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Career and Family

Many men and women have trouble juggling a demanding career with the needs of their spouse and children. There is much angst when a mother has to leave her children to return to the workforce. How will the kids survive without her? Will they think they are no longer loved? How will the parent survive without seeing the children as much as he or she did before?

In a recent episode of the "Office," Jim returns to work after his wife had their baby and he is guilt ridden. Of course, Dwight, the oddest of the bunch sees Jim's weakness and tries to exploit it. Jim falters because of his love for his child but in classic fashion, he rebounds and gets even with Dwight.

Although this subject is good fodder for a comedy show, there is nothing funny when this happens to you or someone you love. It is exceedingly hard to no longer be as present to your family as you were. These feelings of worry and guilt are normal and are actually very good. They are a manifestation of the love and the caring that a parent or spouse has for their children or significant other.

The fact of the matter is that life happens and it requires us all to adapt to change and circumstances beyond our control. If a family cannot survive on one income, then it is necessary for a second income to come to the rescue. This, in and of itself, is being a good mom or dad. It should also be a teachable moment for children to watch their parents deal with change and turn it around, making a seemingly bad situation into something that is good for the entire family. Here are a few concrete suggestions to accomplish this.

First, there is the concept of "sacrificial love." This is the strongest type of love in which one family member is willing to do without something or suffer for the good of the whole. It is taught not through words but through deeds. Children can be told, "There is nothing

more in the world that I would rather do than stay home with you. But we all have to stick together and help mom (or dad) in paying the bills." Enlisting the children in the campaign is a very smart thing to do because they then will understand what is happening, observe your silent suffering, and start to contribute. They will be better people for it and someday, outstanding parents.

Make time to eat together and rest together at least one or more times a week. This time must be sacred and all electronic and other potential interruptions need to be turned off. Family meals are times for exchanging ideas, not for listening to the news. If you must, get a DVR and record it. The children and your spouse must know that they have your undivided attention. You need to know the converse as well.

Another way of dealing with separation is to create happy memories whenever you can. Parents are the ultimate "memory makers." The memories we create will be spoken of long after we are gone. The element of surprise is a great tool for creating a memory. Here are a few examples.

- Plan a costume party for your adult friends AND their children not on Halloween but on a random day. The kids will love it and so will you.
- Write notes and put confetti in your spouse and children's lunches.
- Take everyone on a surprise trip to the park, the beach, or the movies.
- Watch movies together and form a movie club electing one of your kids president.
- Get glass markers and write notes on your bathroom mirrors or on your car windows that make your kids smile.
- Have a drawing contest on every holiday and post the pictures on a bulletin board in your home. Scan them into your computer and make a slide show of them.

When you have time, be generous with it. Do what your family members want to do. In time, they will want to do what you want. Generosity is self-perpetuating in people.

Teach your family how to sacrifice by sacrificing for them.

- Watch football or baseball with your husband. In time, he will be watching "The Housewives of New York" with you.
- Eat some kind of food that everyone else likes and you don't, just so you can be part of the family unit.

- Have "Date Night" at least once or twice a month. Children love to see their parents spending time together. It is a great gift for your spouse and your children.

- Without notice, take the kids for a walk in the park or an outdoor picnic.

Give your children the gift of Faith. This virtue will get them through many difficult times in your life and theirs. Religion is something that is caught and not taught. Only you can give it. Worship together as a family as frequently as you can and take every opportunity to show your children the wonders and the goodness of Creation. Give thanks for what you have and for each other at every opportunity.

Make bag lunches and go with your family to distribute them to the homeless on the streets. Make it a family project. The children will experience firsthand what it means to be poor, alone, and without shelter. Talk about these things. This is a an act of Mercy, another quality that only you can give them.

Finally, make it your business to have "family vacations," even if they last for just a weekend. This gives you the opportunity to have everyone together and create memories that will be cherished for generations to come. It is OK to be a little "goofy" with your kids.

In these difficult financial times, there is no doubt that the family unit is strained. Other generations have faced the same or worse and emerged stronger because of the challenge. If you have a career and your family needs the income, go forward without guilt but with determination by making this a life lesson that will strengthen your spouse, children, and the generations that follow.

Be at peace.

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