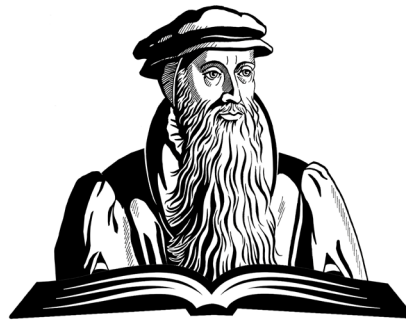


VIDEO DOCUMENTARY SERIES

Family Worship

EPISODE I:
AN INTRODUCTION



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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Family Worship

IN FIVE EPISODES

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Episode II. What to Include in Family Worship

Episode III. The Benefits of Family Worship

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VIDEO DOCUMENTARY SERIES
Family Worship

EPISODE I

AN INTRODUCTION

WHY SHOULD WE PRACTICE FAMILY WORSHIP?

ROBERT McCURLEY

So understanding the biblical basis for Family Worship begins with understanding that worship lies at the heart of biblical religion. Jesus tells us in John 4 that the Father is seeking those who worship him in Spirit and in truth. Indeed, we desire that from the rising of the sun to the setting of the same, his name should be praised. And so, evangelism, for example, is a means to the end of worship. Now we know that because, in heaven, evangelism will cease, but worship continues for all of eternity. Worship actually fulfills our chief end. The Shorter Catechism says that “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” Well, in the act of worship, we are immediately and directly fulfilling that chief end—we’re glorifying God in his worship. And so worship, in general, lies at the center of biblical religion. Family worship fits within the scope of that priority. We have the public assembly of the saints; we have private worship; but we also have the worship of families in their homes.

IAN MACLEOD

So for example, you wouldn’t feed your children one day of the week, and then starve them for the rest. You feed them every day. And so, spiritually, you don’t, as it were, try to stuff your children one day of the week, and then starve them for the rest, but rather, you seek to feed them every day. And that’s what Family Worship ensures. It ensures the constant, daily feeding of your children, your family, in the word of God. There’s something very steady about Family Worship. There is the constant, daily instruction that they have from the word of God.

GAVIN BEERS

We should practice Family Worship because it’s biblical. Scripture supports Family Worship in a number of ways. If you begin by simply thinking about the family, God institutes families, and he graciously brings the family into his covenant. And he blesses us in so many ways under his promise. And in history, sometimes Christian writers spoke of the family itself as a little church. You can go back to the days of the patriarchs for this, where religion was first found in families. So consider Abraham and his family, Jacob and his family, even Job—you find Job there offering sacrifices, as was his custom in the morning, with regard to his family. Then in Deuteronomy chapter 6, we are told that if we love God with all of our heart, our mind and our soul and our strength, then we will also love his Word. And that Word will come out of us, in that we talk about it throughout the day with our children, in our down sitting, in our uprising, and in our walking by the way. So there’s going to be informal discussion and teaching of God’s Word throughout our lives. But then there will also be those formal times of teaching and instruction. So the picture is

one of the family walking with God, and a daily consciousness of his Word, which would express itself in Family Worship. So we should observe Family Worship because it is scriptural, and it enables us both to glorify and also enjoy God.

GRAEME CRAIG

If you look at Scripture, you have examples of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Wherever they went, they built altars, and they worshiped God. Job sanctified his children in worship, sacrificing with them, for them. So you have these things indicating that it was the practice of the apostles. And really you could say that if it is to be worse than an infidel to not provide for your household for their physical needs, how much more for their spiritual needs. And therefore, we should seek the blessing of God. In Jeremiah, he speaks of God's curse being on those families that do not worship God. And that's serious. And that's why, I think, in family life, government, and nations, in the workplace even, surely we should want to seek God's blessing in all that we do. So Family Worship is a central thing and it should be encouraged. It's a duty that falls on all of us. So we can say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

WILLIAM MACLEOD

I think it's very important for us to have Family Worship in our homes, because that means that every day, the word of God is being read, and the children who are growing up in the home are kept in touch with God's Word. You read it through, chapter after chapter every day, morning and evening, and in this way, the children growing up in the home are acquainted with God's Word, and it's set before them as something that is vital to their lives, that they should always be thinking about God, about his law, and his gospel, things we are to believe concerning God, and the duty God requires of man, the obligations upon us, and the promises and the blessings that the Lord gives us. So in that sense, it's important to have Christ-centered homes, and homes where God is honored and worshiped.

INSTRUCTING OUR CHILDREN

ROBERT McCURLEY

It is every father's responsibility, as a vice-regent of the Lord in his own home, to ensure that the home is under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and devoted to His honor and glory. And so, fathers bear that responsibility, not only as head of their wives, in nurturing and serving them in that capacity, but as head of the whole home, in ensuring that they're being led in the ways of the Lord.

MICHAEL SPANGLER

Well, Deuteronomy 6, for example, tells parents, fathers especially, that they're to be training their children all the time—when they rise up, when they go on the way, and everywhere else. There are exact scriptural proofs for this duty. The Bible says that the songs of praises will be heard in the tents of the righteous. We see examples of the patriarchs offering worship in their households. We hear of duties that imply Family Worship, when we read that parents, especially fathers, are taught to train their children, raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And there are many other good arguments from the benefit, for example, but that's a good summary.

MAURICE ROBERTS

Well the Bible makes it clear that the duty of parents is to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and that involves Family Worship. But the most important thing of all is that children should be taught to understand what are the great principles of the Bible, which God has given to us all, to respect and to observe. So in Family Worship, what happens is, children are hearing the principles of the Bible set before them by parents who love them, and therefore this has a profound influence upon them from their earliest youth and onwards throughout life.

IAN MACLEOD

Well, it's clear that the Bible calls upon us to instruct our children. You can think of the well-known words in Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verses 4 through 7. You have there the great Shema, "The LORD our God is one LORD." It calls us there to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. But then, in verse 6, it goes on, and the Lord says, "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children."

GRAEME CRAIG

Well, it's a most difficult duty to do this, to instruct our children in the ways of God. The devil and the world are trying to lead our children astray, and there's a spiritual battle. And Family Worship brings the truth of God into our family life, and it provides for regular instruction and also focus on the things of God. And therefore, it is really a key plan—not the key plan, but a key plan in helping to instruct and direct our children in the ways of God.

GAVIN BEERS

God lays duties upon us as individuals, but he also lays duties upon us in our roles as parents, and particularly upon fathers, as they are to lead their families after them. And so fathers especially are called to bring up their children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. And that really describes the whole instruction and discipline of the family at home. And so, as a father would be responsible to make natural provision for his children, so that he will feed them, and clothe them, and protect them, we would also argue that there's an even greater obligation upon the father to take care of the spiritual needs of his family. And so, he is to lead his family, and instruct them and teach them in this way.

ROBERT McCURLEY

In Deuteronomy, chapter 6, we have that well-known phrase in verse 4, where it says, "The LORD our God is one LORD." And immediately following that, the Lord gives direct instructions to fathers. He says that fathers are to diligently teach their children, in their lying down, in their rising up, in their going in the way, and so on. And so the father is responsible for ensuring that his family is worshiping the Lord. Now many people will have, hanging on their wall, a framed quote from Scripture drawn from Joshua 24, where Joshua says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD!" Well, those words should be found in the mouth of every father.

THE DUTY OF FATHERS

WILLIAM MACLEOD

God gives to fathers a leading role in the family. Wives are called upon to submit to their husbands, but it's to submit to their husbands as to the Lord, and in the things of the Lord. And a husband, in that sense, should be leading his wife and leading his family in the things of God. I recently heard somebody speaking on this subject, and he spoke about the four P's, as it were, that a husband should be. First he should be a priest—a priest who prays for his family. Second, he should be a prophet—a prophet who teaches his family God's Word. Then he should be a provider for his family. And then he should be a protector for his family. So in that sense, a husband is to lead the family in the worship of God, in the service of God, so that it's a God-centered home, and a home where God is honored and followed.

IAN MACLEOD

Well, the role of the father is central. I think one of the great dangers in the contemporary church is the idea that we can somehow delegate the bulk of—if not even the entirety of—the covenantal responsibility to instruct our children in the ways of the Lord. If there is such a thing as a youth pastor, then it is the father in the home. The Bible is very clear. You can think of texts like Ephesians 6, verse 4: “And ye fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the fear and in the admonition of the Lord.” You can think of the solemn words of 1 Timothy 5, verse 8. “If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and he is worse than an infidel.” I think we often think of that verse in terms of material things—food, and shelter, and clothing, and certainly, it has that in view. But why limit what is needed for our families? Why limit the provisions that they need to temporal things, and not include the spiritual? And can we not say that if any provide not for his own, and especially those of his own household in terms of spiritual good, in terms of spiritual clothing and spiritual food, then he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

GAVIN BEERS

The husband is the head of the household. He's the head of his wife. He is the parent and father of his children, and the father is particularly addressed in Paul's command to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And if you look even at the fifth commandment, there is a command to children to obey their parents, but there's also a duty upon the parent with respect to his child. And so there are particular obligations that are laid upon the head of the house. The father as he has the rule of his own house, and so he's like a little king. But he also has a prophetic function, and a priestly function. He is to teach his wife, according to Ephesians, chapter 5, washing her with the water of the Word of God. But he's also to teach his household, in Ephesians, chapter 6. And so he will exercise a kingly function, and a prophetic function, but he will also exercise a priestly function, so that he will pray, not only for his children in secret, but he will pray for them and also with them in Family Worship.

GRAEME CRAIG

Well, Scripture reminds us that fathers are heads of households. That's something denied often today, but that's very clear in Scripture, that fathers are to be the head of the home. And therefore, if they are to exercise that leadership, then they are to exercise the leading of Family Worship. Now obviously, if a father was unconverted, you may end up more with the mother taking the role, being

forced to because the father will not do it, but ordinarily you would want to see the father taking that role. And in a sense, every father should be the prophet, priest, and king of his home, and well, as he rules his home, so he leads his family to the throne of grace in prayer, and he helps instruct them in the things of God.

MICHAEL SPANGLER

Well, the father is the head of his wife, as Ephesians says; of the whole family, as the same book says in other places. It makes sense that as the natural head of the family, I, the father, would take charge of their spiritual life as well. And it's not that the mother doesn't have an important role. She ought to be teaching those children as well. In fact, godly women are praised for doing just that, in Proverbs 31, for example. But I have a duty, to even model and train my wife in that, to teach her as well. And so fathers are very important.

MAURICE ROBERTS

Well the Bible makes it clear that the man is the head of the family. That's a little unpopular with some people today, but that is undoubtedly the teaching of the Bible. And therefore, it is the responsibility and duty of the head of the family, the man, to make sure that whenever possible, he is available to have the Bible in his hand, and the family gathered together in a circle in the home, and that the people are paying attention and listening, and taking seriously the things which are being done. So I would say that is reflecting the requirements of the Bible, that the man be the head of the home, and uses his power in love for his family, that they may take seriously the things of the Bible.

MORNING AND EVENING

ROBERT McCURLEY

In Psalm 92, verse 2—this Psalm is entitled, “A Psalm for the Sabbath”—but in verse 2, we're told that we're to be giving thanks, praising the Lord both morning and evening. Now what's interesting is that that actually reflects the broader scheme of things, because if you turn to Psalm 19, I think, verse 2, it speaks about how the heavens declare the glory of God from day to day, and utter speech every night. And so the whole cosmos is day and night, as it were, proclaiming the glory of God. Within the Old Testament ceremonial economy, you have this embedded in those Old Testament ordinances. So in Exodus 29, we're told that the burnt offerings were to be offered morning and evening—a lamb in the morning, a lamb in the evening. And this established a spiritual rhythm within the life of God's people. That rhythm continues. You think, for example, every week begins with the Sabbath, and so you have a whole day that opens the beginning of each week with devotion to public and private worship. So likewise, every day should begin with, first and foremost, our allegiance and devotion to the Lord, and we have bookends, both at the beginning and the end, closing the day with the Lord, in his presence, returning thanks for his faithfulness, and so on. And so this rhythm is woven into the fabric of the Christian's experience in life.

IAN MACLEOD

Well, the Scriptures certainly speak to the morning and evening sacrifice, using the language and the worship of the Old Testament sacrifices. But that finds expression in the Psalms, for example, in Psalm 92, Psalm 141, the psalmist is saying that he will praise and call upon the Lord and think

upon his lovingkindness in the morning, and he will show forth the Lord's faithfulness in the evening. And certainly, when you read the old writers on this question, they are quite consistent, I would say, that there should be both morning and evening devotion in the family. Samuel Davis, for example, asks, "Which would you exclude? Would you exclude Family Worship in the morning, when you are about to send out your family into the world, into the workplace, into school. Would you exclude prayer and praise to God at that time? Or would you exclude it in the evening, after a day's work, a day's safety, the mercies that have been received in the day. Would you exclude thanksgiving to God in the evening time?" Well, for myself, I don't think we would impose any rule, as such, but nevertheless, listen to the counsel and the wisdom of those who have gone before us. And perhaps what we could say is that especially if things are rushed in the morning, then you could shorten the time of Family Worship then. You could read a shorter chapter, say as Isaiah, chapter 12, or a short Psalm perhaps, and offer a prayer to the Lord for his protection and guidance for the family throughout the day. And then in the evening, when there is more time, you can have a longer time of family devotion.

GAVIN BEERS

The question is often asked, How often should I have Family Worship? And in some ways, there's no absolutely correct answer to that. We can say that it should be daily. But there is a pattern that we see in the Scripture of morning and evening worship. And if you think about that, it's very much rooted in nature. You get up each day, and it's a new day to you, and you ought to be conscious that you're to walk with God throughout that day. And then, you have various needs that God alone can provide. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us each day our daily bread." So even at that level, a family should have an awareness of their dependence upon God. We also need to pray for protection from the world. We need to pray that God would lead us not into temptation. And then going out into the world and coming back at the end of the day, it would be altogether natural, in that context, to give thanks to the Lord for all the things that he's blessed us with, and to confess our sin before him each night. When you look at the Old Testament, there was a sacrificial system instituted. And every morning and evening in the camp of Israel, a burnt offering would be brought to the Lord. And in that, they would show their consecration to the Lord, and they would also be confessing their sins. After that pattern, it seems, it's a very fitting that we ought to observe Family Worship, both in the morning, and also in the evening.

MAURICE ROBERTS

Well, in the morning, of course, obviously, it's before we do the duties of the day, and the evening is the time when we've completed, more or less, the duties of the day. So if we take morning worship and evening worship, we are making ourselves consciously aware of the fact that we are answerable to God in the morning, as to how we are going to conduct our affairs throughout the day, and when we come to the end of the day, we are answerable to God, looking back as to how we have conducted those affairs of the day. So in the morning, we cry to God for help, and in the evening, we ask God for his forgiveness where we go wrong.

GRAEME CRAIG

Well, we remember, in the Old Testament, there was a sacrifice every morning and evening—the morning sacrifice, the evening sacrifice. And I think there we see the key to the regularity of worship, how often it should be performed, both on the Lord's Day in public, and Family Worship every day. And surely, at the beginning of the day, we have reasons to give thanks for a safe night's

rest, for a new day to seek the blessing of God in what we're about to do, and his guidance. And then at the end of the day, we seek the blessing of God upon what has been done, we commit our way to God, as he doesn't sleep when we sleep, and we seek his help. And therefore, that idea of morning and evening is important. When I say "evening," we'd have to perhaps make sure that it's not too late. It's very easy to look when does the evening begin. It's interesting, in the Old Testament, it was at 9:00 in the morning, and 3:00 in the afternoon were the times of the sacrifice. It may be for us, before or after breakfast, and before or after an evening meal would be the most appropriate and beneficial time.

WILLIAM MACLEOD

In the passage that we read earlier on, in Deuteronomy, chapter 6, it says, "when thou rise up," and later on, "when thou liest down," God's Word should be before you. And in the life of the children of Israel, they had sacrifices. They had a morning sacrifice and an evening sacrifice. And so it's good that, as we begin our day, we should begin our day with God, asking for wisdom, and direction, and for help from God. And then, at the end of the day, we thank God for his help, we pray for his protection through the night, for his blessing upon us as we sleep. So, morning, evening, everyday, it's good to give that first place to God—in the morning, and then at night, daily remembering our God and putting him before us.

MICHAEL SPANGLER

Some people like to look to the sacrifices in the tabernacle and temple, at the morning and evening offering made every day. You know, we don't live under that old economy, those exact forms of worship are passed away. But there is wisdom still. There's a natural principle that's reflected in that old pattern. It's that the whole day is to be holy to God. Now, we don't mean every day is a Sabbath. We have work to do in the six days, but it makes sense that just like God requires us to give a portion of our week to holy thoughts and tasks on the Sabbath, that by the same logic, we would offer a part of our day to holy tasks. I think most Christians understand that in terms of their personal life, that I ought to have some time during the day committed to prayer, Bible reading, meditation. And if that's true in the personal life, it's true in the family life as well. And morning and evening becomes a very real and very practical way to give a significant portion of the day to worship. It also bookends the day, and helps us then keep the parts inside those two bookends devoted to God.

LIVING IN THE WORLD

MICHAEL SPANGLER

Family worship guides us in living in the world by shining on our path the lamp. God's word is the lamp to our feet, and the light to our path. It's how, as my own boys know from Psalm 119, a young man keeps his way pure, by taking heed, according to God's Word. If we didn't open the Bible, we'd be wandering around in the dark. We need it in our private lives as well, we need it in the public worship, but as a family, particularly, we don't expect that we can follow or obey God, or know how to live at all, unless we're opening the Word and having him teach us. So Family Worship is an important way that happens.

MAURICE ROBERTS

Well, in the center of Family Worship, of course, is respect for the commandments of God. And

the Ten Commandments teach us to love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbor as ourself. So when children are educated at home in Family Worship to respect the Ten Commandments, their attitude to God and their attitude to other people is shaped by that. So as they get older and older, they learn to apply the principles that they heard in Family Worship in their public life, and it is character-forming.

GAVIN BEERS

There's much guidance to be received from God's word. So the more that we expose ourselves to the Word of God, the more guidance, we trust, that God will give us. Family worship is a wonderful help to this. So we come and worship the Lord together in our homes, and then we live in the world. And the world can throw many difficult situations before us—many times, we don't know what to do. But if we're exposed to God's Word, then the principles of God's moral law, and also the principles of wisdom will sink deeply down within our soul. And when we find ourselves in trouble, we can make it a particular point of prayer, and as a family, that we can these burdens and needs before the Lord and ask him to help us. And the Lord encourages us. He says, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and upbraideth not." And so then, committing our ways to him, and trusting in him, he also promises to bring these things to pass. So we bring our concerns before God in prayer. And then we get the glorious privilege of seeing God answer those prayers and guide us in all of the decisions that we have to make in life. So we've got the benefit of casting our burdens upon the Lord and receiving his guidance. And then, when we do that, make sure to return as families with joy, and to give thanks unto the Lord.

GRAEME CRAIG

Well the Bible relates to every aspect of life. I doubt if there is any aspect of life that isn't touched on in the Scriptures. Is it money? Is it relationships? Is it work? It's all there. And you have this constant application of the Ten Commandments in the whole of Scripture. We see how they relate. So in that sense, it shows us how to live in this world. And we see the failings of God's people—we learn from their mistakes. We see what was to be praised in their lives, and we learn from their mistakes. And as we read through the Bible, I think it's especially helpful to read through chapter by chapter, including sections where perhaps topics are discussed which need sensitivity in being dealt with. But you can still read them and deal with them. And in the modern age, our children know about everything that's going on, and all the wickedness that going on. We can't shelter them. It's impossible today. The Bible relates to many of these things. Why did Lot choose the city above the plain? Well, perhaps there was a measure of covetousness and greed. And where did that lead to? Well, it led to living in a society that was very ungodly. You can speak about these things. Or, if you think of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, in Genesis 34. How did she end up in a situation where she was mistreated? What lessons are there for our children in these things? So, with sensitivity, depending on the age of the children, you can bring these issues out. You can still read it, if you have a wide age range in your family. You speak in a way that is sensitive, but the children know what you're talking about, and you deal with issues. So, there are so many problems which can be raised. They are raised a tactful way, questions that teenagers have, or warnings they need, and it's all in the Bible.

WILLIAM MACLEOD

In our Family Worship, we read God's Word. We read it through from Genesis to Revelation. And God's Word is full of guidance and direction. It gives us all we need to know about the Christian life. So if we're constantly reading God's Word, then we have the direction that we

need for the decisions that we make in life. And children leave home in the morning, and not just children but adults too, we leave home with this consciousness of having met with God. And then as we go through the day, we remember God's Word that we've been reading, and the different situations in which we find ourselves through the day, we can bring God's Word to bear on that situation. But also, the fact that we pray together—we have praying for help in the morning, and going through the day, again, we are conscious of God's leading and guidance. We've given our life to God at the beginning of the day, and so we seek to spend the day living for God.

ROBERT McCURLEY

Family worship sends the whole house back to God on a daily basis. Every day the family is coming to the Word of God with open hearts and open minds, to receive what he says. And so all of the pressing needs that any particular family faces are being addressed by the Lord himself. They're coming to the Word with questions. They're coming to the Word with needs, and looking for what God will say in answer to those questions, and in supply of those needs. The anticipation is fulfilled in all that the Lord delivers in the reading of his Word, or in the singing of his Word, and so on.