

# Life beyond the Cubicle. Where Do Our Priorities Lie?

Chuck Colson • Balancing Family & Work

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**BreakPoint** with Charles Colson

There is a scene in the movie *Elf*-a great family film sure to become a holiday classic-that should be familiar to many American families. When the father, played by James Caan, arrives late to dinner, he doesn't stop moving. Instead he fills his plate while telling his wife and son that he'll be eating in his bedroom because he's "very busy" and has brought home a pile of work he has to do.

The film comes to a climax when the son arrives at his father's office, where he's working late on Christmas Eve of all nights, and the father has to decide between his job and his family.

Work or family: That's a decision moms and dads face every day. Americans pride themselves in a strong work ethic, but that ethic has disintegrated into a contest for who can work the most.

Columnist Amy Joyce of the *Washington Post* has been following the lives of 80-hour-a-week Washingtonians. Recently, Joyce wrote about Lisa, whose father worked long hours and died before he could pursue any of his dreams and hobbies. This left Lisa "with strong feelings regarding the importance of maintaining a work-life balance." Then there's Kate, who has found a good balance: "Work will come and go, she reasons. But there is only one life."

Similar thinking is going on in New York City. Recently in the *New York Times Magazine*, Lisa Belkin traced the lives of eight highly successful women who "had it all"-and found it all unsatisfying.

These eight women had Princeton degrees and Harvard and Columbia law degrees. "They chose husbands who could keep up with them" and "waited to have children because work was too exciting"-the feminist dream? Not exactly. "I don't want to be on the fast track leading to a partnership at a prestigious law firm," said Katherine Brokaw, who left the workplace to stay home with her three children. "Some people define that as success. I don't." Said Vicky McElhaney Benedict, another successful lawyer who quit to stay home with her children: "This is what I was meant to do. . . I like life's rhythms when I'm nurturing a child."

In one sense, feminism has had a positive effect, argues Belkin. Capable female employees are coveted for their talents, but in a backlash against the feminist ideal, they're also more willing to leave, generally claiming family obligations. The "glass ceiling" was not the problem; it was their deep-down desire to be mothers. Many companies are recognizing the need to eliminate the dilemma of deciding between work and family by granting extended leave and, in some cases, sabbaticals. That, in turn, has had a positive impact on men as fathers have taken advantage of this

benefit and are able to manage their schedules around their family life, reversing the "absentee father" model.

This illustrates plainly the natural order-that is, the way God created us. We're wired for work, of course, to be productive, but we're also created to have children and raise them. Women wanting to be home with their children is a good sign, not only of biology, but of moral disposition. It's a good sign, as well, that more and more women are discovering the lies of feminism: that what really matters are those moments with the family-not reaching the next rung on the corporate ladder.