

Why I Would Never Force my Kids to go to Church

My parents forced me to eat three times a day growing up. No joke. Three times. Every. Single. Day. And it wasn't always stuff I liked, either. Matter of fact, I complained a lot about what my mom made. "Ewww, gross! Sautéed zucchini? Seriously? Mom, you know we hate this stuff!" So as I approached adulthood I made an important decision. Since my parents forced me to eat while I was growing up, I decided I was done with meals. Oh, here and there I'll eat out of obligation. I mean, family traditions like Thanksgiving and Christmas, yeah, I'm there. But daily eating? No way. I'm done.

Set in any other context, excuses people make for not going to church sound completely ridiculous. But set in the context of Christianity, people say these things in all seriousness while others nod sagely in somber agreement.

My son told me a few weeks into school that he didn't like the teacher. He wasn't getting excited enough about learning, and he didn't really feel connected to the other kids in his class, so I told him he never had to go back to school again. Who wants to waste their time going somewhere where they aren't being fulfilled?

We've never forced our daughter to stay off the road when playing. We don't want to restrict her imagination. We allow her the freedom to make her own choices in life.

Okay, Ruth. Come on. That one was just ridiculous. No loving parent would ever say that. That's a safety issue- a matter of life and death. Exactly. And that's just my point.

Church isn't a place you go to get pumped up about life. It isn't entertainment like a movie or concert. It is literally a life and death matter. Eternal life. Just as a loving parent wouldn't allow their child to wander in the road or to quit school, a loving Christian parent also does not give the option to their children about going to church, learning Bible stories at home, and praying together. Do your kids always jump for joy when they hear you say, "Time to get up! Let's get ready for church!" No. They won't. Do they get excited for school every morning? Hardly. But you still make them go. Why? Because you are the parent and you know what's best. Even when they complain, you serve them healthful meals and limit their junk food intake. You set boundaries for their own safety when playing outside. You insist they go to school because you're looking at the long term picture. And you are right to do those things. How much more so are you responsible for doing all you can to secure their eternal well-being?

Yes, kids can be brought up in a loving Christian home and still turn away later. That's on them. But you, parents, have a task of the utmost importance. God has placed these precious children into your homes for such a brief while. You have them with you for perhaps 1/5 of their lives. Set a strong foundation while they are under your roof. Take them to church. Make sure they understand that they are sinners and that Jesus is their Savior. They are never too young to learn this. My one-and-a-half year old sees a cross and excitedly

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shouts, “Jesus!” Don’t use the excuse that “they wouldn’t understand this.” Try them. I don’t understand it all myself, but I still believe. And you’d better believe that the Holy Spirit works in their hearts effectively. My children sometime amaze me with the insights they pick up during devotions or Bible readings. The strength of their faith often humbles me. Once when I was having a terrible day, my oldest asked, “Can I pray with you?” He was nine at the time. He knows there is power in prayer. He perceives that sometimes there’s nothing he can say that will make it better, so he’ll just go straight to the One who does have that power. Do my own kids complain about church? Yes. Do they tell me it’s boring? Sometimes, yes. They say the same things about school. But church and school are different environments for a reason. School is centered around learning and thus has its own schedule and structure. Church is a hospital for sinners. That would be all of us, mind you. You, me, the drug dealer a few streets away- all of us are sinners in need of a Savior. So what do we do at church? We confess our sins. Why do we do this at the start? To “wipe our feet” before entering God’s house, so to speak. Then we are assured of forgiveness. We hear God’s Word. We sing hymns proclaiming what Christ has done for us. We hear sermons where our pastors preach Christ. We don’t go to church to hear what we have to do to gain heaven. No, Christ did it all. 100%. We can’t do one thing to merit salvation for ourselves. That’s why we hear sermons about Jesus and not about us. We take the body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion for the strength of our souls. And we depart refreshed to serve God by serving our families, friends, and neighbors in Christian love.

So parents, don’t give in to outside pressures telling you not to force your kids to go to church. Don’t give in to *them*, either, when they complain about it. Because at some point an amazing thing happens- that kid who complains about church grows up and takes his or her own kids to church every Sunday. Going back to my opening analogy, believe it or not, there came a point in my own life where I realized I actually *liked* sautéed zucchini (although I never would have admitted that to my mother). Keep at it, parents. Just as we need three meals a day for physical strength and nourishment, so do we need regular worship to refresh and strengthen our souls. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to go make breakfast.

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