

## FAMILY SERVICE

### PURPOSE

The supporting arguments for family service were given by Pastor John Piper and Jason Helopoulos:

#### ***Togetherness***

- **Worshipping together counters the contemporary fragmentation of families.** Hectic lifestyle leaves little time for significant togetherness. It is hard to overestimate the good influence of families doing valuable things together. Worship is the most valuable thing a human can do and it's good to do it together.

#### ***Catch the Spirit***

- Parents have the responsibility to teach their children by their own example the meaning and value of worship. Therefore, parents should want their children with them in worship so the children can catch the spirit and form of their parents' worship. Children should see how mom and dad bow their heads in earnest prayer during the prelude and other non-directed times. They should see how mom and dad sing praise to God with joy in their faces, and how they listen hungrily to His Word. They should catch the spirit of their parents meeting the living God. **Parents should be jealous to model for their children the tremendous value they put on reverence in the presence of Almighty God.**

#### ***Not an Excessive Expectation***

- To sit still and be quiet for an hour or two on Sunday is not an excessive expectation for a healthy 6-year-old who has been taught to obey his parents. **It requires a measure of discipline, but that is precisely what we want to encourage parents to impart to their children in the first five years.** Children can be taught in the first five years of life to obey their father and mother. Parents' helplessness to control their children should not be solved by alternative services but by a renewal of discipline in the home.

#### ***Not Everything Goes Over Their Heads***

- **Children absorb a tremendous amount that is of value. And this is true even if they say they are bored.** Music and words become familiar. The message of the music starts to sink in. The form of the service comes to feel natural. Even if most of the sermon goes over their heads, *experience* shows that children hear and remember remarkable things. The content of the prayers and songs and sermon gives parents unparalleled opportunities to teach their children the great truths of our faith. If parents would only learn to query their children after the service and then explain things, the children's capacity to participate would soar.
- **Not everything children experience has to be put on their level in order to do them good. Some things must be. But not everything.** For example, to learn a new language you can go step by step from alphabet to vocabulary to grammar to syntax. Or you can take a course where you dive in over your head, and all you hear is the language you don't know. Most language teachers would agree that the latter is by far the most effective. **Sunday worship service is not *useless* to children just because much of it goes over their heads. They can and will grow into this new language faster than we think—if positive and happy attitudes are fostered by the parents.**

### ***A Sense of Awe***

- **There is a sense of solemnity and awe which children should experience in the presence of God.** This is not likely to happen in children's service. A deep sense of the unknown and the mysterious can rise in the soul of a sensitive child in solemn worship—if his parents are going hard after God themselves. A deep moving of the magnificence of God can come to the young, tender heart through certain moments of great hymns or "loud silence" or authoritative preaching. These are of immeasurable value in the cultivation of a heart that fears and loves God.

### ***Our Children are Members of the Covenant Community (the Church)***

- Corporate Worship on Sunday morning is the primary activity the covenant community engages in together (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 10:24-25). Therefore, our children as members of this community should be included in this crucial aspect of covenantal life.

### ***Our Children will be Present in the Midst of the Entire Congregation***

- Our children benefit greatly by being in the presence of Christians of various ages. **They are able to see that the faith of their parents is not a faith that they own alone, but is a faith that is important to all of these people who are gathered around them on Sunday morning.** This only reinforces what mom and dad are modeling and teaching when they see this incredible gathering of people reading the Word together, praying together, confessing together, and singing together (Deuteronomy 31:9-13). They need to see the body in action.

### ***Our Children will Learn the Rhythms of Church Life***

- Teenagers in our culture often balk at attending corporate worship. But how many of our teenagers have we setup for this reaction, because we did not consistently include them in worship until they were a teenager? If attending church for years has always meant coloring Bible pictures, singing songs to a cd, playing games, and doing crafts—then we should not be surprised that our young people find worship to be odd, uncomfortable, and even boring. I love good children's songs—they ring through my house. I love good children's Christian crafts—they decorate my study. But if this alone is the rhythm of church life we have set up for our children week in and week out, we have done them a great disservice. **They must see, know, and learn that the singing of the great hymns of the faith, the preaching of the Word, reading of confessions, corporate prayers, etc. is anything but boring. It is the gathered life of the community of faith. It is our weekly rhythm—appointed by God, designed by Him, established for the ages—this is what we want them to know, because we want them to know and worship Him.**

## **PREPARATION AT HOME – FOR THE PARENTS**

The very earliest "school" for worship is in the home—when we help a baby be quiet for just a moment while we ask God's blessing on our meal; when a toddler is sitting still to listen to a Bible story book; when a child is learning to pay attention to God's Word and to pray during family devotional times.

- Have family worship (devotions) during the week and expect the same the behavior that you are striving for at church.
- Begin preparing for worship the night before – set out clothes, go to bed early, talk about the plan for worship in order to avoid the last minute rush
- If you know what the Scripture passage will be for the coming Sunday, read it together several times during the week. A little one's face really lights up when he hears familiar words from the pulpit.
- Sometimes you can take the regular elements of the service and make them part of the anticipation. "We've been reading about Joseph. What do you think the pastor will say about him?" "What might the worship team be singing this morning?"

**Your anticipation and conversation before and after service and during the week will be important in helping your child learn to love worship and to behave well in service.** Help your children become acquainted with your pastor. Let them shake hands with him. Talk about who the worship leaders are; call them by name.

## **SUNDAY SERVICE STRUCTURE**

*EXPLAIN TO THE CHILDREN WHY THESE ELEMENTS ARE IMPORTANT IN THE SERVICE*

### ***SINGING***

Singing is a great way to engage the children.

### ***PRAYING***

Parents, teach them how to pray.

### ***NEW CITY CATECHISM***

Catechism is a summary of the principles of Christianity in the form of questions and answers. This is a great way to teach and instruct our children of our faith. Together, we went through the Westminster and Heidelberg Catechism. This year, we will be looking at the New City Catechism created by Redeemer Church (Pastor Tim Keller) in New York. Each question and answer includes a commentary, a video explanation, a related verse, and a prayer, and the children's version is also available. Go through the question and answer together with your children and explain to them the meaning and application.

Please visit: <http://www.newcitycatechism.com/home.php>

### ***GIVING***

Giving money is a good reminder that everything comes from God, and it can be a helpful way of symbolizing our commitment to the life and work of the church. Make sure that the parents help them to prepare their offering in advance. Let the children put the offering into the bucket going around.

### ***SERMON***

Parents, please discuss the sermon with the children. Summarize the message into a word or phrase and remind them of the truth.

## **COMMUNION**

Teach our children that Communion is not merely “snack time” in the sanctuary. Explain to our children that the Lord’s Supper is a gift that Jesus first gave to the disciples (Matthew 26:26-29) and for the past 2000 years the church has continued to receive this gift as a reminder of:

- Christ’s death for our sins (1 Cor. 11:26): As we eat the bread (Jesus’ body broken for us) and drink the wine (the blood of Christ poured out for us) we are reminded of the sacrifice Jesus made to have a relationship with us and we reaffirm our faith in Him.
- The spiritual nourishment that God delights in providing us (John 6:35): We pause our busy lives to be reminded that despite all the pursuits that consume us in this world, our real nourishment comes from God alone.
- The unity and joy of being God’s people, the church (1 Cor. 10:17): Before we come to the Communion table we are called to forgive our brothers and sisters and remember that we are one body designed to support one another and show Christ to the world through our love.
- The forgiveness that we are offered through Christ: (1 John 1:9): During Communion, we go before God and invite Him to reveal sin in our lives so that we might confess and receive His cleansing.

## **AFTER THE SERVICE – FOR THE PARENTS**

- Talk to our children about what happened and why we did these things
- Explain to our children why the various parts of worship are meaningful. Let them see how much we love to worship God
- Train them for what they need to do during each part of the worship service

## **RESOURCES**

<http://www.parentinglikehannah.com/2012/12/developing-family-friendly-worship-services.html>

<http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2012/03/06/children-in-worship-lets-bring-it-back/>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-family-together-in-gods-presence>