

Work-Life Balance

There are many demands on our limited time, energy and resources - work, spouse, children, parents, friends and hobbies among the major contenders. In order to experience a life of abundance, maintaining a balance is the key.

To begin with, let us take a look at marriage.

Marriage

The institution of marriage is considered to be a *synergy*, which is a functioning together of two or more things to produce results not independently obtainable; $1+1 = 3$. In our routine living, home is where we need to recharge and love should be the antidote for many of our problems and challenges we face. True demonstration of love between an individual and his/her spouse becomes the bedrock of us being able to sincerely love people who are a part of our lives every day.

Most couples today struggle to keep their families together. To add on to the distractions there are financial commitments like a home loan which needs to be repaid, adamant teenaged children in the family who seek their way out, or a probable job loss for either of the partners, which may all be deterrents. These real-life problems prevent individuals from finding time and energy to demonstrate true love. And in the process, love tends to get trivialized as a romantic, feel-good emotion relegated to something which was present during the earlier years of a marriage.

So, what is love? *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.* To demonstrate that kind of love, a life time of practice and dedication to loving others is required, beginning with the one person to whom you promised to spend the rest of your life with.

The ways of demonstrating love might change with age and time, but the need for love does not change during the lifetime of a marriage.

Marriages either grow or they regress, they never stand still. Gary Chapman describes seasons of marriage:

1. Winter (cold, lonely)
2. Spring (excitement, hope, and joy)
3. Summer (deep sense of commitment, satisfaction)
4. Fall (drifting apart)

We should work towards ensuring that our marriages stay in spring or summer!¹

Let us look at a family in a broader sense.

Family

A family is an interdependent, inter-related and interactive system, made up of individuals forming this collective entity. A family is a nurturing environment where each person can blossom to fulfill their potential.

The overall health of a family, directly impacts each individual of the family. When there are problems in the family especially between the husband and wife, everything else is affected. Most

¹ Chapman, Gary, “*Four seasons of Marriage*”, United States of America: Tyndale House of Publishers, 2005.

of the problems that children exhibit such as poor concentration, rebelliousness, low self-esteem, excessive anxiety etc are a reflection of the marital problems that their parents are facing.

Maybe you feel that time you are spending with your spouse is not appreciated by her/him. Maybe you feel you are not getting through to your teenage children.

Have you stopped to consider if you are speaking the same language?

Communication

When we don't speak the same language, communication comes to a halt. When you and your spouse don't speak the same language, it is not surprising that the relationship breaks down. When it comes to a relationship we need to speak the language of love.

Gary Chapman describes five love languages -

1. Words of encouragement (appreciation, praise)
2. Physical touch (holding hands, cuddling, physical intimacy)
3. Quality time (going for a walk, chatting, spending time together)
4. Gifts (roses, chocolates, a token of appreciation, gifts for special occasions)
5. Acts of service (doing the grocery, household chores, helping with cleaning).

All of us might speak a little of each of these languages but one or two might be our principal language. This means we express our love in that language and we receive love effectively in that language.²

How do you find out what language your spouse and children speak and understand? We need to understand and observe how they express their love towards you. In order for our love to be communicated effectively, we need to know and speak their language.

Out of Balance

Victor Frankl, an Australian neurologist and psychiatrist, was a Holocaust survivor. He believes that we can discover meaning in life through (1) work or doing a deed, (2) love and relationships (3) the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering³.

Do you agree that you can find meaning in life through your relationships? Do we define ourselves only by our work profile?

Another reason is our culture. Is our culture promoting 80-hour work week?

Larry Burkett in his book "*Business by the Book*" says that when a person works more than 60 hours a day he is out of balance. Some of us are over dedicated to our work. Our work interferes with our relationship with God and family.⁴

2 Chapman, Gary, "*The Five love languages*", Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1992.

3 Frankl, Victor E, *Man's search for Meaning*. New York: Pocket Books, 1959.

4 Burkett, Larry, "*Business by the Book*", Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998.

Is our work eating into our time with God and family? What is the cost we are willing to pay? Are our relationships suffering? Is it taking a toll on our health?

One thing my husband and I practice periodically is having a “break day”. We decide one day of the week when we won’t bring work home. We spend the evening together, cooking, eating out or watching a movie. We started this practice when we went through a phase where both our work schedules were terrible. Now that we have a toddler, we try to meet up for lunch once in a fortnight, where we can focus on each other. We have benefited greatly by this and feel periodically recharged in our relationship.

Yet another reason for being out of balance is a poor marriage and strife at home. Many times when home and family is a source of stress and not a place of rejuvenation, we might find ourselves spending more time at work.

Seasons

A challenge in all metros today is the one faced by working mothers about the time they spend away from their children. Some of our friends often regret the fact that they spend 10-12 hours a day away from their very young children. Most of these children grow up with caretakers and in daycare centers.

There are many seasons in life - a time to study, a time to work hard, a time to rest, a time to make children the priority....

You might be expecting a baby, is it a good time now to join a start-up? Are you flexible enough to make the necessary changes and adjustments as you move through different seasons? Are you enjoying the season you are in now? Or are you enduring it? Or are you saying “Why were the old days better than these?”

What season are you in now? Do you need to tweak your priorities?

Health

We need to pay attention to our health. Most adults require seven to eight hours of sleep every day. The other aspect is exercise. It is recommended that we exercise 30 minutes every day. Exercise helps us stay physically and emotionally healthy. Amongst other benefits exercise stimulates the release of endorphins which promote the feeling of well-being. We need to eat a balanced diet for our body to function effectively. We also need to pursue our other interests, whether it is painting, gardening or doing social work, for us to stay psychologically alive. Are we short changing our body? Whatever we put our time, energy, and money into will become more important to us.

Let us consider if we need to rearrange and re-prioritize our lives so that we can spend the time needed to be with our family. We need to guard what has been entrusted to our care. On our death bed, will we regret not having spent enough time with our family or at work?