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# Equipping Families to Worship at Home

By [Carolyn Brown](#) • Posted on January 25th, 2011 • [1 Comment](#)

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One of the biggest barriers to family worship is the vision of what “ought to be.” That vision of a Norman Rockwell family pressed and dressed and gathered in a clean living room and reverently attending to Dad reading from a gold-edged Bible and leading the family in prayer looks totally unattainable to many of today’s well-intended, but stretched-to-the-max families. Lacking any other vision, many families give up before even trying. So, the first task of the church wanting to equip its families to worship at home is to provide them with a realistic vision.



## What can parents do?

Worship at home comes in two forms: the regular worship rituals that become natural parts of daily living, and spontaneous moments in which God’s presence is noted and daily activities and problems are placed in God’s context.

**Prayer at mealtimes** is a simple ritual that develops habits of gratitude. All that is required is a brief statement of thanks for food, for family, and for anything else that is appropriate at the time. The prayer may be a memorized prayer that all pray together, or family members may take turns voicing the prayer. Individuals may fold their hands and bow their heads, or the household may hold hands. Mealtime prayers often take place before the meal. But many families that include young children find that there is a thirty-second window of opportunity at the end of the meal that is more conducive to expressions of true gratitude. Just doing it is more important than how it is done. Some days it feels very dry. Still, children—even more than adults—thrive on repeated rituals and will often be the ones who object when the ritual is about to be skipped.

**Bedtime prayers** for children are an introduction to the lifelong spiritual discipline of examen. At the end of the day, the disciple thinks back over the day, sharing it with God. The “Now I lay me down to sleep . . .” prayer is one good starter. But fairly soon, children benefit from praying out of their own experiences. At prayer’s simplest, parents and children identify parts of the day for which they want to say “hurray!” and

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“thank you” to God, things for which they want to say “sorry” to God, and people and problems for which they want to ask God’s help. Conversation about these three topics is followed by prayer voiced either by a parent or a child. Many parents find it meaningful to create a ritual with which to close this time. That ritual may be as formal as a kiss on the forehead with the words, “Remember always, I love you and God loves you,” or a hug with, “Night, night. Sleep tight.” Some families share this time together. Other parents choose to make it a special time with each child. Again, there is no right or wrong way.

**Some of the most powerful family worship experiences cannot be planned in advance.** They are those times when in the middle of living, the family recognizes and names God’s presence with them. A toddler stops in awe to examine an anthill. A ten-year-old is devastated by the betrayal of a “best friend.” A child has to face up to having done something very mean and hurtful. A friend or relative is seriously ill. Each of these is a call to worship. The challenge for parents is to know what to say and sing and pray to put the situation in the context of God’s loving presence.

## **How can the church equip families to do this?**

Most Christian parents want to include worship in their family’s life at home. But many do not have childhood memories to use as patterns, and most have very limited understanding of and experience with worship at home. **Before parents can become worship leaders in their homes, they need some worship education for themselves.** Churches help them (and their children) when they intentionally teach adults the vocabulary and meaning of the congregation’s worship. Special classes can be offered, and units about worship can be edited into adult curriculum. Even when this teaching is offered to adults of all ages, it is wise to include both vocabulary for adults (confession) and for children (“I’m sorry, God”). Everyone’s understanding is enriched, and parents are prepared to worship with their children.

**Parents’ good intentions can be put into action when the church calls them to a specific action at a specific time.** A sermon about prayer can include homework assignments such as “praying the Lord’s Prayer as a household once each day this week.” During the month of November, households can be provided with table tent card bearing a prayer of thanksgiving, and they should be encouraged to pray that prayer at one meal each day of the month. Advent calendars with prayers or family devotion books to use with an Advent wreath can be distributed as well. All of these church-wide calls to family worship give families opportunities to try for a short, manageable period a practice that may then become a part of daily living.

**Churches also help parents when they make specific parenting suggestions.** For example, as children return to school, family disciplines are shaped for a new year. It is a good time to encourage parents to make bedtime prayers part of each day. A pastoral letter to parents of elementary school children, pointing out the value of bedtime prayers, giving specific how-tos and encouraging parents to take advantage of the start of school to initiate or upgrade this prayer practice, can give parents a useful nudge at an auspicious moment.

**Similar suggestions can be included in newsletters and on web pages** on which parents can find direction with the rest of the congregation listening in. Publish a collection of vacation prayers from worshipers of all ages to encourage all vacationers to pray. Share brief descriptions of family worship rituals used by members of the congregation to give others ideas about how they might worship as a family.

Equipping families to worship at home is not a one-time course or event. Instead, it is an ongoing effort to provide both a vision of what is possible and lots of specific suggestions to try at specific times.

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## Comments



**theroseberries1** says:

Great, concrete ideas and ways for families to incorporate worship into their daily lives so that "the Word becomes flesh, and dwells among us..."

Thank you!

May 11th 2012 at 1:26 PM

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