

Training our Kids to Worship

- Start with the right mindset. Your family is going to worship God not just going to church. Worshiping God puts him as the star of the story not ourselves. Sunday morning is not FOR us. Worship is a blessing to God and he values the presence and praise of children (Matthew 18:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16)
- Worshiping is about the surrender of our souls. Worship is a challenge. With children, it is a bigger challenge. But there is no external circumstance that can keep us from worship and we CAN learn to worship with children.
- Fixing our hearts on being with our children before the LORD not OTHERS will free us up from worrying about it looking messy. We can offer all kinds of grace to each other, our kids and ourselves.
- Children will learn to worship *by worshiping*—through participation, practice and patience. Parents model, by example, what it means to be encountered by God, to love his Son and to respond to the Holy Spirit in worship. Share with your kids how a song spoke to you or whisper your prayers so they can hear.
- Encourage their participation in all parts of Sunday morning—point to the words of the songs, sing so they can hear you, have them bring their own money in for tithing, explain the parts of our service, define words, guide them through times of prayer.
- We are training children to worship not just be quiet. To help a child develop concentration, parents might have to talk more. If you sit close to your children, however, you can give whispered explanations, instructions and reminders. For this reason it is a good idea to keep your kids with you (not sitting with friends)
- Children will ask questions—lots of questions. Adults need to give careful and truthful answers. Scripture needs to be cited time and again as the resource for many answers.
- Eliminate as many distractions as possible. If you bring games and activities the kids will learn they are not expected to pay attention. If there is lack of expectation that your kids will pay attention then they will habitually tune out. Sermon notes for kids can help them follow along. The key is still to concentrate on the service, not just “do something.” Review the highlights after the service--shows the sermon was important.
- Be intentional about pointing out appropriate expectations for children. Be clear about expectations and consequences, no matter how you choose to discipline. Be serious about behavior.
- Express appreciation not just expectations; “I want to let you know how thankful I am to have the whole family sitting together this Sunday. Worshiping with you means a whole lot to me”
- Preparing to worship happens all week—protecting Saturday night from being too late, preparing clothes, tithe, Bibles, etc. before Sunday morning, praying against spiritual warfare, building excitement for God’s special day
- Worship can make all the difference between “borrowed” faith and “owned-for-myself” faith. Sometimes an encounter with God won’t look like one at first. God can surprise us with his presence.
- We must trust God to be at work in the lives of our children, even when this seems hard to do. He alone sees the October apples when it is only June. This is a story about a journey not a Sunday.
- Worship training goes better some weeks than others, for as many reasons as there are parents and kids. Go with Grace

Notes from “Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship” by Robbie Fox Castleman and Ruth Bell Graham

Our Mindset: Going to Church or Going to Worship?

- Biblical worship is partly intended to help God’s people remember, rehearse and reenact God’s great story of salvation. To enter into that story week after week with one’s children is a great reminder of our place in that story. Biblical worship is story-shaped worship.
- Children can infringe on our worship experience, however, children do not have to interfere with God’s experience of worship.
- We are not the star of the story. Sunday morning is not FOR us.
- Worship is good for God. Worship concerns itself with God’s pleasure, his benefit, his good.
- Worship is first a blessing to God, and he values the presence and praise of children (Matthew 18:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16)

Working at Worship

- Worship is the surrender of our souls to a God who is jealous for our attention, time and love.
- Worship is a challenge. With children, it is a bigger challenge.
- We have to work at worship. With children, we work harder.
- There is no external circumstance that can keep you from worship
- Worship begins in the heart of the believer, with or without a bulletin. With or without shoes. With or without stained glass, pews or grass. And with or without children. We can learn to worship with children and teach them to worship with us.
- Children can make it difficult to concentrate on being with the Lord. But if our hearts are fixed on being with our children before the *Lord* and not before the *congregation*, we will begin to experience great relief and freedom.

Worshiping with our Kids

- Children learn to worship by worshipping—through participation, practice and patience
- Parents can show by example what it means to be encountered by God, to love his Son and to respond to the Holy Spirit in worship. When worship is an obvious joy to parents, children will expect to experience the same.
- Children will ask questions—lots of questions. Adults need to give careful and truthful answers. Scripture needs to be cited time and again as the resource for many answers.
- Worship can make all the difference between “borrowed” faith and “owned-for-myself” faith.
- Participation in every syllable of the service is of major importance in training children to worship. But remember, sometimes an encounter with God won’t look like one at first. God can surprise us with his presence
- God can be blessed by children expected to participate in all parts of church, by children helped to do so, and by children that are simply *there*.
- Quote from Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony: “in many of our modern, sophisticated congregations, children are often viewed as distractions. We tolerate children only to the extent they promise to become “adults” like us. Adult members sometimes complain that they cannot pay attention to the sermon, they cannot listen to the beautiful music, when fidgety children are beside them in the pews...Interestingly, Jesus put a child in the center of his disciples, “in the midst of them,” In order to help them pay attention....The child was the last-ditch effort by God to help the disciples pay attention to the odd nature of God’s kingdom. Few acts of Jesus are more radical, countercultural, than his blessing of children.”

Preparing to Worship happens all week

- Sundays are special like birthday cake is special. Technically birthday cake is just cake but the preparations sets it apart. We love the Lord every day, but Sunday is God's favorite flavor and the frosting is sweeter.
- With older children, beginning with toddlers, start Sundays with an announcement that the very best day of the week is about to begin. "Jesus is excited. This is a special day!"
- Make decisions to protect Saturday night from being too late or keeping you from your commitment to Sunday. God is worthy of our best energy, not our least.
- Prepare things before Sunday morning—clothes, tithe, Bibles, etc. Have kids decorate an envelope for Jesus with their offering in it before Sunday to bring on Sunday morning. Children tithing from their own resources (birthday money, allowance, etc) not from parent's spare change.
- Praying against spiritual warfare that attacks Sunday mornings
- Children need to hear excitement about going to church not grumblings, complaints or discontentment
- A families commitment to worship can protect children from burnout due to the reality of "over-choice" in the myriad of things meant to enrich their lives
- Keeping Sunday meals simple, hassle free
- Let your kids see you prepare for worship, sense your anticipation, notice you getting ready for God's special day.

Training Kids to pay attention

- One of the biggest challenges is training children to pay attention to what is happening—the worship of God—and helping them be a part of it.
- Training children to worship does not always enhance our own experience of being before the Lord, especially at first. On a feeling level, the experience of worship may seem impoverished by the demands of parenting. The number of times children must be helped to concentrate, pay attention and enter into the worship service is almost beyond counting. The effort can be exhausting. *And it can be pleasing to God*
- During the Saturday preparation for worship, parents need to be intentional about pointing out appropriate expectations for children. Be clear about expectations and consequences, no matter how you choose to discipline. Be serious about behavior
- Worship as entertainment will not accelerate the spiritual growth of our children. Worship needs to be the one realm in our culture that refuses to accept the world's addiction to be entertained in order to learn.
- When children are trained to worship, when they are helped to develop as spiritually attuned people, they can begin to encounter God in powerful ways. Counting bricks is no match for a God who longs for our attention. Entertainment is no match for worship. Entertainment fills up our time; worship fits us for eternity.
- Keep your kids sitting with you (instead of friends) to train them to pay attention. You can say, "It is much harder to pay attention to God when you want to pay attention to your friend. You will have time later to be with your friend; right now Jesus wants all of our attention because he has something to say to us."
- For parents, being with older teens in worship can seem unimportant. But at this age, training is increasingly transformed into companionship. This can be the time when expressions of worship take on new depth and meaning. It is important for parents to be a part of a teenager's reflections on faith and truth. If the expectation has been communicated in love and in terms of desire rather than denial, teens are cooperative.
- Make bathroom stops before service starts. Make an expectation that it is not allowed to go to the bathroom except for emergencies.
- If we want kids to pay attention to the Lord, we will eliminate as many distractions as possible. This means that toys, books, coloring books and electronic games stay at home. Kids are quick to think of all sorts of diversions, even religious ones (flipping through the Bible), to pass the time in church if that's all that's expected of them.

- Train a child to worship not to be quiet. Quietness at certain times may enhance their ability to worship, but quietness is a means to this effort, not the end.
- To help a child develop concentration, parents might have to talk more. If you sit close to your children, however, you can give whispered instructions and reminders rather easily and with little or no distraction to others.
- Where you sit can be helpful. With other parents training. Away from friends that might distract. Near the front.
 - Point to the words as their being read (scripture or songs) for early readers
 - Children will often get more out of scripture readings than you had expected
 - When we ask our children to pay attention, we often end up doing a better job of it ourselves
- Sermon notes for kids can help them follow along. The key is still to concentrate on the service, not just “do something”
- Ask friends to help you when its too hard or you’re just too tired.
- Worship training goes better some weeks than others, for as many reasons as there are parents and kids.
- No passing notes

Music

- Talk about the hymns. Define words and discuss meanings.
- Teach older children the history behind the writing of a hymn. Explain and discuss the content of hymns
- Children need to feel physically involved in worship. Draw their attention to the screen. Make sure they can see the words or are following along in the music sheet.
- The parent should try to sing in such a way that the child can hear the song clearly and when necessary the parent can give instructions.
- You can keep an arm around the child that wiggles the most
- Very young children can be asked to listen for a particular word or phrase in a song
- Whisper expressions to help a child or teen know what you are thinking after a hymn is sung. “Jesus was sure my friend this week when I was worried about Grandpa”. Such remarks help children get the idea that what is sung really matters. They learn to listen to the words they sing. They learn to live the words
- When children participate in children’s choirs, encourage them to participate as an offering to God, not to perform for the congregation. Compliment the child on how worship was enhanced not on their performance. “I really thought a lot about how God loves me while you sang your song to the Lord this morning. Thank you for helping me worship.” Avoid taking pictures
- When teaching children how to worship, parents must remind them that their “chief end” is the glory of God

Corporate Prayer

- Prayer needs to be woven into the fabric of our lives. Children need to see that prayer is central to our faith-filled dependence on God.
- We shouldn’t be afraid that prayer that is not answered according to our hopes will weaken or destroy our children’s faith. Children need to see that God can be trusted no matter what. This is the foundation for maturing faith.
- Guide your child during times of silent prayers of confession: “Now is the time we bow our heads and talk to Jesus about stuff we are sorry about. Remember our talk this morning about being selfish? Tell Jesus about this now, and ask him to help you share the last doughnut with your brother next time.”

- If a child comes to confession with a “Clean slate” it can be used as a time to thank Jesus for loving us no matter what.
- Pray for patience as a parent. “Don’t judge October apples in June” It is a mark of our own maturing faith in God not to try to play Holy Spirit in the lives of our children.
- True repentance, genuine spiritual insight and real faith are the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives and the lives of our children. Parenting is stressful enough. We don’t need to try to take on God’s job as well as our own. It is God’s job to be working in the lives of our children. His work is lasting, wise, patient and all-knowing. We parents, no matter how well we succeed at times, fall short in all four categories. He alone is the perfect Parent who loves our children perfectly. We must trust him to be at work in the lives of our children, even when this is hard to do. He alone sees the October apples when it is only June.

Paying attention during the sermon

- Learning to listen to God’s Word as it is read, taught and proclaimed is an important part of how children begin to discern the unique authority of Scripture for the church.
- Have the pastor ask the children to listen for one particular word or short phrase that will be said several times. Ask a young child to squeeze your hand every time he or she hears that word. Ask an older child to note how the word or phrase is used or in what context or story throughout the sermon. Ask the children to count how many times the word or phrase is used and to tell the pastor before they leave the service.
- This helps children identify the pastor as a special teacher, a person to pay attention to and listen to
- Review the highlights after the service lets kids know the sermon was important
- Ask what they learned from the story
- Let kids draw a picture of what they heard in the sermon but discern if this becomes doodling and game playing.
- If you bring games and activities the kids will learn they are not expected to pay attention. Expect more from your kids, they like a challenge. They’ll discover the sermon is for them too
- If there is lack of expectation that your kids will pay attention then they will habitually tune out
- Tests after the sermon help show you expect them to listen
- A special treat can be offered
- Your kids may grumble about worship training. The whole family will have to work at commitment, but everyone will adjust, and the new way of “going to church” will soon become the best way of actually going to worship
- Express appreciation not just expectations; “I want to let you know how thankful I am to have the whole family sitting together this Sunday. Worship with you means a whole lot to me”

Communion

- Its very important that children recognize the extra-special significance of communion
- Grow anticipation for the age when they can participate. Wait until the child is ready for the responsibility and self-examination that comes with communion.
- The sacred must be treated with care and oversight for the welfare of the child
- Indicators might be-commitment, cost, personal initiative, and follow-through.
- If your child feels left out because they can’t participate in a sacrament, it may be because explanations have been given in terms of denial, not anticipation. “No you can’t” is different from “Not yet; its important to wait” Communicate a longing for your child to participate “I can hardly wait until your old enough”
- Delay is not denial. Anticipation is preparation for the proper moment of fulfillment. It is wise to work up a good appetite for the most significant meal
- They can be drawn into the sacrament with you...hold their hands around yours and explain the meaning. Take the elements and then put your hands right back with theirs and tell them that God’s love was extended to them in a special way through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

- As kids get older, explanations can deepen. “To think of how much God loved us...how much it cost Jesus to be obedient unto death just to save us...what it must have meant for God to take our sin, hurt—all the bad stuff—and place it on his perfect one...”
- Little by little the elements, the symbolism and the implications for the kids’ own faith will take root.
- Set an example and bring them in on times when you choose to refrain from communion. Tell them you need to work through something through prayer with the Lord. Let them see you restored through scripture, prayer, repentance, confession and reconciliation. They will see what it means to take sin seriously. They will also see what it means to take the grace of God seriously.

Intergenerational worship

- The intergenerational nature of the church is vitally important to God and needs to be nurtured in our worship, programs, mission and community life.
- We wonder why those in the next generation wander off from the church and complain they didn’t feel like they belonged. Maybe they never really did. All through their childhood and teen years they belonged to *their* group, not the church itself.
- It takes the church to make disciples. Intentional intergenerational development within a church is hard in our culture because it is countercultural. Its hard because its Biblical. Its hard because its costly—everyone in the congregation has to die to themselves to be servants to one another under the headship of Christ.
- Intergenerational communities making disciples of all ages are simply worth it.