

"Divide to Each One Their Portion"
(Luke 12:42-48)

Introduction: We have seen over the last couple of weeks the importance of making family worship a part of each day, both morning and evening. Our children, as we have seen, are not spiritual orphans, but a part of God's covenant community and as such are entitled to the benefits of God's worship. They are houses that are yet to be built, and you are daily laying the foundation of their house whether for good or bad. They will not come to Christ on their own apart from God's ordained means. You must use them diligently and without ceasing. Listen to what Charles Spurgeon had to say about this. It might make you think more carefully about it. He said, "I have heard of some persons who have had objections to labour for the conversion of their children on the ground that God would save his own without any effort on our part. I remember making one man wince who held this view, by telling him of a father who would never teach his child to pray, or have him instructed even as to the meaning of prayer. He thought it was wrong, and that such work ought to be left to God's Holy Spirit. The boy fell down, and broke his leg, and had to have it taken off; and all the while the surgeon was amputating it, the boy was cursing and swearing in the most frightful manner. The good surgeon said to the father, 'You see, you would not teach your boy to pray, but the devil evidently had no objection to teach him to swear.' That is the mischief of it; if we do not try our best to bring our children to Christ, there is another who will do his worst to drag them down to hell. A mother once said to her sick son, who was about to die, and was in a dreadful state of mind, 'My boy, I am sorry you are in such trouble; I am sure I never taught you any hurt.' 'No, mother,' he answered, 'but you never taught me any good; and therefore there was room for all sorts of evil to get into me'" (Spurgeon *Art of Illustration* 41-42). Our children, of course, are not just blank slates to be written on by us with good or bad. They are born into the world with black hearts and stand in need of the grace of God. If we do not lift our hands to try and bring them to Christ, you can be sure that the devil will certainly take every advantage he can to take them to hell with himself. But what we have been saying is that the Lord has given to us a wonderful means to affect their souls for all eternity on a daily basis. That means is family worship.

In our passage of Scripture this morning, we read of the story of the faithful and sensible steward who was put in charge of his master's servants to give them their daily rations until his master returned from a long journey. If when the master returned, he found his servant faithfully doing what he had commanded, then the servant would receive a reward. However, if that servant was found to be remiss in carrying out his master's instructions, then his master would come when he was unaware and destroy that wicked slave. The same is true for us as well. The Lord has given to each of us a stewardship that we are to be faithful in carrying out until He returns to reckon accounts with us. You see, this is not just a nice story that Jesus tells which has no touch with reality, but He is warning us what it is that He expects from each one of us, namely to be faithful in what He has entrusted to us. How heavy, then, fathers, should this weigh upon us when we realize that the Lord has entrusted to us the physical *and* spiritual well-being of our families. Christ is one day going to call us to account for our stewardship, for what we have and haven't done for the good of the souls of our wife and children. I would counsel you strongly then to pay attention to this last admonition from God's Word concerning family worship,

for this is the fountain of spiritual blessing which the Lord has given to you, either to bring blessing to your family by faithful performance of this service, or a curse by neglecting it.

We have already seen the biblical basis of family worship, and the benefits that it will have both for us and for our children. This morning I want you to learn how to perform it in your homes. And what we will see is that,

Family worship is the gathering of the household together at fixed times for prayer, praise and the reading of God's Word.

I. *First, Let's Look At the Elements of Family Worship and See How They Might Best Be Done for the Edification of Our Household.*

A. *The First Element Is that of Prayer, the Lifting Up of Our Needs and Desires Unto God.*

1. Much, of course could be said about prayer. I can't presume to give you a course on each of the elements of family worship in one sermon. But I want to give you some specific directions on each of them as to how they might best be used in a family setting.
2. With regard to prayer, it is the time to center on the needs of the family. Though we may tire those outside of our family in other settings with the needs which are represented in our households, there is no such limitation in family worship. This is particularly the time to pray for those needs which are represented by each member of the household, as well as those of the church, and of the state.
3. Using simple words when you pray will help all who are present to understand what you are praying, as well as provide an example from which your children may draw for their own prayers.
4. To help you learn how to do this, it would be wise for you to read the Scriptures and notice how the saints of old prayed, especially in the Psalms.
5. Also, try to vary your prayers. Don't use the same words, or pray for the same things over and over. Your needs and the needs of your family are constantly changing. If you are really thinking through those needs, then your prayers will certainly change accordingly. Seek the Lord for the Spirit of grace and supplication. This is something that you will only find on your knees in your own prayer closet.
6. When you pray as a family, it is also wise to be brief, especially where there are small children involved. Taking too much time in any of the parts of worship might easily make your children resent it, especially with regard to prayer.
7. Let your prayers arise out of a heart which is lit by the fires of heaven, out of a heart which is filled with affection to God, for then it will not fail to be heard or felt. "Theodorus, speaking of Luther, once said, 'I overheard him in prayer, but good God, with what life and spirit did he pray! It was with so much reverence as if he were speaking to God, yet with so much confidence, as if he had been speaking to his friend'" (Watson **Heaven 19**). The attitude of your heart will affect the hearts of those around you. Of course, you must always pray to God and ask Him for special direction and strength to lead your family in these things which are connected with their eternal well-being.
8. Most importantly, your life must reflect, at least in some measure, what it is that you are seeking for in your prayers, or

else you will seem hypocritical to your children. If you pray for holiness and the strength to obey God, but then you spend the day seemingly oblivious to the things which promote godliness, your children will think that you are insincere, and will not take you seriously.

B. The Second Element of Family Worship Is Praise, the Lifting Up of Our Hearts and Affections unto God.

1. In the old Directory for Public Worship, there was a section which read, "In singing the praises of God we are to sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also; making melody in our hearts unto the Lord. It is also proper that we cultivate some knowledge of the rules of music, that we may praise God in a becoming manner with our voices, as well as with our hearts." And what was true of the church was thought to be equally true of the family as well, "It is the duty of Christians to praise God, by singing psalms or hymns, publicly in the church, as also privately in the family" (Alexander 218). What is the family after all except a church in the home?
2. Praise is very important for it is a means of instruction in the Christian religion. Alexander wrote, "In the early church, many of the hymns were compendious formulas of doctrine; and such has been the case in every succeeding age" (220).
3. Paul wrote to the Colossians, "LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM, TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER, IN PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, SINGING WITH GRACE IN YOUR HEARTS TO THE LORD" (3:16).
4. Luther wrote that song was very instrumental in promoting the Reformation in Germany (Alexander 221). Charles Wesley greatly promoted the cause of Christ by taking common tunes in use in his day and putting Christian lyrics to them.
5. If psalms and hymns have been such a blessing to the church throughout the ages to teach and admonish them, how much more the members of your household? How many children learn their first biblical truth through song? It is an important means for laying a foundation. For this reason, you ought to use a small, but carefully thought through, selection of psalms and hymns in your family worship. It should be small because repetition is very important to make sure that it remains firmly fastened fast in their minds. What truths do you want to engrave in the memory of your child? Select those hymns and psalms that embody those truths and teach them to your children. When they are sung by heart, they are more likely to one day be sung from the heart.
6. And of course, if we cultivate the art of singing the praises of God in our families, how much more will it prepare us to lift up the praises of our God in the public worship service?
7. Let us diligently, therefore, teach our children the songs of Christ's church. Again, Alexander wrote, "It is mournful to think, that a service which was so precious to our ancestors, and which they made sacrifices to enjoy, even when under the sword of persecution, should die out of many Christian families in these days of peace, when there is no lack of worldly rejoicings" (230).

C. The Last Element of Family Worship Is the Reading of the Scriptures,

Which Is God Speaking to Us Through His Word.

1. If your children never read the Bible at all, but only knew what you had read to them in family worship, they would still have considerable knowledge concerning the way of salvation and Christian living, if you read it to them diligently.
2. As I've said before, and you know to be true in life, the Word is much more likely to leave its impression in the heart of your children when they are young, than when they are older. It is so important to begin at a young age.
3. And remember, just because the child may not understand every word that you say, doesn't mean that he cannot understand at all. He might grasp the concept; he might have an outline of the truth, which can be filled in later. And such familiarity with the Scripture at an early age could help him avoid serious misunderstanding of it in the future.
4. As to how much of the Bible should be read in family worship, the answer is all of it. That doesn't mean that you necessarily have to read all of the genealogical lists in the Scripture, or every portion of the detailed instructions on how to build the Tabernacle or Temple. Yet, even these have something to teach us about the God who gave them. God gave us the whole Bible, therefore we should use the whole Bible.
5. As to the order in which you should read it, there are many Bible reading records that you could use. Philip Henry, the father of Matthew Henry, that great biblical commentator of old, "advised the reading of the Scripture in order; for though one star in the firmament of the Scripture differ from another star in glory, yet wherever God hath a mouth to speak, we should have an ear to hear; and the diligent searcher may find much excellent matter in those parts of Scripture which we are sometimes tempted to think might have been spared. How affectionately would he sometimes bless God for every book, and chapter, and verse, and line in the Bible". Rev. Cecil wrote, "I read the Scripture to my family in some regular order, and am pleased to have thus a lesson found for me. I look on the chapter of the day as a lesson sent for that day; and so I regard it as coming from God for the use of that day, and not of my own seeking" (Alexander 207).
6. But again, it is best to make your selections based upon the needs of your household. This may work if all of your children are fairly old. But if there are very young children present, you may need to read out of a Bible story book which bring the stories down to their level.
7. And after the Bible is read, you must then explain it and apply it. This, of course, will be determined by your abilities. If you find that you are unable to do this, because you lack the necessary skill or knowledge, then you might consider one of the many devotional books that are available. But caution must be used here that you find something which is true to Scripture. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible is very useful for this purpose. Robert Hawker's **Poor Man's Morning and Evening Portions** may be another good source of instruction. You certainly should never seek to explain the Scriptures if you don't know what they mean. This could lead yourself and those you teach down the road of false belief and false practice.
8. As to the way in which you should read it, it is enough to say

that it should be read well. Every word should be pronounced clearly and correctly. It should be read by only one person, usually the head of the household. Some have had the whole family participate by having each read a verse. But this breaks up the continuity of the passage. You wouldn't read a letter or a newspaper this way, so why the Bible? You should also read it in an unaffected way, that is, not in an unnatural way. But above all, you should read it as though you believed it, and as though it ought to be believed by all who hear.

9. Family worship, then, should include prayer, praise and the reading of God's Word. Though the elements may be varied in order, it is good for you to begin with prayer, asking for God's blessing and guidance for your time together. Next, it is appropriate to lift up your hearts together in song and express your love to God with the sacrifice of praise. With your hearts still inflamed through worship, it is good to read the Scriptures and to explain and apply them to each one present. And then, end your time together by praying that the Lord would take His truth and write it on each one of your hearts and help each of you to do it.

II. Secondly, I Want To Briefly Discuss the Time and the Spirit in Which You Ought to Conduct Family Worship.

A. First of All, You Should Have Fixed Times for Family Worship.

1. The general practice of the Christian Church has been to have family worship twice daily, at the beginning and at the close of the day.
 - a. In the Scriptures, we have examples of those who sought the Lord more often than this, such as David, who wrote, "EVENING AND MORNING, AND AT NOON, WILL I PRAY, AND CRY ALOUD, AND HE SHALL HEAR MY VOICE" (Ps. 55:17).
 - b. But there is no definite statement in Scripture which would set the number of times you should have family worship. But it does say that you should pray without ceasing, or that you should have a constant attitude of prayer. However, the general practice of the church has been to have family worship twice daily, in the morning and in the evening.
 - c. That which is most important for your family is that the time be fixed, that is, that you have it at regularly stated times. This helps everyone to feel the importance of it, that it is not just hit and miss. It also helps everyone in the family to live according to schedule and to get more out of their day.
2. You should have a fixed time in the morning.
 - a. Again there have been differences of opinion from one household to another as to when they gather for morning worship. And there is nothing in Scripture which would commend one time over another.
 - b. But there seems to be a certain reasonableness in having it as early in the morning as the household can gather.
 - c. There seems to be a certain rightness about ingesting spiritual food before we come to the table and eat our physical food, for even the food that we eat requires that we ask the Lord's blessing on it, for Paul says, "FOR IT IS SANCTIFIED BY THE WORD OF GOD, AND PRAYER" (1 Tim. 4:5).

- d. There is also a certain rightness about beginning the day with God, committing everything that we do to Him, and asking for His blessing on it.
 - e. And of course, if you have a lot to do in the morning, you may be tempted to rush through or to omit family worship all together. If you put it first, then you will always have time for it. So set it as the first thing on your daily schedule.
3. You should also have a fixed time in the evening.
- a. As it is with morning worship, so it is with evening, there is nothing in Scripture to dictate the time.
 - b. But again, there is a certain rightness with closing the day with prayer and worship, making this the last thing you do before going to bed in the evening.
 - c. However, in houses with children who must go to bed earlier than the adults, it may be a good idea to have family worship immediately before or after dinner.
 - d. Also, if you have visitors in your house, try not to let it interrupt your worship schedule if at all possible, but see it as a providential means to bring a blessing to your guests.
4. And both of these times of worship should also be a fixed length of time.
- a. It should not drag on *and on* so as to make it unbearable for the children.
 - b. On the other hand, it should not be so short as to have little or no effect.
 - c. Rather, you should set apart an appropriate length of time to include all that must be done, while giving consideration for those whose attention span is shorter.
 - d. Alexander wrote, "It was the fault of our forefathers to make it insufferably long. This goes far to destroy all good influence on the young, by creating weariness and disgust" (194).
 - e. If you continue to drone on *and on* you will do them no good, but rather make them resent it.
- B. Second, You Should Approach It with the Right Spirit.
- 1. It should be a solemn *and* serious time. It is not a time to laugh and joke.
 - 2. It is also a time when all should be paying close attention to to what is going on *and* not thinking about other things, nor talking among themselves. Even the youngest must learn to be quiet for this is a very important lesson for them to learn which will also help them in public worship.
 - 3. Everything should be simple enough so that everyone in the family capable of participating will be edified. And, of course, there should be a note of holy zeal on the part of the father which will leave lasting impressions on his family.
 - 4. Rev. Richard Cecil, speaking about this aspect of worship, said, "Tedioussness will weary them. Fine language will shoot above them. Formality of connexion, *or* composition in prayer, they will not comprehend. Gloominess, *or* austerity of devotion, will make them think it a hard service. Let them be met as friends.

Let them be met as for the most delightful service in which they can be engaged. Let them find it short, savoury, simple, plain, tender, heavenly" (Alexander 195).

5. Remember that it is family worship, the whole family is involved.
- C. Lastly, Just a Word About When to Begin Family Worship If You Have Not Already.
1. If you believe that the Scriptures do command you to have daily family worship, the time to begin is now.
 2. Again Alexander writes, "Where anyone feels himself called of God to establish daily worship in his house, he should act with solemn decision. In this, as in a thousand other affairs of life, the shortest method is the best. Instead of parleying with objections, or waiting for some happy conjuncture, or seeking to prepare the way by gradual approaches, or timorously sounding the opinions of those whose place it is to submit, let him, in reliance on God, without other preliminary, and without allowing another sun to set, call his family together, state his purpose in the very fewest terms, and carry it into immediate accomplishment. The burden of months, or years, will have rolled away! That day will be remembered as one of the brightest in his calendar, and will probably open a new era of domestic profit and joy" (200-201).
 3. Fathers, don't delay! You know that this is the will of God for your family, so don't procrastinate! Their future depends upon whether or not you will faithfully carry this out. Practice it with great patience and love. And pray that God would make it a means of blessing to your household.
 4. And you children, if your parents practice this blessed ordinance, be thankful! Yield to it as a means of good for your souls. Make sure that you are there on time and eager to participate in it. And join in with all of your heart making the praises, prayers, and Words which are spoken, a part of your own heart. Your parents are trying to be faithful to their baptismal vows. They want to see you walk in the Lord's ways. May they practice Family Worship with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Amen.