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How Do Spouses Divide the Load?

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How Do Spouses Divide the Load?

Abstract

"We don't have it all figured out, but we've got each other's backs, and, in the end, by the grace of God, that's enough."

Posting about sharing family tasks from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/how-do-spouses-divide-the-load/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

How Do Spouses Divide the Load?

 [all in allthings.org/how-do-spouses-divide-the-load/](http://allthings.org/how-do-spouses-divide-the-load/)

October 5,
2016

Donald and Erica Roth

“I think our marriage is in trouble.” My wife rolls her eyes as I show her an article from [The Atlantic](#) describing a 2001-2004 study that found that couples who had a clear delineation of roles were more happy with their marriage than those who divided household tasks more ambiguously. Erica knew what I meant: not that we were in actual marital trouble (she wanted to make sure I pointed that out), we just tend to divide a lot of our household tasks on an *ad hoc* basis.

In fact, there are few household tasks that one of us doesn't do at least some of the time. I usually cook breakfast and get the kids ready in the morning, while Erica usually cooks dinner. We both do the dishes, laundry, and clean the house; although, neither of us do it as often as the tiny imaginary versions of our mothers floating over shoulders think we should. We both watch the kids, give them baths, and put them to bed, and we both work outside the home during the day. Neither of us would ever wish to be a single parent, but neither of us is helpless when the other one is out of town.

At the same time, the commentary from the article rings a little true. Especially when we talked through another article I found, this one a survey of how couples perceive their contributions to the family. [The survey](#) found that the average couple spends a roughly equal amount of time each week working for the household, even if the division between child care, housework, and paid work is different between spouses; however, spouses' perception of how much of the load each one was carrying differed significantly, with both sides tending to overestimate their contributions.

This is totally us too, maybe worse than most couples because we split so many tasks “equally.” I am certainly guilty of muttering under my breath as I have to refill the toilet paper roll *again*. At the same time, Erica grumbles when she comes home and breakfast dishes aren't cleaned up. We probably both think we do more than our fair share, so why do we do it this way?

It's not that we set out with some intentional egalitarian vision of trying to equally divide our domestic tasks. In fact, we'd call ourselves [complementarian](#) rather than egalitarian.¹ Instead, Erica and I have made our marriage work by drawing a bit on our parents, a bit on our own work styles, and, ultimately, just doing what needed to be done. It's worked for us for eight years, certainly not flawlessly, but when iAt asked us to write about how we tackled gender roles in our household, we agreed to share a little window into how we've made it this far.

There is no such thing as “women's work”: Donald's Perspective

One of the reasons that we divide tasks equally is because I (Donald) really don't like the idea that there's certain tasks that one or the other of us *can't* do. My parents always emphasized to me that there's no such thing as work that's “beneath” you, and it seems to me that too often the delegation of domestic tasks to women carries with it an assumption that those jobs are lesser in some way.

Similarly, if husbands are supposed to be a type² of Christ in marriage, then Christ's willingness to put on the robes of a servant and wash his disciple's feet should be instructive. While there are certainly tasks that one or the other of us is better at, I've always felt that it's my responsibility to make sure that I'm willing and able to do whatever I need to do.

There is no such thing as Super Woman: Erica's Perspective

The Lord has definitely called me (Erica) and Donald to different lives than what we imagined in our dating years.

We both love our jobs and have been able to enjoy our newest calling as parents. Dividing tasks when it was just the two of us seemed like a “nicety,” but, as we’ve grown our family over the past couple years and bought our own home, it has truly become a necessity. I have always appreciated having quality family time, so I love when Donald does the dishes, folds laundry, etc. so that we have more time together versus only one of us working on the household tasks.

It seems that social media showcases that women can “do it all” (darn Pinterest!) but my reality is that I struggle to get through a good day at work, a healthy meal on the table, a clean house and kids in bed on time. I am a weak vessel³ and a sinner, and I am thankful for a spouse that digs in with whatever is needed to provide for our family (even if that’s washing poop out of our toddler’s undies when potty training). It is a humbling statement to admit I can’t do it all, and there is no such thing as superwoman. If anything, this realization continually points me back not to my husband (as he is far from perfect) but to my ultimate Savior, reminding me to beg for His grace to sustain me through my daily callings as child of God, wife, mother and employee.

Dividing tasks is about saying “I love you” through what we do

We’ve found Gary Chapman’s concept of [love languages](#) to be fairly helpful in thinking about how we work together in our family. I (Donald) appreciate it when someone shows the forethought to anticipate what I want or need and take care of it. Erica appreciates it when someone takes time to spend quality time and just chat with her. When it comes to dividing household tasks, I try to take the jobs that I know Erica doesn’t like, such as taking out trash or anything that involves having to get up earlier in the morning. Erica takes jobs that helps make sure the family is ready for the week, like planning grocery lists or making dinners that give us leftovers for the next day, and we tend to rotate things that give us quality time with the kids or cover for the other when one of us feels down. We try to make sure that the way we contribute to the household is a way of saying “I love you” to the other person.

Overall, we’re far from perfect as a couple (no matter how we manage our family image on Facebook), and we’d be lying if we said there weren’t plenty of fights that we might avoid if we just designated jobs for each of us to do instead of figuring things out as we go along, but there are plenty of other times where me (Donald) baking for a church potluck gives Erica a break or where Erica handling some bills keeps me from stressing about finances so that I can focus on stressing out over those tests I still haven’t graded. We don’t have it all figured out, but we’ve got each other’s backs, and, in the end, by the grace of God, that’s enough.

Footnotes

1. Erica’s vows included a promise to submit to me that I didn’t reciprocate. I had to keep a straight face through that part or she would have kicked me in the middle of the ceremony. ↩
2. I mean this in the theological category of “type” as pointing to a greater antitype, not that husbands directly function as a kind of Christ. ↩
3. Donald accidentally read this as “weak-er vessel” during edits, and I had to remind him of the importance of careful reading. ↩