

Capturing Time

Dear Fernando,

Admit it, as pastors we keep strange hours. Some days we start with an early 6:00 breakfast study, have several meetings during the day, and conclude with an evening activity. Not every day is maxed out; but hard work seems synonymous with effective ministry.

While this situation is inherent to the pastorate, I don't think it has to keep us from our families. Even though some days require being out early or away from home at night, I have learned several ways to maximize time with my family.

As a pastor, I need to remember that my schedule is largely determined by me. Other people may have expectations for my time, but ultimately I decide what is going to be placed in my Daytimer. Obviously, some events are steadfast and immovable, but appointments, administrative work and study time can be adapted to my schedule. There is no question that I am available for hospital emergencies, family crises, and babies that are born at inconsiderate hours. In one sense, I am on call 24 hours a day, but I don't have to jump at everything. In reality, I have flexibility in my daily work as a pastor. When I make it a habit to take an early look at events and opportunities before me, I can make sure that priority activities are included in my schedule.

Let me pass on to you some of the things that I have done to capture time with my family.

When our children were in elementary school, I found my schedule allowed me to be the only male parent accompanying the class on field trips. I went to museums and concerts with my children and their friends, and I got to know teachers and other parents on these escapes away from the office. Time-wise, it usually took either a morning or afternoon until 3, so I shifted my schedule accordingly.

I have also made it a point, if at all possible, to be around after school when my kids are home. I might just stop by for a few minutes to see how things are going and then return to work. Sometimes I pick them up from school, and they con me out of a pop or a burger. Once we pulled the middle seat out of our minivan and ate French fries around a low table in our limousine.

When my children participate in after-school sports, my schedule allows me to stop by practice and watch for a while. I found that I have the flexibility to make after school games because I can adjust my schedule to accommodate these special events. When I am at the games, I don't bring a book to read anymore. If I am there to watch them play, I need to watch and show that I am there because I am their dad and am proud of them.

This week, our church has town meetings Monday through Thursday night. Does this mean I will be running from morning until night, breezing in only for a quick dinner? No. I will go out for a cup of coffee with my wife this afternoon

and later be available to help my son work on his car or play basketball, or soccer, or whatever else may be going on.

The ministry of presence among my own family is of critical value. My job allows me to control my schedule. I can choose to be a driven pastor, squeezing every minute to build a church. Or I can choose to be a balanced pastor, not sacrificing my own family for the church family.

It bothers me that some pastors' kids watch the church steal their dad or mom. But this doesn't have to be the situation. If we allow it and don't educate our congregations, we ourselves are at fault. I want my kids to grow up thinking it was really great having dad as a pastor. Therefore, I try to impress my children with the added perks of Christian service. Let's make sure we talk about these benefits with our families. They are quick to pick up on the challenges of the ministry. Let's help them also see the blessings.

Lewis Bird, a professor in Marriage and Family, reminded our class one day about the importance of giving time to our children. He said, *Remember, your children will rise up and call you something. I want that something to be positive rather than negative and I think my chances are better if I capture time with them and share my life with them now while I have the opportunity.*

I only have a window of a few prime years with my children, as do you Fernando. After that, they will get busy and have other interests. I consider it a crime if I am working all of the time when these windows of opportunity are open. I can't afford to be a workaholic while my kids are living at home. When they are gone, I can increase my load, but not now.

As you grow in your professional ministry skills, dear friend, likewise become more effective in capturing time for your family.

Praying for balance in your life,

Randy Berg

Calvary Community Church, Hastings, Minnesota

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise, but as wise.

Ephesians 5:15