

## BALANCING FAITH, FAMILY & PRACTICE<sup>SM</sup>

### ***Time-Out for Family***

by Tracy Farris

*First published in Physician Magazine (September / October 2003)*

Tears filled my eyes when our 4-year-old stepped to the plate at his first tee-ball game. For years, my husband, Kelly, and I had hoped—even prayed—that our son would one day provide us the pleasure of cheering him on in organized sports. This was a special moment and, like all good moms, I had my camera in hand, preserving the moment for future generations.

Years rolled by while we sat in our lawn chairs watching the entire team of 4-, 5-, then 6-year-olds chase the ball into center field. Finally, we evaluated the time we spent at the ballpark, considering the significance of it all. During the early parenting years, my vision was clear: I would impart spiritual wisdom to my little ones at home; they would learn respect and self-control on the sports field. They would become well-rounded during the magical season of childhood, and I would be one happy mama.

Instead, I found that I was quite unhappy.

Our schedule was getting the best of us; I was overwhelmed by practices, snack preparation, and the time spent driving. Little League wasn't the only commitment wearing me down. I spent my mornings in a swirling mass of swim-team paraphernalia,

attempting to get my children to their appropriate lanes on time. I also juggled orthodontist appointments with Little League and ballet class, many times leaving my sanity and the diaper bag on the curb of the field parking lot.

I was grumpy—and particularly with Kelly. He had chosen to practice at a small county clinic to allow for more family togetherness. In reality he was spending more time at baseball practices and games than he was throwing a ball in the back yard. My own pursuits also conflicted with the children's activities and cluttered our schedule.

I was ministering in various capacities at church, caring for a family—and pregnant. Kelly's "family-friendly" job allowed him to be home for dinner, but dinner never seemed to be on the table. When he headed home after work, the rest of the family wasn't there. He had to come home and compensate for my absence and overcommitment, which left little time for rest and relaxation.

#### **A Change in Plans**

How had we arrived at this point of utter frustration? Weren't we dedicated to putting faith and family first? Somehow things had gotten off track. We wrongly

believed that if we didn't provide a wide variety of activities for our children, we would be negligent as parents. We had followed cultural trends instead of the Holy Spirit, ignoring the priorities we claimed to value most.

We recognized the need for our children to have a real, living faith in the living God who created them, but overactivity was crowding out our opportunities to spiritually nurture them. So, we decided to do something drastic: eliminate most activities from our schedule and approach new endeavors with caution. To aid this process, we came up with an "activity evaluation worksheet"

Other steps included an agreement not to commit the children—or ourselves—to anything without first discussing it as a couple. We defined priorities for our family: regularly eat dinner together; pray together; read aloud together—especially God's Word. We never called it devotions; we just said, "Let's read." We found that we didn't have to make it complicated or flashy; our children just enjoyed being with us—and vice versa.

Another positive decision was to give our children far fewer possessions than we had in the past. (This has been especially

## BALANCING FAITH, FAMILY & PRACTICE<sup>SM</sup>

page 2

difficult because we like stuff, too.) Why clutter our kids' lives with temporary fluff? By buying less, we limited the number of distractions and obligations that competed for our attention.

We found that the less crowded our schedule became, the more responsive our children were to us. This atmosphere enhanced our desire to instruct them in righteousness, as well as their receptivity to our guidance. I found myself saying, "Just go play!" less often, because I truly wanted my kids with me.

### **No Cakewalk, But Worth It**

Life is simpler now, but walking counter to the culture is hard at times. Our commitment requires perseverance and sacrifice. I continually battle the lies that tell me I am not giving my children enough; comments from well-intentioned Christian friends that suggest I'm sheltering my kids can cause guilt.

The truth is our children are involved in outside activities, just far fewer than their peers. Today, we're reaping the benefits of the decision to cut back: Kelly and I have time

to show our children how valuable they are to us and to the Lord. Their hearts are turned toward us, and we're unified.

It's not always easy doing the right thing for the sake of family, but the blessings far outnumber the sacrifices.

---

*Tracy Farris writes from El Paso, Texas. Her husband, Kelly, practices in a rural clinic.*