

Why You Shouldn't Drop Out of Church When You Have Kids

At 6:05 p.m. I just walked into the door from a long day at work and the kids have not been fed. We grab a bowl of cereal and load our toddler into his car seat. His big brother straps himself into the back seat of the van. The van floor is riddled with crumpled wrappers of hamburgers, cheerios and sippy cups.

We're five minutes from church and Alex got out of his car seat. Again. He is hitting me on the back of the head. We pull over and I put Alex back into his car seat.

We're exhausted and I'm wondering if hauling two kids on a week night to church is worth the effort. After all, they have school tomorrow morning and I have no idea what they are going to wear. We drop off the boys at their ministries and go into the church prayer service.

We start singing worship songs and refreshing strength surges in me. "Wow I feel good," I tell my husband, Jerome, standing next to me. He smiles and squeezes my hand. As we worship together, we feel the presence of something bigger and stronger pulling us together.

When we go to pick up the boys from their ministries, they don't want to go home. They are smiling and talking to their friends. Jerome has to literally pick up Alex and drag him out of the Infant Toddler Ministry. We chat with some of our friends who are in the same boat as we are, struggling to pay bills and bringing their multiple littles to church.

I spent several years in the foyer with my daughter with special needs who struggled to sit still and had issues with the sound. I wondered if it was worth getting her dressed just to get to church so I can stand in the foyer with her. There

were many years of tears and frustration with her situation.

Today the squirmy toddler, Alex, who couldn't stay in his car seat is a worship leader in the youth group. His big brother, Chris, also loves God and helps at church when he isn't working or going to school. And my special needs daughter, D'Andra, literally runs us over to get to church.

I've seen single guys and girls pray for a mate. God answers their prayers and then kiddos show up. Then they quit attending church or drop their participation dramatically because of the struggle of bringing multiple littles. I totally understand the struggle of getting kids cleaned, dressed and ready for church.

But here's why I encourage you to continue to bring your child to church even though you may need to feed them fast food to get there:

- **You're establishing the priority of going to church.** There are so many benefits of going to church. A 2010 Child Trends' review indicates that kids from religious backgrounds are less likely to be involved in violence, theft and vandalism or to struggle with substance abuse problems than their peers. Here's a link to the 10 Benefits of Attending Church. More importantly, the Bible is clear as to how this is a priority for God. "Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another, especially as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25, MEV).
- **Your children can develop social skills in a safe, faith-based setting.** Church is the perfect place for children to learn how to get along with other people who don't look like them; how to share and how to carry on a conversation.
- **Your children will learn about God and values that will set a strong foundation for their life.** I have never had

to have a long, drawn-out conversation with my kids on why they shouldn't do drugs or commit crime. We've touched on those issues but they already have within them teachings and training from years of hearing sermons, delivering sermons themselves and participating in prayer and a faith community.

- **Your children will develop relationships with key people in their community of faith that could mentor them and open doors for them.** I know that God brought certain people into my sons' lives that have influenced them as musicians and creatives who want to change the world. Our senior pastor, Steve Gray, has been an incredible example of a passionate creative with a message who is not afraid to experiment and take risks in writing, movie making and music. They have had other models in their life to follow such as Integrity Music recording artist Dustin Smith and Pastor Eric Thomason, another Integrity Music songwriter and artist. If I never brought them to church and they never participated, they would have never made these incredible connections.

So moms and dads of multiple littles, I know how hard it is to get the kids bathed, dressed and fed to get to church. But the benefits far outweigh the temporary season of hardship. Don't cave into our culture that makes faith secondary to sports, success in business and entertainment. Don't give into the voices of your family that tell you that you don't need to bring your kids to church. My heart goes out to you and I pray that God strengthens you and backs you up as you do what is right. Believe me, bringing all the littles to church is well worth the investment.

Leilani Haywood is the Online Editor for SpiritLed Woman and author of Ten Keys to Raising Kids That Love God. Follow Leilani on Facebook or Twitter.