

Welcoming Children In The Church

“God has appointed that parents should train up their children in the knowledge of His Law .. that, as one generation of God’s servants and worshippers passes away, another generation may come, and the church, as the earth, may abide forever, and thus God’s name among men may be as the days of heaven” (Matthew Henry)

“Consider especially what your children are designed for in another world: they are made for ETERNITY. Every child has a precious and immortal soul, that must be for ever either in heaven or hell, according as it is prepared in this present state — and perhaps it must remove to that world of spirits very shortly (Matthew Henry)

Let us never forget: THE NEED of children = they MUST be born again.

Practical Guidelines for Ministry to Children in Your Church

1. INCLUDE the children
 1. don’t discourage mothers and fathers from bringing their children — even young ones! — into the church worship service (Luke 18.15-16). Even as we provide a nursery for small children, nursing ones, toddlers (ages 4 & under), we still must include the children.
 2. Joel, the prophet, included the children and those that nurse on the breasts in the call to sacred assembly (Joel 2.16)
 3. Jeremy Walker correctly writes: “The constant presumption of Scripture is that children were present in the worship of God’s people” >> For this reason, we do not separate children, teenagers, and adults into separate worship compartments during the worship service. Rather, we want to bring them together as one family, and encourage them to sit together as families so that parents can maximize the situation to train their children in godliness.
2. TEACH the children
 1. they must be diligently taught and instructed.
 2. Catechize them diligently and faithfully. Phil Ryken said: "The technique that the Puritans found most effective was catechizing. This question-answer format accorded well both with their stress on the intellectual content of the faith and their penchant to have matters clearly defined".
 3. Teach them in Bible Theology, truth, grand doctrines of Scripture.
 4. Your child’s education is NOT just about his future career in THIS world; a Christian education and training can have a profound influence on whether your sons or daughters persevere as active members of a faithfully biblical church when they grow up.
 5. Puritan Samuel Willard said: "If you would prevent Satan from corrupting your children, do not delay, but be dropping an instruction as soon as they are able to understand anything".

3. TRAIN the parents

1. **Train the parents to lead the home/family/children as prophets, priests, and kings.** >> we are images of His offices and bearers of God's authority in the home. Prophets to teach. Priests to lift up intercessions for their families and to lay themselves down as continual loving sacrifices. They are servant-kings who defend and protect their families from ungodly influences and discipline them under the rule and word of Christ.
2. **Train the parents to BRING their children to Christ — daily.** Parents brought their children to Jesus (Mark 10.13). WE must pray and teach and bring them under the preaching of the Word weekly in corporate worship and also in regular, daily family worship.
3. **Train parents to CONDUCT FAMILY WORSHIP — daily.** Family worship is a child's daily training for public worship. Also, there is something special happening between fathers and mothers and sons and daughters when they open their Bibles and pray together. This includes reading the Word, singing good hymns and praying together.
4. **Train parents to lead their families INTENTIONALLY DURING CHURCH SERVICES — PUBLIC WORSHIP IS VITAL.** It is also a teaching time. We are worshipers to God and also leaders/guides to our children.
 1. Teach the kids that worship is NOT play time. Children should not be allowed to turn the pew into play time. It's not the time for cars, or a library for secular books, or a nursery-atmosphere to play with toys. Teach your children to "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). Teach them to draw near and 'guard your steps as you draw near to the house of God' (Eccl 5.1).
 2. Teach the kids and explain your expectations BEFORE you arrive at church. Have them learn to sit straight, to look in front at the minister. IF you need to talk to them, be very quiet as you speak in the service to teach/exhort them. Encourage the children to be respectful and considerate of others sitting nearby.
 3. Teach the kids that worship is about meeting with GOD! Build a sense of anticipation on Saturday night and Sunday morning. Talk to your children about the privilege of coming before God.
 4. Puritan Cotton Mather gave his testimony: "I find much benefit by a particular method of catechizing the children about the public sermons".
5. **Train parents to cultivate sober-mindedness in their families.** >> Mark it as true, even as counter cultural as it seems: You and I must cultivate sober mindedness (Titus 2.4, 6). That means to be steady, thoughtful, intentional, careful, deliberate. We must talk about God, Christ, sin, the devil, heaven, hell and other great and grand theological

truths. Give them times to play but minimize this and also require them to participate in family devotions and worship.

6. **Train parents to build a solid biblical library of good books.** Lots of families have a shelf full of DVDs and a drawer full of clothing and a library full of music. But we need to also have good libraries of good theology books. If you need help or need to know where to start, seek out one of your elder-shepherds, or your CARE group leader.
7. **Train parents to teach their children how to pray.** >> We can cast our desires, sighs, anxieties, fears, hopes, and joys in the LAP of God (John Calvin). We should remember that we come before God as our Father, through Christ, and present our heart petitions, joys, confessions, and thanksgivings before our Heavenly Father.
8. **Train parents to teach their children by setting a good example TO their children.** >> Eleazar Mather counseled parents: "Precept without pattern will do little good; you must lead them to Christ by example as well as counsel; you must set yourselves first, and speak by lives as well as words; you must live religion as well as talk religion". The phrase "do as I say not as I do" is a miserable example to our children. Let us preach with our lips and let our lives be a commentary on our teaching. Let our conduct match our instruction. Live with integrity in the home before the kids.

4. INVOLVE the children

1. we must involve the children. We can include them by mentioning them in applications in sermons.
2. We should also include children by welcoming them to the PRAYER meeting, to the Catechism class and other evangelism ministry outings.
3. We want the children to know the church is the "Household of God" — a household has lots of ages — including children! Just as children are welcomed at a family reunion, so we should welcome and involve them at the *spiritual family reunion* every Sunday we gather to worship the King!

5. TALK to the children

1. Don't just ignore the kids as you walk thru the church building. Include them. See them. Notice them. Speak to them.
2. Let the children know they are welcome to the House of Worship. Tell them you're thankful that they are there.
3. The assembling of the church is a sacred family reunion. We should train greeters at the door, older saints and newer and older members to all diligently reach out to the CHILDREN, to try to greet them by name, to shake their hand.
4. We should learn their names and ask what they are learning in school, what they did this week, and if they heard anything in the sermon that day.

5. Try to speak a word from the Lord when you talk to the children. LIFT UP CHRIST. Let the kids see your joy in serving the Savior! Meet them at their level and learn about them. But also be quick to show them how precious Christ is to you. Try to bring Christ's glory & his gospel into each conversation with a child — however brief or simple it may be.
 6. Call them to see this Savior! Ask them how you can pray for them this week.
6. LOVE the children
1. Do not be sour or stiff with kids. Don't be angry with them or kick them out angrily. Kids are like trees, they need to be watered regularly, daily and often. Immediate and perfect growth does not happen overnight. Please be patient with them (and with their parents!).
 2. Be warm and let your face be aglow with love for them.
 3. Consider approaching a child after service, bending down to their level, ask what they learn from the sermon, ask to see their sermon notes, then give them a piece of candy. Do this to one child (or two!) each Sunday and see how God will bless them AND YOU.
 4. Consider if one or two people gathered the children on the front pew *after* each Sunday worship service and had them sit still on the pew. The adult asked a few sermon application questions for the kids to raise their hand and answer. Then the child can show their sermon notes and the adult could reward that with a piece of candy. Then a brief prayer at the end. (This would also serve the parents by allowing them to have a few minutes to chat after the service with others while the children are being cared for.) This may be a creative way to serve the children and drive home the message to their little hearts in a fun and interactive way before they go home.

Cotton Mather gives a final word to continually pray for our children:

"I pour out continual prayers and cries to the God of all grace for them, that He will be a Father to my children, and bestow His Christ and grace upon them, and guide them with His counsels and bring them to glory. And in this action I mention them distinctly, every one by name unto the Lord. that the Spirit of Grace may fall upon them in this action, and they may be seized by Him, and held as His temples, through eternal ages".

Your affectionate and caring shepherd seeking to continually point you to Christ,
Geoff

Much of this is adapted from Joel Beeke's article: "Children in the Church"