



I ntroduction

Nothing compares to Sunday mornings. We rise early, dress, eat breakfast, and head out the door with Bible in hand. We walk in the front entrance of the church, down the hall, and file into the sanctuary. As we take up our customary seat, other individuals—men, women, and children—begin to stream through the door and take their regular seats. The room fills with familiar people and the love feels almost palpable. You know the scene; it occurs every week. In one sense it is very common. In another sense it is not common at all. As the call to worship sounds, the church gathered stands and with united voice sings beautiful praise to God enthroned above. Thankfully, I pastor a church which loves to sing. The voices fill the room and the sound delights my soul. In that moment, truly heaven and earth meet. The songs we sing rise above the clouds to mix with the anthems sung by angels and church triumphant before the throne



of the Lamb. And from heaven, by the Spirit, the grace of God cascades down upon His people as we sing His praise, hear His Word, and pray in faith. Though I have belonged to the church for years, this weekly event continues to give me chills.

During the opening hymn I love to look around the sanctuary. Here stand individuals different in so many ways, yet united as they approach the sovereign Lord of the universe. They journeyed to this church from different walks of life and with different stories. Different ethnicities, races, and colors of skin are observable. Men and women sing together. The old saint in the wheel chair, single young man, the recently widowed mother, the four-year-old child, and the teenager all united in song to God. Blessings flow down, praises go up. Is there a sight on earth more glorious?

As I gaze around the room during this opening song my eyes inevitably land on a child. Few things encourage my soul more than seeing children sing with all their little strength to God. They possess no inhibitions; they were told to sing and so they sing with a full-voice. In those moments, I am reminded of God's faithfulness and care. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, He will keep His own, and the covenant community of God continues on. A new generation of worshipers confirms this truth. I need that reminder—it does the soul good.

Yet, the more churches I visit, the less often I witness this scene. The people file in, love still exists, and the singing continues. Different races, ethnicities, and colors of skin remain. Men and women fill the pews. The old saint, single young man, and widowed mother are all present. But something is missing—the next generation.



INTRODUCTION

Children can't be spotted. Why? Families with children attend this local church. In fact, they flock to it. Children are absent because this church considers worship on Sunday mornings an 'adult activity.'

A few years ago, I visited a church with my wife and two children. Friendly faces stationed the church doors and we received a wonderful welcome. As we made our way down the hall and towards the sanctuary, a number of people greeted us. We found ourselves met with friendly faces as ushers handed us the morning's bulletin. Someone volunteered to show our family the way to the children's wing. I declined the offer for a tour but accepted the bulletin. As we sat down in an empty row I read, in bold letters, on the front page, 'Our services are not for children. We strongly encourage you to take your children to age-appropriate Sunday School classes which are available downstairs.' As I read this statement of strong encouragement, I found myself in a state of strong discouragement. I had just finished reading this bold declaration when a pastor of the church ascended the platform, provided a welcome, and offered a few short announcements. The big announcement for this particular Sunday morning was the unveiling of the church's focus for the year—training the congregation in Christian parenting.

I understand it is not easy to bring our children into corporate worship. But worshiping with our covenant children is one of the most significant ways that we parent as Christians. In the pages of this book, I hope to encourage you, the reader, that our covenant children belong in the worship services of the church.

In chapters one and two we will look at the importance of worship in the covenant community and the marks of biblical worship. Some may wish to skip these first



two chapters in order to reach the subject of the book—children in worship. As a writer, it seemed necessary to provide the foundation before addressing the arguments and particulars. I think those who take the time to read the first two chapters will find the material in chapters three and four more convincing. Chapters five and six detail practical advice for parents and church leaders for incorporating children into corporate worship. Many of us stand convinced of this needed practice, but long for some encouragement and help in the actual nitty-gritty of implementation. Let's be honest, it is not always easy to have children in the pew. Chapter seven addresses some of the common replacements and objections to including children in corporate worship, while the appendix includes some testimonials and additional resources.

I write this book as a pastor, but even more importantly, as a father of covenant children who has struggled with his children in the pew. Yet, I believe the struggles are worth it, for one of the great benefits our covenant children enjoy is the privilege of attending weekly worship. I am convinced that we neglect this benefit to their harm and our corporate injury. If only one church or even one family worships with their children after reading this book, this author would count every minute of writing well-worth the effort. However, I continue to pray for an even greater work of the Spirit in our generation. I pray the Lord would convince the Church that it should include even its youngest members in worship. What a blessing it would be, if all, or even most of this generation's churches would once again let the children worship! I pray that we might see that day in our time for the sake of our covenant children to the glory of God.