

Why You Should Take Your Children to Church

One Sunday afternoon, once Marilee has woken up from her nap, we drive out to the lake. It is still early spring, so we are alone as a family by the water. All three kids spend an hour filling cups and pouring them in the sand and digging and forming sand castles and stomping on them. Back and forth and up and down, building, smoothing, discovering.

I start to consider whether this time on the beach is the spiritual one, the one with beauty and goodness and laughter emerging naturally, without any effort other than a stack of plastic cups for entertainment. Again comes the thought: I wonder if we ought to abandon church altogether.

The kids finally show signs of hunger. We rinse the sand from our feet and pack up the towels and the cups. On our drive home as we pass our church building, William yells, “Look! It’s our church!”

All three kids erupt in delighted laughter.

It wasn’t until I was in my early 30s that I learned that whenever Paul writes the word *you* in Scripture, it is plural. I had always read most of Paul’s instructions as individual ones, written to me, singular. But our Bibles could read “y’all” almost every time Paul offers a command, a rebuke or a word of encouragement.

Paul can’t conceive an individual Christian divorced from the church. Christianity happens in community as we bear one another’s burdens—whether the burden of calming our wriggly kids or using a cane to walk through the front door or asking for prayer for a neighbor’s son who broke his leg in a car crash yesterday.

Our children may very well walk away from this faith we are trying to pass along. My goal is not to dictate what they believe or to think that if only we do this right they will live for the rest of their days as Christians. But I do want to lay out a net for them. When they encounter suffering or betrayal or heartache, I want them to have a safe place to fall.

When they find themselves in need or in pain, when their lives are coming apart, I pray they will land in the arms of a God who has and does and will love them. And I believe church may be just that place, whether it is a cathedral with lofty liturgy and thousands of worshipers or a little country sanctuary with a few grandparents nodding in the pews.

So we will go back, next week and the week after that and the week after that. We will trust—even amid my short-tempered words and their inability to sit still and their refusal to go up front for the children's message—we will trust they are learning something about what it means to be a part of the body of Christ, something about God's presence in the midst of a very ordinary place in a very ordinary town, something about God's grace and love, something about singing Alleluia, praise the Lord.

Excerpted from Small Talk: Learning from My Children about What Matters Most (Zondervan 2014) by Amy Julia Becker.