

THE DIRECTORY OF PRIVATE AND FAMILY WORSHIP

FOR THE

ASSOCIATE REFORMED
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Directory of Private and Family Worship for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is in the historical lineage of *The Directory for Family Worship* of 1647, produced by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

This present document reflects our longstanding tradition of giving a directive or guide in worship, much as our *Directory of Public Worship* does. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* insists that “God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God, by his providence calleth thereunto” (21.6). Therefore, it is incumbent that individuals, secretly, and families, privately, worship Him daily.

Such worship is a joy and blessing from God, and it is encouraged and commanded by the Holy Scriptures. Indeed, “the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love” (Psalm 147:11).

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:4-7

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. Psalm 1:1-2

But when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:5-6

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16

- I. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ always have unlimited access to the throne of grace; therefore, it is good for the Christian to devote specific times to the worship of God in private, both morning and evening, and at other times throughout the day. This is an important and special way the Christian communes with God and is properly prepared for the Christian life. Therefore, ministers, elders, and the heads of families should make diligent effort to encourage daily private worship. Reading the Bible and praying in private, being ordinary means of grace, are the principal ways to worship God as individuals.

- II. The ordinary parts of individual or family worship include the following:
 - A. **Prayer**, which is a gift from God himself, is informed by the reading of Scripture and should carefully consider the needs of every member of the family, the church (both local and worldwide), and the nation(s). Every Christian should desire to pray daily, and this should be diligently encouraged by the head of the family.
 - B. **The reading of Scripture**, along with a plain explanation of the passage so that all in attendance (especially children) may understand and receive benefit from it. When appropriate, discussion and application of the passage should also take place, along with any necessary reproofs, admonishments, and corrections, to be given by the head of the family. Also, the use of the catechisms of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (catechesis being instruction by method of question and answer on matters of the Christian faith), particularly when young children are present in family worship, is highly recommended.
 - C. **The singing of praises** to the glory of God. It is recommended that families make diligent use of the Psalms as a part of their praises unto God.

- III. Scripture, being God's Word, is used by the Holy Spirit in shaping the hearts and minds of his people. Therefore, it is good for the minister and elders to instruct their congregations in the proper use of the Bible in family worship. Likewise, heads of families should seek the help of their church leadership when needed. Great care should be taken by the head of the family to uphold the Bible as the written Word of God and the only perfect rule of faith and how to live, not assuming in any way the authority of a minister.

- IV. It is the responsibility and privilege of ministers and elders to encourage and equip all families under their care to engage in family worship, and they themselves are especially accountable to stir up their families in this practice.

- V.** It is the duty of the head of the family to take care that all in the home are present during family worship. Only those who are mature and confirmed in their faith should lead family worship; otherwise, subtle and deceitful errors may enter homes and cause division in the church.
- VI.** Individual and family worship are the ordinary ways whereby Christians are disciplined daily toward Christian maturity. Great care must be taken so that these are not interrupted by the ordinary events of life, whether work, rest, recreation, or entertainment. Neither should extraordinary events of life separate believers from the daily benefit of worshipping God. It is incumbent upon heads of families to make sure that individual and family worship are priorities in the lives of those under their care. In addition, these should not be seen as a rival or substitute to the public worship of God on the Lord's Day.
- VII.** Since there are immense spiritual and practical benefits in keeping the Christian Sabbath, heads of families should make every effort to lead those under their care in preparing for worship on the Lord's Day. Preparation for public worship on the Lord's Day starts before the service itself and should be included as part of both private and family worship. After the worship service, it is encouraged to review and discuss the content of the service, giving special attention to the sermon, along with the prayers, songs, and Scripture readings.
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“Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.” Joshua 24:14-18