

Parenting in the Pew

This podcast is based on the book *Parenting in the Pew* by Robbie Castleman

- What makes worship with your children most difficult? What have you found most distracting?
- What are the best things about your children being in worship with you? What are your treasured moments?
- What are your most endearing memories of church in your childhood? What times did you dread?
- Does your family have a hard time waking up on Sunday mornings?
- I'm pretty sure everybody has had a child melt down over what to wear or the fact that you're trying to make them wear shoes. Sometimes it feels like it's all you can do just to get to church let alone try to teach your child to worship right?
- That's where preparation comes in. Parenting in the pew actually begins on Saturday nights with preparing for Sunday morning. Pick out clothes and when I say pick out clothes, let your kids help pick out their clothes so that there's less of a chance of a tantrum on Sunday morning. Get the baby's necessities together on Saturday night. Here's a big one: anticipate what your family will need on Sunday, like their Bibles, any Sunday school supplies, change of clothes if you have to go to an activity after. Then you're ready for Sunday. So what do you do on Sunday?
 - Help your kids pay attention by having them sit with you. It can be tempting to let them sit with their friends, but it's much harder for them to pay attention when all they want to do is talk to their friend.
 - Be attentive to them- try your best to eliminate their distractions. Go to the bathroom before worship, no water during worship, and then help them pay attention in worship. They actually don't need to be entertained by games, but if their hands need to be busy, you can help them focus by having them draw the story from the Scripture that has been read, take notes during the sermon, use playdoh to create something that symbolizes what the pastor is talking about, or even use the children's worship bulletins to do the activities that go along with the Scripture.
 - The purpose of parenting in the pew isn't to keep your children quiet, it's to teach them to worship. Now for the bad news: **Training children to worship does not always enhance our own experience of being before the Lord, especially at first. On a feeling level, the experience of worship may seem impoverished by the demands of parenting in the pew. The number of times children must be helped to concentrate, pay attention and enter into the worship service is almost beyond counting. The effort can be exhausting. AND it is pleasing to God. It can seem paradoxical that to help a child develop concentration and a sense of quietness for worship, parents have to talk more.**

If you sit close to your children, however, you can give whispered instructions and reminders rather easily with little to no distraction to others.

- [Caroline, has this been the case for y'all? Does it seem like you have to talk more to help your kids concentrate in worship?](#)
- You can definitely help your kids focus on what's happening: you can help them follow along with hymns, follow along with Scripture, etc. And if the Scripture is a story, ask your children to pretend that they were there when the action took place. Ask them questions afterwards to see what they thought it would be like. Here's a great thing that comes out of this: as you ask your child to pay attention, chances are that you'll end up paying better attention as well.
- An important thing to remember is to be consistent and to be clear about expectations and consequences.
- So now you prepared on Saturday night, everyone's dressed, everyone's been to the bathroom and you're ready to help your children focus. How can you help them learn the different parts of worship?
- One of my favorite parts of worship is singing the hymns I grew up with. I love the memories attached to those hymns, and I smile every time I sing them. When I was a child, I loved dancing during the hymns, which in a Baptist church earned my mother the stink eye a couple of times. But she let me dance in our pew because she knew that I was worshipping God. [Caroline, what's your favorite part of worship? What parts do your girls seem to love?](#)
- Teaching your children/teens to worship through music:
 - Talk about the hymns- define words they don't know, discuss the meanings
 - Encourage young children to sing "la, la, la" to the tune if they can't pronounce the words
 - Google the history of specific hymns and talk to your teens about it
 - Children NEED to feel physically involved in worship- have them hold the hymnal
 - You can explain and discuss content of hymns with your elementary age children before worship
 - [Caroline, have your kids ever asked you about the hymns we sing?](#)
 - I love this next suggestion from Parenting in the Pew: she says to tell your kids to think of a Bible story that may go along with instrumental music. We have an orchestra that plays occasionally, and this is a great suggestion for our kids. Robbie Castleman, the author of Parenting in the Pew, actually said this about using this suggestion with her kids: "A lively offertory might be God creating the dinosaurs. It might not be what

Handel or whoever had in mind, but the boys were learning to listen.”
How creative is that?! That makes me want to ask all of our kids what they imagine is happening with some of our offertories.

- So music might be easy because kids can make a joyful noise, but what about prayer? What about when it’s time for them to be silent but the prayer goes on and on and on and all they do is squirm?
 - Remind them that prayer is how we talk to God
 - Many children have imaginary friends (that they obviously can’t see), so they have a capacity to speak to and listen to what is unseen
 - Encourage your children to speak to God in their own words and to talk to God about the things they are happy about, sad about, worried about, or afraid of
 - When we have prayers of confession, tell them that now is the time when we bow our heads and talk to Jesus about stuff we are sorry about
- Trust God to be at work in the lives of your children
- The SERMON
 - Helping children listen to and learn from the sermon takes persistence, creativity, and time
 - Young children- need attention drawn to illustrations in the sermon- ask them questions about the stories
 - Elementary Age Children- ask questions that push them to listen to details. As they begin listening to sermons they will ask questions- tell them to remember their question and ask afterwards. TRUST ME, THEY WILL REMEMBER THEIR QUESTION. If a question is answered from the pulpit, draw your child’s attention to this- they will learn that listening can be helpful. [Caroline, have your kids asked you some crazy questions about sermons?](#)
 - You can ask them to draw a picture of what they learned after the sermon and then the family can discuss the sermon together
 - It’s important to tell your kids that you expect them to listen to the sermon
 - Ask them questions after- about a detail or story in the sermon, what the Biblical text was, etc.
 - Reward children for correct answers, particularly in the beginning
- Special Things in the service

- Baptism- opportunity to help children understand the significance of baptism- talk about God's love and provision for us. Baptism is a symbol of cleansing and inclusion
- The Lord's Supper/Communion
 - You definitely get some funny questions about communion. Kids want to know what it is, why adults have snack during the service, and is that wine or grape juice (if they've ever been to other churches). [Caroline, do you remember any of the questions your kids have asked you about communion?](#)
 - Tell your kids that Communion helps us remember Jesus' sacrifice for us and it's how we remember that we need God to be in our lives. Communion reminds us that we aren't perfect, that we do things that are wrong sometimes, and that we need forgiveness.
 - Focus on the specialness of Lord's Supper and that it's important for your kids to wait until they have made a commitment to God instead of saying no you can't
- "Parenting in the pew can be a hot battle or a holy triumph of grace. It can consist of whispered commands: 'be quiet,' 'shhhhh,' 'sit still,' or it can contain the most intimate moments of life with God's family together in his presence. Sunday morning with children in the pew can be the longest hour of the week, or it can provide the very best preparation for eternal joy. Teaching your children to worship, parenting in the pew, is entering the house of your heavenly Father and saying, 'Daddy, I would like you to meet my children.' Worship is seeing your Father's smile."
- [Caroline, what advice do you have for parents of preschoolers who they are trying to teach how to worship?](#)