

Partnering with the Church in Discipleship of Your Children

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We all know that having children and youth with us in the service can be challenging for them and for us. Why, then, do we persist in including the next generation in our worship services?

Reason 1: To train our children from a young age that Sunday Morning Worship is all about GOD, not ourselves and our preferences.

Growth happens when there is challenge.

Reason 2. Scripture shows a normative pattern of all ages worshiping together.

All throughout Scripture there is no mention of children being separated from adults for worship. When Jesus was speaking to the crowds, there were children present. In John 6 we are told it was a boy who had the 5 loaves and 2 fish.

Normative does not mean that it would be sinful to separate by age, it simply is not an example for us in Scripture.

Reason 3. Our children are members of the covenant community and Sunday morning worship is the primary activity in which the covenant community engages all together. Why would we exclude our children from corporate worship?

Reason 4. We want our children to experience the ordinary means of grace: hearing the preached word, observing the sacraments, singing God's praises, and taking part in corporate prayer

Reason 5. Our children benefit from being with Christians of various ages. They can look and see the faith that we are working to teach them being exemplified in other families, college students, older adults, and high school students, thus helping them to understand that we are not isolated in our Christian walk.

Reason 6. Worshiping the Lord as a family unit reinforces that Christ is central in the home. If Christ is central, then the Church is central, for He is the head and the church is the body.

John Piper: The greatest stumbling block for children in worship is that their parents do not cherish the hour. Children can feel the difference between duty and delight. Therefore, the first and most important job of a parent is to fall in love with the worship of God. You can't impart what you don't possess.

Things to assess:

- What is your attitude on Saturday night?
- What activities trump church attendance?
- Are you as the parent fully engaged in the service?

Daddies...you are your little boy's hero. Are your sons learning that worshipping God is manly?

Parents...your children are watching.

Doing the hard work of engaging will increase your love of Sunday morning worship.

Pray for yourself to love church more.

Practical hints:

Worship prep starts Friday and Saturday:

- All about Sunday E-mails (read Bible verse, review songs)
- Look over the bulletin and explain the order of worship
- Pray for church service, worship leader, preaching pastor, SS teachers, Children volunteers, greeters, visitors...etc.
- Family night (try Friday instead of Saturday)
- Lay out your clothes
- Church bags by the door (Bible, Notebook, Pen, sharp pencils, crayons (twist up), colored pencils, clip board, possibly stickers, a small fidget toy as needed)
- Early to bed

Sunday morning

- Rise Early and pretend church starts at 8:15
- Special, easy breakfast (crockpot oatmeal, doughnuts, Pillsbury sweet rolls)
- Say a quick word of Prayer in car on the way, and affirm your children, tell them how glad you are that you can worship as a family
- Arrival: check in children if needed
- Use the bathroom (everyone)
- ALWAYS have tissues and mints in your bag (to avoid leaving the service unnecessarily)

Going into the service

- Grab sermon notes and bulletins
- Find seats and get situated (know ahead of time who sits by whom)
 - Littles near the front (they have to be able to see!)

- Teens in the middle. Families may want to sit together to encourage a teen's sense of connection with the church
- Nobody in the very back unless you have an infant (too easy to check out!)
- Look over the notes quickly and explain anything difficult to your child, prep with vocabulary words, tell the main idea to listen for, and put notes away until sermon.

During the Service

- Goal is engagement, not silence. (respectful, but not like at the tomb of the unknown soldier or beefeaters in front of Buckingham Castle)
- Let a child use the bulletin during worship, even checking off each thing as it happens
- Stand and sit as asked to
- Get out your Bible: run your finger over the words as the child follows. Older children run their finger over the words for you. Older children look up the passage before service and mark it in readiness
- If needed, remove your child's shoes and let them stand on the chairs, or simply let them stand slightly in the aisle (have you ever considered their view?)
- Smile at your children during the service
- Use the family sign language (thumbs up, you know better, pay attention)
- Use sermon notes
- Have them write in notebook
 - Prayer needs
 - Announcements
 - Favorite song
 - Instruments that were played
 - Who leads in prayer
 - who is preaching

Can no longer attend to the sermon at all

- Write down the Bible verse in their notebook and decorate it
- Draw a picture to go with the sermon, or of a banner, or of the piano, or of the pastor.
- Look around the congregation and...
 - Count how many children you see
 - How many of them do you know?
 - Pick one person you know in the congregation and write as many things that you know about them as you can think of
 - Look around the church and find three people. Pray for them.

Nursery, Children's Church, Sunday School

- Taking to nursery, not just play with toys and hear stories, but be with God's people, hear about Jesus, they love you because you are part of this church family. This is our

church family, they love us, and we love them. We take care of each other at church, etc.

- Make sure you present as excitement to **go** CC rather than **leaving** Big Church
Avoid, “Now it’s time for fun!”
 - Eager to go: Praise them for wanting to hear God’s Word on their level and their confidence to go and be with friends.
 - Reluctant to go: Affirm that wanting to stay with family in worship is good, they may stay with you, but there is a lot of responsibility that goes with staying (or if you do not want them to stay with you, simply tell them how you look forward to the time when they can handle that responsibility)
 - Please avoid saying, “You’re just going to be bored if you stay with me...”

Linking the Family and the Church in Other Ways

Children’s Church and Sunday School

- Children often cannot explain what they learned, not because they did not learn anything, but because they cannot synthesize what they learned. To follow up with them on lessons use the following things:
 - Sign in the hallway with an “at home” question
 - Scope and Sequence of preschool through 6th grade is on our website.
 - Crafts
 - Take home papers
 - What if Sunday lunch involved sharing Sunday papers?
 - What if Sunday night bedtime routine involved looking at the papers?
 - What if you used the take home papers for family devotionals?
 - What if you put papers in a folder in a binder and took it on vacation for doing during travel?
- Talk to the teacher or assistant at pick up (thanking them, know their name)
- Have children write thank you notes, you write thank you notes, small gifts, etc.

Other ways to connect

- Come to activities (picnics, Fall Festival, Skating, Talent Show, Meals, etc.)
- Help your child find a place of service in the church (choir, collecting bulletins and paper after church, see something on the floor—pick it up, a sense of “this is ours together”)
- Serve in the church with your child (greeting and ushering, children’s church, nursery, Service Saturdays, set up and take down, visiting shut-ins from church, writing notes and drawing pictures for our missionaries, VBS, ASP, Bible Club
Christ must be central in your home.

Final thoughts:

- If Christ is central, His people will be central, His people are the Church, and He has called us to the local church.
- We must be purposeful and self-aware.
- Try to think of one or two things you can implement right now!

Resources:

Online:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-children-sit-through-big-church>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/children-in-worship-lets-bring-it-back/>

<https://pcacdm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TeachingYourChildrenToWorship3.pdf>

Books:

Parenting in the Pew by Robbie Castleman (pcabookstore.com)

Family Worship by Terry L. Johnson (pcabookstore.com)

Heirs of the Covenant by Susan Hunt (pcabookstore.com)

Coming this summer:

Church is Not Boring by Lisa Updike (pcabookstore.com)