

Finding Balance in a Demanding Workplace



TOM'S BOSS MADE IT VERY CLEAR: MOVE TO Dubuque to take the job, or there'd be no job. He wasn't being cruel, just realistic. Tom's entire department was being shifted there from the plant in Maine, and Tom was the logical one to lead them once they moved. Their present team leader, Marcos, had already decided to retire.

"Okay," his wife and kids had said, "Quit."

Tom didn't have the same confidence they did that he could find other work, especially work that paid as well as this job did. It worried him that they might have to eat into savings while he looked for work. What if there was no work?

Tom's daughter was in her senior year in high school. A move not only threatened her social world, but her academic one, too. High on the dean's list, a number of scholarships seemed likely to fall her way, especially since she was planning to attend the state university two towns over. His wife understood his nervousness about

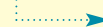
finding a new job, but she was worried about Tom's parents. Their health was poor, and they required a great deal of attention from their only child and his family.

Still, Tom knew the company would make it lucrative for him to go. Not only would he get to be team leader, but there was more money, and it would surely go farther in Iowa than on the East Coast.

To make things worse, Tom's boss had made it clear that if Tom didn't go, then they would scrap the whole team and not take anybody. If they had to find a new team leader, they'd just find a new team, too. Tom's coworkers didn't know this yet, of course, but it weighed heavily on his mind.

Tom called his pastor and two of his best friends. The trio joined him for lunch the next day and he explained his dilemma.

What should they tell him?



Scripture Passages

Deuteronomy 6:5

Proverbs 8:17

Matthew 22:37-38

James 1:27

II Timothy 3:14-17

Psalms 119:11

Psalms 119:105

Matthew 6:33

Luke 12:24-31

Study

Advances in technology were supposed to make things easier. With our devices enabling us to do things quicker, we should have more time to do the things that matter. It didn't work that way. With the time-saving devices came demands to do more.

Child care options were supposed to make balancing life and work easier. Not so. It still drives a stake in your heart every time your child pleads with you to stay home.

Flexible schedules were supposed to be another big help. Though nice, we found ourselves filling both worlds—home and work—with more activity, and balanced lives continued to elude us.

Working out of the home should help, too, we thought, but it didn't. Not really.

So, despite our best efforts, we still find balancing the demands placed on us as one of the hardest things we do.

Does the Bible offer wisdom on this matter? Before we answer that question, let's take a look at some of the things that demand our time and attention. List them below:

Work makes nearly everybody's list. Family, too, even if we don't have children, and often even if we don't have spouses. Today's world finds our parents living longer but often requiring care from children at the end of their lives. Rest should make the list, but it often falls to the bottom of the pile. Leisure activity, also a part of God's plan for us, has ceased to be restful and is instead often simply another compelling demand on our time and energy. If we attend church regularly, then we often have duties there. Then there's the community, the kids' school plays, and on and on it goes.

In the space below, list the top five items in terms of how much time you spend on them:

So how do we decide which is more important? Which gets more time? How do *you* decide?

Most of us live by the squeaky-wheel rule. The thing that puts the most pressure on us gets most of our attention. What's wrong with that?

In terms of time, probably tops on most lists is work, then family, then rest, then leisure, then God. How does your list stack up to that one?

Here are a list of passages that establish priorities from God's perspective. Beside each group of passages, write out what you think the passage is saying about our priorities.

Deuteronomy 6:5; Proverbs 8:17

Matthew 22:37-38; James 1:27

II Timothy 3:14-17; Psalm 119:11; Psalm 119:105

Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:24-31

None of the things which dominate our lives are our priority. The reason we were created, the reason we exist, is to be in fellowship with God. Until we learn that, we lack the information necessary to determine where God wants us to spend our time and energy. Yet, knowing God, worshipping Him, serving Him, all tend to fall to the bottom of our to-do lists, if for no other reason than the more tangible pressures become the squeakiest wheels in our lives.

Jesus talked about this when He was on Earth, and His answer was always the same: Anything that creates a barrier between you and God is sin. Too much work, then, if it inhibits your ability to know and worship God, is a sin. Too much money, if it inhibits your ability to know and worship God, is a sin. Too much ... well, you get the picture.

That said, it's also obvious from Scripture that God wants us to be working; wants us to care for our children, wants us involved in the church and in government and in the lives of our neighbors and others. But until we understand that knowing Him—and understanding how He wants us to serve Him—helps to clarify our priorities, we will merely do what seems most pressing, or what's more personally advantageous to us.

(For just a small example of this, try this exercise if you're a parent: Find all the Scripture passages that tell you providing for your family is important or necessary. Next, find all the passages that talk about your obligation to teach your children about God. Which list do you think will be longer? Yet, as parents—and especially we fathers—we often delegate this duty to the pastor, Sunday school teacher, or even others because our work takes up so much of our time.)

The bottom line, then, is that while God cares deeply about our work (Genesis 2:15, 19; II Thessalonians 3:11; I Corinthians 7:17-24; Colossians 3:17, 23), and cares deeply about our commitments to family (I Timothy 5:8; Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6), and cares deeply about our rest (Genesis 2:2-3; Mark 6:31), the truth is He cares more deeply than we know Him.

If you would find balance in your life, look first to the things that help you know God. Then He will help you know the things you should discard, the things you should do, and the order you should do them in. It cannot work any other way.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- Knowing God must take priority in our life if we are to understand how to organize the rest of our responsibilities and activities.
- God cares about our work, about our families, about our rest, about our church. He cares so much about them that He wants to govern how we tend them.
- When we accepted Christ as Savior, we began a journey to make him the Lord of our life as well. As long as we're trying to grow, God honors our efforts. When we surrender to the demands of this world and ignore His demand for first place in our hearts, we will be perpetually out of balance.