

The Significance of Family Worship for Children

Douglas Sepang
Universitas Klabat
dsepang@unklab.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Family worship is one part that cannot be separated from Christian families. It is the time when families gather together despite their busy schedules to discuss the word of God. Family worship allows parents and children to express their views and opinions on the reading. It also provides the chance to forgive each other. However, family worship seems to give less attention to children. Instead of involving them more in the discussion, children are expected to sit and listen. Therefore, this literature review explores the significance of family worship and its benefits. It especially focuses on ideas to make family worship more fun and enjoyable for children to participate. This literature review gathers relevant literature through Google Scholar and EBSCO. Based on the reviewed literature, it was found that family worship offers various benefits for the family, particularly for children, if done properly. Giving children the opportunity to lead the worship, having themes for worship discussion, and including activities like quizzes and question and answers are some of the things that parents can do to involve children in family worship.

Keywords: Family worship, Children, Christian family

INTRODUCTION

Family worship is a vital part of Christian lives because it involves the whole family participating in morning and evening worship. Whitney (2016) gave two reasons why Christian families should never miss family worship. First, no matter how Christ-centered, faithful, and diligent the family is in studying the Bible, it is not enough to make all family members express the same belief. Second, going to church every Wednesday night and Sabbath cannot guarantee that young children have a high interest in worshipping God or in staying faithful to God once they leave home.

Most Christian families put a lot of time and effort into teaching young children about Christian values, religious beliefs, and spiritual matters; however, there are also families who rely and depend fully on the church to teach children about this (Whitney, 2016). Whatever it is, we can never forget that worship has the power to establish children's “ethical lives” (Clifton-Soderstrom & Bjorlin, 2014, p. 44).

Family worship has been practiced since long ago in the Bible by the Israelite families. The Bible recorded children's participation in spiritual activities. Deut 16 states that children used to always participate in *Shavuot*, or the festival of weeks, and *sukkot*, or the festival of booths (Clifton-Soderstrom & Bjorlin, 2014). These festivals remind the Israelites of God's magnificent miracles to them, such as the giving of the Torah, the harvest of the first fruit, the

going out of Egypt, the journey to the promised land, the commandments, and God’s character (Clifton-Soderstrom & Bjorlin, 2014).

Family worship is paramount for the whole family, especially for children. Whitney (2016) emphasized that “parents should teach the things of God to their children at every opportunity ... they should do so with their children, individually and collectively” (p. 19). Therefore, all members of the family must worship together, including small children, regardless of the rushed morning hours and weariness in the evening.

Family worship is an important element that is needed to begin and end a day. It is a place where Christian family surrenders their lives, plans, and all family members to the protection and blessings of God for the day. Family worship is supposed to be a moment where the family gladly sings praises to God, earnestly prays to God, shares problems and offers solutions, and instructs each other. It is where babies and toddlers, young children and teens, and adults and grandparents sit together at a specific and regular time every morning and evening with joy and thanksgiving.

However, lately, families have become too busy for family worship. Many seem to be always in a rush every morning and exhausted every evening. Children seem to have lost interest in family worship because of boring, monotonous, long, and no variations in the programs as well as too much focus on adults and too little on children. Instead of a need and a moment of joy and celebrations, family worship only appears to be part of meaningless daily routines.

Therefore, this literature review discusses the importance of family worship and what benefits family worship can offer. This paper also explores ideas and suggestions on how to make family worship more interesting and creative for young children without losing the true essence of worship. Most importantly, this literature review aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is family worship and why is it crucial?
2. What are the benefits of daily family worship?
3. How to involve children and make them interested in family worship?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Worship before the Fall

Adam and Eve. God created Adam and Eve as one family unit with God as their spiritual parent. During their time in Eden, God directly communicated with, gave instructions to, and spent time in fellowship with Adam and Eve. At that time, the daily lives of Adam and Eve completely reflected God’s love. The Garden of Eden was the first place for humans to live and have face-to-face fellowship with God who created them. Adam and Eve always started their days by praising God as early as they woke up. They sang, gave thanks, glorified, and expressed their love to their Creator (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1985). The plants, flowers, trees, animals, water, and the singing of the birds are their lessons (White, 1890). There was nothing more that could explain God’s love toward humans than the wonders of creation (White, 1890).

Adam and Eve enjoyed listening to the singing of the angels. They listened to God as He taught them about plants and the universe, creation, and all things that they wished to learn (White, 1890; Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986). Unlike us today, Adam and Eve listened to God's instructions and the secrets of “happy living” face-to-face during worship (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986, p. 59). White (1890) stated that God and the angels came to visit Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and have communion together.

After eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and falling into sin, Adam and Eve can no longer see the presence of the angels and God. Regardless of this condition, they never failed to hold their morning and evening altar “at the gates of Eden” (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986, p. 60). The altar had replaced face-to-face fellowship with God. Since the fall, there were no more direct instructions and teachings from God to Adam and Eve. There were only altars with slain lambs as sacrificial offerings to God. The building of the altar was the family worship after the fall.

Family Worship after the Fall

There are several examples in the Bible about families and their faithfulness in building the daily family altar. The altar was a place where family laid their burdens and sins, gave praises and thanksgivings to God, asked something from God, and surrendered their plans and lives into God's hands. The altar was a tool to communicate with God and to ask for God's protection over the family. The Bible noted that when Satan was asking God to allow him to tempt Job, Satan knew that Job always built an altar to God every morning and evening (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986). Satan knew that the altar offered impenetrable protection for Job and his family (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986).

Other examples were Noah and Abraham. After the great flood, Noah and his family immediately built an altar to God (Gen. 8:20). Abraham always built an altar to God whenever he arrived at a place (Gen. 12:7, 8; Gen. 13:4). If the altar was crucial then, it must be more crucial now, considering the time and conditions of the world that we are living in today. The family altar that is built diligently every morning and evening will provide shelter and protection for the whole family (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986).

Abraham. As one who has never failed to build a family altar, Abraham was known as the “altar builder” (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1985, p. 22). When Isaac and Abraham went to mount Moriah to give offerings to God, Isaac asked his father about the lamb they were going to offer (Gen 22:6, 7). Isaac's question emphasized that he was aware and familiar with his role in their family worship and in presenting offerings on the altar that Abraham led. “Isaac knew when an element of the worship of God was missing because Abraham must have frequently led his family in the worship of God (Whitney, 2016, p. 18). Isaac must have had a role in helping Abraham to prepare the altar; from piling up wood, choosing a blameless lamb, turning on the fire, and all other necessary preparations (Whitney, 2016).

Abraham knew very well whom he served and praised. He never once failed to build an altar to God to praise and worship Him (Gen 18:17-19). He knew how God talked, instructed, made a promise, and revealed miracles (Gen 22; Heb 11:17-19). Abraham was faithful in reminding his children to obey God (Whitney, 2016). Whenever there was an opportunity, Abraham remembered to teach his family about God (Whitney, 2016). Each of his

family members had a role in family worship, and Abraham led everyone to properly worship God. This is why Abraham is the example of true family worship (Whitney, 2016).

Joshua. Joshua was well known for His faithfulness to God (Josh. 14:15). He was always sure that God was with them during their time in the desert and remained faithful to God until the end of his years (Whitney, 2016).

Jesus. Throughout His childhood, Jesus, together with His parents, always started the day with family worship (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1985). After worship, Jesus would go and help His mother around the house and then His father in the shop (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1985). Youngberg and Youngberg (1985) further emphasized:

The purpose of the ‘family altar’ is first and foremost to adore our Lord ... to renew the family covenant with God and one another ... to ... claim the blood of the lamb of God for forgiveness, protection, and victory ... to instruct ... and ... transmit our religious heritage and family values from generation to generation ... to celebrate familiness [sic] ... or to commemorate events. (pp. 26-27)

Until the end of His time, Jesus had never once failed to worship God. He always had His personal time with God early in the morning before the sun rose (Mark 1:35; Matt 14:23; Luke 5:16). He always consulted with God about His plans, fears, and actions (Matt 26:39; Luke 6:12-13). There had never been a time when Jesus neglected prayer and worship.

It can be seen from the examples above that morning and evening worship is the family altar. This is similar to the altar where Israelites offered their burnt offerings to God in the morning and evening. The altar offers protection and blessing to every family member. The altar also offers victory over sin. Family worship is a sacrifice, celebration, Biblical-based program, communication with God, the preserving of the covenant with God, an invitation for angels to come and have fellowship together with the family, a source of strength, witness, a way to feel God’s presence, remembrance of whom to worship and serve, place of family gathering, and a time to freely share with each other (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986).

Therefore, there can be no excuse for not having morning and evening worship. The time to have family worship should be carefully prepared and specifically set aside so worship will not be conducted in such a hurry (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1985). Parents should also make sure that “however pressing your business, do not fail to gather your family around God’s altar. Ask for the guardianship of holy angels in your home. Remember that your dear ones are exposed to temptations” (White, 1905, p. 393).

Elements of Family Worship

Most worship programs today consist of three elements: *Reading and listening to God’s words, praying, and singing* (Whitney, 2016). The first element, *Read and Listen to God’s words*, refers to reading the word of God together as a family. Adults can read a whole passage of the Bible, while children may start from reading short stories or short Bible passages, then later, gradually learn to read longer passages. Reading the Bible should be “enthusiastically and interpretively ... to the best of your ability” (Whitney, 2016, p. 45). Whitney further suggested that when there is enough time, it would be best to add a catechize element. Catechize is “a question-and-answer approach to teaching biblical doctrine” (p. 48). Through catechism, children can learn more about Bible stories and find out the meanings of difficult verses, words,

and phrases. The role of parents is vital here because without their help, children might be more likely to guess the meanings and end up with a wrong interpretation of Bible verses.

The second element, *Pray*, refers to praying together as a family, whether it is led by a member of the family or all family members take turns leading the prayer. Family prayer must be done after Bible reading and should contain at least one prayer request and one lesson that family has read or discussed (Whitney, 2016). Family prayer can also be modified so it will not appear monotonous but enjoyable, fun, and creative.

The last element, *Sing*, refers to singing the family's favorite songs. Singing can be creative; such as when accompanied by music or recordings (Whitney, 2016). Family can also sing with different tones. For example, the father may sing bass, the mother may sing tenor, the sister may sing alto, and the brother may sing soprano. These combinations add creativity to the worship and make it more fun and enjoyable for children.

METHODS

This is a literature review study on the topic of family worship and its significance for children. To ensure the comprehensiveness of this literature review, research questions were formulated to guide the writing process. The researcher used Google Scholar and EBSCO to gather relevant literature on the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What is Family Worship and Why is it Crucial?

Definition of Family Worship

There are several definitions of family worship. The word worship, according to HarperCollins dictionary (2006) refers to giving respect, love, and admiration to someone or something. In other words, if we worship God, it means that we respect, love, and admire God through our prayers, singing, and reading the words of God. Youngberg and Youngberg (1986) defined worship as

An adoration time when prayer and supplication go heavenward, homage is paid ... a sacrifice of time and self is given, God is honored and exalted ... praise and thanksgiving in reverence and humility ... a time of celebration, a time to return to God for His Son who gave hope of eternal life through His death ... through singing, praying, reading God's word and reflecting on it ... acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Savior, recognizing Him as real, and honoring Him. (p. 70)

Therefore, family worship is a time purposefully set aside as a quality time between the family and God. It is a special time when the family praises and expresses love to God. It is a time when the family sits together and discusses God's words. It is also a time when parents teach and instruct their children to help them grow their faith and character.

Types of Family Worship

According to Armstrong (1988), there are two types of family worship: Traditional and modern. Some people prefer traditional worship because they feel that it is more meaningful compared to modern worship. However, Armstrong explained that the difference between the two types only lies in the emphasis of two dimensions of God: Transcendence and immanence.

There are a few major differences between the traditional transcendence dimension and the modern immanence dimension. First, traditional worship has both dimensions but puts more emphasis on transcendence while modern worship purely emphasizes immanence. Second, traditional worship avoids or ignores the cultural environment of the congregation, while modern worship embraces it and encourages the congregations to be close to one another as friends and through “face-to-face contact” (Armstrong, 1988, p. 12). Third, traditional worship tends to “center on words” and highlights listening (Armstrong, 1988, p. 16). It means that it would be difficult for babies, toddlers, and small children to be in church since children this age are more likely to feel bored and avoid sitting too much.

Last, the transcendence dimension of traditional worship emphasizes seeking God “to relate to Him as completely separate being” (Armstrong, 1988, p. 11). This happens when congregations listen to the sermon or during prayer. On the other hand, the immanence dimension of modern worship emphasizes seeking God “to relate to Him through the medium of someone or something ... acting together as a corporate body” (Armstrong, 1988, p. 11). This happens when the congregation sings or reads the responsive reading together. Despite these differences, worship needs both types and dimensions depending on the time and place of worship.

Research Question 2: What are the Benefits of Daily Family Worship?

Benefits of Family Worship

Family worship offers many benefits. Besides building the family’s togetherness, nurturing spiritual lives, and encouraging ministry among family members, family worship also enhances and improves family quality time (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986). Family worship is useful for teaching and training children to follow the rules, take part in spiritual activities and practices, and build relationships with God’s people (Clifton-Soderstrom & Bjorlin, 2014). It provides chances to talk to God and to ask God for protection over the whole family as well as from evil power that endangers the spiritual state of the family (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1985). Thus, every morning and evening, parents have to present their lives and their children’s lives on the altar to ask for protection through sincere prayer and persisting faith (White, 1868).

Family should replace TV-watching, gadget-using, and meaningless leisure time to rebuild the family altar and “claim ... the blood of Christ” so that “ministering angels” can be sent to guard the family and children (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1985, p. 36). Every morning, family members should surrender their lives and plans for the day to God, as well as their duties and responsibilities. Every evening, the family should give thanks for what God has done for the day and ask God for forgiveness for the sins or mistakes that any of the

family members might have made. At this time, all family members should be “free of all guilt” and “go peacefully” to bed (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1985, p. 60).

Nevertheless, Youngberg and Youngberg (1986) warned families to be aware because worship is not a life-saving tool or a means to escape tribulation. It is true that family worship builds spiritual standards and puts a protective shield upon family, but it is not “protection insurance” (p. 16). The main purpose of worship is to praise God, to fully admit to God, to fully rely on God, to give thanks to God, and to “enjoy the fellowship of communing” with all the family members and with God (p. 16). Worship is a reminder to set priorities with God at the center (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986).

Research Question 3: How to involve children and make them interested in family worship?

Participants of Family Worship

The word *family* in family worship talks about the total involvement of all members in the family. Family worship needs the willingness of all family members to apologize to and forgive each other and to be ready to renew the “family’s covenant with God” (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986, p. 71). In other words, family worship is a place of forgiveness between family members and between family and God.

An experiment done by Armstrong (1988) in a workshop showed that the most influential factors to affect the growth of one’s faith were “family ... human relationships,” church involvement, and Bible study, which appeared to have the lowest influence (p. 15). Thus, the main challenge of Christian families today is how to gain the interest of young children so that they want to participate in family worship and other spiritual activities. No matter how great this challenge and responsibility are, involving children in family worship can help them prepare for God’s work to share the gospel and be the light (White, 1909; White, 1913).

Therefore, parents must find ways to make worship an interesting activity. It should not be used to criticize, to point out mistakes or wrongdoings, and to discipline family members. Instead, it is a time to create “meaningful interaction” between family members and God (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986, p. 70). Family worship should not be dominated by reading-listening activity. It must be a fun, meaningful, and enjoyable experience for children (Armstrong, 1988). Hence, it should not be too wordy or too long so children will not feel “restless, bored, and turned off” (Armstrong, 1988, p. 16).

Children’s Involvement and Role in Family Worship

Since family worship is significant to help children grow in faith, children must be given as many chances as possible to participate in it. They can take part in offering prayer, presenting a special song, or reading something from the Bible. “Children are the loci of broad generational flourishing and are valued as the ones through whom Israel sustains memory, stories, ethos, and rituals;” therefore, “participating in cultic activities, such as worship, is a crucial way for children to learn” (Clifton-Soderstrom & Bjorlin, 2014, p. 17).

Children’s involvement in family worship is necessary because God always puts children in His plans for humans.

Clifton-Soderstrom and Bjorlin (2014) stated that teaching little children about worship must start with simple things like singing along with family even when they are not yet able to fully utter the lyrics or memorize the music. Other things that can be done is to teach children to have good relationships with their friends, neighbors, and church members. It is also necessary to keep reminding little children about what God has done to their family through story-telling, family heirlooms, or family heritage throughout generations so that the new generations will never forget about God’s goodness to their family (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986; White, 1911).

Considering the two dimensions of worship, the immanence dimension appears to be the most suitable method for children today since it focuses on the relationship between church members and congregation to help children grow in faith. This dimension suggests that children need “a loving, caring, close relationship with other Christians” because “faith ... is nurtured through close human relationships ... through caring, loving groups of people” (Armstrong, 1988, p. 15). When children feel that they are cared for and loved, they will develop the desire to learn about Jesus, attend Bible lessons, and accept help to grow their faith (Armstrong, 1988). Even though small children tend to cry or get bored in church, parents should not separate them from other church members. Isolating children from the “worshipping community” will result in children losing their chance to “tell us something unique about God and God’s kingdom” (Clifton-Soderstrom & Bjorlin, 2014, p. 44).

Whether it is during church service or family worship, parents have to be creative to help little children to be part of church members. They must be involved in the Sabbath programs from the beginning until the end, including listening to sermons (Armstrong, 1988). This is useful to build children’s sense of belonging and feeling of being accepted by adult church members (Armstrong, 1988).

Creative Ideas for Family Worship

There are many ways to make children interested in family worship. The first thing that parents can do is to model the correct way to worship (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986). It is not enough to tell children to sit, sing, and pray during worship and to enjoy the programs. Parents have to show that they enjoy every minute of family worship by singing wholeheartedly and expressing deeply through prayers.

The second thing that parents can do is to teach children about the importance of family worship (Deut 6:7). The word of God should be taught as often as possible. Based on Deut 6:7, “when thou liest down” can be interpreted as the end of the day when all family members return from daily responsibilities and duties (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986). “When thou risest up” can be interpreted as the beginning of the day when the family is just about to begin their work (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1986). This can be done through pictures, stories, or flannel board.

The third thing that parents can do is to know what material is suitable for their children. Jean Piaget introduced the four stages of a child's development (Armstrong, 1988):

1. 0-2 years period (*the sensorimotor stage*). Children are more likely to be on an emotional level. Thus, it is crucial to introduce worship as something fun and enjoyable for children to participate in.
2. 2-7 years period (*the pre-operative stage*). Children should feel that they are really *wanted*; therefore, it is crucial for parents to build a sense of belonging in children for worship. For example, let the children lead the worship program, give them a chance to offer special songs or present their favorite verse, allow them to choose songs, or let them choose what topic to discuss from the Bible or from their favorite books.
3. 7-11 years period (concrete operational stage). Children are more likely to be interested in things that they see, thus, it is crucial for parents to make sure that they have built their sense of belonging in worship. Explain the topic as clearly as possible and allow children to propose ideas and be involved in discussions.
4. 12-above years-period (the final stage). Children start to question and find answers to everything. It is crucial for parents to lead, guide, and help children with topics they find difficult to understand.

After knowing the stages of children's development, parents can use Youngberg and Youngberg's (1986, p. 61-62) eight ideas to teach or discuss the word of God with children in family worship:

1. The priesthood of all believers (based on 1 Pet 2:9). This idea lets the children take turns to lead the worship program.
2. Decide the theme of the worship program (based on Rom 12:1). This verse encourages family to offer a living sacrifice to the Lord-our own bodies.
3. Christ is our great High Priest (based on Heb 4:16; 7:25). This idea encourages family to ask God for His forgiveness and willingness to grant grace simply because He is the only one who can intercede for us.
4. The Three Angels' Messages. This topic should be included in the discussion during family worship.
5. Choose whom you shall serve (based on Rev 14:6-12). Since the beginning of the fall, there have always been two groups of people: One that serves God and one that serves “man-made ideas and practices.”
6. Try to win your family (based on 2 Tim. 1:5). If there is a family member that refuses to pass on the “Christian heritage,” other family members “should in

humility and love try to win that one, not relinquish the privilege of family worship.”

7. Rise up early (based on Mark 1:35). Jesus always woke up early before the sun rose to have His morning prayer in quiet places.
8. Follow Jesus’ example. Jesus is the teacher and we are the disciples. The disciples should follow the teacher’s direction.

Parents can also use Youngberg and Youngberg's (1985) 10 creative ideas that can be added to family worship:

1. Share problems and find solutions together.
2. Include poetry and Bible activities like discussion, quiz, question-answer, and memorizing verses.
3. Take turns to lead Bible study, explain difficult words, and choose favorite verses or passages.
4. Get to know the characters of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.
5. Tell Bible stories to children and let them be creative in asking questions about the stories.
6. Use media to teach and tell Bible stories. These can be anything from a laptop, iPad, or tab to a flannel board, hand puppet, busy books, and the list goes on.
7. Separate regular Bible verses from doctrinal and promises ones, then decide on a special time to discuss the doctrinal lesson together with the children.
8. Include kid’s songs in the worship. Take time to sing from the hymnal and from children song books.
9. Teach children to pray. Start with short and to-the-point prayer, then through time, gradually teach children to add more details to their prayer.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

Family worship is vital for Christian families, particularly for children. Involving children in family worship can help develop children’s sense of responsibility, bravery, and confidence. It also builds close and intimate relationships between family members. A regular time of worship helps children remember and be ready for worship time.

Worship should be fun and creative. In order to involve children in the worship, parents should choose enjoyable activities and use fun reading materials. There should not be a time when children just sit and listen; instead, they should be allowed to take part in discussing the word of God.



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Since this is a literature review, further research can include studies from more databases. A meta-analysis study can also be conducted to broaden the topic and make it more systematic. More themes can be added to broaden the context, such as including specific activities or discussions during family worship time.

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