

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

10-6-2016

Our Stereotypical American Family

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Recommended Citation

Frisch, K. E., & Frisch, K. (2016). Our Stereotypical American Family. Retrieved from https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/565

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Our Stereotypical American Family

Abstract

"God has blessed us in different ways, so shouldn't we play to the strengths God has given us?"

Posting about a stay-at-home dad family 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/our-stereotypical-american-family/>

Keywords

In All Things, family, parenting, child rearing, work, father and child

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

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

Our Stereotypical American Family

 [all in allthings.org/our-stereotypical-american-family/](http://allthings.org/our-stereotypical-american-family/)

October 6,
2016

Kayt and Kurt Frisch

At first glance, we look like a stereotypical American family: we live in a small town in the American heartland that embraces “family values,” we live in a 3-bedroom house mostly owned by the bank, we have a toddler, and Kurt (dad) stays home while Kayt (mom) works full-time. Okay, maybe the last one isn’t stereotypical, but it works for us.

When we got married as an engineer + accountant couple just out of college, we looked to be headed down the “typical” path. But then we chose our geographic location based on where Kayt was going to graduate school, so for many years there has been an implicit assumption in our relationship that we will follow her job. A few years into her career as a professor, our son was born. We were at a transition point in Kurt’s career, as he was finishing a master’s degree in history (and no, not the history of accounting) and it was a logical next step that since he wasn’t already working, he would stay home with our son for a while.

Our family life seems entirely normal to us, but whenever we venture outside of our own home we are reminded how anti-normal and unexpected our arrangement is. We see it in the name of the local stay-at-home-parent support group called MOPS (which stands for “Mothers of Pre-schoolers”). We see it in the well-meaning grandmotherly lady at church who, on learning that Kayt teaches engineering, said to her “what’s a nice girl like you doing in a field like that?” We see it in the comments made by people on how Kurt must be looking forward to having a “real job” again someday. We see it in the family members who love us dearly, but who can’t face saying to others that Kurt is a stay-at-home dad. We see it in the person who continues to talk to Kayt about the baked goods Kurt is selling at the church fundraiser. None of these individuals or organizations intend to hurt us in their comments, and we don’t take them as such. However, they do make us question the deep and (often) unconscious biases of Christian “family values,” particularly the one that says the man should work and the woman should stay home (or maybe work too).

We know that our parenting arrangement can be seen as strange and unorthodox, particularly in our community, though the arrangement is increasingly more common in our larger society (which, admittedly, might not be the ringing endorsement we might wish). While one might get lost in an endless debate regarding gender roles, one observation that we find productive as we think about our individual and joint callings in service to God’s kingdom is this: God has blessed us in different ways, so shouldn’t we play to the strengths God has given us? Kurt is an above-average cook, extremely patient, and relatively content to work at home (we say “relatively” because, like most people, he finds getting out of the house can be a relief, particularly since our son has just learned how to throw tantrums). Kayt is gifted with an interest in and ability to teach engineering and physics and with genuine concern for the students she teaches.

Sometimes the cultural judgement of our decision for Kurt to stay home feels strong. But, must we follow the cultural norms to be a good servant of God? Certainly, there is merit and Biblical precedent to working within them. Yet, Christ was remarkably unorthodox in his day. The company he chose to keep, his responses to the establishment when they asked loaded questions (“You brood of vipers” is a rather undiplomatic but certainly effective attention-getter), and even his willingness to help people in spite of religious strictures (healing on the Sabbath) suggest that Christ’s attachment to tradition was much looser than many found comfortable. In fact, in a merit-based society, Christ’s life and teachings can be decidedly uncomfortable. So are we being less “Godly” by flipping the traditional parenting arrangement on its head? The question we have asked ourselves is does it affect our fundamental calling to raise our son to follow Christ and his example? God has given us gifts and charged us to use them to the best of our abilities; should cultural norms stand in the way of that?