

3 Exhortations

1) Start doing it today if you don't already do it.

Don't put it off until you have your lives under control, or until baby is doing a little better, or until after you're back into rhythms when the kids are back in school. Start it today.

If the doctor gave you a prescription, you wouldn't wait until life settled down to get it filled, and as one of your pastors I'm telling you this is just as important and doesn't have to take much longer each day than swallowing that pill or applying that ointment.

And a quick note: Start doing this today *even if you don't have kids yet, even if you don't have a spouse yet*. With just a husband and wife, I know it might feel awkward at first, but push through. It will make it that much easier when kids show up, and it will bond you together spiritually now. It will also set the pattern that, with or without kids, husband really is still the spiritual leader and wife really does submit to his leadership. And for singles, the habits you set now in your singlehood shape what you think is normal and good for when you're married. A man or woman who's done daily household worship by himself or herself is certainly not going to be weirded out by household worship with a spouse and kids.

2) Do it every day. If you don't do *that* now, start *that* today.

God made days. He made this division of time bounded by sleep. It's a God-authored unit of time. Account for that reality (that days exist as a real, non-arbitrary unit of time) by putting a simple family Bible reading, singing, and prayer routine into your daily life. It can be 8 minutes long. Make that a daily event and start doing it today.

4,400. We've been doing family worship every day since at least Ellie was born, and that's my estimate for how many days our household has read God's Word and prayed together in family worship. There is no magic to it, nothing you can't do, nothing you can't create in your own households. It just takes the faith and effort to do it every day.

Over 4,000 times our household has sat together to hear a chapter or less of God's Word and pray to Him. Day after day after day after week after week after month after year of spiritual planting, watering, weeding, planting, watering, weeding, planting, watering, weeding.

How many times did you have to watch your favorite movie to be able to quote it? 10 times? 5? Read God's Word, book by book, over and over and over day after day after day, asking His help to love it and understand it, to love Him and understand Him, and your household will bear the marks of it. His Word will not return void.

And it's beautiful how, in His providence when you do this every day, the next chapter you read, the next Bible book you enter, will expose something needed, or comfort something needed, or teach something needed in your household. Listen to God every day together as a family and you'll be startled at how often you hear something needed.

Johnny is lying a lot and you come to Achan in Joshua 7. Sally is worried she's not actually a Christian and you come to the book of 1 John. Mommy didn't even realize she had some false ideas about Heaven until you started reading through Revelation.

One last thing: Dads, your kids will associate your voices with something, be it frustration, criticism, or corny jokes. What a blessing it would be for the first thing to come to their mind when they hear or remember your voice to be God's Word, prayer, or worship of Him!

Do simple, brief family worship every day.

3) Don't be discouraged that it doesn't go well. Even if it doesn't go well for days or weeks.

God prescribed the sabbath every 7 days. God prescribed regular festivals and feasts in the Old Covenant. Our Maker and Savior knows that we need these regular, constant observances of worship and of His rule *regardless of how they go or how we think about how they're going.*

He did not allow the Feast of Booths to be canceled if nobody was feeling it. He does not say we can pull the plug on Lord's Day worship as a church if things don't seem to feel right. The Passover was still held even if someone was sick.

I know as well as anybody here what it feels like when it doesn't go well. We have 6 kids, 3 of each gender, and ages ranging from teenager to toddler. Here are the things I've had happen during family worship:

- Dirty diapers
- Discipline for disobedience
- Pauses for me having to take a child into another room to discipline
- Visible tension between some combination of family members
- Me not feeling well
- Multiple other people not feeling well
- Me feeling guilty for a recent sin I committed against someone in the household

- Guests who don't get it
- Uncontrollable crying
- Uncontrollable laughing
- Dog distractions

How you feel about something fluctuates independent of whether or not that thing is actually good for you. Don't let your emotional response to how this basic Christian discipline seems to be going dictate your actions.

Elements of Family Worship

1) Prayer

- True fear of God, Biblical language.
- An older kid can close it out if you choose

2) Bible

- One chapter or less, read the very words, explain as needed, during or after.
- Find a verse in that book of the Bible and have the kids say it out loud every night. They will have it memorized in about a week.
- Let the kids have their own Bibles if possible.

3) Short Reading (Optional)

- Christian biography or good devotional. Let the kids hold the book or look at it afterwards. Refer to the subject or author by name, reminding the kids they'll see him or her in Heaven.

4) Song

- Make it one they like that is theologically solid. Instruments and dancing are optional, but singing (once they know the song) is not.

5) Questions/Comments (Optional)

- Encourage this. Any comments or questions are allowed as long as they're not sarcastic/irreverent.

Some Practical Tips

On Little Kids Not Sitting Still

For kids 2-years-old or less, I think you have a few options:

1) Choose not to care about it. I think this is a really valid one if you have a room you can do it in that the baby can't just leave and if you have other kids who are older and *are* sitting still. Let them and your wife get everything, and the baby will get a little bit. You'll be surprised how often they do get little bits of it, especially when you start singing or getting animated in your voice modulation.

2) Dad holds the baby while leading. Dad can keep that baby in his arms. If you opt for this one, I'd keep the worship to less than 10 minutes. Bible, prayer, and a verse or two of a song. Dad can scratch/pat the baby's back, pace, or swing/bounce him in his arms if needed, especially if you buy a large-print Bible.

3) Worship while eating. I know you may scoff at this if meal times feel feisty or hectic, but it is doable. Dad can feed the baby so he's timing bites with his reading and so his firm hand is on the situation as he leads worship. If baby is nursing, it's still viable to do this. Don't write off how much little ones absorb even if they're not staring at you with rapt attention.

4) Worship in the car. Dad sits next to the baby or where all the kids can see him, and Mom can either drive or not drive depending on whether baby needs the driving to not cry in the car seat. If you do this one, make it a fun thing: “Worship drive!”

5) Let the little guy have a fidget toy. He has to sit still to keep having it, and if he doesn’t and cries when it’s taken, then he’s disciplined.

For 3-years-old to 6-years-old, you can add in:

6) Everyone sits on the floor, and the little guy in question sits next to Dad with Dad’s legs on top of his legs.

7) Let everyone dance during the song if everyone sits still during reading and prayer. This works great with 2+ kids and especially with girls.

8) Let everyone draw on blank paper or dry erase boards as you read as long as they’re quiet and draw what they’re thinking of as they listen. To make that second part happen you can have them wait until you get to the first thing in the Bible passage that suggests something drawable. You could then take photos of these drawings and talk about them later, asking each kid what he or she drew or giving comments yourselves on the pictures.

On Kids Not Seeming Interested

1) Give them a specific ask: “Let’s sit up straight and be looking either at your Bible or me, okay?” Don’t ask for much more than that from little ones. With older ones (6+), you can add “look cheerful.”

2) As appropriate, give little ones something to look at. “Okay, we’ll make this snack cup here Jericho. And these Cheerios I’m putting around it are the Israelites. You with me?” Or, “Okay, I’m going to draw something here on our little dry erase board...”

3) Be silly, at least once in a while. I’d shoot for having a little bit of silliness 2-3 times a week. This isn’t preaching, it isn’t a gathering of the local church. It’s your family, your covenant household with whom you’re supposed to laugh and have fun. A little, “Okay, show me your Pharisee face,” or “It probably smelled *really* bad in that lion’s den” is good and fitting.

4) If you’re in a funk, start with singing, make it a fun version of a song, and let them dance a little. My Soul Among Lions: Psalm 21, Psalm 10. Brian Sauve: Psalm 100. Citizens: Made Alive. If you’re okay getting a little nuts, Skillet’s The Resistance is great.

5) Have them repeat things once in a while. It helps a kid to stay engaged if he gets to say something with his own mouth and vocal cords once in a while, even when it’s something you told him to say.

On Discipline During

1) With little ones, give an instruction one time and then, if a second goes by and they're hovering between obedience and disobedience, use a nonverbal gesture to communicate that instruction.

Kids inherently stop taking seriously someone who keeps giving the same verbal instruction without any consequence.

2) Everyone sits up respectfully during the Bible reading and prayer. We're composite creatures, flesh and spirit, material and immaterial. It's good for us, good for each other, and right towards God for us to sit up respectfully when His Word is read. It teaches us it's weight.

3) Do everything reasonable you can to avoid corporal discipline for something done during worship.

On the Genealogies

Read a chapter or less of the names, and make one of these points:

1) “God cares about each of these people enough, ordinary as they might have been, to put each one of their names in His Book that will be around forever. For thousands of years people all over the world have been reading _____’s (pick a particularly silly-sounding one like Oholibamah or Meshobab) name. Why? Because God wanted them to.”

2) “God wanted people to know who was whose dad when it came to Israel and His people. He wants us to know where these people came from, and that they were for sure in the family tree of that old man Abraham He made that promise to. Remember that promise?”

On the Intense Passages

Don't try to assign sin where God doesn't, and don't get squeamish or embarrassed if God isn't. If the passage says Joshua did not leave anything alive that breathed in a Canaanite town, read it as God had it be written, without any undermining of it.

If a kid asks, "Why did they kill people?" you can answer simply and truthfully. An example:

"What does sin deserve?"

Death.

"Right. Who's committed sins?"

Everyone.

"Right. So we all deserve death. In this particular place God said these people's sins and wickedness had gotten so bad that He was giving them all death through Israel. He told Joshua and the Israelites to do that. Does He still talk to people in the exact same way He talked to Joshua?"

No.

"Right. So is He going to do this exact same sort of thing again now?"

No.

"Was He fair and right to do it then?"

Yes.

"Right. He's always fair and He's always right."

For passages describing sexual immorality, try just using the blanket phrase “sexual sin.” That’s what we’ve used for 10+ years now for adultery, homosexuality, and rape. Then you can use any additional descriptions or explanations as you deem appropriate.

On Family Prayer

1) Let any kid pray out loud who wants to, but don't force the ones who freeze up about praying out loud to do it. Everyone has to pray, not everyone has to pray *out loud*.

2) Pray for things the kids want to. “Anybody have any prayer requests?”

3) Help the littlest ones close their hands, close their eyes, and say the words.

Additional Things You Can Try

Verse Memorization

Pick a memory verse from each book of the Bible you get to in family worship. Then say that verse out loud as a family as a part of family worship each night. Within 10-12 days of saying it, most kids will have it memorized. Then a few times a month buy some candy or other treat and let kids do their memory verses from books you've memorized a verse from, giving out the treat as a reward for getting some, most, or all of it right. Kids love "verse candy" night!

Family Catechism Questions

Come up with a creative family catechism question that represents that book of the Bible (or part of the Bible) as you finish it. Then do those questions at night (1 for each kid) before the kids go to bed.

Supplement With Good Videos

Superbook, Hanna Barbera's *The Greatest Adventure, Stories from the Bible*, or Full of Eyes.