

Family Worship – For Families with Young Children  
*Grandparents, this means you, too!!!*  
by Karen Parker on 10/09/04

Sometimes it is hard in a busy home to add one more thing to our schedule, but we must realize the importance of Family Worship to our family of little children. One parenting book I've read put it this way – *"This offer is available for a limited time only!!!"* We have little ones for only a short time – we have to make the most of it. If we want more Timothy-type young people in the church, perhaps we need more Lois-and-Eunice-type grandparents and parents in our homes. (read II Tim 1:2-5)

I'd like share our family's testimony that made us realize the importance of family worship. About two years ago our family was struggling a bit in our corporate worship and we were sporadic in our family worship in our home. When we attended services at our branch we were constantly in and out of the sanctuary with our toddler, Kaetlyn. We were trying to train Kaetlyn to sit through the service while receiving spiritual food for ourselves. We were alternating which parent would take Kaetlyn and which would be free to participate in the service. And then the Lord added a baby to our family. We became very frustrated parents and wondered why we even attended services. My husband, Howard, was seeking the Lord in behalf of our family's need for worship when the Lord gave us instructions. Part of what the Lord commanded us was to set our home in order and to have regular family worship in our home. One of the first scriptures the Lord brought us to reinforce what He was doing in our lives was D & C 90: 6 a – f. Frederick G. Williams was condemned because he hadn't taught his children light and truth and therefore the wicked one had power over him. He was told to set his house in order if he wanted to be delivered. Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, Jr., and Newell K. Whitney were also mentioned in this passage of scripture as needing to set their families in order. We saw that this was not a strange thing that the Lord had asked of us.

As a family, we had to take a look at how the Lord meant for us to worship Him. We learned that worship isn't only what appears printed in the bulletin: an invocation, scripture reading, sermon, offering, and benediction with some hymns for congregational participation. The passage of scripture in John 4: 25 - 26 where Jesus talks with the Samaritan woman points us to true worship. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that she didn't know what she worshipped and that true worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. As parents it is our responsibility to introduce our children to the Lord and to make our homes a tabernacle where the spirit will dwell. So, how do we introduce Kaetlyn and Nathanael to the Lord and how do we invite the spirit in our home so that they are familiar with him? Our journey has not been easy and we have been side-tracked at times, but I'll share with you some things that we have tried with our family.

We started by identifying four basic elements to our family worship: prayer life, reading & memorizing scripture, hymns & spiritual songs, and sharing testimonies – ours and those of others. These elements interlock with one another in a natural way which helps us to reinforce what we are teaching our children.

## PRAYER

One of the first things Howard decided to do was to teach Kaetlyn about prayer; and what better place to start than Matt 6:10 where the Lord taught the disciples to pray. We went through each verse and applied its meaning to our own personal prayers. Through our family study on prayer we were able to help Kaetlyn see that prayer was more than God bless Mommy and Daddy and Nathanael and Grandma and Grandpa. We learned that prayer is so important to our worship because it opens our hearts up to the Spirit. As we learned in John 4, we are to worship in spirit and in truth. Our worship should be a prayer reaching out to God as the psalmist in Psalms 51: 10 said “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew and right spirit within me.”

During our prayers our children hear what we talk to the Lord about – our praise, our needs, the needs of others, and our repentance. Before we took turns praying, we shared prayer requests. We would then ask Kaetlyn what she was specifically thankful for on that day and what she wanted to try to do better from now on. These questions helped her formulate her own prayers. We also felt it was important for Kaetlyn to learn to listen as others prayed, not merely bide her time until it was her turn. When our children hear us pray, we communicate our faith in God to our children. We show them that we believe that we are talking to our God who cares and will answer us. When we finished praying, we would kind of quiz to see if she had listened to our prayers. As Kaetlyn has grown, we have seen fruit from our efforts as she has already begun to cultivate the gift of prayer with which God has blessed her. She offers up very tender and sincere prayers. The newest addition to our family, Nathanael, is ready to turn 2 and for about a year he has been joining in our prayers over our meals. He knows that we all join hands – he has this habit instilled in him. He says “pray” and claps when we are done. When prayers are offered at church services, he says “amen” at the close of a prayer. It’s never too early to include our children!

A parental benefit to teaching our children to pray is that we gain insight into our children when they pray – it’s a window into their souls. We’ve had friends share with us the experience of not knowing their child had a fear until hearing it in a prayer and then they were able to take action to help the child deal with the fear.

## READING AND MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

One thing Kaetlyn started early on her own was to act out stories from the scriptures. The majority of our storybooks were stories from the scriptures and she wanted to act out the stories we read together. I was always given a role to play and coached as to what I should say and do. I can’t count how many times I called to the tomb to resurrect Lazarus. Esther is her favorite role because she became Queen and wore a crown and fine clothing. Kaetlyn would appear in front of Howard with all her play jewelry and a crown and ask him which woman he would choose as his queen, her or her imaginary companions. This was a little troubling to me at first and I was quick to remind her that Esther’s true beauty was in her heart where she obeyed God’s commandments and had courage to save her people. Of course it was also easy to contrast Esther with Haman’s wife and talk about which woman we would choose to be

like. I think that this play acting helped to bring the scriptures to life for her and it sure kept us searching the scriptures to be certain we were following the original script closely.

You know it's been said that children don't come with an instruction manual, but the book of Proverbs is a very practical section of the Word of God. Children can memorize the verses and then in years to come we can help them internalize the principles. In the process of teaching Kaetlyn how to pray, she memorized the Lord's Prayer. Recently I found it necessary to teach her how to decide if a book, music, movie or toy was something that belonged in our home, I turned to Philippians 4:8 and we made a checklist—is it true? honest? pure or lovely or of good report? Does it have any virtue or praise God? If yes, we can partake, if no, then we should abstain.

Visual aids are always helpful in reinforcing scripture stories for our little ones. I have many of the old paper flannel graphs from years back when I taught Sunday school. My children literally beg to get these packets out and have me tell a story and then tell the story themselves. Now I wish I had the felt stories that are available because inevitably Nathanael gets a little rough with one of the pieces and we have to get out the scotch tape and repair. At first this made me uptight, but I have decided that the rewards are worth some repairs because it gets him involved with learning the story. We can also bring out action figures and act out stories whether they are the Book of Mormon figures available at the Tree of Life or the figures from a dollhouse, use them to tell the stories. We've invested in a few puppets to help us sing and tell stories also.

## HYMNS & SPIRITUAL SONGS

Music is a very important aspect to worship. It touches our souls and brings the spirit in greater abundance. We usually begin our worship time with songs as an invitation for the spirit to join us. Our little ones love action songs and there is a place for them. Participating in the actions helps draw toddlers into the family activity while they are still learning words. The hymns are vital. Hymns teach theology and we can share our rich Restoration heritage with the beautiful hymns penned by our forefathers. Kaetlyn learned to recognize "The Old, Old Path" in the womb and, if asked, she'll tell you that it is her favorite song. Many of our hymns are prayers set to music so this combines two of our basic aspects of worship. Many times I've been at the Lord's feet with a feverish child singing back to Him, "God will take care of you" and trusting in that promise.

It's hard to harbor the frustrations of the day in your heart when you sing "Joyful, joyful we adore thee. . ." Taking time to sing hymns helps us to set our day back in order when contention or strife has edged into it. It's rewarding to hear our children singing a hymn as we go down the aisles of Wal-mart or when they are alone in their rooms playing. What we have instilled in their hearts during worship stays there and naturally comes back out. Children aren't worried about what is politically correct, they sing what is on their hearts and this can be a witness to other shoppers. Our children have provided an opportunity in which we can respond to questions from others.

## SHARING TESTIMONIES

. Sharing our testimonies goes right along with prayer time. It's important that we remember to share our answers to prayer with our children and teach them to look for the answers to their prayers. Our lives are full of testimonies that we need to pass on to our children. One of Kaetlyn's favorite bedtime stories is how God told Mommy that Daddy would be a loving husband to her in answer to a prayer from her heart's desire; and how God gave Daddy a spiritual dream that told him that he was to marry Mommy. She takes joy in the continuation of that family testimony of how we prayed that we might have a child and that **she** was the first answer to our prayer. We can also share testimonies of other family members and friends when there is a subject before us that we can connect with a testimony that we have heard. Kaetlyn has several dear friends that are ten years older than her, and their testimonies are very meaningful to her. Kaetlyn was remarking one Wednesday night about the fact that Howard and I were fasting, and I was able to relate her friend Lauren Smith's testimony of praying and fasting during two meals before a Sunday service and that during the sermon the speaker gave answers to the questions that were on her heart. Kaetlyn's response was that some day she wanted to fast too.

## THE GOAL

I think it's important to remember the goal of setting a specific family worship time. Our goal is to introduce our children to a relationship with their Heavenly Father, their Savior and the Spirit. Setting a specific time for family worship is a means to this goal; it is not the end in itself. There have been many times when we struggled thinking these squirmy kids aren't sitting still for worship time when we should have realized that what they were participating in was more important than how they were doing it. The goal was not to sit still on the couch for 30 minutes. (Not that learning to sit quietly isn't an important goal!)

We need to be creative and flexible if we want our worship to shepherd and nurture our children. Maybe we have planned a flannel graph story on David and Goliath on a day that the family dog died. It will be more pertinent to our children to talk about life after death. We have to learn to take the opportunities when they present themselves.

We discovered that there's something to carefully choosing the time of our worship. At first we chose right before bed, but we were too tired and everyone was too easily frustrated at that point in the day. We then chose right after supper and that has been great for us. It helps set the tone for the rest of the evening.

## BENEFITS FLOWING OUT OF FAMILY WORSHIP

If we don't have worship time at home, we may be disappointed as we drive off to church on Sunday morning thinking our children will be participating in worship with the congregation. If we don't practice this at home, it likely won't happen in corporate worship. What happens at the church building is often a reflection of what is happening or is not happening in the home.

Family worship makes me a better parent. Through our time of worship I have made a spiritual bond with my children and am more able to administer loving discipline rather than disciplining in anger. The spirit also makes the children more responsive to our correction. When I listen to Howard explaining a concept for Kaetlyn, I realize that I make things too hard in my own walk with the Lord. For me, personally, home worship has reminded me that the gospel is simple. The times when I have explained verses to Kaetlyn in order to show her why she needed to change some behavior, the Lord used that time to teach me that Kaetlyn's behavior wasn't the only one in need of change. How many times in explaining something to someone else are we convicted of our own sin and need to change? I can see how the Lord uses the responsibility of parenting as a tool for perfecting the parents. As a side note I would add that as a mother, this isn't my only time of worship. I still need my personal quiet time with God and a time set aside to pray and share with my husband.

### TEACHABLE MOMENTS

In addition to the special times we plan with our children where we set aside everything to come before the Lord, we must make the most of unplanned moments. This is commanded to us in the scripture. Deut. 6: 7 tells us to teach the commandments diligently to our children. To talk of them when we sit in the house, when we are walking, when we lie down and when we get up. We are to keep the commandments always before us and even write them on the posts of our house and on our gate. How do we do this?

1. Use that captive time when we are traveling in the mini-van. Play hymns and spiritual songs on the CD player or pop in a book on tape. One mom shared with me that she kept a list of Sunday school songs on her visor so that she could sing with her children. Take the time to pray with your children as you start your journey and then thank the Lord when you arrive safely.
2. Go for a walk and talk about all the things that God made. Pray for the neighbors in the homes you walk by. Use creation to start conversations on spiritual topics: "See the rainbow it reminds me of the everlasting covenant. What can we do to keep God's commandments and embrace the truth?"
3. Pray that the Lord will bring scripture to your mind during those wonderful times when your children question you – "Mom, why is the sky so big?" This can prompt the discussion that God holds the whole universe in the span of His hand. Or during a squabble over a toy you can talk about preferring your brother and loving your neighbor as yourself – what closer neighbor than your little brother? Take a moment to interject a scripture verse or a sentence prayer into your child's daily life. Though brief, a spontaneous quiet time with our little ones shows them that we have Jesus always in our thoughts. Our goal is to make God part of the every day existence of our children.

## TRY, TRY AGAIN

I mentioned before that our home does not have a perfect record of consistent family worship. We've gone through periods of success and received great blessings, but we have also gone through some tough dry spells. We were going through one of those while I was preparing to teach a class on family worship. I was so discouraged that my prayer to the Lord was that I was going to back out from teaching this class unless He sent me something specific to show how important that this class was to Him. And so it was that, in his preparation for an upcoming sermon, my husband "just happened" to be reading a book of worship illustrations put out by Herald House in 1956. One passage in particular caught his attention and he quickly brought it to mine. It was written by Sadi Anka Negaard and I'm going to paraphrase what she has written about the junior department at a Center Stake reunion. The teachers had been praying and fasting for 85 children that they might be drawn closer to God and feel His presence. And each morning during prayer and testimony service they were blessed as the spiritual tone rose until the last morning when many, many children rose to state their determination to serve the Master. I want to quote what Stake President Elder Charles Graham said at the close of that service. "Statements of desire to serve God such as you boys and girls have made today cannot come from a brief experience with God. They are born of years of teaching in homes of Zionite quality. They result not from this one reunion experience but from many reunions, camps, church school experiences, and family worships that have gone on before in each of your lives. Now I see more clearly how Zion will be brought again to earth – through the steady, consistent adding of word upon word, deed upon deed, and thought upon thought in the minds and lives of the many children throughout the land who are reared in Zionite homes." After reading this experience I felt that in spite of our many failures in consistency, we must keep trying to build that Zionite foundation in the lives of our children. It is all the times that we are successful that will establish a vision for our children. We are to repent for our failures and move forward.

There are many things to overcome when trying to establish regular family worship. I felt led to share one particular struggle that I have had to work on. To me, this worship time means that all the family members are present and accounted for and that as the spiritual head of our home, Howard, should lead our time together. Well, it's taken me awhile to come to grips with the fact that whether Howard is gone on a visit or meeting or maybe he's just not motivated to get started one evening, I need to proceed and do what I know is right for our family. **I mean this in no way to usurp my husband's authority.** The times when Daddy can't be home we should worship all the same and we can include special prayers for his evening's activities. And on the evening when Howard may not put forth the effort to lead us, then I can have an encouraging attitude instead of an accusing one. When I do choose to be an encourager and show up at the kitchen table with a flannel graph story, then everyone is blessed. I have not

brought a contentious spirit into our home, the children learn, and their daddy quickly joins in and leads our worship.

### COMMITTING TO FOLLOW THROUGH

Once again I want to remind you that “this once in a lifetime offer is available for a limited time only!!!” We have to be willing to make our walks a little slower and cleanup time a little longer for the sake of our children. Worship in the Parker home won’t be exactly like worship in your home or your friend’s home. Your family’s specific needs are different from my family’s needs. There are so many books available for us to buy with lots of specific activities to aid us in our teaching. And it’s good for us to share with each other how we worship in our own homes. But what has been firmly impressed upon me as I prepared to teach the class on family worship is that no matter *how* we do it, we **MUST** worship as families. There is one walking the earth as a roaring lion and he desires to destroy our families and take our children. The Lord has commanded us to worship Him for our own good. Worship is a weapon that we must use to protect our families in the spiritual battle that rages around us.