

## A Pastor's Marriage and Family

To be qualified for gospel ministry, a man must be shepherd his home well, *“He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?”* (1 Tim. 3:4-5)

Paul Tripp says that the home is a microcosm of the church. The qualities of spiritual life that give the pastor credibility at home will lend the same measure of confidence to the people he serves in the church. The spiritual vitality that enables his family to joyfully follow his leadership will give assurance to the church that they are in good hands. Home life is more than just the venue for showing pastoral skill. It is also the furnace in which those skills are forged.<sup>1</sup>

The quality of your family life will either invest you with or rob you of credibility as a pastor. The goal of godliness in family life is not to gain credibility for pastoral ministry, it is the glory of God. Still, the people you serve will closely observe your family life.

A busy pastor often feels torn between the needs of his family and the needs of the church. On the one hand, there should not be a competition between the ministry to family and the gospel ministry. A pastor is serving his church when he is serving his family. Investments made at home can pay huge dividends for the local church in modeling how the gospel applied to the family helps to serve the church.

What are some of the most common strains that can lead to problems with the marriage:

- insufficient time together
- financial strain
- problems in communication
- the wife’s indifference toward ministry
- expectations from the congregation towards its pastor, his wife and children
- bringing only the burdens of ministry home to the neglect of the joys
- counseling women
- sexual immorality
- loss of friendship

Important Questions to ask of a Pastor in relation to his family:

- A pastor is constantly dealing with crisis in the lives of his members. What is he bringing home? Is the pastor ever “not on call” and how does this effect his family?
- How does a pastor’s wife come alongside, but the pastor still keep some matters confidential? Where is the line?
- How do you remain faithful to your wife and faithful to your ministry?
- How do you spend adequate time with your children and adequate time in ministry?
- How does the pastor lead his wife and children to love and enjoy their local church?
- Why is it important for the pastor’s family to get away for vacation and renewal?

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Tripp’s chapter in *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*, 53.

How does the man of God lead both his family and his church well? First he must love and imitate Christ. His personal devotion to Jesus must be evident as he cares for his own soul. Spiritual formation must first begin with the pastor before he moves to disciple others, as Richard Baxter states, “saving grace...thoroughly wrought in your own souls.”<sup>2</sup> And again Baxter says, “Be also careful that your graces are kept in vigorous and lively exercise.”<sup>3</sup>

After his personal devotion to Christ, the pastor must lead his wife in such a way that he is imitating the beauty and the glory of the Lord’s loving leadership over his church (Eph. 5:23-25). It is a challenge to be both husband and pastor to a wife, but these need not come into conflict if the pastor/husband remains genuine and sincere in his loving devotion to church and family. A pastor’s wife can be a tremendous blessing in that she is in a unique position to help her husband in ways no other person can.<sup>4</sup>

Next, the pastor must remain a devoted father. He must manage his household well and train up his children in righteousness. A shepherd is one who leads, provides for, and protects his flock. This first must take place with his children. Again, it is a challenge to be a pastor and a father at the same time. Transparency is a must here. If the children see a different dad at church than at home, they will struggle with the sincerity of their father and their father’s faith. Leading children to worship God at home can be essential in the spiritual growth of the family as well as beneficial to their involvement at church. Father’s should teach their children to love their local church and the pastor is no exception.

Things I Have Found Useful in Cultivating Family Life in the Midst of Ministry (Pete Schemm):

- Most Crises are not crises, and they can wait (“tyranny of the urgent”)
- I am not “Super Pastor” (though I sometimes want to don the cape and “S”)
- Ministry work is like caffeine (it has potential as a stimulant or depressant)
- Ministry work is not the primary means for satisfying your soul
- Personal dignity and respect from others go together
- Rise early and do hard things (do them first and regularly)

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>4</sup> See Curtis C. Thomas, *Practical Wisdom for Pastors*, 35.