

## **Suggestions to help the whole family worship on Sunday**

### **Begin preparing the evening before.**

- Older family members can share their excitement and joy about being able to go to worship tomorrow.
- Favorite outfits can be selected and laid out; ready to wear—perhaps with a 'fancy' necklace, hat, tie or hair clip.
- Everyone should get to bed at a good time so no one is tired (and grumpy) in the morning.
- Share memories of past great worship times, lessons learned, experiences remembered.
- Anticipate the worship experience-
  - Discuss the theme of the service and/or the church season.
  - Guess what songs might be sung; whether there will be drama or special object or event
  - Talk about what you know will be happening (for e.g. *Tomorrow, the Smith's new baby will be baptized.*)
- Listen to worship music. At dinner devotions have everyone pick a favorite praise song and sing it together (who cares if you're all off key, you're making a joyful noise!)
- Talk about and prepare your offerings.
- Gather other items needed- Bibles, journals or notebooks and pens, mints.. the diaper bag!
- Make sure everyone knows that we are going to worship so we don't bring toys and other books or games.

### **Get up early enough so that you don't have to rush.**

- Turn on the radio to Sunday morning worship or put on a worship CD.
- Enjoy a bigger, leisurely breakfast together as a family.
- Pray for 'pre Christian' neighbors and friends that you have invited as well as other seekers who may attend.
  - Ask God to get them there!-to open their hearts-to touch them with His love..
  - Ask God to help your church family to be warm and welcoming

- Ask God to help each person there to experience God's presence, hear His Word and respond with trust and obedience, including yourselves.
- Leave 10 minutes earlier than you really need to so that you have extra time to get everyone settled and prepared to worship.
- On the way to church, discuss appropriate behavior in a positive way-
  - *"I really like it when I hear you singing your praises to God, Johnny.*
  - *We really appreciated the way you listened to Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ and worked on your children's bulletin last week, Susie. I wonder what will be on your sheet today.*
  - *Martin, I wonder what your teacher will tell you about today. Be sure to listen carefully so you can tell me all about it.*
  - *Let's really work at honoring God and loving and thinking about others at church today.*
- Everyone will be much calmer and more able to focus if your pre-church time is not chaotic and rushed!

### **Upon arrival.**

- If you need to be at church really early to help with set up, warm up for choir or serve as an usher, bring stuff for your children to do during this time or give them jobs with which they can help. Children can be great greeters and ushers!
- Sit together as a family. Help children prepare by ensuring that they have their children's bulletin, a pencil, a Bible, the first hymn opened in their hymnal, etc.
- Model for children and newcomers what a worship service is all about- in your attitudes and actions, e.g. Ensure that everyone has gone to the bathroom before the service begins!

### **During the service.**

- Worship WITH not just beside your children! *For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.*  
Acts 2:39
  - Stand children on the pew next to you so that their ears, eyes and mouths are near yours and those of other worshippers as you sing, pray and listen together.

- Hum or 'la-la' along with those who cannot read all the words; whisper repeated phrases in their ears just before they are about to be sung so that they can sing them too.
- Help new readers follow along with the words on the screen or in the songbook.
- As much as possible engage them in the worship experience.
- Whisper simple instructions that will help children understand and participate in what is going on --
  - *Now we're going to pray and tell God the things that we feel bad or sorry about.*
  - *Watch over there, there is going to be a drama.*
  - *Hey, the verse we are reading is on your children's bulletin, let's follow along.*
  - *I think the Pastor just gave the answer to one of the questions on your sheet.*
- Whisper wondering questions to encourage children to listen and pay attention -
  - *I wonder how Jesus felt when that happened.*
  - *I wonder how that story relates to what we were talking about yesterday.*
- Whisper little comments about what, what is happening, means to you -
  - *I really feel close to God when we sing some quiet worship songs like this.*
  - *This prayer time, when we pray for each other, is really important to me.*
- Snuggle in, so to speak, when it's time to simply listen-a head leaning on a Dad's shoulder, a mother's hand tightly held-consider them 'holy hugs' and use them to communicate the wonder and miracle of discovering, knowing and worshipping the heavenly Father together.
- Expect your children to be full participants in the worship service!
  - Sunday worship is not "R-rated"! It is an opportunity for the whole church along with (and observed by) the community to worship, learn and celebrate God and the life together that He has given us. It is prime time for God to touch and speak to people in meaningful ways-including children! Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me (Matt.18:3).
  - Children are children-they will wiggle and fidget and that's okay! They can, at the same time, be profoundly impacted by worship, surprising us with what they have learned or discerned. So don't worry if they squirm a little! Jesus said for it is to such as these [children] that the kingdom of heaven belongs (Matt. 19:14)
  - The kingdom of heaven belongs to. children? There is something about child-like faith that God seeks, that God loves! "*Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*" Perhaps

there is something we can learn from our children at worship too. There is nothing like hearing a daughter sing her praise or seeing a son sway to the worship music! It touches the heart and brings a smile to the face (or tears to the eyes!)

- Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." Luke 18:16

### **After the service.on the way home.**

- Talk about what each person in your family enjoyed, heard, learned and wondered about.
- Start with the youngest and give everyone a chance to share.
  - *I'm so glad we got to sing, Days of Elijah*
  - *I learned that God really wants to be our friend.*
- Ask each other questions to clarify and expand on the comments.
  - *I'm really glad you felt close to God today. What helped you feel God's presence?*
  - *What does \_\_\_(Sermon title)\_\_\_ mean to you?*
- Affirm and encourage all thoughtful input.
- Discuss what you can do personally and as a family to live what you learned and experienced. Adults can set the tone by suggesting what they will do.
  - *I am going to try to pay attention to the Spirit's guidance every day this week at work.*
  - *I want to read a chapter of the Bible every day after school.*
  - *I am going to pray for my friend Susie.*
  - *Let's make some cookies and welcome cards and bring them to our new neighbors.*
- And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.  
Hebrews 10:24a
- Avoid criticism and complaints (often fueled by hunger and fatigue)!
  - *"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything."*

**Later** you may want to talk about what we could 'do better' next time. (If there were problems, be firm and consistent as with all learning and discipline.)