

# DO NOT HINDER: welcoming kids to worship

CHRISTINA EMBREE, REFOCUS BLOG

I recently wrote a blog entitled [“My kid doesn’t ‘get’ anything out of church.”](#) In it, I shared that while children might not get the same things out of church that we do, they certainly do get many things out of church. I also shared that, while I am an advocate for Children’s Ministry (that’s my job after all!), I see the need for times where the whole community of faith comes together and worships as the corporate body.

But, let’s be honest, church as we know it isn’t really designed for that. Church as we know it is designed for kids to be otherwise engaged, if not for the whole service, at least for the sermon.

## SO, WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THAT?

I have received a lot of feedback from a lot of people about a lot of ideas and strategies to address that question. And I fully intended to write a blog about that very thing, something like, [“10 Ways to Engage Kids in Worship.”](#) But the more I prayed, the more I felt a strong conviction that it’s not about that.

It’s not about making sure we use strategies to keep kids occupied and from being a distraction. That’s important, but it’s not about that.

It’s not about changing the way we do our service or sing our songs or preach our sermons. That’s important, but it’s not about that.

It’s not even about making Scripture come alive and building intergenerational relationships and encouraging mentoring. That is so very important, but it’s not about that.

## WHAT IT IS ABOUT IS SIMPLY THIS:

*He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name **welcomes me**; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but **the one who sent me**” (Mark 9:36,37).*

There is so much in that moment. There’s a culture that Jesus is creating. There’s a deep understanding that He is trying to get across to the people who have gathered about where children fit into His kingdom. And He doesn’t do it once or twice. Over and over, Jesus works through and with the children who always seemed to be near Him.

- To feed 5,000 men, He uses the gifts of a little boy. (John 6:5-13)
- To demonstrate how to be great in God’s kingdom, He points to a child. (Mt. 1-4)
- To explain how to enter the kingdom of God, He says we must be like a child. (Lk. 18:17)
- He reprimands the disciples for keeping the children from reaching Him. (Mark 10:13-16)
- He rejoices in the praises of children shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Mt. 21:15-16)
- He rebukes those who cause “the children who believe in him” to sin. (Mt. 18:6)
- He declares in no uncertain terms, “Let the little children come to Me and **DO NOT** hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 19:14)

He heals children. He holds children. He includes children. He uses children. He appears to really, really like children and it would appear that children really liked him. They never seemed far from His presence. They never seemed too young to understand. Too distracting to be a part. Too uneducated to comprehend truth.

I can’t imagine Jesus’ church being a place where children are not engaged with His body. I can’t conceive of His church being one where children and adults grow separately in their own spaces rarely, if ever, sharing in Christ as one. I can’t believe that Jesus the preacher would be okay with never having the chance to be a part of the lives of the kids.

Even if we add in a cool new bulletin or some crayons for coloring, even if we sing some songs with motions or keep our sermons shorter, even if we offer booster seats and give grace when kids are loud, which are all fine and good strategies for makes space for kids in worship... **if we don’t do it from a place of genuine belief in the absolute importance of the community of faith being one, regardless of age, and a place that specifically answers Jesus’ command to “welcome the little children and not hinder them,” than I don’t think it will make the impact we want it to.**

It has to be in our hearts.

It has to be the desire of the church.

Collectively, we must say, “We welcome you, with all of your idiosyncrasies and distractions, with your questions and your confusion, with your gifts and your talents, with your hearts and your praise, with your child-like faith we so desperately need, we welcome you!”

And then, I don’t think it will really matter to us if a baby is crying and needs attention or if a little one is bored and needs to color or if a child is fidgeting and needs to move around a little. After we create and embrace that culture of welcome, we can engage strategies to invite and welcome kids into worship. Because that is when we recognize what Jesus knew and tried to tell us all along—the children are precious in His sight and they see Him for who He is. We need them as much as they need us.

*And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them (Mark 10:16).*

## THAT IS WHAT IT IS ABOUT!

For parents that see Sunday as a chance to get a break, I hear you. I totally get it. And I do think because we are a *community* of faith, the church should provide space for that. For adults who really struggle with distraction when kids are in the service, I understand that it can be difficult.

But what we *have* to wrestle with is simply this: Jesus said to welcome children, explicitly and specifically, as though He knew we would have the tendency to push them away, to need a break, to not want the distraction. So, the church, as HIS body, it can’t just be about what we want. ♦