

A guide to daily reformation at home

FAMILY WORSHIP



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ESSENTIAL GUIDANCE

*“God is to be worshipped everywhere,
in spirit and truth...in private families daily,
and in secret each one by himself”*

Westminster Confession of Faith (21:6)

Worship and National Reformation

Purity of worship in public is essential and a great blessing. Every individual should also worship on their own in the secret place. Likewise, family worship should take place in private. These are a necessary part of national reformation. They help to advance the profession and power of godliness within family and personal life.

Private Devotions

Secret prayer and meditation bring indescribable benefits. Such benefits are best known and experienced through careful practice of those duties. These are the means by which, in a special way, we experience and maintain communion with God. They help us to properly prepare ourselves for all other spiritual duties.

Thus pastors should urge everyone in their congregation to engage in private devotions morning and evening and other times. The head of every household must also take good care that both he himself and all those in his care are diligent in this on a daily basis.

Family Worship

Family worship honours God. It brings peace to the conscience and inclines members of the household to obey and respect the commandments. It also makes the family to be a Bethel or the house of God and brings safety and blessings of all kinds. It greatly helps Church and State since the family is the seed bed of both. Where family worship is neglected, neither the laws in the city nor the Word of God in the Church will be given due regard.

The Elements of Family Worship

Ordinarily, family worship will include the following elements once the family have gathered together:

1. Prayer and praise. In this there should be reference to current needs and condition. This is for the Church in general, the nation, the family as a whole and each family member.
2. Reading the Scriptures followed by questions and plain explanation of the text. This aids children and those with less understanding. It helps them to benefit from public worship and the public reading of the Scriptures, as well as in their own private reading.
3. Discussion with application to all family members. The purpose of this is to build them up in their most holy faith. Rebukes and corrections where justly required should be explained by those with authority in the family.

Family Religion

Other aspects of family religion include the following duties which complement the practice of family worship:

1. Catechising. It is not enough that members of the family are catechised at Church. They must also be instructed in a plain and simple way at home. This will include the basic principles of Christianity and the doctrine which is according to godliness.

2. Prayer and thanksgiving morning and evening, before and after meals together with psalm-singing where possible.
3. Discipline exercised with wisdom and patience. This is necessary for practising godliness. There must be warning, reproof and correction for faults that are appropriately dealt with in the family. For this reason the head ought to observe diligently the ways of all within the family.

“The head of every household must take good care that both he himself and all those in his care are diligent in this on a daily basis”
4. Observing the providence of God. We must learn about God from His works of justice and mercy both past and present.
5. Private fasting and humbling ourselves in response to God’s call in providence. This may arise from public calamities or the private distress of the family. The Scriptures read and the prayers poured out at this time must be relevant to the situation. Such duties help in abasing ourselves and strengthening our faith.

Guidance in Applying Scripture

Formally instructing people in interpreting the Holy Scriptures belongs to the office of a minister. No one, regardless of qualifications, should usurp this unless properly called and set apart by God and the Church for that office.

Likewise, it is usually the primary duty of the head of the household to read the Scriptures to the family. After this it is commendable to have some discussion to apply what has been read and heard.

- If the passage rebukes any sin the whole family should be urged to be watchful against it.
- Where divine judgement is threatened or mentioned, all should be warned. They should fear in case the same judgement or worse comes on them unless they avoid the sin being punished.
- Any duty commanded or comfort promised should be observed.

These can be used to stir up each one to seek Christ’s strength to perform the duty or for His gracious provision of comfort. The head of the family should lead in all this. Family members should seek answers to their questions and doubts from him.

Responsibilities of the Head of the House

The head is responsible for ordering and ruling the household with wisdom. He should provide for their necessities diligently and give a good example of godliness and seriousness in spiritual things. Responsibility for leading all the different parts of family worship belongs to the head of the family. He should ensure that no one in the family withdraws from any part of family worship. The head is also responsible for ensuring that the other aspects of family religion are carried out. If he is absent from the home through necessity he should ensure that another member of the household takes

his place in these duties. Wives and mothers also have a special responsibility in guiding the house and providing godly instruction and example.

Promoting Family Worship

The minister should stir up those who are lazy and train up those who are weak so that they are qualified for leading it. Where the head of the family is not fit for this duty he may engage someone else to lead family worship for him. Such should be approved by the presbytery.

In other cases where the head of the family is unfit to lead family worship another member of the family or someone residing in the home may lead. This should be approved by the minister and kirk session who are accountable to the presbytery in this.

In God's providence the minister may be visiting the family. In conducting family worship he should ensure that the whole family is present. In some circumstances it may be necessary and wise to discuss matters privately with only some of the family.

Protecting Family Worship

No one without fixed abode and employment or who pretends to have a calling should be allowed to lead family worship. This prevents such taking opportunity to spread error or cause division and lead foolish and unstable people astray.

Each family should keep family worship by itself. Visitors staying in the home, guests or those present for other lawful reasons should be invited to take part. Otherwise people from various families should not be required or invited to be present.

Gathering people together from different families for worship has been of benefit in times of great decline and trouble. During such times many things may be commendable that are not usually permissible. Yet in times of peace, stability and gospel purity such gatherings should not be encouraged. This is because it can hinder worship in each family by itself. It can also undermine the ministry, divide families and congregations and even in process of time the whole Church. Much offence can result which will harden the hearts of ungodly men and bring great grief to the godly.

The Best Times for Family Worship

The most suitable times for family worship must be chosen wisely by those with authority in the family. It is appropriate to engage in it before they put their hands to work in the morning. When the day's work is done and the time for rest approaches in the evening is likewise suitable. Any other times that can be spared from the duties of their particular calling are also appropriate.

The Lord's Day

On the Lord's Day, the family should seek the Lord apart and as a whole family together. They seek Him to prepare their hearts, fit them for worship and bless the public ordinances to them. The head of the family should ensure that all under his care attend public worship with the rest of the congregation. They are to behave quietly and religiously during the time of worship as being in the presence of God. After the service he should take account of what they can remember of the sermon. He begins and

In a time when Christian families are under increasing attack, they need every available help. Family worship has been appointed by God with His special blessing for this purpose.

Here is the key to family reformation which is itself indispensable for the reformation of Church and nation. This booklet contains practical guidance to help families engage in this vital and blessed duty.



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