

# Sunday Morning Circus

*IF YOUR HOUSE IS LIKE OURS, GETTING READY FOR CHURCH CAN BE A REAL ADVENTURE. HOW DO YOU SURVIVE IT ALL AND REMAIN IN THE SPIRIT?*

Most days I am a Spirit-led woman, though I sometimes possess an exceedingly great capacity for distraction—and chocolate. I have great intentions always, but my willpower is often weaker than my want to. At no time is this demonstrated in a more dramatic way than on the first day of the week.

A typical Sunday morning will find our family preparing for church. Our goal to leave the house at 8:30 sharp is once again thwarted. A quick glance at the clock on the microwave reveals it's already 9:05.

My 13-year-old son, Calvin, is complaining because I want him to change from his torn jeans to his “good jeans” and a “decent” shirt. Since he turned 13, our definitions of good and decent anything have been growing farther and farther apart.

My husband, John, has no clean, matching socks so I suggest a moderately soiled black pair buried only a few inches below the surface of the hamper. Then I turn my attention to getting myself dressed.

In my closet are three sets of clothes:

**\*\*My skinny clothes, which I've been holding for 10 years, hoping to squeeze back into. (I know that will never happen.)**

**\*\*My regular clothes. I zoomed right past their thigh capacity last week when I had thirds of the double chocolate fudge 'n 'nut pie. With that decision and others like it, I sealed my fashion destiny.**

**\*\*My fat wardrobe—my only option. Elastic is a girl's best**

friend, but it's not too stylish. Applying my one fashion rule—avoid horizontal stripes—I decide on a nondescript navy blue tent, I mean, dress.

As I pull the dress over my head, I begin verbally herding everyone to the car, yelling, "We're leaving in five minutes." I jump into my shoes, grab a necklace off the dresser and by the time I reach the kitchen, I'm ready.

We usually grab something to eat while running out the door. Though I desire to steer my family toward the balanced diet exalted by the nutrition pyramid, my plans sometimes go awry.

"Calvin, why are you eating a Ding Dong? I told you to grab a peach."

"I thought you said 'Grab what was in reach,' and the Ding Dongs were on the bottom shelf," he says.

Many times while driving to church we engage in "intense fellowship" over trivial issues. Today I ask, "Who fed the dogs this morning?"

Calvin: "It wasn't my turn; I did it last night."

John: "No, I fed them last night."

Calvin: "Then they got fed twice, because I fed them."

Me: "Make that three times; I fed them too. Well, who fed the dogs this morning?" There is silence.

"Doesn't anyone follow the job chart I spent two hours making?" I asked incredulously.

They all answer, "Job chart?"

We park the car, and as I walk toward the church I see our pastor's wife. I turn a sharp left and squat between a car and a minivan to avoid being seen.

Ever since I saw her at the theater and forgot her name when introducing her to my friend, I've been too embarrassed to make eye contact. I can't believe I've been running and hiding and squatting for nearly six months.

When the coast is clear, I enter the church and am greeted by friendly staff members. I'm impressed that they're still in the foyer shaking hands with stragglers who are more than 20 minutes late.

"Good morning. How are you? I'm glad you're here."

Secretly, I'm still upset about the lack of cooperation over the dog's eating schedule, but I smile my happiest fake smile. Their families probably feed their pets regularly, I think to myself, and they probably quote Scriptures together in the car driving to church—the Scriptures they memorized at family altar this week.

I secretly fear that Calvin, although appearing to be a normal 13-year-old—a major oxymoron if there ever was one—has one foot dangling over the sulfur-spewing pit of sinful, immoral life choices and the other foot on a banana peel, and it's all because I can't get my act together enough to have regular family devotions. This troubling image sometimes wakes me during the night.

I work hard to appear that I have it all together—or at least together enough. This false self-confidence is shattered when Calvin points out that I'm wearing one blue pump and one black pump—something that I failed to notice at home but that now seems glaring. I slink to the nearest seat and slide my feet under the pew.

I looked forward to worship, or what was left of it. But when the pastor started his sermon, my mind entered hyper-wander.

Pastor: "Today we will look at the Lord's provision through tithing. Exodus 23:19 states, 'Bring the best of the

firstfruits...'”

Me: I’m almost out of fruit. I need bananas and apples for Calvin’s lunch tomorrow. I’d better make a grocery run this afternoon.

Pastor: “Leviticus 2:1 says, ‘When someone brings a grain offering....’”

Me: I need bagels too. I ate the last half dozen yesterday, so I’d better pick up some raisin and plain. Also, I’ll need garlic bread for the spaghetti I’m making for dinner.

Pastor: “If we are faithful with our finances He will surely bring us into a land flowing with milk and honey....”

Me: I need two gallons of milk and breakfast cereal, maybe Honey Nut Cheerios. I think I have a coupon wadded up in the bottom of my purse. I’d better jot this down, or I’ll forget.

Pastor: “The Lord promises to pour out a blessing so large we cannot contain it. Our cups will be running over....”

Me: I need coffee and tea and a few two-liter bottles of pop.

Pastor: “In a time of need, the Lord even provided a coin from the mouth of a fish....”

Me: Tuna is on sale, two cans for a dollar at Thrifty-Mart. I’ll also get noodles and mushroom soup to make a casserole. Maybe I’ll splurge and get a can of those crunchy fried onions for the top; Calvin loves those.

The pastor is wrapping it up. I can’t believe it. I totally missed the sermon. But it was my most productive 30 minutes this week.

Ministry time follows. Miraculously, for the first time in 39 weeks, I am not in need of the theme of this week’s altar call.

That means I should probably go forward and pray for someone, but I look like a jerk wearing different-colored shoes. Since I wrote my shopping list during the sermon and argued in the car this morning, I feel totally disqualified from praying for anyone.

There are lots of people waiting with no one to pray for them. God, I can't go; other people are more qualified.

The pastor is calling for anyone who is born again and can lay a hand on someone and ask the Lord to bless them. I can do that.

All I have to do is put one foot in front of the other. Here I go—blue shoe, black shoe, blue shoe, black shoe. It was a lot to overcome but well worth it.

Later, pushing my grocery cart down the tuna aisle at Thrifty-Mart, I'm still thinking about how God showed up during the ministry time. He proved once again that it's not about my qualifications and attainment, the smooth execution of the dog's feeding schedule, or even my glaring wardrobe faux pas.

It's all about God's merciful and loving heart toward sincere believers—not perfect believers, not attaining believers—but sincere believers. Thank God His mercy never ceases.

As Sundays go, all things considered, it was a good day. Now if I can just find the aisle that has those crunchy fried onions.

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