

Children in Worship

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

by Mitch Stutzman

Bringing children intentionally into corporate worship is a vital act of faith formation and belonging. Author Meredith Miller reminds us through her book *Woven* that children experience God best through participation, relationship, and story—not through perfection or performance. When we create intentional space for children in worship, we communicate that their presence matters, their questions have value, and their faith is already valid. This resource was born out of a question from one congregation seeking to do this work better: How can we make story time in worship more meaningful and engaging? What follows are best practices and practical guidance shaped by that question—tools to help nurture curiosity, invite wonder, and help children see themselves as full participants in the life of your faith community.

1. Keep it short (3–5 minutes)

Children’s ability to sustain attention is limited and in many settings is getting shorter. As the article “How to Keep Kids’ Attention”¹ notes, kids may need to have their attention “reset” every five minutes or less. By keeping the segment brief (or by resetting their attention every five minutes in settings like Sunday school), you increase the chance the children will engage meaningfully rather than becoming distracted.

2. Focus on one simple takeaway

According to Meredith Miller’s work², faith formation for children isn’t about delivering a curriculum of many morals, but helping them come to *know God*—one truth anchored in relationship rather than a series of rules. By choosing a single point, you help anchor their experience rather than overloading them or providing too many opportunities for children’s focus to deviate from what you are trying to bring.

3. Use concrete, literal language (minimize figurative language)

Children are still developing capacities to handle abstract thought. Our churches are often filled with figurative language, allusion, and metaphor. These communication tools can be really hard for children to understand. Research on children’s spirituality notes that formation is best when it engages their capacities to wonder, play, and explore story. Miller critiques³ moralistic or rule-based models (where children “must be good” to earn favor) and argues for relational language about who God is and what that means for children. Using clear, everyday language helps children more easily connect with the message.



Illustration by Elisa Chavarri

1. <https://churchleaders.com/children/childrens-ministry-articles/341013-the-formula-for-keeping-kids-attention.html>

2. <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/story/holy-imagination/>

3. <https://www.christiancentury.org/books/how-do-we-help-children-weave-healthy-faith>

4. Include something tangible or sensory

Children's faith formation should emphasize experiential, multisensory learning. Things that are image-rich, interactive, and engage the body help children make meaning. A tangible object, visual, or simple action helps children connect abstract ideas to their experience, making the message stick.

5. Connect to real-life experiences that children understand

Miller emphasizes that faith is woven strand-by-strand through real life, not built like a wall by piling up "spiritual blocks." When you tie the message into something children already know like their life at home, school, play, friendships, or nature, they can see that what they're learning isn't separate from their life but part of it. In doing so however, be mindful of the assumptions you make about what someone's home life may be like. There is an increasing amount of diversity in what family structures look like in our churches and in the families that come visit our churches. Be intentional in choosing language that is expansive and does not assume a certain family composition, educational model, or economic status.

6. Encourage participation (ask a question, invite a response)

Children are not passive recipients; they are active participants in the process of faith formation. Part of nurturing a strong faith in our children is giving them the confidence and security to ask questions and interact with faith in a space that is supportive and hospitable. Children need space to wonder, ask, respond, reflect. By engaging children rather than lecturing, you honor their agency, you help them internalize truth and help them feel seen and included. This also nurtures a sense of ownership in their faith community where children will feel seen and valued by the community of faith. Honor every question as a valid one. There are no silly questions in church.



Illustration by Elisa Chavarri

7. End with warmth and blessing (affirmation of God's love)

Miller argues that a faith children don't have to heal from is one rooted in the character of God (goodness, power, nearness) rather than in fear or obedience-only models. Closing with words of affirmation helps children feel valued in their faith community and invites them into ongoing relationship and trust with God. Ending with a short prayer that is one or two sentences long provides a meaningful ending and transition point in the flow of worship as well as an opportunity to model a valuable prayer practice. Keep closing prayers short, warm, and affirmational. The structure and language of your prayer or blessing can reinforce that this practice of prayer is something that we live out, something that is genuine, and something that they can do too.