



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Let's get the kids to church

I don't know about you, but getting my family ready for church on Sunday mornings can send me over the edge sometimes.

It's a paradox for sure, the cursing under my breath and snapping at everyone because they can't move fast enough. Here we are preparing for holy ground, and all I can think is, "Enough, already. I'm *done*."

Once I get to church, however, something strange happens. The tightness in my chest relaxes, and suddenly I can breathe again. The peace washing over me can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit, and without a doubt I know this is where I belong. Worshipping is what I was made to do. At no other point during the week do I feel so deeply moved and connected.

Once I get to church, I'm always glad I made the effort. *Always*.

I wonder sometimes why church affects me this way. Why is it my comfort zone, whereas other people feel uncomfortable the moment they enter the building? Why do I feel a little empty when I skip church on Sunday, whereas others don't think twice?

To me there's only one earthly explanation: my parents.

Because of my parents, I attended church almost every Sunday growing up. Even when I squirmed on the pew, clawed at their arms or whined about the service taking too long, they made me tough it out. Like most kids, I didn't enjoy church. Besides finding it boring, it made no sense to me.

But somewhere along the way, religion started to click. I realized I could get something out of a service if I listened. That priest I'd been watching for a million years wasn't speaking gibberish. He had useful life lessons, actually, and if I paid attention, I could learn things to help me through the week.

It was definitely a revelation.

As parents, we plant seeds, and sometimes it takes years — decades even — for our seeds to bloom. The spiritual seeds my parents planted didn't take root until college, and looking back I realize how perfect the timing was. Although I loved college, it tapped into my deepest insecurities. Having a church to tether me offered calm among the chaos.

As a freshman at the University Alabama, I finally had freedom to *choose* going to church. While my parents lived 15 minutes away, they never called or appeared on my doorstep to

guilt me into going. It was my decision, but I knew if I did go I'd see them.

It started by accident, attending church on my own accord, and largely because of friends I made. I'd hit it off with someone and discover that they, too, were Catholic. They'd ask if I wanted to ride together to Mass, and I'd go because I enjoyed their company and figured a service would do me good.

The campus priest at the time was prolific, and his sermons drew me in. Sometimes I'd go to hear him. Sometimes I'd go to pray for a good test score. Sometimes I'd go for answers, or to simply feel better about life. While I didn't visit every Sunday, I went a lot, often after a late Saturday night out.

My purpose in sharing this is to encourage parents to get the kids to church even when they resist. Even when they hang on you like dead weight, or force you into the cry room, stick with it. Children can't love something they don't know, and the more time they spend in God's house, the more at home they'll feel. The more at home they feel, the more likely they'll sustain the habit and eventually attend church by choice, not force.

We live in a world of quick thrills and fleeting pleasure. We hunger for substance, yet only one thing — God — can meet that craving. Now's our chance to plant spiritual seeds that can benefit our kids down the road. Now's our chance to teach them church is a place to love and respect, not fear and avoid.

So next time you're at your wit's end on a Sunday morning, and tempted to call it off, remember the habit you're setting. Remember you're teaching your kids to keep holy the Sabbath and associate Sunday with God. Of course, there's no guarantee your child or mine will keep the habit long-term, but there is peace of mind knowing we tried. As parents, that's all we can ask of ourselves — to give our absolute best and pray for God to take it from there.

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