Family Worship:
An Essential Tool for Discipling the Next Generation

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A couple of years ago I was asked to lead a prayer at an annual Pro-Life rally at the Oregon state capitol. The well-meaning evangelical politician who introduced me botched the introduction by stating that I was the Director of the Northwest School of *Disciplineship* (rather than *discipleship*). Then, without realizing her mistake, she quipped that "my kids need to go to your school!" I have often reflected on that humorous moment because it was telling. First of all, it revealed that she was not very familiar with the word discipleship, which, simply put, conveys the state of being a serious follower and pupil of Jesus and is often used in contrast with simply being a cultural Christian. Thankfully, many North American Christians are waking up to the fact that nominal, cultural, shallow Christianity is never what Jesus intended for his followers, nor will that kind of faith commitment survive the "negative world" in which Christians now live.[1] Second, the speaker also instinctively assumed that someone else—not she—needed to educate her children in "disciplineship." That instantaneous response revealed her participation in the culture of "professionalization" that has influenced many Christian parents for several generations. For too long, Christian parents have looked to Sunday school teachers, youth ministers, children's ministers, private school teachers, or Christian universities to make disciples of their children, and it has been a disaster for

[1] See Aaron M. Renn, *Life in the Negative World: Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2024), who has prompted a lively debate about how Christianity in America went from being viewed positively, then neutrally, to now negatively by the broader culture.

multigenerational faithfulness. Also thankfully, many researchers and thoughtful youth workers have come to see that parents have the most influence on children's faith and that getting them to embrace disciple-making at home is a desperately needed course correction.[2]

This essay seeks to introduce readers to a long lost yet effective way to help parents embrace their disciple-making role by creating spiritually rich space in the family routine. That tool is family worship, *the regular gathering of the family to worship God and receive instruction in the Christian faith in the home.* The four essential elements of family worship include reciting memorized truth, singing spiritual songs, reading the Bible, and communal prayer. Practical guidance of the "how" of family worship is important, but without conviction of its need—the "why"—and inspiration to implement it, the time pressures placed on today's homes will overwhelm the practice in time. This essay calls attention to the biblical basis and historical precedent for family worship that hopefully will inspire ministers and church leaders to recover for themselves and their congregants an excellent and essential tool for home-based discipleship.

Why Family Worship? Biblical Foundation

The most important reason to embrace family worship is that parents have a biblical mandate *to personally pass on faith to their children.* Consistently throughout the entire Bible, the home is viewed as the central place where faith is transmitted to the next generation of believers.[3]

In the Old Testament, the home is the essential context where the pivotal events of Israel's history are commemorated and taught. The identity of the Israelites as God's chosen people was solidified when he rescued them from slavery in Egypt. God struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians but spared the Israelites who smeared blood over the doorposts of their homes. This event is commemorated annually as the Feast of Passover and is accompanied by the

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[2] See Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Stickyfaith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 69–92, as a representative example of researchers trumpeting the importance of parents for kids' faithfulness.

[3] What follows is an abridged and adapted version of chapter 2 of my *Family Worship Guide: A Handbook for the Christian Home* (Los Angeles: Sulis Publishers, 2020). Used with permission. This handbook provides practical guidance and resources for implementing family worship and can be purchased from most online booksellers.

Feast of Unleavened Bread, two celebrations based in individual homes and calling for personal instruction by parents.

Regarding the *Passover*, Moses commanded the people, "You shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, it is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover" (Exod 12:26). Further in the section, Moses provides more instruction about the Passover, specifically that the lamb or goat "shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones" (Exod 12:46). The home is ground zero for remembering the Passover. As well, the accompanying *Feast of Unleavened Bread* is to be celebrated in the home and explained to children directly by parents. Moses said, "You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt. And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand, as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth" (Exod 13:8–9). Finally, fathers must explain the *consecration of the firstborn* to their own children. He writes, "And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery" (Exod 13:14).

From the beginning, then, God commanded the Israelites to make their homes a place of instruction. Most religions have a consecrated priesthood and sacred temples and shrines that are the focus, yet biblical faith, while acknowledging a role for these institutions, centers instruction in the home. It is important to point out that parents, specifically fathers, are commanded to *personally* instruct their children in the grand story of God's deliverance from bondage. They are not told to bring them to the priests or rely on the professional religious class for that teaching. They are told to explain to their own children about the great deeds of the LORD.

Years later, after the dramatic events of Mount Sinai and the subsequent lapse into sin and forced wandering in the desert, the Law is once again given to the people. As a new generation of Israelites prepare to enter the promised-land, God reiterates the essential task of parents in communicating his will to the next generation. Arguably the most famous passages in the Bible, the *shema*, points to home-based instruction as the key to multigenerational faithfulness.

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul

> and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut 6:7–9).[4]

This amazing and succinct statement of monotheistic belief is foundational for the Israelite but was alien and unknown to the cultures around them and would require constant communal reinforcement. When it comes to how this conviction and the rest of the Law would be communicated to each generation, it cannot be any clearer. The family is the place where these convictions are established, transmitted, and reinforced. Unlike other religions, God's law is not just something that gets talked about by the priests or by the elders of the community on special feast days and festivals. It is part of the everyday fabric of the family's existence. It is to be performed diligently, not accidentally or lackadaisically. Diligently means purposefully, thoughtfully, consistently, and creatively. God's Word is to be discussed in just about every part of family life: hanging out in the house, traveling down the road, at bedtime, at meal times. It is even something that finds its way into the furniture and symbolic spaces in house indicating the priority and focus of the family. The mandate of the passage is clear: God's people must teach their own children his law and do it in creative and intentional ways in the home.

Further in the section, fathers are again told to attentively teach their children the reason for all the laws that Israel is to keep.

> When your son asks you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your son, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always,

[4] Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from the Bible are from the English Standard Version (2016).

> that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us (Deut 6:20–25).

The clear sense of the entire passage is that Israel's faithfulness is dependent upon a diligent and purposeful attention to the law and that the family is the primary place where this is to happen. Interestingly, it is the child who asks and the parent who is to respond with a thorough answer. As will be noted later, the genius of this method of transmitting faithfulness lies in the fact that for parents to teach their children, they must know the Law themselves. A father cannot explain and teach something to his children that he personally does not understand. Many parents who have brushed up on history, math, science, and literature for the purpose of helping their child with school work will readily grasp this principle. As the old saying goes, "to teach is to learn." This dynamic may be one of the reasons God put the burden of religious instruction of children on parents. Unfortunately, the history of Israel's unfaithfulness suggests that they failed to heed this fundamental command to teach their own children.

Later, the psalmist reiterates this command, saying:

> He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (Psalm 78:5–7).

The importance of the passage to multigenerational faithfulness is obvious. When a father or mother personally and diligently teaches their children about the Lord and his word, the following generations are certainly impacted in a positive way. To put it another way, when I take the time to worship and pray with my children and teach them God's word, I am not only impacting their faith, but the faith of my unborn grandchildren.

Other passages in the Old Testament attest to the critical importance of teaching and instruction of children, and always the assumed and primary persons doing the instruction are the parents. Proverbs, the storehouse of spiritual and practical wisdom for God's people, contains multiple solemn exhortations to youth to pay close attention to their parents' teaching. Proverbs 1:8–9 says,

"Hear, my son, your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck" (see also Prov 2:1–5; 3:1–4; 4:1–4). This material and many others demonstrate that personal parental instruction of children is a biblical mandate.

When we turn to the New Testament, it is no surprise to find that the apostles built upon this theme in the household codes. Paul's exhortation to Christian fathers is a very succinct expression of everything taught in the Old Testament regarding the method for maintaining multigenerational faithfulness. He writes, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). Paul addresses both the tone and the content of teaching. Fathers are to raise children through instruction in the faith, but to do it in a way that does not antagonize or embitter their children. The passage points to two kinds of teaching, one that is focused on behavior or thinking that needs correction (discipline) and another that is more positive in nature (instruction) and carried out on a regular and consistent basis. Regardless of the specific kind of instruction that is envisioned, Paul's words plainly mean that parents are personally responsible for a child's spiritual and moral development as the God-ordained primary teachers of their children.

Paul singles out fathers as responsible for educating their children, but this does not negate the important role of godly mothers. The apostle commends Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois for teaching his young protege the holy Scriptures from his childhood (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15). In Acts 16, we learn that Timothy's father was a Greek and therefore not capable or willing to instruct his son in the faith, yet he received that teaching from the spiritual women in his life. They were so successful at raising Timothy in the Lord that he sacrificed greatly to go on the missionary journeys with Paul and was later entrusted with the spiritual care of Ephesus, one of the largest Christian communities.

The ideal Christian marriage presented in the New Testament visualizes a spiritual relationship that will spill over into the rest of the family life. Paul and Peter both envision husbands and wives as forming a complete unity in Christ, whose intimate bond together in the Lord is bolstered by shared times of prayer and worship in the assembly and in the home. Their physical intimacy should be interrupted only with mutual agreement for a short period of

devotion to Christ (1 Cor 7:5) and their closeness of relationship is compared to the relationship between God the Father and the Son (1 Cor 11:1–16) and involves mutual respect and love, lest the relationship with God is hindered (1 Pet 3:7). The beautiful imagery of spiritual relationship between husband and wife in Ephesians 5 certainly supports a vision of homelife that involved regular family worship as a natural and obvious part of living out the faith.

Certainly, the biblical model for transferring the faith to the next generation is the home and the family. One of the main reasons we are seeing such a large fall-away rate among our current generation and the utter absence of a truly biblical worldview among Christian young people is that many Christian parents have simply neglected this essential biblical command. Most have assumed that someone else more educated or more spiritual or more efficient would teach their children about God. But this negligence is having a negative effect on our children, and it must stop. It is time to return to a biblical model that faithful Christians in times past have embraced, and that practice is home-centered instruction.

Why Family Worship? Historical Precedent

A brief survey of Christian history reveals that something like family worship is encouraged and practiced sporadically throughout the life of the church, especially at times when Christianity is thriving at making genuine disciples of Christ. There is no extended discussion of family worship in the years immediately following the first-century church. But a few Christian writers made passing comments about the priority of the home for Christian instruction. One example comes from the second-century *Shepherd of Hermas*. After contending that God earnestly desires the conversion of the reader's family, the speaker provides an earnest appeal:

> Do not be negligent, but be of good courage and strengthen your family. For as a smith shapes the object he desires by striking it with a hammer, so also a righteous word spoken daily overcomes all wickedness. Do not cease then to admonish your children, for

> I know that if they repent with their whole hearts, their names will be inscribed with those of the saints in the book of life.[5]

Vigilance and hopefulness are to characterize parents' approach to children's faith, a principle repeated in other simple and straightforward exhortations among early writers. The *Didache* says, "Do not neglect your responsibility to your son or daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them to revere God (4.9)." Polycarp instructs the Philippians to "educate their children in the fear of God" (4.2), and *1 Clement* exhorts, "Let us rear our young in the fear of God … Let our children have a Christian training" (21.6–8).[6] In those years immediately following the first century, the limited Christian material on the family repeats a simple exhortation to daily instruct children in the word of God, and this task is assigned to parents.

The later Church Fathers continue to emphasize religion in the home. In the process of making the case for Christian marriage, Tertullian extols the virtues of sharing faith together:

> Together they [husband and wife] pray, together prostrate themselves, together perform their fasts; mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining. Equally (are they) both (found) in the Church of God; equally at the banquet of God; equally in straits, in persecutions, in refreshments … Between the two echo psalms and hymns; and they mutually challenge each other which shall better chant to their Lord. Such things when Christ sees and hears, He joys.[7]

Tertullian's emphasis on a unified faith in marriage is based on the conviction that this godly marriage will produce true spiritual oneness and a context in which faith will be transmitted to the next generation.

John Chrysostom, the greatest preacher of the ancient Eastern church, devoted an entire treatise to helping Christian parents personally shape their

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[5] Shepherd of Hermas, *Visions* I.3.1-2, quoted in Everett Ferguson, *Inheriting Wisdom: Readings for Today from Ancient Christian Writers* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 2004), 13.

[6] Quotes from the *Early Christian Fathers*, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

[7] Tertullian, *To My Wife*, 2.8 (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 4:48).

children's character and faith. To him, Christian parents are just like artists entrusted with precious material. He writes,

> To each of you fathers and mothers I say, just as we see artists fashioning their paintings and statues with great precision, so we must care for these wondrous statues of ours. Painters when they have set the canvas on the easel paint on it day by day to accomplish their purpose. Sculptors, too, working in marble, proceed in a similar manner; they remove what is superfluous and add what is lacking. Even so must you proceed. Like the creators of statues do you give all your leisure to fashioning these wondrous statues for God. And, as you remove what is superfluous and add what is lacking, inspect them day by day, to see what good qualities nature has supplied so that you will increase them, and what faults so that you will eradicate them. And, first of all, take the greatest care to banish licentious speech; for love of this above all frets the souls of the young. Before he is of an age to try it, teach thy son to be sober and vigilant and to shorten sleep for the sake of prayer, and with every word and deed to set upon himself the seal of the faith.[8]

Chrysostom's emphasis is that parents make a constant and "day by day" effort to shape their children's faith, training them to value prayer above sleep and eventually guiding them toward the waters of baptism, the "seal of the faith." In other places in the document, he extols the value of Christian singing: "Let their words be giving thanks, solemn hymns; let their discourse ever be about God, about heavenly philosophy." Above all, he urges parents to personally teach their children the stories of the Bible at home around the dinner table, particularly stories that shape the moral character.[9]

In two other writings, Chrysostom exhorts families to make Christ the center of the home, to be "little churches" where God's name is praised. Commenting on Ephesians 5:22, he makes the simple point that godly leadership in the home will result in godly leadership in the church, for "If we administer our households in this way, then we will be fit for leadership of the church, for

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[8] John Chrysostom, *An Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,* Section 22, translated by Max L. W. Laistner in *Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1951), 9.

[9] John Chrysostom, *Address*, section 28 (11); the section on the importance of teaching the Bible stories is found in sections 39–47 (13–16).

the household is a little church."[10] In a homily on Genesis 1:2, Chrysostom exhorts,

> And let the husband repeat [at home] the words said here in church. Let the wife hear; let the children learn; let the servants be taught; And let your household become a church. Do this in order that the devil may be banished and that evil demon—the enemy of our salvation—may run away. The grace of the Holy Spirit will rest there at once, and all peace and harmony will surround the residents.[11]

Chrysostom's vision of the home as a "little church" speaks volumes; the home is a place where the values, teachings, and reality of the body of Christ is lived out. Like the church—the house of God—the home is to be a place of worship, instruction, and peace.

This evidence of religion in the home among the ancient church is enough to show that Christians in the early centuries continued the biblical mandate of passing along faith in the home and understood that the home was the key. While the phrase "family worship" is not coined until much later, the idea is certainly there.

As the church entered the Middle Ages, several developments unfortunately led away from an emphasis on family worship. The rise of a formal and professionalized and celibate priesthood, the growth of Christendom and its accompanying "dumbing down" of Christian commitment, and the formation of monastic orders for the truly religious all conspired against making family worship a priority for Christians.

The Protestant Reformation of the early sixteenth century sought to reform Christianity from the abuses and stifling traditions of the medieval era. This reform movement was characterized by a renewed focus on salvation by grace alone through faith, an emphasis on Christ, a rejection of burdensome traditions, and return to Scripture as the sole authority for doctrine and life. Despite the diversity amongst the reformers, they all agreed that their

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[10] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 20.1, 6, on Eph 5:22ff., cited in Ferguson, *Inheriting Wisdom*, 11–12.

[11] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 2.4 [13], on Gen 1:2, cited in Ferguson, *Inheriting Wisdom*, 11–12.

initiatives must be accompanied with renewed homes permeated by genuine faith, biblical literacy, prayer, and worship.

One of the ways that the reformers sought to train the average Christian was through systematic teaching booklets known as "catechisms." In the early church, those receiving instruction in the faith prior to baptism were called catechumens. Some booklets for instruction of Christians existed in the Middle Ages, but the Reformation's insistence on biblical literacy produced a flood of manuals of Christian instruction, or catechisms, in the sixteenth century.

Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* (1529) was written to provide a tool for instructing children in the faith *in* the home by the head of the household. It is comprised of six sections that seek to ground the family in the foundational teachings of evangelical Christianity in a topical format. Each section begins with indicating the topic, followed by the phrase, "The simple way a father should present it to his household." It is also important to note that an appendix to the *Small Catechism* is a short guide to how a father can teach his family the faith. Essentially it involves instruction on prayer and singing in the morning, evening, and at mealtimes.[12]

Luther's insistence on the home as a place of worship and instruction is well-known and appears in other places among his writings. One of his famous statements comes in a sermon on Abraham where he, like Chrysostom before him, likens the home to a church and school:

> Abraham had in his tent a house of God and a church, just as today any godly and pious head of a household instructs his children … in godliness. Therefore, such a house is actually a school and church, and the head of the household is a bishop and priest in his house.[13]

For Luther, the critical role of the home and the head of the household for the advancement of evangelical faith was obvious. In addition to straightforward instruction, reformers also viewed singing as a powerful and effective way to

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[12] The *Small Catechism* is available in many English translations. The topic headings for the catechism are the Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Confession, and Communion. For a modern translation, see http://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-boc.html#sc.

[13] *Lectures on Genesis*, in *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955): vol. 4: 384.

establish the evangelical message in the minds and hearts of Christians. Luther's contribution to Christian hymns is significant, and he specifically sought to encourage singing in every part of life, including the home, as an effective way of communicating the gospel to the people. Luther understood that the home was essential for passing along the faith and sought to encourage family worship in evangelical congregations.

Luther's contribution was important, but others even more vigorously called for family worship as a priority—and obligation—of the Christian home. John Calvin, the major reformer of Geneva, influenced millions of Protestants through his ministry and writings, and influenced what is known as the "Reformed tradition." Echoing Chrysostom's phrase, Calvin repeatedly refers to the home as a church where Christ was to be central and instruction in the word a priority. Commenting on the conversion of an entire household in Acts 16, he writes,

> Anyone, who is included among the children of God, who is entrusted to exercise authority over others … is unworthy if he does not take care to give a place to Christ. Therefore, let each of the faithful strive to organize his household as an image of the church. All the godly ought to exert themselves so that every kind of superstition is prohibited in their homes. They are not to have godless families but retain them in the fear of the Lord.[14]

This emphasis placed on the home typifies the tradition that follows in Calvin's footsteps. The importance of family worship among sixteenth-century reformers comes together in a formal capacity in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), a document that has had a profound impact on churches in the Reformed tradition ever since. This confession was adopted by Puritan leaders in England in the middle of a war with the king of England over issues of religious freedom, democracy, and civil rights. This comprehensive and historic guide for Reformed faith in England insists that, "God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself."[15]

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[14] Cited in William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin. A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 211–12.

[15] Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 21, Section 6, available at http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/WCFScriptureProofs.pdf.

Around the same time, Scottish churches produced a short document entitled, *The Directory for Family Worship*, which sought to encourage and guide worship in homes across their nation for the advancement of the Christian faith. In its words,

> It is expedient and necessary that secret worship of each person alone, and private worship of families, be pressed and set up; that, with national reformation, the profession and power of godliness, both personal and domestick (*sic*), be advanced.[16]

The English Puritans and other Reformed Christians brought this conviction and practice of family worship with them to America. Many Puritan leaders such as Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, and others held up family worship as a normal and essential part of the Christian life.[17] One of the most eloquent expressions of this conviction about family worship comes from Samuel Davies, Puritan preacher and president of Princeton:

> If you love your children; if you would bring down the blessing of heaven upon your families; if you would have your children make their houses the receptacles of religion when they set up in life for themselves; if you would have religion survive in this place, and be conveyed from age to age; if you would deliver your own souls—I beseech, I entreat, I charge you to begin and continue the worship of God in your families from this day to the close of your lives.… Consider family religion not merely as a duty imposed by authority, but as your greatest privilege granted by divine grace.[18]

Some took this requirement so seriously that they refused communion to men who failed to practice regular family worship in their homes. While few would take such an extreme view today, it illustrates how normal and expected family worship was in previous generations, and this emphasis impacted every corner of American Christianity of the colonial period and early republic.

The nineteenth-century American Restoration Movement, led by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott, was greatly impacted by Reformed patterns of worship and piety. Most

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[16] Available at http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_standards/index.html?mainframe=/documents/wcf_standards/p417-direct_fam_worship.html.

[17] For a great survey of American Puritans and their emphasis on family worship, see Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 33–38.

[18] Cited in Whitney, *Family Worship*, 36.

importantly, Alexander Campbell was an ardent proponent and practitioner of regular family worship. Robert Richardson, Campbell's close friend and biographer, describes its place in the Campbell family routine. He writes,

> It was the evening that was always specially devoted to social and religious improvement. At an early hour the entire household, domestics included, assembled in the spacious parlor, each one having hymns or some Scripture lessons to recite. After these were heard, often with pertinent and encouraging remarks from Mr. Campbell, the Scriptures were read in regular sequence, with questions to those present as to the previous connection or the scope of the chapter. These being briefly considered, he would call upon Mrs. Campbell [Selina], who had a good voice, to lead in singing a psalm or spiritual song, in which he himself would heartily join, and then kneeling down would most reverently and earnestly present before the throne of grace their united thanksgivings and petitions for divine guardianship and guidance.[19]

Richardson goes on to emphasize that Campbell was no mere formalist when it came to religion in the home but worked to make sure that family worship did not become stale or dull. He continues:

> Such was the customary order, but the details were often varied to suit the occasion. Family worship was not allowed to become a mere routine. He knew well how to maintain its interest, by making it a means of real instruction and enjoyment; and by encouraging familiar inquiry on the part of the young, he managed to bring forward and to impress indelibly the most charming practical lessons from the sacred writing, having always something novel and agreeable to impart zest and interest to exercises which in many cases are apt to become monotonous by frequent repetition. In these praiseworthy endeavors to bring up children in the nurture of the Lord, much was due also to the judicious arrangements and hearty co-operation of Mrs. Campbell, who like her predecessor, made all things subservient to the desired end, and in her husband's absence herself officiated at the family altar when there happened to be no brother present accustomed to the duty.[20]

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[19] Robert Richardson, *The Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1870), 300–1.

[20] Richardson, *Memoirs*, 301.

Selina Campbell's recollections echo those of Richardson, as she emphasized the way that her late husband's personal love of God and his family were revealed at the "family circle." In her words,

> All of its members were lovingly assembled, morning and evening, to unite in worshipping God the Father, through his beloved Son, through and by the Holy Spirit. Nothing was permitted to interrupt the regularity of this sublime privilege. It was not attended to as a cold, formal duty, but it was made inspiring to all in attendance, by wife and children taking part, either in reading verses, turn about, in the precious book, or reciting passages of Scripture. Hymns were often recited, and sometimes chapters and part of chapters. Servants were all called to be present; singing with spirit and understanding, accompanied the family devotional exercises.[21]

At the height of his influence as president of Bethany College, Campbell published a treatise entitled *Family Culture, or Conversations in the Domestic Circle at the Carlton House*, a booklet designed to show families how to conduct Christian instruction in the home. In the preface, Campbell does not mince words about the importance of heartfelt and explicit household worship. Building on the meaning of the word *Bethel* (house of God), he writes:

> All Christian dwellings should be *Bethels*—houses consecrated to God, in which his word should be read, his praises sung, and his name invoked on all the days of the year.… Are not Christian householders as much bound by divine authority to bring up their families for the Lord—to nurture and train them for the royal family of heaven! And what son of God is there who has a heart, a tongue, and a Bible—children and servants under his care, and will not anoint his pillar, erect his altar, and worship the Lord constantly in his family? Thus teaching his children by his example how much he loves and delights in God, and with what pure affection and tender love he seeks their moral excellence and the eternal life.[22]

Campbell's influence was felt throughout the Restoration Movement, as thousands of visitors, students, colleagues, and friends joined him for worship

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[21] Selina Campbell, *Home Life and Reminiscences of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: J. Burns,1882), 18–19.

[22] Alexander Campbell, *Family Culture; or, Conversations in the Domestic Circle at the Carlton House* (London: Hall & Company, 1850), 16–17.

in his home. The practice among the Campbells appears to have impacted later leaders, such as J. W. McGarvey and Moses Lard, who, after his death, vividly and approvingly recalled Campbell's attention to family worship.[23] The Campbell emphasis on daily devotion to God in the home can be seen easily in other leaders of the movement. Exhortations to family devotions appear in the pages of Barton Stone's *Christian Messenger* and was a well-known part of the daily life and mentoring of Walter Scott. His personal piety and commitment to family worship matched that of Campbell. Scott influenced a generation of young preachers by incorporating them into his own family's worship time and taught them how to lead their own homes in that way.[24]

In sum, the testimony throughout Christian history is that the home has a critical and paramount role to play in passing along faith to the next generation. Beyond the massive practical value for ensuring multigenerational faithfulness, exalting God in worship and praise in the home has been understood as a duty. While it has not always born the title "family worship," the practice of regular training in the faith and focus on God in the household is a regular feature of faithful Christians of the past. It is not a coincidence that family worship seems to shine most brightly when revival and reformation and restoration are occurring.

Conclusion

Much more could be said about the blessings and effectiveness of family worship, but for now, it is simply helpful to know that family worship rests on a solid biblical foundation and a proven historical precedent. Family worship may not be the silver bullet that will solve all the problems of discipling children or provide absolute guarantees of multi-generational faithfulness, but it is pretty close. Embedded within it are all the classic practices essential for spiritual formation: it requires parental modeling of faith that we know is the best

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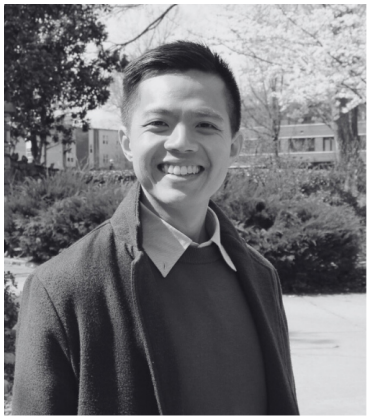
[23] See J. W. McGarvey, *The Autobiography of J. W. McGarvey* (Lexington: College of the Bible, 1960), 16; Moses Lard, "Alexander Campbell," *Lard's Quarterly* (April 1866): 265.

[24] For example, see a short excerpt from the *Christian Register* entitled "Family Prayer" that Stone reprinted in his own journal. It is a scathing critique of those who fail to implement family prayer in their homes. *Christian Messenger* 4 (1830): 189–90. For Scott, see Dwight E. Stevenson, *Walter Scott: Voice of the Golden Oracle. A Biography* (Joplin: College Press, 1946), 137–43, whose chapter on the Family Circle describes family worship and how Scott mentored young ministers in his home.

predictor of multigenerational faithfulness, it breaks down the wall between one's religious life and home life, and it gives worship of God a prominent place in the rhythm of the family. If family worship were to become a standard practice of Christian homes, in a short time we would witness a sea change in the depth, commitment, and faithfulness of the next generation. May God grant us a revival of this practice in churches today.

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