

# Children's Worship

by James Boice

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*James Boice critiques children's sermons for distracting from worship and advocates for a more integrated approach to children's participation in church services.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:6, Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 18:6, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21

**Topics:** "Teaching Children", "Worship"

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## Description

James Boice addresses the issue of children's sermons, arguing that they distract from true worship by shifting focus from God to children. He believes that instead of elevating children's understanding of worship, these sermons often lower adult engagement, leading to a 'dumbing down' of the service. Boice advocates for keeping children in church from a younger age and providing them with resources to engage meaningfully in worship. He emphasizes the importance of teaching children to participate at an adult level rather than catering to their immaturity. Ultimately, he calls for a reevaluation of how churches approach children's involvement in worship.

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## Transcript

I don't do children's sermons. I know they are popular with parents and that they are a staple in the Sunday services of most evangelical churches. But I don't like them, and I don't do them. Let me explain why.

My first reason is that children's sermons distract people from the worship of God. They are meant to involve children in the worship service by offering something appropriate to their age. But the effect, whether intentional or not, is to focus the attention of the adults on the children, and that is not what we should be coming to church to do. We should be focusing on God. I find that when children are invited forward to hear some cute word from the minister, the adults perk up and begin to pay close attention to the children. They are amused. They laugh. It is a bright spot in the service. But it is not worship. Children's sermons sidetrack worship even if it has been going on previously, which often it has not. In practice children's sermons come dangerously close to idolatry since they invite worship of the fruit of our loins rather than the Lord.

My second reason is that children's sermons are part of what I see as an overall bad direction in which services have been moving. They are a part of what we call "dumbing down" in other disciplines.

Let me put it this way. The goal we should have with our children is to bring them up to the level of the adults; that is, to enable them to begin to function on an adult level in their relationships to God. But what we have succeeded in doing instead is to bring the adults down to the level of the children. In many churches the sermon is hardly suited to any genuinely adult mind, the praise choruses would fit better at a high school rally than in the worship of the Bible's God, and the children's sermons probably speak as much to adult immaturity as to the children. In fact, the children's sermons are usually geared to the smallest children, and the older children are ignored.

The defense of this bad practice is probably that children cannot follow what goes on in church. But that is not true. They can. And even if they cannot follow what goes on at first, our task is to teach them so they both can and will. And why not? It does not require much more time to teach children to participate in the worship service than it does to prepare some of the children's sermons I have heard.

We have thought about this challenge at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and have developed a few ideas that we find work pretty well.

First, we keep the children in church from a much younger age than we used to do. We still take the very little ones out for the parents' sake as much as for theirs. We don't want excessive distractions for anyone. But we keep the children in church from the second grade up. They can read at this age as well as participate, and we think it is good for our families to be worshiping together.

Second, we prepare a children's bulletin which the children pick up when the adults receive theirs. The children's bulletin contains the text of such service items as the Apostles' Creed, and there are side bars and added texts with arrows to explain what various words or phrases occurring in the service mean. The third page contains a one paragraph summary of the sermon with several questions about it for the older children and a "word alert" section for those who are younger. "Word alert" lists words they can listen for.

Third, both the organist and I come to the opening exercises of the Sunday School to talk about the sermon and the hymns. I explain what I am going to be talking about and what the children should look for. I even ask them to pray that people who are not Christians may hear what God has to say and be converted. The organist tells about the hymns we will sing, who wrote them, and why we sing them as we do.

By the way, we teach the children hymns instead of choruses, since they learn them easily at this age. We have them memorize a children's catechism and large blocks of Scripture too, believing that it is a serious mistake to waste precious Sunday School time with mere games or trivia.

I would like to get pastors and other church leaders to rethink what we are doing with our children. There is more than one way of causing these little ones to stumble.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/james-boice/childrens-worship/>

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