

XXII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“Personal and Family Worship – Getting Started”

II Timothy 2, 3

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I have bearing not gifts but books. A theologian by the name of Dr. S.G. De Graaf wrote a four volume book about the Bible for children called Promise and Deliverance and I'm hoping it is still printed. I would recommend this book to you in terms of family worship. Another I would recommend is by Sinclair Ferguson called Big Book of Questions & Answers and it's like a workbook that you can work your way through. For those who want to read more about family worship check out A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home by Jason Helopoulos. Then I want to recommend a classic to you by Matthew Henry called Family Religion and it's an extraordinary book.

Before we get started I want to confess I will not have time to cover both personal and family in this study but I will cover family worship and the next time I have the opportunity to preach I'll cover personal worship. Two years ago our theme was worship and I took the time to develop that's why we were created, saved and why God upholds us for the worship of our triune God that He would be glorified in us and through us. I divided worship up into two categories. There is Romans 12:1 worship which says *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* That is life is a worship statement to God by those who have been made in His image, redeemed by His Son and filled with His Spirit. Life is worship. I Corinthians 10:31 says *[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* As we are being discipled that is a way we would glorify God with our lives and worship Him. Life worship is based upon, leads to and is invigorated by gathered, corporate worship. So I tried to lay out worship in those two categories.

I would like to go to this more formal aspect of worship where another way to approach this is that when God saves us for His glory that we might worship Him, you might think of worship as three interdependent spheres of worship. They are not the same but they feed upon each other and support each other. Think this way. I worship personally with the Lord that spills over into life. I have family worship that spills over into life and I have corporate worship when I gather with God's people and that spills over into life. So there is personal worship, family worship and corporate worship and all of that leads me to a life of worship and praise to God.

So all three of these spheres lead to life worship so that our lives are invigorated and framed for the glory of God but they also help each other. Personal worship feeds family worship. Family worship feeds corporate worship. Corporate worship encourages my personal worship and my family worship. So they feed each other in a linear way – personal to family to corporate – and then dynamic way where corporate feeds personal and family so that the three are interdependent in working with each other.

I think there are couple of things today that undermine gathered worship. I don't think anyone is doing it purposefully or maliciously but I think it happens. We undermine gathered worship when we turn worship into the primary instrument to reach the world for Christ. In other words the morning worship service becomes the one evangelistic event of a church. In reality the church impacts the world, not when it relies on gathered worship to do evangelism but

when we scatter from worship for that's when we evangelize the world. It doesn't mean we don't evangelize when we gather for worship but worship is not believer-centered or unbeliever-centered or seeker-centered. It is God-centered and that's the blessing to the believer and the unbeliever who comes into our midst and realizes that God is in the midst of us.

Another way I think we've undermined corporate worship is that for many of us we turn corporate worship into personal worship. Don't take this logical statement into an illogical arena. In other words, don't mess this up, what I'm about to say. When we worship, because we don't do much personal and family worship and we want to do this, sometimes when we gather for corporate worship, we're not doing what we're supposed to do in corporate worship. We almost draw a little box around ourselves. We close our eyes and make the corporate worship more of an act of personal worship. When in reality the Bible says in Hebrews 10:25, *[25] do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* But we are to be doing what it says in Ephesians 5:19–20, *[19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, [20] giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Please don't take this to absurdity for I have no problem when you're singing if God moves your heart and you close your eyes. I'm not opposed to that but what I'm saying is that there is this vacuum of personal worship so we lose some of the dynamic of corporate worship which is to be other-concerned, other-centered. That is one of the reasons we sing out. We don't sing out for God to hear us for the Lord is listening to your heart. The reason we sing aloud is because what is in the heart comes out of the mouth and so that we can encourage one another and stimulate one another. Sometimes we lose that corporate worship because we're so devoid of personal worship that we take the corporate worship to substitute for what should have been happening personal at home to prepare us for corporate worship. I'm hoping these studies on personal and family worship will invigorate our corporate worship to be more corporate.

In this study we'll focus on family worship or couple's worship. If you're single you may not always be so this is a good chance to get ready for what family, couple worship would look like or what you could enjoy being with other couples and families as well in one another's homes and not be segmented from each other. How do we go about this dynamic of family worship? About once a month we couples that come to the front our church during the worship service for the baptism of their child. You will hear them make three vows. Do you acknowledge that your child is in need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit? In other words, do you acknowledge that your child is a sinner under the judgment of God and that your child is dead in their sins? They need the power of God for salvation.

Another vow is do you publically affirm that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior because you're about to claim a covenant promise that is only for believers so you must publically affirm again that you're a believer who trusted in Christ alone for your salvation. Then comes the third vow that says do you now in humble reliance upon divine grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to pray with your child, set an example before your child and to teach your child the Word of God and use all the means that God has appointed to raise your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

On the one hand I have deep concern and conviction that Jason Helopoulos is right that this is a much neglected grace but I don't think anyone is doing it maliciously. It's just so easy for other things to take the place of family worship. Yet on the other hand I have great

anticipation for I know for the blessing of it in my own family and I know the struggles of it as well. I remember my dad and mom trying to get it started and it would last for two and half weeks and then it would be gone. Then a conference would happen at our church and my dad would say 'let's start this again.' So I know the challenges of it but I also know the blessings and have seen the blessings.

As a pastor, when you shepherd people you want to make your life count and you want to get them to focus and embrace those things that make a difference in your life. After you have committed your life to Christ I can't think of anything much more important than personal and family worship and your commitment to gather with God's people to be a vital part of the body of Christ. It is not only a conviction but an expectation, an anticipation of all blessings that begin to flow in the families when they embrace and engage in this kind of worship. Let's look at Genesis 17 as God makes His covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 17:1–8 says [1] *When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, [2] that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."* [3] *Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, [4] "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. [5] No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. [6] I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [7] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."*

I am unabashedly committed to covenant theology. I believe God's Word is the unfolding of the covenant of grace from Genesis 3 all the way through Revelation 22 through a system of covenants. One of the things God puts in His covenants are promises that are 'yes' and 'amen' in Christ. One of the promises is that God has taken the institution of creation, the family, and woven it into the institution of redemption, His covenant people, His church and He has ordained to use the family. He says 'I will be a God to you and to your children after you.' That did not stop when Jesus came. On the contrary, Jesus reaffirms it and the Apostles amplify it. The first time Peter preaches the Gospel he says "Repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins for the promise is for you and your children and all who are afar off." That is code languages for the Gentiles. It will go to those whom the Lord calls from the Gentiles, to them and their families. God works through the family. He is not limited to the family but works through the family. He works through the institution of creation to accomplish the institution of redemption which is covenant people for a new heavens and a new earth.

Paul also affirms this when he says to a Roman employee, the one over the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved you and your household." When Paul is telling believing spouses to stay with their unbelieving spouses he tells them that their witness to their unbelieving spouse can be affective and uses the reference from I Corinthians 7, 'are not your children holy?' It doesn't mean they are saved but it means they are set apart by putting you as a believing parent in that home and then through you your children are tasting the good things of the age to come. They are seeing the power of God at work and God uses that in their life but this God who makes this promise does not make the promise without the means to fulfill the promise. The means is your prayer with and for your children are teaching them the

Word of God with and for your children. You are taking them under the teaching of the Word of God alongside of them so that isn't there to do what you're supposed to do in the family but to equip you to do what you're supposed to do in your family and to amplify what you're doing in your family.

That is why at the end of the baptismal vows I will do a fourth vow. That is the one where the members of the church stand and vow to assist these parents. We can't take their place but we can assist and equip them. We can pray with them and for them. We can mentor and disciple them. The members of this church will be committed to doing that. One of the neglected main delivery systems but it is not the only thing that you can use, is family worship. To build on this I want to look at another text of Scripture in Deuteronomy 6. Over 400 years later God will take this offspring that He is preserving from Abraham and He will lead them out. As He leads them out this passage is what is said to them.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 says [4] *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (one with multiplicity – doesn't define the Trinity but accommodates the Trinity – single with plurality). [5] You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

You teach your children. How? You incarnate God's Word. You have it on your heart. You think on God's Word with your mind. You embrace God's Word with your heart. You live God's Word with your life. You begin to do all of those things to the glory of God. As you are doing it, you take what you've incarnated and you instruct them, teach them and model for them God's Word. You saturate your home with the Word of God. You are constantly teaching your children because children not only learn by instruction but they learn most of all by imitation. That family worship time can be a concentrated moment for the teaching piece that gives them wisdom as to why you're living the way you're living by God's grace and growing in His grace. Joshua 24:15b says [15b] *“But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*

I'd like to look at one other passage in Ephesians 6 which is kind of like the Deuteronomy 6 counterpart in the New Testament. Here we get a little more specificity. Ephesians 6:1–4 says [1] *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. [2] “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), [3] “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” [4] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Not provoking children to anger is a whole other series that I don't have time to cover here. I'll just go from the negative to the positive. One of the ways you don't provoke them to anger is by communicating what is right in the right way at the right time for the right reason. Instruct them and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord for you are creating for them that nurturing womb in your home. They were brought into this world from the nurturing womb of their mother. Now father, you build a womb to nurture them in the home. That doesn't mean you're all alone for I understand the parental partnership that goes on between a father and a mother. I know that the mothers teach as well for the book of Proverbs says the mother has the teaching of kindness on her tongue but there is clearly a responsibility to men to chart the course in their home.

Fathers pull the trigger to bring God's Word and Gospel bullets right to the heart of your children constantly, day after day. Fathers set the womb, set the environment and saturate it with God's Word. Fill it by God's Word by how you and your wife model it as a father and mother. Then actually teach them the Word of God. I want to look at another passage in Psalm 78 and then I want to give you some practical takeaways for you to use. Psalm 78:2–4 says [2] *I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, [3] things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. [4] We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.*

People ask me why I believe the Bible is the Word of God. In our shorter catechism it says we ultimately won't believe the Bible is the Word of God without the Holy Spirit for He is the One that finally convinces you that it is the Word of God. Without the Holy Spirit you'll find every reason to believe it is not the Word of God. The Holy Spirit uses instruments to convince us that it's the Word of God. I started believing that the Bible was the Word of God when my mother told me. I know my mother was not the Holy Spirit but she was next to the Holy Spirit and I'm absolutely convinced of that. Then my grandfather put in front of me John 1 and said "Son, memorize it." "Why?" "Because when you hide God's Word in your heart you'll know the Savior and quit knowing sin. It has power so I want you to start hiding it in your heart. This is the Word of God." My grandmother told me and she taught me to sing His Word.

II Corinthians 2:9–11 says [9] *But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" — [10] these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. [11] For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.* Isn't He wonderful? I heard it from my mother, grandfather, grandmother and my father. My dad never said on a Sunday morning to us 'where do you think we ought to go to church?' My dad said "They preach the Bible here so we're going there and then I'll talk to you about it on the way home." That is just the way it worked. All of that the Holy Spirit used to convince me of the Word of Truth and it's the Word of Life. They didn't hide it from me. They found a way to teach it to me.

In my family it was a hit and miss on family worship when I was growing up. God allowed our family (my wife and I) to be a little more consistent and so I want to leave you with some things that helped us. Here are ten brief things that you can utilize in your family worship. One is that if you want to get family worship done then you have to make a commitment. It won't just happen. You might think what if you fail and that's why most of us don't make a commitment. If you don't make a commitment then you've already failed. So make a commitment and when you fail, you'll have the other things in place to start back because it's a commitment. God's grace forgives us when we falter, renews us and we can grow from it but don't be afraid of making a commitment. That's why in those baptismal vows we say 'I will endeavor' depending on the Holy Spirit.

Two, select for family worship an appropriate, accessible time and an appropriate, acceptable place. In other words, pick a place and time that will lend to your success. Here is personal illustration. When I was first convinced of personal worship I read that George Whitfield got up at 4am every morning for an hour in the Bible. I tried that and that lasted three days for me. I can't get up that early every morning but 6am is about the earliest I can get up. When is the best time for you and your family? Is it morning, noon or evening? The best time

for our family worship was probably when our kids were younger and we could keep it at the suppertime. As they got older we weren't going to let athletics rob us of Lord's Day worship or family worship but we did move the time from suppertime to 9pm every night.

Reserve sacred time and sacred space for family worship. We met on our bed at 9pm and it became something regular and anticipated. Here is my argument for the evening time for family worship. I cannot tell you how many of those times when the worship time was over that one, two or three of the kids stayed to talk about what was happening in their life and everything had slowed down. That was an added benefit from it.

Thirdly, I encourage you to do family worship Monday through Saturday. On Sunday evening we closed in prayer but we didn't do a family worship because our family has been worshipping on that day for the home has come to our church and the church has come to our home on the Lord's Day.

Number four, create a workable, predictable plan and don't be overly ambitious. In other words don't try to invoke all nine elements of worship we do on the Lord's Day in your family worship. It is the K.I.S.S. method – keep it simple saints.

Five, select a curriculum and don't try to write your own. I know some of you can but for the vast majority of us don't try to create your curriculum for there is something already out there for you to use. Our family would use TableTalk from time to time in our family worship. You could use the read through the Bible in a year but perhaps extend it to three years for it doesn't have to be done in a year. What would be the size of reading that would be best for your family? You could use the children's catechism or the shorter catechism for that's why those were written, to be used in family worship. When they finished doing the Confession of Faith the Westminster Assembly said 'this is great, how can pastors teach the elders?' So they did the larger catechism to teach the confession. Then they said 'how can fathers teach their children?' That's how the shorter catechism came about. Use these things and go through it at the pace you want to go through it and memorize it as you go. You may want to use one of the children's Bible study books. So find yourself a good curriculum.

Six, consider adding two elements to the curriculum particularly when your children are younger and they don't get embarrassed. Incorporate singing into your family worship. This works well when your children are smaller. Another element is to start reading through a book like Pilgrim's Progress, Holy War, Screwtape Letters, or the Chronicles of Narnia. Read through some good literature with your children. Let everyone take a turn to read. So singing and reading are a good addition to a study time in the Word. Start it with prayer and end it with prayer as you pray for one another.

Seven, start small. Start with ten or fifteen minutes. Start with five minutes if it will just get you started. This way you begin to put it together.

Eight, always aim at the youngest in the family. Everyone else will get blessed. If you aim high then the youngest won't get blessed but if you aim young everyone will get blessed.

Number nine, coordinate your family worship with corporate worship. Here is a suggestion. Have your own curriculum on Monday through Friday and then on Saturday go to the church weekly that is sent to you and read the texts that will be covered on the Lord's Day to prepare for the Lord's Day as a family. So you unite your family worship with Lord's Day corporate worship as part of the preparation for worship.

Ten, to dads in particular but to moms when the dad is not there, try to come up with one application, one takeaway from what you've just covered in your family worship. Don't get overly ambitious on this. If you use the TableTalk booklet it will already have a takeaway for

you and that is under the part that reads 'coram deo' where R.C. Sproul always liked using Latin words. I remember being in a class taught by R.C. Sproul and he threw a piece of chalk at a student and said 'wake up!' The student said "I'm awake." Sproul said "what does this mean to you, son?" The student replied "Dr. Sproul, I don't know but I figure you'll give me some Latin word for it that I won't understand anyway." Coram deo means before the face of God so in other words walking away, living life under the eye of God. So give on life takeaway in your family worship time. What this means in our life before the Lord.

So just start it. You will be providentially hindered but don't give up. You'll get disengaged so get back engaged. This isn't missing two days so we'll just forget doing this. Just say 'Ok Lord we got sidetracked so we'll get back on target' and then you begin to work your way through it. I think you will find this to be an extraordinary blessing in your life. Don't be overly ambitious. Just start small and simple and get into God's Word as a family. Fathers, teach your children for they will be forever grateful to you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You so much for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You that we could spend time on something so practical. Help us to implement it. We thank You that this doesn't merit our salvation but this is a means whereby we can meet and grow in a relationship with Jesus our Savior. Thank You that we can come together with corporate worship. Thank You that in families we can establish times of worship and thank You that we can personally worship You. God I want to thank You also that life is worship and that the personal feeds the family and the family the corporate and the corporate worship feeds the family and personal worship. God thank You for the wonderful tapestry of a Gospel life for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.