

Balancing Church, Family, and Career

A Challenge to Young Men

Christians are servant-hearted people (Ephesians 2.10), but raw empathy can lead to exhaustion and a lop-sided life. The challenge is to render joyful service in a sustainable God-pleasing way. Without balance, service can become neurosis and sacrifice can foster dependency. Equilibrium is essential for healthy living.

The Problem of Imbalance

Jesus taught His followers to “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6.33). In essence, He was saying, “The desire to do what is right in God’s eyes must overrule every decision.” Putting God first does not mean hanging out at the church building every waking hour. Rather, it is bringing Christian mindfulness to all of your responsibilities. Every man has three main roles for which he is accountable. Success is learning how to give the right amount of attention to the right one at the right time.

Work Life Imbalance

Are you a “workaholic”? Unfortunately, that term has become a secret badge of honor among men. They equate it with being a workhorse, go-getter, or overachiever. Like materialism, it is one of the more socially acceptable sins. People reason, “Well, if you have to go overboard somewhere, hard work is not a bad choice.” What they fail to see is the devastation this imbalance causes. Preoccupation with career means that other important matters are being neglected. Your soul slowly shrivels as your home gradually crumbles. The training of your children and the self-esteem of your mate take a backseat to worldly business. Delinquency and divorce are common consequences of excessive attention to work.

Family Life Imbalance

Do you come from an inward-focused family of origin? Did everything revolve around kin to the exclusion of other concerns. Jesus warned against overly enmeshed families when He declared,

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10.37-39).

Overly fixating on family leads to loss of identity and integrity. Healthy people do not perceive their loved one’s outside interests as a threat. Rather, they view them as a sign of wellness and spiritual vitality (Matthew 25.40). Well-roundedness is a sign of health. Smothering is a sign of sickness.

Church Life Imbalance

Churches can also contribute to imbalance and spiritual illness. So ask yourself, “Does my congregation have a presence in the community *and* make a positive difference in my own life?” Healthy churches care more about developing disciples than coddling critics. They are more interested in sanctifying souls than perpetuating programs. Unhealthy churches drain people rather than energize them. They use people up and discard the empties. Choosing a congregation dedicated to your family’s growth may be the most important decision you ever make on their behalf. Select one that promotes the welfare of its members rather than the fragile egos and narrow agendas of insecure leaders.

The Biggest Danger

Everyone struggles against imbalance, but this article focuses on the unique challenges of younger men. For instance, men tend to derive ego gratification from the workplace more than other life accounts. This may be due to their competitive natures or to the amount of time it takes to earn a living. The danger is that men will judge their success using a financial matrix. That would be fine if God were the supreme accountant of the universe. If you were created to generate the most possible money, then it would make sense to derive your identity from your standard of living and savings account. However, the Bible is filled with warnings against making money the measure of your life (Luke 12.15; 1 Timothy 6.6-8).

Having said this, your family does need food, clothing, shelter and a sense of security. The point is not to neglect your work responsibilities. The point is to guard against “work-creep.” From time to time you will have to put in extra effort on special projects, but do not let it become a way of life. For example, when you go on holiday, try leaving your laptop behind. Vacation is for building up your family and your soul. If you are a hard worker who adds value to your organization, have enough self-confidence to set strong boundaries. Your family is counting on you to protect them from harm, and when work constantly encroaches on their time, you place your greatest treasures at risk.

The Bible Model

One of the best methods for self-improvement is to search out role models who exemplify what you hope to achieve and become. In the church, deacons are divinely designated role models of righteousness and responsibility. When you look at the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3.8-13, you are seeing a description of a spiritually balanced life. Those who serve in this capacity were chosen because of their maturity and stability. They are not perfect but they are dedicated to a lifetime of study, service, and growth.

Deacons are multi-dimensional leaders who demonstrate proficiency in overall life-competency. In addition to being steadfast workers, they are sound in the faith and self-controlled. God is concerned with their mouths, morals, and money management as well as their ministries. So if you want to succeed as God’s man, take a closer look at the demands of a deacon and you will gain insight into ways to create balance in your own life.

The Best Opportunity

Since deacons exemplify a God-balanced life, young men should note the emphasis Paul placed on caring for their families. Above everything else, deacons love and lead their families well. The need for this attribute is not limited to special servants in the church; it is a message for all married men in God's kingdom. Get the family thing right and you will probably be on the right track. Since men are prone to overlook this priority, God highlighted it to get your attention. You cannot lead better than you love. Two family related qualifications emphasize this point.

Deacons must be the husband of one wife. Scripturally married? Sure. But much more is implied. Paul's emphasis is on being devoted to your mate's wellbeing. Attention to her needs will make you a better person and give you a base of support for all your other endeavors. Neglect this and you become less sensitive to people and your marriage becomes a drain on everything you do. The challenge is to work as hard on your marriage as you do on your career. Purpose right now to build an extraordinary marriage. Think about it daily, pray for it continually, and look for concrete steps to bring more joy to your spouse and more glory to God.

Deacons must also rule their children and houses well. In other words, the best thing you can do for God's family is to manage your own family well. If you are neglecting the needs of your wife and kids, there is nothing noble about caring for strangers. Acts of benevolence are part of the Christian life, but charity begins at home (1 Timothy 5.8; Galatians 6.10). After you get your arms around your domestic responsibilities, then it is time to stretch and do more for the church and community. It is not a matter of "either, or" but of "first things first."

Conclusion

The three dimensions of life every Christian battles to balance are work life, family life, and spiritual life. Your career, companion, and congregation all need your time and attention. The key is to be honest about your tendency to shortchange one area or the other. To become more self-aware, listen to the voices God brings into your life to help you adjust and grow. Get out of denial and pay attention.

As you get older, you will fine-tune the way you allot time to glorify God by serving others. Until then, remember that dedication to your career comes more naturally than the other two, so work a little harder on pleasing your mate than your manager. If you are a devoted husband and responsible church member, it will make you a better boss or employee. Happy juggling.