

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: Our family life is just constant travel from one activity to another. It seems like we don't have any real family time. I feel like life is slipping away and the kids are growing up too fast. Our stress level makes us irritable and exhausted. My wife and I constantly play "tag-team". What advice do you have?

ANSWER: Certainly, life these days is hectic and over-scheduled, especially as the Holidays approach, but you need not resign yourself to a life of "irritability and exhaustion". It takes courage, organization and determination to begin the steps needed to free yourself and your family from the distractions of our culture. As father, husband and spiritual leader, it is up to you to take some action. Since I don't know the specifics of your situation, I'll suggest a general plan of action.

Begin by having a heart-to-heart talk and a sincere prayer with your wife about your concerns. Lay them out before God. See if your wife shares your concerns; she probably will. Have a couple of suggestions ready before you talk in order to set her heart at rest and let her know that she can follow your lead. Problem solving is generally a man's strength. His brain is wired to focus and figure. Your mood and motive are critical if you want cooperation. A wife and mother will feel secure in your leadership if she is convinced you have her and her children's best interests at heart. This will require you to spend some time with God in Word and prayer asking God's Holy Spirit to "search and know" (PS 139) your motives.

Realize that getting rid of both stuff and activities from your life goes against the cultural norms of our suburban society. Although we are seeing more of this behavior, people who opt for the simple life are still considered mavericks.

As you begin this courageous move, consider the following:

1. This change needs to be a family affair. Everyone must make changes. As leader-father, you should be first. Announce what steps you will take to simplify YOUR life and why.
2. Mom gets to go next
3. Involve the kids. Help them evaluate and choose how they will simplify their lives.
4. Maintain a mood of expectation and excitement. Pray together as a family. Such action sends a powerful message to your children about your leadership and faith.

5. Share your vision of what the family will be like once you all have made changes to simplify life.
6. Seize this challenge as an opportunity for appreciation, relationship building, spiritual renewal and rest!

If you are having trouble deciding what stuff needs to go, consider the following:

1. Turn off the “time vacuums”...those activities and things that suck away your time... TV, video games, cell-phone, iPod, and Internet... or significantly limit the time spent in these activities.
2. Have your kids choose no more than two activities besides school and do them well...same goes for mom and dad.
3. Block some time periods without anything scheduled, maintain them no matter what, and use them for family time.
4. The more stuff we have, the more time we spend taking care of it. Be willing to make some tough decisions involving throwing out “stuff”.

Newsflash! We really can't have it all. It will drive us crazy! Most of it we don't need anyway (1 TIM 6:8). The really important stuff of life is generally free...grace, forgiveness, relationships and love.

Most suburban people live the way they live because deep down they are afraid they will miss something. They have an emptiness inside they are desperately trying to fill. Sadly, what they really do miss is far more important than what they are trying to hang on to, and the emptiness will never truly be filled by activities or stuff.

Have courage and determination, dad, your gut is right and your goal is good. Now, make it happen!

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