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The Family Friend

A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.

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Balancing Work & Family

by Paul Faulkner

In Fiddler on the Roof, Teyve poses the question, "How is it that the fiddler can keep his balance?" The answer: "Tradition!" It is extremely difficult for Teyve and all the Jewish families in his little Russian village to balance their way of life and the changing (and often oppressive) culture that surrounds them. But the traditions passed down from generation to generation provide the anchor for such a balance.

Christian families have always relied on the traditions and values of God's word-traditions that pull together and make it possible for parents to teach children basic morality and love for God, and values that help all of us make decisions and structure our lives. Yet, today, these traditions seem more and more difficult to practice because of time challenges and external influences that pull some of our families apart. [See list at end]

Economics, the "good life," single parenting and time constraints have caused parents to work more, which has drastically affected our families.

Arlie Hochschild, in her book, *Time Bind*, draws the startling conclusion that, for many families, home and office have changed places. "*Home is a frantic exercise in beat-the-clock, while work seems a haven of grown-up sociability, competence and relative freedom.*" And, as parents spend less time with children and experience more frustration in family relationships, it becomes easier to stay at work, thus creating a downward spiral of family satisfaction.

If time, energy, effort and the family in general are out of sync, we are at great risk of losing our families, and that is by far, more destructive than losing our jobs. So, what is the way to restore balance?

Let me suggest six steps, all of which have to do with priorities. Although most of us say we are family-oriented, research by Norval Glenn suggests that there is a big gap between what Americans say about their families and what they actually do to support them. "*A large majority claim that family is the most important thing is life, but surveys show that most people will put their jobs, possessions and personal freedom before responsibilities,*" Glenn said.

So, maintaining balance means **first, looking more carefully at what we do than what we say we do or what we believe we do.**

It means being honest in looking at how we spend our time and energy, and ruthlessly honest about our motivations for doing what we do. As Christians with a spiritual function, we may need to bargain with repentance and a prayerful determination to commit ourselves to godly values.

One of the strong and effective fathers I interviewed for *Raising Faithful Kids* said, "*We base our family on the principles found in the Bible and the people found in the church.*" Effective families are intentional; they set goals; they focus precisely by choosing each day whom they will serve.

The second step is to give adequate time.

Ronald Levane of Harvard Medical School once wrote, "*I think quality time is just a way of deluding ourselves into short-changing our children. [They] need vast amounts of parental time and attention.*" It's amazing that good people who would not think of robbing their children's piggy banks or stealing their possessions can be casual about stealing their children's

time. No family can prosper and grow without time for talk, fun and games and rest, or without time to show love to one another.

A recent time management survey of executives diagnosed three critical ways to divide time for maximum effectiveness. In a 90-day period, the subjects had to have a certain amount of days to focus, a certain amount of days to get the details done and at least 20 days to do nothing. Sounds un-American, maybe, but it also sounds a little like the Sabbath God commanded of Israel. And, isn't it interesting how often secular research confirms a principle written in the Bible many years ago?

Third, we need to evaluate our work.

Are the ends of financial gains really worth the means to get there—moms less functional, dads less a part of the family and children with too much money to spend? If we need to aim at the second rung of the ladder instead of the first, we need to be humble enough to do what our family needs rather than what our pride demands. At the very least, we can thoroughly examine our financial situation and correct what we can.

The next thing we can do is learn to live down, to appreciate the simple life.

This may mean taking a step back in our expectations, perhaps by limiting exposure to the culture. It probably means resetting our family's "want" button. Author and

psychologist Mary Pipher suggests a good way to begin is by spending more time in nature. The simplicity and timing in the natural world is an excellent antidote to the frantic materialism that often saturates our lives.

We need also to be mindful of all the biblical admonitions toward self-control and learn to live within our limits. It is a great model for children to actually set limits and stick by them. This works not only for income, but for activities as well.

Fifth, many good strategies can be put into play to help families get control of their schedules.

The key is good communication and participation by everyone. Dads and children need to help with the work at home. Moms need to make sure everybody knows how to pitch in so the family can function as a team, with everyone contributing.

Finally, we must avoid the temptations that tear away at balance.

We have a different value system from the world, a different set of priorities that puts family over job. We must not allow ourselves to buy into the idea that success is attached to money, fame, power, prestige or consumer goods. As Christians, we must have the courage and determination to let our satisfaction come from an eternal perspective.

We must be serious about the heritage we leave to our children, the social, emotional and spiritual legacy we pass on from gen-

eration to generation. We have been given a charge to make memories, and we can't "do it later" with children. Parents are the only really effective teachers, trainers and mentors for the children—not the church, the schools, or even the grandparents. May God bless our efforts to stay balanced.

-via Church and Family, Fall, 1998

Time Challenges and External Influences that Pull Families Apart

Massive Economic Changes

- ◆ Nature of world wide economy
- ◆ Competition in the marketplace
- ◆ Job layoffs
 - Left without a job
 - Increased work time
- ◆ Global economy
 - Lower family incomes
 - Requires twice as much income to pay mortgages than one generation ago
 - Income taxes rose from 2 percent in 1950 to 24 percent in 1990
 - Healthcare and education costs have skyrocketed.

The Good Life

- ◆ Redefined needs vs. wants
- ◆ Parents and grandparents
 - Lucky to have a job
 - Small closets
 - Eating out was a luxury
 - Content with modest homes
 - Made good living with high school education

Divorce

- ◆ Solo wage earner/parent in many homes
- ◆ Outside childcare

Lack of Time

- ◆ More time at work
- ◆ Less time for relationships
- ◆ More time for children to spend with TV/Internet

