



## Children In Worship

It's become quite the norm for churches to have well-developed, well-staffed, children's church programs. When churches advertise that they have a ministry for the whole family, they mean that they have a specialized venue for each age group, and the more precise the segregation, the better. If you can staff a nursery for 0-3 months, another for 4-6, another for 6-12, yet another for toddlers 1-2 years old, then separate classes for each grade up through college, you have developed a well-rounded children's ministry. Since the church at large generally sees children's ministries as the life of the church, and has multiplied Sunday School classes and Children's Churches and youth ministries, we think it good to outline why we have chosen to take a different course in regards to these issues.

This statement is not meant to be a full treatment of a Theology of the family, but is simply a concise presentation of our church's philosophy of children's ministries. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us.

### 1. **We believe children are a blessing.**

Psalms 127 & 128 clearly present children as a great blessing from the Lord. Psalm 37 specifically states that children reared in the context of a godly family will be used as an instrument of blessing to others. That blessing extends to the church. They are not distractions that need dismissed from the congregation, rather they bring vitality to it. Their giggles and wiggles are to be enjoyed. They have a unique ability to bring fascination and wonder back to us older people who have long since ceased to find rocks and pennies and string objects of wonderment, and who are still enthralled with the depths of theology expressed in 'Jesus Loves Me.' Do we think that God uses Children to mature adults any less than he uses adults to mature children? Hearing children's voices raised in worshipful song imparts great emotion to the worship service, as we see that we are passing on a holy reverence and love for God to our little ones. When children interact with the preaching of God's word along with the adults, we gain the blessing of passing along biblical faith to the next generation as Psalm 78 commands. Therefore, we see a great blessing in keeping the kids together with the adults in our worship services.

### 2. **We believe that parents are primary.**

We believe that there is no one more qualified to teach kids about faith in God and to train them how to worship than their own parents. God created children to be born to their parents. Built into a mom and a dad is an intense adoration and drive of protection towards their own kids. That is not by mistake. God commanded parents to be the ones to train their children how to love Him and serve Him. (Duet 6:5-6; Eph. 6:1-3) Children learn much more by example than by dictation. They need to see a daily illustration of godly faith lived out in real time. This is provided for in the family. How does a young child learn what God is like?

**Continued on the next page...**

From Mom and Dad. Why is God called Father? Because He wants us to learn of his character from the relationship we enjoy with our earthly dad. How does God feel and act towards people? The way a dad acts towards his children. How does Christ feel and act toward his Church? The way the husband loves his wife, his bride. How do we interact as members of the church? The way we interact as brothers and sisters in a family. The family is Theology in action, and it is powerful in its instruction. Granted, in this sin cursed world it is a marred example, but it is still God's plan that fathers and mothers be the ones to train their children in godliness and the fear of the Lord. So who better to answer the child's questions about God, and about why we do what we do in church, than Dad and Mom? So we believe that parents soul be the primary means of discipling children, rather than children's church programs.

**3. We believe that corporate worship is important.**

God's people are commanded to gather together for corporate worship. Example shows us that there have always been regular meetings for corporate worship and that children were part of those corporate gatherings. The Passover meal was a family event designed to intrigue children and draw them to ask questions regarding the symbolism and meaning of the event, so that moms and dads would have a ritual opportunity to instruct their children. (Ex. 12:26). The Communion meal provides just the same opportunity for the church, as parents instruct their children on the significance of the bread and the wine. Why, especially, would we separate our children from their parents at this moment of great opportunity to explain the gospel? In Duet. 31:10-13 Israel was commanded to have a gathering on the Sabbatical year for a corporate reading of the Law, and the whole family is mentioned. Can we imagine children sitting while the books of Moses were read publicly? In Joshua 8:32-35 the people of Israel did just that. They all gathered, the whole family, and listened while the Law of Moses was read. When Jesus fed the five thousand, whole families had gathered to listen to Him, including children. (Matt. 14:13-21, 15:32-39) Paul, in writing the epistles to the churches of Ephesus and Colossians gives instruction to the children who would be present with the families. Corporate worship involves singing (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16), public reading of the scriptures, coupled with instruction (1 Tim. 4:13) prayer (1Tim. 2:1-3), and fellowship with other believers (Acts 2:42). If we want to pass on a godly heritage to our children, then they must be trained in these vital areas, and we believe the best training is by doing. So we find great value in keeping children with the adults for our corporate worship services.

**4. We believe in relationships rather than programs.**

Growing people happens most in the context of a relationship with other people. We learn from those who are more mature than we are in a particular area. In Titus 2 Paul outlined the program of older men and women training the younger men and women in life skills. In this way, the younger gain wisdom and insight from the experience of the older, and the older are refreshed with the life and vitality of the younger. Each are built up by their relationship with the other. We believe this is no less important for children that it is for young adults. When children, even very young ones, form strong bonds with people of all ages, they gain great benefit from those relationships, much more than a classroom setting can give them. So we believe the greatest benefit to children, who learn best by seeing it in action, is to see the faith lived out in relationships with people in the church.

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## Answering a few questions...

Generally there are a few questions that arise when people encounter this idea for the first time.

1. **Don't children have special learning needs to have the truth presented to them in a manner that they can understand?** Answer: Yes. Refer back to our point that we believe parents are best. Since God created children to be born to parents, and then commanded parents to train children, we believe that parents are uniquely equipped to train their own children. Who better knows the learning styles and personalities of the children than their own parents? So, the worship service may not be uniquely fitted to that individual child, but neither is it uniquely fitted to every adult. It is the responsibility of Mom and Dad to make sure that the elements of the worship service are understood by their little ones. The car ride home and Sunday lunch are great opportunities for Mom and Dad to follow up with questions kids may have about the songs, the sermon, or the symbols seen in the worship service.
2. **Don't you believe in reaching children of unbelievers, then?** Sure we do. Do you know a child from an unbelieving family? Get permission from the parents and bring him to church to sit with you through the service and see the worship of God in action. Answer his questions about what the Pastor said, or what the songs means, or the symbolism of the Communion table. Introduce him to other believers in whom he can see the love of Christ. Then work with that family to see if you and their child might win them to Christ and begin to come to church to worship with you.
3. **What if a Dad or Mom doesn't feel qualified in understanding the Bible to be able to teach his or her children?** His resource is the church. The church is his go-to place to find that understanding. Let him ask his pastor. Let him ask an older man who has raised Godly children. Ephesians 6:1-3 commits to Dads the solemn and joyful responsibility of faithful instruction. Let him rise to it! It may take effort and study, but God created dads to love a challenge, and rearing godly children will certainly be the greatest challenge he ever aspires to. But he can accomplish it with the Lord's help.
4. **You talk a lot about a Dad's responsibility to train his children. What about single Parents?** The scriptures do present a family with both a Mother and Father as the ideal. In a sin-cursed world it doesn't always work out that way. But families that have been broken are not cast off by God, but rather given special promise that He is able to fill in the holes. Deuteronomy 10:17-18 proclaims the glory of God as an 'awesome God,' and as one who 'executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and who loves the sojourner'. Certainly our God cares about those whose lives have been wracked by the consequences of sin, whether their own or others, and we as His church should care as well. The church should be their support. Is a parent laboring to raise children without a partner spouse? How can the church help? Why not invite that family to sit with yours, and help that single parent teach the children how to engage in worship. The command to parents to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord still applies. If a father, or a mother, will not take the responsibility, then the other parent must rely upon God for the strength to fill that gap. Is a parent absent through abandonment, or death? God can supply, and the church should look to support that family in whatever ways are appropriate.

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5. **Doesn't having a bunch of wiggly children in the church service distract people, especially the parents, from their goal of worship, and from paying close attention to the teaching?** We strongly encourage parents to keep their children in the service as long as possible. Children do need to be trained how to engage in worship without distracting others with their wiggles and squirms. This is the parent's privilege to be able to teach them how to do so. Understandably, the younger a child is the less time he or she will be able to stay in the service without being too much of a distraction. But they do learn how, if they are trained to. It is also the parent's responsibility to know when a child is being a distraction, and should take a break from public service for a few moments to calm down. We always encourage parents whose children need a bit of break to return to the service as quickly as possible, so that the kids learn the importance of taking part of the corporate worship service. The key is mutual love for one another, where the people without children are patient, remembering the days when their children were small, and the parents with children applying the proper training to teach their children how to worship corporately. If another couple can see that parents with younger kids could use a break, why not invite their little children to sit with you for the service? You can build a great relationship with those little ones, show them that it's not just Mom and Dad who take worship seriously, and give Mom and Dad a bit of break. But the ultimate goal is to have children learn to worship corporately with the church, not to separate them from it and their family.