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THE PASTOR:

Pastor's Family

The pastor's family:

The pastor's family -- it is the most important ministry that he has! Too often though his family does not come first. It comes last, after the other people in the church have been served. Many times this becomes evident when the pastor's children are known in the church and in the community as children who are not well-behaved, or when they have a double life, living sinfully behind his back. These generally are signs of a family in which the children have been neglected, with other people and/or things put before them. Please note that though this article speaks to the pastor's family, what is stated here is just as relevant for the other elders of the church. The pastor is the focus of this article because he is the most visible elder in the church and community.



Some pastors think their children will automatically understand that they are important people in the community and have important work to do; saving the souls of the lost and ministering to the needs of the saints. But what their children believe is that their father does not have time for them. They see themselves as unimportant in his eyes compared to others in the church or in the community. The pastor's wife may also feel the same. The result of this may be that she and her husband do not have a good relationship. In such a situation, it is possible that the pastor's wife may become bitter; feeling that the people of the church are her enemies who have taken her husband away from her.

The pastor's family's needs:

The pastor should never forget that his wife and children also have needs. They need his time, his love, and his attention too, not just the leftovers and scraps which fall from his table. He needs to help his wife when she needs something fixed in the house or when she simply needs a listening ear and his companionship. He needs to take the time to be at his children's soccer games or school events; talking with them and being there for them with a ready, listening ear. When a pastor does these things, his wife and children will know and feel that they are important in his life; that they are loved and have his full attention. They then will be more willing to sacrifice when he is called away for emergency situations.

The pastor who does not invest in his family from the beginning will pay dearly in the end. He who does not have his family in order, according to the Apostle Paul, is not fit to be a pastor (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). This does not mean that the pastor, his wife and children are perfect. It does mean that his family is stable and under control, following God. If a pastor does not have his family under control, then for the sake of his family and his church, he needs to relinquish his position and work at loving his family and bringing them back to where they should be biblically. Bringing his family into order is not to be done by force or with expressions like: "I have to leave the ministry because of you! Get your life in order and listen to me!" This may actually be the problem. They did listen, maybe not to his words, but to his actions. Instead, he needs to invest his life in theirs by loving them. It is easier to invest the time necessary in these relationships on a day-to-day basis rather than neglecting them, and then one day trying to salvage what is left when it may already be too late. Such behavior is ungodly and not fair to the pastor's wife and children. They deserve a lot better.

The pastor's family's adversary:

It is important for the pastor to remember the words of the Apostle Peter when he said: "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). The pastor and his family are some of those whom Satan earnestly desires to devour. If he can destroy them, then he has accomplished a great feat. Satan may attempt this in many ways. He may draw the pastor's children into sin such as drinking, smoking, drug use, pornography, sex, listening to ungodly music, etc. He may sow discord between the pastor and his wife so that they no longer get along, fighting a lot and having a home where there is no peace and harmony. How many times have stories been told of a pastor, or even his wife, running off with someone in the church and committing adultery? Too many times. The reason Satan pursues the pastor and his family especially is because if he can destroy and discredit them, then he can negatively impact the church and its testimony in the community. This may cause people to doubt the claims of the gospel and its power. What can be done to protect the pastor and his family?

The pastor's relationship with God:

The pastor needs to make sure that he maintains a close walk with God. This is his number one priority and relationship. If this relationship is not right, then the other aspects of his life will not be right either (John 15:5). Therefore he needs to be: 1) having a personal time of Bible reading and prayer, preferably at the start of each day; 2) memorizing Scripture on a regular basis; 3) studying the Word of God and applying what he is learning to his life; 4) fellowshiping with other like-minded believers; and 5) serving the Lord for the right reasons, not simply doing so in order to have a place of authority, position, power and/or financial gain in the church (1 Tim. 3:3; 1 Pet. 5:2). If the pastor's relationship with God is not growing and alive, his spiritual life will not be growing and alive either. This will negatively affect his relationship with his Heavenly Father and ultimately with his family. (See the article titled, "Spiritual Disciplines.")

The pastor's relationship with his wife:

The second relationship the pastor needs to protect is his relationship with his wife. The passage which speaks the most about this relationship is found in Ephesians 5. Though often men like to focus on verses 22-24 (a wife's submission to her husband), they tend to forget the importance of verses 25-33. It is interesting to note in this passage (vss. 22-33) that there are 3 1/2 verses and 2 commands which pertain to wives, and 8 1/2 verses and 4 commands which pertain to husbands. Whereas the wife is to submit (vss. 22-24) and respect her husband (vs. 33), the husband is to: 1) love his wife sacrificially (vss. 25-28, 33); 2) nourish her (vs. 29); 3) cherish her (vs. 29); and 4) cleave to her (vs. 31).

How is he to fulfill these commands? In regards to loving his wife, he is to love her as defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. If he does not love her in this way, then it does not matter how great a preacher or teacher he is because he is nothing more than a "noisy gong or a clanging symbol" (1 Cor. 13:1). In addition, if he does not love her as he should, it is of no value how well he knows the Word of God or how great a man of faith he is because before God he is "nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2; cf. Jam. 1:21-25). Furthermore if he does not love her in accordance with this passage, it matters not how generous he is to the poor nor even how willing he is to sacrifice himself as a martyr for the Lord because doing these things will be of no profit to him (1 Cor. 13:3). Love therefore is to reign supreme. This love, which is a facet of the fruit of the Spirit, is to be manifested with the other facets of the fruit as well: "joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). These facets of his faith are to be manifested at all times with all people, especially with his family. Often times this behavior can be neglected and forgotten toward the ones he is to love the most -- his wife who is his companion by covenant (Malachi 2:14) and his children; the fruit of that union. Therefore, "you husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7). "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28). Consequently, she is to be treated as a fellow heir in Christ and as a one-flesh partner.

The pastor is to nourish his wife. This pertains to his care for her. He is to provide for her needs such as clothing, food, health care, etc. Please note that meeting the physical needs of his wife is his primary responsibility, not hers, although she may help him with this task (cf. Pro. 31:13-16). He is to cherish her as well. This word has the idea of loving her tenderly and valuing her as one would a highly prized gift, for such she is; a gift from God (cf. Pro. 18:22). How does one care for a highly prized gift? Carefully, delicately, respectfully, being jealous of it (in a healthy manner), protecting it, and loving it. This is how a pastor, or any man for that matter, should cherish his wife.

The pastor, when he marries his wife, is joined together to her. Though this union -- this act of being bound together -- is a one-time act which occurs at the start of marriage (Gen. 2:24), it is also the beginning of a process. Therefore, the two who were united are never to separate (Mat. 19:6; Mark 10:8-9). The pastor needs to re-

solve that he will never divorce his wife, but continue to cleave to her throughout good times and bad.¹

It should be the goal of every couple to work together as a team and to complement one another, each using their strengths to help the other where they are weak. This means allowing the strengths of your wife to complete you where you are weak. For some men this can be a humbling experience, but the pastor who does not allow his wife to complete him (maybe due to his pride or his being shortsighted) is foolish. He is neglecting a resource available to him that God prepared and gave to him as his helpmate (cf. Gen. 2:18) in life and ministry. God, knowing each person's weaknesses, provides others in the body of Christ (such as his wife) to come alongside and help him (cf. 1 Cor. 12:20-25). Work together properly and wisely with the wife God has given you!

The pastor's relationship with his children:

The next relationship that the pastor needs to protect is his relationship with his children. Along with the pastor's wife, children also are a blessing and gift from the Lord (Psa. 127:3). Therefore as a gift, it is the father's duty to raise up his children in the way of the Lord so that they live a disciplined life (1 Tim. 3:4) which is characterized by a personal relationship with Christ and not by excessive living and rebellion (Titus 1:6). This training must begin when the children are very young. Proverbs 22:6 instructs parents to "train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." The word "train" speaks of a process of instruction which, in the context of this verse, starts at the very beginning of the child's life. The word "way" is the path on which God desires His child to travel. There are two main paths spoken of in the Bible upon which a person may go: the way of righteousness (Pro. 1:15,19; 2:12-15; cf. Mat. 7:14), and the way of unrighteousness (Pro. 2:8,20; 3:6,23; cf. Mat. 7:13). The implication in this verse is that the person hearing Solomon's words will want his child to travel the path of righteousness. Therefore if you train your children from the beginning in the path of righteousness, when they are old, they will not depart from it. Although this is not always the case, it is generally the outcome of such training.

What should one's training consist of if he desires to raise godly children? The pastor must be an example, not only to his flock, but to his children as well (cf. Titus 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:3). In being an example, he must first love God and then his wife. As he models this love for them, his children will feel secure and stable and will imitate what they see and hear. If either of these relationships are not right, his relationship and training of his children will eventually suffer. He must also be careful that he does not provoke them to anger (Eph. 6:4) or exasperate them so that they lose heart (Col. 3:21). The pastor, along with his wife, are not to rear their children in such a way that they arouse either anger or discouragement in them. This can be done in many different ways so the pastor needs to monitor the results of how he and his wife interact with each other and their children, as well as how they instruct and discipline them. They need to ask the question: "Do our methods of child rearing, our rules, and/or our family life provoke anger in our children and/or discourage them, or do these things encourage them in the things of God?" (Eph. 6:4).

¹The only exceptions to this are in the cases of adultery (Mat. 5:31-32; 19:9) or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:15).

Another important aspect of child rearing is discipline. The word discipline means to instruct; to train. When a child is disciplined, the person administering the discipline is training or discipling the child. This is the ultimate goal of discipline. Since this is the case, discipline should never be done out of or during a time of anger. It is to be done in love. When a child knows that the one disciplining him loves him and is discipling him for his own good, the discipline will be accepted much more readily than when it is done out of anger. A godly, loving pastor will discipline his children, for Proverbs 13:24 states: "He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently." If children are not disciplined, they will remain foolish (Pro. 22:15) and not mature; not having been disciplined through discipline. In some cases, the result of a lack of discipline could be the death of the child (Pro. 23:13-14) due to his lack of wisdom; for the child who does not obey his parents may see fewer days of life (Exo. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3). Therefore, "the rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother. Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul" (Pro. 29:15,17). Furthermore, "discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death" (Pro. 19:18). As the head of your home, it is your responsibility to teach your children the things of God (cf. Deut. 4:9-10; 6:4-7,20-25; 11:18-19; Psa. 78:1-8; Eph. 6:4). You should have family devotions with them, pray with them, teach and correct them. Your children are your closest disciples. If you don't teach them, be assured that someone else will; but the question is, "Who will be teaching them and what will they be learning?"

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:



1. How is your relationship with the Lord? Are you seeking Him fervently on a daily basis? Is Jesus your first love? If things are not going well in this relationship, do you know why? What can you do to correct this relationship? Who can you talk with to assist you in this area of your life?

2. Do you see your wife and children as your first and most important ministry? If not, why? Please explain using Scripture to state your case.

3. How is your relationship with your wife? Are you getting along well? Are you each other's best friend? If things are not going well in this relationship, do you know why? What aspect of the problem might be your responsibility? What can you do to correct this?

4. What kind of things can you do in order to build a stronger relationship with your wife?
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5. Are there areas of your life which you know your wife wants you to change? Are there areas of your life which you know you need to change? If so, what are they? What is your plan to correct these things? Do you know of a book or a person who could help you make these changes? Could your wife help you make these changes?

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6. Do you treat your wife as you would like her to treat you (Mat. 7:12)? Do you nourish and cherish her as Christ does the church (Eph. 5:29)?

7. When was the last time you bought your wife flowers or took her out on a date? When was the last time you told her you loved her or washed the dishes for her? Will you do something like this soon?

8. What are you doing to protect your relationship with your wife?

9. Do you find yourself attracted to women other than your wife? What are you doing to combat these desires? Do you have someone with whom you could talk about overcoming these desires before you succumb to them? Have you confessed this to the Lord? Have you talked to your wife about this? What is your plan of action to deal with this temptation?

10. How is your relationship with your children? Are you getting along well with them? Do they respect you? If things are not going well in these relationships, do you know why? What aspect of the problem might be your responsibility? What can you do to correct this?

11. Do you take time to talk with your children? Do you show interest in their lives? Do you do things with them which they like to do? How much of your time and attention do you give to them on a daily basis? Please record your thoughts below.

12. Do you know who your children's friends are and what kind of children they are? Do you know their parents and what kind of families they come from? Do your children and their friends positively influence one another, or do changes need to be made? If you have concerns, are you able to talk to the parents of your children's friends about your concerns? Please record your thoughts below.

13. Do you provoke your children to anger (Eph. 6:4) or exasperate them so that they lose heart (Col. 3:21)? If so, what will you do to change this behavior?

14. What special event can you plan with your children that you as a family can do together? What special thing can you do with or for each of your children so that they feel special and loved?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:

1. As you look at beginning your church plant, do you believe that your family relationships are strong and growing, or are they weak and need to be strengthened? Remember as you step out into a new ministry, Satan will attack you where you are weakest. He will attack your family whether it is weak or not. For those of you who are going to minister in another culture, your adjustment will be more difficult, and the stress upon your family will be much greater. You need to be prepared for what lies ahead. Below rate yourself on a scale of zero to ten -- zero being no relationship exists and ten being your relationship is as strong as it can possibly be.

- How is your relationship with God?
- How is your relationship with your wife?
- How is your relationship with your children?
 - Child's name:
 - Child's name:
 - Child's name:
 - Child's name:

- Are there any issues between you and your wife which you need to resolve? If so, what issues? Do you need to ask for her forgiveness? Do you need to forgive her for something? Does she need to ask you for your forgiveness?

- Are there any issues between you and your children which you need to resolve? If so, what issues? Do you need to ask any or all of them for their forgiveness? Do any of them need to make things right with you?
 - Child's name:

 - Child's name:

 - Child's name:

 - Child's name:

- Are there any issues which need to be resolved between your wife and any of your children, or between the children themselves?
 - Your wife:

 - Child's name:

- Child's name:
 - Child's name:
 - Child's name:
- Is there an issue in your family which you and your family need to discuss with someone, possibly with a pastor or godly, trusted individual? If so, what is the issue that you need to resolve? Who do you think would be a good person to help you with this? When will you take care of this matter?
2. Can you foresee any potential problems which may develop in the future as a result of stress in your life or in the lives of your wife and children due to your new ministry? If so, what might they be? How will you begin to deal with them now?
- You:
 - Your wife:
 - Child's name:
 - Child's name:
 - Child's name:
 - Child's name:
3. If you are a missionary, have you read anything on or been taught anything about culture shock and the culture shock cycle? Do you believe that you and your family are prepared to enter a different culture, learn a new language, different customs, etc.? If not, how will you prepare yourself and your family for this?
4. What kinds of things could you do as a family to maintain or even strengthen your relationships, especially during times of extreme stress? Defining these

things now may help you when stress and spiritual attack overwhelm you. Discuss this with your wife and list your ideas below.

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