

Preparing Children for Worship

A Guide for Parents

Some thoughts on Children and Worship

At Camelback Bible Church we feel that a crucial part of our children's Christian education includes preparing children for meaningful worship. It has been said by our pastor that "we are most fully human when we are worshipping our Creator". We were made to worship the One who has given us life and sustains us in that life, thus it is vital that our children learn the worship of God.

Now there are many ways a church might seek to teach children in this area. At Camelback we have chosen an approach that allows our children to worship both with the whole church family as well as in an age-graded environment. At the beginning of every service our children, age 4 and above, are encouraged to worship with their families. This is a time for each child to learn that he is part of a community who gathers together to praise and give thanks to God. During this time the child is learning the community's essential message by entering into the songs, hymns, creeds, and liturgy that unite our people.

After a time of corporate worship, children age 4 through the 6th grade are dismissed to a children's worship time. This time provides additional instruction in and experience of worship at a level appropriate to the child's age. An important goal of this time is to prepare each child, by the time they are in the 7th grade, to be able to meaningfully participate in the main worship service.

Though much instruction is given during the children's worship service, it is vital that parents actively participate in the training of their own children for worship during the first part of the service. The following suggestions are designed to stimulate each parent's thinking in this important area of their child's Christian education. It is hoped that following some or all of these suggestions will encourage our children to see the importance of their time of worship with God's people, and improve their comprehension of and participation in the worship experience. Ultimately, we know that true worship will only come to our children, and to us adults as well, as our hearts are wholly given to our Lord and as we focus on love for and gratefulness to Him.

Preparation begins at home

1. Consider starting your "Sabbath" on Saturday night. Ancient Jews considered a day starting at sundown and ending at sundown the next day. Thus, their Sabbath began the night before. Try gathering as a family before bed time and preparing your hearts for the day to come. Focus on love for God and gratefulness to Him. If you can get a copy of the worship bulletin ahead of time (perhaps from the church website) look it over and use one or two elements to guide your time. (Walk through one of the hymns or choruses, or read through one of the Scriptures.) This time need not be long, but should foster an anticipation for your community gathering. Remember also that children will learn much about the importance you place on Sunday worship

when they see that you are careful not to overdo it on Saturday nights with other activities.

2. In addition to spiritual preparation on Saturday nights, consider also some practical preparations. Set your alarm clock early. Set out clothes for your children so decisions about what to wear do not need to be made on Sunday morning. Have each child set out his tithe and be sure to set out any ministry materials you will need. Plan to keep Sunday breakfasts simple, and if you plan to have guests for lunch, keep it simple. Focus on loving hospitality, not on making impressions.
3. Think through ahead of time what you are likely to want to communicate to your child about the elements of the worship service. If the worship bulletin is available ahead of time, look over it and determine what sorts of brief comments you might want to tell your child to help them understand what is being said and done. It is preferable if some of these comments can be communicated during a Saturday night preparation time.
4. Sing as a family using some of the hymns and choruses that we use in our worship services. The more familiar your children are with our music, the more they will be apt to enthusiastically enter into this form of praise to God.
5. Communicate your expectations to your child before entering the sanctuary. Be sure your expectations are appropriate for the age children that you have. Realize that if you have a broad range of ages, you may need to vary what you are asking of each child. You will naturally have different goals for non-readers than you will for your children that are reading. The "behavior guide for children" which follows may be adapted to help you communicate your desires to your children. Above all communicate that God is present in our assembly and that He cares how we show Him that we love Him and think He is special.
6. For younger children you may want to teach them to learn to sit. Starting with short periods of time (10-15 minutes) ask your child to sit and look over several books. Tell your child that during this time he is not to talk to Mom or Dad, nor is he to get out of his seat. After a successful "sit time" be sure to praise your child. Increase the amount of time as your child shows his ability to control himself in this manner. Please remember, though, that your goal as a parent is not to get your child to "be quiet" in church, but rather to enter into the worship of God in a meaningful manner. "Sit time" may only be one step in helping your child move toward that end.

How to maximize your time with your child in the pew

1. As a parent you must set an example. Your child needs to see that prayer is important to you, that giving is vital, that worship is a joy and not drudgery. Your child needs to see you sing praise to God from a heart that is conscience of God's presence and His goodness.
2. Sit with your children during worship. If your child asks to sit with friends, kindly tell him that this is time set aside for Jesus, and that it is often hard to pay attention to God when we are paying attention to friends. If you have

more than one child you may wish to place an adult in between each child. Please note that some children do not come to church with their parents. Be open to having these children sit with you. Teach them the love of worship.

3. Ways to encourage involvement in singing during worship: A. Young children can sing “la, la, la” with the tune until they can read the words. B. Allow the children to hold the hymnbook as the parent points to each of the words. You may wish to have younger children stand on the pew while you hold them from behind. C. Give short comments about the message of the song and how it applies to life. D. After church talk about the history of the hymn. Hymn story books are available for this purpose. E. Have children listen for a certain phrase that they can sing out when the time comes.
4. Helps for listening to choral selections or instrumental pieces (classical service): A. Have the child listen for a word or phrase and squeeze your hand when he hears it. B. Have children think about a Bible story or theme that might go along with the music. (To train children to do this, play classical music in the car and allow them to tell you what they think is going on. During worship, have them confine their imaginations to Biblical themes.)
5. Helps for making prayer time more meaningful: A. During times of confession encourage your child to confess to Jesus any “no-no’s” or any things they feel sorry for. If their slate is clean, encourage them to thank God for His love of sinners and His help in time of temptation. B. During times of intercession encourage your child to pray with the person praying. You may also wish to remind them of others in need of prayer. C. When offering prayers of praise point out different characteristics of God in the creeds, hymns, etc,... and use these to form your praise. D. Help children learn that in silence the Lord may speak. During times of silent prayer encourage your child to think on what he has sung and heard, and then to listen to what God might want to teach him.
6. If your child is present during the sermon, the following may be helpful: A. Encourage your child to use their Bible and open it to the text from which the pastor will be speaking. B. Tell your child that you will be asking him 3 questions about the sermon when you return home. You may wish to provide a reward for your child’s good listening. C. You may wish to allow your younger children to draw a picture of what the sermon means to him, or of the narrative the sermon is based on, or one of the key illustrations.
7. Some helps concerning the ordinances: A. The ordinances are visual sermons. Help your child understand what they mean, just as the ancient Israelites would do every time they celebrated Passover. B. Baptism has a message of cleansing, new birth, inclusion into the family of God, the new covenant, dying to self and sin, and living unto God, ... If your child is interested in baptism after having participated in a baptismal service, begin studying together what the Bible teaches about baptism. You may sign up your child for a baptism class once he is in the fourth grade. C. The Lord’s Supper should remind us of the death of Christ for our sins, of our need of the life of Christ within us, of our unity in the body (this is after all a community meal), that Christ is indeed Lord and Savior, and that one day we shall drink

the cup afresh in the fullness of God's Kingdom. Since baptism is an ordinance that symbolizes entrance into the faith community, it is thought best not to have children participate in the Lord's Supper until they have been baptized. D. If your children are with you during communion allow them to hold your hand as you hold the elements. Quietly whisper the significance of each element. Share with them how much the Lord loved us to give His life for us. Pray with them thanking the Lord for His death and life. E. Set an example. If bitterness or anger or any sin troubles you, do not partake. This will show your child that you are serious about Paul's admonition that we should not partake of this in an unworthy manner.

After Service Suggestions

1. If you encouraged your child to be a good listener by telling him you would ask 3 questions after service, be sure to do so. Make sure the questions are age appropriate and seek to make this an encouraging time.
2. Take time to discuss the sermon at home. Reread the text. Find out what stories or illustrations the children remembered. See if they picked up any of the main points. Ask them what difference this message should make in their lives. Note: both points 1 and 2 can be used in the same manner for children who attended children's church.
3. During the week look for situations where Sunday's lesson might be applied. Use those situations to focus on the lesson application. Also use those situations as opportunities to trust in and praise God.

Behavior Guide for Children

1. Remember that God is interested in your worship. It shows Him how much you love Him, and how important He is to you.
2. As you wait for service to start, try praying and asking God to meet with you and to teach you something that will help you honor Him more.
3. Before the service look over the worship bulletin (if available) and get an idea of the worship focus. Try to figure out what the main theme of the morning will be. See if your parents agree with you.
4. Come to church prepared. Bring your Bible and your offering. Set these aside on Saturday night.
5. Participate in the service in the best manner you are able. Stand and sing to the Lord noticing the words and their meaning. Read or recite Scripture or other written prayers trying to understand what you say, always directing your words to the Lord. During times of prayer, pray along with the person who is praying. Concentrate on the sermon by taking notes, making an outline, or drawing a picture.
6. Go to the bathroom and get a small drink before church. Don't get up to leave before the service is over.