

Phase 5: Growing a family

Matthew 6:31-33

November 13, 2016

Well, it has been quite a week in this great nation with the election of Donald Trump as our President-Elect. Like our nation, this congregation was split over the candidates. Some of us are conservatives; some of us are liberals and everything in between. Some were not happy about any of them. But I am very proud of the fact that we are able to live together as a church despite our differences. That is my prayer for our nation as well in the days ahead. Christ has given the church the ministry of reconciliation. So I would ask that you spend time on your knees praying for our leaders and modeling a grace-filled life for

those who disagree with us and how we live can together.

We have been going through the phases of life; preschool, elementary, the teen years, and young adults and what we can learn about our spiritual lives as we go through them. Today we look at our established families. You know if you are in this category if you are between the ages 35 and 55 years old and if you have children, they are most likely between the ages of 5 and 19 years old. You spend a lot of time attending your kid's extracurricular events and you are trying to figure out how to have a life after work. In fact, having a work/life balance may be the biggest thing you struggle with. You struggle with competing pressures and priorities. You have little to no margins in your life.

I am long past that stage, thank God. Being an empty nester, I have a life again. But maybe your life resembles the life of

our youth pastor, Matt Howe. Here is his typical day.

His day starts at 5:30am. Annabel's bus will come at 6:31am and she needs breakfast and because today they are serving "Tuna Surprise" in the school cafeteria, she's also going to need a lunch packed. Plus Kristian has gone back to work as an aide at Anderson High School this year, so she's going to need a lunch packed as well and her morning cup of coffee.

Kristian's out the door at 7am and it's time for Matt's breakfast and about 15 minutes of the national news. Then there is a basket of laundry that needs folding and a couple of bills that need to be paid and then the other three children stir.

The boys usually emerge first; Oliver and then Benjamin. They're going to need breakfast and lunches packed and papers signed and "bed head" corrected

and...who knows what else. Their bus comes at 8:47am.

Finally out stumbles little Nora, the youngest of the four children. She needs her chocolate milk and she needs it now! Of course for her it's more than just breakfast. Its clothes, shoes, teeth, and hair. Three days a week she needs to be at preschool and so at 9:15 they head out for church. Then Matt gets ready for the day, a shower and dressed for the day.

At 9:30am Matt finally arrives at work...4 hours after he woke up.

Of course it doesn't stop there, because at 11:50am he picks Nora up from school and drive her to the sitter's house and then there are the baseball practices, the piano lessons, the basketball games, the orchestra concerts, and the dance recitals. Yes, LIFE is BUSY!

Does that sound familiar? If it does, this message is for you. I want to begin by

hearing what Jesus says in Matthew 6:31-33.

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

We tend to think more is better. Every Thanksgiving I make a pledge not to over eat. Last year I had no intention of overeating. But people kept passing the food around. Soon I was doing seconds, then thirds. There were three different kinds of pie and I didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings so I had a small piece from each one. I had worn my fat pants but soon I was unbuttoning the top button and soon that was too tight. My only option was take off my pants but

that would freak out the nieces and nephews.

Every Christmas at the end of the day Melinda and I look at all the stuff we have bought and say to each other, "Where did all this come from?" And we make a promise, "Next year let's do a little less." More Jesus, more people, but less stuff. But every year we get more.

And it's the same with other stuff. We think we need a bigger house, bigger cars, and a bigger career. Plus we worry about our savings account, preparing for retirement, and having enough money saved up for college for the kids.

Work

My kids are grown up and have been out of the house for years and yet I still find work intruding into my home life. In a normal week I put in about 55-60 hours, which works pretty good for me now. I don't think I could have done that with

kids at home. But if anything extra is added; a wedding, a funeral, a church family needs help, or I get sick, family life suffers. It's because I have failed to build margins into my life.

Do you feel that way? Do you feel that accelerated pace in your life? We feel it in the work place. Some of you work very, very hard. And you know that there is no such thing as a 40-hour workweek. You have email to answer, fax machines humming, your phone is ringing. And that's just in the car on your WAY to work.

And then we crush ourselves with a little more hyperactivity. A round of golf, exercise at the gym, social activities. If you have kids you're running to dance lessons, soccer, piano lessons, and all that. And if we can eek out a vacation, we go to a national park called Mt. Rushmore. What's that about?

During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther taught that all work was divinely ordained. Whether you were a pope or you mopped floors, it could all be done to the glory of God. Luther talked about vocation, from the Latin word *vocari* meaning *calling*. Our vocation is not so much work as it is worship. We are to do on Monday at the office what we do on Sunday—glorify God.

From Luther's understanding of work came the Protestant work ethic. And while this work ethic is a good thing, it can easily be distorted. Work replaces God. It becomes an idol in our lives.

Work, like any human endeavor—sex, money, art—can be tainted by human sin. We are tempted to give honor and energy to jobs that ought to only be given to God. When work becomes the end toward which all human energy is directed, work becomes an idol—just another means of avoiding God rather

than serving God. It's interesting how many people use their careers to avoid getting involved in God's work. I ask people "Why are you sacrificing your health and your family spending all those nights down at the office or all those days on the road?" They are always quick to answer, "Oh, I'm doing it for my family so they can have a better life."

Really? Jesus said, "*What does it profit to gain the whole world and lose your soul in the process?*"

Work may be a gift of God, but it is a frequently perverted gift. Ask yourself, "Am I giving to my job that which I ought to give only to God? What are the limits I set for myself and my work? Our primary vocation, our real calling is to serve God in all we do.

Kids

I fear that in our pursuit of more stuff, we neglect building a Christ centered home.

Most of you are high capacity people. You have big goals for yourselves and big dreams for your kids. There is nothing wrong with that. Neither do I want to make you feel guilty today. You have enough guilt to deal with.

But don't forget your spiritual life. See, if you neglect your spiritual life, you can't develop your kids' spiritual life.

In Ephesians 4, the Bible says, "*bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*" Clearly God has given us the job of leading our children to faith.

In first Timothy 3, there are a set of qualifications for church leadership. Verse 4 says, "*He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—* In verse 5 it says why "*for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?*"

That's how important leading our children is.

So as Christ followers we have a special responsibility to our children to invest our time. But one of the myths I hear is that it's not the quantity of time that matters; it's the quality that counts.

You can't cheat a child in your priorities and then somehow make it up with a bit of quality time—which is almost always defined by the parent's convenience and availability, not the kids' preference. Even children who can't divide 10 by 2 can be razor sharp when it comes to the mathematics of priority. Even if you are able to fool them for a little while with trinkets brought back from business trips, eventually they'll figure out what those 'souvenirs' cost them: time with you.

A toddler doesn't think abstractly. She sees that you're around or not. Whether you're away at work, on the golf course,

or volunteering at church doesn't really make any difference. All she registers in that little brain of hers is that you're there or not. And yes, she is asking the question, "If he really does love me like he says, why he doesn't spend more time with me?"

Generally speaking, the more your child sees her parents, the more stability and less uncertainty there is in her life. This doesn't mean you should make her the center of the universe, but your regular physical and emotional presence, even in small ways, makes a big difference.¹

When I was a child, I usually chose to misbehave when my parents were absent. That didn't happen very often, but when they were gone, I took advantage of it. The most compelling reason was my Dad had a way of knowing when I was up to something bad. I would be in the middle

¹ Home Court advantage. Dr. Kevin Leman. Page 33

of getting into trouble and I'd turn around and there he would be. Being involved in your child's life will make a big difference. So we need to make sure we are giving them the time they need.

Now this may make you feel guilty—or you can choose to see it as an opportunity. Imagine the impact you can make by taking your son or daughter out to lunch every other week or so. Monday I was having a breakfast meeting at First Watch and there was Jesse Mullins with his three kids; Ella, Swing, and Derek. I thought “there is one brave man.” As I passed he said to me, “I hope Brooke arrives soon or I'm sunk.”

What if instead of sitting in your favorite chair with your face in your newspaper, why not read it with your child at the table and discuss it?

Yes, quantity time should be quality time too. But *more* is part of the equation that makes that time better. Traveling sports

teams and after school clubs may be stimulating and educational, but signing your child up for something every night of the week will ensure that you have neither. Parents who spend time with their kids help them grow up well.

Unfortunately, churches fall into the trap of dividing families as soon as they come through the door. Infants and toddlers go one place, children another, students someplace else. It has become very popular for churches to have a separate worship service for every age group. A certain amount of that is okay.

But this church has made a very deliberate decision to keep families together where we can. We think it is important. In fact, we have come to understand that the parents are the primary vehicle for passing on the faith to their children. Think about it; the church has only about 52 hours a year with your child. Since the average

member here comes twice a month, the real number is about half that— 25-29 hours a year. So who is going to have the bigger impact? The church or the parents?

So we have changed our strategy and are now trying to equip parents to pass on the faith to their children. We have even made this one of our core values; “We believe in intergenerational ministry where we all assume responsibility to pass on the faith—learning, serving, and worshipping together.”

Marriage

But we can't allow our commitment to our children to rob us of time investing in our marriage. I truly believe that investing in your marriage is more important than your kids. I tell the young couples this that I marry—if you have children, don't forget that your first priority is your marriage. Some couples make the mistake of investing everything

into their kids and neglecting their marriage. This is a bad mistake. If you have a good marriage, you provide your kids the trust and security they need.

Just having a regular time for everyone to sit down for a meal can do great things for your family relationships. Now I know by the time they hit high school that's almost an impossible thing to accomplish. What if you turned off the TV, and put down the phones and spent that meal time talking to each other?

- How was your day?
- What was the high point?
- What was the low point?
- Where did you see God at work?
- And then pray for each other

Spiritual Disciplines

If you want to see your kids grow in their spiritual life, you need to grow in your spiritual life. Let them see you practice your faith. I wish I had done that more as

a father, especially my time of prayer and scripture reading. I did mine when the kids weren't around because I didn't want to be disturbed. But I wish I had at least some of the time done it when they were around. Kids will pick up what they see you doing and understand that it is important to you. My mother had an hour of prayer and scripture reading every morning. She had a place in a spare bedroom with her books and chair. We knew when she was in there that she was spending time with God. She set a wonderful example.

You can do the same. Find a time and place to spend time in prayer and scripture reading. Jesus put prayer time into his schedule. In Mark 1:35, it says, "*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*"

Jesus had to have to have a prayer time and the only time he could work it in his schedule was early in the morning. Maybe you need to put that in your schedule?

You can set a great example by putting *worship* in ink on your calendar every Sunday morning. It should not be optional. If you are out of town, or if you have to work or you are sick, or if it's the apocalypse, you can stay home. Otherwise we would like you to be here.

Luke 1:16 says, "*And on the Sabbath day, Jesus went into the synagogue, as was his custom.*"

Jesus had a custom of weekly worship on the Sabbath. It was on his calendar in ink.

Worship is so important to you and me. The writer of Hebrews warns us not to neglect corporate worship. So when we come Sunday morning, tired from a week

of hassles, worn out by the relentless pressures of the world, shaken by an election that did not go our way, worship will remind us that God is still in control of the future and we can entrust our lives to him. From the biggest matter to the smallest. God knows. God cares.

Worship reminds us of this fact. And so I would say that worship is the single most important thing you can do in your week.

And what a great example it sets for your family and friends. That's why doing a face book check in on Sunday morning can be such a great witness. It tells your friends: this day is set apart for worship. Of all the things I could do today, I choose to worship with my church family.

Conclusion

Do you find yourself with a schedule with no margins? Then your first priority is to be relentless with your calendar. Changing your schedule can drastically

change your life. It can change your marriage, your children, and your spiritual life.

I want us to consider wiping clean our calendar, consider God in the equation and restart our schedule to reflect who you want to become as a Jesus follower.

So how is your schedule working for you? Are you tired all the time? Never get the essential things done? Are you late for everything? Does your family complain that work comes first? Do you find it impossible to spend time with God? When was the last time you took a vacation?

Maybe you are thinking this has nothing to do with your spiritual life. The greatest saints of the church would disagree. The thoughtful arrangement of your calendar is one of the holiest endeavors you can undertake if you want to change your life. What if I told you that planning a new schedule will play a critical role in

determining who you will be as a person,
a Christ follower, as a family member,
and as a friend?

Would you consider changing your hectic
lifestyle for a Christ centered home?