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IMS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER



How Can Family Worship **Be Made More Appealing?**

by Johanna Muñoz

Bachelor's degree in Spanish
and Literature | Canada

This is a common question in most Christian homes. Certainly, linking theory and practice is challenging, not only on an educational level but also spiritually. We know that the religious instruction of children is the responsibility of the family, and the church is only a means to reinforce and support the family's instruction. If we study the Scriptures, we will understand that the education of children is never entrusted to priests or church leaders; it is the exclusive task of the father and, in his absence, of the mother. Samuel is the only example of a child raised by a priest who was not his father, although the child's spiritual success could be attributed more to the influence of his mother and her prayers than to the education of the priest Eli. As a father, Eli was not a good role model.

It is not new for families of believers to talk about the importance of family worship and to consider it as the principal time when the teaching of the Holy Scriptures takes place (Deuteronomy 6:7). During worship, the family gathers to share experiences (Deuteronomy 6:20). It symbolically builds an altar to renew the family's covenant with the Lord and give thanks for His mercies (Genesis 35:2-3). During this time, the Holy Spirit rests on our homes, and the blessing of God abounds in each member of the family. However, why is it so difficult to have meaningful worship? Why is it so easy for it to become routine and lose its essence?

First, we must recognize that family worship time is the enemy's principal target. So, we are constantly required to examine, rethink, evaluate, change, and innovate, especially when there are children, who at each stage have different needs. On the other hand, this time involves effort and preparation, two responsibilities that in today's society are difficult to carry on. Daniel 12:4 describes the end of time as a world rushing hither and thither, and it is evident that these words describe today's society. But will we allow ourselves to be carried away by the system of this world and, as parents, excuse ourselves for lack of time for risking the salvation of our children?

There are many ways to enrich our family worship, and this is where theory and practice converge. While we can learn from the strategies that other families use, those strategies will not necessarily fit into ours because each family is unique. Furthermore, family worship includes routine and creativity at the same time, because it is a daily, usually twice-daily, activity. What does this mean? There must be order and care to preserve

the fundamental elements of worship such as the reading of the Word of God, prayer, and praise. However, these elements should be presented in an appealing, motivating way, promoting the participation of all.

"Let the services be brief and full of life, adapted to the occasion, and varied from time to time. Let all join in the Bible reading and learn and often repeat God's law. It will add to the interest of the children if they are sometimes permitted to select the reading. Question them upon it, and let them ask questions. Mention anything that will serve to illustrate its meaning. When the service is not thus made too lengthy, let the little ones take part in prayer, and let them join in song, if it be but a single verse." —*Education*, p. 186.

Ask for God's guidance. Then equip yourselves with resources that will facilitate your work. For example, for the little ones, it is essential to have Bible storybooks with pictures in them. Also, we can sometimes carefully select a short video referring to the concept or story we want to teach. Nature, animals, food, plants—all creation is an inexhaustible resource to share with your boys and girls. Leave the most interesting things for the Friday service, and cultivate a special love for the Lord's day.

Encourage children to learn through their senses. For example, put different kinds of oils into jars and, through smell, identify the scent of olives; then tell a story about this oil, even mentioning its healing properties. You can extinguish all the lights and turn on a lamp to teach how the Bible illuminates our lives. Give your child a taste of one food without salt and another with salt to illustrate the analogy that Jesus made regarding the preaching of the Gospel. Inside the house, in the garden, and in the kitchen, there

are many items that we can use to animate our services and give them more meaning.

You can create or acquire surprise elements such as a "Trunk of Biblical Promises," "Box of Prayer Requests," and Bible cards with pictures and/or information that allow you to introduce the desired theme. However, this type of resource should not be part of the routine. Make it something special.

Never rush through worship. You may not have noticed, but at the back of the International Hymnal there is a 7½-page list of Bible verses with an appropriate hymn or hymns to use with each verse. This can be useful when you sometimes don't know where to begin.

As the children grow, increase the complexity of the activities. For example, create a "Decision Box," for which each one writes down a practical decision based on what was learned in the service. Read a chapter of Proverbs every day of a 31-day month. Each day write a new verse on a board.

Read the Bible in a year as a family, taking care that it does not become boring because of the complexity of certain books. Draw something on a board, and let the family guess what is going to be talked about. Memorize verses of the Bible together, such as Psalm 23, the Ten Commandments, the order of the creation days, the three angels' messages, etc.

Music is very important for children of any age, but singing and playing an instrument should not become merely a "musical moment." With actions and objects, help listeners to understand lyrics. Teach children to sing with spirit and understanding. As a family, compose a song.

Or prepare a children's hymnal with your family's own favorite songs.

Learn verses through repeated singing. Prepare a special song to present in church. From time to time, it is good to allow the children to lead the family worship service, always making sure that they remain respectful and do not make a game of the occasion.

Everything must have both an educational and a spiritual objective. We make a mistake if prayer becomes a simple element of beginning and closing the service. Prayer should reflect the need we have for God's direction and

should also express an understanding of the subject: if we talk about honesty, our prayers should include asking forgiveness for the times we have not been honest as well as asking for strength to incorporate this value into our lives.

Resources and materials are unlimited, but we as parents must always remember that the futures of our children, both physically and spiritually, depend on us. We must move past theory and put into practice all the knowledge that we have. The success of God's people consists of working within one's own family and thus collectively achieving edification of the body of Christ: His Church. ■





Take Care of the Environment

by Miriam Bordonaro
Master's in Environmental
Engineering | Germany

I recall very well the first time I went to Africa. With some Ghanaian friends, I travelled through the country using local buses. I was once traveling on a bus packed with people and their belongings through Accra, when we passed a very poor quarter, then hills of garbage and lots of plastic. In that moment I realized the importance of my job. I am an environmental engineer. Most people have no idea what I do (more Christians take medical or social studies to directly help people). What we tend to forget is that not only people, but also our environment, need our help and care. But the Bible reminds us "... that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Romans 8:22.

Why is it so important to take care of nature? Because God Himself is the first one who cares for nature, as we can read in the following sentences of E. G. White.

"Through such mediums [the garden with its opening buds and blooming flowers] he may give them the most important lessons concerning the Creator, by opening before them the great book of nature, where the love of God is expressed in every tree and flower and blade of grass. He may impress upon their minds the fact that if God cares so much for the trees and flowers, He will care much more for the creatures formed in His image." *The Adventist Home*, p. 223.

"God has surrounded us with nature's beautiful scenery to attract and interest the mind. It is His design that we should associate the glories of nature with His character. If we faithfully study the book of nature, we shall find it a fruitful source for contemplating the infinite love and power of God." *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 144.

**"... that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"
(Romans 8:22).**

How can we and our children take care of nature in practical ways?

1 Spend time in nature

"Next to the Bible, nature is to be our great lesson book."
Child Guidance, p. 45.

Nature is presented to us as something to study. To learn about it, we need to spend time in nature. Take walks in the woods, have a vegetable garden, observe birds and animals.

"Mothers, let the little ones play in the open air; let them listen to the songs of the birds and learn the love of God expressed in His beautiful work. Teach them simple lessons from the book of nature and the things about them...." Child Guidance, p. 34.

In nature you will find rest from the stress of a busy week on Sabbath afternoons. You will have time to meditate, and the children will calm down. Tell your boys and girls that, next to the Bible, nature is God's second book. Enjoy sitting on a hill observing the landscape. Make time to listen to the rain and to feel the sunshine.

2 Grow a garden with your children

I know that not everyone is blessed with land on which to grow a garden; if you are not, try at least to keep some pots in which you can grow some vegetables. Taking care of little plants, observing every day how they grow (or maybe do not grow), discovering what water, sun, and earth can, with God's help, do, will teach us to be patient with God's timing and give the children the needed lesson not to waste food.

3 Leave nature as you found it

A good friend of mine, who has four grown children, told me how she taught them to take care of forests and natural parks. No one, she said, should ever guess you have been there. And do not throw out anything you brought with you. If you live in Europe, try even not to discard a banana peel (we do not have banana trees here in Europe; decomposition of the peels is not the same as in Africa or South America). If you find garbage thrown out by others, collect it with your children— using gloves, of course. In this way they will learn to respect the environment they are living in.

4 Reduce the use of plastic

There is just one country I've been to that forbids the use of plastic bags, and this country is in Africa: it is Rwanda.



The moment you leave Rwanda for Uganda you notice the difference: in Uganda you find tiny black plastic bags everywhere.

Plastic is a plague on our planet. About 50 billion bottles of plastic are disposed of every year, and plastic degrades in 500-1000 years. It breaks into tiny particles that float through the ocean and endanger marine life.

There are several little things you can all do daily to reduce the use of plastic at home:

- Use textile bags. You can even sew your own in the shape your children like the most. These bags can be used every day, can be washed, and do not generate any garbage.
- Use reusable water bottles on your trips into nature, at school, and at home.

- Reduce plastic garbage at home, avoiding the use of one-use only plastic plates and glasses. When you go shopping, try to buy unpackaged items as much as you can.

- Divide the at-home-produced garbage at least into paper, glass, and plastic. Children will learn to do so and will keep doing it when they are grown up.

5 Recycle

Nowadays many people think that everything has to be brand-new. It does not matter if it is a child's dress, a toy, or furniture. When something breaks down, it is usually thought to have reached the end of its life. But, if possible, teach your children how to repair broken items. When they

see that they have too many toys, ask which can be given away or sold. Go to second-hand shops with your children. Involve them in decorating your home with things picked up during walks at the seaside or in the mountains or in the woods.

I recall that, as a child, I wore a lot of used clothing from other children. I did not feel poor because of this; I felt blessed, because I lacked nothing. Even now, as a grown woman, I trade used clothes with friends. We all say, why buy everything new? As long as it looks good and meets a need, I am glad I do not have to buy much of anything.

The above practices will keep us far from over-consuming, wasting, and negatively impacting our planet, and the money we save can be used for helping those in need. ■



www.imseducation.org



education@sda1844.org
info@imseducation.org



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Editor-in-Chief: Manuela Di Franca

Art Direction & Design: Ixzelt Aldana

Photography: Freepik

Translation: Raquel Sosa, Sarai Archila

Editors: Marthica Cabrera, Evelyn Holmstroem

Theological Review: Pr. Rubén Martínez

Final Review: Margie Seely, Sarai Archila