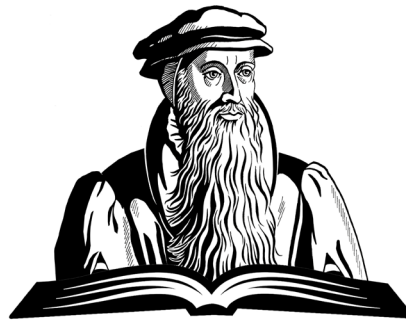


VIDEO DOCUMENTARY SERIES

Family Worship

EPISODE III:
THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY WORSHIP



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Family Worship

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Episode II. What to Include in Family Worship

Episode III. The Benefits of Family Worship

Episode IV. The History of Family Worship

Episode V. Practical Guidance for Family Worship

VIDEO DOCUMENTARY SERIES

Family Worship

EPISODE III

THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY WORSHIP

THE BENEFITS

ROBERT McCURLEY

The question about the benefits of Family Worship to a Christian family is a cogent question. But it's not actually the first question, nor is it the most important question. Why do I say that? I say that because we should not think of God as a means to our own personal end. So we don't approach spiritual duties in terms of what benefits we derive from them, but first and foremost, we approach them in terms of our duty to God, and our desire and pursuit of his glory and his honor. And so God is first. God is at the top of the reasons on why we worship as families.

Having said that, there are many benefits that we receive from Family Worship. This should be no surprise to us—the ways of the Lord are good and full of blessing. So for example, Family Worship creates a God-conscious, God-centered, and Word-centered home. We are, through the anchoring of ourselves morning and evening in Family Worship, setting our faces heavenward. And that creates an atmosphere within the home. In fact, it may be imperceptible to the children, but they're learning about what is important, that God is what is first priority in our family's life. They are learning that he has the preeminent place within our home. This isn't even consciously, perhaps, spelled out to them, but imperceptibly, they begin to glean this. And the Word of God is carried with them throughout the whole day. They can make reference to it. Moms can remind children of what they had read earlier that morning, and how it applies to their circumstances, or recall prayers that had been offered. All of that creates a sense of the Lord's presence that actually suffuses the home as a whole.

MAURICE ROBERTS

One of the benefits that comes to a Christian family in Family Worship is that the family is united. Now we all know that it's a very important thing that in any association of any kind, that people should be united in their attitude to one another, and their respect for one another. And when children are brought up with their parents to be in Family Worship morning and evening, then the children automatically just learn to respect the father for what he is, and the mother for what she is, and they grow up and they share their private thoughts to one another in the light of the unity which they have one with another in the family circle.

MICHAEL SPANGLER

To my mind, the greatest benefit of Family Worship is it helps us obey Christ, when he said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all the other things will be added unto you." We're a busy family, we have a lot to do during the day, but insisting that morning and

evening, for at least a few moments, we're devoted to God in a special way, helps us then devote our whole life to God, and present even our bodies as a living sacrifice.

GAVIN BEERS

God is at the center of our worship, and we are to worship him whether or not we receive any blessing or benefit from it. God is gracious, and as we worship and bless him, he blesses us in the doing of it. And so there are many benefits that come to us from daily Family Worship. Not least in that it orients family life around God. There's so many other pressures that come into our lives, and yet, if we have this rhythm of daily worship morning and evening, it directs our thoughts toward heaven. It creates a sense, even an unspoken culture in the home of dependence upon God. It brings the family together as well to discuss the things of God, and so there's a uniting principle. Too often, families, particularly as they get older, begin to scatter. But we have this set time when we're brought together again to fellowship around the word of truth. Through time, this continual worship of God in our homes regulates the minds of the family members, so that as we go out into the world, this Biblical mind is able to interact with all of the things that present themselves to us in life. There are many blessings that come to us through Family Worship.

Another thing daily Family Worship helps with is solving problems in relationships in your home. If a family is to come together to worship God every day, and realizes what it is they're about to do, then oftentimes, apologies have to be made first. How can we say, "Let us worship God"? How can a father say, "Let us pray," when he knows there are difficulties between his children, or between him and his wife, or between parents and children? Chiefly, Christ is set before the family. And so, as we read the word of God, we are continually brought to the Savior, who's instructing us and drawing us again and again unto his cross, and we are able to go out into the world, strengthened by the Bread of Life himself.

Another element where you might notice the effect of Family Worship is that, when your children grow up to adulthood, and they step out into the world for themselves, that they have cultivated a Biblical mind upon many things. Sometimes, when you're in the midst of bringing up your children, and you can't see any encouragement, and you see all the negative things. But then you see them standing on their own two feet. They're answering questions. They're defending the truth. And they or you might never know where they learned those things. But I think the regular practice of Family Worship is filling our children's minds with the word of God.

GRAEME CRAIG

Well, we do see that it helps cement family unity. We would think it would be important for families to have a meal together, well this gives an opportunity for families to have a spiritual meal together. And just as mealtimes are a uniting influence, so Family Worship helps bind families together in the things of God. It's also another opportunity to present the gospel to our children. And we're desirous that they might come to know the Lord and to walk in his ways. Well, here is this opportunity every day. The Bible is brought before them, the claims of Christ, and we're able to present the truth to them. And at times, challenge them. We might not do it personally by name, but there's only two or three children there, and you would say, "Well here's something you need to do. We all need to do—make sure we are trusting in the Lord." We have something to discuss together, and it might be discussed thoroughly. And I think we can say, if family have come, or friends have come to visit, some of them may not be church attenders, but they join in worship with us, they see that this is the most important thing to us. And it provides an opening for witness, even when they may...otherwise it might be difficult to introduce the things of God into a conversation.

Certainly we have found that family who were never used to Family Worship, when in our family, that would be readily accepted. “Well, this is what we do. Would you like to join in with us?” And we would expect them to, if they’re in the house, should worship together.

WILLIAM MACLEOD

Family worship is of great importance really to a Christian family. I know that in this country sometimes we go into houses, and we’ll see a plaque saying, “Christ is the Head of this home.” Now, and that’s very good, but Christ has to be in reality the Head of the home. And when Family Worship is conducted, and Christ is worshiped morning and evening, then it is more likely that Christ will indeed be the Head of the home. So it’s a constant reminder to the whole family—the parents and the children—that we are living our life before God, and it’s important in bringing up our families, that we train them to know that God is the Head of the home and of the family.

IAN MACLEOD

When we ask the question, What are the benefits of Family Worship, well, the benefits are very many. But I think even before we ask the question of benefits, we have to recognize that even if there were no benefits, to worship the Lord God of Israel daily in our families would still be the most commendable of activities, because the Lord is worthy of our praise, even if there were no personal benefits to us. And yet, of course, there are indeed many benefits and many blessings to be had in the daily Family Worship of the Lord our God. Robert Murray M’Cheyne said that there is perhaps no means of grace that is more blessed.

Or you think of the words of the *Shorter Catechism*, question 1, the well-known words: “What is the chief end of man?—Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” There is great blessing in the glorifying of God. There is the enjoyment, or the possession of the covenant God.

I think though the greatest benefit that can come to a family, you have in the words of Psalm 78. In Psalm 78, the psalmist is speaking about the dark sayings, the gospel mysteries, all the things that you have in the word of God, all the things that God has done for his people in time past. And the psalmist says there that he will not hide them from his children. But he goes on in verse 5, to say that he will make them known to his children, and then, in verse 7, he gives this as the desired outcome: that they would set their hope in God. And that surely, for a Christian father or a Christian mother, would be the great thing to see—that the children who hear of what the Lord has done would set their hope in God. And then you see in that Psalm also an extension of blessing. There is the preservation of the covenant line; there is the preservation of the godly seed. The Psalm tells us that we have heard from our fathers the things that the Lord has done, and now we are not going to withhold these things from our children. We desire that they would set their hope in God. And when they set their hope in God, then they will do the same. They will tell their children, and generations who are yet to be born will praise and magnify the Lord. And so, this blessing of Family Worship extends from the one doing it, from the father, to the children, and potentially, with the Lord’s blessing, for many generations to come. Who knows how many generations to come that would thank you in heaven at last for continuing that covenant line of telling the children the things that the Lord has done.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

IAN MACLEOD

If we go back to Genesis 18, verse 19, the Lord says of Abraham, “I know him, that he will command his children after him.” And you see many of his children after him, of course, in Isaac, and Jacob, and the children of Israel after him. You see the godly leaders that came from this commanding of the children after Abraham.

And if you think of what is essential for leadership, especially in the church, and you think of the kinds of things that Family Worship will inculcate in a child who then grows up, you can think, for example, of the impressions that they have of God, from Family Worship—the fear of God; the reverence for God; adoration for God; love for God; a listening to God and his word—all things that are essential to Christian leadership

You think of the consecutive reading of Scripture over all these many days, and weeks, and months, and years, and even decades, and you think of the qualification given for the office of elder in 1 Timothy 3. The elder, we are told, “must be apt to teach.” And you think of all that instruction that the child has received over all these days, from Family Worship. You think too of how the child learns to listen. There’s a time in the day where the child sits and listens—listens to the father reading, listens to the father praying, listens to God’s word being read. And so they sit and they learn to listen. They also learn to pray. They learn to pray from listening to their father pray. They learn to pray themselves. And all these things are essential for Christian leadership. And in this way, as the old writers used to say, the home becomes a nursery for the church and for the state. And all these, and many others, no doubt, characteristics of Christian leaders, are inculcated in the consecutive, daily worshiping of God in the home.

MAURICE ROBERTS

Well, we all tend to follow the example of those who are above us, and have experience before us. And when children see that their parents have the ability to read in a little Family Worship within the family circle, the children themselves say, “Well, when I grow up, maybe I can do this too.” And as they become teenagers, the boys especially, being men, they say, “Well, I would like to have an opportunity in the church to teach people in a group who will listen to what we do in Family Worship. So the benefit of what we hear at home they can also listen to in the church.” So it sets an example, in other words, of leadership, and it’s simply like that.

MICHAEL SPANGLER

Christian leadership training, you know, especially with my boys, I see it. They’re learning by example one day to be fathers in their family. Occasionally we’ll allow my boys to lead a portion of the prayer time, and I think that’s important. Sometimes my wife as well, as a way to help and aid her in her service to the children. She certainly has an important leadership role in regard to them. We pray that our boys will be called to the gospel ministry, be converted and brought into the ministry. We will leave that in the Lord’s hands, but we certainly think that Family Worship is a way that we might use to prepare them for that.

GRAEME CRAIG

Well I suppose as a father leads worship, he is learning what it is to be a leader. He is learning to take the Scriptures and apply them to his family, and in that sense, it is a means of providing training for leadership, self-teaching. And there is a lot of life where doing things helps us get

better at doing things. And I think the practice of Family Worship is one of these things. And a person will learn to speak, learn to lead in prayer, so that if they were called on to pray, it wouldn't be a completely new thing, because they're used to praying in the family. And in these ways, it does help develop leadership amongst the people of God.

ROBERT McCURLEY

In 1 Timothy 3, the Lord provides for the church a list of qualifications for holding office within the visible church of God's people. And in the instruction that's given in reference to elders, it makes the point, Paul makes the point that if father's can't rule their own homes well, how can they rule the house of God? In other words, he saying that rule within the home is a precondition for the ability to rule within the house of God itself. And so, learning to exercise leadership within the home, as a husband, as a father; leading, guiding, shepherding the souls of our children, praying with and for them; giving them counsel and guidance; upholding and maintaining God's standards, all of that within the confines of the home enables a man who's gifted and called to then, with experience, to then be able to exercise those same patterns within the offices of the church.

WILLIAM MACLEOD

I think Family Worship is important really from the point of view of training leadership for the church. A father who is leading in Family Worship, he gains experience through doing this, and so can develop him to where he's able to be a leader in the church, an elder, or a deacon or whatever in the church. And even from the point of view of children, it's important that they pray at Family Worship, and in that way, they learn to pray, and for other people to hear them praying, so that when, later on, they're in church, they can pray in the prayer meetings in church without being too self-conscious about what they're doing. So it's a means of training for leadership.

GAVIN BEERS

As with any duty, it does not come naturally to us, and men oftentimes find it difficult to fulfill their obligation to lead their home, not only in the area of Family Worship, but it is one area where men will struggle to lead. But if we own this duty, as God lays it upon us, we can begin to develop leadership of our family in this way. Simply learning to call your family to worship every day, and then leading that worship in the reading of the Bible, saying to your family, "Let's pray," and leading your family to God in prayer, is developing vital principles of leadership that you need for the whole of your family life. Sometimes men struggle, and women can try to stand in to help—the wife feels uncomfortable. Better to let him struggle, and develop principles of leadership in his home. And as a father develops consistency in Family Worship, then silently, his children after him, and particularly his sons, are learning what it means to be consistent, and godly, and faithful, in the leading of their own families.

A SPIRITUAL ANCHOR

GRAEME CRAIG

It's very easy for people, and indeed our children, to get the impression that the Bible and church is something for the Lord's Day, and only for the Lord's Day—if you are a one-day-a-week Christian. Now, obviously, that's not true Christianity. Christianity affects the whole of life. I remember visiting Pompeii a few years ago, and one thing that struck me was, in most of

the houses that you went into, there was a family altar, with pictures of the gods. And that was paganism. And you tend to see the same thing in Romanism as well. You will have symbols of religion. Now, it's not idols or pictures of Jesus, or even texts on the wall that would show this is a Christian home. It's having the Bible at the center. And Family Worship keeps the Bible at the center seven days a week. And therefore, it is a great means of putting the Scripture at the center of family life. The Bible is central and it helps us in regulating our family around the Scriptures. It's difficult to do that if you neglect Family Worship.

MICHAEL SPANGLER

Family worship anchors true religion in the home by making sure that we are giving a significant portion of our day to God, in a special way. Now that's the logic of God telling us to do acts of worship. They're a way in which we may our whole, all of life spiritual because they're especially spiritual. We do a lot of natural, unspiritual things during the day, but even they are to be a spiritual offering. And so, by bookending our day with morning and evening Family Worship, we are helping to devote the whole of life to God.

GAVIN BEERS

Every Christian family needs an anchor, particularly in troublous times, like we live in. There are so many cultural pressures that we face, so many temptations all around, and Family Worship, every day in our homes, serves to anchor us to the word of God. And as the word of God is read, and we teach our children, what happens is the minds of our children and ourselves are informed. The conscience is instructed. And when we go out into the world, maybe even unconsciously, we'll be found in various situations, and the word of the Lord will be governing our decisions, keeping us back from sin, teaching us wisdom, delivering us from folly.

WILLIAM MACLEOD

Yes, I think it's very important for us to have Family Worship, because it sets before children how they are to begin their day, how they are to end the day. And I know many children myself, many young people and older people indeed, who thank God looking back in their lives for the Family Worship that they had, because it gave a direction to their lives. We have to set God before us, and then as we go through the day remember that we are living our life in the presence of God, and that we are answerable to God. And also, that we can look constantly to him for help. Whenever we're in a crisis situation, we lift up our hearts to God, and he helps us through these crisis situations.

IAN MACLEOD

Well, Family Worship is essential for anchoring true religion in the home. You could think, for example, of Psalm 101. Really, this Psalm is a charter for David's kingdom, but it's also a charter for his home. There in Psalm 101, David begins by saying that he will sing of mercy and of judgment. And you look then in that Psalm at all the things that flow from that singing of mercy and of judgment. He says that he will behave himself wisely. He says he will walk with a perfect heart. He says he will set no wicked thing before his eyes. He says he will not know a wicked person. You see how true godliness is anchored in this singing of mercy and judgment, this Family Worship, we might say. You could also think of Psalm 119, verse 9. There, the psalmist asks, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse himself?" And the answer is, "by taking heed thereto unto God's word." And so, when you do Family Worship, when you do it prayerfully, in dependence on the Lord, you

can expect great blessing.

The Lord has not said to the seed of Jacob to seek him in vain. And those who honor him, he has promised to honor. And so, you can expect, in your home, less open sin, you can expect less contention, less fighting, and certainly less ignorance of what is right and wrong. And then you can also expect more love, more tenderness, more prayer, more pleading of the promises that they are learning day after day, and more calling upon the name of God, more praise of the name of God, more Jacobs and more Israels who take hold of God and will not let him go until he blesses them.

MAURICE ROBERTS

Well, Family Worship is something which children learn to grow up with, and they look upon this as normal. When children are in a home where there's no Family Worship, say, for the first ten or twenty years for any reason, and suddenly the Family Worship springs up, they tend to think, "Oh well, you know, we can do without this really, we don't need to have this Family Worship. We used to be happy enough as a family without the Family Worship." But when one grows up with it from children, they look upon this as normal, and as a routine, and as the best way of organizing our family life. So I think that's the way it educates children to think in that manner.

PREPARATION FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP

ROBERT McCURLEY

Family worship is the nursery for public worship. In Family Worship, children are being taught, at a manageable scale, to sit, to focus, to listen, and to apply what they're hearing. It provides an ideal setting for them to learn what it means, in terms of the standards of behavior in the worship of God. Parents can use that to instruct them. And it's incremental, so it's briefer, for example, than what takes place in public worship. But all of that is preparatory, so that as they come to public worship, they're already accustomed with much of what's taking place. They're accustomed of singing the Psalms—perhaps they've learned some of them by memory in Family Worship. They're accustomed to concentrated times of prayer, to listening to the Word of God read. All of this is familiar to them, because it's woven into the fabric of everyday life. That assists them in being able then to come into the public assembly, and sit still, and focus, and listen, and benefit from what transpires there.

MICHAEL SPANGLER

We have found that Family Worship is indispensable to training for public worship. I don't know how my three- and six-year-old would have learned, as they have, to sit still in public worship, unless we'd been training them throughout the week in Family Worship for years on end.

We have our little six-month-old now, and, as you saw, we understand that she's little—she's just beginning. But we're already trying to hold her hands, keep her close, shush her, and you know, according to her ability, we will increase that time in which she's sitting still, and will insist, and even discipline accordingly. And our goal is that, she, within due time, hopefully by age two, if not beforehand, will be ready to sit still for a whole service.

And I've seen that success in many families. And I think it's often a big missing piece when children aren't able to sit and worship, that Family Worship is not being adequately used, or perhaps the standards for Family Worship are not as high as they should be. I think parents need to

be encouraged that, trusting in God's grace, Family Worship can bring enormous blessing to your children in the public worship.

MAURICE ROBERTS

Yes, well I was not a Christian until I was about eighteen. And when I started to go to church—I say it with shame—when I sat with my friends in church, we were all unfamiliar with the practice of sitting in church. And I'm afraid I have to say, with shame, we sometimes snickered in church, and we laughed a little bit in church under our breath, not because we wanted to do it, but because we were so nervous. But when children are brought up from childhood, they immediately see that when you go to public worship, you do what you do at home, that is, you respect the name of God, and you respect the privacy of everybody who's there, and you don't open your mouth to make a noise of any kind until you're invited to do so. Our duty therefore is to listen to what the preacher is saying. Now that's an education which not every child has, if they don't have this benefit from childhood.

IAN MACLEOD

If there is no Family Worship in the week, then there's no preparation in the family for the public assembly of God's people. And in that way, parents are really ensuring that the hearts of their children are like the wayside hearer in the parable, with the good seed of the word of God, which is being read, and which is being preached, and which the Spirit is especially pleased to use as an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, will simply fall by the wayside. Then the birds of the air will come and will pluck it away, and there will be no benefit. Of course, the Lord, in his mercy and sovereign grace, can overrule these things. But to not prepare the hearts of our children throughout the week, is to do our best to ensure the hearts of children are like the wayside hearer, or the stony ground hearer, or the seed that falls among thorns. And yet, on the other hand, when we are watering the hearts of our children with the word of God, and with prayer throughout the week, with the blessing of the Lord, we can expect that the Lord will prepare these hearts and soften these hearts, and fulfill his own covenant promise, "I will give unto you a new heart," so that the word of God, especially on the Lord's Day, especially in the preaching of the word, becomes an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners.

And indeed, I believe this is one of the great benefits of Family Worship. When you are worshiping God in the home, when you are reading the word, when you are singing his praise, when you are praying to him, there is then, or there should be then a seamless transition from Family Worship to public worship. The church of God, the public assembly of the people of God is no strange place, and it's no strange activity that is done there. There is a continuity between what happens in the home, and what happens in the public assemblies of God's people.

WILLIAM MACLEOD

I think it's very obvious where children have Family Worship in their home, because when they come then to the church, they are used to sitting, listening to the word being read, they are used to joining in the singing of praise to God, and in being involved in prayers. And you can see very often with little children where Family Worship is practiced, that there's a kind of discipline there that shapes and molds the child, and prepares them for serious worship as they go to church.

GRAEME CRAIG

Well public worship is very important, and I think you have to say that. And indeed Psalm 87 makes it clear that, in a sense, public worship is preferred over private worship. God loves

the gates of Zion more than all the gates of Judah. A central worship was vital. I'm not decrying Family Worship by saying that, but I'm indicating that public worship is most important—it's where God has promised to place his people. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in there in the midst." But Family Worship, as well as being helpful to us in itself, it's a great means of preparing us to enter into the spirit of public worship. With children, it teaches them to sit, to listen, and to sing, and to not sing. So it's good to realize that there is a time for being solemn, as well as a time for playing around. As we read through the Scriptures, our children begin to get a grasp of the whole teaching of Scripture. The prophets and the Old Testament characters aren't strange sounding names to them—they're familiar with them. They will hear something of their teaching, especially as it is explained to them. And therefore, being familiar with the range of Biblical teaching, with Bible history, when the preacher speaks of these things, it's not something weird. They'll relate to the examples that might be used from these things. And on the Lord's Day, when they go to worship in public, they hear prayer for the minister, and they are aware that we are praying for the minister to sit in his place, and God's blessing on the worship. And they become aware that there's this desire for us all to benefit from the worship, and that can help our children, when they hear us praying for the minister, for the preacher, and that the truth might be blessed to us.

GAVIN BEERS

Family worship is a wonderful training ground for the public worship of God. If you expose your children day after day to God's worship, such things are familiar to them. They know what it is to listen to the Bible being read, to bow their heads in prayer, and maybe most importantly, just to sit in a disciplined way and engage with these things. Then, when we go into church, and the worship service is longer, there are certain principles that have been laid down in the home that will carry over. If you ask your children questions from the reading of God's word at home, that will help them when they listen to the minister read and preach the word in church. And if all the families of the congregation are doing this, then the ability for each household to profit from the reading and preaching of God's word in public worship will be heightened.