

DEAR PARENTS

Turn on the television, pop open your laptop, or open a magazine and you will find all kinds of instructions to life's greatest pursuits. Titles abound from "Ten Tips for Financial Gain," "Ten Ways to Get the Ultimate Physique," "10 Best Destination Spots For Your Next Vacation," to "10 Reasons to Vote for Such-and-Such." It all can be quite overwhelming especially when in reality what you just want is for your child to sleep more than ten minutes (so you can sleep), to sit still for more than five minutes, or to go to the bathroom *in* the toilet. While I am sure guides for those things can be helpful, we want to provide you with a guide for something far more important. In fact, the most important thing you can ever guide your children in...worship of the living God!

Defining Worship

When we think of this word worship, we tend to limit it to singing. However, in the original Hebrew, the word worship literally means, "weightiness" or "heaviness." In other words, we all have something that holds tremendous weight or worth in our life. As parents, we tend to pass down this weightiness to our children. We become natural evangelists for our favorite sport, hobby, habit, food, or complaint to our kids. Our kids pick up on our worship because worship is not just something adults do...but children do it too. This is where we get into the important subject of family worship.

Family Worship

Throughout history, the Christian church has placed a high value on children. Everything from opposing abortion, opening orphanages, hospitals, and schools for children, fighting for child labor laws, and in the modern day, fighting against human trafficking of all kinds, including that of children. In doing so, we share in the heart of Jesus who held a special place for children in the kingdom. How tragic, though, when we fight for the physical well-being of our children, and all the while ignore the most important...their spiritual well-being.

After all, we are not just parents but *Christian* parents. We desire our children to love the Lord like we love the Lord. We desire our children to go to Heaven like we want to go to Heaven. We want our children to experience the blessings of knowing God, just as we have experienced those blessings. This is why we as a church family have chosen to regularly include our children in the worship gathering so that families may experience this blessing together.

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILDREN BEFORE SUNDAY

Unfortunately, for many parents, Sundays can be the most exhausting day of the week. I totally understand. Getting the children up, clothed, fed, and out the door on time can be like running a marathon.

1. Prepare beforehand by protecting your Saturday night.

Friday nights are a great night to have fun, to stay up late, and to watch movies as a family. Saturday nights should be protected by going to bed early and waking up early on Sunday. Pick out your clothes, set the coffee maker on delayed brewing, and fill up the gas tank so you have three fewer things to do on Sunday morning. The reality is tired children and tired parents create fertile ground for cranky worshippers.

2. Demonstrate an excitement about going to worship.

Model excitement about how wonderful it is to go to church to worship God. Talk with your children about how much joy Sunday morning worship brings. Turn on Christian music during breakfast. Sing songs you know you sing at church. The reality is if Mom and Dad reluctantly go to church, then the children will reluctantly go as well.

3. Practice family worship at home.

Many parents come to church and wonder why their children have trouble sitting still and listening to the Bible when they are not provided with any other opportunities to do so. Begin a regular routine of reading the Bible and praying together as a family. Jason Helopoulos said, "For too many children, worship at church seems foreign because worship at home is absent. A family that worships together at home finds it much easier to worship together in corporate worship together."

HOW TO WORK WITH YOUR CHILDREN DURING SUNDAY

1. Be patient with them.

It will take time for your children to learn how to sit still, sing songs, and absorb sermons. Don't expect them to be angels on the first few tries. One of the most important things you can do is be patient with them, but also be consistent. Don't allow them to doodle one week and expect them to pay attention the next. If the congregation stands, make them stand. Consistency leads to constancy.

2. Use moments during the worship gathering to encourage them.

There are many opportunities during the worship gathering where you can encourage your child. Between songs, whisper to your child how much you love a certain line in the song. During the sermon, write five different words on a piece of paper and ask your child to put a tick next to the word every time they hear it in the sermon (A good example of a word would be "Jesus"). During the giving time of worship, explain to your child why you give and the joy that comes from giving.

3. Minimize the distractions.

I know this will be hard to hear, but remember our goal is not to train our children to be quiet and still (though that is necessary), but to participate in worship. That being said, it is important not to just bring a tablet or phone your child can watch movies or play games on. If the goal is for your child to participate in worship, we don't want to cause them to miss that opportunity. Instead, make it special by having your children sit on your lap or hold their hand. If you feel your child is being too distracting, sit towards the back to make it easier if you need to stand up with them.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN AFTER SUNDAY

1. Ask your children what is one thing they heard during the worship gathering.

I can attest to many great conversations with both of my children following worship. Don't lose out on precious opportunities to have great conversations. Instead of turning on the radio and tuning them out, turn it off and tune them in.

2. Encourage your children.

Look for several ways you can specifically encourage them. For example, "Son, great job for behaving and listening to Mommy and Daddy when we asked you to do things." "Daughter, it was such a joy to hear you sing songs to God. Isn't He great?" "Kids, I know we had a hard time this week, but just know we had a wonderful time worshipping together as a family." Hebrews 3:13 tells us that encouragement protects us from being "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." This includes children as well!

3. Look forward to next Sunday.

Whether your child is in ClineKids or it is Family Worship Sunday, we want our children to see the priority of gathering together with other Christians for worship. What a shame it would be if what our children remember most about us is our love for something other than the Lord who saved us. What a shame it would be if we miss out on sharing the good news of Jesus with those closest and most precious to us.

ONE LAST THING...

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Find a church member beforehand and employ them to provide help for you if they notice it is becoming difficult. Don't worry if someone is judging you or your child (more than likely, they are not). Don't be embarrassed if your child is struggling. If we are honest, as adults we struggle too! Our children may distract others in worship. We do well to be sensitive to this, but not overly sensitive. We are here for each other to show the love of Jesus and the glory of God to all people, big and small.

Additional Resources for Parents

Let the Children Worship by Jason Helopoulos
Parenting in the Pew by Robbie Castleman
For the Love of Discipline by Sara Wallace
Parenting by Paul Tripp
Shepherding a Child's Heart by Tedd Tripp

Additional Resources for Family Worship

The Big Picture Story Bible by David Helm
The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones
The Biggest Story by Kevin DeYoung
My 1st Book of Q&As by Carine Mackenzie
The New City Catechism by Crossway