

Dear FBCD family,

Recently you were sent a letter describing our church move to a more corporate or family based worship for our older children. We stated that starting this new school year, beginning August 7<sup>th</sup>, we wanted to recommend that families with children in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up join together with their children in worship as a family. In this follow up letter we will give reasons, tips, and a biblical basis for including children in corporate worship. We sincerely hope that you find it helpful as you share the “experience of worship” with your children.

### **Some benefits of children in corporate worship**

- **Hearing the Gospel.** Children get to hear the gospel proclaimed through all of the elements of the worship service (Scripture reading, corporate prayer, songs, preaching, and the ordinances). Though they may not understand everything, there is still much that is caught.
- **Exposure.** Children get exposed to their parents and the body of Christ worshiping their Lord through song, communion, baptism, prayer, and the Word.
- **Shared experience.** Shoulder-to-shoulder experiences (hearing the same sermon, singing the same songs, seeing the gospel dramatized through baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and participating together in other aspects of the church’s worship service) open the door for face-to-face conversations later.
- **Training.** Children are prepared for a lifetime of corporate worship in a local church. Prayer, singing, Scripture reading, and sermons become normal for them.
- **Integration.** Children are better integrated into the life of the congregation.
- **Family togetherness.** In a culture that often fragments families, the family is together in the presence of God.
- **Good fruit.** When trained to participate in corporate worship, children learn to wholeheartedly worship God, enable parents to participate in corporate worship, and are a minimal distraction to other worshipers.[\[1\]](#)
- **Adult benefit.** The adults benefit from children in corporate worship as they are reminded, *“unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”* ([Matthew 18:3](#)).

### **Practical Suggestions**

#### **General suggestions**

- **Remember the goal.** Remember the goal is not to keep your children quiet but to train them to worship in the corporate gathering. This is a key distinction.
- **Delight yourself in worship.** “The greatest stumbling block for children in worship is that their parents do not cherish the hour. Children can feel the difference between duty and delight. Therefore, the first and most important job of a parent is to fall in love with the worship of God. You can't impart what you don't possess.”[\[2\]](#)
- **Attitude is contagious.** Your attitude toward the worship service is contagious. A steady diet of criticizing the worship service will not engender a positive view of God or his Church for your children. In contrast, your excitement and anticipation of the service will likely lead to the same for them. This may include overlooking pet peeves and style preferences in music and other elements of the worship gathering.

- **Start sooner than later.** Begin training your children when they are young rather than waiting until they are older. Take advantage of their formative years.
- **Teach the meaning of worship.** Teach your children about the meaning of worship. Worship is essentially responding with awe, wonder, and affection over who God is and what he has done through the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- **Take advantage of special opportunities.** Use special church gatherings (e.g. baptism services, [Summer Family Ties](#), Youth Nights) as a training step toward Sunday morning service participation.
- **Team up with other parents.** If possible, band together with some other parents who want to help their children engage in the corporate worship service. Sit near one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, discuss struggles, share ideas, and celebrate victories with one another.

## During the week

- **Worship as a family during the week.** Seek to regularly practice [family worship](#) in the home. This lays a foundation and trains them to participate in corporate worship in the local church.
- **Expose your children to worship songs.** Expose your children to the same songs that we sing on Sunday mornings. You could purchase some of those songs and have your children listen to them. You could also sing them as part of your family worship time. This approach will make the songs familiar to your children, and they will be more likely to participate in singing the songs in corporate worship services even before they are able to read. Our church provides an order of worship on [our website](#) by Friday of each week. You can look this up and then search the Internet for chords or performances of the songs so you can sing along.
- **Prepare for Sunday on Saturday.** Begin preparing for the worship service on Saturday night. Get your children (and yourself) to bed early so they (and you) wake up well rested. Set out everything you will need (clothes, shoes, Bibles, offering, notebooks, pens/pencils, etc.) for the morning before you go to bed. This will help Sunday morning be less of a rush and set a more restful/worshipful tone to Sunday morning.
- **Read Scripture ahead of time.** If you know the sermon text ahead of time, you could read it with your children a few times during the week. This will make yet another aspect of the service familiar to your children.

## Before the service

- **Prepare your own heart.** Spend personal time with God in his word and prayer Sunday morning. Ask him to prepare your heart for worship together with his people.
- **Pray.** Pray for your children to engage in the service. Pray that God would give you and your children eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand ([Deuteronomy 29:4](#); [Ezekiel 40:4](#); [Matthew 13:15](#); [1 Corinthians 2:9](#)). Pray with your children before the service starts.
- **Remove common distractions.** Take your children to the bathroom and to get a drink before the service begins. A pre-service snack might be helpful as well.
- **Communicate clear expectations.** Remind the children of your expectations for them during the service.
- **Explain the elements of corporate worship (liturgy).** You may want to talk through the order of worship our church's bulletin, pointing out songs they know or other special aspects of the service.
- **Get ready for what will come.** Have the children look up the sermon Scripture ahead of time in their Bible. If you have older children, they might be able to help the younger ones do this.

- **Choose seats intentionally.** Choose seats that enable the children to see and hear well.

## During the service

- **Encourage the children to participate as much as they can.** Have them sit and stand with the congregation, sing the songs they know, and give an offering if they're receiving allowance money. When they are old enough, have them look up the sermon Scripture and follow along in their own Bible.
- **Designate a special "sermon notebook" for each child.** "Taking notes" grows up as the child does. At first he draws pictures of what he hears in the sermon. Individual words or names trigger individual pictures. You might pick out a word that will be used frequently in the sermon; have the child listen carefully and make a check mark in his 'notes' each time he hears the word. Later he may want to copy letters or words from the Scripture passage for the morning. When spelling comes easier, he will write words and then phrases he hears in the sermon. Before you might expect it, he will probably be outlining the sermon and noting whole concepts."<sup>[3]</sup>
- **Use key moments in the service to help train your children to worship.** "Use transitional moments in the service to whisper in your child's ear how much you loved a certain verse in a hymn, how you need to remember to pray for the sick person mentioned, or how you were convicted by that application."<sup>[4]</sup>
- **Help restless children refocus.** Point out what is going on at the moment in the worship service. Seek to help your child engage. If your child becomes disobedient, remove him from the worship service for discipline, if necessary. If it is merely a matter of restlessness, rather than disobedience, help them to refocus. Remind your child of the expectations you had set for them before the worship service. Be gentle but firm, clear, and brief. Affirm positive efforts. Perhaps have a positive event that happens after good behavior in worship service.

## After the service

- **Be quick to praise.** Praise children who participated well as soon as possible after the service. Look for little evidences of grace and progress. Look for something specific to praise, even in those children who have room to grow.
- **Discuss the service with your children.** Encourage them to share and explain their drawings/notes with you. Ask each child to share at least one thing they learned or noticed in the service. What did they think the sermon was about? What part of the service was most meaningful to them?

## What the Bible has to say about children in corporate worship

- Scripture does *not* include a specific command for children to be included in corporate worship services. However, it does give numerous examples of children being present in corporate worship services, enough that it could be viewed as normative for God's people.<sup>[5]</sup>
- Children participated in the feasts and religious practices in the Old Testament.<sup>[6]</sup> Indeed, one of the purposes for these feasts was to intentionally pass on the faith to the next generation ([Exodus 12:26–27; 13:8–9, 14–15; Leviticus 23:42–43; Joshua 4:6–7, 21–24](#)).
- Israel's corporate gathering at Moab to renew the covenant with God included children ([Deuteronomy 29:10–11](#)).
- Moses commanded Israel to gather corporately every seven years to hear a public reading of the Law. This gathering explicitly included children. The purpose of this gathering was that the

coming generations might hear the law and learn to fear God ([Deuteronomy 31:9–13](#); [Joshua 8:34–35](#); [2 Kings 23:1–2](#)).

- When threatened by enemies, all of Judah (including children) assembled before the Lord ([2 Chronicles 20:13](#)).
- Joel calls Judah to return to the Lord with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Joel explicitly includes children in this call ([Joel 2:15–16](#)).
- Elkanah offers an example of a whole family gathering together in corporate worship ([1 Samuel 1:4](#)).
- Israel’s “hymnal” (Psalms) gives significant clues about children in corporate worship.<sup>[7]</sup>
- When Jesus was a child, his parents included him in at least some of their religious feasts and religious practices (Purification [[Luke 2:22–24](#)]; Passover Feast [[Luke 2:41–42](#)]).
- Children were present in the temple when Jesus cleansed it ([Matthew 21:12–16](#)).
- Children (or at least youth) were present when Paul preached into the night in Troas ([Acts 20:7–12](#)).
- Children are directly addressed in the epistles ([Ephesians 6:1–3](#); [Colossians 3:20](#); [1 John 2:12–14](#)). The apostles intended the churches to read these letters out loud in their corporate gatherings ([Colossians 4:16](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:27](#); [Revelation 1:3](#)), so it seems logical to conclude that children would have been present in the corporate reading of the letters.

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[1] John Piper and Noël Piper, “The Family: Together in God’s Presence,” *Desiring God*, January 1, 1995, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-family-together-in-gods-presence>.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.


[4] Jason Helopoulos, “Children in Worship—Mom Tested Tips,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 2012, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2012/03/07/children...>

[5] If children participating in corporate worship was the accepted practice, then an explicit command for it in the Bible would have been unnecessary.

[6] Passover Feast ([Exodus 12:24–27](#)); Feast of Unleavened Bread ([Exodus 13:3–10](#)); Feast of Booths ([Leviticus 23:39–43](#); [Deuteronomy 16:13–15](#)); Feast of Weeks ([Deuteronomy 16:9–12](#)); Consecration of the firstborn ([Exodus 13:11–16](#)); Offerings, sacrifices, and tithes ([Deuteronomy 12:1–7, 18](#)); Twelve memorial stones from the Jordan ([Joshua 4:1–7, 20–24](#)); the dedication of the rebuilt wall in Jerusalem ([Nehemiah 12:43](#)).

[7] [Psalm 34:11](#) intentionally calls children to come and learn. [Psalm 148:11–13](#) calls children *with* old men to praise the Lord. [Psalm 22:30–31](#); [78:1–8](#); [89:1](#) include commitments to teach the next generation about God.

Sincerely,



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