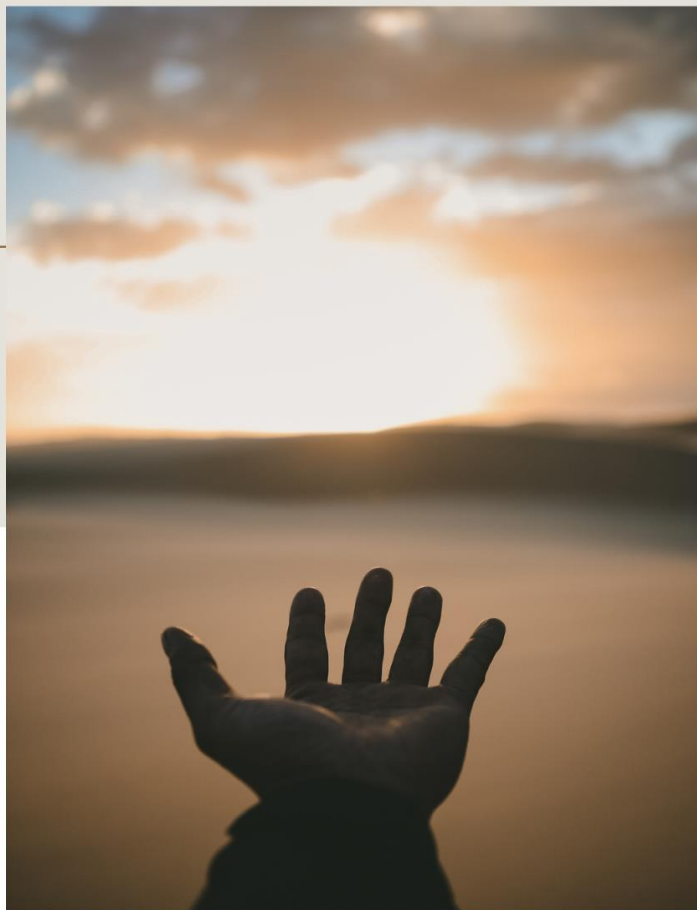


LET THEM COME



A GUIDE TO TEACHING YOUR
CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
WORSHIP SERVICE

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Special thanks to:

My parents

My wife, Alysia

The Fellows

Tori Jones

*who have modeled and inspired
the principles of this guide.*

Let the Children Come

One time when Jesus was out teaching, people started bringing children to him. His disciples tried to prevent them, presumably thinking that children would be too disruptive to the important things the grown-ups were doing. But Jesus rebuked his disciples, saying “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14, ESV).

The Gospels are clear that Jesus had a deep love for children. Here at Grace Bible Church, we always want your children to feel welcome. We do not see them as disruptions, but as blessings from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5), and we want them to have the opportunity to encounter Jesus.

Because of that desire, we offer a variety of ministries for children in order to assist parents in the process of raising their children in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, ESV). Nursery, Children’s Church, and Kid’s Discipleship Groups are intended to supplement, not replace, the discipleship that parents are called to do with their children at home.

Some parents may choose to keep their kids with them in the main service from the very beginning, which we welcome and encourage for parents who feel so inclined. However, even children who do participate in our children’s ministries will eventually reach an age where they too will participate in the normal worship and discipleship times with their parents and other older believers.

Proverbs 22:6 says, “*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*” (ESV) Parents, this guide is intended to equip you to effectively train up your children to participate in the regular worship and discipleship of Grace Bible Church as they continue to reach an age of maturity. Here’s some principles that you can use to help you along the way:

Prioritize The Gathering of Believers

One of our Core Values here at GBC is Fellowship: *We Prioritize Gathering Together to Encourage and Care for One Another.* The key here is *prioritize*. A priority is something that is important enough that

you will structure your life around it. You will say “no” to certain things in order to say “yes” to your priorities.

You cannot effectively teach your children that the weekly church gathering is important if you do not prioritize it for yourself and your family first. Church attendance does not happen by accident. You will have to say no to certain things in order to say yes to gathering with other believers each week. It means you may have to say no to certain sports, kid’s activities, or social events.

Whether you will be at church or not should not be a Sunday morning decision. That’s not to say there are never legitimate reasons to miss church occasionally, but showing up each week for fellowship should be the norm for your family, not the exception. The greater commitment you demonstrate to the local church, the more likely you are to pass that commitment on to your children.

Prepare beforehand

None of us usually do well in situations we’re not prepared for or when we don’t know how we’re expected to act. Kids are no different, and the younger the kids, the more likely they are to need proper reminders and preparation for Sunday morning to go smoothly. Here’s a few suggestions on how to prepare your kids (and yourself) for Sunday morning worship.

1. *Go to bed on time the night before.*

This can certainly be a challenge, but the value of it should be self-evident. It is difficult to set our kids or ourselves up for success on Sunday Mornings when we wake up late and have to rush to get out the door. Getting to bed early enough to get a full night’s sleep and wake up with enough time to get ready, get breakfast, and get out the door on time will make everyone’s morning and time at church easier.

2. *Prepare Needed Supplies*

Depending on the age of your kids, there may be a variety of supplies you want to bring to help your kids during the worship service. Spill-resistant drink containers, snacks, quiet toys or stuffed animals, notebooks and writing

utensils, and Bibles are all perfectly acceptable things to bring to church to help your child in the service. Get these ready either the night before or Sunday morning so you can grab them easily when it's time to leave.

3. *Arrive to Church Early*

Again, this can be a challenge, especially depending on the number and ages of your kids. And let's face it, some mornings just go wrong and there's not much you can do about it. But if able, arriving to church 15 minutes before the service starts will let you and your kids enjoy some early fellowship, find your row and pick seats (so they're not fighting about it during the songs), grab activity kits or arrange your supplies, and have kids use the restroom before the service starts.

4. *Discuss Expectations Beforehand*

Clearly communicating ahead of time to your kids what's expected of them while at church or in the worship service can be a great aid in teaching your kids. On the car ride over or the night before, remind your kids or ask them what appropriate behavior is during the worship service. During the week, you could even use a regular family worship time* to practice so they are well prepared for Sunday. The next section will get into some guidelines on what these expectations may be.

**For a great family worship resource, check out Doorpost Songs on RightNow Media through your free GBC account. Details on the back inside cover.*

Develop one skill at a time.

As parents, Proverbs 22:6 says we have the responsibility to *train* our kids. Training them means that we are teaching them a skill that they don't yet have. Since they are still learning, they're not always going to get it right! My suggestion in teaching your kids the necessary skills to participate in the worship service is to focus on building *only* one skill at a time, and be sure that the skill you develop with your child

is age-appropriate. Let me encourage you to be careful that you don't expect either *too much* or *too little* of your child. Expecting too much will often lead to frustration, while expecting too little means missing an opportunity to help your child grow.

The following is a list of skills in the order that they should be developed, with suggested ages for when children can begin learning these skills, based on my observations and experience. Since each child is different, and depending on what age your child begins staying in the service with you, you may adjust the age as needed, keeping expectations appropriate for your child.

Skill #1 - Stay quiet/non-disruptive (Ages 0-3)

The first skill to teach your child is simply to stay quiet (not be audibly disruptive) during the worship service. Munching on snacks, the occasional comment or whisper, or playing/quietly talking with toys is perfectly ok for young children. Babies will also fuss, and that's okay too! Nobody is going to be upset that your child is making noise (Most people probably don't even notice). The goal here is simply to teach your toddler/young child that, during the service, they should not be making disruptive sounds such as yelling or banging.

When they do make more disruptive sounds (Because they will! Remember, this is training and they are still learning), you can quietly shush them. If they become upset or particularly loud, feel free to step out of the service, calm them down, remind them of the expectation to stay quiet, and bring them back in. While there may be times when it is best to drop your child off at the nursery for the remainder of the service, bringing them back in as much as possible will help your child learn that making noise is not a free pass to get out of the service and go play. Going in and out of the service multiple times is perfectly ok in helping your child develop this skill.

Skill #2 - Stay in the service (Ages 4-6)

Once your child has a firm grasp on the skill of staying quiet while in the worship service, the next skill to develop is to

simply *stay* for the duration of the service. Preparing beforehand by going to the restroom and gathering supplies before the service will help with this. As before, snacks, drinks, quietly playing with toys on the floor or coloring are perfectly acceptable for younger children if it will help your child stay in the service and be non-disruptive. If your child asks to leave, quietly tell them to wait patiently until the service is over.

Skill #3 - Sit still (Ages 6-8)

Admittedly, it is difficult for many children to stay in a confined place quietly for a whole 45 minutes. Focusing on the previous skills has allowed children to move and play as long as it was not audibly disruptive. This is the stage to begin working on *sitting still* during the service. They can still color or have snacks as needed, but now is probably the time to begin phasing out certain toys such as cars that encourage moving around so that they can develop the skill of sitting in one seat. At this age/level, kids can learn to avoid playing on the floor or climbing around. Some wiggling is perfectly natural, but begin teaching your kids that excessive movement or climbing on a parent's lap should be avoided.

Of course, the music portion of the service is the exception to this. Try to take advantage of the music time by using it as an opportunity to encourage your kids to stand and sing. Participation in the music is both a fun time for kids to move around and make noise, and a great opportunity to prepare them for transitioning to the next skill level.

Skill #4 - Actively participate (Ages 8 and up)

As you work through these skills with your kids, they will have learned some incredible things. Not only will they will have learned to sit still quietly in one place for about 45 minutes, but by being under the regular teaching of the ord, they will have begun to have their hearts and minds shaped by the Bible. Once those basic skills have been developed, it is now time to teach

your children how to not only be non-disruptive to others, but to actively engage in worship and discipleship themselves.

This is probably the most difficult stage to transition into, especially for those who are coming out of Children's Church. Remember that transition takes time and practice, but is well worth it. Also keep in mind that learning is a two-way process: we usually get out of learning times what we put into them. The pastors work hard to be clear and engaging to everyone in the service, but the listeners are responsible to participate in the learning process, as well. Here are some key sub-skills and suggestions in teaching your child to actively participate in the worship service:

Stand and Sing.

Some kids will be more musically interested and involved already, but if your child hasn't yet, this stage would be a good time to require standing and singing along with the worship music.

Listen Attentively.

It's now time to transition from simply sitting and quietly playing to actively paying attention to the sermon. Have your child put away distracting toys or activities and focus on learning from the preaching of the Word. Kids do have different learning styles, so be aware of what *helps* your child pay attention vs what *distracts* them from learning. This requires wisdom and knowing your child. What would be distracting for you may (or may not) be helpful for them, and vice versa.

Read Along in the Bible.

Have your child bring their Bible with them each week so that they can read in their own Bibles along with the pastor as he reads from the passage aloud. Not only will this better engage them in the message, it will also help them become more familiar with their own Bible. Plus, having your Bible open

to the passage can help bring your attention back to the text when your mind starts to wander (It happens to all of us!).

Look up at the Pastor.

Making eye-contact with the pastor can help keep us visually engaged, but also serves as a great encouragement to the one giving the message. When the pastor sees that you are engaged, he is encouraged as well, and may be a more engaging and passionate speaker as a result. Encourage your child to make the effort at least occasionally to intentionally look up at the pastor.

Take Notes.

Note taking helps us learn by engaging not just our hearing, but also our sight and touch, and gives a resource to reference later. The activity kits by the back table have “I’m Listening Club” sheets that provide a simple way for kids to follow along. Kids who age out of Children’s Church receive a special Sermon Journal to help them learn to take notes during the sermon. If there are slides accompanying the sermon, they can be a great source of things to write down. If they hear a word or something else they don’t understand, have them write that down too! They can then ask you or the pastor about it after the service, which gives a great opportunity to clarify and allows for further conversations as a family about what you all learned at church. There are many different note-taking strategies you can use, so choose whichever works best for you and your child, but the point is to help your child learn to take notes in order to engage them with God’s Word.

Keep Practicing, Keep Growing Together.

These are the basic skills that your children need to participate in the Sunday morning worship service. And remember, since this is training, they won’t always get it right. You may need to come back to some of these skills from time to time and remind your children of the expectations of participating in the church gathering. Perhaps some of

these principles could even help you! Continue to prioritize the gathering of believers, keep preparing beforehand, and keep growing in the word of God together as a family.

We hope this has encouraged and equipped you to help your kids participate in the worship and discipleship of Grace, so that they too can come meet Jesus.

Let them come!



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