

Kids in the ADULT service?

A question that has been raised by some in our Cornerstone family is, “Why don’t we have children’s church?” Many adults grew up in a church that had a special program for kids during every main worship service. At Cornerstone, we emphasize a family worship service, where the whole family can attend together.

At what age should we expect our kids to sit with us in the worship service? Obviously, babies and preschoolers may need extra attention in a nursery or a classroom where their physical needs can best be met. And for them, we offer nursery and preschool ministries for kids ages 0-5. Also, every second and fourth Sunday, we provide “Kids’ Konnection,” a ministry for first, second, and third graders during the pastor’s message. In each of these ministries, we aim to teach the five principles listed below to help them be prepared to worship with their families in the service.

It says in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” This verse is directed at parents for the purpose of the spiritual training of their kids. Although we would probably NOT prefer to train our kids in a worship service, it provides a great opportunity to do so. So, what can we teach our kids during the service? Here are a few ideas:

Self-Control (Galatians 5:22-23)

Self-control does not come easy to adults, so we cannot assume that it will automatically happen with kids. We have to practice self-control in our prayer lives, Bible studies, exercise, nutrition, housework, and many other situations. We must teach self-control to our kids. In today’s world, kids are used to being entertained, but that does not have to dictate to us how we raise them. The worship service is not set up to make everyone laugh, nor is it a place to eat popcorn while you sit and listen. Kids can learn at a very young age that there are times to be quiet, participate in singing, listen to prayer and preaching, and sit still. At home with your kids, practice having a “quiet time,” where there is little talking or movement while looking at pictures or at a book.

Orderliness (1 Corinthians 14:40)

There are ways we can teach orderliness during the worship service. First, we can point out that there are different parts to the service, and that each of those parts are important. For kids who can read, we can show them that there is an order of service on the bulletin, which we try to follow each Sunday. There are also announcements that give us information we need to know. Another area of orderliness is that once we enter the worship center, we do not leave until the end. To help accomplish this, make a stop at the restroom before entering the worship center. Remind your child that he/she will be able to use it

again at the end of the service, but not during. Now of course, some kids are not medically able to wait 1 ½ hours to use the restroom. Parents must use their discretion with this, but teaching orderliness at a young age will be a valuable tool as they grow.

Study Habits (2 Timothy 3:16)

Are kids going to understand everything that goes on during the service, including the preaching? Not necessarily. However, this does not excuse us parents from teaching our kids study habits. So, what will kids study during the service? First, they will be studying US. What kind of example are we being as parents during the service? How well do we follow along in our Bibles, passionately sing the songs, willingly give our offerings, attentively listen to the sermon? Our kids are watching us and learning from us! Also, kids can practice study habits by using a Bible, whether it is their own or looking at a parent's. Kids can also participate in prayer by closing their eyes, and in singing by humming or listening to the songs. Play familiar church songs in your car or at home to help children become more familiar with them. During the sermon, younger kids can draw something they heard the pastor say. Encourage older kids to write down three things they heard the pastor say; then you can talk about them afterwards.

Setting of Priorities (Hebrews 10:25)

We all have priorities that we set, according to what we think is important. Kids are no different. The worship service is a time to teach our kids that our priorities should be with God. When kids say, "I don't want to go to church," we know that their priorities are not where they should be. However, when we set the expectation that staying home is NOT an option, our kids will learn that there is a different standard of priorities than their own. We need to be teaching our kids why we worship together (Hebrews 10:25) and what worship is. Also, when we open the Bible during the service and at home, we are showing that putting ourselves under its authority is a priority to us. Are we modeling the fact that God is OUR first priority, so the kids learn from our examples?

Service (Romans 12:1)

Kids are used to the idea that things are done for them. The worship service is a time to teach kids that we are all expected to serve the Lord. There are many examples of people serving during the worship service, including the ushers, choir, worship team, instrumentalists, sound/video technicians, pastors, nursery leaders, and those who serve behind-the-scenes. Teach your kids why these people are serving and what it takes to serve in these areas. Some examples of giving your child an opportunity to serve is after the service, have them pick up papers left behind or collect communion cups.

These are just five ways you can teach your kids during the worship service. Remember that this is a process that takes a lot of time and effort on the parents' part. One more practical way parents can help a younger child stay focused on these areas of teaching is to provide him/her with a "worship bag." This could be a canvas bag that is used for the worship service only. It should be considered and presented as a special bag that is not used for anything else. The bag should contain items that help your child stay involved and focused during the service. Here are some examples of items to include in the bag:

- Pencils
- Crayons
- Peppermint
- Bible coloring book
- Small spiral notebook
- Picture Bible storybook
- Bookmarks
- Change for the offering
- Any other items which you might find helpful

Establish your rules for how and when the items in the bag are to be used. For example, during prayer time, your child should be praying. During song time, he/she should be singing/listening. If everyone is standing, your child should stand, too. Give specific assignments like: draw/color a picture of the pastor or usher doing his "job." Have a specific time when the peppermint can be eaten (i.e. after the offering). Be creative and use your imagination with this bag. So now, instead of just saying, "Shh, sit still!" let's take the opportunity during the worship service to teach our kids biblical principles that will last a lifetime.

Please read the article by John and Noel Piper entitled, "The Family: Together in God's Presence." You can find the link under the same parenting section where you found this article online. In it, they raise some very important reasons why we should teach our kids to sit in the service with us. Some very practical advice is also given, which should be of great benefit to you.

In Philippians 4:6, Paul reminds the church that, "in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." The process of training our kids requires much prayer. We cannot do it alone. Together with your kids, ask the Lord to help your family reflect His character by walking in His light.