

*Single Mom
on Sunday Mornings*

Preparing yourself and your children for church

SCENARIO

It's Sunday morning – time to get ready for church!

We'll begin with the older children - make sure you have them fed, bathed, dressed in recently washed and ironed clothes, teeth brushed, hair combed, face wiped, and shoes tied (double-knotted so you don't have to tie them again). Ask the older ones to keep themselves occupied for a while, which doesn't include arguing with each other, while you get the baby ready. Next, you need to feed the baby, change her diaper, dress her in an adorably cute dress with matching socks and patent-leather shoes. Afterward, she should be placed in her bouncy seat with a teether to play with so you can gather all her morning necessities including bottle, bib, burp rag, diapers, wipes, pacifier, extra outfit, favorite toys and blanket and put them in the diaper bag (which, by the way, has become your new purse). Oh yeah, *you* need to get ready. Okay, check the clock to see if you have enough time to jump in the shower or if you just need to tussle the hair a bit and quickly get dressed. Of course, there is nothing in your closet that you feel like wearing, but you need to just buck up and choose

something without feeling sorry for the fact that you can't fit into the dress that you really want to wear.

Now, to the car. First, you need to bundle everyone up because it's 10 degrees outside. So, on go the winter coats, each child trying to "help" as they button up their own coats. All Bibles are in hand (or in the diaper bag), and everyone must be out the door approximately 25 minutes before the church service begins. You all get into the car, seatbelts on (or placed in their 5-point harness car seats). Oh, you need to head back in to grab the diaper bag, *your* Bible, and change out of the slippers you're still wearing into your dress shoes. Before going back in, however, you tell the children not to move out of their seats and be assured that they will obey because of your use of the scare tactic: telling them the story of the children who disobeyed their mom, got out of their seats, accidentally hit the lever that put the car in reverse, and became seriously injured because their car ended up rolling into the street.

It takes 5 minutes to drive to church. Thankfully, on this trip you only heard a few "He's touching me!" comments. You slowly pull into the driveway and find a parking space. You tell the children to get out and then not to move away from the car yet. "Stay next to the car until Mommy has the baby out and is ready to start walking in."

Ah, you made it! Well, almost...

As you enter, you're greeted with hugs and hellos from fellow church attenders. You enjoy seeing everyone and greeting them, but on the other hand, you really hope no one tries to begin a lengthy conversation with you because you only have 15 minutes to get coats off and hung up, the baby in the nursery, each child in their proper class, and arrive at your seat at, or near, the front row of the sanctuary before service begins. Once you have done that, however, you can take a slow, deep breath and begin to take in the fact that you have made it through yet another Sunday morning! You go, girl!

OUR EXPERIENCE

We had four young children while serving at our second pastorate. The church had multiple services on the weekends. There was 1 Saturday evening service and 3 morning services, with classes running simultaneously with 2 of those services. Needless to say, Max left quite early in the morning, which meant that I was a single mom each Sunday morning.

Each Sunday, I would *try* to get up when Max did so that I could make myself a cup of tea, eat a bit of breakfast, and then have a moment of devotions before

everyone woke up. Obviously, it didn't always happen, but more times than not, it would work out for me to do that.

I really believe that organization is the key. We learned a great phrase from Bill Hayes, one of our dear friends from Northgate. He liked to remind his employees of the 5 P's - "Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance".

These were some practical steps I took to prepare for Sunday morning:

1. I prepared (ironing included, if necessary) and set out outfits the night before, including my own
2. I gathered all the needed "supplies" the night before (children's Bibles, tithe check, purse, my Bible, diaper bag)
3. I had a regular routine for the morning so that everyone became accustomed to it
4. I tried to leave extra early so I didn't feel the stress of rushing to church

For our family, the car ride to church consisted of listening to some Christian worship music as everyone sat in silence or quietly sang along. It really helped to calm my nerves and allow time to prepare for the morning of corporate fellowship and worship. It also gave a nice time of family worship as well, all

focusing on Jesus instead of the hectic activity of the morning.

As far as getting everyone situated in their classrooms, again, there was organization and routine. We did it the same way each week. This allowed the older children to know what was expected so that they helped, instead of hindered, the process.

Also, I broke down and was willing to ask for help. I always appreciated the helping hands (and arms!) of Skip Smith. He was the Sunday School teacher that used Max's office as a classroom when space was limited. He would hold our baby for me as I helped the other children take off and hang up their coats in the office closet.

We also had a plan for gathering the children after service as well. We would tell our older children that, after class, they could go into the gym and play there until we arrived. They knew that they were not allowed to leave the gym and did a great job of helping in that way. We also talked, in advance, with the nursery workers and asked them if it would be okay to be a little late in picking up our younger children. This allowed time for us to converse with others after service without holding a crying, tired baby in our arms while doing so.

After packing everyone into the two cars that we drove to church, it was good to start our Sunday

afternoons with a family race home. The children (and dad!) enjoyed the competition! When we hit the driveway, we knew as a family that we had ministered together for another weekend, and we were ready to unwind and relax.

JUST REMEMBER...

We all know that our Sunday schedules are different from those of laypeople. Most church families get ready together, arrive to church together, and sit together during the service hour. We need to make sure we change our mindset from thinking that we are losing out on something because we can't do all of that together. Sunday is a work day for pastors' families. It's okay to say that. We just need to make sure we have other family "together" moments – being creative throughout the week.