10 Tips for Balancing Ministry and Family Time

1. Date your spouse.

Even after you are married, you need to date your spouse. Schedule a night once or twice a month for a night out together, without the children. You and your children will benefit from making your marriage a priority. If you can't afford a baby-sitter, find another couple with whom you can trade off baby-sitting duties.



2. Wherever you are, be all there.

When you are about the Lord's work, remember it is Christ you are serving. A poor work ethic invites ridicule and diminishes credibility. On the other hand, don't dwell on ministry problems and responsibilities after you leave the office. Flip off the switch when you head for home. If you're preoccupied, you time with your family won't really count. Let your loved ones know that they are truly cherished.

3. Eat dinner together.

A common thread among successful people is that most grew up eating dinner with their families. The benefits of eating meals with your family are both obvious and numerous: Manners are taught, principles are modeled, and lessons are learned.

4. Learn to say no for your children.

Many children want to be involved in everything. (Where do they learn that, I wonder?) Parents need to remember that, contrary to popular opinion, the world doesn't revolve around their kids' extracurricular pursuits. Help children prioritize their time with an emphasis on serving God with the gifts he's given them.

5. Never publicly ridicule your spouse.

Some Christian leaders regularly make fun of their spouses. Repeated personal illustrations—however humorous—can wound the ones your love most. Your congregation needs to know that you treasure your mate and would never toy with temptation.

6. Schedule dates with your children.

An out-of-town hospital call or a speaking engagement can provide a wonderful opportunity for you to spend quality time with one of your children. Buy a disposable camera so your child can chronicle the trip. I've found that my children will open up freely when it is "just us" for an extended period. For best results make sure the ratio is one parent to one child.

7. Take your children to a place that is special to them.

As I write this book, my three children range in age from six to twelve. About once every six weeks, I take each child to a special eating place that he or she has chosen. This location becomes a *sacred secret* that my kids do not disclose to one another. Each child gets to choose a different place twice a year. I'm noticing that the older they get, the more cultured their palates

have become! McDonald's has given way to more expensive choices. My nine-year-old, Sadie, used to choose Applebee's. She loved the barbecue ribs. Once when Sadie and I returned from lunch, Samuel, my six-year-old, loudly declared, "Sadie, you ate at Applebee's." Like Simon Peter, she denied it three times.

Unconvinced, Samuel whispered to me, "Dad, her breath smells like Applebee's!"

8. Pray together each night.

If you are married, there is no better way to close out the day than to pray with your spouse. This involves your spouse in your ministry and allows you to pray for each other's needs. These prayers promote intimacy and foster commitment to god and to your marriage.

9. Turn the television and computer off, and play together.

Television stalls conversation and interaction. Use it sparingly. Couples and families who watch TV for extended periods of time or spend countless hours on the computer talk to one another less and less. Replace those hours with interactive activities that stretch your mind and creativity. You'll make memories that last a lifetime.

10. Keep the communication lines open.

The need to communicate doesn't end when you turn forty or when the kids group up. Someone said, "If Adam had been talking to Eve, she wouldn't have been out in the garden talking to a snake." Guys, we need to be listening *and* talking. Communication is key to making a ministry marriage work.

When I was growing up, I was always intrigued by the personal attention my parents gave to each other. As we ate dinner together, my dad would pull an index card out of his pocket. On it would be a few words he had jotted down that day. Referring to the card, Dad would share events of the day or things he'd heard. He might say, "Jed Winston got season tickets to the Reds' games," or "A new Disney movie is coming out." Even now, Dad makes his list and goes over it with Mom. She knows that when he jotted something down,he was thinking of her. She knows that she was on his mind throughout the day, and that makes their moments together even more precious.

Excerpted from Keeping Your Head Above Water