

Worship Praising the Lord together as a church family

*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.
Psalm 95:6*

At Third we encourage children, by the time they reach first grade, to join their families for the worship service. Worship is the central act of the gathered community of God. We do this corporately in response to God's act of love on our behalf. We also encourage families with younger children to bring them into the worship service. You can bring them to the beginning of the service for corporate worship and prayers, and then take them to childcare during the offertory song, or bring them for the entire service! They are welcome to worship alongside others in the Third family!

The worship experience is essential for the formation of identity as people of God. Worship provides an experience for the congregation to become formed into the community of faith. Our Presbyterian heritage acknowledges that children bring special gifts to worship and grow in the faith through their regular inclusion and participation in worship with the congregation. It is important for parents to acknowledge that the experience Sunday School provides for our children is very different from the opportunity they have to worship and praise God during the service as a community of believers.

Children are watching parents and soaking up what they see during this formative stage in their lives. A young father once said, "It was simply watching my dad in worship when I was young that left the largest impact on my faith and influenced my deep commitment to worship each Sunday morning." His experience bears out what Mark Holmen notes in his book, *Faith Begins at Home*: "The question is not are we passing things on to our children, but what are we passing on to our children." Church attendance models what is important in your life. It shouts out your love for God and His Number One priority position in your heart.

Proverbs 22:6 conveys a clear mandate: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." As you consider this role, what are some practical parenting tools when it comes to training and preparing our children for worship?

Try to avoid making attending worship a power struggle. Treat it in the same matter-of-fact way that school or other family events are treated. Listen to any potentially challenging issues your child may have and discuss how to address them. Children learn to worship by worshipping. This will happen over time, through regular attendance and strong parental support.

We encourage you to take a worship bulletin home, look over it with your child, and talk through the order of worship in preparation for what to expect on Sunday. It is incredibly beneficial for children to simply know what to expect.

As you enter the Sanctuary for worship, remind your child to pick up a children's bulletin, which has activities related to the sermon. Bring a Bible from home or use a pew Bible to refer to during the scripture reading. This active participation helps children pay attention.

Involve your child and give him or her as much responsibility while attending worship as you can. For example, try letting your child decide where your family will sit in an effort to help him or her feel comfortable.

Encourage your child to participate: stand when the congregation stands, follow the words in the bulletin as we go through the service, place offering in the offering basket, and "sing a joyful noise unto the Lord." Suggest that your child save the children's bulletin for the sermon time and invite your child to draw a picture of what he or she hears during the message. This encourages children to stay tuned into the message and interpret it in a creative manner on an age-appropriate level.

Following the service, reflect as a family on the worship experience. What did you hear through the sermon, songs, or prayers? How did God touch your heart in a special way when you sought to meet Him there and worship Him? What will you apply to your life this week as you go out into your neighborhood, school, work and world? What wonderful truths we have to share with one another when we worship the Lord together.

*Praise the Lord for the glory of His name. Worship the Lord because He is holy.
Psalm 29:2*

Resources:

Parenting in the Pew: Guiding your Children into the Joy of Worship by Robbie Castleman (IVP)

Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How to Keep Them Close to God for Life by Kathleen Chapman (Baker Books)

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