HOW DO I BALANCE FAMILY, WORK AND FAITH?

If I were to ask you guys to write down your top three priorities in order of importance, 95% of your responses would be: faith, family and work.

Unless you’re retired.
And then it would be faith, family and golf.
Or faith, family and fishing.
Or faith, family and getting to my prostate appointments.

But, if you’re working or when you were working, top three priorities in order of importance, 95% of Christian guys would say:
faith, family and work.

But of those 95%, what percentage actually live with their priorities being first faith, then family and then work?

If an impartial observer were to follow us around, watch how we spend our time, record what we think about, and look at our financial expenditures, how many of our lives would actually look like lives that are prioritized around, in order: faith, family and work?

My guess is most of us know the right answers, but most of us have trouble living what we know to be right.

This morning’s question is one that was asked by a number of guys.
Basically it’s this:
How do I balance my obligations to my work, my family, and my commitment to serve Christ and the church?

It’s a great question.

Especially coming from the guys it came from.
I know these guys,
and they are not guys afraid of doing too much,
these are guys who are doing a lot –
and who are always feel they should be doing something more.

One guy came up to me recently,
he has 5 kids,
the oldest one is 11.

And he started telling me how sorry he was
that he wasn’t doing more at the church to serve.
He wasn’t just talking to hear himself talk.
He was serious.
I could see it genuinely bothered him
that he wasn’t able to serve in the same ways he had in the past
because of his responsibilities at home and at work.

I know this guy.
He loves Jesus
He’s a great husband.
Great father.

But he was feeling bad that he wasn’t doing more to serve Christ and the church.

I’ll come back to what I told him in a few minutes.

But that’s where this question comes from,
from guys like that.
Not guys who are afraid of doing too much
but guys who are afraid they’re doing too little.
Most of us are very busy people.

When we’re young, just starting out,  
most of us have going on at the same time:  
marriage, young kids, and career.  
And our career,  
when we’re just starting out,  
we feel this incredible pressure to succeed  
because we now have a house and cars and a family to provide for.  
And we feel that we need to perform well  
so we’ll be promoted and receive raises  
so we can continue to provide for our families.  
And sometimes that means performing better than the other guys,  
and sometimes that means working longer and harder than the other guys.

And yet,  
it’s the very same time when our wives are stressed out and need us most  
and when it’s so important that we be involved in our children’s lives.

It’s tough.

And then as we get older,  
if we show ourselves to be men of character and caliber,  
people reach out to us,  
and they want us to be involved in serving the community  
and serving through the church,  
And often by this time we have an even more responsible position at work.  
And, of course, there’s still our wives and our families.

And it’s not easy,  
meeting all of our responsibilities,  
keeping our balance, and  
staying focused on what’s most important.

And it’s a pretty rare cat who can live out in order what he says are his priorities;  
faith, family and work.

So how do we balance faith, family and work?  
Well, I could be honest and simply say, “I don’t know.”
I’ve never done this very well, and
I’ll feel like a hypocrite if I try to give you any advice,
so, let’s just call it a morning and go to work.”

Instead, I decided to think through this topic
and see what I could learn for myself
and then share it with you.

I have some big thoughts for you this morning
and I’m not sure they really hang together.
So, this talk will be a little more disjointed than normal.
Good news is, if one point doesn’t work for you,
maybe the next one will.

Here’s the first one.

1. TRUE SUCCESS IS A BALANCING ACT.

That’s another reason I like this question.
I think it’s getting at something very important.

Sorry if you’ve heard this example before.

But when I was in may late 20’s working here the first time,
I met with one of my high school buddies,
starting his career as an investment banker.

Peggy was complaining that I was working too much.
60 to 80 hr weeks and she didn’t care for that.

It wasn’t like she was alone all day.
She had a baby at home to keep her company,
so I don’t know why she needed me around.

But I asked my friend, how much he worked.
He said he got in early, about 7:00,
and then he left at 5:00.

Bill, I said, are the other guys still there working when you leave.
Yes, they are, he said.
How about your boss?
Yep.

And so, you just walk past his office, wave and say,
   I’m taking off,
   hope y’all have fun while I’m at home?
Isn’t that hard to do?

Here’s what my then 28 year old friend told me:

Yes, it’s hard.
And I may not get all the promotions the other guys get
   or make all the money they make.
But that’s ok
   because that’s not what defines success for me.

Then he asked me;
   You know who is proclaimed the world’s greatest athlete, right?
It’s the guy who wins the decathlon.

He’s not the best in the world at any one event.
As a matter of fact if he tried to be,
   he wouldn’t win the decathlon and
   he wouldn’t be the world’s greatest athlete.

But he wins because he’s good at many events,
   even if he’s not the very best at any.
That’s how you win,
   and that’s who I want to be.

I’m going to do well in my career.
I’m going to do well as a father.
I’m going to do well as a husband.
I’m going to do well serving my church
   and having a ministry to others.

But if I make any one of those my focus,
   and lose my balance –
I’m going to fail in the other areas
   and I’m going to fail as a man.

28 years old.
Today, he’s my age.

Very successful in his professional career.
More importantly,
   he has four great kids,
       grown and educated and walking with Christ,
   he has a terrific marriage,
and he and his wife mentor young couples in their church in Dallas.

Guys, I don’t know who you want to be when you grow up,
   or what you think it means to win at life,
   but that ain’t bad to shoot for.
And it came about because a young man understood
   that true success is a balancing act,
and because he lived that way.

Second thought:

2. DON’T COMPARTMENTALIZE YOUR LIFE.

I like the question: How do I balance my family life and my work life and my spiritual life?

But there’s something not quite right about it.
Why?
Because it almost sounds like we have these three lives
   and we’re trying to make sure that they all get their proper due.

But, you don’t have several different lives.
You don’t have a family life –
   and a work life –
   and a church life –
   and a community life.

You have one life –
   and it’s ALL your spiritual life.
OVERSTATEMENT BUT CLOSE TO THE TRUTH:
You are not a material being, occasionally having spiritual experiences.
You are a spiritual being having a material experience.

You have one life and you have one goal: to serve Christ and glorify him.

Some of your life is spent at work,
some of it is spent at home,
some of it is spent driving back and forth,
some of it is spent on the golf course, and
some of it is spent in church or in the community.

But you have one life
and you have one goal: to live your one life, wherever you are and whatever
you’re doing, to live that life in relationship with Jesus Christ
and glorify God.

Look at
Romans 12.1: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present
your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual
service.

You are to be a living sacrifice and your life is to be your offering to God.

Literally, it says present your bodies a living sacrifice.

Why bodies,
why not simply present yourselves?

It’s because Paul wants us to know that he’s talking about everyday stuff.
The everyday stuff of life –
that’s spiritual stuff that’s meant to be offered to God.

Here’s how the verse is translated in The Message.

Romans 12.1: So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your
everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-
around life—and place it before God as an offering.
Your entire life, everyday, ordinary stuff – it’s your offering of love and praise to God – not just the “spiritual” part of your life, but every moment of every day –

even when you’re crunching numbers at work or putting deals together, or treating a patient, or advising a client.

Treat it like a spiritual task because it is. Treat it like it’s an offering to God because it is.

The Scriptures lift up a beautiful vision of an integrated life where all we do and say is an act of worship to God – how we approach our work, how we treat our wives, how we raise our kids, how we serve the community, how we serve through the church – it’s all spiritual stuff, and none of it is more spiritual than any other part.

I want you to be sure and get that. What you do at work is just as spiritual as what you do at church.

We in the western world segregate our lives. We compartmentalize our existence into various components.

And it’s almost like – this part of my life belongs to my company, this part belongs to my family, and this part belongs to God. And I really wish I could figure out how to make it so that I got to do more God stuff.

It’s all God stuff!

That segregated, compartmentalized view of life
is not the biblical view of life.

You have one life and God is to be glorified in all of it.

And once you see it that way
    and once you treat it that way,
you won’t come home thinking,
    when can I do something to express my faith and serve Christ,
        because you will have been doing that all day.

Let’s talk about a bit more about work for a moment and then family.

A. WORK

Look at

**Colossians 3.23-24**: And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

Those words were written to Christian slaves.

It would have been easy for those first century slaves to say,
    I spend most of my day working for my earthly master,
and then after all my chores are done,
    with the little bit of time I have left,
I can serve Christ.

And Paul says,
    as you go about your day and as you obey your earthly masters,
do it for Christ.
How you do it,
    why you do it –
do it as if you were doing it for the Lord,
    because you are.

Offer up what you do and how you do to your Lord Jesus,
    and he will see it and he will be pleased with you.
Even your work as a slave is spiritual work;
    it’s an act of worship if you do it for Christ.
I know this is hard for guys,
so I’ll say it again.

Your time at work is just as much a part of your spiritual life as your time at church.

Work is 8-9 hours a day for most of us, more for many of us. That’s at least a third or more of every day.

What a huge waste if you don’t integrate that part of your life into your service of Christ.
What a colossal shame if you don’t use that part of your life to grow in your relationship with Christ and serve his kingdom.

At work, you have two great opportunities.
One is


Much of our growth comes through study and prayer. But much of our growth also comes through the struggles of life and learning how to handle them so that we grow in character and become more Christ-like.

What was Christ like?

He was patient.
How do you become patient?
You get irritated and you learn not to react rashly.

Jesus was loving.
How do you become loving?
You hang out with people who are hard to love and you care for them anyway.

Jesus was forgiving.
How do you become more forgiving?
You get done wrong
and you learn to let it go.

And there are two places where you are going to be irritated, find people hard to love, and get hurt more than any other.

And that’s in your family and at your work.

Your employment is a huge opportunity to grow into the image of Christ if you make that your goal. If you don’t, you’re still going to get irritated, be around difficult people and be done wrong, but you won’t profit from it at all.

And that’s just stupid. To pay the cost and not reap any of the benefits.

There another opportunity you have at work.

And that’s


If along with your goal of being successful in your employment, you decided that you wanted to be successful in influencing and serving others at your work, you’d find that your job could be a remarkably fulfilling spiritually.

If someone at your work is going through a tough time, go into his or her office, shut the door, and ask him how he’s doing.

Tell him you’ve been thinking about his situation, that you can imagine how rough it is, and that you’re there for him to help however you can.

In case you don’t recognize what that is, it’s called being Christ-like.
When you go out to lunch with someone,
before you get up, say, “John, this may freak you out but I pray.

And I believe in prayer, and I’m wondering if there’s anything going on
with you or your family I could pray for.”

You might be surprised how someone would open up.
And even if he thinks you’re a nut,
he won’t be able to escape the fact that you care.

And in case you don’t recognize what that is,
it’s called being a Christ-like.

And if not at that lunch,
I’ll bet you money,
there will come a time when he pulls you aside
and tells you about something with his family,
and asks you to pray him.

And when you buy yourself a book about the spiritual life,
buy another copy for someone at work,
and give it to him and say,
I bought this book for myself and it looked so good,
I bought one for you.

And if you know some guys at work who are believers or are on the borderline,
invite them to come early or go to lunch once a week
and have a Bible study.

In case you don’t know,
that’s called being – well, hopefully you’ve figured out what it’s called by now.

Work is a third of your life.
And it’s an incredible opportunity to grow and to serve.
Don’t waste it.

B. FAMILY.

Again, huge opportunity for growth,
and an incredible opportunity to influence.

Not only an opportunity, but a responsibility.
Like it or not, men, you are the priest of your household.
You are meant to be the spiritual leader.

And if you take that seriously, you immediately take a step towards integrating and growing your spiritual life.

Loving your wife is a spiritual act.
**Ephesians 5.25:** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Loving your wife is a spiritual act.
It’s a way of serving God.

It’s not” I’ve been a patient, caring, attentive husband, now I have to go out and do something for Jesus.”
That is a way of serving Jesus.
In fact, it’s one of the most important ways you’ll ever serve Christ.

Loving your kids is a spiritual act.

**Ephesians 6.4:** … Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

In a minute, I’ll talk with you about having a devotional time with your kids, but right now I’m not even talking about something like that.

Being involved in your children’s lives,
helping them with their homework,
giving them the certainty that they are worth their father’s time and they are a priority in his life,
providing the proper discipline that requires enough time and thought so that you instruct them and don’t provoke them,
all of those are incredible blessings that, frankly, most kids in this country do not receive.
And it creates a foundation in a child’s life that is critical his or her future success in life.
Guess what – that’s as important as going on a mission trip.
   God may or may not have given you a responsibility to care for poor children half way around the world.
   But he has definitely given you the spiritual responsibility of loving and equipping your own children for life.
There’s nothing more important and there’s nothing more spiritual.

If your kids are young, start praying with them.
Here’s a devotional book, you can purchase – for kids, ages …
(Granddads)

Can I tell you one of the coolest things that could possibly be? Your kids never remember a time when you didn’t pray with them and pray for them.
They grow up with that and they learn from you that’s what men do and that’s what fathers do.
They pray and they pray for their kids.

Back to the father who told me he wished he could do more at the church. What did I tell him?

I said, “Man, your kids are your ministry.
   There will be plenty of time to do more at the church, but there won’t be another time to raise your kids.
   Being a good father, that is your primary spiritual responsibility.”

I need to be doing more at the church.

My friend with 5 kids and a wife, I appreciate the sentiment of wanting to do more, but right now if his life, if he is loving his wife, actively raising his kids, making it to church and Quest,
getting his children to Sunday school,
being an example of a Christ-like man,
and going to work every day to provide for his family,
if he’s doing all of that (and he is)
he doesn’t need to be doing anything more.
He needs a vacation
and he deserves a medal.

If you see your family and your work and all you do as part of your spiritual life,
which it is,
and you start approaching it that way,
a big part of the balance problem will be solved.

New Point.
Short and it picks up a couple of weeks ago.

DO FEED YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE.

Part of balancing your Christian life is making certain you have a devotional life.

Two weeks ago we looked at John 15.

John 15.1,4: I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. … Remain in me,
and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in
the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

When we talked about living a Christian life,
we talked about having some rituals in our lives that
cause us to focus our minds on Christ,
especially some time in the morning and the evening
and maybe something in the middle of the day.

This will help you with what we just talked about.
If you’re praying for the other guys at work,
if you’re praying that you’ll be an example of caring and integrity,
if you’re praying for your wife and your children,
and if you’re sharing with them what you’ve been learning in your
devotional life,
it will help you keep a spiritual focus at work and at home
and it will help you serve others and serve Christ.
Several options for you.
May get one.
Or may get a couple – one for the morning.
One to read right before or after lunch.

And if you do, get one extra for that guy at your office.

4. DETERMINE YOUR PRIORITIES BECAUSE YOUR PRIORITIES WILL DETERMINE YOU.

We started off by my saying that if I asked you your priorities, most of you would say faith, family and work.
Hard to argue against that, but it’s a little too vague, really, and that’s probably one reason we don’t always live by them.

W. Clement Stone was born in 1902 and lived to be 100. As a child he was poor and fatherless, and he began peddling papers on the streets of Chicago. At the age of 20 he took his hundred dollar savings account and began an insurance company that became very successful financially and allowed him to become a generous philanthropist, giving away something like $275 million dollars before his death.

Two quotes I’ll share with you.

One, he said, All I want to do is change the world.

The other, more germane,

**W. Clement Stone:** “98% of the people who are dissatisfied with their world do not have a clean picture in their minds of the world they would like for themselves.”

Here’s what I believe. Your potential is unlimited. But your opportunities are not.
The hours in your day.
The energy in your body.
The length of your life.

They are all limited.

There will always be more things to do,
good things to do,
than you can do.

Usually there will be more people wanting you to do things
than you can get to.

More causes to support
than you can give yourself to.

And though I believe you can do just about anything,
I don’t believe you can do everything.

So, it’s very important to be intentional about your priorities
and then stick with them.

Of course they can change.
Your priorities as a retiree won’t be the same as your priorities
when you’re a young father.

But there’s hardly a more important exercise for you to go through
than to spend some time thinking and praying about,
“What are God’s priorities for me right now?”

If you don’t,
you may stay very busy and even make great strides in some area of your life,
but how will you know you’re headed in the right direction?

All progress requires movement.
But not all movement is progress.

Some movement and busyness is nothing but a distraction
that keeps us from fulfilling God’s will for our lives
and doing what’s most important.
If you and I have limited time and energy,
    then we had better limit our time and energy to the things that are most
    important.
Final suggestion.
Pick one or two things,
    specific things,
to make priorities for this year,
    and do them.

1. Join a small group.
2. Go on a mission trip.
3. If you don’t have a ministry in the church, get one.
4. Have a devotional time with your children.
5. Begin having a daily devotional time yourself.

Do something that will become a regular part of your week and your life,
    and then next year build on that.