipleship takes time. Regularity is a necessity. But how much are we talking about?
 - A massive target would be four times per week
 - Imagine if outside of Sunday and Wednesday, and it could be later on those days, your family was sitting down together and discussing the truths of God together four additional times. What difference would it make?
 - Family Worship is regular.
 - Intentional
 - If you desire to see this happen in your family, it must be intentional.

¹ *Guide to Family Worship 2015*, For God’s Fame, accessed January 5, 2021, <http://forgodsname.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/guide-to-family-worship-2015.pdf>.

² Kurt Bruner and Steven Stroope, *It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide to Nurturing Lifelong Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2020), 26.

³ Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home through Time Moments, & Milestones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 157.

- To go back to the working out example, how many of you have accidentally fallen into an incredible habit of consistent workouts? If you have, I'd love to study how you did that.
- Jonathan Williams helpfully identifies, "Gospel Families don't happen on accident or by chance. I've never seen anyone just stumble into this sort of reality."⁴
 - You likely have not already stumbled into this practice already, so why would we imagine that it will randomly show up?
 - Terry Johnson agrees, "We will never regularly do what we don't set out intentionally to do."⁵
- You must consciously make the decision that your family will worship together, and make time for it to happen.
- Gathering of a Household
 - This is where we stumble into what may be new territory. Family worship is asking you to gather everyone in your home together for participation.
 - Yes, your household. Hear the words of Chandler and Griffin: "No matter what your household looks like, your family is the primary instrument and environment for discipleship in all the fantastic and flawed ways that it might be worked out. Your persevering and often thankless spiritual leadership in your home is one of the most important things you will ever do with your life."⁶
 - Your home is the primary location for the discipleship of your children.
 - But can I do that? Absolutely. Doesn't mean it will be easy. But, John Piper says - "You have to decide how important you think these family moments are. It is possible—for little ones and teenagers and parents. You may have to work at it. But it can be done."⁷
 - God can do great things for your children through you.
 - All of them.

⁴ Jonathan Williams, *Gospel Family: Cultivating Family Discipleship, Family Worship, & Family Missions* (Houston: Lucid Books, 2015), 15.

⁵ Terry L. Johnson, *The Family Worship Book: A Resource for Family Devotions* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 17-18.

⁶ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 17.

⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 42.

- Unpacking principles for family worship, Howard Hendricks agrees with other authors that every member of the family should participate in family worship.⁸
 - You must communicate and stand by the fact that this is a non-negotiable portion of your schedule. A part of your family’s day will include everyone gathering together to worship.
 - If they don’t want to, that’s okay, have them be there. The Lord works in mighty ways through his Word.
 - Choose a location, living room, table, etc. but make that the spot that you gather regularly. As you do it more and more, a pattern will form and memories associated with that location will be established.
 - Gather your family together intentionally and regularly.
- Worship and Make Disciples
 - We must lead our families to worship God, revere him, love him, glorify him. This is our key aim in this time. But how?
 - Joel Beeke says it this way, and Don Whitney and others agree, “We must direct family worship by way of Scripture, prayer, and song.”⁹
 - So, there are three key elements to family worship: Reading, Praying, and Singing.
 - Reading
 - You saw what we did earlier. Pick a portion of the Bible and read through it together and discuss it with your family.
 - What part? J. W. Alexander says, “When asked how much of the Scripture is to be read in family worship, I reply, ‘the whole Bible.’”¹⁰
 - All of it is useful to you and your family! Set a goal of one day, working through all of it with your family. How amazing would that be?
 - Whitney advises, “Chapter by chapter, read through books of the Bible together. The younger the

⁸ Howard G. Hendricks, *God’s Blueprint for Family Living* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible, 1973), 67.

⁹ Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 14.

¹⁰ James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998), 120.

children, the more you will want to use narrative passages and read shorter sections. As the children get older, set a goal to read through the entire the New Testament, later through the entire Bible.”¹¹

- Target accessibility and then grow into more
 - Start small. Don’t work to bite of more than you can chew as you get into this practice.
- What about preparing? I don’t have time for that!
 - I’m not asking you to! Truly, in many cases you won’t need to. Maybe if there is a tough section coming, but really you are reading and learning with your family. What an incredible opportunity that you get to read and grow with your family.
- Praying
 - You may think, “I don’t know how or what to pray.”
 - Keep it simple, you aren’t trying to teach God or trying to impress Him or your family. Pray based on what you read.
 - Joel Beeke recommends, “Be short. With few exceptions, don’t pray for more than five minutes. Tedious prayers do more harm than good.”¹²
 - Avoid unnecessary repetition, teaching them to respond to God rightly.
 - Pray in light of the text, pray honestly, for one another, pray for present needs, pray for mission efforts world, and model for your family reliance upon the Lord.
- Singing
 - Uh oh, here is the odd one.
 - But, you can do this! Find a way to have music your family can sing together
 - How I handle it at home, and other options with videos, etc.
 - This will be awkward at first, but it will grow into normalcy.

¹¹ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 44-45.

¹² Beeke, *Family Worship*, 28.

- Further, it will become a joyous means of training your children to worship the Lord.
 - It's also natural. Good theology, doctrine, should lead to praise and adoration.

3) Concluding Recommendations

- Hear that definition again in light of our discussion: Family Worship is, "The regular and intentional gathering of a household to worship God and to make disciples in the home."¹³
- Final Thoughts Before Sending You Out
 - This process is not to make you feel guilty.
 - I am not up here to bring down a scolding finger. Most of us never have practiced this because we were never told to or never knew how.
 - I prefer how Jason Helopoulos approaches the topic. He titles his book on Family Worship, "A Neglected Grace."¹⁴
 - This is an amazing opportunity.
 - Chandler and Griffin encourage, "One of the most powerful moments you can have with your kids is to own the fact that you wish you would have done these things in the past, that you love them, and that you want to start working through this framework together."¹⁵
 - I want you to see what a joy this will be. How worthwhile this practice is, and...
 - Family Worship is attainable
 - You can do this!
 - Donald Whitney agrees, "God deserves to be worshiped daily in our homes by our families. This is how you do it. God made it doable. It's simple: just read, pray, and sing. You can do that!"¹⁶
 - This practice is simple and sustainable. Further, it is this way because it shouldn't be long, which is the last recommendation I want to give.
 - Keep it short

¹³ *Guide to Family Worship 2015*, For God's Fame, accessed January 5, 2021, <http://forgods fame.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/guide-to-family-worship-2015.pdf>.

¹⁴ Jason Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013).

¹⁵ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 155.

¹⁶ Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 51.

- Chandler and Griffin helpfully dispel our fears, “But if you read this and fearfully think that your family must sit for thirty to sixty minutes in a circle in perfect attentive bliss as you expound some deep theological tenet to their eager ears, please lower your expectations.”¹⁷ – (Chandler 88)
 - Donald Whitney recommends, “Be brief, otherwise the experience can become tedious. A good average time to read the Bible, pray, and sing is roughly ten minutes, perhaps less if you have very small children. It is usually easy to lengthen the time if the occasion seems to be especially meaningful and family members are asking questions.”¹⁸
 - That is the target, short, simple, yet deep and consistent.
- Your challenge is to start with one day. How can you make this happen once in this coming week?
 - Then a second. Then a third.
 - Start small, expect bumps, but also joyously expect great things as your family worships together.

¹⁷ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 88.

¹⁸ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 50.

Lesson Plan

2) Family Worship and the Bible

- Week 2 will lay the theological foundation for family worship. Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Psalm 78:1-8, Ephesians 6:1-4, and 2 Timothy 1:3-7 will be unpacked in great detail along with rapid reference to other passages to demonstrate the mandate for regular family discipleship.
- ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be able to build and explain a biblical foundation for Family Worship.***

Outline

1) Demonstration of Family Worship

- Read: Psalm 1 and lead a short discussion
- Pray: Pray in light of Psalm 1, emphasizing the content of the text
- Sing: Come Thou Fount

2) Biblical Foundations for Family Worship

- Is Family Worship Biblical?
 - “The regular and intentional gathering of a household to worship God and to make disciples in the home.”¹⁹
 - If I am going to encourage you to regularly participate in these instructional times within your homes, I better have biblical backing.
- A fuller unpacking of a theology of family would take us extra time, but hear for the sake of our discussion:
 - Throughout Scripture, the primary discipleship of children is placed upon the family.
 - This truth will be seen through the texts we look at. But I want that to be the backdrop for our discussion.
 - The primary responsibility for passing on faith to your children is upon you, parent. And, family worship is a an incredible, and biblical, resource to do so.
- Deuteronomy 6:1-9
 - Context
 - In the midst of Moses passing God’s instruction on to the people of Israel, the people of God, we get to a section that is occasionally labeled as, “The Greatest Commandment.”
 - Similar to what we see in the New Testament, but this is far before that.
 - Text
 - 1

¹⁹ *Guide to Family Worship 2015*, For God’s Fame, accessed January 5, 2021, <http://forgodsname.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/guide-to-family-worship-2015.pdf>.

- Here is what God commanded me to teach you so that you would put it into practice.
- 2
 - Notice the start of this verse.
 - You, and your sons, and your son’s son.
 - These commands are for the faith of your family for generations!
- 3
 - Hear them and do them that it may go well with you!
 - Now we get into the meat of the text.
- 4
 - This command starts with the acknowledgement of God, the Triune God of all.
 - Right worship worships the One True God. No one else.
- 5
 - These are familiar words that you have likely heard over and over.
 - The call on the people of God is to seek and work to love the Lord their God with all of their being!
- 6
 - And to write this on the very core of their being, with all that they are.
 - But look what happens next. Love the Lord, make that a priority. Okay, we are on board, but what else?
 - Tad Thompson - “The first specific mention of family discipleship appears in Deuteronomy 6:7.”²⁰
- 7
 - You shall teach them to your children!
 - You. It is your responsibility!
 - And in what way?
 - Diligently
 - With great intentionality and focus.
 - Regularly
 - At all times, making the most of every opportunity.
 - Tad Thompson – “Here we are confronted with the crucial responsibility of teaching and instructing our children in the Scripture in a way that is both routine and repetitive.”²¹

²⁰ Tad Thompson, *Intentional Parenting: Family Discipleship by Design* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 57.

²¹ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 57.

- 8-9
 - Your lives, your homes, should be absolutely marked with these truths and practices.
 - So, in Deuteronomy 6 we see the clear call on parents to pursue generational faith by regular and intentional instruction.
 - As we are thinking on the practice of family worship, regular and intentional, engrained in our life, Deuteronomy 6 lays the groundwork.
 - Your calling is to teach your children and to teach your children regularly.
- Psalm 78:4-8
 - Context (v. 1-3)
 - In this writing of Asaph, there is the introductory call to heed the teaching, the teaching the fathers before us have passed down.
 - This is a reference to a faith and truth and trust in the Triune God.
 - Text
 - 4
 - What are the people of God to do?
 - Not keep the truth of God veiled to their families. Hiding it.
 - But declare the truths of God to the coming generation!
 - Make much of the glorious deeds and might of the Lord to our children.
 - 5
 - He has given us his Word and revealed Himself to his people, clearly then and even more so now through Christ, and has commanded us to pass that down.
 - Fathers are to teach their children these truths.
 - Families are to pass this down from generation to generation.
 - 6-7
 - Why?
 - So that the next generation would know them.
 - Then the next generation after them would know them.
 - Again, why?
 - So that they would set their hope in God and not forget his works.
 - That they would come to know and trust Jesus!
 - 8
 - That they would not be like those who are rebellious, but would be faithful.

- Kurt Bruner explains, “Clear Purpose of Parenting: Those blessed with the gift of children are called to inspire and nurture the faith of the next generation as life’s greatest privilege and priority.”²²
 - God has given you your families so that you would make much of Him among them.
 - But how?
- Psalm 78 shows the call on parents to intentionally seek to pass on their faith, to pass on truth, from one generation to the next.
 - You are not to merely hope it happens or stands idly by.
 - And so, David Platt concludes, “One practical way to put this psalm into practice is through regular times of family worship.”²³
 - You are called to tell the coming generation of the glorious deeds of the Lord that they would set their hope in God and continue the same trajectory for generations.
 - Jonathan Williams explains – “Through family worship—including teaching the Word of God, praying together, and singing praises with one another— heads of households have the great opportunity and privilege of passing on the gospel to their children and their children’s children.”²⁴
 - Wouldn’t that be beautiful?
 - Biblically, we see intentional regularity with generational faith in mind.
- Ephesians 6:1-4
 - Context
 - Progressing into the New Testament we come to the conclusion of Paul’s letter that reminds believers of the gospel and the new life they are to live in Christ.
 - In particular, we are following a section where Paul has discussed the importance of marriage and the picture of the gospel that it is. We then get to recommendations for faithful families.
 - Text
 - 1-3
 - Children are to honor their parents, for this is a commandment of the Lord, and a commandment that

²² Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 64.

²³ David Platt, “Psalm 78,” in *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 51-100*, by David Platt, Jim Shaddix, and Matt Mason (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 259.

²⁴ Jonathan Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship: Richard Baxter’s Timeless Encouragement for Today’s Home* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2021), 80.

carries with it a heavy promise, that it will go well with you.

- But following the command on children, there is a call to parents, and particularly fathers.
- 4
 - Fathers, in seeking to train up your children, do not do so in a manner that is demeaning, or aggressive, or shaming
 - Kent R. Hughes urges fathers not to be: critical, excessively strict, irritable, inconsistent, or characterized by favoritism.²⁵
 - Rather, raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
 - There are three main ideas:
 - 1. A large amount of weight falls on Fathers
 - One of Satan’s greatest tactics is to get fathers to be lazy in or neglectful of their calling.
 - You are called to lead your family in this area. One of the great tragedies we are seeing is so many households that see no male leadership when it comes to faith.
 - Talking about a father’s involvement at home, Kevin DeYoung notes, “This is especially true when it comes to spiritual leadership. Christian husbands can be aggressive and assertive when it comes to making money, tackling problems at work, or pursuing their hobbies, but when it comes to loving leadership in the home, too often they’re doormats. They take zero responsibility for the spiritual well-being of their household.”²⁶
 - Further capturing the weight of that absence, John Angell James says, “The man who does not make the religious character of his children the supreme end of all his conduct toward them may profess to believe as a Christian, but certainly acts as an atheist.”²⁷

²⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 64-68.

²⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 70.

²⁷ Michael S. Beates, “The Father as Priest.” In *Family Practice: God’s Prescription for a Healthy Home*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg NJ: P&R, 2001), 34.

- What amazing and impactful joy it would be to see fathers stepping up and leading in this area!
 - In family worship, fathers, you are called to be the ones who step out and lead! You are to be the ones who say, “Let’s make time for this, let’s make this happen.”
 - Jonathan Williams says, “Husbands, fathers, can you imagine the transformation that would come to your home if this year found you growing in your spiritual leadership of your wife and children, enjoying the responsibility of pointing them to Christ?”²⁸
 - J.W. Alexander agrees, “Unspeakable good would ensue if every father could feel himself to be the earthly-but-divinely-appointed head-spring of religious influence to his household.”²⁹
- Please hear again, this isn’t about trying to make you feel guilty.
- Fathers, you are called in particular to lead your family!
- 2. Discipline
 - There is specificity in training your family in discipline.
 - There is no way to teach discipline with irregularity or simplicity.
 - Your call is to bring them up in regular and consistent practice.
 - In their own walk and in your consistent family practice.
- 3. Instruction
 - This may be intimidating, but your call is to teach your children, not merely discipline them.
 - Your duty as a parent is not merely to make sure your children are checking off boxes, but that they are growing in wisdom and knowledge. You are to make sure they are growing in their awareness of the glories of God.
 - Parents, particularly fathers, you must commit to bringing your children up in discipline and instruction.
- 2 Timothy 1:3-7

²⁸ Williams, *Gospel Family*, 37.

²⁹ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 25.

- Context
 - Paul's second letter to Timothy on instruction in the faith.
- Text
 - 3-4
 - We see Paul's love for Timothy, thanking God for him and longing to see him.
 - 5
 - Paul is reminded of the sincere faith that resides in Timothy. This is what we hope for in our children.
 - And where does Paul credit that?
 - A faith that was passed through his grandmother and mother.
 - Look at 2 Timothy 3:14-15
 - 6-7
 - So, fan into flame and press forward in your faith and gifts!
 - As we look at family worship, the thought can be, "Well, this doesn't work in my family setting" or "Fathers are called to lead, and my family doesn't have one or doesn't have one who would step up and lead" or "I'm single, this isn't possible."
 - We come to this text to show you that biblically your calling doesn't change, and to encourage you that God can work mightily through your faithfulness.
 - This was Timothy's situation. We see it here and hear it also in Acts 16:1-3.
 - "Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek." And it goes on in verse 3 to again identify Timothy's Father being outside of the people of God.
 - This is then further bolstered in our text. Timothy's faith grew from the faithfulness of the women in his life.
 - Those of you leading in differing home situations:
 - Chap Bettis encourages, "Mothers, including single mothers and mothers with unresponsive husbands, know that God sees your situation. Don't hear from these pages the need for a picture-perfect home. We live in a broken world. Take heart that Timothy grew up in a less than perfect home. You, too, need to realize that when you are weak, then you really are strong if you are relying on the power and grace of God."³⁰
 - Jason Helopoulos instructs, "If there are children in the home then the believing spouse should try to have family

³⁰ Chap Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent: A Comprehensive Guidebook for Raising Your Children to Love and Follow Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Diamond Hill, 2016), 275.

worship with the children even if the unbelieving spouse is unwilling to participate. It will be difficult to reinforce the importance of worship in the home with your children if their father or mother refuses to engage, but this does not mean that it is impossible. Your frustration will reach high points and you will want to “throw in the towel,” but don’t. Persevere and continue to encourage your children in worship. Family worship should be a positive experience, and your joy in approaching family worship will greatly influence your children; by God’s grace, your spouse will be influenced as well.”³¹

- Thinking again on regular family worship, Donald Whitney encourages, “If you are a woman in this situation, remember to ask the Lord to make you a grandmother like Lois or a mother Eunice.”³²
 - Hear that call and encouragement.
 - No matter what your marital circumstances, your call as a parent is to lead your family in regular and intentional discipleship.
- So, from Scripture we can see that families, and particularly fathers are called to regularly and intentionally pass their faith from generation to generation.
 - This reality is bolstered throughout Scripture in passages like:
 - Genesis 18:17-19, where Abraham is chosen to command his children and household to keep the way of the Lord.
 - Or Joshua 24:15, where Joshua declares that his family will serve the Lord.
 - Or Job 1:5-6, where Job is seen regularly leading his family in being consecrated before the Lord.
 - Or Psalm 145:4-6, where, similar to Psalm 78, families are shown to declare the works of God from one generation to the next.
 - Or Proverbs 22:6, with the famous calling to train up a child in the way they should go, a clear call to train a family!
 - Or Matthew 28:18-20, where we are called to make disciples! That starts in your home!³³
 - Or 2 and 3 John, where John speaks of the great joy he has in his spiritual children walking in the truth, modeling the same joy we should have in the faithfulness of our children.
 - The Bible declares the importance of family discipleship. Within that, I have chosen these 4 passages that we’ve covered to demonstrate that the

³¹ Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 94.

³² Whitney, *Family Worship*, 53.

³³ Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 6.

Bible is clear: Families, and particularly fathers, are called to regularly and intentionally pass their faith from generation to generation.

- What is your plan?
 - Your challenge this week is to target 2 days of intentional family worship.
 - If you can do more, that's great, but try for 2 days!
- God has given you his Word. He has given you this calling. May we be faithful to worship Him rightly through leading our family rightly.

Lesson Plan

3) **The Benefits of Family Worship**

- Week 3 will detail the varying benefits of regular family worship. The works of J.W. Alexander and Jason Helopoulos will be highlighted to show family worship to be a neglected grace.
- ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be able to articulate the benefits of the regular practice of family worship for the individual, family, and local church.***

Outline

1) **Demonstration of Family Worship**

- Read: 1 John 1 and lead a short discussion
- Pray: Pray in light of 1 John 1, emphasizing the content of the text
- Sing: In Christ Alone

2) **The Benefits of Family Worship**

- My hope is that you have already seen this in your personal practice of family worship.
 - But I want to spend intentional time making sure we hear how beneficial family worship is.
 - This is not simply another discipline I am trying to add to your list for the sake of attempted reverence or extra holiness.
- Further, my hope through these weeks has not been to guilt you or make you feel bad if family worship has not been in your household.
 - This course is the hope to start correcting our lack of instruction and begin our input on a helpful practice that we hope flows in our homes
 - Because I believe, and I hope you'll see, that it is so beneficial!
- I will primarily be pulling from Jason Helopoulos and J.W. Alexander's work, *Thoughts on Family Worship*.
 - I want to highlight 8 Benefits (and I genuinely believe there are more) to the regular practice of family worship.
- 1. Family Worship Strengthens the Spiritual Health of Parents
 - What is interesting is that one of the primary reasons families avoid family worship is one of the great benefits of family worship.
 - Family worship will make you stronger!
 - Yet, parents don't initially feel that way.
 - The thought of sitting down in front of their children and leading them in Scripture, prayer, and song, is terrifying.
 - What if I say the wrong thing? What if I don't know the answer? What if they don't want to listen to me? What if it is weird?
 - Or, and this is the heavy one, what if they are surprised that I would even want to do this because of the pattern I've established up to this point and they don't want to follow me now?

- Hear this, it is never too late to start.
 - If that involves humble and open repentance, that's great!
 - Matt Chandler says, "Repentance is actually a great place to start when it comes to family discipleship."³⁴
 - He goes on, "Your kids don't need perfect parents; they need to know how their imperfect family can know and follow their perfect heavenly Father."³⁵
 - Paul David Tripp adds in the helpful statement, "So quit beating yourself up because you feel inadequate; you feel that way because it's true!"³⁶
 - Our only hope in parenting is the Lord.
 - Howard Hendricks explains, "To train children according to biblical standards is to trust the Holy Spirit to do in the life of a child what He alone can do."³⁷
- Parents are imperfect. But you must not let that prevent you from diving into family worship. For, God's strength will be magnified in your weakness. Further, this time benefits you immensely.
 - As you spend more time reading and hearing Scripture, your knowledge of the Bible and of Doctrine will grow.
 - As you approach tough passages your preparation strengthens you further.
 - As you pray regularly, your ability to pray will improve and your relationship with the Lord will grow.
 - As you sing songs, your willingness to be bold in front of your family will improve, and your knowledge of helpful music will thrive.
 - Additionally, you will benefit from the frequency as well.
 - The more time you spend in God's Word the more it will be a part of your life.
 - The more time you spend in prayer, the more you are likely to pray without ceasing, always being a moment away from prayer.
 - The more time you spend singing songs of praise and worship, the more truth is learned and the more those words will ring in your head.

³⁴ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 64.

³⁵ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 70.

³⁶ Tripp, *Parenting*, 35.

³⁷ Hendricks, *God's Blueprint for Family Living*, 32.

- Also, as you lead family worship more, spiritual headship will be clarified and you will grow in your confidence in God’s calling on you as a parent.
 - Do not make the mistake of think that family worship is only for the little ones.
 - Family worship strengthens the spiritual health of parents.
- 2. Family Worship Strengthens the Spiritual Health of Children
 - I want you to think about the spiritual impact that would be made on your family if there were 3-4 times per week that you sat down, read the Bible, prayed the Bible, and sang the Bible.
 - I don’t want you to think that I am pushing this as some magical solution. But I think we would be blind to not see the immense impact this would make on our children.
 - Their knowledge of the Bible would grow as they spend more and more time in it.
 - Their knowledge of doctrine would grow as they see the glories of God from Genesis-Revelation.
 - Their ability to pray and reverence for prayer will grow as they participate in and see their parents participate in prayer.
 - Their knowledge of helpful songs will increase and their knowledge of God will grow through the words that become engrained in their heads.
 - Regular time in worship together presses your children towards holiness.
 - Simply put by J.W. Alexander, “Daily worship, in common, encourages children to acts of devotion.”³⁸
 - Do you want to see your children grow in godliness? Practice God-given spiritual disciplines with them!
 - For, God has given family worship to strengthen the spiritual health of children.
- 3. Family Worship Protects Sound Doctrine
 - This is true for both parents and children.
 - But parents are given a carved-out opportunity to make sure their children hear and hold on to sound doctrine.
 - These could range from creation, to salvation, to sanctification, to marriage, to purity, to the attributes of God, and the list goes on.
 - As you spend time in Scripture, you will come across doctrine. Theology will be discussed.
 - Family worship gives you an opportunity as a family to discuss and address what is sound doctrine and what is not.
 - Julie Lowe, in her book, *Safeguards* says, “As a parent, my ultimate goal for my children is not to keep them safe (though that is *a goal*); rather, it is that my children would know the ways of God and walk in truth.”³⁹

³⁸ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 34.

³⁹ Julie Lowe, *Safeguards: Shielding Our Homes and Equipping Our Kids* (Greensboro, NC:

- Family worship gives you this opportunity over and over!
 - As you spend regular and joyous time around the Bible as a family, you etch the importance of Scripture as our authority into the minds of children.
 - We are watching a generation struggle to cling to what is true, including what is true about God and his Word.
 - Family Worship opens dialogue regularly, looking to God’s Word to reflect on, pray on, and sing on truth.
 - Many children are afraid to approach deep topics with their parents because they aren’t sure if they will discuss them with them. Family Worship regularly has you talking about the most important topics! Pathways for communication can be built through this practice.
 - Your time committed to family worship will help your family know, cling to and protect sound doctrine.
- 4. Family Worship Promotes Academics
 - You may not have been expecting this one, but I love that Alexander, in the 1800s, dove into this topic.
 - Hear this, time spent in family worship will benefit your family intellectually!
 - Not merely in knowledge of the truth, but will stretch their academic faculties.
 - As you ask your children to read passages, or you have to yourself, they are stretched in their ability to read and read out loud.
 - Encourage them, work through the names and pronunciations that they would grow in confidence.
 - As you wrestle through texts, they will grow in their reading comprehension and ability to process deep truths.
 - They will learn to think and observe you thinking, “How can I look at a text and pull out the faithful meaning?”
 - Imagine if your family was doing that together several times every week!
 - They got to watch dad explain the application of a particular text.
 - They get to hear mom place a passage within context so that it all makes more sense.
 - They work to recount the context of the passage you’re about to read.
 - These experiences will strengthen them intellectually!
 - As you then work to pray in light of that text, they learn further how to take truths and speak about them and apply them to their daily needs.

- Singing will strengthen them in their musical giftings, especially if you have them start playing along, and further work to have helpful truths stretching their minds.
- On this subject J.W. Alexander concludes, “In a word, I cannot think it possible for any family to enjoy, twice every day for all their lives, the privilege of hearing the Scripture read at domestic worship without, by that very means, rising perceptibly and greatly in knowledge and intellectual force.”⁴⁰
- What a benefit to your family this would be! In addition to spiritual growth, family worship promotes academics.
- 5. Family Worship Helps Build Family Unity
 - I want to highlight three ways regular family worship will work to establish unity in your household.
 - Unity is established around a common purpose.
 - As your family sees their lives aimed toward the worship of God regularly, a common theme of brothers and sisters pushing together for the glory of God is built.
 - You are not merely family by blood, but family bought by the blood of Christ.
 - You are not people with different interests separated by unconquerable distance in age. You are brothers and sisters in Christ unified by the same call no matter how old you are.
 - Your faith becomes a family faith.
 - Unity is established around a common schedule
 - One of your goals in family worship is to establish a rhythm in your family that becomes so engrained in who they are.
 - Your children start to expect time spent in Scripture together.
 - Priorities shift and unity is built around the part of the schedule that is the most important.
 - As it currently stands, it’s hard for everyone to feel as if the family is unified, because priorities are given to whatever is more important to specific individuals.
 - Timmy likes baseball, so we are going to that now and shutting everything else down.
 - Julie has dance, so we can’t do anything else, we need to be at her rehearsal.
 - Your children may feel frustrated because what is most important is disunified.
 - Making time for family worship shows your family that the worship of God is the most important part of your schedule. It will happen. Everyone is involved and everything else will conform to that.

⁴⁰ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 44.

- And we can all unify around that idea because we are all unified by a common goal.
 - Unity is established through growth in godliness
 - Additionally, your family will be brought together by their growth in love for God and knowledge of their own sin.
 - It is more difficult to mistreat your siblings when regular time has been spent talking about love for one another and how to apply it in our lives.
 - It is hard for parents to demonstrate anger with one another when the passage at hand speaks the opposite.
 - Also, this opens the door for such a great opportunity for you to model repentance and faith!
 - God's Word sanctifies us.
 - As your family grows in their knowledge of God, they will grow in their peace with one another.
 - For, family worship helps build unity.
- 6. Family Worship Promotes Evangelism
 - This seems to be the opposite of the picture you may have in your head. Family worship seems to be focused inward.
 - But what would take place in the heart of our family if they were reminded of the gospel over and over again?
 - What would take place in the lives of our family if they read and discussed and applied passage after passage about the need to make disciples and those who have gone before them to do so?
 - What would your family learn is important if prayer during family worship was spent praying for lost friends, our own hearts for evangelism, and missionary efforts?
 - What if family worship was so engrained in our schedule that we practiced it when family was in town, when neighbors were over, or during our travels?
 - Realize, family worship builds a love for the gospel and provides you with an incredible opportunity to build a love for the gospel within your family.
 - Family worship promotes evangelism.
- 7. Family Worship Strengthens Local Church Worship
 - I wonder if so much of the lack of participation we see in many church's worship services is due to a lack of worship in the home.
 - Think about it, the only time many parents and children hear the word of God read or spoken of, pray together, or sing songs together, is Sunday morning.
 - That means it is a practice participated in once a week, maybe twice, and maybe none!
 - Think about any other discipline. Would this pattern work to make you confident to compete in that? If you were a musician who had to play a concert, would practice one morning per week make you confident, knowledgeable, or ready?

- Family worship builds your family's ability to worship with the local body.
 - They are more prepared to listen to, to sit still, to think on, and to apply sermons that are preached. They practice similar all week!
 - What about their ability to participate in prayer? They have heard it and seen it modeled!
 - Can you imagine the impact this would have on singing? So many of our families are afraid to sing because it is weird, or not cool, or they've never seen dad do it.
 - What if they were singing together four other times that week? What if they were singing songs that they sing in church together four other times that week?
 - Even beyond the worship gathering, in their small group settings, in your core group settings, you would be more equipped to read and discuss and pray through God's Word than ever before.
- We know that in the local church we are all of benefit to one another.
 - Family worship equips your family to benefit one another even more.
 - Family worship bears fruit outside of your walls and strengthens local church worship.
- 8. Family Worship regularly places the gospel before your children.
 - We can't forget that one of our deepest desires is to see our children come to know and trust Jesus as Lord.
 - Family worship allows the opportunity for you to speak about the Lord over and over in front of your family.
 - Your children are placed in an environment where they hear of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus time and time again. They hear about transformed lives. They hear about the dangers of sin and the joys of righteousness. They hear about an eternal hope that brings comfort in the present and holds promise for the life to come.
 - Let's be clear. Family worship does not save your children nor guarantee the salvation of your children.
 - But it is a means of grace that God has given so that in hearing the gospel, they may come to know Christ as Lord.
 - How much richer of a benefit can we find than that?
- I truly believe there are more benefits to family worship.
 - But I hope these seven weighty realities show you how much of a treasure this discipline can be.
 - Strive for two times together this week.
 - Family worship is a gift from God. May we not neglect that grace.

Lesson Plan

4) A History of Family Worship

- Week 4 will cover how family worship was practiced and discussed in church history. Sermons and historical examples will be utilized to reveal a historically common practice that has faded in modern families.
- **Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will have gained a knowledge of the practice of family worship throughout church history.**

Outline

1) Demonstration of Family Worship

- Read: Genesis 3 and lead a short discussion
- Pray: Pray in light of Genesis 3, emphasizing the content of the text
- Sing: Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me

2) Modern Patterns of Family Worship

- I don't think I would be exaggerating to express that the state of families, particularly in the US, is currently struggling.
 - In his work on family worship, Donald Whitney recounts a story of this weakness in families being reported, and expresses, "First, things are *really* bad when the *government* believes that the family is in trouble."⁴¹
- So, what has happened to the family?
 - Let us look at that from a Christian perspective, remembering that God has given families, and particularly fathers the call to regularly and intentionally pass their faith from generation to generation.
 - Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin explain it simply, "Since mankind's fall into sin, family has become a broken version of what God intended."⁴²
 - But, even more specifically today, what is happening?
 - Kurt Bruner Steve Stroope suggest, "The collective data, however, strongly suggests that about half of those raised in church will leave behind active faith as adults. And the problem is not our churches but rather our homes."⁴³
 - Christianity is leaving primarily through the walls of our households.
 - What I mean is, Christianity has lost its place within our homes.

⁴¹ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 11.

⁴² Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 52.

⁴³ Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 156.

- Howard Hendricks expressed this in the 70s, declaring, “One of the alarming trends in America today is the gradual disappearance of the distinctively Christian home.”⁴⁴
 - And that was almost 50 years ago! Imagine what he would say now.
- In 2020, as they address students leaving the church, Chandler and Griffin agree, “The single greatest reason why we are losing our young people today is that the home is no longer the place where faith is transferred.”⁴⁵
- Hear that, our homes are no longer a place where faith is transferred.
 - Reflect honestly on your own household. What could be said of your home? Your family? What about in our community? In our church? In many churches?
- What are our modern households for?
 - If they are not to pass on faith, what is taking place?
 - Well, simply put, survival.
 - Getting by, impressing, and making sure our children do the same.
 - Tad Thompson states, “The plain truth is that many parents teach children to be disciplined students and disciplined athletes, but when it comes to spiritual disciplines, the expectations are far lower and the emphasis greatly reduced.”⁴⁶
 - Paul David Tripp builds on, “It’s possible for a mom to be more worried about stains on her couch than the soul of her son, or for a dad to be more focused on the shine and maintenance of his new car than the heart of his daughter.”⁴⁷
 - He adds the probing question, “How has the value of career success impacted your commitment to the work that God has called you to as parents?”⁴⁸
 - Activities and accomplishments take precedence.
 - And it happens slowly over years. We slowly let Christianity slip out of our households and into a once, maybe twice a week item.
 - Tripp again explains, “Many parents unwittingly separate Christianity from everyday life as they parent their children, and in separating Christianity from daily life, they fail to make worship as important as it is.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Hendricks, *God’s Blueprint for Family Living*, 7.

⁴⁵ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 28.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 44.

⁴⁷ Tripp, *Parenting*, 26.

⁴⁸ Tripp, *Parenting*, 27.

⁴⁹ Tripp, *Parenting*, 157.

- In general, what we are seeing is that household worship isn't important
 - It may not be present at all.
 - Terry Johnson observes, “Not only have we given up a proven method of transmitting the faith to the next generation, one that has a built-in format for Bible study, prayer, and singing, but we have done so for alternatives that add to our already hectic pace of life and take us away from our spouses, children, and neighbors.”⁵⁰
 - We pour into so many other activities and make no time for family worship.
 - Our schedules are planned out to the minute, yet worshipping our God and King don't seem to fit in.
 - Please don't hear this as finger pointing. Rather, hear it as investigative work trying to get a picture of our present situation in light of a deep need.
 - Doing the same work, Tad Thompson points out, “The hard fact is that fathers and mothers are not taking on the responsibility to disciple their own children, and churches are doing very little, if anything, to challenge this reality.”⁵¹
 - Hear that last section.
- The church has not equipped families for family worship.
 - I want to make sure you hear me claim this fault on the church's behalf.
 - As I have researched this topic, I have talked to so many wonderful, godly families who have simply never even heard of regular family worship.
 - Further, they have never been taught about it by their local church or checked on.
 - Joel Beeke expresses, “I believe one major reason for this failure is the lack of stress upon family worship.”⁵²
 - Jason Helopoulos echoes this sentiment, “It's [family worship] gone! Or, at the very least, it is rarely seen or heard. If it were an animal, it would be on the endangered species list. We have not only stopped *doing* it, but we have stopped *talking* about it. We hear few sermons or pastoral exhortations that attend to it. We find few fathers and mothers encouraging one another to pursue it. Christian publications seem to have forgotten about it altogether. And yet, in the history of the church, it has been one of the Christian family's strongest characteristics.”⁵³
 - The hope in this course is to correct that.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *The Family Worship Book*, 10.

⁵¹ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 7.

⁵² Beeke, *Family Worship*, 1.

⁵³ Helopoulos, *A Neglected Grace*, 13.

- Because, what has happened is a combination of errors.
 - The church has appeared to take the place of families, and families have taken up the church on that resource.
- Chandler and Griffin agree, “We live in a day and age where it is far too easy to put off or pass off the Christian discipleship of our children.”⁵⁴
 - This is a problem that Paul David Tripp identifies, “Your church was not designed to replace you, but to assist and equip you for this essential work.”⁵⁵
 - Recognizing this struggle, Tad Thompson concludes, “While the church and parents alike want to raise up spiritual champions, the discipleship model in which church professionals essentially replace parents as the primary agents of discipleship is just not working.”⁵⁶
- We must return Christianity to our homes.
- Your household needs family worship.
 - But how did we get here?
 - Has it always been this way?

3) Historical Patterns of Family Worship

- This relationship of misplaced roles between the family and the local church was not always present.
 - Terry Johnson informs us, “During the 19th century, as Sunday Schools began to be introduced in North America, resistance was encountered in a number of traditional Presbyterian churches. Their argument? That as the Sunday School was established, it would result in parental neglect of their responsibility for the spiritual training of their children.”⁵⁷
- What was the concern of the church?
 - Structured programs for the training of children would teach parents that the responsibility to disciple their children does not fall on them.
 - Now, as a student minister, I want to be careful teaching this, as I enjoy my job.
 - But I want to always make sure that my job never steps over into or diminishes or harms the role of parents.
 - Because, think back on our session on biblical foundations.
 - Biblically, the primary role of disciple-maker has always fallen on parents.

⁵⁴ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 35.

⁵⁵ Tripp, *Parenting*, 30.

⁵⁶ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 9.

⁵⁷ Johnson, *The Family Worship Book*, 8.

- That is the way it was created, that is the way God commanded it to be.
 - So, as we think on the history of family worship, we must start there.
 - J.W. Alexander – “. . . Without any indulgence of fancy we cannot fail to discern the principle of family worship, appearing and re-appearing as a familiar thing, in the remotest periods.”⁵⁸
 - God ordained regular family instruction and discipleship for the transmission of faith.
- Family worship was the norm.
 - Hear that idea. For years and years, regular intentional time together as a family growing in faith was normative.
 - I had a professor once tell me, one of the more helpful ways we can serve our church is to help them see that we today are not the norm in church history. We are the oddity.
 - Hear that! Tad Thompson asserts, “The idea that fathers and mothers should be the primary agents of discipleship in the lives of their children is hardly a “new and creative norm.” It is a scriptural and historical norm.”⁵⁹
 - This was most commonly seen in family worship.
- The Early Church
 - Patterns of family worship were evident within the early church. The first generations that sought to apply the words of Scripture did so through leading their families in regular discipleship.
 - Although the records are not as frequent and clear as later periods, the evidence is still present.⁶⁰
 - In the second century, so we are talking about 160-225, Tertullian wrote about family worship as a regular part of the Christian home.
 - Ignatius wrote on Ephesians 6:4, explaining the application to be that fathers must teach their families the ways of the Bible.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 3.

⁵⁹ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 10.

⁶⁰ Kerry Ptacek, *Family Worship: Biblical Basis, Historical Reality, Current Need* (Birmingham, AL: Covenant Family Fellowship, 1994), 46. Acknowledging what can appear to be a lack of evidence, Ptacek posits, “It is likely that Biblical patterns of family worship persisted without publicity in isolated areas of ‘Christendom.’” This statement is especially relevant to the discussion of the early church. The pieces of evidence that we do have are likely indicators of a greater practice.

⁶¹ Ignatius of Antioch, “Epistle to the Philadelphians,” In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 81. Ignatius comments, “Fathers ‘bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;’ and teach them the holy Scriptures, and also trades, that they may not indulge in idleness. Now [the Scripture says] says ‘A righteous father educates [his children] well; his heart shall rejoice in a wise son.’”

- Tertullian identified couples worshipping together through Scripture and singing.⁶²
 - Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian recommended that families, referring to children being involved as well, begin their mornings and evenings in prayer.⁶³
 - Observing the work of John Chrysostom, Phillip Schaff notes, “Chrysostom urged that every house should be a church, and every head of a family a spiritual shepherd, remembering the account which he must give even for his children and servants.”⁶⁴
 - This practice was present in the earliest stages!
- The Reformation
 - Tragically, following the early church, family worship saw a decline. This dip was not due to the weakness of the practice but rather the state of the church at the time. Doctrine and family had become less important.⁶⁵
 - But then, J. H. Merle D’Aubigne notes, “If we leave the humble dwellings of the primitive Christians, it is true that we shall find the practice of family worship becomes less and less frequent; but how gloriously it reappears at the epoch of the Reformation!”⁶⁶
 - The return to Scripture brought about a return to family worship. Connecting the two, Coley and Robinson assert, “When Scripture returned

⁶² Tertullian, quoted in Phillip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 20-21. Tertullian writes, “What a union of two believers—one hope, one vow, one discipline, and one worship! They are brother and sister, two fellow-servants, one spirit and one flesh. Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit. They pray together, fast together, instruct, exhort, and support each other. They go together to the church of God, and to the table of the Lord. They share each other’s tribulation, persecution, and revival. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids, neither annoys the other. They delight to visit the sick, supply the needy, give alms without restraint, and in daily zeal lay up their offerings before the altar without scruple or hindrance . . . Psalms and hymns they sing together, and they vie with each other in singing to God. Christ rejoices when he sees and hears this. He gives them his peace. Where two are together in his name, there he is; and where he is, there the evil one cannot come.”

⁶³ Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship*, 59. Looking to Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian as part of Richard Baxter’s own development of theology, Williams identifies, “Examples from both Scripture and early church life strengthen Baxter’s view that Christian families have opportunities for praying together.”

⁶⁴ Phillip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, vol. 3 (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 545.

⁶⁵ Ptacek, *Family Worship*, 41-46. Ptacek helpfully traces the decline in family worship that preceded the Reformation, identifying that the rise in the prioritization of celibacy began to hurt family ministry. If being celibate was righteous, then raising a family was a less righteous endeavor, so the practices of family discipleship saw a decline in prominence and importance.

⁶⁶ J. H. Merle D’Aubigne, *Family Worship* (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2001), chap. 1.

to the hands of individuals in the congregation, family worship began once again to flourish in the home.”⁶⁷

- Our hope is similar, as you and I see that Scripture declares the glories of God and the importance of family discipleship, we want to bring that into our homes.
- The Puritans
 - The Puritans carried forward and championed the practice of family worship.
 - Family worship was a biblical and cultural stronghold for the Puritans. Coley and Robinson summarize as follows: “Puritans were adamant of the practice of family worship in the home for two primary reasons: 1) it was a command and blessing to the households of God’s people according to the Word of God, and 2) it was a direct response to the secular assaults experienced by families of the day.”⁶⁸
 - Their two-point summary of the Puritan approach is helpful for the modern church. A return to Scripture should point families to devotion. Further, family worship is a helpful response to the attack on families today.⁶⁹
 - Joel Beeke notes, “The more their public efforts to purify the church were crushed, the more the Puritans turned to the home as a bastion for religious instruction and influence.”⁷⁰
 - The response of the church was not to adapt to cultural norms and abandon the family, but rather to strengthen the church by strengthening the family.
 - These efforts included:
 - Developing the London Baptist Confession, Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Directory for Family Worship, which both included statements encouraging church discipline for fathers who failed to lead in this way.
 - In the Directory for Family Worship, it says, “Whether there be among them any family or families which use to neglect this necessary duty; and if any such family be found, the head of the

⁶⁷ Ken Coley and Blair Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship* (Nashville: Randall House, 2021), 22.

⁶⁸ Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 26.

⁶⁹ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 73. Looking to the perseverance and devotion of the puritans, Leland Ryken concludes, “The age of the Puritans was no stranger to societal assaults on the Christian family. Faced with the same pressures that confront us today, the Puritans formulated a theory of the family that offers some attractive possibilities to our own age.”

⁷⁰ Joel Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017), 65.

family is to be first admonished privately to amend his fault; and, in case of his continuing therein, he is to be gravely and sadly reprov'd by the session; after which reproof, if he be found still to neglect Family-worship, let him be, for his obstinacy in such an offence, suspended and debarred from the Lord's supper, as being justly esteemed unworthy to communicate therein, till he amend."⁷¹

- Take note of that. Members could face church discipline if they were not practicing family worship!
- Although the London Baptist Confessions do not include a specific section on family worship, it is implied. However, the preface of the Second London Baptist Confession warns, "And verily there is one spring and cause of the decay of religion in our day, which we cannot but touch upon, and earnestly urge a redress of; and that is the neglect of the worship of God in families, by those whom the charge and conduct of them is committed."⁷²
 - These ideas were carried forward by faithful men like Richard Baxter and Matthew Henry:
 - Richard Baxter regularly preached and wrote on the subject, even visiting families to check on them and guide them.
 - Matthew Henry then called families to have their homes be as little churches.
 - And more could be said, but the clear picture is of a people who prioritized family worship.
- Early America
 - By God's grace, the practice continued in early American life
 - Jonathan Edwards modeled this practice regularly within his own household.
 - In the 1700s, Samuel Davies encouraged families, "Consider family religion not merely as a duty imposed by authority, but as your greatest privilege granted by divine grace."⁷³
 - In the 1800s J.W. Alexander produced an incredible work on the subject, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, which we spoke of last week.

⁷¹ *The Directory for Family Worship*, The Westminster Standard, Accessed May 15, 2021, <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/directory-for-family-worship/>.

⁷² "The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith," The 1689 Confession, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.the1689confession.com/>.

⁷³ Samuel Davies, "The Necessity and Excellence of Family Religion" in *Sermons of the Reverend Samuel Davies* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997) 2:86.

- In the late 1800s Spurgeon also voiced, “If we want to bring up a godly family, who shall be a seed to serve God when our heads are under the clods of the valley, let us seek to train them up in the fear of God by meeting together as a family for worship.”⁷⁴
 - John Paton a missionary in the late 1800s looked back on his father’s consistent practice of family worship as formative in his own life in ministry.
 - Then, in the 1900s, Martin Lloyd Jones’s biography identified how integrated family worship was into his regular life.
- This is a rapid snapshot of history.
 - Much more could be said, but what I want you to see is that historically, family worship has been a part of the lives of Christian families.
 - As that has faded, we have seen the impact on the family and the Church.
 - So, looking to Scripture, looking to history, what can we do?
 - Hear the words of Howard Hendricks, “Many Christians today are praying for revival in the church, but there will never be revival in the church unless there is revival in the home. And that revival usually starts with family worship.”⁷⁵
- We have seen what we are facing and we have seen the wisdom of those who have come before us.
 - Start a new history for your family today.
 - Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope explain, “We are all influenced by multigenerational patterns, but none of us are victims of them. It is possible to break away from a bad cycle and launch a new era of good for ourselves and future generations.”⁷⁶
 - What is your plan to break and change the cycle for your family?
 - We have issued the challenge of two days a week last week. The challenge this week is to spend time in family worship at least 3 days this week!
 - You can do it!
- May we be a positive and biblically faithful generation in the trajectory of the history of family worship!

⁷⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Pastoral Visit,” In *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol 54, (repr., Pasadena: Pilgrim 1978), 362-63.

⁷⁵ Hendricks, *God’s Blueprint for Family Living*, 68.

⁷⁶ Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 75.

Lesson Plan

5) Reading in Family Worship

- Week 5 will begin the breakdown of the key elements of family worship, starting with the reading of Scripture. Practical recommendations and strategies will be given to help families understand their aim in reading together and how to faithfully accomplish this task.
- ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be aware of and able to implement multiple strategies for reading and discussing Scripture in family worship.***

Outline

1) Demonstration of Family Worship

- Read: Amos 4 and lead a short discussion
- Pray: Pray in light of Amos 4, emphasizing the content of the text
- Sing: He will Hold Me Fast

2) Reading in Family Worship

- The primary elements that make up family worship are reading, praying, and singing.
 - I hope these have gone well, and I hope that these next three sessions can serve to further equip you to worship well with your family in these areas.
 - This week, our focus will be on reading.
 - This is potentially the most important element of family worship.
- What are we to read?
 - J.W. Alexander says, “The daily reading of Scripture is a solemn and indispensable part of family worship, one which I cannot consent to see omitted in any case.”⁷⁷
 - Your family must be in the Bible. As parents you should see getting Scripture into their lives as an absolute priority.
 - There may be occasions for your family to go through or think through another topic or book together, but do not sacrifice your time in the Bible together.
 - Avoid falling into devotionals at the expense of Scripture.
 - If you put your family through a devotion that has great wisdom built off of one verse each day, over time you will have treasured a great amount of man’s word over the Lord’s.
 - Devotionals are helpful, but the must never replace the Word.
 - Now, I want to be real. If you have younger children, it may be more helpful to work through some of the amazing material that is available to you and targeted toward reading the Bible to them. (Offer several recommendations)

⁷⁷ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 118.

- Have every family member participate.
 - Equip them with Bibles. If you have established a regular spot you will meet, have them stacked or ready there.
 - Do not have children or parents on their phones.
 - Do not have children or parents sitting idly while Scripture is being read. Have them in the text!
- Remind your family of why you read the Bible.
 - Recite, teach, and have them memorize 2 Timothy 3:16-17 so that the practice is seen as beneficial rather than a time-filler.
- Place the Bible in front of your family regularly that they would hear and know it and treasure it.
- What parts should we read?
 - This is a difficult question. We all should want to read more of the Bible individually and hopefully you are wanting to read more of the Bible with your family. But where do you start? How much should we read with our family?
 - J.W. Alexander responds, “When asked how much of the Scripture is to be read in family worship, I reply, “the whole Bible.”⁷⁸
 - As much as his answer sounds like a joke, this should be our goal. All Scripture is profitable for your family. All of it.
 - So, as you work through reading the Bible together, set a goal to cover all of it throughout the years.
 - Do you remember Donald Whitney’s goal that we mentioned? He recommends, “Chapter by chapter, read through books of the Bible together. The younger the children, the more you will want to use narrative passages and read shorter sections. As the children get older, set a goal to read through the entire New Testament, later through the entire Bible.”⁷⁹
 - That is your goal, to work through Scripture together, chapter by chapter.
 - Start humbly, and work yourself into a plan that works well for your family.
 - On this topic, Howard Hendricks helpfully adds, “The most important principle to remember in this regard is that it’s not spiritual to multiply Scripture during family worship. It’s most important to make it meaningful.”⁸⁰
 - And this may be what we mentioned with the utilization of other resources.

⁷⁸ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 120.

⁷⁹ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 44-45.

⁸⁰ Hendricks, *God’s Blueprint for Family Living*, 63.

- If your family handles one chapter per day well, start there!
- If that gets easy, add another, you'll finish the Bible every two years.
 - I have spoken to a family that reads one chapter in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament each day.
- Maybe look at a yearly reading plan and take your family through it.
- But, be wise based on who is with you. Never target too much or too little.
 - If you set a goal for two readthroughs a year, 7-8 chapters a day will wear your family down.
 - If you commit to one passage or one verse, you are not filling your family with Scripture and modeling for them that they don't need much of it.
 - If you decide to launch your young children into Numbers, it may not be the most helpful.
 - If you avoid difficult books you will teach your family they are unhelpful.
- Formulate a plan, pick a book of the Bible, get started and stick to it.
 - Set long term goals, and then rejoice as you recount the biblical terrain your family has covered!
- How should we read during family worship?
 - Simply, and most importantly, out loud.
 - Do not have your family read silently and then come together to talk about it.
 - Read it out loud, that the Word of God would be heard and declared within your home!
 - Organizationally, pick someone to read it and launch in.
 - As they read, encourage them when they doubt themselves, assure them in their pronunciation of names, and help them view it as a positive.
 - I would recommend against roundtable reading. Alexander despises this, claiming it is overall injurious to aiding listeners in hearing and discerning.
 - Only if you are working to read small passages at a time would I employ this method.
 - With students, this gives a great opportunity to create and take turns.
 - Include yourself in the rotation, showing this to be an important opportunity.
 - From experience, sitting and observing loved ones reading Scripture together is a beautiful time.
 - A grace not worth neglecting.
 - What about tone?

- J.W. Alexander explains, “The manner of reading the Bible in the family is of great importance. My judgment is that too much care cannot be bestowed on this point.”⁸¹
 - Why would he say that?
- The way you read will communicate to your family what you think about what you are reading!
 - Further, the way you read will aid your family in listening and learning.
 - These are important matters!
- Donald Whitney urges, “Read enthusiastically and interpretively. In other words, don’t be one of those people who reads the Bible as apathetically as if reading a phone directory out loud. It is the Word of God—read it to the best of your ability.”⁸²
- As you read, demonstrate that Scripture is vitally important, then expect the same of your children.
 - Joel Beeke recommends, “Teach your children how to read articulately and with expression. Don’t let them mumble or speed ahead. Teach them to read with reverence.”⁸³
 - Do not let them get away with lazy participation. Model it and watch them follow!
 - Read the word out loud and with reverence.
- What do we do after we have read?
 - This is the portion that many parents fear.
 - “Uh oh, now I have to try to explain it.”
 - Remember, your target timeframe is short. Your job is not to present a masterpiece sermon on the text or develop a theological work on the doctrine that was mentioned.
 - You too are a student of the Text. Show them that!
 - Ask for a summary.
 - It’s valuable to have them try to articulate or concisely explain what they heard.
 - Plus, that often helps all of you remember/pick up the main point of the Text.
 - Ask for observations and questions.
 - Was there any particular part of our reading that stuck out to you?
 - Ask questions targeted to your children’s age.
 - Is there something bad we see in this passage? A sin?
 - Where do we see the gospel demonstrated in this chapter?
 - How does this section point us forward to Jesus?
 - What does this teach us about marriage and purity?

⁸¹ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 123.

⁸² Whitney, *Family Worship*, 45.

⁸³ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 25.

- How does this tell us Christians should live?
 - Ask questions about practical application.
 - What are ways you are tempted to have two masters?
 - How can we help one another hold on to this command?
 - What is your specific plan to work on this? What about today?
 - These questions then lead well into prayer, which will be our next session.
 - You have laid the groundwork for reverent prayer by reading the text and speaking about the content of the text.
 - Two other recommendations:
 - Remember that it is okay to say, “I don’t know, let me look into that and get back to you tomorrow.”
 - This doesn’t make you dumb or unequipped, it shows that you are a student, shows that you are humble, and shows them that you take their questions and your faith seriously.
 - Participate in extra study when you can.
 - There is no shame in buying a commentary or listening to a sermon over a passage you are preparing to read.
 - Praise God for resources!
- What has worked well for you?
- As you prepare to launch on your own, your challenge is to formulate your plan for reading in family worship.
 - Be specific, take some time in small groups where you are to discuss specific plans.
 - Additionally, think of some questions or structures or patterns that would be helpful as you work to engage your students with Scripture.
 - Finally, hear your challenge. Three times this week. You can do this! Make it a pattern!
 - These are three incredible opportunities to fill your families lives with God’s Word.

Lesson Plan

6) Praying in Family Worship

- Week 6 will teach families effective strategies for prayer in family worship. Emphasis will be placed on brevity, content, following Scripture, and modeling healthy habits.
- **Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be able to identify and apply several methods for leading prayer in practices of family worship.**

Outline

1) Demonstration of Family Worship

- Read: Luke 3:23-28 and lead a short discussion
- Pray: Pray in light of Luke 3, emphasizing the content of the text
- Sing: Christ the New and Better

2) Praying in Family Worship

- As a reminder, the primary elements that make up family worship are reading, praying, and singing.
 - I hope these have gone well, and I hope that, in conjunction with last week, these next two sessions can serve to further equip you to worship well with your family in these areas.
 - This week, our focus will be on praying.
- Why pray during family worship?
 - God has called us to!
 - We are to cast our cares on him and let our supplications be known to him (Phil 4:6; 1 Pet 5:7)
 - Help lead your family to pray without ceasing.
 - The gracious God of all has commanded us to pray to him. We must lead our families in regularly doing so.
 - “It is not just before a sermon that we need to pray, “Speak, O Lord.” In our personal devotional lives or in family worship, parents should pray that God would speak.”⁸⁴
 - Because it works.
 - J.W. Alexander explains, “The primary advantage of family prayer to the church is that it is answered. It is no small thing for any congregation to have daily cries for God’s blessing on it ascending from a hundred firesides.”⁸⁵
 - You pray with faith, trusting the Lord will answer for your good and his glory!
 - Because we need it.

⁸⁴ David and Barbara Leeman, *Our Hymns Our Heritage: A Student Guide to Songs of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2022), 222.

⁸⁵ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 83.

- Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin remind us, “We don’t pray with our families out of guilt over forsaken duty or out of intimidation of a demanding God we’ve assumed is hypercritical. We pray because we *need* God and we have been invited into his presence to commune with him.”⁸⁶
 - Praying will demonstrate a regular dependance upon the Lord. Let your family see your constant reliance upon the Lord.
- How should we pray?
 - Prayer within family worship should flow naturally from your reading.
 - They should not feel like two separate elements. Rather, prayer should feel like a continuation of reading.
 - Take what you have read and discussed, and pray about it.
- What should we pray?
 - Pray the Bible.
 - That is the first principle to carry with you. What should you pray during family worship? Pray the Bible.
 - What do I mean by that?
 - If the passage speaks on anger, pray that you and your family would be aware of the anger in your lives and that you would be equipped to fight those moments as they rise.
 - If the passage speaks of God’s glory, spend time praising Him for who he is and pray that your family would not lose sight of that truth.
 - If the passage speaks about the work of Christ, lead your family in thanksgiving for his active obedience and for the gospel.
 - Examples could go on, but the idea is that you should be taking the principles that you and your family have read and discussed and praying over them.
 - Pray biblically and also pray practically.
 - Pray over the text, but also make sure you pray specifically for one another that you would apply the text.
 - If it is over purity, pray by name that each of you would fight for purity in your settings.
 - If the passage is over friendships/relationships, pray that the Lord would provide them for your child and that they would have wisdom in who they choose to attach themselves to.
 - If the text speaks of repentance, pray that you personally would have the strength and humility through the Spirit to repent of your sins and love the Lord and your family well.
 - Cover the material, and then bring it into your home.

⁸⁶ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 90.

- A great resource worth reading over this topic is Donald Whitney's *Praying the Bible*.
 - You will be modeling for your family how to read and apply God's Word to their lives.
 - You will be modeling for them how to pray.
- Current events
 - And I am not necessarily talking about what is present in the news, but that should apply.
 - If there are major events going on, teach your family to turn to the Lord in response to them.
 - What I mean by current events is what is going on in the lives within your family.
 - If you are in a period of mourning, include prayers for peace, comfort, and trust.
 - If you are in a time of joy, teach your family to rejoice in the Lord for that, not neglecting to thank Him for all good things.
 - If there are major family events or travels coming up, prayers for those demonstrate a familial dependence upon the Lord.
 - Pray for what is of importance in the life of your family.
- Requests
 - Open up the opportunity for your family to ask for specific items to receive prayer.
 - Over time, your child, or your spouse, may open up about specific needs or struggles, allowing the family to bond together in prayer and accountability.
 - The door for this will be opened more if you find time for repentance and requests of your own, modeling them for your children.
 - You may be informed of a hurt or loss or joy that you would not have known of or prayed for otherwise.
 - Additionally, your family and their needs are shown to be important to you, and to the Lord.
- Local Church
 - Teach your family to love and pray for your local church.
 - Pray for the pastors, pray for the staff, pray for the members.
 - Pray that the Lord would protect and keep the church.
 - Pray that your family would love and serve the local church well.
 - Pray for specific events that may be coming up.
 - Think on our student ministry and children's ministry events. Can you imagine if our families were regularly praying together, out loud, for our camps and meetings?
 - Instruct your family to regularly love and lift up the local body you are blessed to be a part of.
- Evangelism

- Pray that you and your family would have gospel opportunities.
 - Your family will hear you over and over pray that you would have the chance to share the good news of Jesus Christ.
 - They will hear and see that as a priority.
 - Pray for specific individuals that you know are lost.
 - Never in a way that diminishes or looks down, but in a manner that shows how important the gospel is.
 - Pray for your children and their specific spheres of influence, that doors would be opened for them to share the gospel.
 - They hear that language and hear that goal from you, leaving it echoing in their minds.
 - Do not leave your family worships without an evangelistic focus.
 - Missions
 - This is further seen in praying for missions!
 - Pray for missionaries from your local church.
 - Download one of the apps that recommends unreached people groups and pray through them together.
 - You want to take the text and bring it home, but then you want your family to see and remember that the gospel is for the world!
 - Gospel Family has a wonderful family prayer sheet you can hang up or use over and over to help guide you and keep you focused.
- Additional Recommendations
 - Brevity
 - This is not your time to demonstrate your holiness. Keep it short and to the point.
 - J.W. Alexander warns, “What has been said of brevity applies especially to prayer as a part of family worship. Few things are more hardening and deadening in their influence than the daily recurrence of long and unawakening prayers.”⁸⁷
 - Joel Beeke agrees, “Be short. With few exceptions, don’t pray for more than five minutes. Tedious prayers do more harm than good.”⁸⁸
 - Do not think that you have to cover every item and every concept and pray perfectly or you have failed.
 - Rest in the Holy Spirit. Remember the words of Romans 8:26. “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

⁸⁷ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 114.

⁸⁸ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 28.

- Target meaningful brevity.
 - Variation
 - As you pray, try to avoid falling into the pattern of saying the same thing every time.
 - This will result in a lack of sincerity on your part and a lack of sincerity being communicated to your children.
 - Tad Thompson argues, “Token prayers are the easiest kind to pray, and perhaps the most common. But it is far more instructive and effective to take the time to say a genuine and thoughtful prayer.”⁸⁹
 - Variation will teach the different models of prayer we see throughout Scripture, and will also better maintain the attention of your family.
 - J.W. Alexander argues, “Family prayer should be varied; otherwise the inevitable result will be formalism and tediousness.”⁹⁰
 - Work to respond genuinely and thoughtfully in response to the text and requests in front of you.
 - Training
 - Allow your family to pray. Hold them to the same standards, encouraging them in their success and pressing them to grow.
 - You will teach your children to be open with their faith and to pray confidently and helpfully, whether with you or not.
 - Now, do not let the prayer devolve into silliness or mediocrity. There is a difference between sincerity and laziness. Maintain reverence while allowing children the opportunity to grow.
 - Another advantage to prayer time is that your family will see you praying and learn from you. Use this as a teaching opportunity.
 - Terry Johnson encourages, “Let your children hear you pleading with God for their souls; for their sanctification and growth; for their healing when afflicted; for the church and their part in its ministry; and for the nation.”⁹¹
 - Whether you realize it or not, your family is learning from the way you pray.
 - Teach them through praying, and give them the opportunities to grow.
- What has worked for you?
- Now, go and do!

⁸⁹ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 63.

⁹⁰ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 114.

⁹¹ Johnson, *The Family Worship Book*, 36.

- Lead your family in faithful and helpful prayers in response to God's Word!
 - Your target is 3 times this week. Hopefully this is becoming even more of a habit.
- Let me pray for us as we go out with this task in our hearts.

Lesson Plan

7) Singing in Family Worship

- Week 7 will instruct families on the importance of singing in family worship and offer practical options for families of varying musical comfortability.
- ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be aware of common obstacles and solutions to effectively bring music into family worship despite musical giftings.***

Outline

1) Demonstration of Family Worship

- Read: Judges 21 and lead a short discussion
- Pray: Pray in light of Judges 21, emphasizing the content of the text
- Sing: Behold Our God

2) Singing in Family Worship

- As a reminder, the primary elements that make up family worship are reading, praying, and singing.
 - I hope these have gone well, and I hope that in conjunction with the previous two, this session can serve to further equip you to worship well with your family in these areas.
 - This week, our focus will be on singing.
- This may be the oddest element for families to implement.
 - Read the Bible together? Deal, we can do that. It may be tough, but we've got that.
 - Pray the Bible together? For sure, we can get over the fear and make that happen.
 - Those two are understandable and special and beneficial and we look forward to trying to implement them.
 - Good, now sing the Bible. Yeah, you lost me. This may have been a struggle up to this point for you.
 - Singing is really awkward, especially in our family setting.
 - We don't have any musical talent in our family, and I mean any.
 - I don't see the need. We are reading and praying, isn't that enough?
 - Let us spend some time addressing these common concerns and discussing practical solutions to help you include this element in your times of family worship.
- Singing together at home is really awkward.
- Singing together at home can be awkward for a time.
 - Well, to be honest, you're right. But, only to an extent.
 - Singing together will be awkward, when you first start out.
 - With almost any activity, starting out comes with rigidity and struggle, yet builds into fluidity and joy.

- This is like fly-fishing, a form of fishing that is more of an art than just a hobby. Casts start out clunky and inaccurate and filled with tangles and awkward movements. But, after much training they are the pictures that fill magazines, with experienced fly-fishers bringing beautiful fluidity into their casts so that they can get the most joy out of an activity they love. In the end many fly-fishers say it's their favorite type of fishing.
 - Maybe more relatable, think of your children learning to ride their bikes. They were wobbly and fearful. But, seeing the joy at the end of the tunnel, they pressed forward until it became second nature.
 - Almost any discipline worth pursuing will take time to acclimate to.
 - Give it time.
 - My wife and I do family worship with us two and a bass guitar. That's it! Do you know how awkward that can be?
 - The first few times it was, and we acknowledged that going in.
 - But, over time, we have grown to love those sweet times praising the Lord together.
 - So, my encouragement is, know that it is going to feel different, but like any new pattern, time will make it feel like the norm.
 - Don't give up after one or two or three sessions. Press into it and make it a regular part of your family.
 - The awkwardness will fade, and joy will increase as you listen to the voices of your family praising our God and King.
- We are not musically talented.
 - All of that sounds well and good, but our family can't do that.
 - None of us play instruments.
 - None of us can sing well.
 - These are very realistic concerns!
 - I have three recommendations:
 - 1. Make use of the great mercy the Lord has provided us in technology.
 - Now more than ever it is simple to pull up a digital version of a song and play it for your family.
 - If playing music or carrying a tune is tough for you, let the professionals do it! There is no shame in listening to the recorded version of a song and singing along.
 - Just make sure you are genuinely singing with it!
 - Additionally, it may be helpful to look up a version on YouTube with the lyrics so that your family can watch and sing along.

- You are not left without the opportunity to fill your house with the sound of God-honoring music and voices!
 - 2. Rejoice in the understanding that your family will improve over time.
 - How many of you would consider yourself excellent runners?
 - Do you think you be better if you committed time to jogging four times a week? Also adding in Sundays and maybe Wednesdays?
 - You get the idea. We improve in our skills with practice of our skills.
 - Your family will get better at singing as they sing more.
 - You will find yourself better able follow the words and better able to pick out notes once you have done so time and time again.
 - Songs that you have sung several times will get easier and easier.
 - As awkwardness fades and confidence grows, your skill will improve.
 - Many of us fear jumping in because of where our skill is now, not knowing where it may be later.
 - 3. This opens the door for you to learn a musical instrument.
 - Have you ever wanted to play guitar or piano? They're truly easy to pick up. Plus, what impact would it have if your family saw you pouring into an instrument and asked why and your answer was, "to help lead us in family worship."?
 - What better reason do you have to learn to play?
 - Do not fear a lack of quality. Your rightly placed praise to God is a pleasing aroma, no matter the sound. Just know, it will improve over time.
- Why do we need to add singing to the mix?
 - Need is a strong word. It is an encouragement to the people of God in Colossians 3:16 (letting the Word of God dwell in you richly, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs), so it likely would be true in our homes as well. Either way, I highly recommend it, for the benefits are immense!
 - Music is a powerful a means of instruction and encouragement
 - The weight that music carries with it to help us learn and remember can hardly be overstated.
 - For example, if I asked you where the letter J falls in the alphabet, what do many of us start doing? Singing the alphabet song!
 - Music is an incredibly powerful force that sticks with us for years and years

- My mother works in an extended living facility. As so much slips away from those residents, it’s remarkable how many hymns they remember.
 - Knowing this, we should absolutely take advantage of the opportunity to lead our family musically.
- Your family will learn to respond to biblical truth.
 - Theology should lead us to doxology.
 - God’s Word and truths about Him should propel us into praise and worship.
 - Time in musical worship shows your family this.
 - You do not somberly read, understand, pray, and go about your life.
 - You take those truths and turn them to praise to God!
 - This time will show your family the vitally important truth that God’s Word demands response. Our time in musical worship is a small and helpful practice of that.
 - Scott Aniol concludes, “Furthermore, few things shape us more profoundly, especially as young children, than what we sing—not just the words of what we sing but also the music itself. Singing is a significant way to ‘practice’ right affection for the Lord, thereby nurturing the right kinds of affections within our children even before they can intellectually comprehend the theology they are singing.”⁹²
- Your family will grow in their knowledge of faithful songs.
 - We all know how it is to have certain songs stuck in our head for days.
 - You get a chance to pick and lead your family in faithful and helpful truths!
 - Your family will have the music and words of helpful music ringing in their ears as you sing them over and over.
- Your family will grow in their understanding of doctrine.
 - As you sing biblically faithful songs, truths about God are sung by your family repeatedly.
 - J.W. Alexander simply says, “Psalmody is a means of Christian instruction.”⁹³
 - Those truths become engrained in the mind of your family member, calling them to mind when needed and hiding them in their heart as life comes their way.

⁹² Scott Aniol, *Let the Little Children Come: Family Worship on Sunday (And the Other Six Days Too)* (Conway: Free Grace Press, 2021), 76.

⁹³ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 128.

- God is King, he is good, We Need Him, he is a Mighty Fortress, when things go poorly it is well with my soul because of Him, and the list go on.
- Music etches these truths into the lives of your family.
 - Tad Thompson also adds, “There is nothing quite so sweet as singing the gospel over my children.”⁹⁴
 - Elisabeth Elliot notes, “In times of deep distress I have been sustained by the words of hymns learned in family prayers.”⁹⁵
 - Why not take every opportunity you can to do that?
- Your family will grow in their love for one another.
 - As we talked about earlier, singing can be an awkward/vulnerable time.
 - As they see each other worshipping and grow in comfort with that practice and time, their care and closeness for one another will improve as well.
 - Further, they are unifying by voice around a common theme.
 - Music truly does bring the family together. Faithful music brings a God-fearing family together even more so.
- Your family will be better equipped for worship with your local church.
 - One of the sad realities that the American church faces is seen when you go into a Sunday worship gathering and look around during the music.
 - Many people are not singing at all. Especially not men.
 - I knew of a local church with over 1500 attendees on a Sunday and had a student tell a leader that he and his friends liked to play a game where they would try to see who could find three men singing first. his punchline that followed was, “No one ever wins.”
 - I wonder if the struggle we see in musical worship in local churches is due to the fact that the only time families participate in a similar activity is the previous Sunday.
 - Men don’t want to sing. Individuals are afraid that others will mock their voice or quality. Students watch their parents avoid singing and do the same themselves. We create a generation of silence during worship.
 - Imagine the difference if our families were singing all the time.
 - Your family would be equipped to come and musically worship with the saints.

⁹⁴ Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 23.

⁹⁵ Elisabeth Elliot, *The Shaping of a Christian Family: How My Parents Nurtured My Faith* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 80.

- Their voices would be an encouragement to fellow members, their visible participation would be an encouragement to other parents and children as well.
 - Singing regularly is of great value to your family.
- Final Recommendations:
 - Teach your family why you sing.
 - Don't leave them in the dark about a topic that may seem odd to them.
 - Ken Coley and Blair Robinson encourage, "To begin, gather your family and explain to them the blessing of singing to our glorious God and how you desire to sing with them. Address the awkwardness, or any objections, all upfront. Appeal to them to trust you as this is something that will please God and bring life to your family's hearts and devotional times."⁹⁶
 - The extra steps taken to help them see the benefit will serve you in participation efforts later.
 - Read Psalm 150 to them!
 - Choose doctrinally sound songs.
 - This is the practical response of what we discussed earlier.
 - Joel Beeke charges, "Sing doctrinally pure songs. There is no excuse for singing doctrinal error no matter how attractive the tune might be."⁹⁷
 - Be wary of simply gravitating to what is popular on the radio.
 - Look at the lyrics, look at the character of the band, test them against Scripture, see what is wise.
 - If you need recommendations, turn to your pastoral staff, a hymnal (*Hymns of Grace* in particular), Johnson's *The Family Worship Book*, *Our Hymns Our Heritage*, *25 Songs of Suffering*, Our Spotify Lists, The Getty's family hymn of the month, etc.
 - There is no excuse not to be able to find great music!
 - Do not be afraid to repeat songs.
 - If you are comfortable with a helpful song, there is no shame in repeating it!
 - J.W. Alexander agrees, "No evil can arise from often recurring to the same hymns, if these are in themselves excellent. The best hymns are those which are sung most often, and which everyone knows by heart; and those will have the largest stock in remembrance who have praised God all their lives at home."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Coley and Robinson, *Equipping Fathers to Lead Family Worship*, 67-68.

⁹⁷ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 31.

⁹⁸ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 133.

- Encourage family participation.
 - Let the different members of your family pick the song.
 - If they are learning an instrument or working on voice, give them opportunities to lead and play.
 - If they are shy or hesitant, encourage them to sing and compliment them on their efforts.
 - At the minimum, ask them read and reflect on the words, questioning on their response to them after.
- What has worked for you?
- Singing in family worship is possible, helpful, and joyous.
 - And any of you can do it!
 - Work to incorporate it and stick with it!
 - Your target again is 3 times of family worship throughout this week. I hope the pattern is continuing to be formed in your life.
 - What a joy it would be all over our community to have families singing the praises of God.

Lesson Plan

8) Perseverance in Family Worship

- Week 8 will highlight the importance of perseverance, methods of overcoming obstacles, and call families to press on in the task of discipleship. Additional resources and recommendations will be given for parents to utilize in family worship and receive extra training.
- ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will understand strategies for overcoming obstacles to family worship and remaining disciplined in their practice of family worship.***

Outline

1) Demonstration of Family Worship

- Read: Revelation 22 and lead a short discussion
- Pray: Pray in light of Revelation 22, emphasizing the content of the text
- Sing: Holy, Holy, Holy

2) Perseverance in Family Worship

- Our final focus in this course is perseverance. Continuing. Enduring. Making this a part of your life for years to come.
 - If we want family worship to have its greatest effect on our families we must persevere.
 - Paul David Tripp voices, “Principle: You must be committed as a parent to long-view parenting because change is a process and not an event.”⁹⁹
 - Just as we have compared this practice to many other disciplines, let’s do that once more.
 - What is the length of most initial workout plans? 90 days. That’s three months of time committed to discipline!
 - This is our goal, and then beyond. You want to establish a lifetime pattern!
 - However, we have only walked through close to 60 days together. Not even the full length.
 - As you’ve implemented family worship, you may have come to bumps in the road during that time.
 - As with workouts, obstacles arise that prevent us from continuing:
 - Fatigue, laziness, broken equipment, distractions, bad workout partners, lack of desire, emotional struggles, etc.
 - Our perseverance is stunted.
 - As you prepare to launch out, let us address some obstacles you may face.

⁹⁹ Tripp, *Parenting*, 85.

- There are obstacles that may have already been addressed, but I want to use this time address a few more.
- I haven't gotten started
 - Hopefully by this point you have launched into the practice of family worship.
 - Many people will sit at the starting line, knowing they want to run the race and that it would be good for their family to run the race.
 - But guilt and fear hold them back from ever embarking on the journey.
 - It is never too late to start with family worship.
 - You may have heard the old expression, the best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the second best is right now.
 - Do not let the guilt of not starting sooner drag a problem further!
 - Get started now! Bless your family now!
 - Do not let the fear of getting started worry you. God is merciful and you will grow in wisdom, knowledge and leadership as you practice.
 - That first obstacle is simply about pushing past the initial bump in the road. Pray that God would mercifully send the Helper to strengthen you to begin.
- Not enough time
 - This is potentially the biggest obstacle to family worship.
 - We are so busy with work, activities and then our own rest/hobbies that we do not have time for family worship.
 - Hear this warning: if you do not make time for family worship it will not happen.
 - Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin agree, "Regular time together centered around God will not just happen."¹⁰⁰
 - So, what is the solution?
 - Plan your schedule around family worship.
 - Listen to the way I said that.
 - I didn't say to fit family worship into your schedule. I didn't say to add it to your schedule.
 - Build your schedule around family worship.
 - As your family is looking at all that they have to do, show them that the worship of God is the most important item they have on their plate.
 - Joel Beeke explains, "Your children must understand that family worship is the most important activity of the day and should not be interrupted by anything."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 96.

¹⁰¹ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 20.

- Jonathan Williams says, “We all have busy schedules and full calendars, but unless we push pause in order to enjoy our Savior, rest in the presence of the Lord, and celebrate Family Worship with an undivided, undistracted heart, then I’m afraid that the next thing on our calendar will inevitably be ‘burnout.’¹⁰²
 - If we do not make the time for family worship, the spiritual health of our family will suffer.
- Make a routine, establish a time, establish a place, make it a necessity in your family’s day.
 - What about odd weeks? Joel Beeke recommends, “Carefully guard this time of family worship. If you know ahead of time that the normal time will not be suitable on a certain day, reschedule worship time. Don’t skip it, however; that can become habitual. When you can keep to your appointed times, plan carefully and prepare beforehand to make every minute count. Fight every enemy of family worship.”¹⁰³
 - Changes happen, but do not let that be the norm. Donald Whitney advises “Every family has to flex its worship time occasionally. Just be careful that your flexibility does not lead to inconsistency.”¹⁰⁴
- The thought that families do not have enough time for family worship is a lie that the enemy has perpetuated so that we would neglect the grace of God given in family worship.
 - We have the time; we must order our priorities rightly.
 - What is your plan to make time for family worship?
 - Remember our initial discussion. We are only looking for ten minutes to start! You definitely have that time.
- I don’t know what material to use.
 - We covered this some in reading, but hear again, your local church would love to help you, providing reading lists and recommended music.
 - Start a Bible reading plan and get into it.
 - Ask our staff, check out Spotify, for a list of the songs you sing on Sunday.
 - Additionally, talk to other families. What have they used that was helpful?
 - Take a look at a book like *The Family Worship Book* for reading recommendations and checklists.
 - Check out gospelfamily.org or truth78.org for family worship guides.

¹⁰² Williams, *Gospel Family*, 142.

¹⁰³ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 51.

- All of the material you need is readily available to you, the biggest hurdle will be the effort needed to ask to get it.
 - Honestly, the more I have researched this topic, the more convinced I am that there is a plethora of wonderful material. The biggest question is, will you use it?
- My family members won't participate
 - This is truly difficult. But you must persist for the health of your family.
 - Make family worship a requirement. Not for some, for all of your children. If they will not participate, punishments should be similar to the neglect of any chores or duties.
 - Joel Beeke suggests, "If you have difficult children, follow a simple rule: no Scripture, no singing, and no praying means no food."¹⁰⁵
 - Do we believe this matter is that important?
 - Even if they are going to sit and participate as little as possible, their presence is necessary. Pray that God would pierce their hearts through the Word read, prayed, and sang.
 - Again, Joel Beeke recommends, "Don't indulge excuses to avoid family worship."¹⁰⁶
 - You must put your foot down on this issue. Your family will gather together for worship. If they don't want to give all of their effort, that is fine. But, never let them be a distraction.
 - You will demonstrate through your discipline how important this issue is.
 - What if a spouse does not want to participate?
 - Fall on 1 Peter 3:1-2. Who knows if your conduct may bring them to knowledge of the gospel?
 - Gather your family without them, inviting them regularly, and commit to raising up your children rightly.
 - Try giving them simple tasks or asking pointed questions
 - Work to specifically get them involved.
 - And when they do, be complementary and positive rather than aggressive and spiteful.
 - Your response to their involvement will weigh into their thinking greatly. Find joy in their participation, no matter how small!
 - Explain why you do family worship.
 - The rebelliousness of family may be quelled when they hear and understand why you are pursuing this discipline.

¹⁰⁵ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 39.

¹⁰⁶ Beeke, *Family Worship*, 22.

- You are not trying to be boring or demanding or time consuming. You want to worship God rightly and you want them to do the same.
- There seems to be no impact.
 - You have spent time together and you are committing to family worship, yet your children sigh every time you gather them together. Participation is minimal, and you're still having to get on to them throughout the week.
 - Do not lose heart!
 - Think back to our exercise example.
 - If you worked out hard for two weeks, would you look at yourself and be exactly where you wanted to be? No! Why? It takes time. Sometimes a lot of time.
 - Sometimes, you may not see the results for years.
 - But you may not truly see how much those times are impacting your family.
 - They are seeing your commitment, they are hearing God's Word, and they are remembering these times.
 - There are numerous recorded testimonies of children, many years down the road, reflecting back on the wonderful time they had with their parents in family worship and the profound impact it had whether they knew it or not.
 - The back of Jason Helopoulos's work includes many testimonies, showing the impact had on families!
 - Hold on to hope! But, hope in the One who is faithful!
 - Your hope in family worship is not you, but the mercy of the Holy Spirit in the lives of your family!
 - Do not lose heart. Trust in God and continue to be faithful!
- Encourage one another
 - What if we made this a topic that we asked each other about? What if we encouraged young couples to start these patterns? What if we asked other parents how this was going? What if we committed to holding each other accountable? You aren't running alone!
- Persist in family worship!
 - Prepare yourselves to launch into this glorious grace-filled journey!
 - Terry Johnson encourages us, "Persevere. If you miss once, don't despair, but persist and your routine will become routine!"¹⁰⁷
 - Prepare yourself for a marathon, as the race is arduous
 - J.C. Ryle reminds us, "Truly, patience is needed in training a child, but without it, nothing can be done."¹⁰⁸
 - Patiently labor on patiently trusting the Lord.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, *The Family Worship Book*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Ryle, *The Duties of Parents*, 7.

- Persevere, hoping in the one who remains steadfast in his love and care for you.
- Make a plan, get accountability, pray, practice and keep practicing.
- Are there any final questions that would be helpful?
 - Let us take some time to pray for one another as we set out to honor the Lord through regular worship in our homes.

APPENDIX 3

CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL

The following tool was utilized by the expert panel to evaluate the family ministry curriculum that was developed after the results of the FDPPS. The criteria and scoring are structured to promote biblical soundness, accurate content, effective structure, and material that aims towards the identified goals.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop patterns of family worship.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better lead family worship.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4

EXPERT PANEL CURRICULUM EVALUATIONS

The following are the completed CETs from the chosen expert panel. Matthew Haste, Shawn Wright, Jonathan Williams, and Ryan Smith were sent a copy of both the FWC and the CET for evaluation.¹ Their responses were digitally returned.

¹ This is the order that the forms are presented in. Although there is not a name or date, the first CET is from Matthew Haste.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.				✓	
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.			✓		
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.				✓	
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.			✓		
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.				✓	
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.			✓		
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop patterns of family worship.				✓	
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better lead family worship.				✓	

Other Comments:

Well done! My only practical suggestion would be to consider swapping the order of weeks 3-4 to incentivize engagement.

Name of Evaluator: Shawn Wright

Date: 7/25/22

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.				✓	The exegesis was faithful
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.				✓	
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.				✓	The combination of careful biblical instruction with quotes from other sources made the lessons very full.
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.				✓	
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.				✓	The purpose of each lesson is apparent A lot depends on how the classes are taught.
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.			✓		
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop patterns of family worship.				✓	Very good information is given to those who need models and ideas.
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better lead family worship.				✓	

Other Comments:

Name of Evaluator: **Jonathan Williams**

Date: **Aug. 1, 2022**

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.				X	
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.				X	
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.				X	
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.				X	
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.				X	
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.			X		I love that the group gets to read Scripture, pray, and sing together. Perhaps there could also be some discussion questions for the group, if that's appropriate in your setting. Each section included, "lead a short discussion," so it seems like this is the plan.
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop patterns of family worship.				X	
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better lead family worship.				X	

Other Comments:

This is an exceptional resource. Very well researched, written, and organized. Strong biblical & theological foundation, with incredibly practical application & equipping.

Name of Evaluator: DR. LYAN SMITH

Date: 7/19/22

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.				✓	FOCUSED, BIBLE-SATURATED, AND APPLICABLE USE OF SCRIPTURE.
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.				✓	VERY SOUND.
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.				✓	GOOD JOB OF ASKING + ADDRESSING RELEVANT QUESTIONS.
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.				✓	WELL-ORGANIZED, DESCRIPTIVE, MEASURABLE, ATTAINABLE
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.				✓	VERY CLEAR INSTRUCTION, CHALLENGE, + SUPPORT
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.				✓	SPECIFIC INSTRUCTION, ENCOURAGEMENT + EQUIPMENT
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop patterns of family worship.				✓	CLEAR STEPS OUTLINED + RESOURCES GIVEN.
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better lead family worship.				✓	WELL-ROUNDED + THOROUGH

Other Comments:

EXCELLENT CURRICULUM. THIS WILL BE FRUITFUL FOR GENERATIONS.

APPENDIX 5

FAMILY WORSHIP CURRICULUM VIDEO LINKS

Each session from the FWC was recorded, uploaded, and shared so that families could watch those they were unable to attend. The following is a collection of the links to access each session.

Family Worship Curriculum Video Links

All session videos can be found compiled at:

<http://eagleheights.com/family-worship>

Session 1: What is Family Worship?

<https://vimeo.com/760861200>

Session 2: Is Family Worship Biblical?

<https://vimeo.com/763200853>

Session 3: The Benefits of Family Worship

<https://vimeo.com/765511398>

Session 4: History, Present, and Need

<https://vimeo.com/767902074>

Session 5: Reading in Family Worship

<https://vimeo.com/770525096>

Session 6: Praying in Family Worship

<https://vimeo.com/775592246>

Session 7: Singing in Family Worship

<https://vimeo.com/777916385>

Session 8: Perseverance in Family Worship

<https://vimeo.com/780194955>

APPENDIX 6

FAMILY WORSHIP HANDOUT

The following tool from *A Practical Theology of Family Worship* by Jonathan Williams was given to families following the second session of the FWC to promote further discussion over the first two weeks of taught material.¹

¹ Jonathan Williams, *A Practical Theology of Family Worship: Richard Baxter's Timeless Encouragement for Today's Home* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books), 119-21.

Opportunities for Reflection on Family Worship

From *A Practical Theology of Family Worship* by Jonathan Williams

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Reflection on the Abundant Opportunities for Family Worship

1. What Bible verses encourage family worship?
2. What opportunities does your family have to worship together each week?
3. When could you bring your family together for a time of worship in the home?
4. What challenges would you expect to see in your home as you practice worshipping together?
5. What blessings would you expect to see in your home as you practice worshipping together?

Reflection on the Opportunities for Teaching the Word of God

1. What Scriptures do we expect our children to obey? Have we taught these Scriptures well in the home?
2. What are some of the most important Bible stories that you want to teach to your family?
3. How can we create more opportunities to teach our families about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?
4. Do our family members have the opportunity to ask questions about what they find in Scripture?
5. When the call to teach the Bible seems overwhelming, how can we depend on the Lord for this ministry?
6. How can we grow in our ability to teach the Word of God?

Reflection on Filling the Home with Prayer and Praises

1. What are the primary elements of family worship? Which of these would be the easiest for you to begin practicing with your family? Which of these would be the most challenging?
2. What Bible verses encourage family prayer?
3. What is the relationship between teaching the Word of God and prayer?
4. Do you currently have a consistent rhythm of family prayer with those in your household? Do you pray with your spouse? Do you pray with your children?
5. Who is currently leading your family in prayer and praises?
6. Do your children have space to share their prayer requests and praises? What would prevent you from praying with them as they share? Who can you ask to hold you accountable to make the most of these opportunities?
7. When is your family able to participate in singing worship songs?

8. How would you describe your prayers before each meal? How would you like to see these mature?
9. What needs do you currently have that should be lifted up in joint family prayer?
10. What would help your family grow in your time of prayer?

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE PARENTS AT EAGLE HEIGHTS BAPTIST CHURCH IN STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA, FOR FAMILY WORSHIP

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Shawn D. Wright

This project seeks to equip the parents at Eagle Heights Baptist Church (EHBC) in Stillwater, Oklahoma, for family worship. Chapter 1 establishes the ministry context of EHBC and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides a biblical basis for family worship by exegeting four passages (Deut 6:1-9; Ps 78:1-8; Eph 6:1-4; 2 Tim 1:3-7) and demonstrating the frequency of family discipleship in Scripture through several additional texts (Gen 18:17-19; Josh 24:15; Job 1:1-5; Ps 145:4-6; Prov 22:6; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 3:1-7; 3 John 1-4). Chapter 3 explores the history, modern practice, benefits, and need of family worship. Chapter 4 details the implementation of the project, explaining the process of curriculum development and teaching. Chapter 5 evaluates the success of the project based on the established goals. Altogether, this project aims to prepare parents to embrace their calling and faithfully disciple their children at home.

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