

ONE DECISION OR 52?

Giving our best to our little ones

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If the downward trend in children's church attendance is a picture of where the church is heading into the future, we have reason to be concerned.

We can find lots of reasons for the decline, and some may be valid

- Families are having less children.
- Sunday is the new Saturday.
- People in general attend church less often.
- Children are participating in Christian activities during the week.

Having served in the same church for 24 years, I've had the pleasure of seeing a generation of families raise their children within a church context. What I've discovered anecdotally won't surprise you when I say that families who positively engage with church life on a Sunday will see their children, by and large, rest easy with Jesus and his church. These families make one decision every year to attend church on Sundays. Other families make 52 decisions a year depending upon circumstances or feelings.

When I talk with the parents of active families their answer is simple and positive: "This is who we are. This is how we roll. We do church on Sunday and everyone's involved." What I've noted is that these parents always maintain a grateful predisposition towards what we all know is an imperfect institution: the local church. There's very little of "What's in it for me?" and a lot more of "Where can I help and where do I fit in?"

Excuses, excuses

Over the past 12 years, the weekly church attendance of Baptist children has dropped by 33%. In the same

period adult attendance has dropped by 21%. This is alarming. But the number of people still found in our total worshipping community has taken a relatively smaller dip. This means Baptists are still involved but are attending church on a week-by-week basis less frequently.

There are always arguments to defend these statistics, such as: "You don't have to be a churchgoer to be a Christian." I agree. But in saying this, I don't see solid numbers of non-church-attending Christians making a positive mark upon society. If being a Christian is all about my morning quiet time, then I'd be less concerned. But the church is called to be a positive witness, an alternative community that lives and breathes kingdom values and seeks to transform society.

Reducing family church attendance to a minimum is a recipe for heartache. I've had a number of these conversations with parents of young adults who have left the faith. It's a hard conversation to have with a parent when I point out an obvious reason: for the child, church and Jesus are synonymous. Avoid one and you're diminishing the value of the other. We can't take short cuts when making disciples.

So, every time a parent makes a decision on a Sunday morning to go to the beach because it's such a nice day, or to stay at home because it's cold, or to have a break from church during the school holidays, or to not go today because the sermon series

this month is not to their liking or the church should make better quality coffee, they are telling their children that attending church is just one of several multi-choice options and certainly not the most important.

In other words, a family can make one decision a year to attend church 52 times or the family can make 52 decisions a year as to whether church is a priority today. ***What will your family decision be?***

Investing in our children

If you're reading this article, then chances are high that someone or a group of people disciplined you into a place of maturing faith. What would it take to pour your faith experience back into the lives of our children? Why don't you approach others who hold responsibility for the children in your church and offer a hand to see our precious children come to faith in Jesus?



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