

Family Worship for the New Year

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A New Year – New Resolutions. With each new year comes new resolutions for many, often focused on physical or mental health and wellness. Many decide it's time to eat less and exercise more. Perhaps you have been reflecting on years past and contemplating what this new year holds in store for you and your family. Hopefully, even beyond your physical wellness, you have considered the state of your spiritual wellness.



The Great Shema. Deut. 6:4 begins the passage known as the great Shema named from the Hebrew imperative translated as “hear!”. This passage also contains what is called the greatest commandment. Moses proclaimed,
“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.”

This command to love and obey also came with the command to teach God’s Word to our children. Moses continues, “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.”

Everyday Disciples. God does not want simply Sabbath disciples. His worship is to impact every aspect of our lives. The Apostle Paul declared, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31), and “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Based on Moses’ instruction, we obey the LORD’s command by teaching and talking. This is both worship and discipleship. We are commanded as parents to disciple our children in the Word of the LORD. This command also includes the entire family unit, whether one has children or not. These are the things we should be talking about with everyone who enters our threshold and those we encounter in the public square. The Psalmist said, “I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame” (Ps. 119:46). God’s people are called to disciple others and be discipled; when we encounter unbelievers, it is called evangelism.

Along with our faithful attendance in church on the Lord’s Day, and other church activities throughout the week, the best way to remain faithful to God’s commands to teach and talk His Word is to have regular family worship throughout the week in our homes. Family worship necessarily includes the reading of Scripture aloud with the family along with prayer, and may include other activities such as singing, Scripture memory and recitation, and reading from a devotional source such as the catechism, confessions, or commentaries.

J. W. Alexander (1804-1859), eldest son of Archibald Alexander the first professor of Princeton Theological Seminary wrote, “Time was, when there were but two human beings upon earth; and we may feel assured that they offered adoration in common. This was the Family Worship of Paradise.” This pattern of family worship continued with the examples of the patriarchs throughout the Old Testament by Noah, Job, Abraham and others. It was additionally demonstrated in the New Testament by faithful Christians such as Cornelius and Aquila and Priscilla.



The Puritans. The Reformers emphasized Christian training in the household and called parents to disciple their children. The Puritans further cultivated this Reformation vision and energized consistent family worship and discipleship. Their expectation was that every household was to be “a household of faith; every father a priest in his own family.” Of the family, one Puritan referred to it as “the seminary of church and state and if children be not well principled there, all miscarrieth.” It is in our homes where fathers are called to disciple their children in the faith and to teach them the commandments of the LORD. In Puritan Scotland, any “Head of the Family” who neglected family worship could face church discipline. During pastoral visits, ministers were to determine, “Whether God be worshipped in the family, by prayers, praises, and reading of the Scriptures? Concerning the behavior of servants towards God and towards man; if they attend family and public worship? If there be catechizing in the family?”

Conclusion. At the close of the OT, Mal. 4:4 takes the reader back to Deut. 6, then in Mal.4:6 the LORD concludes the OT with the promise that “he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.” As families meet together for worship, they can begin to taste the ultimate fulfillment of that promise.

Now is the perfect time to reflect on how you have followed through on teaching and talking God’s Word in your home, and consider ways to strengthen old habits and build new ones in discipling your family. If you haven’t already, set that habit of regularly scheduled family worship. Pray with your children as you tuck them in bed, and be always on the lookout for other teachable moments God gives you with your children or spouse. Another area in which you may consider growth is Scripture and songs with mealtime prayer. May you begin, or reenergize, your family worship at the start of this new year.

A newly consolidated family resource titled “Scripture and Songs for Mealtime Prayers” can be found on the WRS Resources Publications webpage under Specialized Topics at www.wrs.edu/pub.html

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