



5 Principles for Smooth Family Worship, for The Long Haul

by Jenni Burks

This post is part of the series Family Worship: A Woman's Perspective. Catch up on what you missed:

- [What is Family Worship?](#)
- [The Top 3 Reasons I Love Family Worship](#)

I originally planned today's post to be about what family worship looks like in our home and what resources we use. However, I recently had a couple great discussions with a friend about family worship, and as I reflected on those conversations and the topic in general, I realized that you might benefit from reading this post first.



Like most things, family worship doesn't always go the way we might imagine.

I literally laughed out loud when I saw the meme above in my Facebook feed. (I think the bottom photo is supposed to illustrate general chaos, but the stock photo they used shows the father goofing off, which really doesn't fit, but I think those of us with a sense of humor can get the intended punchline. Hopefully no one wants to hogtie me over this!)

Memes and jokes are born from real life experiences. I believe it's a blessing to be able to laugh about our struggles. I also believe it's critical to recognize real struggles and to use our laughter as a tool to acknowledge the problem.

Family worship can be a struggle, you guys.

It can be hard to sustain. It's not all roses and sweet blog posts describing the times it went smoothly.

And I'm afraid that some of us families set ourselves up for frustration right out of the gate.

How can families start family worship on the right foot?

How can families who've given up restart fresh and stick it out for the long haul?

How can family worship time be transformed from something the family sometimes (or usually!) dreads into something they often look forward to?

If I had to boil down the lessons my husband and I have learned while striving to persevere in family worship, I'd suggest five key principles that have made the biggest difference to us.

1) Have a plan

Know what you're going to do before you sit down together as a family.

Especially if you have little ones with short attention spans and emerging self-control.

Know basically *what* you'll do, *where* you'll do it, and *how* you'll do it.

Before you and/or your spouse call the family together, gather what you will need (or have a plan for who gathers what).

The smoothest times of worship in our home are those my husband opens as soon as the family is gathered and continues to direct by telling us what comes next.

He has the flexibility to change things up as he sees fit (see #3), but no matter what direction he takes or what he adds or subtracts from the routine, since he has a plan, he leads us smoothly through.

Have a plan to guide what scripture passage you'll read, have a plan for which songs you'll sing or how family members can make requests, and have a plan for what prayer time will look like.

If you want to incorporate catechisms, creeds, confessions, scripture memory, a book, prayer requests, or other things, then have a plan for when they fit in your routine.

As you plan...

2) Keep it simple

I'm a planner. I'm also a details person. My husband lavishes appreciation on me for the printouts and other things I make us. My husband and I have **SO MUCH** we want to teach and share with our children. We want to fit it **ALL** in.

He and I could talk Bible and theology

all

night

long.

So...sometimes we've made family worship kind of long and kind of complicated.

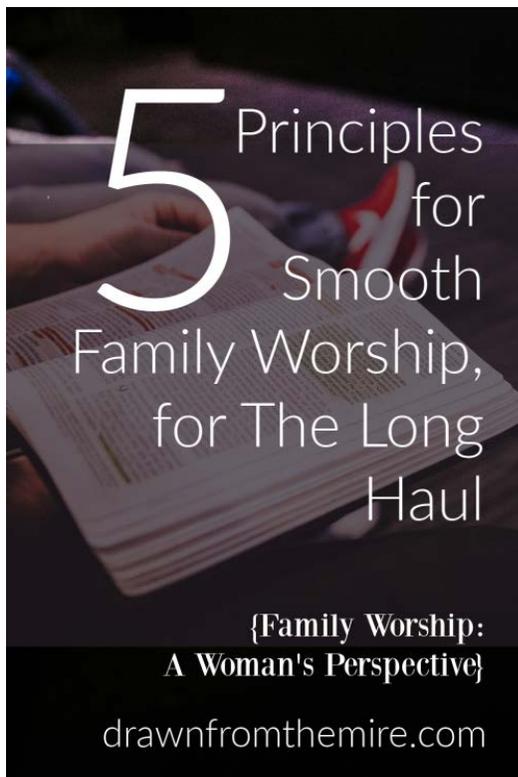
And you know what? Depending on your circumstances and the ages of your children you *can* do that. We've done it successfully at times.

The temptation when you do that, though, is to skip on the nights we don't have time or energy to do everything we planned.

It took us a while to realize it's absolutely ok to simply sing a hymn, read a few verses, and have one person lead in a relatively short prayer.

Make a plan that is simple enough you can follow it consistently.

If you're ambitious like we are, then make a back-up plan you can flex to on the nights you can't make the original work.



3) *Be flexible*

Be flexible about location: Worship in the room your family is most comfortable. Also be willing to worship elsewhere if the evening flows that way. For example, when cooking out for dinner or planning to enjoy an evening fire pit, worship outside instead of herding everyone back into the house.

Be flexible about attendance: It's good to require family members who at home during family worship to be present at family worship, and it's good to encourage everyone to prioritize worship and consider it when they schedule other things. However, it's counterproductive to skip worship because one or two family members can't make it on a particular night. It's also an unnecessary struggle to try to have worship at unpredictable times in an effort to "make sure everyone is there."

Be flexible about timing: While it's counterproductive to stress about everyone being there all the time, it's wise to consider what time is best for your household. My husband has worked 2nd and 3rd shifts. There have been times we gathered for worship in the morning, and times we gathered around 3:00 p.m. right after my husband woke up. Don't feel like you have to meet right after dinner (or any other particular time). And don't feel like once you start meeting at a given time you can never change it in the future.

Be flexible with your plan: Your plan with young children will look different than your plan with only teenagers. And that will be different from a plan for just you and your spouse. Sometimes a toddler is in total meltdown, or someone starts barfing, or some other stick gets stuck in the wheel. I mentioned a back-up plan because crazy days happen. We believe it's better to at least gather to do some sort of family worship than to do nothing at all. For example, on the evenings my husband suffers a migraine, we simply gather for a short time of prayer.

Family worship is not about checking boxes. It's about living out our devotion to God together.

Be flexible about your consistency: Strive to do family worship according to your plan, as consistently as possible. At the same time, if you miss a day, the world won't end. You won't lose your salvation. Open anger about missing a day (or giving up altogether because you missed a day) is far, ***far*** worse than actually missing that day. If you miss, just pick up again the next day you can.

Whatever happens, roll with it. Expect you'll have things to roll with. Which leads me to:

4) *Have appropriate expectations*

This might surprise some of you, but every member of your family has a sin nature. And as sanctified and mature as some of us might be (or perceive ourselves to be...) there are times we aren't, ahem, "our best selves."

Particularly if you worship in the evening, it's likely that someone will be tired, or not be feeling well, or have something pressing they need to work on and feel impatient or rushed.

Stress, pressure, fatigue, and discomfort reveal our weaknesses, struggles, and the sin in our hearts.

And it seems like the evenings are prime time for these.

Understand how long to reasonably expect a 2-year-old to sit still quietly. (And how long to expect they do so in the evening after skipping nap!)

Understand each child's reading level and, if you can, their learning styles and strengths and weaknesses. This isn't the time to ask your struggling reader to read a whole chapter while others look on impatiently.

Be considerate of and compassionate towards the rest of the family. Be ready to humbly repent and apologize when you're snippy instead.

Sometimes your family may have amazing discussions and your children may seem to glean beautiful truths immediately from that night's reading. Sometimes little ones may bring you to tears with their simple but profound prayers and faith. Sometimes they'll just seem bored. Sometimes you'll need to follow up with loving correction about respect when others are reading or speaking.

Don't expect perfection. From anyone involved.

Expect that you will need to strive to be faithful and to strive to glorify God through the process, by His grace.

5) Be committed

Commit to do family worship as consistently and as well as you are able, by God's grace.

As I mentioned in #3, if you miss, pick back up again as soon as you can.

Don't skip because you've just had conflict with another family member, or you've been unkind to one of your kids. Reconcile and run back to the Lord together!

Start. Start simple. And keep going. Keep tweaking. Keep trying. It's worth it.

In the weeks to come I plan to unpack many of the reasons my husband and I are convinced that family worship is worth our commitment, just as much as attendance and involvement at our church.

I'll also discuss some specific challenges families face in family worship, and suggest solutions.

Do you and your family practice family worship? Do you have another key tip I missed? I'd love to hear it!

This post originally appeared at drawnfromthemire.com