



MERIDIAN CHURCH

Why Do We Want our Children in the Worship Service?

by Josh King

Why wouldn't we?

Yet, we understand that one of the first things guests notice about our fellowship is all the children. Unfortunately, we believe, this is foreign to the “normal” church experience. For this reason we want to provide an explanation and some food for thought. But before we answer this first question, let's answer another question in order to set some ground work.

Who is Responsible?

Biblically, parents are to be the primary faith nurturers of their children. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers “not provoke their children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (ESV).” Dad and mom will be held accountable to God for how they shepherd their children to worship Him and fathers bear the chief responsibility as the heads of their families. Parents, feel this burden and realize that you cannot outsource this duty.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6 was the Hebrew's John 3:16, that is to say, it was the piece of Scripture most familiar to them. It is known as the *Shema* (the Hebrew word for “hear”). It might sound familiar.

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 (ESV).

When asked what the great commandment was Jesus replied with the Shema (Mark 12:29-30). Parents, is your parenting an obedience to this overarching command? Immediately following this command in Deuteronomy 6:7-9 we read:

You shall teach them [God's words] 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (ESV).

Parents, school is always in session, the world is your classroom, the Bible is your textbook, your children are your pupils, and your objective is that God's glory be feared and delighted in. Parents, you are your children's greatest influencer. Most often, what you worship, they will worship. This should couple the burden of shepherding with a sense of delight. Parenting has explosive potential for the glory of God.

To evaluate how you are doing ask your children this question, “What do you think daddy (or mommy) loves more than anything else?” Have your children caught your passion for fishing but not for worshipping? They will formulate their answer by seeing what you are most passionate about, what you give your time to, and what you sacrifice for. Now I believe we are ready for our original question.

Why Do We Want Our Children in the Worship Service?

Do your children observe you worshipping God? When we really enjoy something we invite others into it, especially those closest to us. If dad loves football his son will likely catch his enthusiasm. Worship is contagious. It is caught as much as it is taught. Sadly, the biggest obstacle to overcome in bringing children into the worship service isn't children, but parents. John Piper writes:

There are several reasons why we urge parents to bring their children to worship. But these arguments will not carry much weight with parents who do not love to worship God.

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.

I think a healthy, Biblically-saturated, Christ-intoxicated mind will reason like this, “I'm worshipping God! – why wouldn't I want to share that with my children.”

This reason partly answers the objection, “But they won't understand anything.” The young child who watches football with his dad doesn't perfectly understand the game, but he does begin to understand more and more of it. He begins to grasp the vocabulary and the point of the game. The child who worships with their family won't catch everything, but they will catch something, chiefly they will catch that mom and dad are in awe of God.

Further, we believe that there is a strong Biblical precedent for children to be part of the worshipping assembly. In Deuteronomy 31 the nation of Israel is commanded to assemble every seven years with their children during the Feast of Booths to hear the public reading of the law (meaning either the Pentateuch or the book of Deuteronomy). Imagine trying to keep your children quiet for that service. Why would God command something so difficult? Why not just assemble the adults who could “really” understand it, and understand it better free of distraction? The answer is the glory of God in their children learning to revere Him.

Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess (Deuteronomy 31:12-13 ESV).

Worship for the nation of Israel under the old covenant was a family affair (Deuteronomy 12:10-12). Can any good reason be given why this should not be the case for the church?

We are not naïve as to the difficulties this may present, but we believe the rewards far outweigh the cost. The Christian life isn't lived because it's easy, but because it's glorious. Still, we want you to know that we are here to help and support you. We want to create a church culture where we value and celebrate children, yes, even in "our" worship service.

Help and Preparation

We believe that the best way to prepare your children for congregational worship on Sundays is family worship throughout the week. If you have never practiced family worship we recommend that you start very simply, and then keep it that way. Start by using one of the recommended Storybook Bibles listed at the end of this article. Follow this with praying together, and singing a hymn or song. As the children age you can read a short portion of Scripture and then discuss it. Using a catechism with older children is also an excellent way to disciple them.

Family worship is probably best if kept to around ten to twenty minutes. Pick a regular time, after dinner or before bed will probably work best for most families. Require your children to sit still and attentively during family worship. If they do not obey, administer discipline and try again. Be firm, be consistent, and don't give up. Family meals are also a good opportunity to teach you children how to sit still and not play.

On the church website, www.meridianchurch.com, we make available by Friday a guide for family worship on Saturday evening to prepare your children for Sunday morning. You may find that your child's face will light up on Sunday morning as they sing a song they are familiar with and hear the Scripture read. Before you go to bed prepare for the Lord's Day. This will communicate how special you think the day is and your anticipation of hearing the Word of the Lord. Lay out their clothes, get their offering ready, and gather everything you will need to bring with you.

During the service prompt them to participate appropriately (i.e. clap, sing, stand, pray). Draw their attention to the words on the screen. Share your Bible with the youngest ones and point to the words of the text as they are read and referenced. Encourage them to take notes during the sermon. For the youngest ones this could be drawing a

picture of something they have heard. We do not recommend that you bring toys or electronics. You might allow the youngest non-readers to color, but even then we recommend that you find coloring sheets that are pertinent to the message and give them to the children only as a last resort. Looking at a Bible Storybook is another option if they can do so without being a distraction.

While a training room and nursery are available, we want you to know these are more for your comfort than ours. Our hope is that parents use these for as short a time as possible so that they can most fully feel part of the congregation. We don't think this is an unrealistic expectation. Children can easily learn to sit still and quietly at a surprisingly young age. We believe it better to teach parents to exercise Biblical discipline than to divert unruly children. We want to attack the bigger issues and see greater God-glorifying results. If your child does become disruptive, please don't be embarrassed but quietly find a private place to administer or promise consequences, and return to the service if possible. I have personally had to do this. I will not think less of you. Sitting at the end of a chair section will help you to more easily deal with any problems. If your children are easily distracted by others it might be best to sit closer to the front and in the center where they cannot so easily see all that is going on.

Finally, on the way home or over lunch talk about the worship gathering. Ask them questions and ask them if they have any questions. You will often be surprised at their level of comprehension.

A Child-loving Culture

Finally, I want to appeal to the church body to help us in this endeavor. Let's look upon children and the discipling of them as a blessing and not a curse. Let's rejoice more in the beauty of families worshipping together than in our personal comfort. Optimally, when children visit grandparents, the grandparents may have to do some child-proofing, but if adjustments must be made, they are made with delight. You may need to make some adjustments; may I propose that you do so joyfully. For example, if you think you will be greatly distracted you might try sitting closer to the front and center. Yes, this will be harder. Yes, it will involve sacrifice. Yes, we could make the service all for the adults, but then would it be all for the glory of God?

Recommended Resources

All of the following resources are linked on our website; click on “Resources” then “Recommendations” and scroll down to “For Families.”

Sermons

- “Leading Family Worship” by Joel Beeke (highly recommended!)

Online Articles

- “The Family: Together in God’s Presence” by John Piper
- “Suggestions for Helping Your Child Worship” by Salley Michael
- “Worship Together” by Jen Wilkin
- “Big Church for Small Kids” by Jen Wilkin
- “11 Reasons to Worship with your Family” by Jason Helopoulos
- “The What When and How of Family Worship” by Jason Helopoulos

Family Storybook Bibles

- *The Biggest Story* by Kevin DeYoung
- *The Big Picture Story Bible* by David Helm
- *Mighty Acts of God* by Starr Meade
- *The Gospel Story Bible* by Marty Machowski

Catechisms

- The New City Catechism
- *Big Truths for Little Kids* by Susan and Richie Hunt
- A Baptist Catechism

Music

- *Hymns of Grace*
- *Trinity Baptist Hymnal*
- *Seeds Family Worship*
- *Sovereign Grace Kids*

Parenting

- *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp
- *Instructing a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp
- *Gospel-Powered Parenting* by William Farley
- *Give them Grace* by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson
- *A Neglected Grace* by Jason Helopoulos
- *Future Men* by Douglas Wilson
- *Family Driven Faith* by Voddie Baucham

Kids Bibles

- Seek & Find Bible
- Grow Bible