
Helping Parents Bring Sons and Daughters to Church

Psalm 27:4

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Introduction

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

Coming to the gathered worship of the church at services is an interesting thing. Having been reared in Africa, worshipped in Brazil, England and Germany, I have experienced many different kinds of church services. Even across traditions and denominations, the expression of worship in a service is often very different. Now with contemporary worship and modern services where entertainment is emphasized and the sermon downsized if not totally eliminated, one of the common elements in the historical worship of the church is being lost. Up until the modern era, the emphasis in church services was on the preaching of the Bible. So, parents had to train their children to learn to participate and profit from church services. This has largely been lost today. Our educational systems often are not helping us as they themselves drift away from the skills of learning by listening.

We are shaped in our coming to worship by so many cultural things. Even the way we worship here in the west is somewhat cultural. And that is OK. This is the glory of the New Covenant, that within the bounds God has established, we are encouraged to worship freely. However, much of modern worship has lost the bounds and is adrift from the sure anchor of God's Word. So we are free to express our worship in culturally diverse ways but we are not free to do anything nor to behave in any way. The Scriptures are clear that the way we gather as God's people will demonstrate what is in our hearts.

The Psalm Pastor Devon preached from this morning shapes us well for God pleasing worship. As families we are gathered in the midst of life (v.1-3) to behold (v.4-6), to worship (v.7-10), and to learn (v.11-13). We are here in our struggles to see, savor and serve God. At the heart of all this is content – words, sentences, paragraphs adding up to meaning in our expressions of worship and in our expositions of the Word. So, training your children to participate and profit from worship will require more intentional and practical effort on the part of the parents.

Our talks on Sunday evening are aimed at giving counsel and advice. We are making an appeal for some of the etiquette during services. Much of this hopefully will challenge many of you and encourage all of you, stimulating you to help your children profit more from our services. I would encourage you to share together ideas, lessons and wise counsel from your own experience. I also want you to encourage each other in whatever new efforts are being made.

For some who will notice, I am not using a full manuscript this evening. The outline I am working from will be available as usual on our web site. Let's begin with prayer and talk together about these things.

Bringing Your Children to the Services

Coming to gathered worship with God's people is a very great privilege. Because of that we need to help our children be ready for services and to take part in services well.

Preparing for Worship

Many families are just trying to get every one out the door and in the car in some managed chaos that gets you to church before class begins or before Tom is finished with announcements. Here are some guidelines that parents might take on board that will stand the family well.

- ❖ Teach by word and deed the importance of our gathering together...
- ❖ Have a heart that looks forward to services and excites your children. If church is a dull bore to you, it is difficult to see how your children will love coming...
- ❖ Try to get everyone into bed on Saturday just as you would for a school night (assuming of course you believe sleep is important for paying attention.)...
- ❖ Have an organized start to the morning on Sundays. Figure out how much time you need to get your family ready, get up and get going...
- ❖ Have whatever passes for breakfast in your home at a set time and make everyone come to it. Pray together and begin anticipating what God will do.
- ❖ Teach the importance of being on-time and prompt. While this is often perceived as a western virtue, it is part of loving others to try to be a bit early so that we are in our places and not a distraction as classes or services begin.
- ❖ Use the travel time as an opportunity to prepare your family for worship. Turn off the news, CD and radio. Reconcile relationships. Frame your souls and the souls of your children to be with God's people.

You will see right away that much of this calls for self-discipline. The only way you are going to carry this off will be to make some hard decisions and stick with them.

Participating in Worship

As we gather together, how we act, participate and respond during the services is both an experience of worship and an expression of our hearts. So, in the things that I will say, it is important not just to regulate behavior, but to discern hearts. Sometimes, adults (parents, singles, seniors) are not setting a good example in these things. We need to look at our own hearts. Sometimes, it is just poor training, church backgrounds or even, just not thinking about it. But what can we do to help our sons and daughters participate in worship better?

Behaving in Services

Our primary focus in how we behave in worship is on **LOVING OTHERS** as we gather...

- ❖ Sitting quietly and not talking - (announcements, offering, etc)...
- ❖ Waiting at the back during prayer, special music, etc...
- ❖ Do not leave during service unless really necessary (teach them to go to restroom during service breaks)...

Participating in Worship

Our primary focus in participating in worship is **LOVING GOD** as we sing...

- ❖ Have your children stand with you and sing...
- ❖ Have your children engage the worship as they are able...
- ❖ Resist allowing your children to "play" during worship...

Listening to Preaching

Our primary focus in listening to preaching is on **HUMBLING OURSELVES** under the Word...

- ❖ Teach pre-school children who are not in Learning Lambs to listen and capture a word, idea or truth in a picture they draw...
- ❖ Teach early elementary children to capture core sentences, phrases or words by "taking notes"...
- ❖ Teach the rest of your children to take note either through the Junior Notes or by writing down the outline (as they are able)...
- ❖ Reinforce by talking about the service and the sermon on the drive home or at lunch or through the week...

Bringing Your Children to the Ordinances

Two special services in the church require you to teach and train your children so that they will participate in both a Biblical and an appropriate way. These two services are called the ordinances of the church. We believe in and practice in two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper or Communion.

Preparing for Baptism

It will be helpful to prepare your sons and daughters to observe a baptismal service.

- ❖ Teach them what baptism represents as *an opportunity for the gospel*.
 - ❖ We come to publicly confess that we are believers in the gospel.
 - We come to outwardly affirm and physically demonstrate the inward and invisible realities of our salvation. At our salvation, God by His Spirit applied the saving benefits of the death and resurrection to us. A whole host of invisible realities took place. One of them we have discussed this evening, sanctification. God has chosen through this public rite to illustrate for our eyes and for our hearts, what God has already done.
 - We come to be identified with and joined to the public gathering of the people of God. The consistent witness of the book of Acts is that those who believe, are baptized and joined to the gathered, local, visible church. Spiritual baptism unites us to the body of Christ. Physical baptism unites us to the assembly of Christ.
 - We come as witnesses and as recipients of the grace of God so that our rejoicing and boasting is in God alone.
- ❖ Teach them why baptism is important as *an opportunity to encourage professing children to make a public confession*.
 - That they are willing to publicly separate themselves from their past life of sin, self and religion and live in the kingdom of God;
 - That they have been placed into the saving death, burial and resurrection of Christ;
 - That they are to be identified as a member of the Body of Christ and the local gathered assembly;
 - That they are now to leave the old life and to walk in newness of life before the face of God and in the presence of the company of the saints.

Once your children ask for baptism, begin to confirm their profession while encouraging their obedience. We want to be both welcoming and discerning who want to publicly profess Christ.

Preparing for Communion

The Lord's Table or Communion is a special time of remembrance, reflection and rejoicing in the past, present and future work of Christ. He is the focus of this time. Due to the interactive nature of this ordinance, you will need to spend some time initially teaching and reminding your sons and daughters that only those who publicly have professed Christ may participate.

Now, let me remind you that we have been teaching and explaining our understanding of this for almost seven months now. As with all things, we are praying that you will also see both the Biblical basis and applied wisdom of our practice. However, we understand that for many of you this is new to you and some are not persuaded. We hope that by this time you will be willing to encourage your baptized sons and daughters to join with us as we share the table.

- ❖ Teach your children the meaning of Communion as an opportunity for the gospel...
- ❖ Teach your children to quietly observe as believers share in the Lord's Table as an opportunity to love others...
- ❖ Be open to the questions and concerns your children may have...
- ❖ Teach your believing children to approach the Lord's Table with both seriousness and thankful joy...
- ❖ Help your believing children to be humble with their peers and not to be "spiritually superior" because they are able to participate...

Be aware that the Elders have authorized the celebration of the Lord's Table at Flocks. This will give you more opportunities to teach and to help your sons and daughters.

There might be much more to say. Let me wrap up this evening by inviting you to affirm in your own home these core commitments we as a church make to the good of your children and the glory of God. **Conclusion**

1. We will present the Gospel regularly and clearly to the children of Clearcreek Chapel.
2. We will present a comprehensive view of the facts of the Gospel.
3. We will challenge children to respond to the Gospel in repentance and faith, and a public declaration through baptism.
4. We will not coerce or manipulate the young, impressionable heart.
5. We will shepherd and work together, church and parents, to assist in the recognition of the effects of the Gospel.
6. We will be careful to evaluate the authenticity of the response to the Gospel but not to the extreme knowing our inability to know the heart.

Listen again to the closing stanzas of Psalm 27:

Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.
Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!
Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!