

Parenting Tools:

Valuing the Church



HOME
22.6

Parenting Tools:

Valuing the Church

The American church has experienced one of the most dramatic roller coaster rides in recent church history. Over the past 40 years, the church has experienced both astronomical growth (in 1970s–1980s) and monumental decline (in 2000s–2010s) all during a time of expansive population growth on American soil. Churches are dying at a faster rate than they are being planted. Recent research of this generation of teenagers and young adults continues to echo a relatively new phenomenon: “People love God, but hate the church.”

Think back to some of the conversations you have had with your children. More likely than not, your children, and maybe even you, view church as an interruption to the life that they want to live. Perhaps your children have expressed they would rather be on the field, in the bed, or at the lake instead of at church. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that many families view the church as a private contractor whom they have hired for childcare or faith development of their children rather than as a place to gather for worship, community, and Kingdom assignments. One of the problems that feed this misguided view of church is that the church as a whole has come to be known more for what it does not believe rather than for what it does believe. The church is perceived to practice judgment first and love second. No wonder this generation struggles to find value in the church. But we can still right the ship! Consider the following strategies for helping your child value the church.

Develop and model a healthy understanding of the church

The church did not come into existence until the New Testament when the Holy Spirit descended on those gathered during Pentecost. The word is translated from the original Greek word *ekklesia*, which is defined as a public assembly or gathering of

people. Paul refers to the church as the body of Christ (Romans 12:5). Jesus Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The purpose of the church is to glorify God and tell the world about Jesus. In other words, the church is an assembly of believers gathered together for the purpose of worship and growing in Christ with the goal of making Him known to the world. The church is not a structure, a daycare, or an elitist group. The church is a gathering God's people—young and old, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile—who worship Him with abandon, who devote themselves to the Word, who pray together, who are equipped to do ministry, and who are engaged in making disciples of the nations. How are you as a parent modeling this to your child? Acts 2:42

Make being a part of the church a priority

It is been proven over and over again that the things that are most important to us are the things we invest the most time, effort, and resources into. There are three primary institutions that God created: (1) mankind, (2) the family, and (3) the church. Man's relationship with the Creator supersedes man's relationship with his family, which supersedes his relationship with the church. In other words, God is most concerned with an individual's relationship with Jesus, then with his or her relationship with the family, and then his or her relationship with the church.

We often claim to live out these priorities in this order, but in reality the church and God get the leftovers. We position our family times, and even church commitments, around work schedules, sports tournaments and practices, dance recitals, and exam schedules. Let's be honest, if God was truly the priority, then our families would not be consistently missing family meal times or struggling to schedule in church attendance.

Teach and model to your family that church is not an interruption, but it is a core value in your family. Make it a priority to attend and

engage the church. When your children ask you why church has to be a priority, do not hesitate to tell them why. Steer clear of the simple answers like "just because" or "it has to be." Your child is old enough to know why. Talk about the importance of being plugged into the body of Christ. Make church a part of your regular conversations with your child.

Help your child find a place in the church as early as possible

One of the most important ways to help your children value the church is to help them find their place in the church. The Scripture repeatedly teaches the importance of its members. The task set before the church is not to be performed by the few, but by the masses. Your child, regardless of age, has been specially gifted to fulfill a specific role within the church. Encourage your children to find their places in the church as early as possible. Lead your family through a personality and spiritual gifts assessments like those offered by PLACE Ministries. Probably one of the most foundational ways to do this is for you to know and fulfill your place in the church. Yes, our place in the church may change as more gifts are developed and realized, but the sooner we get started, the sooner we value the church.

(1 Corinthians 12:4–6, Ephesians 4:12, 1 Corinthians 12:14–27)

Below are two common excuses about church that you may have heard from your child. Reflect on the responses to these excuses so that you can help others come to see the value of the church.

1. Church is boring

This excuse is common for today's teenage and young adult culture. The music is not loud enough. The preacher uses too many big words. The prayers last too long. If preferences are not met, then boredom easily becomes a reason for not engaging or valuing the church. Essentially, preferences can take precedence over what God desires. Yes, the church should strive for relevance but not at the

cost of truth or authentic worship. The deeper question attached to this excuse is what are your children bringing with them to church? In other words, is there baggage or distractions that they have yet to leave at the feet of Christ? Boredom most often kicks in when one's heart and mind are somewhere else. What is occupying your child's heart and mind? What relationship, struggle, or even unconfessed sin might your child be dealing with that is distracting him or her from worshipping the risen Savior?

2. Church is full of a bunch of hypocrites

This excuse may be one of the most commonly used among the younger generations. R.C. Sproul writes, "The charge that the church is full of hypocrites is manifestly false. Though no Christian achieves the full measure of sanctification in this life, the fact that we all struggle with ongoing sin does not justly yield the verdict of hypocrisy. A hypocrite is someone who does things he claims he does not do. Outside observers of the Christian church see people who profess to be Christians and observe that they sin. Since they see sin in the lives of Christians, they rush to the judgment that therefore these people are hypocrites. If a person claims to be without sin and then demonstrates sin, surely that person is a hypocrite. But for a Christian simply to demonstrate that he is a sinner does not convict him of hypocrisy."

Help your child realize that though Christians have a higher calling—we are to live above reproach—the temptation to sin still exists. "Those who use the excuse that all Christians are hypocrites as a reason not to become Christians are equally (if not more) judgmental as those so-called hypocrites because the definition of a Christian is someone who has admitted and confessed his or her sins to Jesus."

If your child uses some of these excuses, then it is very likely that your child's attitude toward church is directly affecting whether or not he or she values the church. Help correct this negative attitude as soon as possible, not in a judgmental way but in a proactive way.

Remember, if your attitude toward the church is not very positive, then it is likely influencing your child's attitude toward the church