



Absentee Dad!

Dear

I am in Portugal as I write this.

We hadn't planned to be here but my son Jake, who currently lives in Australia, was coming home to attend the wedding of a university friend.

When he mentioned that he was coming this way, he floated the idea that he was wondering about extending the trip to spend some time surfing in Portugal and 'Would you fancy coming with me?' We didn't

need to be asked twice. The opportunity of spending time with our kids is always a no brainer.

I have two kids. Jake and Soph. They are 29 and 28 so technically aren't kids anymore. But your kids are always your kids ... if you know you know. Being their Dad has been one of the biggest joys of my life. The banner photo with this edition of Uncommon is one of my favourite family pics and was taken at a Foy Vance concert in Belfast in 2017.

I vividly remember bringing Jake home for the first time about a week after he was born. Standing on the doorstep looking down at him in the car seat in my hand, I had the thought, 'This is it. We're on our own now'. I felt a weight of responsibility, but we were now a family, and I was excited.

Twelve years later sitting in the therapy room was when I started to see that for much of the previous twelve years, I hadn't created space for the people who really mattered to me. Sure, I had ticked the boxes of being at their birthday parties, school sports days and school Christmas shows where all the kids get to perform. I even found time for some great family holidays. Problem was it was all squeezed in around my busy schedule of work, church committee meetings and running a local youth group.

My days typically started at 6am and finished around midnight. I was very busy trying to stay on top of all the commitments I had made outside of my home. I was doing enough to kid myself that I was being a great dad and husband, but my family were not getting me at my best, they were just getting what I had left after all my other commitments.

This was one of the toughest realisations for me after my burnout. I had been doing a great job at providing but I was treating being a dad like something on my to do list. I had got lost in terms of what was most important to me. I was trying to do it all. Trying to please everyone.

In last week's edition I mentioned that one of the judgements I used to drive myself was the judgment that I was 'not good enough'. The result of this judgement being part of my operating system was that I said 'yes' to everything and everyone. What I couldn't see was that no

matter how much I did or how hard I tried, it was never going to be enough because in my eyes I was 'not good enough'.

I didn't know it at the time. In fact, I didn't really start to see this until the last couple of years, but I 100% believed the 'not good enough' thought. Even though it wasn't true, no matter how hard I tried, no matter what I did, the power was with the belief, with the judgement and I ended up burning myself out trying to be 'good enough'.

All I knew sitting in that therapy room was that I had let my kids down, let myself down and had to do something about that. More judgement, but back then that was all I knew.

So, I turned things around by doing what I did best and threw myself into trying to be a 'good enough' dad. I had stepped back from a lot of my commitments soon after the burnout experience in 2006, so I had more time. Then in 2008 when I left my family business, I had more flexibility as I was training as a therapist and doing some volunteer hours as part of that.

I had always done the school runs or at least some of them. The kids soon worked out that if they had forgotten something in school they needed, that calling me was worth a try now. I watched more of Jake's school rugby matches, I did more of Sophie's lifts to horse riding lessons, to singing lessons. I managed to get to more of the singing performances my daughter gave at local festivals ... she is an amazing singer! I had time to help with homework, when I understood it and even managed to be helpful in the run up to exams.

It was from a place of trying to be 'good enough' but it was a step in a better direction for me. I was more engaged with Jake and Soph, I was building a better relationship with them, and I was loving it.

Have a lovely weekend!



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