

Training Children In Worship

One of the most challenging tasks facing parents is that of training children how to behave in worship. It's hard enough for some adults to be still and pay attention for an hour. Imagine how difficult it is for an active youngster who is accustomed to running around, playing and talking all day long or an infant who only knows that he or she is wet, hungry or uncomfortable and wants to be sure Mom and Dad know it. Of course, the adults have no excuse. They should be able to stay focused on spiritual matters for at least an hour. The children, on the other hand, have to be taught and in fact can be taught.

One part of this training process is for the parents themselves to be faithful in their attendance to worship services (Hebrews 10:25). Not only is faithfulness required of God, it is beneficial to the soul and sets a tremendous example for others, including the children. But now suppose that parents are erratic in their attendance. They come once a month, once a quarter or maybe even just once a year and place their children in a setting to which they are not accustomed. It's extremely difficult to expect them to behave in such an unfamiliar situation. I wonder how many parents of school-age children would take them to school only once a month or so and expect them to behave there? Parents, you have to take the lead here. You have to be the examples and since you are the ones responsible for training your children to learn how to worship God, you have to bring them regularly and then of course behave yourselves during worship.

Another facet of this training is to try to get the children involved in worship. Granted, this can't be done with the newborns, but as the children grow older they can look at the song book while songs are being sung or at a Bible while it is being read. At a later age they can be given an outline or a notebook and encouraged to follow along or write down the Bible verses as they're being read. There is nothing that can top hearing our young ones singing. We even have some two and three year olds who have been trained so well by their parents in the assemblies as well as at home that they can join right in with everyone else.

A final aspect of training children in worship is for parents to use their own judgment regarding when the children need to be taken outside of the assembly. I would like to remind both parents of young children as well as everyone else in attendance that this decision belongs to the parents of those children and the parents alone. Let's accept the fact that as parents try to train their children to worship God there will be some talking, some crying and, yes, even some screaming. But you can't very well take them out at their first whimper. Children are smart. They'll figure out in a hurry that the slightest sob will get them into another room. Parents, when they start to become fidgety, try to calm them, being patient with them as you do so. It may take a minute or two, but by not rushing them out at their first sound you will be teaching them that what you are doing (worshipping God) is very important. You will be teaching them patience and you will be teaching them respect. Will others in the assembly be distracted by your children's cries? Perhaps, but keep in mind that these are your children whom you are trying to train in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6). Therefore, you have to make the call as to when you need to take them out of the assembly.

Here's one more thought on this matter. Jesus welcomed little children into His midst. "Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:13-14). Hearing the sounds of little ones in the congregation is an unspeakable joy. Thanks to all of the parents of youngsters from the cradle on up who are themselves being faithful and who are patiently training their children to worship God. You are greatly appreciated and deserving of admiration.

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