

Simple Successful Family Worships

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7.NIV.

Family worship starts with you

The most important gift that you can give to your children is a passionate desire to love God, and the desire to obey him, follow him and serve him. We can't give gifts that don't belong to us in the first place. It's hard to pass on a vibrant relationship with God if you don't have your own living and growing relationship with a loving God.

Children are inspired by their role models of their parents' relationships with God, so it's very important that you nurture your own spiritual development through Bible study, prayer, scriptural meditation etc. Take the time to talk to your children about your own faith and relationship with God, in ways that they can understand. Pray for your family and your children, as well as for yourself. Let your children see and hear you praying for them. Look for answers to your prayers together, to help them develop their trust in God, but also remind them that God knows best, and sometimes the answers come in ways that we're not expecting, or even wanting.

Experience God's grace and forgiveness for yourself so that you can pass this on to your children. Grace is about God loving us no matter what we have done, just because we are His children. This is one of the most beautiful aspects of the Christian faith. Learn how to put God's grace into action in your family, by offering forgiveness and showing acceptance when your children make mistakes or accidentally break or spoil something. Deal with your children in the way God has patiently dealt with you. Think about how God has gently disciplined you before you consider how to discipline your child in a way that will bring them closer to God.

As you parent your children, show them God's amazing love by the way you manage them with caring gentleness. Read 1 Corinthians 13 and think about how that kind of love can make a difference to your parenting and make experiencing the love of God a central theme in your family worships.

Planning worships that make a difference.

Planning your worships is an important key to their success. It can help if you take some time each week to plan your worship schedule and activities. Use your children's lesson guides for the week, or use a children's devotional book to inspire you. Look out for Christian books that have ideas for activities, or children's worksheets, ready for you to use.

It is wonderful if you can manage an amazing multi-sensory, interactive worship each day of the week, but if you start off too ambitiously you could easily find it too much and give up. It may be best to start with a simple, sustainable schedule and then become more creative as you build up your experience and resources.

Scheduling your family worships

It can be hard to find a good time to have family worship in a busy family schedule. Some families manage to have interesting worships morning and evening. Some choose to have a family prayer together in the morning, and to have a longer worship in the evening when people are less rushed.

Mika's family has morning worship in the car on the way to school. She finds that she has most energy first thing in the morning, having worship in the car means that it doesn't distress her non-Christian husband. She uses Bible story and music CD's to accompany their worship time. She tries to make use of the things in the car, or along the road, or whatever the boys are interested in, and blends this into their drive-time worships. She talks to them about God's love for them, discusses their Bible Story lessons, and invites the boys to pray.

Gina only has her unchurched grandchildren once a week, so she plans a lively, activity based worship whenever she has them at her house.

Kylie and Jake found it works best for them to have a simple prayer in the morning, and then to spend time having short worships with each of the children at their different bed times. On Friday nights they plan a special worship together, trying to involve all the children in a lively spiritual activity, with the older ones helping the younger ones.

Abbie and Paul decided to try a short worship with Jessica in the evenings, just before her bedtime, because she was often still asleep when Paul left for work in the morning. They included a story from an attractive toddlers' picture Bible, a simple prayer and a song.

Praying in a different way

- Prayer is an essential part of family worship.
- Shape your prayers around the needs and understanding of your children. Keep prayers short, and vary the kinds of prayers you pray.
- Write or draw prayer requests on blank cards. Then share them out so that you can each pray for different things.
- Pray for different people on different days.
- Write 'thank you' prayers in thank you cards, prayer requests on stars to hang from a line in your worship area, or prayers for forgiveness on a blackboard so they can be wiped away, without trace.
- Have a bag of prayer reminders and let children choose one reminder each to guide their prayers – such as a toy car to pray for Dad's safety as he travels to work.
- Write prayers of praise with permanent markers on inflated balloons.
- For more ideas see '100 Creative Prayer Ideas for Kids and grownups too!' Karen Holford, Pacific Press, 2003.

Singing a new song

- Use the musical talent in your family to enhance your worship. Even a toddler can play bells or use a shaker.
- Make use of CDs and DVD's of worship songs.
- Remember that teens can be very shy about singing, even in their own family. Let them choose or create their own music, or listen to praise and worship songs instead of singing them out loud.
- Some teens might like to create their own mimes for worship songs, or to put together a power-point presentation of pictures to accompany a favourite song.

Bringing the Bible to life

- Another core ingredient of worship is exploring the Bible. There are probably more ways to do this than there are Bible stories! Think about the Bible stories from a few different angles and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- Think about the lessons from this Bible story that apply to your life, or your family. How can you help your children to discover these lessons for themselves?
- What principles in this story would help develop your children's moral reasoning and strengthen their character?
- Ask yourself what this story tells you about God's love, and then ask yourself how you can help your child experience this aspect of God's love.
- If you were each of the different characters in this story, what would you be thinking and feeling? How can you fill the characters in the story with life and energy as you explore the story with your children?
- If you were actually living at the time of the story what would you taste, smell, feel and hear? How could you bring these sensory experiences into your worship time?
- Are there any simple craft projects, household activities, or family activities that you could do together that would support the themes in this Bible story?
- For more ideas see '100 Quick and Easy Worship Ideas for Kids,' Karen Holford, Pacific Press, 2004.

Growing closer as a family

- A useful tip for building effective worships is to make sure that everyone leaves the family worship experience knowing without a doubt that God loves them and that everyone in their family loves them.
- Use worship time to help you to get to know each other better, to share your hopes, to hear others pray for your fears and concerns, and to show care and appreciation for each other. The great thing about most interactive and multi-sensory worships is that different family members often have to help each other, create things together, and have fun together, and all those activities help families to stay closely connected with each other.

But we're so busy!

- Try to keep a couple of almost instant worship ideas ready prepared.
- When you have your own devotional, choose a thought that you want to carry with you throughout your day. As you think about it, wonder and pray about how you could share this thought creatively with your own children for their worship.
- Share worship times with other families. Meet up for Sabbath worships and take it in turns to plan a special worship activity for your group.
- Start a family worship idea file at church, and encourage families to add their ideas to the file, or put them on your local church website for families to download and use.
- Encourage your church to start a worship library, so that you can borrow good books, games, videos, etc from the library to enhance your own family worships.
- Look at www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk – and click on 'Ideas' or go to www.lightlive.org

Foundation for great family worships

- As parents, make sure you are being filled spiritually through your own meaningful worship times.
- Keep the family worships simple. One idea is to use a devotional book suitable for the ages of your children, with short inspirational stories, during the week.
- Make Sabbath worship times as special as you can.
- Plan ahead for worships, and gather the materials you need well before time.

- Invest in the best spiritual material for your children! Buy good books from your local Christian Book Store, seek out and hire good Christian videos, buy interesting Bible games, and activity books.
- Keep worship times free of discipline and criticism. Make them positive experiences, which are fun, interesting, brief, happy and loving. This is what your children will remember the most.
- Use the worships to teach Bible stories, learn how to make good choices, follow God's guidance, develop a prayer relationship with God, learn about God's creation, memorize scriptures, experience the joy of serving others in practical ways, learn worshipful songs, and enjoy being a Christian.
- Remember that children learn in different ways, and make sure that your worships contain practical illustrations, crafts, memorable stories and physical activities.
- Use the everyday events that happen to you and your children to teach them about God. News stories can jumpstart great discussions with teenagers. Opportunities for spiritual teaching are all around you once you start to look, and these are often the best ways to help your children learn about God.

Useful things to keep in your worship box

- An attractive child's Bible with a modern translation
- A variety of age-appropriate Bible story books, Bible puzzle books
- Bible games and jigsaws
- Tapes and CDs of children's praise and worship music
- Christian videos and DVDs
- Safe scissors
- Adhesive tape, tacky glue and stick glue
- White and coloured paper and card
- Scrapbooks
- Marker pens, crayons, pencils and erasers
- String
- Brass fasteners
- Balloons
- Paper plates
- Christian stickers
- Musical instruments
- A soft scarf for a blindfold
- Fabric scraps

When you haven't had time to plan

- Choose a Bible theme and ask the children to go on a scavenger hunt to find objects that remind them of the Bible story, or theme. Or ask them to find five objects that remind them of God's love for them, etc.
- Choose a Bible story and create a scene from the story in your home. Create an Israelite tent under a table covered with sheets, use construction toys to design King David's palace, or use coloured card to create a miniature scene of the lost sheep in an old shoebox.
- Jesus is the light of the world. Go on a hunt to find as many different kinds of lights in your home as you can. When you find a light discuss what 'illumination' that kind of light can throw on our understanding of Jesus as the Light of the World, and our own responsibility to be lights in a dark world.
- Look through a magazine and tear out a few good adverts as examples. Use them to help inspire you as you design posters to advertise God, prayer, heaven, etc.
- Go through the alphabet and make a list of words that describe God's character, His actions, or are God's different names. See if you can find at least 100. (It's not very

hard!) Or use the alphabet and list things you want to thank God for. See if you can find another 100 things!

- Give each person a piece of paper and ask them to create something from a Bible story – by tearing, folding, crumpling etc. Then try and guess what each person has created. Discuss what each of the Bible stories represented tells us about God's love.
- Make simple stick puppets and act out a Bible story.
- Choose 1 or 2 chapters from Proverbs. Let each person choose one text and create a mime, picture, cartoon, mini story, poem etc to illustrate their text. See if the others can guess which text inspired their creation. What wisdom does this proverb offer your lives today?

Wondering Questions

These wondering questions were developed by Jerome Berryman for working with a storytelling concept called Godly Play. They are very useful to ask your children, your teens or yourself after exploring a Bible Story together.

- I wonder what you liked best about the story?
- I wonder what the most important thing was about the story?
- I wonder where you see yourself in the story?
- I wonder if there was anything in the story we could leave out and still have all the story we need?

If the story is a parable then you can also wonder what each part of the story really means, or who the characters represent.

In Godly Play sessions a Bible story is told using simple wooden figures and shapes. Then the wondering questions are explored, and then each person uses good quality craft materials to create something in response to the story – whatever they like – it is between them and God. It is often in this creative and reflective individual space that the Holy Spirit works.

(Adapted from an article Karen Holford wrote for 'Women of Spirit' magazine)