



## Children in Worship

Take a moment to think back to when you were a kid. What did “worship” in the context of Sunday mornings mean to you? Did you go to church? What was it like? What did you do?

One of my earliest memories of church is of a dark, chilly sanctuary, shrouded in mystery and strangely lit by big blue stained glass windows. I can still smell the old wood pews and I remember the feeling of *not belonging in there*. Little children like me never set foot in the sanctuary unless we had a baby sibling being baptized or it was Christmas time and the cherub choir was singing “Go Tell it on the Mountain”. As soon as we finished singing, we were shuffled out the door and back down the hallway to Children's Church.

I loved church, and had relationships with many wonderful teachers and adults committed to helping my parents raise me in the nurture of the Lord, but I *never once* worshiped with my parents while we were there. Whatever happened in that big sanctuary was Adults Only territory.

I want to submit to you that that's not the way it's meant to be! I don't believe it's biblical, and it's not the way we do things here at BEP for many reasons.

God calls us into a covenant relationship: He promises that He will be our God and we will be His people. The children of Christian parents are a part of this covenant community (1 Cor. 7:14). Therefore, we always include children in the central act of this community-- corporate worship. And the same goes for our corporate prayer meetings, as well. By doing this we make a big statement about our children's status in God's household-- *they are no less significant than adults*. Corporate worship is not to be mysterious to them! As parents, we have the duty and privilege of bringing our kids into God's presence and teaching them what it all means. We see an example of this parent-child worship dynamic in Deuteronomy 6:20: “When your son asks you, 'what is the meaning of the decrees and statutes and ordinances the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you are to tell him...” We explain what we are doing and why it is significant.

I love that our children are welcomed into corporate worship at BEP. Dismissal for kids is purposefully *after* much of our worship has already taken place, so that families are worshipping together.

“What a benefit there is when children witness their mother or father singing with conviction, praying in reverence, listening intently to the sermon, or receiving the Lord’s Supper in joy. In these moments a child witnesses the importance of faith and worship. There are few greater encouragements to a child’s faith then seeing their parents worship God with reverence and joy.”

—Jason Helopoulos, Children in Worship—Let’s Bring it Back

During the sermon time, the BEP Children's Ministry offers a nursery, a preschool class, and Children's Worship for kids through third grade. We want to provide purposeful, worshipful instruction for kids and we also want to provide for visitors who may not be used to a worship service.

Even so, the purpose behind Children's Worship is not to keep our covenant children from the full time of corporate worship so that they are not bored or so they are not a distraction to adults. The purpose is to train them in worship, with the goal that they would become full and active participants in it as part of this body of believers. But I whole-heartedly believe that this training can and must be done in the proverbial pew, next to you, next to me, as well.

We might need to switch our thinking from wanting to keep our kids away for as long as we can, to wanting to bring them in and include them *as soon as we can*.

This is one of the areas where the CMT wants to empower you and equip you: to train your kids in worship. Our children look to us and our example as their parents to determine whether all these things about God and our worship of Him are important and true. God primarily calls parents to train their children in the ways of His covenant people.

### **The Mind and The Heart**

Faith and worship are a matter of both the *mind* and the *heart*. When our children are little, much of how we engage them in spiritual things will be with their minds. We are training and teaching them. We are filling them with big ideas and words and truths about who God is, and what He has done for them in Christ, and why He is worthy of their worship.

At home every day, we're demonstrating the disciplines of godly living. Maybe we're catechizing them or reading the Bible together; we're talking about spiritual things; we're praying with and for them. We are showing them by example that Christ takes preeminence in our schedules and our decisions. The word "disciple" means learner... we are engaging their minds.

In the context of Sunday morning worship, that means that they'll need to grow and practice and be taught and be *expected to participate*. We walk them through the patterns of our worship and explain what each part means and how it displays the Gospel. We have them stand to sing praise. We bow heads to pray. We whisper explanations into little ears. And as we include them in worship, as we use it to show them who God is, it is our prayer that eventually the *heart* will follow the mind in Spirit-produced faith and love-- and out of that, genuine worship.

***But the heart cannot love what the mind does not know.***

"The more kids know [about corporate worship], the more they will engage. The more they appreciate, the more they will delight. The more they understand, the more it will prove meaningful to them. They won't treat worship casually or indifferently or with boredom because they will start to understand its significance." - Let the Children Worship

Isn't that true for us adults, too? We also want our children to understand that our corporate worship, including the Elder's prayer and sermon time of the second half, *is for them*. Whether they join us for the sermon at age 3, 6, or 9, they need to know that they are part of Christ's body and can offer worship to Christ.

## Help for Parents

We remain sensitive to the fact that there is no magic formula to training our children in worship. Different families will have different comfort levels, challenges, and past experiences when it comes to including children in the service. Your family at BEP recognizes that some fussing, chatter, and rolling crayons (not to mention the clattering of fallen activity clipboards!) are a part of having many generations gathered in worship together. At baptisms, we promise to help you as you raise your children to be disciples of Christ, and helping you on Sunday mornings is a part of that promise. Please reach out to me or to a friend if you could use some help and encouragement. There are many helping hands ready to come alongside you.

We want you all to feel prepared, equipped, and excited for Sundays, especially if keeping your kids with you during worship is new for you. Again, beginning in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, our kids are present during the sermon.

- I will have special materials and bulletins and sermon notes for different ages.
- I have a handout that lists some wisdom for parents when it comes to having your kids with you during the worship service. “8 Tips for Helping Your Children Worship” cards are available at the Welcome Desk. “Sermon Notes” notebooks for elementary schoolers are available as well.
- Pastor Brian and Pastor Jon will be prepared to speak to the kids and apply the sermon to young lives as well as older ones.
- Talk about sermon time at home, presenting it as something that's exciting. Don't be filled with dread! Temper your expectations with the reality that our kids don't always *feel* like being in worship, but we bring them in as an act of joy and love and obedience.
- Focus on seeing the glory of God in Christ through the elements of our corporate worship, considering how each part displays the gospel. This fuels joy in our own hearts that will become contagious to our kids!

Let us diligently and faithfully embrace our calling as parents and disciple-makers, and consider how we can display to our children the joy and privilege of worship as the gathered Church, show them that worship is *for them*, and encourage them to *understand, participate, ask questions, and be present*. We love your families and pray whole-heartedly with you that all of our children will walk in the Truth and come to cherish Sundays and the Body of Christ! Pastor Brian and I are both available to discuss this with you and answer any questions you might have. Please come talk to one of us, we'd love to hear from you.

In Christ's love,  
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