



A PAC MAN PARABLE FOR MILLENNIAL FAMILIES

By Susan Vogt

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One of the first popular video games was Pac Man. Perhaps you remember it. A yellow head races around the maze gobbling up dots while being pursued by ghosts. The better one gets at clearing the frames, the faster and more difficult the pace. The game goes on indefinitely without rest for the ghosts who are always chasing you. One never really wins in the sense of “finishing” because there are always more dots to consume.

Listen anyone who has ears! Pac Man and Ms. Pac Man are you and I. The maze is life – especially life in a family. The dots are all the jobs, meetings, and activities we have on our “to do” lists. The ghosts are time.

If your family is anything like ours, it often feels like we’re in one giant Pac Man game or Mario Brother’s race. We race from one activity to another, juggling jobs, school, church, recreation and transportation. We valiantly try to balance checkbooks and schedules. There’s always more to do: attend the PTA meeting, take a child to Brownies, participate in a faith sharing group, clean the gutters, monitor homework, fold the laundry (at least before it’s time to wash it again). If the car breaks down or someone gets sick, this tightly calculated system goes haywire.

We may achieve a lot but the work is never finished. This picture is complicated even more and the pace quickened when both parents work outside the home or there is a single parent family with school age children. There’s so much to do and so little time to do it in that the crunch of time is always chasing us. We never really catch up.

This Pac Man style of family life seems to be a common tension. In fact a [Harper’s](#) article by Louis Grant has even coined a name for it “Fast Folk”. He describes it as “keeping up with the gerbils.” Yes, getting control of the family calendar is a real challenge today.

As I have pondered a solution to the hectic pace of our own family’s life and competing commitments, I see no one easy solution which will slow everything down, tame life, and get us caught up. Some beginning ideas for reflection, however, have been helpful to me:

1. Is it essential that both parents work outside the home while there are school age children? Maybe yes, maybe no. At least weigh whether the additional money or fulfillment will balance out the strain of less time and presence.
2. If our family schedule is so tight that we have little space to breathe, consider scheduling in [Family Only Time](#). Respect it just as much as an important meeting.
3. Take time out occasionally to breathe, regroup, and take stock of where we’re going in life. Are we hooked on Pac Man mania? Prayer and retreats can help lead us beyond the frenzy of the game.

In the end, what’s really important in life? When the kids are grown, will they remember fondly how many dots our family gobbled up, or how friendly and present we were to each other while we played the game?