

CHURCH FOR ALL GENERATIONS

WHY SHOULD I RAISE MY KIDS IN CHURCH?

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There are both spiritual and practical reasons why children belong in church, and you could turn the question around and ask why you would not want your children to be in church. We live in a time and society where anything seems to go, and if we want to care for, and nurture, our children in the best that God has for them they need to be in church.

Spiritual Points:

Jesus was born as a baby, and lived as a child within a family and it is apparent from the gospels that he was involved in the synagogue from birth:

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual... Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. (Luke 2:41-42,46-47, NLT)

We have other examples of entire families being involved with the gospel, such as Lydia in Acts 16, Stephanus in 1 Corinthians 16 and Onesiphorus in 2 Timothy 4. In the Old Testament we have the example of Samuel whose mother, Hannah, dedicated to the Tabernacle once he was weaned, and he grew into a great man of God. We can see that having children in the house of God was a usual thing.

... But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15, NLT)

Children are a gift from God, and as Christian parents we have a responsibility to love and care for them, but also to bring them up in the ways of the Lord. Children will not learn about God on their own, they need to be taught, and the place to do this is in church.

Hear this, you leaders of the people. Listen, all who live in the land. In all your history, has anything like this happened before? Tell your children about it in the years to come, and let your children tell their children. Pass the story down from generation to generation. (Joel 1:2-3, NLT)

We cannot educate our children into the Kingdom of God, they need to make their own decision, but we do have a duty to put them into a position where they can make the decision, and this involves them being in church. Children also need to be given moral guidance, and this too is best carried out in church where there are moral standards and they can be seen in action.

Jesus Himself cared for children and saw them as a vital part of the Kingdom of God:

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. "And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me. But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matthew 18:1-6, NLT)

We too have a great responsibility for our children and their moral and spiritual upbringing. It may be possible for a parent to do this on their own but really it needs the help and support of church to do this properly, so children need to be in church.

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it. (Proverbs 22:6, NLT)

This is not a promise, but a proverb, but still very good advice. If we do not show children the correct path in life there is nobody else who will, and plenty of people who are willing to teach them the wrong way to go.

There are plenty of other proverbs that give advice regarding children:

- *The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children who follow them.* (Proverbs 20:7)
- *To discipline a child produces wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child.* (Proverbs 29:15)
- *Discipline your children, and they will give you peace of mind and will make your heart glad.* (Proverbs 29:17)
- *Young people who obey the law are wise; those with wild friends bring shame to their parents.* (Proverbs 28:7)

Discipline is not a negative thing, it means providing positive role models, encouragement and support, and church is the place to provide this. Children need Christian friends and church is where they are found, social activities with other Christians are found in church. Children and young people are also able to support each other in church, and see that they are not alone in their faith. It is also a safe supportive environment if they have problems and do not want to talk to their parents. Junior church is also a place where they may be able to experience having a male teacher, which is often lacking in the primary education environment.

We also need to remember that we do not have our children long. When they are born it seems like they will be our child for ever, but they soon grow up and eventually leave the nest.

Practical Points

- Raising children is not easy, there are many trials and tribulations along the way, but it is also very rewarding and great fun. Enjoy your children and take joy in them every day. If God has blessed you with children He will help you cope with the problems that may arise.
- Pray for your children and your family.
- Make sure your children come to church and church meetings. Children do not always know best and as a parent these things are your decision and responsibility. Most children would not go to school if given the choice, but we make that decision for them, for their own good. Attending church is similar.
- Get them involved in the children's work at church: we have an exceptionally good provision for all ages of children, from birth upwards. Junior Church is a must on Sundays and Tuesdays, and Ignite and The Pulse are there for young people.
- Attend church as a family. Children are very good at detecting when adults say one thing and do another. It is no good telling your children that attending church is important if you do not attend yourself. It is also a lot easier to take your children with you if you go as a family. This may not always be easy, but is a battle that has to be fought and won for the children's own good.
- Be careful what you say at home. Children hear everything that you say. If you speak badly about people in the church at home, they will hear and be influenced by it.
- Behaviour at home must mirror that in church. Children will pick up on any discrepancies between the two.
- Church is a place where children can discuss problems in a safe environment with other adults, such as leaders of young people's groups. If, as a parent, you feel that there are issues you cannot deal with alone then church is a place to find help and advice.
- If you are a man please come to church with your family when you can. Children need male role models, and you can help provide one by just being here and being involved in church.
- Family meetings once a week to plan the coming week's activities, read the Bible and pray together are a great investment of your time. You can even do this once your children have left home if they are living locally.
- If you are not a parent, or have children in church, you can still do your part. Speak to the children and young people and ask them about themselves and their lives, they are usually very willing to talk!
- Remember you can only do your best. Each of us has different family circumstances and challenges, and different children. We cannot all be wonder dad or wonder mum. Our children may decide not to become Christians or follow other courses in life that we do not approve of, and that is their choice as individuals. However, if we have brought them up in the ways of the Lord, and in church, they may return at a later date. The story of the prodigal son is relevant here. If we have done the best that we can do we have done our duty and we should not feel guilty, even if we are sad, if things do not turn out as we may have wished.
- Enjoy being a parent. It is one of life's great experiences and adventures: enjoy every moment that God has given you with your children, and grandchildren if you have them. Being in church makes it even better!