

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 15 SEPTEMBER 2019



## Why You Should Keep Taking Your Kids to Church

*Emily Carrington*

I remember my parents dutifully bringing us to church and carting us up to the balcony. My grandma would quietly pass out fruit Mentos while we wiggled in our pew.

Over the years this pew was where we would doodle on bulletins, sing hymns, and memorize the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed. Slowly, but surely, these words were written on our hearts and the wiggles stopped. My parents' persistence and regular church attendance wasn't futile.

Other parents of young children be encouraged. Your work on Sunday mornings isn't futile either. Even the worst, most distracted and failed attempts are important, if for no other reasons but the following.

### **You Are Teaching Your Child that Church Is Important**

You wouldn't be attempting church with children if you didn't think it was important. You know the beautiful reality that going to church is a vital part of spiritual life.

As Russell Moore stated, "We are not simply fueling our individual quiet times with praise choruses. We're actually ascending to the heavenly places together, standing before Christ and all of his angels

on Mount Zion." But, with children, participation in the corporate body can feel like a distant reality and heaven isn't any closer.

Every Sunday families face the monumental challenge of getting out the door and to the service on time. In our house the baby always needs something right as it is time to leave. Some mornings we stop to address her needs and we are late to church. Other mornings we come rolling in with a crying, needy baby. Either way, we are not part of corporate worship in the ways we used to be.

It is easy to find excuses to stay home, but even on the most stressful mornings it is important that Christian parents haul their families to church, even if we just feel like we are going through the motions. Children see what we do and, as my pastor reminds us regularly, they love what we love. The regular struggle to attend regular worship reinforces to our children that church is an absolute priority.

### **You Are Creating Habits that Will Smooth the Future**

*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6.*

If we wait until we have perfectly well-behaved children to bring them to church, it is likely Jesus will have already returned. Looking back, things only got more difficult for my parents as my sister and I got older. I have distinct memories of my dad sitting in the station wagon idling in the driveway while my mom herded us out the door.

Once I could drive, we would often take three cars to get four people to church because nobody could get out the door on time to suit my father. But we followed his lead. Going to church wasn't debatable, and nobody had to tell us that. This was simply the established order as long as I can remember. It was this habit that pulled me through as I doubted my faith in my adolescence.

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While on the subject of behaviour and habit-making: what a great way to teach, practice, and live grace. Our salvation isn't dependent on our behaviour, so don't make church attendance behaviour-dependent, either. Our children need grace, and so do we. Regardless of how the children are acting during worship, if worship involves entering the presence of God, then what better time than with screaming children to experience such a grace.

## You Are Introducing Your Kids to a Lifelong Community

So you got to church and you survived the service, but you can't repeat any points from the sermon and your child was throwing a fit so epic no one could focus on the sacraments. Wasted time, right? No.

Your time after the service, while perhaps not as essential as participating in the word and sacrament, is an important part of being part of the body. Your children are meeting peers whom, Lord willing, will be alongside them as they come into their faith.

They are also meeting adults who are praying for them, teaching them, guiding them, and setting an example of a godly life. As an adult, I now see that some of my fiercest prayer warriors are the adults who have prayed for me since my baptism. They prayed for me when I left for college and kept me connected to the body of Christ as I struggled to find a church home in early adulthood.

These peers, prayer warriors, teachers, and mentors are essential to your child's spiritual well-being. We live in a time when fewer and fewer other associations will uphold the gospel. With the secularization of the communities in which we live, our children will lean even more on their church community to help bear the burdens that are inevitable to the human experience.

## You Are Building Your Own Community

As I have already stated, perhaps belaboured, being part of Christ's body is essential. If you stay home, when do you have a chance to share your needs as well as offer support to others?

Perhaps an exhausted tired mother with a screaming baby in the back will remind others to pray for all of the exhausted tired mums (and especially you). You need the prayer.

You also need to pray for others. As a mother, I surprisingly find myself with more time to pray. This might change in the future, but with one baby I seem to have extra quiet time in my day. I find myself praying on walks, while I am nursing, while I am rocking a sleeping baby. By staying connected to the Christian body, I can use this time to pray for others.

## You Are Including Your Children in Christ's Body

You are not just offering your children a like-minded community, you are faithfully including them in the body of Christ. In Acts 16:33 Paul baptizes the

whole household of the jailer. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." The New Testament makes it clear that there is a place for our wiggly, fussy, and distracting children. Our efforts as parents, however messy, are worth our time, if only to follow the example of both Christ and Paul.

## You Are Being Faithful

Perhaps the most important reason to strive for regular church attendance is because it is part of the duty of a Christian parent. This builds on point number five, but it is not just a recognition of the place of children in church. Instead, it is acknowledging our responsibility as parents to bring them up in the church.

When we baptized our daughter we promised to instruct, pray with, set an example for, and "endeavour by all the means of God's appointment to bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." These vows echo Paul's words in Ephesians 6:4: "provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

This is an intimidating responsibility, if only for the sheer weight of its consequences. While baptism practices and vows vary between denominations, the responsibility to raise our children according to God's word is an essential responsibility as a Christian parent. And that cannot be done apart from the church.

## Take Heart and Keep It Up

So dear parent, rest easy. While Sunday morning might feel more like a wrestling match, a battle of wills, or a circus, your time, efforts, and distracted worship are worth it. Even the messiest and most frustrating days are not wasted. Thank God for his grace – and keep it up.

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