

How to Bring Your Children into God's Presence

Teaching children to worship helps them develop a relationship with God. But it also prepares them to live a life of victory in the spiritual realm.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants You have ordained praise because of Your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger (Ps. 8:1-2, NIV).

"FROM THE LIPS OF CHILDREN AND INFANTS" Jesus is very comfortable with children. In the book of Mark, we read of a day when Jesus was completely happy to have a bunch of wiggly kids in His lap, kissing Him and telling Him secrets. Mark 10:16 tells us that "He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them." It was the adults around Jesus who were bothered by their noisy, unashamed, nonreligious enthusiasm.

Young children are ready to jump into the lap of Jesus. We can spend too much time trying to turn them into little adults who know all the rules of conduct.

In fact, worship can get so boring and stiff, kids lose interest. But being in the presence of Jesus is never boring, and He is very willing to touch them!

Actually, you can bring your child with you into the Lord's presence in a very simple way. Just put the child on your lap, perhaps in a rocking chair, and sing Christian lullabies or worship songs. As the child grows, he or she will want to sing along and will begin to request certain favorites. They will look forward to this special snuggle time with you and the Lord.

As your family grows, you may need to move from the rocking chair to the floor or bed, but try to make this period of the day an unhurried time and as consistent as possible. Ten to 15 minutes every night can make a huge impact on your family.

You may be tired and ready for the little rascals to go to sleep. The television will call your name. The phone will ring. But make family worship time a priority!

“YOU HAVE ORDAINED PRAISE” Worship is a spiritual experience that we will be learning about all our lives. When we get to heaven, we’ll see that on earth we’d only just begun to glimpse the awesome wonder of the presence of God.

How do we teach kids to understand and believe in the invisible? Let’s look at what Jesus did with his disciples. He was aware of their limitations, so He talked about simple, everyday things.

He taught them to pray by referring to God as His loving and respected Father. He drew in the dirt with a stick, helped them catch fish and pointed to a mother hen with her chicks.

My husband, Frank, is a children’s worship leader. He can take a group of squirmy kids and get them to focus their attention in worship. Sometimes he comes up with unusual ways to help the kids understand what they are singing and why.

Once, he took them into the stairwell of a two-story church building and had them sit on the stairs and sing. Their voices sounded bigger, and they could hear each other better. The echo effect in the stairwell was an awesome, reverent sound, and the kids were caught up in it.

Frank is constantly looking for things that will illustrate a spiritual principle to kids visually. One day, he had a child lie down on the floor in the front of the Sunday school room. The child had to close his eyes and hold his arms to his

sides. He was not permitted to move or make a sound.

Then, he told the child on the floor to think about the Lord and all the good things God had done for him and to tell the Lord, without speaking, how much he loved Him.

After this, he had a child come forward and lift his hands and shout and clap, but he instructed the boy to think about what he had eaten for breakfast while he was doing these things. He asked the children watching which of the two boys was really worshiping.

He then explained to the kids about one of the words in the Old Testament that worship is based on: shacah. It means to "prostrate oneself" or lie down before the Lord in complete surrender. After the explanation, all the kids wanted to lie down, so they had worship time on the floor that morning, and the children went away with a clearer understanding that true worship comes from the heart.

There are some very practical steps you can take to help your children learn to worship. First, be sure that you are growing in your own personal worship experience. Perhaps it would be wise for you to pray and ask the Lord to show you where your worship life has become too "grown up."

Are you secretly bored with worship? Maybe you've been too busy or you've allowed sin to draw the veil back over the holy of holies. Jesus' death on the cross tore that veil in two, and we always seem to be trying to sew it back up.

Second, make sure you go to a church where worship is a priority. Children need to see others freely expressing their love for God and responding to His presence. Look for worship that is modeled after Scripture more than after tradition or culture.

Third, don't get discouraged. Even if you waited to start teaching your children to worship until they were older—maybe

even teen-agers—it is not too late. Jesus is the Redeemer, and just a few minutes in His presence will do miraculous things. In fact, there is no one more zealous in their faith than a teen-ager who has been in the presence of the Lord.

Finally, worship with music! Music has a way of moving the soul and spirit like nothing else.

“BECAUSE OF YOUR ENEMIES” As parents, we are aware that our children have an enemy. We may not realize it when we are holding the soft, sweet, little bundle God has entrusted to our care, but as the months go by, it becomes all too clear. Someone is out to steal our child’s innocence, joy and faith in God.

The enemy’s tactics may be subtle at first, but they will become progressively more evident. Take a walk through your local toy store. How many violent or occult-related toys do you find for children under the age of 10?

Now, go to your local library. What is the percentage of books related to witches, fantasy, boy-girl relationships or violence located in the children’s section? And what about the influence of television, peer pressure, videos, or the Internet?

We do not have to send our children into the world unequipped to face their spiritual foe and unaware that “greater is He” who is in them than “he who is in the world” (see 1 John 4:4). I have discovered four powerful benefits of teaching children to worship that will prepare them for spiritual victory:

1. Their attention will be focused on Someone who is bigger than they are. When David, as a teen-ager, slew Goliath, he already had a long history of knowing God to be bigger than his problems. He had spent his childhood with the sheep, singing worship songs by himself on long, dark, scary nights in the wilderness. I believe it was worship that developed within David a giant-slaying, bear-chasing, lion-killing

faith.

2. Their spirits will be opened to the presence of God. Developmentally, children must grow in their ability to understand facts, rules and the use of motor skills and language, but a child's spirit is functioning from day one. They can sense the presence of God in their spirits, and the sense of God's presence is the key difference between a vital, life-giving, thrilling relationship and a dry, meaningless, wagon-rut religion.

3. The sweet "taste" of God's presence will help them to refuse the bitter taste of what the world has to offer. Prov. 27:7 says, "He who is full loathes honey, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet."

Church can, potentially, be a frustrating experience for a child. It's rather like taking him to a bakery shop. He walks through the door, and the adult customers are all eating something that smells wonderful. He presses his nose to the display case and looks at the tantalizing items.

We tell the child all about the bread available in the shop, how nutritious it is, how delicious it is and that if he could eat some, he would never be hungry again. We may even give him a little dough to play with.

But what he really needs is to taste the bread! Someone has to pull it out of the display case and hold it down to the child's level so he can grab hold of it. He needs to taste and see that the Lord is good.

Worship, on a child's level, is that taste. Then, the worthless junk food that the world has to offer will not be so tempting, and the child will learn to be spiritually discerning.

4. They will be able to identify other true believers. My 15-year-old son recently told me that there are a lot of pretty

girls in his youth group at church. This was not a surprising revelation. After all, he is 15.

What did surprise me was what he said next: that the girls who love to worship have an attractive quality about them other girls do not and that he would not want to marry someone who is not a worshiper. He recognizes the fact that someone you can pray and worship with is someone you can have true fellowship with. (By the way, he also mentioned that the other guys in his youth group agree with him.)

“TO SILENCE THE FOE AND THE AVENGER” When the chief priests and the teachers of the law were indignant because of the miracles and wonderful things Jesus was doing, they asked him, “Do you hear what these children are saying?” Jesus silenced them by quoting Psalm 8:2, “Yes, have you never read, ‘“From the lips of children and infants You have ordained praise”?’” (Matt. 21:16).

The children were shouting, “Hosanna!” (see vs. 15). This word is a word of worship, faith and petition for salvation. Oh, if we can only get our kids to shout Hosanna! If they can learn to worship, to believe and to look to Jesus for salvation, the enemy will be silenced!

Jesus pointed to the worshiping children to show His enemies that no matter what they did to Him, those children would be the future of Christianity on the earth. He would save them, rise up in them and defeat the enemy through them.

He was pointing to our children, too. Let’s teach them to worship!

Read a companion devotional.

Betsy Ann Hernandez is a writer and singer. Over the years, along with her husband, Frank, they created music projects,

such as the “Hide ’em in Your Heart” series with Steve Green and “Kids in Worship,” to be used to help build the kingdom of God in children.