

SPORTS & SUNDAYS

Showing Your Family What Matters

As both a pastor and a parent, I am deeply aware of the many things that vie for our families' attention. Sports are just one of the competitors. It is vitally important for us to start talking about the many good things that compete for our attention.

We need to talk about what is important for our families and how we will choose to spend our time. We can do this by asking two important questions. The first is this:

What message are we sending to our kids with the way we spend our resources?

Whether we like it or not, the things we do on a day-to-day basis send a message to our families, and other people around us, about what we value.

When you make the effort to get two screaming children out the door to church on Sunday morning, you are showing them that this is important. In the same way, when you as a parent give up a free evening to shuttle your kids to soccer, softball or hockey, you are communicating that it's important to you and your family. When you spend time reading with your kids, you are saying "this is what we do as a family."

The way we spend our time sends a message.

There is nothing we can do to change that. What we can do, however, is take the time to actually think about what those messages are. This requires us to press pause for a minute, and reflect on the way we spend our days and paychecks.

It requires us to think about the things we still do even when we're tired, and the things that fall to the wayside when we're exhausted. All of this is communicating what's valuable in our homes.

The good news is this – there's no one-size-fits-all system. The things that I really value may be different than yours. Sports may be really important to one family, and academics may be really important to another. Vacationing together may be very valuable in one house, while in another, it doesn't matter at all.

And that's okay. Every family is unique.

I think it's important that we start deciding what actually matters to us and allowing the way we spend our resources to reflect that. We shouldn't put our kids in a particular activity, force them to take a certain class, go on an expensive vacation, sign up for a certain camp or even volunteer for a particular church program if it isn't valuable to us. We need to be willing to decide what matters to us, and live our lives based on those values.

The next question we need to be asking is this one –

What does the way I spend my resources say about my family's relationship with Jesus?

I know – this one hits where it hurts. I fall short in this one, more than I care to admit.

However, if we want to, as parents, be following the ways of Jesus, then we need to be asking ourselves these hard questions. If the way we are spending our evenings, weekends and Sundays doesn't reflect how we truly feel about Jesus – then why are we spending it that way?

The reality is that for our kids, actions speak louder than words. If we tell them that God is the first priority in our lives, but don't live it out, then it becomes confusing.

As you ask these questions, I'm sure that you'll start to see areas in your life that you're not happy with. There may be things you want to change or activities that need to be cut out.

My advice is two-fold: Give yourself grace, and then take action.

Don't beat yourself up about poor decisions, messed-up priorities or commitments you can't get out of. God is gracious with us, and so we can be gracious with ourselves too. We can't just stay in that place though. We need to take action to make the changes our family needs to better reflect what we value, and what God values. Again, this isn't a one-size-fits-all.

Maybe that simply means getting up and getting to church needs to become more important. Maybe it means saying no to certain travel opportunities – for work, activities or sports – and yes to rest and family time. Maybe it means sitting with your kids and reassessing their schedules – is there something you can Cut out? Cut back on? Change?

Let me leave you with some words from John Wesley. I read these words from centuries ago in my first few weeks of ministry, and they have stuck with me ever since:

"Surely if you love and fear God yourself, this will be your first consideration: 'In what business will your son be most likely to love and serve God? In what employment will he have the greatest advantage for laying up treasure in heaven?'

This has increasingly become the lens I try to filter the things that come into our home and family – not just in employment, but in activities and the way we spend our time. I think this actually reflects the words of Jesus in Matthew 6 – "Seek first the kingdom of God."

It's not always easy, but it is so worth it.

For more resources like this one, check out www.equipfamily.com.

