

**The
Family
Worship
Book**

THE FAMILY WORSHIP BOOK

A Resource Book for Family Devotions

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*To Andrew, Samuel, Sally,
Abigail and Benjamin,
members of the "little church"
that meets in our house*

PREFACE

For years I have been hearing cries from heads of households for help in conducting regular family worship. Their questions have been fundamental: what are we to do and how are we to do it? This work is designed to come to their aid by providing the following;

- *An order of service* for family worship;
- *Resources* in prayers, creeds, commandments, Psalms, hymns and catechisms in a single book;
- *Tables and schedules* for Scripture reading, learning Psalms and hymns, and memorizing Scripture.

In addition, we have provided an extended introduction which we hope will persuade families of the duty and benefits of daily family worship, as well as other related life-simplifying commitments. Our prayer is that by again walking these “ancient paths” Christian parents will witness the salvation and sanctification of their covenant children and enjoy the strengthening of their Christian homes.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY WORSHIP

The Ancient Paths

*Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths,
Where the good way is, and walk in it;
And you shall find rest for your souls (Jeremiah 6:16)*

When I was a young boy, I walked to my public elementary school every school day for seven years. After school, I rode my bike to the ball park for my Little League games. Every Sunday we walked a few blocks to church. The recreation park was a little further away than the ball park and a little closer than the school. Scout Hall was behind the school, so we also rode our bikes, or walked to Boy Scout meetings. Life was simple for us kids and our parents. In the suburbs of Los Angeles, the epitome of the commuter city, we lived life within a mile radius of our home. We even walked to the doctor's office.

Most people used to live this way. Before the automobile, everything had to be within walking distance, or at least horse-and-buggy distance. Communities had to develop accordingly. Each neighborhood had its local grocer, clothier, druggist, school, church, and so on. People knew their neighbors because they couldn't be avoided. One was constantly rubbing shoulders with them as one worked, worshiped, played, ate, and lived in the same area.

I like our cars. I can hardly imagine life without them. But as I was driving to school-work-store-ball game the other day, I kept wondering, is this really a better way of life? Our city, Savannah, Georgia, like every other community in America, now sprawls. We have big malls, big parks, big hospitals, big medical practices, nice roads in every direction, and nice air conditioned cars in which to drive. But is this a more humanly satisfying way to live?

While driving through town one evening, I noted the remarkable differences between poor and middle class neighborhoods. The poor neighborhoods are older, more run-down, and yet abuzz with life. Some folks are sitting out on their porches, rocking and talking. Others are walking on the sidewalks. Still others are congregating on a street corner or at a storefront. What do you see in the middle class neighborhoods? Nothing. Not a soul. Why not? Air-conditioning. In the "poor" neighborhoods the "deprived" have no air-

conditioning but do have community. The “affluent” neighborhoods have air-conditioning, but consequently everyone stays inside and minimal human interaction takes place. Who then is truly deprived? From air-conditioned offices to air-conditioned cars to air-conditioned houses, the socially impoverished move about, while the economically impoverished, though sweltering, enjoy a rich community experience.¹

We are technologically superior to previous generations. But are we losing too much in the process? First we walked, then galloped, then rode on rails together. Now we drive, largely with the window up, and go home to hermetically sealed homes, only coming out to take out the trash or grab the newspaper. Once we entertained ourselves at home by reading books aloud. In the 1920’s families gathered around the radio. In the 1950’s, they gathered around the T.V. Now there is a T.V. in each room.² Computers will only make it worse. Once the home was a castle, a place of refuge for the family. When behind its doors, the family conducted its affairs without interruption and without outside influence. Now one can hardly eat a meal or conduct family worship without the phone ringing. Sacrosanct family time is violated daily. Friends and strangers alike barge right into the middle of the family’s most private and intimate moments via technology. Again my question is, is this progress? When does life slow down enough so that we can talk? When do we enjoy our neighborhoods? Where do we experience community? In the last 100 years we have gone from life on a porch with family and neighbors to life in isolation in front of a cathode tube. Is the quality of life improving? Is ours a richer human experience? Frankly, I don’t believe it anymore. Call it romanticism. Call it naivete. Call me a Luddite. We have wonderful toys today. But they have cost us too much. Growing prosperity and technological advancement do not necessarily or automatically mark human progress.

I have labored this point because I believe the church has largely failed to recognize the death of family and community or compensate for it. Rather than reaffirm traditional practices that build family life and stimulate community, it has tended to baptize secular trends that do the opposite. The small neighborhood church has given way to the large commuter church. The friendly country parson has been replaced by the suburban CEO/pastor. Older practices such as the “family altar” and the “family pew” have received

¹For a highly effective critique of automobile induced suburban sprawl, read James Howard Kunstler’s books *The Geography of Nowhere* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) and the sequel *Home From Nowhere* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). For a “new urbanist” alternative, see Duany, Plater-Zybeck and Speck’s *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (North Point Press: New York), 2000.

²For a powerful critique of television’s effects on culture and learning, see Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in The Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

token attention, while new programs have been devised that divide families and segregate the ages. In many ways we have become too clever for our own good. We are just as guilty of “chronological arrogance,” as C. S. Lewis called it, as the rest of society. Repeatedly tried and proven ways of transmitting the heart and soul of the Christian faith to others have been abandoned in favor of exciting, entertaining, novel, but ineffectual alternatives. We pride ourselves in being modern. We look down our noses at previous generations. We have had a love affair with the novel and the new. Educational, political, social, and religious fads have swept over us again and again, first possessing the field and all right thinking people, and then in a matter of months, fleeing to the curiosity shelf in our cultural museums, replaced by yet another untested novelty. The time has come to admit our error and pause to look back, before we again look ahead.

What we hope to demonstrate in the pages ahead is that by returning to the practices of previous generations we may be able to revitalize the family and the church of today. The “ancient paths” of Sunday worship, Sabbath observance, family worship, and catechizing are where spiritual vitality for the future will be found.

The “Family Pew”

What then is the first key to a Christian family’s spiritual health? Though you may not have anticipated our answer, we are quite sure that we are right. The key is not new. It is not novel. It will not reveal long hidden mysteries, disclose any secret formulas, provide any new techniques, or require lengthy or costly counseling.

What is it? Simply, the first and primary key to your family’s spiritual health is a commitment to the weekly public worship services of the church. The most important single commitment you have to make to ensure your family’s spiritual well-being is to regular, consistent attendance at public worship.

Sound far-fetched? I’ll say it even stronger. I have yet to meet a person for whom it could not be said that all of his problems, personal, marital, familial, or vocational would not be solved by such a commitment. I do not believe that the person for whom this is not true exists. By saying so, I do not minimize the seriousness of the problems that people face. Rather I maximize our confidence in the power of the gospel. So I’ll say it again: we do not know of anyone of whom it could not be said, if only he were in worship week in and week out, fifty-two weeks a year, year after year, his problems would be basically solved.

That public worship is not generally recognized as playing this central role in spiritual development demonstrates the degree to which modern individualism has rotted the core out of our commitment to Christ. How is it, after all, that we receive the benefits of the death of Christ? How is His

grace communicated to us? Does it just drop out of heaven? Or are there means? Yes, there are means. What are they? The *Shorter Catechism* identifies the primary means as follows:

- Q. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?
- A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation (Q. 88).

The three primary means are the word (“especially the preaching of the Word,” says the *Shorter Catechism* #89), the sacraments, and prayer. Now ask yourself, where are these three primary means normally operative? Where is the word preached? Where are the sacraments administered? And as for prayer, yes one can pray in one’s closet, but don’t forget the special promise of Jesus concerning prayers offered where “two or three have gathered in My name,” no doubt, given the context of church discipline in Matthew 18, a reference to organized public worship (Mt 18:15–20). Jesus said,

‘Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven...’
(Matthew 18:19).

There is a unique efficacy in such public prayers.

When we gather in public worship, we are ushered into the presence of Christ. He is in our midst (Mt 18:20). We do in worship what we were created to do—offer to God intelligent praise. We become more truly human at that point than at any other of human existence. Just as a child is more aware of his identity as a son in the presence of his father, or as a husband is aware of his identity as provider and protector in the presence of his wife, so we are most aware of who we are and what we were created to do as human beings at that point at which we bow in worship before our Creator and Redeemer. We are humbled as we offer to Him our praise and adoration. We are cleansed as we confess our sins. We are built up, torn down, and rebuilt again as we submit to instruction by His word (Eph 4:11ff). We are fed and united to the whole body of Christ by the sacraments. Through the bread and cup we enjoy *koinonia* with Christ and one another (1 Cor 10:16). We access His strength through “all prayer and petition” (Eph 6:18), and are thereby enabled to fight the spiritual battles of life.

The public worship services of the church are our life-line. There we are both purged and fed. There we make soul-saving contact with Christ through His word, sacraments, prayer, and the fellowship of His people. That contact, over the long haul, will change us. It will make us into the kind of people who are able to solve our own problems with the strength that the gospel provides.

The opposite view, that we can prosper spiritually on our own, apart from the public ordinances of the church and the public gatherings of the saints is foolhardy. No, it's worse than that. It is worldliness—worldly individualism, worldly pride, worldly self-sufficiency.

The metaphor of the church as a "body" is employed by the New Testament to represent both our union with Christ and mutual dependence. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor 12:21). We need each other. "We who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom 12:5). We need each other's *gifts* (see Eph 4:11–16; 1 Cor 12–14; Rom 12). We need each other's *graces* (as in the many "one anothers" found throughout the New Testament, such as love one another, be kind to one another, bear one another's burdens, etc.) We need each other's *fellowship*. So we are warned, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together..." The writer to the Hebrews sees the public assembly as the primary place in which the mutual stimulation to "love and good deeds" takes place. He writes, "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:25).

How does this commitment to public worship relate to the family's spiritual well being? The effect upon parents is clear enough. Spiritually nourished parents make for better families. But the "family pew" has more in mind than sanctifying parents. When your children are brought with you into public worship, they too are sanctified. Your children, from their earliest years, will be ushered along with you into the presence of God. They will be brought under the means of grace and will experience the fellowship of God's people week after week as they mature through childhood. Beyond this, they will sit by you Sunday after Sunday, watching you publicly humble yourself before God and submit to His word. Among their earliest and warmest memories will be those of holding their parents' hands during church, sitting close to their sides, following along in the hymnal, placing money in the offering plate, and bowing their heads in prayer. Do not underestimate the cumulative effect of this witness upon covenant children. No doubt it is considerable, even incalculable.

The key to your own and your family's spiritual health is remarkably simple. Though there is considerable hype to the contrary, it involves no pilgrimages to sacred places. It requires no week-long or weekend retreats, seminars, or special programs. It depends on no special techniques or novel methodologies. You won't have to spend yet another night out. You won't need to add more meetings to an already frantic schedule. The key is to be found in the regular, ordinary, weekly worship services of the church. It is not a glamorous key, but it is the key nonetheless.

The Lord's Day

Let's explore this further. As we have noted, many well-meaning but misinformed leaders in the Christian world would have you running hither, thither, and yon to find the magic formula for spiritual growth. They would have you out every night attending meetings for prayer, study, and fellowship. They thrust before you countless tapes, study books, and methods, techniques, seminars, retreat, and programs, each promising to provide the key to your spiritual well-being and happiness. Our response is—it is not that complicated. Whatever is of fundamental importance for the Christian life has been known in every era and is reproducible in every culture. If a thing is true and necessary, it can be understood and practiced in a primitive, grass-hut civilization, an igloo, and in modern America. This is not to say that the toys of modernity can't help. We make profitable use of the tapes, videos, telephones, fax machines, and computers. We access the modern means of transportation. But we shouldn't lose sight of the greater reality that all that we need to thrive spiritually may be found down the block at our local evangelical church through its regular ministry and worship. In its failure to recognize this, the church today is little better than the world in unnecessarily contributing to the frenetic pace of modern life.

What can we do? Slow down. Stay home. Quit running mindlessly all over town. Limit yourself. And do this: *Commit yourself to the Lord's Day in the Lord's House and little else outside of the home will be necessary for the cultivation of a thriving spiritual life.*

The Puritans referred to the Lord's Day as "the market day of the soul." Six days a week one buys and sells for the sake of one's body. Sunday however we are to "trade" in spiritual commodities for the sake of our souls. All secular affairs are to be set aside. All Christians, after a "due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand," are to "not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations," but also are to be engaged, "the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy" (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXI. 7). In other places we have argued the biblical case for the continuing obligation to keep the Lord's Day (e.g., our booklet, "Observing the Sabbath"³). We won't repeat the case now. Instead we will assume its validity and assert on the basis of it that the key to consistent attendance at public worship (of which we have spoken above as the key to your spiritual well-being) is a commitment to observing the Christian Sabbath. Or to state it negatively, you will never

³Available from the Independent Presbyterian Church Bookshop, P.O. Box 9266, Savannah, GA 31412-9266. See also Walter Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), and Joseph Pipa, *The Lord's Day* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 1997).

be able to become consistent about attending public worship until you are convinced that Sunday is not just the Lord's Morning, but the Lord's Day.

When the writers of the *Westminster Confession* joined into one chapter "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day," they knew what they were doing. We are the first generation of American Protestants to have forgotten the benefits of the Sabbath command. Prior to the middle of this century, all American Protestant denominations, whether Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, or Episcopalian, were Sabbatarian. This was true for over 350 years, dating from the establishment of the Jamestown colony in 1607 until the mid-1960's. For generations it was understood that the Sabbath was made for man, for man's benefit (Mk 2:27, 28). But once again we have become too clever for our own good. We have crammed our schedules full of activity seven days a week. We have lost our Sabbath rest in the process. What have we given up? Hughes Old has recently written, "Any attempt at recovering a Reformed spirituality would do well carefully to study the best of the Puritan literature on the observance of the Lord's Day."⁴ How is this so? What is the point?

Essentially it comes down to this. If you are not convinced that the whole of Sunday is the Lord's and not yours, you will not be consistent. You will inevitably allow other matters to interfere. Things will come up. Even the best of us will become three-fifths Christians: three out of five Sundays we will be in church. The other two we will be out of town, watching a ball game, traveling, entertaining out-of-town guests, slightly under the weather, preparing for a busy Monday, out too late on Saturday, and so on. Let me challenge you—count it up. You might be surprised at how much you miss. Though you see yourself as there "every Sunday," even *you* miss two out of five.

Return for Sunday night worship? Forget it. It's once a month at best, even for many of those who are members of the few churches that still conduct Sunday night services. If Sunday is not the Lord's Day, who is going to bother? You might be convinced that it is good to be there, the singing is good, the preaching is, well, the preaching. But if it not the Lord's Day, then one is likely to spend part of the afternoon at the mall, on the ball field, in the garden, cleaning the house, in front of the tube. By Sunday night, one will be too tired, except every fourth Sunday or so when guilt overwhelms inertia. The cumulative effect of this is significant. Instead of the ministry of 104 Sunday services (morning and evening each Sunday) one drops to under 45, 30 Sunday mornings and about 12 Sunday nights. Just like that you have forsaken the assembling of the saints and been deprived of the means of grace

⁴Hughes O. Old, *Christianity Today*, "Rescuing Spirituality from the Cloister," June 12, 1994.

on something like 60 occasions in a single year. How do you propose to make it up? The best of us will seek to compensate by adding midweek spiritual commitments. This will help, but only at the cost of hyping-up one's schedule in the process. For most, however, nothing will be done. The loss is absolute.

But, if you are convinced that Sunday is the "market day of the soul," then it changes everything. The questions of the Sunday services is settled—you will be there AM and PM. The fact that the issue is dead, so to speak, has a wonderfully therapeutic effect. It is like the divorce laws pre-no-fault. Because it was tough to get out of marriage, one tended to work it out and in the process find marital happiness. Eliminating options helps. Because Sunday worship is an inflexible given, everything else has to accommodate it. The Fourth Commandment tends thereby to cast its influence over the rest of the week. Life has to be organized around one's Sunday obligations. Shopping, travel, business, yard work, house work, recreation all must be finished by Saturday evening. Sunday must be cleared of all secular obligations. The blessed consequence is not only that one is free to worship twice on the Lord's Day, but one also enjoys guilt-free, refreshing rest from the concerns and labors of life. I find myself regularly falling asleep about three o'clock in the afternoon with chills of gratitude and pleasure for the rest of the Christian Sabbath. Amazingly, even for preachers for whom Sunday is the busiest day of the week, it is also the most restful.

One can understand why the prophets sometimes speak of the abandonment of the whole of Old Testament religion as "profaning the Sabbath" (Ez 20:21; 22:8; 23:38). There is a subtlety to Sabbath observance. Because it excludes secular activity, its "holy rest" comes to dominate all of life. The family's week must be organized around its inactivity. Consequently, it can function as a plumb-line, a litmus test for measuring your commitment to God. Will you submit to the Lordship of Christ in this tangible way, this way that forces you to organize your life, to prepare, to complete your secular affairs, and devote half of "your" weekend to the things of God? Will you "desist from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word" (Is 58:13)? If you will, you will find time for all the things that really count—time for your soul, time for rest, time for the family, and time throughout the week for the rest.

Family Worship

Now we come to the heart of our concern. During the 19th century, as Sunday Schools began to be introduced in North America, resistance was encountered in a number of traditional Presbyterian churches. Their argument? That as the Sunday School was established, it would result in parental neglect of their responsibility for the spiritual training of their children. Were they right? Cause and effect would be difficult to determine. But if they were, it would be an example of the "law of unintended consequences," that is typical of the modern world. Our intentions are wonderful. We mean to improve life by

the creation of labor-saving devices, the development of new methods and the provision of supplementary resources. But are we careful to examine the net effect of our innovations? Do they, in the long run, really help? *If the consequence of the proliferation of Christian meetings has been the neglect of daily family worship, then the net spiritual effect of those meetings has been negative.*

Let us assume for a moment that we all understand that the Bible commands that we conduct daily worship in homes. Read the second chapter of this work for an outline of the specifics. This was certainly the conviction of previous generations. For example, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches that worship is to be conducted “in private families daily” (XXI. 6), and the Church of Scotland included in its editions of the *Westminster Standards a Directory for Family Worship*, its General Assembly even mandating disciplinary action against heads of households who neglected “this necessary duty.”⁵ Indeed, many of our Reformed forefathers believed in and practiced family worship *twice* daily (following the pattern of the morning and evening sacrifice). Family worship, they all assumed, was vital to the spiritual development of both parents and children.⁶

But today, one does not hear much about family worship.⁷ No, instead we seem to have replaced it with small-group activities. These are the key, we hear again and again, to spiritual growth. Everyone needs to be in a small group. Or, it might be said, everyone needs to be in a discipleship group. Perhaps even, one needs to be involved in both. Maybe one needs to be involved in both, plus the church’s prayer meeting, plus visitation, plus the choir, plus committee meetings, etc. You see my point already, I assume. Protestantism has become all but silent on the issue of family worship, a near universal practice in the recent past, and replaced it with meetings that take us out of the home and away from the family. Not only have we given up a proven method of transmitting the faith to the next generation, one that has a built-in format for Bible study, prayer, and singing, but we have done so

⁵See appendix 3.

⁶See for example the collection of essays by such worthies as Samuel Davies, Philip Doddridge, Henry Venn, and George Whitefield published under the name, *The Godly Family*, (Pittsburg: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993). See also the essay by Hughes Oliphant Old, “Matthew Henry and the Discipline of Family Prayer,” found in *Calvin Studies VII*, Papers Presented at the Colloquium on Calvin Studies at Davidson College, January 28-29, 1994.

⁷Thankfully, there are of late a growing number of exceptions to this claim. For example, the wonderful essay by Douglas F. Kelly, “Family Worship: Biblical, Reformed, and Viable for Today,” in Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, *Worship in the Presence of God* (Greenville, South Carolina: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press, 1992); Kerry Ptacek, *Family Worship: Biblical Basis, Historical Reality, Current Need* (Greenville, South Carolina: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press, 1994).

for alternatives that add to our already hectic pace of life and take us away from our spouses, children, and neighbors.

I like small-group Bible studies. I will get more involved with them at a later stage in life, when my children are not so young and my wife and I are able to attend them together. But in the meantime we have a discipleship group, and if you are a parent with children at home, so do you. Everyday little eyes are watching. Sooner than we realize, they become aware of discrepancies between what we say and what we do. The family, in this respect, is the truest of all proving grounds for authentic Christianity. Parents either practice what they preach or become the surest means of sending their children to hell yet devised by man or the devil. Daily family worship forces the issues of Christian piety before the family every 24 hours. It forces parents in the roles of preachers, evangelists, worship leaders, intercessors, and pastors. Who is adequate for this? No one, of course. He who would attempt to be so, must necessarily be forced to his knees. Children growing up with the daily experience of seeing their parents humbled in worship, focusing on spiritual things, submitting to the authority of the word, catechizing and otherwise instructing their children will not easily turn from Christ. Our children should grow up with the voices of their fathers pleading for their souls in prayer ringing in their ears, leading to their salvation, or else haunting them for the rest of their lives.

If your children are in your home for 18 years, you have 6,570 occasions (figuring a six day week) for family worship. If you learn a new Psalm or hymn each month, they will be exposed to 216 in those 18 years. If you read a chapter a day, you will complete the Bible four and a half times in 18 years. Every day (if you follow our format) they will affirm a creed or recite the law. Every day they will confess their sins and plead for mercy. Every day they will intercede on behalf of others. Think in terms of the long view. What is the cumulative impact of just 15 minutes of this each day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, for 18 years? At the rate of six days a week (excluding Sunday), one spends an hour and a half a week in family worship (about the length of a home Bible study), 78 hours a year (about the length of the meeting hours of seven weekend retreats), 1,404 hours over the course of 18 years (about the length of the assembly hours of 40 week-long summer camps, assuming about 30 such hours in an average week-long camp). When you establish your priorities, think in terms of the cumulative effect of this upon your children. Think of the cumulative effect of this upon *you*, after 40 or 60 or 80 years of daily family worship—all this without having to drive anywhere.

Catechism

Finally, we commend the catechizing of children, a grand old Protestant tradition which regrettably has fallen on hard times. Few catechize their children any more. For some, the word itself sounds archaic or like something the Catholics used to do. In actual fact, it is an ancient practice reaching all

the way back to the earliest centuries of the church. It was revived in the 16th century by the *Protestant* Reformers so successfully that even the Roman Catholics began to mimic them. Catechisms were written by Luther, Calvin, Bullinger, and nearly all the major Reformers. In keeping with this tradition, the Westminster Assembly produced two catechisms, the *Shorter* for children, and the *Larger* for adults. The former has been the most popular and widely used in the English language since the mid-17th century.

Should you catechize your children? Yes, you should, and for a number of reasons.

1. It is a tried and *proven method of religious instruction*. For generations Protestants have successfully transmitted the content of the Christian faith to their children through Catechisms. This was taken so seriously in Puritan New England that a child could be removed from its parents' custody if they failed to catechize him or her! Admission to the communion table in Scotland for generations was preceded by the successful recitation of the *Shorter Catechism*. It was not uncommon in 19th century Presbyterian homes in America that the *Shorter Catechism* would be completed during a child's sixth year. According to John Leith, 17,000 Presbyterian youth memorized the *Shorter Catechism* and had their names published in the *Christian Observer* in 1928, the year in which he achieved that feat. Education pedagogues come and go. Here is a method that works.
2. It is *simple*. It doesn't require additional resources. Any parent can catechize any child using no more than a small booklet. (In the process, the parent may learn more than the child!) But since the Bible places the responsibility of Christian education squarely upon Christian parents (Deut 6:4ff, Eph 6:1ff), here is a method easily adopted by parents.
3. It is *content-rich*. The old catechisms are rich reservoirs of theological, devotional, and practical content. Fully 40% of the *Shorter Catechism* is concerned with ethics (the Law of God) and nearly 10% with prayer. God, man, sin, Christ, faith, repentance, and so on are all given succinct, accurate definitions. Children nurtured on the catechism will be formidable theologians in an age of irrationalism and general mindlessness.

Here are a couple of practical reasons as well.

1. Memory is a faculty that should be developed. One might liken memory to a muscle—it grows when exercised and shrinks when neglected. J. A. Motyer, former Principal of Trinity College, Bristol, and lecturer in Old Testament and Hebrew once said that he noticed a significant change in the capacity of his students to learn Hebrew declensions. What was typically learned upon first hearing by students in the 1930's and 40's was the labor of a week in the 1970's and 80's. Obviously, it is a great asset in life to have what we call a "good memory." What has often not been understood is that having such is more a matter of work than nature.

2. Memorizing logical, structured, conceptual material like the *Shorter Catechism* actually contributes to mental development. J. S. Mill, no friend of orthodox Christianity, claimed in his famous essay, *On Liberty*, that the Scots had become mental philosophers of the first order through their study of the Bible and the *Shorter Catechism*. Douglas Kelly, noting the work of Scottish theologian T. F. Torrance, states that “children brought up on the Catechism have a greater capacity for conceptual thinking (as opposed to merely pictorial thinking) than those who never memorized it.”⁸ It provides matter (theological matter!) for building the mental framework within which rational thought can take place. While not superior to the memorization of Scripture, this does explain why the Catechisms are to be memorized alongside of Scripture.

The Anglo-Catholic essayist, J. A. Froude, who spoke of “the Scottish peasant as the most remarkable man in Europe,” traced the dignity, intellect, and character of the typical Scottish peasant up to that time, “as largely flowing from the memorization of the *Shorter Catechism*,” says Douglas Kelly again.⁹ Let the educational fads come and go. Concentrate on a method that has stood the test of time.¹⁰

A Simpler Life

Now pull together the various threads. Instead of spiritual concerns contributing to an already frantic pace of life, the family should commit itself to the time-proven, biblically-based means of spiritual nurture—public and family worship. In these settings great Psalms and hymns are sung, children are catechized, sins are confessed, and the Scriptures are read and taught. Instead of running all over town, children and parents heading out in every direction, commitments are focused upon the Lord’s Day services and daily

⁸Douglas F. Kelly, “The Westminster Shorter Catechism,” Carson and Hall (ed), in *To Glorify and Enjoy God*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), p. 124.

⁹Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁰Regarding the concern that children don’t understand what they are memorizing, David Calhoun, in his *History of Princeton Seminary, Volume 1: Faith and Learning (1812-1868)*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), records the following comments of Robert Hamill Nassau, career medical missionary in Africa. After noting his ability to answer Dr. Hodges’ classroom questions in the language of the *Shorter Catechism*, he said,

“I thus had a reply for any one who objected to children being taught Catechism, on the ground that they could not understand it. Of course, they did not. Neither had I, in my childhood. But memorizing is easy in childhood. With that Catechism in memory it was an advantage to have its splendid ‘form of words’ when I reached an age at which I *could* understand them” (p. 363).

worship at home. Life is simplified! Not only will we be using means that are more fruitful than the modern alternatives, and more likely to result in the salvation and sanctification of covenant children and parents alike, but the pace of life will slow, allowing more rather than less time for families to be together. Public worship, family worship, the Lord's Day, and catechizing are the "ancient paths" in which we will find "rest" for our souls.