

YOUR KIDS AND YOUR TIME

BY: **WALT MUELLER**, CPYU President



“God has established parents – nobody or nothing else – as the ones primarily responsible for the spiritual nurture of children.”



I think often about the story I once heard about a busy woman who was struggling to balance the demands of her life outside the home while being a wife and mother. One night her nine-year-old son approached her as she typed diligently on her computer in the corner of the family room. “Mommy,” the little boy said, “if you had a dog, and you really loved this dog, and you worked real hard to earn the money to buy him the fanciest dog house and the best dog food, don’t you think it would be better if once in a while you played with that dog?”

There are many things that steal time with our kids. Work, clubs, outside commitments, over-scheduling, are just a few of the time-stealers. In today’s social media and smartphone saturated world, we can be physically present, but otherwise detached as we sit in the

same room while focused solely on the devices in our hands. Parents, when you aren’t spending time with your children, three things happen.

First, someone or something else nurtures, catechizes, and raises your kids for you.

It could be anyone from a baby-sitter to a day-care worker to a schoolteacher to the television or digital media. In today’s world, it’s whoever they focus ears, eyes, and attention on during those almost 9 hours-a-day of screen time. Social media, YouTube celebrities, marketers, TikTok videos. . . the list goes on and on. One of the risks of living in today’s pluralistic society is that these surrogate parents will instill false values in your children. Whoever speaks first to a child on anything. . . ANYTHING. . . will set the bar for truth, making everything



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else seen and heard after that subject to being evaluated by that first standard. What are your kids learning about identity, gender, sexuality, work, play, academics, relationships, love, etc.? God has established parents – nobody or nothing else – as the ones primarily responsible for the spiritual nurture of children.

Second, your kids will learn from your busy lifestyle.

They will look at how you live out your commitments to career, family, and church and learn that it is more important to achieve, work, and expand social circles than it is to be at home. And what they learn gets passed on to the next generation. If you find it difficult to be at home with your family, your children will find it even harder to spend time with your grandchildren. If you place a premium on job and career, they will grow up to do the same.

Third, your children may suffer in ways you never imagined.

When we are not available to help them through the difficult years of adolescence, we open the door for our children’s involvement in a vast array of dangerous behaviors and problems. Children of absent-due-to-busyness parents are not only left to listen more closely to the life-shaping messages of media and their peers, but they tend to be more prone to emotional and substance abuse problems. The reason? Mom and Dad are absent, a reality that can hurt so deeply that kids may enlist unhealthy ways to deal with their pain. And, there’s a clear and strong connection between parent absence and family breakdown with the very real presence of loneliness and mental health issues in our kids.

When we choose to have children, we make another choice commonly forgotten in these busy days: We choose to become parents. Parenting takes time. Don’t allow yourself to fall into the trap of believing that “quality time” is more important than “quantity time.” Quality time always has a way of fitting a parent’s schedule while disregarding

the need of the child. We must learn to say no to other demands that are not as important as our children. When we don’t spend time with our kids, they will begin to interpret our actions as rejection. It isn’t long before rejection becomes resentment, and resentment turns into hostility, which in turn leads to rebellion. Quality and quantity are equally necessary!

There is an old Navajo saying: “A man can’t get rich if he takes proper care of his family.” If we were to add some more time-tested wisdom to that saying it would continue on: “but a man who spends time with his family can pass on the legacy of what it means to love God and his family more than the idol of his things.”

Back in the 19th century it was quite common for people of all ages to keep detailed diaries and journals. The very busy Charles Francis Adams, son of John Quincy Adams, was a diplomat whose time was in great demand. One of his shortest journal entries says, “Went fishing with my son today – a day wasted.” When historians checked the journal entry in his son Brook’s journal, they found this: “Went fishing with my father today – the most wonderful day of my life.” There you have it.

Here is a resolution that all parents would do well to make: *I will consciously work to give more of my time to being with and intentionally nurturing my kids in the Christian faith.*

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