

**Pew**  
***SURVIVAL***  
**Kit**

By Sandra Humphrey  
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**“W**hy do I bother to come?” As a mother of six, I well remember occasionally asking that question while trying to sooth a fussy baby and appease a couple of toddlers through a worship service that had run overtime.

Of course, I knew very well why I bothered. All the effort spent teaching them what the doggie and the cow say and how to count to “10” was worthless compared to the spiritual foundation I was giving them on that pew every Sunday. And it did get easier. With time, mothers pick up a few tricks that work. Let me share a few that I’ve seen and learned through the years.

### **Start at the Beginning**

Take your newborn to worship services faithfully as soon as you are physically able to go. A few pediatricians recommend that you not take your newborn out in crowds for up to six weeks. They do insist, however, that you bring that infant to a crowded waiting room full of sick people for a one-week check-up. Other pediatricians believe that the antibodies your child receives from you will protect him in such situations, so this is an individual decision for parents.

When you do first take your baby to church, you will learn that getting to hold your sleeping newborn peacefully for that hour is a delight; and you will love worshiping God while holding this incredible tiny gift He has given you. Starting early will also get you in the habit of taking your child to church, one of the greatest things you can do for that child.

Equally important, it will develop confidence in you that you can get through a service fine with your baby, as this is particularly easy with a new born. (Besides, it is a lot of fun to dress her up in all those ruffles and bows and show her off!) It will also allow you to adjust gradually to keeping her occupied as she slowly increases the time she is awake.

### **Act Calm and Confident**

Babies sense nervousness in you and react accordingly. Even if your child is a toddler, remember that you are still bigger and smarter than he is, regardless of how incapable and insecure you may feel.

Some mothers of toddlers just give up, thinking they can’t keep their children quiet during services.

So they stay home until those children are older — and even more difficult to control.

If you are having a difficult time, pray for confidence and wisdom. Then, ask an experienced mother you admire for help. You might ask if she would hold your child during a service or two while you sit a few rows behind and observe. But never let your child sense that you are dismayed with him or feel he is out of control. How distressing to a child if even his mother does not know what to do with him! In all areas of dealing with children, young or old, a confident adult provides crucial security and gets respect and obedience.

### **Go Prepared**

Preparation builds confidence. Begin by laying out all of their clothes — including matching socks, shoes, blankets or hair bows — the night before. Empty and reload the diaper bag each Saturday night to make sure you have packed plenty of diapers and a fresh plastic bag for used ones, a fresh wet washcloth or wipes, a change of clothes in case of a serious accident, scented talcum powder to disguise unpleasant smells, and an extra pacifier. Also, prepare and refrigerate bottles the night before, so you are calm and not harried on Sunday morning.

With bottle-fed infants, go prepared with plenty of bottles. Do not risk running out! If you live in a warm climate, measure powdered formula into one bottle and sterile water into another to be mixed if you run out of prepared bottles. You may also want to carry a small can of juice or powdered juice mix in case of an emergency. These extra supplies are your security blanket.

Before you leave home, feed your infant cereal, if necessary, to stall his bottle so that you can give it to him during church services. This and a warm lap will almost always put an infant to sleep, particularly if he has been conditioned to this since birth. It also sets the stage for church being a quiet time. Avoid taking a child to worship hungry or frantically exhausted, but work at his schedule to make sure a bottle and nap will fall within service times.

### **Be Creative**

Food for toddlers usually only makes a mess of their clothes and the pew, so instead take a little bag full of soft, quiet toys. Into that special bag, slip

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interesting little only-for-church treasures that you find during the week.

These might include an old necklace or bracelet, a discarded compact mirror, a soft feather, an empty toilet tissue tube, a long piece of colorful yarn, a squeeze coin purse, or a broken watch. Keep your stash fresh and interesting, revising it every Saturday night.

During services, hide this little container behind you, so the child can see only one item at a time. Otherwise, he will grab the entire bag, dump everything immediately, and then you are in trouble!

## **Distract**

This is a mother's smartest weapon. A toddler's attention span is very short. If he grabs something he cannot have, like the hymnal, rather than precipitate a noisy showdown, simply hand him an exciting new toy from your bag while you quickly and quietly remove the forbidden object from his hand and view.

This is most effective if you not only produce a new toy but show him something fun to do with it. For example, you can balance the feather on top of his head, tickle his nose with it, stick it into his pocket, tuck it into his sock, or hide it in your fist for him to guess where it is.

In a similar way, if he begins to talk out loud, simply press his cheeks together gently but firmly so that he cannot talk. At the same time, hand him an interesting new toy, whispering something exciting about it in his ear.

## **Try Relaxation Therapy**

Often a baby or small child will become almost hypnotized if you lightly rub his hair, leg or back. This can keep some children still for an entire sermon.

Try running the feather up and down his arm or softly outlining his hand with a little pencil. Once a child is calmed and quiet, he can often be kept that way with small Bible storybooks or a tiny pencil and pad on which to draw. As a special treat for the older toddler, you can make little felt animal and people cutouts for stories such as "Creation" or "Noah and the Ark" for the child to quietly arrange in a small, felt-lined box.

## **Avoid the Floor**

Parents soon learn that a freedom once given is almost impossible to take back. Unless you do not mind your child always crawling about on the floor during services, keep him in your lap or on the seat. Most children allowed to play on the floor will soon

be scooting under the pews and out of reach and will never again be happy just sitting on the pew.

An older woman once confided to me, "My children didn't even know the church building had a floor until they were three years old." (Remember, holding those chunky little ones will keep your upper arms from getting flabby!)

## **Choose your Pew**

To sit at the front of the church building with most toddlers is sheer foolhardiness, as every child is bound to occasionally misbehave and distract others. Do not sit on the back row either, though, or you'll get lazy about their behavior. And do not sit in the middle of a pew, in case you have to take him out. If you sit where you have to climb over lots of people to get out, you will be nervous; and your child will sense your nervousness.

Occasionally mothers hope to teach their babies to stay in services by just sitting there and letting them cry for a long spell. Their reasoning is that if the children learn that crying accomplishes nothing, they will stop doing it. But this is incredibly rude to the speaker and to the other worshipers.

If a small baby continues to cry, the movement of getting up and walking to the back is usually sufficient to distract him from crying and sometimes will even lull him to sleep. An older child, however, should know that going out will result in something he does not like. If you just take him out and let him play whenever he is naughty, you are teaching him that if he is naughty, he will get to go play.

One last hint on where to sit: if you are in service without your husband, try sitting by a man. Since three of our six were small at the same time and my husband was preaching and could not sit with us, I sometimes tried to sit by men my boys didn't know very well. This seemed to keep them somewhat in awe and was quite effective.

## **Spank When Necessary**

When a child is old enough to shout "no" and throw a toy, he is old enough to be disciplined. Remember that others are there to worship God, so don't spank your child in the auditorium. Quietly warn the child once that he cannot again bounce his book off the head of the lady in front of him, or you will have to take him outside and spank him.

When he does it again, which he will the first time or two to test you, do not keep giving him more chances. Quietly get up, immediately and take him outside to where you are sure you will not be disturbing others and paddle his bottom.

When he is through crying, pick him up and,

looking him right in the eyes, tell him that you love him too much to let him act naughty in God's house. Then confidently tell him, "We're going back in and act nicely now!" Always remember that discipline is something we do for our children and not to them.

### **Schedule Potty Breaks**

Children are incredibly adaptable. They can learn to do just about anything you teach them — good or bad. So teach them to go to the restroom between class and worship service. Do not ask them — just go.

Then, when they ask to go to the potty during the service, which they will whenever they get bored, just whisper to them gently but firmly, "Just as soon as our worship service is finished." You can do this confidently only if you know they just went! If you never take them to the potty during services, they will soon stop asking. But if you do take them regularly, they will probably still "need" to go out when they are teenagers.

### **Encourage the Child to Participate**

Encourage your little one to sing when everyone else sings. Jesus loves children and does not care whether they get the words or the tune right.

Even 1 year olds often enjoy folding their hands and scrunching their eyes shut during prayers and then whispering "Amen" at the end. And always help them put some money in the collection plate. Explain simply that they can have bread and juice later when they are big boys and girls and are baptized. As your child gets older, let him "read" his own picture Bible during the sermon.

### **Remember Why You're There**

This advice is more effective than you may realize. Many parents are so intrigued with their little darlings that they spend the entire service watching and admiring them. Toddlers are ingenuous enough to know when they are the center of attention, and they know just how to keep that attention!

Start them out right by making it clear by your actions that the worship service, not him or her, is your main focus. Smile and give a bottle or toy as necessary, but never let your child think that he is your focal point during worship.

Always hold a hymnal. Look up verses in your Bible during the sermon. In fact, for best results, try not to even let your toddler catch you looking at him. Concentrate instead on worshiping. He will

learn how to act by your example.

Solomon encouraged us with the famous proverb, "Train up a child in the way he should go; And when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6 NKJV). What better way to train up a child in the way he should go than to help him from birth to learn to enjoy worshiping and respecting God.

And that is why we mothers "bother to come."

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