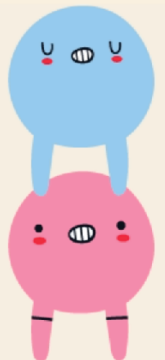


PERSPECTIVE

NOVEMBER 2023



welcoming
children
in worship



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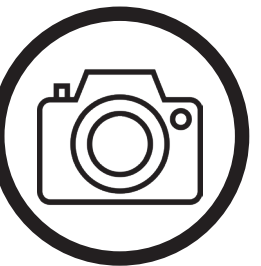
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Welcoming Children in Worship

Do you remember Adult Swim? I do. During my childhood, we spent many hours at our neighborhood pool. I'm certain it didn't actually happen this way, but it felt like every time we went, within five minutes of getting in, the lifeguards would blow their whistles repeatedly and shout "Adult Swim!" We children would begrudgingly hop out of the pool, find a seat nearby, and wait for what felt like an eternity as we watched the adults swim laps. For the adults, these were sacred moments. Moments of peace. No splashing. No screaming. No distractions. They looked forward to Adult Swim. It was their time in the pool.

Is corporate worship supposed to be the church's version of Adult Swim? Does God intend our gatherings to be times when only adults gather to focus our undivided attention on him without the distraction of children? If you attend Mount Vernon's gatherings, I trust you think the answer is no. But, do you know why it's not only necessary but good to welcome children in worship?

My aim in this article is to convince you from Scripture that corporate worship is not Adult Swim. While our time together might be more serene without children, the Bible tells us we lose something profound in their absence. Is it always easy to welcome children in worship? No. But Scripture tells us that when we labor by God's grace to do so, he blesses not only them but us too.

THE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT

Whenever we find the people of God gathered for worship in the Bible, we find children present. This is true of the worship gatherings pictured in both the Old and New Testaments.

As we turn through the pages of the Old Testament, we find children of all ages were present in Israel's corporate gatherings (e.g., Josh 8:34–35; 2 Chron 20:11–12; Ezra 10:1). If you're like me, this doesn't surprise you. What else were the people of Israel to do with their children? Send them off to play with wild animals in the wilderness while they gathered to worship God? Hire a Canaanite teen to babysit for a few hours? Of course not. But, if we think Israel's children were present at their corporate gatherings solely because parents couldn't find quality babysitters, we're sorely mistaken. The children of Israel gathered to worship the Lord alongside their parents because he commanded it.

And Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel

comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, *and little ones*, and the sojourner within your towns, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess." (Deut 31:10–13, emphasis mine)

When the people of Israel assembled, they *had* to bring their children. Why? Because God had a purpose for their presence: "that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God." They were to gather alongside their parents so that they too might become worshippers of the LORD from the earliest possible age.

Children continued to gather with God's people in the New Testament. Before the establishment of the church, we catch numerous glimpses of Jesus gathering and teaching groups that included men, women, *and* children (Matt 14:21; 18:1–4; Jn 6:9). When we move into Acts and the epistles, we find no direct references to children gathering with the churchesⁱ and, yet, it is clear they were present. We know this because Paul addressed them in his letters to the churches in Ephesus and Colossae. These letters were read to the churches during their corporate worship gatherings. In both, Paul spoke directly to the children he assumed were present in the gathering, saying, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph 6:1–3; cf. Col 3:20). Paul not only expected children to be present, he expected them to listen. God's Word was for them just as much as it was for their parents. In the New Testament, just as in the Old, God has a purpose for children in corporate worship: "That they may *hear* and learn to fear the Lord."

When God's people gathered for worship, the Bible tells us their children gathered with them. While this doesn't mean providing childcare for very young children during our corporate worship gatherings is outside the bounds of the Bible, it does call into question the mentality that views corporate worship as an exclusively adult activity. According to Scripture, corporate worship is not Adult Swim. God intends to use the corporate worship of his people in their lives and the lives of their children.

WELCOMING CHILDREN IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

What's your gut reaction to the thought of lots and lots of children participating in Mount Vernon's corporate worship gatherings? Does it excite you? Or, does it concern you? Maybe some mix of both? I expect the idea concerns more than it excites. We may think of the frustration of getting stuck sitting behind a continually wiggling, talking child. We might imagine the blood-curdling screams of crying babies and defiant toddlers. Some of us visualize young children constantly up and down, going in and out of the Main Hall. As parents, we fear the children you're thinking about are ours! And, we dread the thought of engaging in years of distracted worship, catching snippets of sermons, and hoping to make it by on those crumbs, week after week.

These concerns are valid, yet I'm convinced they loom large—too large, in fact—in our minds because we've been conditioned to think of corporate worship primarily in terms of our personal experience. This thinking has its roots, at least in part, in the church growth movement that emerged in the 70's and 80's.ⁱⁱ The leaders of the movement sought to reach the unchurched by making corporate worship gatherings as appealing as possible. They focused their attention on the experience of the worshipper. Gatherings needed to be comfortable and pleasant. For that to happen, parents needed to be free from the responsibility of caring for their children. And both they and the congregation needed to be free of the distraction caused by their children. This emphasis led to the removal of children and youth from corporate worship. Separate services were created. Adults gathered for pleasant, distraction-free worship in one space while children and youth gathered for engaging, age-appropriate programming in another. This wasn't all bad. Churches grew and adults came to Christ. But something else happened in the process. Many of those who weren't allowed in the pool as kids, decided not to get in as adults.

Research shows that nearly six out of every ten children who grew up in the church during the height of the church growth movement either left the institutional church or left the faith entirely.ⁱⁱⁱ While every story is unique and there are undoubtedly many other contributing factors at play, the removal of many of these children from the corporate worship gathering is not insignificant. Because children were no longer welcome in corporate worship, the gathering of God's people became foreign and even unattractive to some, especially when compared to the fun and excitement experienced in children's church and youth ministry. These children left the church as adults,

at least in part, because they rarely, if ever, worshipped with the church as kids.

Thankfully, the pragmatic fads of the church growth movement have started to slowly lose their luster. But, sadly, the movement's perspective on children in corporate worship remains deeply engrained in the minds of many in the church today. Viewed through the lens of the church growth movement's emphasis on personal experience, some parents see their children primarily as a burden and distraction in worship. And, some church members view children in the gathering as a hindrance to their full-hearted engagement with God. When children are viewed through that lens, corporate worship seems better without them. It becomes the church equivalent of Adult Swim. Children aren't welcome. And, on the rare occasion that one makes it into the pool, the unwelcoming looks they receive when they aren't on their best behavior tell them everything they need to know.

Seen through the lens of God's Word, children in the worship gathering look altogether different. Scripture teaches parents to view their children primarily as a blessing and stewardship, as eternal souls who desperately need to hear and fear the Lord (Deut 31:13; Ps 127:3–4; Matt 19:13–15). Through this lens, we see that welcoming our children into corporate worship, while not always easy, presents us with an opportunity to train them from their childhood to do the primary thing they were made to do, the thing that we pray they will do for all eternity—worship the living God with the people of God (Rev 5:11–14). The lens of Scripture gives us eyes to see that in doing the hard work of training our children to sit still, listen quietly, and engage in the worship of the Lord we are actually engaged in worship ourselves, presenting our lives as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God (Rom 12:1).

For those tempted to see the presence of children as an impediment to worship, the lens of the Bible gives the clarity of vision to see them not as a hindrance, but as a help. Their presence in the gathering serves to remind us of both the necessity and beauty of childlike faith (Mk 10:13–16). As we hear their sweet little voices joyfully and loudly singing praise to God, as we watch them listening carefully as they work to fill out the children's bulletin, as we overhear them asking questions about the sermon or Scripture reading, we are reminded that simple faith is beautiful and profound. Jesus places children in our midst as we gather, not that we might see them as stumbling blocks to worship, but as his loving invitation to humble ourselves so that we might experience the perfect worship of the kingdom of heaven (see Matt 18:3).

The lens of Scripture also helps us see that welcoming children into our corporate gatherings provides a unique opportunity to call them to faith in the living God. In Psalm 78, the psalmist leads the gathered people of God to proclaim, “We will not hide them from our children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might and the wonders that he has done. . . so that they should set their hope in God” (Ps 78:4, 7). As we gather together to worship the living God with our children present, this is exactly what happens. We sing of the glorious deeds of the Lord, we pray to the mighty God who hears, we read of the wonders that he has done, and through the preaching of his Word, we call every man, woman, and child to set their hope in God. When we welcome our children into corporate worship, we place them under a gushing fountain of God’s grace in the hope that they will drink deeply and find satisfaction in him forever.

Through the lens of the Bible, we come to see we have far more to gain from our children’s presence than we have to lose and we gladly welcome them into our corporate worship gatherings. Corporate worship becomes All Swim rather than Adult Swim. And, when everyone is in the pool, something glorious happens. God’s people wade deeper into worship and the coming generations are lovingly taught and encouraged to follow suit

WELCOMING CHILDREN IN MOUNT VERNON’S GATHERINGS

Mount Vernon welcomes children of all ages into our corporate worship gatherings. We provide childcare for our youngest (0-3yrs), not because we don’t want them in our gatherings, but because we desire to bless their parents. These little ones require constant attention and supervision. Some are incredibly busy and still learning to sit still. Many also take naps and, unlike some of us, haven’t mastered the art of dozing off during the sermon.

Why not offer this service to parents of four- or even five-year-olds? Our elders aren’t opposed to the idea. I think providing childcare for all our preschoolers (0-4yrs) would be ideal. However, since 2020, the Lord has not seen fit to provide us with enough childcare volunteers to make that happen. While we would love to have more volunteers (please contact Hannah Ragan if you are interested in serving!), we trust God’s wisdom in giving us exactly what we need. He knows what is best for us and our kids. And, as our four-year-olds, often wide-eyed and extra wiggly in their first few weeks of gathering with the body, slowly adjust and begin to engage in simple ways with the different elements of the service, we see his wisdom at work.

Our Children’s Bulletins are the primary way we’ve sought to help younger children engage in corporate worship. These bulletins are available during our morning and evening services and, much like the regular bulletins, walk through the service element by element. The morning Children’s Bulletins change monthly, while the evening bulletins stay the same. Both seek to engage children of varying ages by providing them with opportunities to do everything from counting the number of times they hear words like God, Jesus, and gospel, to drawing a picture of something they heard in the sermon or evening devotion, to writing down one or two of the things we prayed for in the pastoral prayer. The bulletins foster active listening, helping children hear in the hope that they will come to fear the Lord.

We also seek to help our children engage in singing on Sunday mornings. Several years ago, we introduced Elementary Children’s Choir as part of our Wednesday night children’s programming. The goal of the time is not primarily to prepare our children to perform for a special event (though we do so on occasion) but to prepare them to sing with the church on Sunday morning. Each week we teach the children a “coming right up” song that will be sung in the Sunday gathering. If you watch carefully on Sunday mornings, you’ll notice children cheerfully alerting their parents to the fact that “We’re singing the coming right up song!” The “Songs for Sunday” playlist on Spotify was also created to help adults and children prepare to sing with the church when we gather.

One other, somewhat imperceptible way we’ve sought to engage children in our gatherings is by being mindful of their presence as we prepare our sermons. While Aaron only occasionally speaks directly to children as he preaches, he is always aware that they are present and listening. This is one of the many reasons he labors to preach simple, clear sermons. While we only occasionally speak directly to children and youth from the pulpit, we always speak directly to them when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. This not only serves to keep the unconverted and unrepentant from “eating and drinking judgment,” it also provides a unique opportunity to call children and youth to trust in the crucified, risen, and returning Christ.

Though these are all small things, they work together to foster an environment that welcomes children. Like signs posted all around the pool that say, “Children Welcome,” they serve to invite our children to jump into our corporate worship gatherings and learn to swim.

WELCOMING CHILDREN PERSONALLY

Welcome signs are good. But, welcoming children into our corporate worship gatherings involves more than just putting up a sign. It requires a willingness on the part of those gathered to genuinely welcome children into their midst. No matter what the sign on the side of the pool says, it is the words and faces of those in the water that communicate whether or not children are truly welcome. So, how can you communicate to Mount Vernon's children that you are convinced our corporate worship gathering isn't Adult Swim? You can speak, show, and share.

First, speak to the children and youth around you before the service begins. Greet them with a smile. Say hello. Let them know you are glad to see them. Learn their names. Engage youth in extended conversation. Get to know them. These small interactions show our children we believe they belong in our gatherings.

Second, show the children around you what it looks like to worship the Lord not only by example (e.g., singing loudly, praying fervently, listening carefully, resisting the urge to check your email or Instagram) but also through occasional instruction. Let me explain what I mean. Say, for example, you are sitting behind a family, and every time we stand to sing, their four-year-old turns around and makes faces at you. While it is certainly mom and dad's responsibility to teach this little one to face forward when we sing, you have a unique opportunity to serve both the child and their parents by gently saying something like, "Please turn around, buddy. Let's face forward as we sing praises to God." In that moment, you are inviting that little one to worship God rightly, to give their full attention to him. And, you are doing so in a manner that says, "I'm glad you are in the water, kiddo. Let me help you learn to swim."

Third, share a word of encouragement with a child near you as the service concludes. Did the little boy behind you sing out? Did the young girl in front sit still and take notes during the sermon? Let them know you were encouraged by what you heard or saw. Encourage them to keep it up. Let their parents know too. As a parent, I can tell you there is no greater shot in the arm than a word of encouragement about my children's behavior. You should also feel free to share with parents about misbehavior they might have missed during the service. But that kind of sharing should only take place when you have a relationship with the parent in which encouragement is the norm.

It's one thing to know your presence is welcome. It's another to know your presence is wanted. As we make

an effort to speak, show, and share each Sunday, Mount Vernon's children will know without a doubt that we want them in our worship gatherings.

WELCOMING CHILDREN AS A PARENT

Teaching children to swim is hard work. We have to give them our full attention every time they're in the water. It requires patience and persistence. It can be frustrating. There are often lots of tears. It's no wonder that most parents gladly pay for swimming lessons. Once our children can swim, we are glad to have them in the pool with us. Until then, we'd prefer they not be in the pool at all.

I trust you can see the parallels when it comes to welcoming children into corporate worship. It isn't easy to train a four-year-old to sit through an hour-and-forty-five-minute service that includes a forty-five to fifty-five-minute sermon. Early on, our children struggle to adjust. They require constant attention. They wiggle. They whine. They throw fits. They throw their cheerios. And, to add insult to injury, they do it in a quiet room before the watching eyes and listening ears of a few hundred people. Even if we are convinced from the Bible that it is good and right for our children to be present in corporate worship, every parent has moments when they wish their child could have stayed in childcare just a little longer. We want to welcome our children into the pew, but it is not always easy.

As a parent of four (soon to be five), I've been there and will be there again soon. Jamie and I welcomed our first child into corporate worship almost a decade ago. Training our children to engage in Mount Vernon's worship gatherings was (and still can be) challenging, but we've seen the Lord's faithfulness to us and our children over the years and we've learned a lot along the way. When I think of the lessons we've learned, seven words come to mind:

- *Perspective.* When we welcomed our first child into the corporate worship service, it was tempting to think we might never hear a full sermon again. In retrospect, we've come to realize the years of training our children to sit still and engage were really quite brief, especially once we committed ourselves to diligently and consistently training them week over week. We also realized the need to regularly remind ourselves of the Bible's perspective on training children. Training our children to worship is an act of worship. God is glorified as much by our engagement with our children as we teach them to worship as he is by our undistracted engagement in worship. He

uses both to sanctify us. For a season, he is using the former rather than the latter. One day in the not-too-distant future, he'll only use the latter and we will miss the days of worshipping with our children at our side. As you parent in the pew, it is important to maintain perspective on both the brevity and the blessing of the task at hand.

- *Posture.* The posture of our hearts drives our words and behavior (Lk 6:43–45). It determines how we respond in every situation. If, in my heart, I view having my children in the worship gathering as an inconvenience or a burden, it will be apparent to them and to those around me. On the other hand, if I view their presence as a God-given stewardship and the opportunity to train them as a great privilege, that too will be apparent. What is your heart posture toward your children as you sit with them in the pew each Sunday? Mine isn't always what it should be. More than once, I've had to confess that sad fact to the Lord and my children. If you are anything like me, you need to pray each Sunday for a heart posture that welcomes your children in worship.
- *Pride.* Parenting in the pew often exposes our pride. As a pastor of the church—and not just any pastor, but the one who oversees the church's family ministry and writes articles like this one about parenting—I want to have well-behaved children who sit still on Sundays and joyfully participate in worship. I don't want to be seen taking a defiant, screaming child out of the service. I don't want my kid spilling cheerios all over the couple sitting next to us. In my pride, I want to be seen as a perfect parent with perfect children. But, my kids aren't perfect, and neither am I. Week over week I have to put my pride to death. I've learned to do so by reminding myself of a simple, but important truth. While I'll never be a perfect parent, I can be a faithful one. Faithful parents consistently and joyfully train and discipline their children because they are committed to pleasing the Lord, not the people around them. Even if the person behind me is annoyed at the fact that I'm standing up for the third time to take my unruly child out of the service (and, trust me, they aren't nearly as annoyed as you think), God is pleased, and that's what really matters.
- *Preparation.* One of the ways we help children learn to swim is by getting them used to being in the water. When it comes to corporate worship, we've found it helpful to use our family worship times and the Sunday evening service to prepare our children to join us for corporate worship on Sunday mornings.

During family worship, we require our children to sit up, sit still, and pay attention as we read and discuss the Bible, pray, and sing.^{iv} When we had toddlers, we typically trained them in this routine by having them sit in our laps so that we could easily offer correction and redirection. When our children turned three, we brought them into the Sunday evening service. This served as a kind of “right of passage” for each kid and provided us the opportunity to train them in a smaller, more relaxed setting where it was easier to instruct and discipline without distracting lots of people. After a year of sitting with us in the evening service, the transition to Sunday morning was much less jarring for our kids and for us.

- *Purpose.* If the purpose for which we welcome children into corporate worship is so that they might hear and learn to fear the Lord, parents must do the hard work of training them to pay attention to and participate in what is taking place in the service. When our children were very young, I was often tempted to distract them during worship so that I wouldn't have to discipline them as often. While we certainly want to ease them in, we must be careful that the things we provide to help them adjust don't defeat the purpose for which we've welcomed them into the service. Toys and screens may keep our children still and quiet, but they don't encourage participation. Far better are pencils, crayons, and notebooks filled with blank pages and the encouragement to write down or draw pictures of things they see and hear in the service. We've required our children from the earliest age to sit close to mom and dad (the younger they are, the closer), focus their attention on the platform, stand when the church stands, sing when the church sings, and pray when the church prays. Training them takes work, but over time, we've seen our kids increasingly engage in worship.
- *Praise.* Children need instruction and encouragement. The trick is finding the right balance. I tend to be a “cup half empty” person. At the end of a service, it's easy to focus on what my children did wrong. Jamie, on the other hand, tends to see the good. She often praises our children for their obedience and engagement in the service and encourages them to keep up the good work. I'm convinced her approach is the better of the two. During the service, we should instruct, correct, and discipline our children as often as necessary. When it ends, we may need to briefly address ways they can grow, but we don't need to dwell on their failures. That only leads to discouragement.

Instead, we should go out of our way to acknowledge all the good we saw. This provides our children with the encouragement they need to keep at it week after week.

- *Perseverance.* Most children don't learn to swim in a day. And none learn to engage in corporate worship overnight. It takes time and perseverance on our part as parents, but the hard work is worth it. Whether you just welcomed your first little one into corporate worship or have been at it for a while, I want to encourage you to keep at it. The benefits to your soul and theirs far outweigh the costs.

This certainly isn't everything a parent needs to know about welcoming children in worship. If you've never read it, I'd encourage you to check out a Family Ministry resource we've put together entitled, "A Parent's Guide to Parenting in the Pew." It's available on the church website at www.mvbchurch.org/files/ParentinginPew.pdf. We fleshed out the ideas in that pamphlet further and provided lots of practical tips at our 2022 Parenting in the Pew Workshop. You can find the workshop audio at mvbchurch.org/Audio/2022/ParentingInThePew2022.mp3.

As helpful as these resources are, there is nothing like sitting down with a seasoned parent and asking them to share from their experience. Find someone you respect. Ask them what they did. Ask them what they learned. If you want to gain the most you possibly can from them, ask if they'd be willing to sit behind you one Sunday and give you feedback on your parenting. That's humbling, but it's incredibly beneficial.

Parents don't have to teach their children to swim. It's perfectly fine to pass that responsibility on to someone else. But, as a Christian parent, you do have to train your children to engage in corporate worship. It is part of bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). It isn't easy, but when we see it for what it is—training our children to do what they were made to do and placing them in the way of God's grace that they might hear and learn to fear the Lord—we see that it is totally worth the work. And, as we joyfully, thoughtfully, and attentively welcome our children into the waters of corporate worship, it serves everyone else in the pool and encourages them to graciously and gladly welcome our children in too.

WELCOMING CHILDREN IN HOPE

I'm thankful corporate worship at Mount Vernon isn't Adult Swim. While our gatherings are a bit noisier and

busier than they might be without children, we adults are better off for it, and so are our kids. It is my hope I've convinced you from the Bible that's true. And, more than that, I hope I've convinced you to do your part in welcoming children into our worship gatherings. God has given us a great stewardship in the dozens of children and youth that attend our weekly gatherings. They need to hear and learn to fear the Lord. As we lovingly welcome them into our gatherings each week, it is my hope and prayer that our gracious God will open their ears and transform their hearts for the glory of his great name.

— Dustin Butts

ⁱ One possible exception is Eutychus (Acts 20:7–12) who is described as both a young man (v. 9) and a youth/child (v. 12). Though it wasn't a corporate worship gathering of the church, we are also told that the Christians in Tyre brought their children along to bid farewell to Paul and to pray for his journey (Acts 21:5–6).

ⁱⁱ I'm indebted to David and Sally Michael, *Children and the Worship Service* (St. Paul, MN: Truth:78, 2017), 17, for many of the following insights on the church growth movement.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.barna.com/research/5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church/>

^{iv} If you are new to the idea of family worship and would like some guidance on how to go about it, I've written a short, introductory guide to family worship that I'm happy to share.

Be Thou My Vision

A Liturgy for Daily Worship

Written by Jonathan Gibson

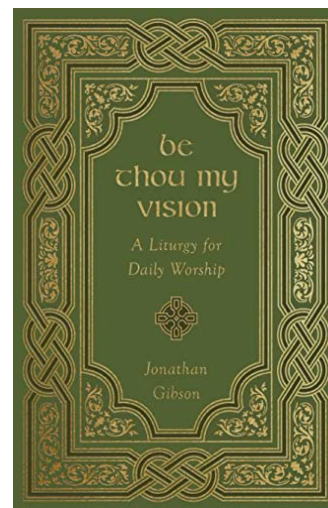
Have you ever experienced a spiritual desert of sorts where your prayers are replete with petitions but are lacking in confession and sheer adoration of our heavenly Father? Jonathan Gibson experienced this in his personal walk with the Lord. However, when he sang hymns and recited rich church creeds, historical prayers, and daily catechism, he found his love for the Lord deepened and his trials bore hope and spiritual grace.

Gibson prefaces *Be Thou My Vision* by reminding readers of God's call to Abraham and to the Israelites to keep their households in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19) and to never stop teaching their children the words of God (Deut. 6:5-6). Because the habitual discipline of having personal and family worship and devotions is assumed in many parts of Scripture, Gibson compiled this 31-day devotional guide of set liturgy. *Be Thou My Vision* can be repeated every month as it includes ongoing catechisms and a yearly Bible reading plan. Each day includes Old and New Testament readings, multiple written out prayers—including confessions of sin and assurances of pardon—creeds about the Christian faith, songs of praise, and catechisms. Each day faithfully closes with the Lord's Prayer and suggested topics for focused time in prayer. The included prayers, creeds, and confessions come from various sources including the *ESV Prayer Bible* (2018), *A Book of Public Prayer* (1857), and *Augustine's Confessions* (c. 400). The catechisms are from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1647), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), and the *Book of Common Prayer* (1552).

Overall, I really enjoyed the structure and layout of this daily devotional and appreciated the ease of being able to read rich prayers by faithful Christians who have walked before us. The reading of church catechisms and creeds broadened my understanding on topics like the Trinity, communion, baptism, assurance of faith, and the all-encompassing power of the Lord's prayer. Meditating on the prayers of believers who have gone before us also deepened my prayer life and helped me to articulate personal confession and praise of the Lord in fresh and honest ways.

I would recommend *Be Thou My Vision* to anyone looking to add depth to their personal devotions or as a guide to family devotions. Due to the academic nature of some of the prayers and creeds, this devotional is perhaps more suited for family devotions with middle and high schoolers. Opening this devotional fills your day with clearly directed praise, prayer, liturgy, and most importantly the reading of God's Word!

— Recommended by Ashley Chiang



Excerpts from the Book

1

Oh! Divine Man, let me gaze on you more and more until, in the vision of your brightness, I loathe the sight of my impurity; until, in the blaze of that glory which human eye has not seen, I fall prostrate, blinded, broken, to rise again in a new man in you. Amen.

– George Matheson *Confession of Sin* p. 88

2

Grant me, O most loving Lord, to rest in you . . . above all health and beauty, . . . above all sweetness and comfort, . . . above all gifts and favors that you can give and impart to us. . . and above all that you are not, O my God. Amen

– Thomas Kempis *Prayer of Intercession* p. 98

3

What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Created of heaven and earth"? That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father for the sake of Christ his Son. I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this vale of tears. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful father.

– Heidelberg Catechism Question 26 p. 248

With Reverence and Awe

Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship

Written by D.G. Hart and John R. Muether

Why don't we have fog machines and cameramen during Mount Vernon's corporate worship? Why don't we have solo performances or dancing? Why do we pray many different times and why do we sing the songs we do? While some of these suggestions seem ludicrous for Mount Vernon, there must be a good reason for why we worship the way we do.

A brother recently asked me if I have noticed that one can often determine whether or not a church is reformed and espouses biblical theology by the way they present themselves in their corporate worship. Without hearing a sermon, you can often tell if a church is biblically sound by the way they worship. This is because, for reformed churches, many (if not all) of the practices during our weekly Sunday services are informed by and grounded in rich, biblical theology.

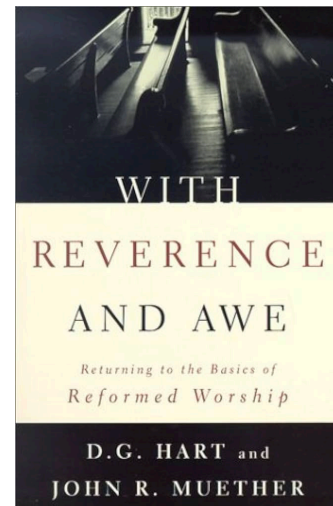
With Reverence and Awe helped me define and even understand the process by which elements of our service are determined and employed, everything from song content to types of prayers offered. This book provides an in-depth evaluation of corporate worship practices and defends the practice of biblically-based, reverent worship.

With Reverence and Awe reads as a rebuttal to casual and man-centric worship that has plagued a number of congregations, both large and small, for decades. It was helpful to understand that there truly are biblical defenses for theologically-rich sermons (ch. 8), structured services (ch. 10), and even how corporate worship can and should be used for discipleship (ch. 3 and ch. 11).

It should be noted: this book is written by Presbyterians who are also Christian Sabbatarians. The authors base a number of admonishments in elder-rule models that are not necessarily espoused by all reformed churches (including Mount Vernon Baptist Church). Since it is written to refute modern, man-centric worship, some terms are not defined (such as what corporate worship is or what is the New Covenant equivalent to the "holy of holies" in the Old Covenant [ch. 4]). Take care as you read this book to use it as a resource *alongside* the Bible. It's a fantastic resource if you have a background in reformed worship and want to dig deeper into terms such as the "Regulative Principal" (ch. 5). But it may not be the best beginner's introduction to reformed worship.

However, using *With Reverence and Awe* as a resource, I learned a lot, and I appreciate how it has led me to reassess my worship preferences that may not be based in biblical theology.

— Recommended by Sam Cook



Excerpts from the Book

1

Worship is not only something that marks the true church but also an activity that disciples God's people.

– "A Worshiping Community" p. 55

2

Preaching is not simply what the minister says at the point of the service where the bulletin reads "message." It is an element of worship where God speaks to his people through his under-shepherds, and it should assume a fitting form.

– "Elements and Circumstances" p. 153

3

Our only standard for worship is what is revealed in Scripture, not our emotions, or what church-growth experts recommend.

– "Discernment in Worship" p. 183

NOVEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

November 1	Romans 11:1–12	November 17	Psalms 44
November 2	Romans 11:13–24	November 18	Romans 14:1–4
November 3	1 Kings 8:22–30	November 19	Romans 8:31–39
November 4	Romans 11:25–36	November 20	Psalms 46:4–7
November 5	Romans 8:26–27	November 21	Revelation 19
November 6	Romans 8:28–30	November 22	Revelation 20
November 7	Romans 12:1–2	November 23	Revelation 21
November 8	Romans 12:3–8	November 24	Hebrews 12:18–29
November 9	Romans 12:9–13	November 25	Revelation 22
November 10	Deuteronomy 7:6–11	November 26	Psalms 46:4–7
November 11	Romans 12:14–21	November 27	Romans 9:1–5
November 12	Romans 8:28–30	November 28	Romans 14:5–12
November 13	Romans 8:31–39	November 29	Romans 14:13–19
November 14	Romans 13:1–7	November 30	Romans 14:20–23
November 15	Romans 13:8–10		
November 16	Romans 13:11–14		

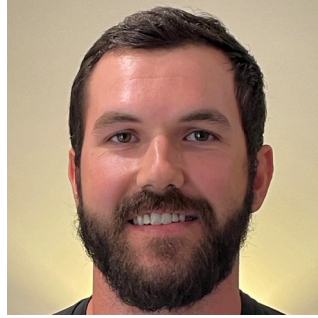
*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



Luke
Davis



Matt
Flynn



Christopher
Hoffman



Madison
Reike



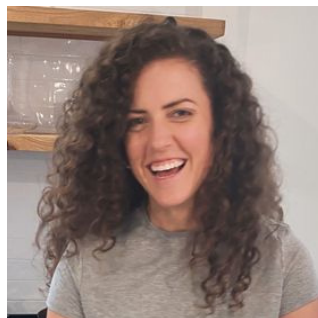
Caroline
Reike



Matt
Tillman



Abbey
Tillman



Katherine
Wabler



Emma
Young



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH