

MY KID DOESN'T 'GET' ANYTHING OUT OF CHURCH

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One common concern I often hear from parents and other adult church members about including children in the corporate worship setting is that kids won't 'get' anything out of the worship or the sermon. From an adult perspective, there are certain things we want to walk away from church with such as a sense of having been in God's presence or having learned something that will help us grow in our faith.

We presumably come to church for a reason and it is easy for us to assume those same reasons apply to our kids for what they get out of church. But they probably don't.

You see your kids are young in their faith. They don't understand the desire for fellowship or the beauty of corporate worship or the need for continued learning and growth in their walk with Christ. **They go to church because they follow you to church; they are your disciples and they are learning what being a Christian looks like by watching and emulating you** (if I were a psalmist, I'd write a "Selah" after that and encourage to 'stop and think about' that for a moment).

So, parents often express this concern: "My kids are only going to church because I make them. It's bad enough when they are going to Sunday school where they get to have fun but when they are just sitting in 'big church' and they don't get anything out of it, it seems rather pointless."

I get it, I do! I have kids and I know that often the worship service is geared towards adults only and not applicable or appropriate for them. I too have struggled with the fact that they don't seem to 'get' anything out of those corporate times of gathering. But I have also seen and read many studies that show definitively that **these times of worship and learning in the midst of the larger congregation are one of the leading reasons for increased 'stickiness' of faith in young adults.** Thus, there must be something to it, even if what they get out of church is not the same as what we adults 'get' out of attending church service.

SO, WHAT IS IT? WHAT DO KIDS 'GET' OUT OF CHURCH?

1. THEY GET SEEN

I have been at churches where I have seen kids dropped off by parents in the Children's Area as soon as they walk in the door and picked up as it is time to leave. More than once I've heard it said in the hallway, "You have kids? I had no idea!" That makes my heart hurt. It has been shown that one of the most important and meaningful things for kids is that someone knows their name. When kids are secluded from the congregation, not only are their names unknown, their faces aren't even recognized. They are for the most part a dismissible part of the church and wouldn't be missed except by a few volunteers and staff members if they never came back... which is often exactly what happens when they are old enough to do so.



2. THEY GET TO SEE

One of the main ways that kids learn is through emulation by watching activities and actions and imitating them. Every church I've been to has had its own form of liturgy or way to worship. Some churches have prayers that are prayed each service. Some celebrate communion. Some engage in corporate prayer, take up offerings, recite a creed, or have a time for sharing testimonies. Some use hymnals, some projectors with contemporary praise and worship. During the service, Scripture is read, Bibles are opened, and the Word comes to life. All of these things are imperative for kids to be disciplined in. **It may seem like they are not 'getting' anything out of it, but they are learning and growing in those moments.** They are watching mom and dad and other adults they respect and trust show them how to worship. And if they don't learn from the church, they will learn somewhere else. The world has plenty of things to worship and are more than willing to teach kids how to do so.

3. THEY GET EXPERIENCE

For a moment, I want you to think back on your own walk of faith. Do you remember the first time you took communion? Got baptized? Found a Scripture verse in the Bible by yourself? Put money in the offering plate? Prayed at the altar? Maybe even shared in front of church? For many of us, those things happened in the context of congregational worship. Now, I bet you did some of those things in Sunday school or kids church before you did them with the larger congregation, but I also bet there was something meaningful and affirming about doing it with the whole church.

When my girls got baptized, they shared their testimony in front of the church and after the baptism, the congregation cheered and hugged them and loved on them in a way that left deep impressions on their hearts of their place in God's church. We don't attend that church anymore since we moved, but the experience of being accepted in the body of Christ has stayed with them. Having the experience of an entire congregation embracing them gave them a sense of belonging that is not easily forgotten.

It would be naive to think that this is a simple or easy task

Kids are... kids. Churches would be wise to find ways to make it easier to invite kids into worship. Parents should be prepared for the inevitable eye rolls of boredom or occasional acting out and having to do follow-up after the service to reinforce what was taught. But I firmly believe these frustrations of the moment are far less painful than the alternative—a generation who is unknown, disengaged, and separated from the larger body of Christ.

By giving our children a place to be seen, to see, and to experience their faith with others, we give them so much more—we give them a foundation for their faith that will leave lasting impressions on their heart. ♦