

What Can Children Get out of Church?

By Scott Brown

There is no indication from scripture that children were ever removed from the meetings designed for preaching scripture reading, prayer and worship. But, in our culture, it is automatic and comprehensive. Jeremy Walker has observed,

“The constant presumption of Scripture is that children were present in the worship of the people of God. In Nehemiah's time, men and women and all those who could hear with understanding gathered to hear Ezra the scribe read the Law (Neh 8.1-3; Ezr 10.1). Moses certainly anticipated the literal 'children' of Israel to be present when the Law was read (Dt 31.12-13). Paul's letters, intended to be read to the churches, assume the intelligent presence of children (Eph 6.1-4; Col 3.20), and children were present when the Lord Jesus taught (Mt 18.1-5; 19.13-15).”

What effect does worship singing have on a child?

First of all, it must be said that children get something out of everything they experience. So we should abandon the idea that “my child gets nothing out of big church.” This is subterfuge and misinformation. Plus, nobody gets everything out of anything, particularly a sermon.

We may say, “our children don't get anything out of the services,” but we can't really believe it. We get goose bumps when we sing to our children while they are in the womb. We believe that the sounds and even the attitudes surrounding them are affecting their development process. Some people play classical music to their children in the womb, while others contend that just hearing it makes their kids smarter outside the womb. We take them to the library and they do not get everything out of what is there. They listen to all of our conversation, and don't think for a minute that everything goes over their heads.

Children get something out of everything they experience.

There is great value for a very young child experiencing the deep and authentic worship of the church.

Something is being transferred as they watch their fathers give of the family resources during the offering. As they grow up their understanding will increase.

Something is being transferred, as they watch the adults ‘worship in spirit and in truth’ John 4:23.

They don't get everything but they can get something from observing the fervency and genuineness of the church's expression of love for God, dependence upon Him and joy in Him.

Children progressively understand what a parent and the wider church members love and appreciate. Year after year, their understanding builds. Year after year the well is filling up.

What effect does the teaching of the Word have on a child?

By joining in the main services they will be experiencing the teaching of God's Word and beginning to understand the importance of preaching. This is a perfect opportunity for a father to share with his children how the preaching of the Word is affecting him and how he plans to bring his family in line with it.

Only God knows what a child gets from hearing father pray.

Only God knows what a child gets out of hearing God's people worship.

Only God knows what a child gets out of seeing men standing up and speaking of the things of God.

Only God knows what a child gets out of experiencing Christian community.

It is really much simpler than you might think. The attitude should be: the church is family time. Our family, and the family of God.

We enjoy eating out together as a family. We enjoy going to the beach together as a family. Then, why do we not enjoy worship and instruction and fellowship with our brothers and sisters? One reason is that it is culturally odd and it is difficult to resist the direction of culture of excluding children. At many points, the church must be separate from its culture to maintain its faithfulness to God. This means that difficulties will present themselves as we resist

Steps for the Preparation of children:

The first thing that must be in order to bring your children into the main worship services of the church is to examine your own heart. Do you find pleasure in hearing the Word of God and turning your heart toward Him in the corporate worship service.

Do you yearn for the courts of the Lord? Do you hunger and thirst after God and His Word?

So, when should you bring your children into the main service? As soon as you personally love the Lord with all your heart.

If you do not love the worship and the preaching, you will no doubt raise up another of your own kind.

A husband and wife came to our elders once to say that their children were not getting anything out of the services and they were going to leave the church. Both of them told of how boring and dead and irrelevant church was to them as children, when their parents forced them to go. I asked, "were your fathers regenerate? They said "no", they did not

think so. This is the legacy of parents who make their children to go to church when they themselves have no relationship with Him. I believe that they thought church was irrelevant, because their father thought it was irrelevant. If your chief delight is not in the worship of God and Word of God, you will no doubt create more problems than you will solve.

Second, you must teach your children that it is ok if they do not understand everything. Life is built one building block at a time and it takes much time. The child raising experience is marathon of accumulation. Each day something is added.

Every valuable activity in life is not the exciting rush of activity that you find in our incredible movie entertainment products. Some legitimate activities are exciting and some are not. It is healthy, in a sense, "to be bored." It is good for them as it strengthens them in another area: honor for parents and others around them.

It will strengthen their ability to wait patiently while not being entertained, and it helps them break addiction to entertainment.

It lengthens their attention span and the ability to sustain energy under the hearing of discourses with demanding logical progressions.

Third, keep a routine of methods. Here are some ideas for keeping your children with you in church.

The night before the service, look at the text to be preached and look for images or objects that could relate to what is there. Try to find an object to bring to church with you that will help the very young child to understand the content.

If you have older children, instruct them to have sensitivity to the mothers with very young children who may need help.

Give the children some guidelines: no potty breaks, no drinks of water or wandering around, no running in the meeting place of the worship time, no getting on the platform.

For very young children, bring a blanket and have them sit on it on the floor during the service and give them something to draw with or play quietly. This will also give them a footprint upon which they can be instructed to stay. This could also be practiced at home for a successful experience in church.

I am not in favor of giving children coloring books and distractions to keep them occupied. It is better to bring their attention to true worship of God.

Bring a small chair for the small child.

Third, prepare yourself for the long haul view. This is not an Instant Gratification Affair. It takes significant time and effort to shape the heart and behavior of a child to the place where they are well behaved and participating in the services. A few Sundays will not be enough to train them to be active listeners and participants in worship. It takes many weeks, months and years and is an ongoing process.

Ages 1-4 are the most difficult ages since children are more squirmy and ‘attention spans’ are shorter. These years require constant coaching and vigilance. It could drive the most godly parent to church hopping, drink or homicide. But remember, you are preparing them for the future and the front end investment, though it is the most difficult is worth the return.

Training children is like building a new company. It is harder at the beginning and severely taxes almost everything you have. But, if you are diligent on the front end, rewards await.

Fourth, plan what you will do during the service.

One of my favorite things to do with my children who are beginning to learn how to write is to have them look at my notes as I write them. I tell them to copy the words I have underlined on my page. They have difficulty keeping up with everything I write in my notes, but if I underline a few key ideas, they will understand some of the really important points.

Use tools to help the child keep focus

Use a “fill in the blank” outline

Play a word identification game – We list key words to be used in the sermon on the sermon outline sheet

Vocabulary builder – have the child write down words they do not understand. It is also wise to have the parent write down words that the child should learn.

Use a “picture it” outline for very young children. In our church, we provide a sheet with key ideas in the outline so the student can draw a picture of the idea being presented. Even if you do not have a prepared sheet like this, a blank one will work.

If your children are being disobedient or dishonoring, feel free to take them out of the service to deal with the heart issues that have created it.

What can children get out of church?

The question would be a strange one for people in 1800 since they always had their children with them during worship. It was normal. The question would not have come up because people were used to keeping their children with them.

The question would also have been an unusual one for people in the early church. The early church met in homes with all present and Jesus made it clear to His disciples that children were always welcome.

The question would be a strange one for people in Israel. We have many Old Testament references that record children present during major events where God's Word was being communicated to groups of people. The Old Testament writers make mention of this without interpretation.

It is obvious that the normative practice for Israel and the early church was to integrate children into the normal practices of the gatherings of the people. Nowhere do we find a trace of teaching or example of our modern age graded approach to the church.