



## Parent Guide & Resource for Discipleship and Worship Hour

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. Psalm 78:1-4*

## Parent Guide & Resource for Discipleship and Worship Hour

As we enter into this new exciting season at Exchange, we want to best prepare parents, kids, and the Exchange family for this to be a smooth experience. We understand that some of this will be new and we will all grow into it as we encourage each other and learn together. Below is a guide for parents to help understand the why, the what, and the how. This is hopefully just the beginning of an ongoing conversation that makes this better and better. Let's begin by looking at the heart of God...

### The Heart of God in Worship

In writing this document and preparing for this March transition, I have been reminded how God feels about what we get to do on Sundays in the space He has provided. It is easy to grow forgetful or apathetic toward this either from rote routine or unfortunate self-focus.

Psalm 95:1-3 says, *"Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods."*

In these verses, there is a clear posture of expectation and anticipation in worship. We have been invited into a space where we can have a real and authentic encounter with the real and authentic God of the universe...every single week...with people we love! He is there! We get to rehearse what we will be doing for all of eternity; enjoying and experiencing the Glory of God. This thought alone reminds us that worship is not primarily about us. It's never been about us. It's about Him. The reason we get to participate is because we are invited in. Worship is an experience where God is revealing Himself to us with beauty, drama, and power. This then changes how I view what it means to bring my children, family, and friends into worship. I am ushering them to "come along" with me into a living encounter with the one true God. Woah!

This "come along" mindset then gives us an exciting mission of being a "tour-guide" for others as we bring them to see who God really is. When I take my kids on a tour of a new city, a National Park, or a zoo, I want to help them see and respond to amazing and beautiful things. I also get to watch them see and respond to amazing and beautiful things. In turn, they help me see and respond to amazing and beautiful things. I remember my youngest daughter seeing a common bird in our front yard and saying, "wowww...that's amazin!", awakening my hurried and glazed-over eyes. I needed her to help me see. Other times she needs me to help her see.

We enter with expectation and anticipation...together. He will be present and He will not disappoint. God's heart for us and our children is that we "come and see" Him for who He is. As parents, worship provides us an intentional and sacred space to begin to fulfill the very core of our parenting mission (Deut. 6:7, Ps. 78:4). He invites us to train them up (Prov. 22:6), and aim these "arrows" (Psalm 127:4) toward the bullseye of the all-satisfying King Jesus. "Kids! You gotta see this!" Then we get to turn our eyes to them, and watch them see Him. They will see Him in the church gathered, in the submission to the Word, in the singing of His praise, in the response of adults, in the passion of those speaking, in the breaking of bread remembering his sacrifice, in the story of the gospel that includes them. They will hopefully hear Him saying, "I want this one", "let them come to me" (Mark 10:13-16). In turn, God will use them to form our hearts to be "like them", "for to such belongs the kingdom of God". Jesus is the kind of person who kneels down to talk to children. He looks them in the eyes with his knees in the dirt. He offers them a seat which was probably his own. He welcomes them not as an afterthought or an appendage, but as a valued participant in His Kingdom. He invites them to be a blessing, be a participant, and be a learner. This is the heart of God and the heart of Exchange in preparing a place for our children to come and worship alongside us. Let them come-and-see, as they help us come-and-see.

## Description of the new structure starting March 3

### **DISCIPLESHIP HOUR (8:40-9:40)**

- Multiple COURSES offered for adults and youth during this hour
- Provide childcare for Nursery-P2 every week
- Provide Full Kids Ministry for ELEMENTARY every week
- TEACHERS: serve 6 weeks in a row, then off for 18-24 weeks
- Teachers will not be asked to serve during worship hour when teaching
- Teachers will be able to take Discipleship Hour courses on rounds they aren't teaching kids

### **WORSHIP SERVICE HOUR (10:00-11:20)**

- Provide N-P2 care during the Worship Service
- K-5 will be in the service every week
- Volunteers will miss 10:00 worship service every 12-14 weeks
- Volunteers will be able to take any morning class

## Exchange's hope in the March structure

We are hoping to accomplish many things through this new structure in March. We believe there are many advantages church-wide, for Kids Ministry in particular, and for families and Kids. Really this is nothing new as churches have been doing this for a long time. We are simply trying to make the Exchange version.

### **Church Wide**

1. Allows us to emphasize additional Discipleship through COURSES. Allows us to have an expanded scope of teaching and equipping on Sunday mornings. Providing structured childcare allows parents to attend together.
2. COURSES also allows us to expand the voices of other teachers at Exchange, coaching and allowing others to teach.
3. Maximizing time on campus, instead of trying to gather other evenings for classes, which can be challenging for small groups and young families and schedules.
4. Creates MORE connection points for adults (including non-members).
5. Allows a much larger percentage of our people to hardly ever miss a service. Allows more of our people to consistently be in the service, allowing us to move forward collectively and more unified in vision and direction
6. People will serve much less frequently in Kids Min. This spreads out the load. We will need "All hands on deck". This is our family and our kids with whom we have been entrusted.
7. Opens up more opportunities to serve in other areas (connections, setup, etc) and not be relegated only to Kids Min.
8. Allows kids to be in the service with families. We benefit tremendously from the energy and unhindered faith of young people.
9. We see this as being a next step that prepares us for the next season of undeniable growth at Exchange.

## **Kids Ministry**

1. Gives teachers more ownership to a class because they will be in the class multiple weeks (6) in a row. We believe this is better for the teacher and the kids relationally.
2. This will lend itself to better quality teaching as teachers will know exactly what was taught the week before and have a big picture of where the curriculum is going.
3. We get to honor and empower those who truly have a desire to invest in this area and have a unique gifting toward teaching kids.
4. Provides shorter classes for kids (1 hour), which is good for teachers and the kids.
5. Doesn't necessarily alleviate the total number of volunteers needed. Yet it does change how often they serve and how often they miss the service. Of course as we grow we need more volunteers.
6. Spreads out the load so it's not the same people serving back there and missing worship.

## **Families and Kids**

1. We want Kids to have more discipleship opportunities. This way they get it in a classroom setting with their friends and teachers **AND** also get a bigger picture of church-wide discipleship with their parents. Much of this discipleship is by observation and participation.
2. Kids in the service allows the kids to get bigger picture of church, see parents model worship, hear a common language, and participate in things like giving/worship/communion/hearing the Word/learning about missions.
3. This gives us a chance to help offer kids a picture of church that is authentic.
4. This is one more way we can "partner with parents to point kids to Jesus".

## **OUR COMMITMENT in this process**

- Consider all families involved: we understand that there are a myriad of different needs within our Body. We will continue to consider all of the unique challenges, but this will also require honesty and openness from parents. We will need to hear from you.
- Experiment and assessment: we will offer surveys throughout to receive feedback and make adjustments and decisions accordingly.

## Exchange's Expectations for Kids during the Worship Hour

Exchange is thankful to have your child in corporate worship and supports you in your efforts to disciple them. Children are a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127) and we are blessed and encouraged by their presence in the service. That being said, we do understand the potential challenges of growing into this together. We want to be clear on what our expectations are and what we will be reinforcing together.

Please allow some of the FAQ's below to answer your questions. But we also want to hear from you with questions we did not ask here.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How will my children need to conduct themselves?**
  - The goal is not merely behavior, but to help them be a blessing, be a participant, and be a learner. We have outlined these below with the 3 Heart Postures (page 8).
  - We remain in our seats. This means no lying on the floor doing activities like coloring. We will not sit on the floor or in the aisle.
  - We sit upright (no sleeping) and keep our belongings and hands to ourselves. We try not to wiggle.
  - We keep our shoes and socks on.
  - We potty and get a drink before and after the service, not during. (Remember to take the child for both of these needs before the service starts.)
  - We do not talk to those behind or around us. If we must speak to mom or dad, we whisper.
- **Where should my kids sit in the service?**
  - It is always good for kids to sit where they can see. Being short, it may be best to sit up front so that no one stands in front of them.
  - Kids should sit in their seat.
- **What if my child wants to sit with their friends?**
  - We would recommend you spend the next few weeks or months practicing this new rhythm as a family before you allow your child to sit with anyone else. That is not a rule but a recommendation as you grow in this together.
  - Kids will want to sit with their friends. This is your decision, however, it would be best if you sat with them as they sit with their friends. It can often become too much for a parent to have to oversee their child and other people's children in the service.
  - There should not be a large group of kids all sitting together with one set of parents.
- **What will my children do if I am serving in Nursery or Preschool during the service?**
  - Your children can serve with you in those classes.
  - They can also sit with other families IF there is an agreement and understanding that those parents will encourage and reinforce the same expectations.
- **How long is the Exchange Service supposed to be?**
  - The leadership and worship team is making a determined effort for the EC worship service to go from 10:00-11:20.
- **What can I do if my kid becomes extra-wiggly or restless?**
  - Our desire here is to offer these as short term solutions rather than a permanent solution. You would not want the child to misinterpret these options as a reward for them not doing what you would actually prefer they do. The goal is to keep practicing and growing in self-control through the duration of the service.
    - You may take your child behind the curtain in the back to do something at the tables in the cafeteria (under parent supervision).

- We have a room where parents can take them, get their wiggles out, and still watch the service being streamed.
  - Parents can walk kids out into the lobby simply to regain composure.
- **What hands-on resources can you provide for parents?**
  - Our hope is to continually provide resources on a dedicated webpage. We may also be able to provide an online collaborative where parents can share ideas and practical help.
  - We are working on a Kids Journal which will allow them to work all the way through the Gospel of John during this sermon series.
- **What resources can you suggest for children with an attention deficit?**
  - We understand this varies uniquely from child to child. We would love to have an individual conversation to help resource and meet unique needs. Please reach out to Jenny or Ed.
- **What help can you offer a solo parent with multiple kids?**
  - This could be a place to involve friends and small group members to help allow you to focus on the training of one child instead of two or three.
- **Will the content of the sermon be age-appropriate for young kids?**
  - Yes. The pastors and speakers will be continually encouraged and reminded to navigate more sensitive topics in Scripture with the Kids in mind.
- **What worship elements can my kids participate in?**
  - **Singing:** we strongly encourage kids to sing. We have created Spotify playlists available so they can become familiar with the songs we will be singing.
  - **Passing Offering Baskets:** it is very important that you let your kids touch and pass the offering baskets as they go around.
  - **Giving:** if you haven't already taught your child the importance of giving, saving, and spending, this could be the time we/you begin that conversation. We can offer some suggestions on how kids can participate in giving in the service. For now, it may be as simple as parents writing a check and allowing the child to place the folded check in the basket as it is passed.
  - **Reading Scripture:** we would strongly encourage parents and children to bring a physical copy of the Bible with them so they can follow along and search for some answers in their service guide.
  - **Note Taking:** this is something that can be done in the John Journal and will also need to be modeled by parents.
- **How should we handle Communion with kids?**
  - Communion at Exchange is reserved for those who have made a public profession of faith, have been baptized, and are in a walking relationship with Jesus.
  - If they are not yet following Christ, we would recommend that your children walk up with you as you take the bread and juice. If there is a time of prayer, pray as a family and use that minute to pray for their salvation- explaining the gospel over and over.
  - Model this as a normal rhythm of church life. Communion at Exchange is usually the 3rd Sunday of every month.
- **What if I feel like my child will “mess-up” my worship experience?**
  - We understand this feeling. We all need to be challenged to rise above such thinking and see a much much bigger picture. Please reread the first section of this document. We understand that worship can be very personal, AND we may find that our worship experience is actually enhanced when it becomes less of “my” and more of “our”. Also, we can allow our kids to watch and respect us having a personal moment with the Lord.
- **If I feel I need to choose between Discipleship Hour and Worship Hour, which should I choose?**

- We would like to challenge you to fight for both. Please try to begin by fighting for both and don't simply assume it will not go well.
- If you absolutely have to choose one, choose the 10:00 Worship Hour.

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR PARENTS

- **What would be helpful to bring to the service for K-5th grade?**
  - Obviously there is a wide range of needs for these ages, but here are some general suggestions and helpful tips as you establish family expectations and rhythms
  - **SUPPLIES:**
    - Clipboard (hard surface to draw on- to also keep them from using the floor)
    - Markers with a zipper bag
    - More coloring or activity sheets than you think you need
    - EC Kids John Journal
    - Quiet Snacks: in consideration of those around you, consider choosing quiet snacks that are more chewy than crunchy (bars, not chips)
    - Water bottle
    - Toys are fine but try to choose more quiet toys
    - There are plenty of blogs and helpful websites if you search for ideas
  - **A Note on Supplies:** Please note, at the entrance of the gym, we will provide some supplies and activities for guests who may not have been prepared. Please note that these are not intended for regular-attender use unless it's an "emergency".
- **Other Practical Tips**
  - Plan and communicate with your kids WHEN they can begin their special activities. We would recommend that they wait until after singing and after welcome/announcements. The best time to bring out the activities would be when the sermon starts. This encourages their participation in worship as well.
  - If married, you and your spouse need to be on the same page on this. It will train your children to wait for a specific time (reward) and need to practice patience with a payoff. They can do this.
  - There is a chance that the John Journal will take the place of most of the activities.
  - It may be best to only bring ONE activity each week. Have a special basket at home with various options and have them choose which one they want to bring each week. This teaches decision making, focus, and moderation.
  - A wise recommendation would be bringing items that are ONLY used on Sundays at church. The item they regularly play with throughout the week may not be seen as special or unique, making it less appealing.
  - This is a preference (Ed), but if possible, consider the worship hour being a screen-free hour. I understand there are unique situations here, but sometimes the easiest thing is to give them your phone or a device, but just remember that is also a formative experience and decision for them. The worship hour could possibly serve as a wonderful one hour sabbath from more screen time.

## Setting Expectations with your Kids and Setting them up for Success

So much of this is like coaching. This is what we do as parents in all other areas. There is pre-game, mid-game, and post-game coaching. They simply do not know yet, so we must guide them, allow them to succeed, let them fail and train them in it. How else will they know? How else will they grow?

**\*\*PLEASE NOTE:** You are not reinforcing these expectations for the sake of mere behavior modification or out of a concern of what other people will think of your kids or your family. That is not the appropriate WHY or motivator. A community marked by grace can't let you feel that way. The motivator for all of us is to help your kids encounter God and develop heart postures. Remember that God is growing us into a certain kind of people, developed from the inside out.

**Before the First Time in Worship**, explain:

- Worship is a time for believers of all ages to enjoy worshiping God together.
- Worship is a space where both children and adults belong. You are important to the church.
- Talk about how long the service will last.
- Talk about the order for worship: first we find our seats, greet each other, then we sing, we are welcomed, then we give, then we listen to the pastor, then we sing again, then we pray.
- If possible, introduce your child to your pastor and worship leader. A child is more likely to listen and participate if she feels seen and known by the person leading the service.
- Finally, set specific, age-appropriate expectations to encourage these 3 Heart Postures:

## 3 HEART POSTURES : BE A BLESSING / BE A PARTICIPANT / BE A LEARNER

### 1. BE A BLESSING

Explain to your child that being a blessing in worship means:

- The people of God have been blessed to be a blessing (Gen 12:2)...wherever we are.
- A good family phrase when entering any environment is, "Let's make them glad we came, and not wishing we would leave".
- We become a blessing by allowing people to focus on Jesus rather than being distracted by us. The following are ways we come prepared and practice self-control and bless others:
  - We remain in our seats. This means no lying on the floor doing activities like coloring. We will not sit on the floor or in the aisle.
  - We sit upright (no sleeping) and keep our belongings and hands to ourselves. We try not to wiggle.
  - We keep our shoes and socks on.
  - We potty and get a drink before and after the service, not during. (Remember to take the child for both of these needs before the service starts.)
  - We do not talk to those behind or around us. If we must speak to mom or dad, we whisper.

### 2. BE A PARTICIPANT

Explain to your child that being a participant in worship means:

- We follow along with what everyone else is doing as part of sharing worship together.
- We stand when others stand (sit, pray, sing, greet, give, etc.) Help your child meet this expectation by guiding him through the participation process during the service. Sit where he can see the song lyrics



on the screen. Help him turn to the Scripture reading, following along with your finger while it is read. If an offering is taken, let your child drop the envelope in the plate or offering box. Model how to pray, sing and greet others.

### 3. BE A LEARNER

Explain to your child that being a learner in worship means:

- Listening: talk to your child about the importance of listening to people who God has placed over us: a teacher, a police officer, a parent. Explain that a pastor is also placed over us by God. We listen to him because he teaches us God's truth. Introducing your child to the pastor or worship leader will help them be more personally engaged as they become known.
- Engaging: prepare them with some questions ahead of time.
  - "Write down three words you heard that you didn't know."
  - "Draw a picture of something the pastor talks about."
  - "Write down something true that God showed you through the sermon."
- Debriefing: after attending worship together, remember to talk to your child about how it went and what could go differently next week.
  - Ask your child for feedback: "What did you learn in church today?" "What was your favorite part of worship?" "Tell me about what you drew or colored." Talk about what you liked from the sermon in terms they can understand. Can you show me your booklet?
  - Affirm success: "I appreciate how you sat quietly and colored, even though the service went long today."
  - Correct failure: "Next week I want you to try to wait to ask me questions until after the service."
  - Reset/re-emphasize the expectation to Be a Blessing, Be a Participant, and Be a Learner.
  - Reinforce the sermon message: plan a family devotion or service activity to correspond with what the pastor talked about.

#### **A Word of Encouragement to Parents** (by author Jen Wilkin)

*Begin with the end in mind. As parents, we make decisions for our children's future, not merely for their present. This means we begin with the end in mind, asking the question: "Where do I want my children to worship when they are adolescents?" Then we think strategically about how to train them to that end. If we wait until they are adolescents to bring them to worship with us, we may be waiting too long to model worship for them and we heighten the unfamiliarity they will feel entering that environment. Far better to ease them into their rightful place in corporate worship during their younger, more teachable years. This might mean that in the short term they sit in a room that does not always perfectly engage them at their level. And that's really okay. Your child may not catch every sermon point, but attending with you is still a huge win because of the modeling they will see and the familiarity they will develop. And you might be surprised by how much they do take away.*

*Be patient and don't give up! It takes many offerings of leafy greens before a child learns to eat them, and many more before she learns to enjoy and value them. "Big Church" is also an acquired taste and a learned value. Allow your child time to develop his taste for the spiritual food of corporate worship. The act of worship takes self-control. Believers of every age must learn to set aside distractions and devote our full attention to the adoration of God. Self-control takes time to develop for all of us, and especially for children. Give **grace** during that process. The One you are training them to worship has been a patient Father to you. Persevere in training your child to take his rightful place among the community of believers. Before you know it, Big Church will be just the right size for everyone in the family.*