



I'm sure my parents talked to me about how important the church was in our lives. I'm sure they explained that because we love Jesus we love his people. I'm sure they explained that this was clear in the Bible.

But I don't remember any of that.

Instead, this is what I remember: as long as I could remember, every other week, a bunch of people would invade our house, eat our food, and leave.

Our church small group was ingrained into our schedule like doctors appointments and Christmas Eve at Nana's and dad's work day. I'm sure my parents preached the theology of the church to me, but what I really listened to as a kid was how they preached their theology through the way they used their time.

I didn't understand what the church was, or why it was important, but I got that it was important. Well, important enough for me to spend Wednesday afternoon helping get the house ready and Thursday morning cleaning up.

Take for example, what 1 Peter 2:4-5 says about the church:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.

I couldn't explain the metaphor of the verse to you as a 10-year-old, but I understood something: when my mom and dad met Jesus they started living differently. And part of living differently meant building their lives into other people, so much so that when other people hurt we hurt, when other people rejoiced we rejoiced, and when people left it was hard for all the right reasons.

I have kids of my own now, ages 2 and 4. All the four-year-old understands about church is that if you get there early there are donuts, that you have to wait for four songs before you can go to class, and that afterward, you can't run on the stage. I talk to him whenever I can about the truths of 1 Peter 2 in a way he'd understand, but I'm comforted knowing that while he may not remember the conversations, he'll remember our rhythm of life.

Whether you realize it or not, you're teaching your kids a theology of the church with your time.

Here are some of the messages they can hear from us:

THE CHURCH IS IMPORTANT, JUST NOT AS IMPORTANT AS KIDS ACTIVITIES

We might think that we're serving our kids by prioritizing their activities or sports over church, but in reality, we're speaking loudly about priorities.

In his book *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, Bill Farley shares a story of a family that always made church activities secondary to their kid's activities and then were surprised when they wandered from the church in their college years:

Mom and dad taught them well. Church was not important. God was not at the center of their lives. What really mattered were their children's activities. Ken and Jackie had placed their children, and their success, on the throne of the family. Their children had heard the message, understood it, and imitated it.

THE CHURCH IS IMPORTANT, JUST NOT AS IMPORTANT AS MOM AND DAD'S MORE IMPORTANT THINGS

When work or hobbies take precedence over the church, the kids notice. The message is that the church is one important thing that sometimes gets pushed out by more important things.

Now I'm not saying there's never an excuse to miss church. My dad had to work Sundays sometimes growing up (no way around it), but then he was even more intentional about us getting together with church people during the evening. I could see him straining to stay connected and it said something to me.

THE CHURCH IS IMPORTANT, JUST NOT AS IMPORTANT AS COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE

One of the most common reasons I hear from people who don't make it to the Sunday gathering is that "There's just a lot going on" or "We had a really busy weekend." And really, I do judge that charitably—because I really don't know the exact circumstances in most cases.

But if the family only goes to church when it's not "inconvenient" and when everyone is feeling "100%" they won't make it often at all. And "not often" has a funny way of becoming "not usually" and then "never."

There have been sleepless nights with a newborn after which my wife Jenn didn't make it to church, so I get that. But there have been a lot more sleepless nights she's made it. Why? Because we as a family want that rhythm built into our life as a family and that little buddy's life, too.

THE CHURCH IS IMPORTANT, IMPORTANT ENOUGH THAT WE SACRIFICE FOR IT

When you've had a busy weekend and you make it to church, your kids notice. When you rearrange athletic obligations to get to church, your kids notice. When you get in late from a trip Saturday night and make it to church, your kids notice. When you are willing to slog through traffic after work to make it to a small group meeting where the snacks aren't amazing and the fellowship is a little forced but you do it anyway, your kids notice.

We have one guy who regularly plays on our worship team even after staying up till 2am most Saturdays because of his job. That says something to his kids. I want to say the same thing to my kids.

Now please, don't misread this as legalism. Church attendance doesn't save anyone, Jesus saves. Church attendance won't save your kids, only Jesus can. But part of imparting a love for Jesus to our kids means imparting a love for Jesus' family, the church. If we tell our kids one thing about the church and undermine it with our time, they're sharp enough to get the message.

So what are you preaching about the church to your kids? What is your time preaching to them?

I heard simple truths like this read as a kid: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:10 ESV).

I couldn't grasp how huge those words were—that once we were without a people but because of what Jesus has done we've become God's people. But I knew this: we had a people and we saw our people on Sunday mornings and during the week at small group and sometimes unexpectedly when they showed up crying and sometimes in the hospital when they were sick.

They were our people. I heard that loud and clear.