

Combining personal (family) life with ministry

"Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim. 5:8)

"If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim. 3:5)

"No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." (1 Corinthians 9:27)

These introductory Bible parts are sharp words.

God clearly brings to our attention that we first have to take care of our family and our own spiritual wellbeing, before we can work for the church.

The pressure from the church can be big. There's a lot to be done and there may not be enough people available to do it all. Before you know it, you spent a lot of hours in the work for the church and your family is missing out.

You may think that God asks this of you and that your family has to make these sacrifices for the sake of the good cause.

Many Christians with great ministries have thought this, like Billy Graham, Bill Hybels and others.

Billy Graham told, when he got older, that this has been one of his biggest mistakes. That he had spent too little attention and time on his wife and children.

He formulates, what God has clearly put in the Bible: your wife (or husband) and your children are a higher priority than your work for the church.

God's priority list:

1. God – Your relationship with God, your own spiritual wellbeing and growth come first. Without this you can't do anything. (John 5:19, 30)
2. Your spouse and your children – they are your most important neighbours (neighbours = the people who are close to you). God says that whatever you do for Him, should arise from how good you take care of your husband or wife and children.

3. Spiritual work for the church, evangelism in the world etc. – This is in third place and will develop more according to God's will if you take good care of the first two priorities.

For single people it's easier to spend a lot of time on the work of the Lord. (1 Cor 7:32-35) They don't have to divide their time between their marriage and family life on the one hand, and the work for the Lord on the other hand.

That's why some people have a gift for being single (of course not every single has this gift automatically!).

But for single people it is just as true that they first of all have to spend enough time and attention to their personal relationship with God and their own spiritual growth.

Paul, who was single himself, writes this, as we saw in the introductory text: *"No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."* (1 Corinthians 9:27)

What does this mean in practice?

1. Make enough time for prayer, reading the Bible, thinking about God and other ways in which you maintain your relationship with God.
2. Take enough time for recreation so you stay healthy.
3. Make sure you have enough energy to keep developing a positive relationship with your husband or wife (talking together, doing fun things, sharing worries, eating together...).
4. Make sure you spent a lot of time with your children, that you're really part of their life, know how they're doing and lead them.
5. Sometimes there can be situations or phases in your marriage or family life that take up even more energy and time than usual. Such as sickness, your teens who go through a difficult phase, pregnancy, little baby's or the menopause of your wife that gives difficulties. You may have to withdraw yourself temporarily from church tasks, so you can dedicate yourself to your family. Do this in good conscience.

For your partner and your children it's essential, that they can be convinced that they're more important to you than the people you're helping in your spiritual work. Children sometimes grow into disliking God, the church and the Christian faith, because they think that everyone is important, except them. Prevent this at all times!

Make your family part of your faith

Next to clearly spending enough time with, and give enough attention to your family, it's also important to make them part of your faith.

So that your own life of faith, your spiritual work and your family life are not three separate, isolated areas, but are transparent, visible for your family.

How do you do this?

- Tell your family what you believe and why
- Share your faith experiences; answered prayer, special situations, God's guidance that you experience etcetera. Be open and real.
- Be interested in the faith and the spiritual experiences of your family members. Share with each other mutually.
- Give your family opportunities to do spiritual work as well, that's suited for them specifically. Give them recognition for it.
- Look for opportunities where you can work for the Lord as a team, where each family member can do something that fits him or her.
- When children get older, you can share with them once in a while what you find difficult in your spiritual life or your work for the Lord, and how the Lord helps you with that and gives you growth.
- When you're asked to do a new task, first discuss this with your partner and if necessary with your entire family, before you say yes.
- Give your partner and children space to have their own ministry, which may be very different from yours. Give appreciation and respect for that.

Finally, it's also important that we stimulate each other as church members to give our relationship with God and our family life the highest priority. Be especially caring for church members that spent a lot of time in ministry, or have a pastoral role. Make it possible for them to be with their family. Don't be at their door unexpectedly all the time with a problem for example. Respect their privacy as family. Encourage them to be with their family, by helping in the church or volunteering to take over a task sometimes, or by encouraging them to take time off or go on vacation.

Questions:

1. Do you have tips to keep your marriage good and to improve it?
2. Is the atmosphere in your congregation focused on seeing marriages and families as a high priority? How could this be improved?
3. Do you find it difficult sometimes to find the right balance between spiritual work and family?

4. How do your children experience the church? Do they like it? Do they feel at home?
5. Now that you've heard this topic, do you think you have to change something? In your own spiritual life or family life? Or in your ideas about other church members, such as the pastoral workers or minister?

Assignment:

1. Do something fun with your partner in the next weeks!
2. Evaluate your life on the basis of this subject and make adjustments if necessary!