



Spiritual Parenting

Preacher's Pen *by Eric Dwyer*

I have noticed a startling trend in our culture today. Parents aren't taking their kids to church. I'm not just talking about here at CCMH, or even in Mountain Home. I have had discussions with other youth ministers across these fruited plains who have also noticed this trend. What gives?

I want to get something out of the way before you read any further. Since I am a youth minister, I know I may come across as a *tad* biased with the next sentence in this article. Your kids need to be in church. If you are an awesome kid who happens to be reading this (props to you), then I'm speaking directly to you. YOU need to be in church. "But Eric, I DO go to church. I attend Sunday morning services... sometimes." That's garbage and you know it. Get that lame sauce outta here! Try telling your coach that you are a part of the team when you only show up to games... occasionally. On top of that, you never go to practices. Try telling your band, choir, or theatre director that you are a part of the show but you only attend *some* of the performances and you never rehearse. You never put in any work. Your coach would laugh at you. Your director would cut you immediately. Why would they respond this way? They have no interest in you if you're not even going to give half of your effort. Why do we even entertain the idea that we can give God less than we give our extracurricular activities? If a coach wouldn't point to a player who gives 30% of their time to the team as a shining example, why should youth ministers applaud parents for bringing the family to *some* of church?

I'm not trying to be scathing in this article. It really does come from a loving heart who, like you, wants your kids to know our God deeply. If you won't take my word for it, try listening to a parent who tried her best not to push her kids too far.

Lisa was a single parent with a lot on her plate. Her kids were dealing with a lot, too, and she felt she was losing her influence on them. In fear of pushing them away from God, she let them decide when they wanted to go to church. For Lisa, hindsight is 20/20. Her kids wandered away from God on their own while she sat on the sidelines because she didn't want to be too...I don't know...too much of a parent? She wishes she could do it all over again.

Don't get me wrong. This philosophy of letting the kids make decisions can be empowering. Let your kids pick the color of their bedrooms. Let them pick what they want for breakfast. But for something as important as discipleship, there needs to be more structure. After all, the word "disciple" shares the root of "discipline." It is not easy. It takes training. You can't go to www.imanavysealnow.com and click a link to be part of an elite task force. You need to be pushed and trained for years! Your kids have the opportunity to grow closer to Jesus and grow in grace and knowledge. They have the chance to be trained by the great teachers we have here at CCMH. We have Sunday school classes, we have Wednesday night classes, and we have multiple retreats and camps. I don't know when these training opportunities became "optional" in families, but you should not be surprised if your kids aren't as mature in their discipleship as God wants if you let these training opportunities slip by time after time. You need to dive in and commit! Commitment is not just for kids. Parents are more than welcome and encouraged to get involved. Take Bill for example.

Bill had two kids who never went on youth group trips. Bill didn't push the issue because it saved him a few bucks since he didn't have to pay for their registrations. Bill got asked to be a youth sponsor on a high school CIY trip. Bill agreed because the youth minister was really in need, sponsors had their trip paid for, and he had vacation time he needed to use or lose. On the final night, the group was sharing their experiences and Bill confessed, "I didn't realize how important these trips are. I didn't know how much deeper they take you in your faith and how much you connect with others. I've decided to be a sponsor on these trips every year, even if I'm out of paid vacation. My kids and I are NEVER going to miss these again."

Personally, I am grateful for my parents taking me to church from an early age. And when I say "early age," I mean that I was born on December 2nd and I was baby Jesus in the church Christmas play that year. I'm sure there were some days when I didn't exactly "feel like going." I don't even remember those days now. All I can recall is the example they showed of the importance

of training and the benefits I am reaping in my life now as a disciple of the Most High. THANKS MOM AND DAD! I LOVE YOU!

What kind of legacy are you leaving your kids? Are you teaching them that God deserves whatever time you have left after you've done all the stuff *you* want to do? Are you subconsciously teaching them there is a church quota you have to meet in order to make God happy? As I search the scriptures, that quota is nowhere to be found. In fact, the early church met together *daily* in each other's homes. I know for some of you, the thought of meeting together daily is disturbing. You can barely tolerate church for the two hours a week you can muster. Somehow, the first church managed to meet daily with "glad and sincere hearts." They couldn't get enough of each other!

I want you to consider how much time you spend with the church. Notice how I didn't say, "consider how much time you spend *in* church." I'm not talking about the time you spend at 1365 Eastside Centre Ct. There is much more to it. If being in a physical location were the requirement, Arlene Dixon would have achieved sainthood in 1998. How often do you spend time *with* the church? Are you a part of a small group? Do you fellowship on Wednesday nights? Do you train Sunday mornings after service? Do you go deeper on retreats and trips designed to challenge you. One of the trips we attend is *literally* called "Deeper Life."

You will need a pen and paper for this next exercise. I want you to estimate the number of hours a week you

spend *with* the church? Got it? Ok. Now I want you to consider and write down what else you do during the week. Do you work? Do you have any hobbies? Do you run errands? How much time do you spend on these tasks? Done? Cool. Now I want you to order your week based upon what you spend the most time doing. Put the task you spend the most time doing at the top of the list and the task you spend the least time doing at the bottom. Now put a star next to "*church*." For sake of argument, let's say you attend Sunday morning service, but do nothing else church related during the week. That is two hours a week in your "church" category. Now, let's say you average half an hour a day getting ready. This means bathing, fixing your hair, shaving, putting on make-up, etc. That means you spend three and a half hours a week grooming. Now don't get me wrong. Grooming is important. And we all need to work, sleep, and eat. I am not trying to say that if you don't spend more time in church than anything else you do all week, that you don't love Jesus. This was just a chance for all of us to examine ourselves and see if there is anything we are placing above God in our lives. I hope my point has been made. Get to church. Get your kids in church. Most importantly, get involved and *be* the church. Let's train together.

"The deeper life only looks deep because the average Christian is so unbelievably shallow." A.W. Tozer