

multiple generations of believers.

How do we prepare our kids to join the worshipping community to which we belong and are committed? Let's take a look at what we can do to prepare and shepherd our children before, during and after public worship with Christ's church.

## \* **Before Worship: Preparing Hearts and Minds**

### Pray

Pray for with your kids and for them. Pray for your church's leadership. Pray that God would be honored and the Word faithfully preached. Pray for the church of Jesus Christ who will be gathering all around the world.

### Explanation

Instruct them – explain what is going to happen and what they can expect to experience. Help them understand as much as possible about what happens in worship. Discuss worship at home prior to coming to church. Explain any change in routine, or new elements such as child dedication, baptism or other special features. Take time to answer any questions they may have.

### Encouragement

Encourage your children. Encourage them to open their hearts to God and to expect God to speak to them through His Word.

### Expectations

Let them know what you expect. Don't send

them in unprepared. Don't expect them to read your mind. Here are some appropriate expectations:

- Listen and pay attention.
- Take notes during the sermon.
- Write down questions you have.

### **Plan Ahead**

When we go on family cross-country trips—sometimes 8,000 miles or more—it is always helpful to take a map. I like to show my kids where we are going to go and where we are. When preparing kids for worship, plan it out. Show them the map.

Helpful tips on planning for the worship service:

- Arrive on time to be able to find a good spot to sit, especially with younger children. We found that sitting near the end of an aisle close to the back of the room was helpful so as not to cause distractions if we needed to take our children out.
- Final preparation for Sunday starts best on Saturday night – lay out clothes, plan ahead.
- Go to the bathroom before entering worship service.
- Arrive to church early enough to get “settled in” your seats with your Bibles.
- Allow time to “quiet down.”

- Remind them on way to church what you as a family are going to do—worship the King of kings and Lord of lords with other believers. And make sure you review your expectations—repetition is good.

### **Point Them to God**

If you know the Scripture verses that will be preached on Sunday, read them ahead of time with your family several times. Hearing familiar words from the pulpit will further reinforce God's truths in young lives. Pray together for your pastor as well – it is amazing how well we receive God's directions and even correction from those we regularly pray for.

Build anticipation and excitement. God is going to do something special!

### **During Worship: Shepherding Young Lives**

Help your children participate in the worship experience. Make the worship time as positive as possible for them.

### **Take Resources**

- Your Bible, a Worship Bulletin, a Pen or pencil. I suggest not bringing toys—consider bringing alternate quiet activities for times when younger kids get restless.

### **Timely Reinforcement**

- Be gentle with your children; remember they are learning. Wouldn't it be great if everyone remembered this?

- Be loving and firm with your expectations.
- Be consistent in your follow-through.
- Guide them, shepherd them, disciple them, discipline, enable, correct, protect.
- Quietly describe what is going on for younger children. When first introducing them to worship, give them clues as to what is going to happen next and help them follow along in their Bible.

### **Be Sensitive, It's Not About You**

If your kids get fussy, remember that a group of people are trying to worship. If your church has one, utilize the Mother's Room or Family Room if necessary. If your kids are disruptive or too fidgety, pray for those around you, that they would understand. Deal with the challenge without drawing more attention to it. Don't allow what is for you a good thing to be spoken against because of your lack of awareness that others may be distracted by fussing or misbehaving children.

### **Pay Attention**

If we are going to model for our family what it means to attend to God, we are going to need to pay attention when we are in corporate worship. We are so easily distracted aren't we? We have our electronic devices, we have friends nearby; sometimes it's just such a temptation to be a distraction rather than paying attention to what is going on.

Robbie Castleman says,

*"Parents are the best people to teach their children what it means to worship God. And I believe that parenting in the pew helps adults as well as their offspring to 'pay attention'."*<sup>1</sup>

### **Listen Actively and Expectantly to the Preaching**

We ought to set a great example for our kids of people who are hungry for the Word of God and eager to obey what it says.

Thabiti Anyabwile speaks of being "expositional listeners." He says:

*"Expositional listening benefits us, first, by cultivating a hunger for God's Word. As we tune our ears to the kind of preaching that makes the primary point of the sermon the primary point of a certain passage of Scripture, we grow accustomed to listening to God."*<sup>2</sup>

Joel Beeke shares that:

*"John Calvin often instructed his congregation about rightly hearing the Word of God. He taught them how they should come to public worship and how to hear the Word of God preached. Calvin wanted parents and children to grasp the importance of preaching, to desire preaching as a supreme blessing, and to participate actively in the sermon."*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Castleman, Robbie. *Parenting in the Pew*. P. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Anyabwile, Thabiti. *What is a Healthy Church Member?* P. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Beeke, Joel. *The Family at Church*, p. 3.

We come to the preaching of the Word of God not to be entertained, that we would be pleased; but to be edified, that God would be praised. God is pleased when His people listen eagerly to His Word and seek to honor and obey it.

### **Rest in Jesus**

Free yourself from worrying about your kids' behavior. Your kids' restlessness is probably more distracting to you than anyone else. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Do not rush the process. Allow your kids to grow and develop on God's timetable. Remember to express your gladness that your children are with you.

### **After Worship: Applying Truth to Life**

After the service, be sure to include kids in conversations; introduce them to others around you. Let your kids know you were proud of how they did.

### **Review**

What songs did we sing? What did the pastor preach? What do they remember about the time?

### **Apply**

What did we hear today in the sermon or the entire service that we can immediately apply to life? What major doctrines were highlighted? What questions do you have?

### **Integrate**

What difference should what we saw, heard and experienced make in our lives?

### **Consider**

Ask them to pray about and consider how God is working in their hearts. Use some of the discussion questions on back of sermon notes or make up your own. What needs to change in your life?

### **Remind**

This is a good time to remind them of the value you place on corporate worship and their wholehearted part in it.

### **Commend Appropriately**

Give your kids more praise than correction. Tell them what they did right. Commend them for their attentiveness, note taking skill, enthusiasm, or any other praiseworthy thing you observed.

### **Correct Gently**

Sometimes it is beneficial to wait a bit to correct or give consequences.

### **Look forward to next time**

Immediately after worship and on the way home is a great time to reinforce what they just experienced at church and look forward to the next time you will gather as multiple generations.

### **Your Example Speaks Volumes**

To teach your children to worship well you need to worship well. You need to be prepared. You need to be praying for your church leadership and for those who preach the Word. You need to listen to the sermon well. You need to support

and bless your people relationally.

John and Noel Piper say:

*“Parents have the responsibility to teach their children by their own example the meaning and value of worship. Therefore, parents should want their children with them in worship so the children can catch the spirit and form of their parents’ worship.*

*Children should see how Mom and Dad bow their heads in earnest prayer during the prelude and other non-directed times. They should see how Mom and Dad sing praise to God with joy in their faces, and how they listen hungrily to His Word. They should catch the spirit of their parents meeting the living God. Parents should be jealous to model for their children the tremendous value they put on reverence in the presence of Almighty God.”<sup>4</sup>*

### **Your Attitude is Contagious**

If you are excited to worship with the gathered body of Christ, your kids will catch your attitude. The opposite is true as well.

As you anticipate and engage in corporate worship individually, as households and as members of a local church body, make sure to pray expectantly and participate wholeheartedly.

### **Pray Expectantly**

Pray for a huge display of the glory, character

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<sup>4</sup> Piper, John, and Noel Piper. *The Family: Together in God's Presence*.



and attributes of God among the people of God. Pray that His people focus on God Himself and learn to worship and build one another up in the process. Pray for each other and for church leaders and as they plan each week. Pray that your worship would be "from the heart," that you would be God-focused and Christ-centered, and that it would be based on the deep truths of God's greatness and goodness.

May we seek the Lord and go deeper with Him in our understanding and experience of corporate worship each week. That starts Sunday after the service; and continues to Saturday night and Sunday morning. Prepare your household for what they will experience. Be ready for God to do something.

### **Participate Wholeheartedly**

Participate wholeheartedly in worship when you are present. Hebrews 13:15-16 says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

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As D.A. Carson says,

*"We cannot ascribe to the Lord all the glory due His name if we are consumed by self-love or intoxicated by pitiful visions of our own greatness or independence. What will make our worship gatherings great is a renewed focus on who God is and what He does."<sup>5</sup>*

Dive in wholeheartedly to praise Almighty God with the people of God and you will be setting a God-honoring example for your household.

<sup>5</sup> D.A. Carson, *Worship by the Book*.