



Ten Tips For Balancing Your Ministry and Family: Help For the Tug-Of-War

By Greg Leith

I slipped into his room late one evening when I arrived home from work. He was still awake, snuggled under the covers.

“Hey, Dad, it’s Wednesday,” my 12-year-old said. “Tonight was our date night, Dad. You forgot.”

Somewhere between the deadlines, donors, and to-do list, I had forgotten the most important ministry God had entrusted to me — my family. It had been weeks since my wife and I had a date together, just the two of us, without our work worlds on the agenda. I knew things needed to change and fast. Instead of focusing on work, I needed to focus on my family and let them know they were as important as my ministry work

FAMILY MATTERS

We set out to meet our ministry goals and somehow in the midst of our work we forget a young boy is waiting at home to play catch, a teen-age girl is waiting to talk about boys, and a spouse is waiting to be treated with the attention she received when you were dating. Why does it happen? How does it happen? How can you prevent it from happening to you? Why do we feel we need to work so long and hard?

What is the prize you are striving for? Is it possible the prize has edged out your precious family or the spouse you were madly in love with during your courtship days? They need your best time, not your leftover time.

Recently I met a ministry leader for a cup of coffee. In between sips of Starbucks[®], the truth about his family came out. Similar scenarios have occurred many times before with other ministry leaders. The leader I was meeting with told me where things were with his ministry. The ministry was doing well, but his family was suffering. Later, he temporarily stepped aside from his ministry to focus on his family until things turned around. I was glad he did this, but surprised that I had witnessed another incident where ministry had edged out a leader’s family.

Nobel Prize winning Harvard biologist George Wald has some thoughts: “What one really needs is not the Nobel laureates, but love. How do you think one gets to be a Nobel laureate? Wanting love, that is how. Wanting it so badly, one works all the time and ends up a Nobel laureate. It is a consolation prize. What matters is love.”

If we were sitting at a Starbucks near your house talking about your day, I would ask you a personal question. What is the prize you are striving for? Is it possible the prize has edged out your precious family or the spouse you were madly in love with during your courtship days? They need your best time, not your leftover time.

TEN TIPS

Before the Starbucks gets cold and we both need to run, it is time for a rebalancing of ministry and family. Here are 10 ideas to jump-start your thinking and help you get back on track.

1. Get your family together and craft a family mission statement. It is just as important to be intentional as a family as it is to be where you work. We wanted our family to understand why we were here on earth and what principles would govern our time together. We wanted a grid for decision making and conflict to pass through. Need a head start? Here is ours:

“Our family is going through life’s journey together, growing roots in Christ and wings for our mission — to become equipped to make a difference in our world by learning to live like Jesus, for Jesus, and in Jesus.”

We have designed other elements of this mission statement into the shape of a house with walls of laughter, doors of prayer, and windows of other important character traits.

2. Plan time for your family each week in advance. Put it on your calendar. Stop believing you need to get one more thing done before you leave for home. Plan your week with specific ending times and stick to them.
3. Jettison things from your schedule that are not important. March to the mission Jesus called you to, not the mission others want you to do for them. Be ruthless here.
4. If your work situation requires constant excessive hours to get the job done, it is time to evaluate other ways to accomplish the task. You cannot accomplish the mission of the organization single-handedly, so stop trying. Ask the Lord to send workers into your harvest field and then watch Him go to work. Pray for supernatural results from the time you put into your day, then go home and be a minister to the other mission field God gave you — your family.
5. If you lead others, have your people write into their job descriptions the need to be committed to their family and specifically how they will do it.
6. Develop an activity with your entire family or with individual family members. For example, hiking, a date at Denny’s for breakfast on Saturday, or coffee with your spouse where you pray together for your day. As you do this, remember teachable moments are almost like intentional accidents — they happen — but not always because you planned them. Be sure to plan large quantities of time throughout the year so teachable moments will have a chance to occur.
7. Create a spiritual-life development plan for each of your children by outlining their strengths, their areas needing improvement, and your plans to shape their

- character as they grow under your care. Our children are arrows that are being sent to a world we cannot fully see. Our job is to shape our children into arrows that will fly straight and travel the distance to the Kingdom target God intends for them.
8. Schedule an hour each week with each child and your spouse and focus only on them. Getting together with family members does not need to be expensive; time together is the critical ingredient here. When our budget has been tight, I have spent time in my backyard with my son.
 9. When you are traveling, send an e-mail or a postcard to your family. Call them on the phone and pray with them in addition to chatting.
 10. At the end of the day, ask your kids or spouse three questions: “What happened today that you are proud of?” “What happened today that you wish you could do over?” “Where did you see God in your day today?”

When I speak to men about fatherhood at FamilyLife marriage weekends, I ask men to use single words that describe their memories of their fathers. Many of the words used are negative words such as “absent,” “domineering,” and “detached.” If your children were asked to describe your parenting, or if your spouse was reviewing your life at your funeral service, what words would they use? If you are not happy with the words they would use, it is time to make some changes in how you lead your family. If you are the man in your family, do not abdicate the work of family leadership to your wife. Leadership is not to be shouldered solely by her. Get involved.

Eugene Petersen’s *The Message* says, “Exploit or abuse your family, and end up with a fistful of air” (Proverbs 11:29).

When my work years come to an end and the castles of my ministry stand tall and strong, I want to be holding more than air. Are you pleased with the investment you have made in building your family and your marriage? If the answer is no, why not leave this article and make a few important dates with your kids and your spouse.

“Hey Dad. I passed,” says my 15-year-old daughter.” I am writing this from the Department of Motor Vehicles. I came here with my daughter to get her driving permit. Some days you cannot balance, so lately I have been working on **integration** — aren’t laptops great? As my daughter and I celebrated her passing the test with a big hug in the lobby, I was glad I had decided the to-do list at work could wait. The memory of this morning with her will last forever.

© 2008 Greg Leith, used with permission.
Reprinted from *Enrichment* journal Q1, 2006.

Greg Leith, Rancho Santa Margarita, California, is director of business and corporate relations at Biola University. Greg and his wife Shelley are part of the national speaking team for Family Life Ministries.