

WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

GOAL: Empower parents to make the most of worship services where they are with their children.

Preparation:

- Post-it notes and large sheets of paper.
- Bibles and the references of verses printed out.
- Copies of Family Tips for Worshipping Together for each family (see *Extra Resources* on the website).
- Three worship stations set up to worship together at the end of the session: worship music to play in the background, a large whiteboard with markers for writing attributes of God, post it notes and large card for writing praises to God (one church wrote a music staff for praises to be stuck onto and played 'Ten Thousand Reasons' as the worship music), possibly an outline of a tree with leaves to stick on for people to write names of people who have inputted into their lives spiritually and who they are inputting to.
- Ideally read *Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children Into the Joy of Worship* by Robbie Castleman (this can be borrowed from the BCFM resource library). Throughout this document this book is referenced by page number.

Explain it: (10 min)

As families arrive, ask parents and children to write on post-it notes some things that they think children need to learn. Come to the front when completed and stick them on whiteboard or wall.

Ask: Which ones would parents teach? For which do you need professionals/special teachers to teach?

Lots of these are taught by parents! I'm glad to see that worshipping is one of the things written here. Why is it important that we all learn to worship together? It's a command of God.

We'll look at Scripture as our base:

Let's read this together in groups. E.g. Ladies read yellow, men read blue, boys read red and girls read green (or divide your group up into sections of the room). Leader reads black (have this on the screen).

Deut 6:5-9 — ⁵Love the LORD **your God with all your heart** and **with all your soul** and **with all your strength**. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on **your hearts**. ⁷Impress them on **your children**. **Talk** about them when you **sit** at home and **when you walk** along the road, **when you lie down** and **when you get up**. ⁸**Tie** them as symbols on **your hands** and **bind** them on **your foreheads**. ⁹**Write** them on the doorframes of **your houses** and on **your gates**.

What are the commandments talked about here? Jesus was asked about the commandments and here is His reply:

Matthew 22:36-38

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” It’s like God’s strategic plan to pass on faith.

Summarised: I love God and I teach others to love God.

This command was given to the whole tribe of Israel, not just parents, but tribal leaders, grandparents, aunties, uncles, everyone was to be part of passing on the faith to children.

And everyone was to be part of worshipping God!

Matthew 21:14-16

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant. ¹⁶“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

Inspire them: (20 min)

Children you are going to go with another leader while I chat with your parents and you have a special activity to do for 15 minutes which you will come and share with us.

Activity with children:

What do you like best about being at church and worshipping God? Write or draw on a large sheet of paper.

Verses—in groups get someone to look up and read out each verse. Then write or draw some answers to share back with adults.

- Why do we worship God? *Psalm 48:1; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Psalm 18:1-3.*
- How should we worship God? *Psalm 46:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-21; John 4:23,24; James 4:8; James 5:13.*
- What does worship look like at the end of the world? *Revelation 15:2-4; Revelation 19:4-8.*

Write or draw ideas on big sheets of paper to share with the adults soon.

Activity with adults:

What we are doing here today is of vital importance to the future of our church. Our latest New Zealand census has shown a marked drop in the number of people identifying themselves as Christians and attending church. Some Baptist church research in New Zealand found that many of our churches are declining and as part of that, less children are attending. Here is a little bit of research that shows some of the reason why.

David Goodwin researched with 200 young Australians, as to why their friends had stopped attending church during or after high school. 58.6% cited lack of acceptance by the adult church as part of the reason or the ‘deal-breaker’ for their friends leaving. Many children don’t feel part of church—having been part of the children’s ministry then the youth, they haven’t built relationships with adults or been a regular part of the wider church worship.

<https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/635-5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church#.V6r04Pl97IU> Barna research shows that young people who had a close relationship with another non-parental adult or mentor in church were twice as likely to stay in church.

In the book *Parenting in the Pew* the author comments:

“The intergenerational nature of the church is vitally important to God and needs to be nurtured in our worship, programs, mission and community life. Too many congregations follow the highly successful marketing strategy of our culture. Specialty stores for every age... so we give the teens at church a youth house across the street... and we keep children out of the sanctuary. We provide style shaped options for worship services... Then we wonder why those in the next generation just wander off ‘somewhere’ and complain that they didn’t feel like they belonged... It takes the church to make disciples. Intentional intergenerational development within a church is hard in our culture because it is countercultural... it’s costly—everyone in the congregation has to die to themselves to be servants to one another under the headship of Christ Jesus.” (p132)

It is important that we spend some times where we all learn to worship together across the generations, just like the Israelites did, if we are going to pass on our faith to the next generation and ensure there is a church for Jesus to come to!

There is a difference between going to church and going to worship. Do we just tell children to be quiet and good? Going to worship requires a life transformation and happens out of a new heart. Going to church can be nothing more than smart time management with good intentions and may have nothing to do with worship.

God spent a lot of time training the nation of Israel to worship and we and our children also need to be trained to worship. The Bible talks about bringing a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15), and there may be some sacrifice needed here, as adults we need to be generous, but there are lots of wins too so let’s have a look.

Win 1:

“Teaching your children to worship = parenting in the pew—is entering the house of your heavenly Father and saying, ‘Daddy, I’d like you to meet my children.’ **Worship is seeing your Father smile.**”
(*Parenting in the Pew* p23).

Win 2:

“Learning to pay attention to my children has helped me pay attention to my heavenly Father in worship... I was with them when they first understood a gospel illustration. I was next to them the first time they held the sacred symbols of Christ’s body and blood in their hands. I paid attention. These moments of grace and worship are remembered. And treasured. Training your children to worship is one way to pay attention to the truly important and life-changing moments of life.” (*Parenting in the Pew* p18).

Win 3: It can change our own heart. Often parents say they don’t get much out of worship when their kids are present but this is missing the point. Worship is not about us. “Bless the Lord, O my soul” not “bless my soul, O Lord” My personal experience in a very dead traditional church. I chose to worship... not be bitter and critical of their service.

“In many of our modern, sophisticated congregations children are often viewed as distractions... Adult members sometimes complain that they cannot pay attention to the sermon... when fidgety children are beside them in the pews... Interestingly, Jesus put a child in the centre of his disciples, ‘in the midst of them’ Luke 18:16 in order to help them pay attention... The child was a last-ditch effort by God to help the disciples pay attention to the odd nature of God’s kingdom” (p40).

Children do not have to interfere with God's experience of worship. Worship is first a blessing to God, and he values the presence and praise of Children.

"Worship is the surrender of our souls to a God who is jealous for our attention, time and love. Worship is a challenge. With children it is a bigger challenge" (p25).

Win 4: We become part of God's big plan to share faith between the generations.

"Parents in the pew can show by example what it means to be encountered by God, to love his Son and to respond to the Holy Spirit in worship. Children learn that prayer is important when they see their parents (and other adults) make it a priority... When worship is an obvious joy to parents (and other adults in the congregation), children will expect to experience the same" (p26).

"Parents are the best people to teach their children what it means to worship God" (p41).

However, parents also need help as they have a huge job, and this is where having a supportive congregation and working together is so important. Talk to your church staff if you have suggestions about how they can make it easier for you and your children to worship together.

Children come back to share with adults what they learned about worship from their verses.

Model it: (10 min)

Ask for feedback: Who likes to make cakes? What kind of cakes do you make?

What is the difference between ordinary cakes and birthday cakes?

1. Prepare:

We can praise and show love to God every day but Sunday is a special day. Look forward to going to worship just like going to a birthday. Start to get ready on Saturday night.

If you were going to a birthday party what would you need to prepare?

What are the things you need to prepare to be ready for Sunday?

TIPS: When we come to church what does God see? *1 Samuel 16:7. Our hearts.*

Start Sunday morning by telling the children "Jesus is excited. This is his special day." Choose special music to play in the morning while everyone is getting ready and having breakfast.

Offering: Have money ready to give.

Breakfast: keep it simple and have it ready the night before?

2. Positive attitude:

What are we grateful for? What do we love about our church family?

Afterwards talk about what we learned, how God met us in worship...

3. In church:

It is important to **sit together** as families. I know children want to sit with their friends but—
"It is much harder to pay attention to God when you want to pay attention to your friend. You will have time later to be with your friend: right now Jesus wants all of our attention because he has something to say to us" (p60).

If your children have friends whose parents don't come to church, then invite those friends to sit with you as well so they can learn to worship too.

It's important to **get rid of distractions**, phones, iPads, colouring books, etc will only divert attention from God and what is happening in worship.

Sit close to your children so that you can **whisper and explain what is happening** during the service. Just telling them to be quiet is not going to train them in worship. At the beginning this is harder for parents and takes a lot of effort but God is pleased!

Choose where you sit carefully—choose a place where you can see what is happening and maybe near other parents who are also training their children in worship so you can encourage one another. And if there is a bad day you can encourage each other that it is worth it in the long run!!

For toddlers it is good to have them stand on the seat next to you during worship—point out the words to the songs up on the screen—maybe teach them the chorus to some of the songs you regularly do so they can join in. Kids are generally more attentive when they are sitting nearer the front.

When the Bible is being read **ask some “I wonder” questions** to your children: “I wonder what this verse says to you about how you felt yesterday?”

Let your children and young people make comments to you as they make connections between Scripture reading and their lives.

“Questions are good for children. You usually only have time to ask one question to draw attention to each part of worship as it happens. When we ask our children to pay attention, we often end up doing a better job of it ourselves” (p73).

If your church has sermon note sheets for children to take note of main points in the service, you will need to keep an eye on these that your child is staying in focus with what is happening. These then need to be used as a basis for discussion on the sermon at lunchtime or another good time after church.

Parents **express appreciation**. “I want to let you know how thankful I am to have the whole family sitting together this Sunday. Worship with you means a whole lot to me.”

Encourage children to join in with prayer: Say “Amen” at the end of a prayer, participate in prayer stations around the church, adoration, confession, thanks, asking. As adults, share stories of faith and failure. “Children need to see that God can be trusted no matter what” (p91).

Read this story from Parenting in the Pew:

“I remember one night my son wheezing with asthma. As a seven-year-old he struggled with the idea that Jesus could heal, but had not healed him. After many prayers of his own, along with ours and those of the elders of the church, he surprised me with a faith that I sometimes struggled to reach myself. Between heavy breaths he prayed, “Jesus, I know that you know best. I sure would like to be better, but whatever you do is okay with me.” About a year later, he prayed the night before my husband had to have knee surgery, “Dear Jesus, please make Daddy’s knee all better so when the doctors see it tomorrow they will be surprised that they don’t have to fix it. Well, I know you always do what’s best, so if you decide not to do what I really want, well, that’s...” He paused and then haltingly yet deliberately continued, “okay... because... you... are still... well... Jesus.” (p.89)

Now I will give you a **resource sheet (Family Tips pages)** with these tips. Have a little chat in your family group now and talk about which one of these areas your family could make a start on for next Sunday.

Practice it: (10 min)

So we've spent a bit of time looking at why it is important to worship together.

Now we are going to practice it. You can see that there are some response stations round us. While some music plays we also have a choice to move round some of these stations.

1. At one station you can choose to write something you are thankful for!
2. At one station you can think about who has put into your life as a disciple of Jesus so that you are here today, who are you teaching to worship and follow Jesus?...
3. At the white boards you can write some attributes of God. Why He is worthy of our praise.

Blessing: (1 min)

Session author comment (Raewyn Moodie):

“For me as a Grandma being part of the spiritual development of my grandson is so encouraging to me. My grandson Theo, has the blessing prayed over him in bed at night. It's part of his routine and he loves it.”
(Share your own personal story).

Let's pray this blessing over one another now as we go:

Numbers 6:24-26

May the Lord bless you and keep you,
may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
may the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.