

## Sunday as the Happiest Day of the Week

Throughout their lifetimes, I have taught my children that tomorrow's success is greatly dependent on today's preparation. No day exists in isolation from the previous day or the next day. Every today is somewhat determined by each yesterday which in turns influences tomorrow. This is very true about Sundays. Most families regularly experience some trauma on Sunday mornings that could be moderated, if not altogether avoided, by preparations on Saturday. In her book, *Parenting in the Pew*, Robbie Castleman notes that

In the dictionary, worship comes right after *worn, worn-out, worry, worrywart, worse and worsen*. Sometimes on Sunday mornings, worship follows the same sequence....There is a way to turn the hearts of our children to worship and take the worry and worn-out from the Sunday-morning agenda. The key lies in another, better "w" word: work.....Worship is work, hard work. It is also rewarding work. To worship the Lord "in spirit and truth" does not come easily, and it certainly does not come naturally to us. It is difficult to worship on the leftover energy of a long week and a late Saturday. The Sunday-morning encounter with God is worthy of our best energy, not our least."<sup>1</sup>

How can Saturday be the platform to a successful Sunday experience in which church<sup>2</sup> attendance is enjoyed rather than endured? Consider these thoughts.

1. Remember that your spiritual life and that of your family always involves spiritual warfare. If a family can be disconnected from the local church it is all the more easy to disconnect that family from Christianity altogether. The difficulty of just getting to church on Sundays has discouraged many families from church attendance. To be forewarned is to be forearmed so recognize that Sundays are different from any other day of the week; treat them as such by praying and preparing accordingly.
2. Make Sundays a special day by your attitude throughout the week. Your attitude about Sunday every other day of the week will affect your child's actions on Sunday. Don't just talk about Sunday on late Saturday night or early Sunday morning. In eager tones of expectancy, speak with your children Monday through Saturday about Sunday as though it is the most important day of the week. It is.
3. Consider your own attitude about Sundays. Parents are a child's most important spiritual influence. Your child's thoughts about Sunday may just be a mirror of your own attitude. It is very easy for adults to go through the motions of worship without really considering it a meeting with the God of the universe, the creator of all things and the giver of life. Your attitude will not only affect, it will determine your child's attitude toward Sunday.

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<sup>1</sup> Robbie Castleman. *Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1993), pp. 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> The word "church" here is used of the gathering place of God's people on Sunday morning. Of course, the church is not a place but a people. This is an important distinction and should be acknowledged. However, "church" is used here simply because of its natural connotation with the gathering of God's people on a Sunday morning.

4. Keep Sunday simple. Worship is the most important aspect to Sundays. Ensure that whatever is peripheral to your relationship to God maintains its proper place. Dress can become too important an issue. We can teach and model for our children that “God looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7) by our attitude toward our dress and their clothes.
5. Everything essential for Sunday mornings can be gathered and readied sometime on Saturday. Choosing, washing, ironing, and laying out clothes, packing diaper bags; whatever may be particular to your family, can all be finished by bedtime on Saturday. Some items (like Bibles) can be placed by the door to be picked up on the way out lest they be forgotten. This is especially true of wintertime coats, gloves, etc.
6. The most important aspect of Sunday is gathering with God’s people for corporate worship which involves Bible study, preaching, singing, fellowship and responding to God. It is very easy for other things, what we wear, the music we sing, the length of the service or how others treat us, to become major distractions that discourage children from church as we negatively reflect on these issues. As you drive to church, be careful that your conversation encourages your children about God and his people. On the way home, make your conversation encouraging to your child’s spiritual life. Discuss everything in positive language, engage the children in conversation about what you learned, what they learned or how each of you will apply what God said to you that morning. More children are turned away from church as teenagers by what happens with their families on the way to and from church than by what happens there.
7. Plan to leave home with enough time to get to church without rushing. Don’t be late. Make enough time to get the children to their classrooms or the nursery so that they can joyfully experience the ride to church and, once there, spend time with friends without time pressures.
8. Know before Sunday as you leave the church parking lot where you will eat on Sunday afternoon. Choosing a restaurant or knowing that the family will eat at home relieves a lot of Sunday after-church stress on parents and children alike.

Treat Sundays with importance and your children will believe Sunday is important. This involves your attitudes and actions before, after and on Sunday. In early life, your children believe whatever you say. As they grow, your attitudes and actions play a pivotal role in your confession of faith and theirs too. “Going to church” on Sunday is not the beginning or ending of a family’s spiritual commitment but “getting there” is important. In general, families will spend more time planning for annual vacations than the a lifetime spent preparing the whole family for the most important aspect of their lives, spiritual nourishment, of which church attendance is a vital part.

How you get there and how you leave there each Sunday morning will 'speak' as much, if not more, to your children about the reality of God, Christianity and your beliefs, as what you say. Sunday can be the happiest day of the week but to make it so, every other day is important, especially Saturday.

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