

A MINISTER AND HIS FAMILY

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Introduction

New Testament qualifications for leadership deal not only with the person himself, but also with his domestic situation. Being qualified for ministry includes, then, how your wife and kids act and how you all relate to one another. The ongoing relationship within your family follows the reciprocal pattern characteristic of all social relationships. How you treat them affects how they treat you, and how they treat you affects how you treat them. Consequently, the burden does not fall just on the minister in the family. The emphasis here is, however, is on your side of the interaction. It stresses the fact that your relationship toward them is preliminary to how they subsequently enhance or detract from your ministry. Their actions do not wholly reflect how you have first loved them and their actions reflect other influences in their past and present lives, but there is a correlation between the quality of how you treat them and how they conduct themselves as a result.

It probably ought to be said as well here that anyone considering leadership ministry needs to take honest inventory of his family situation if he is already married and perhaps has children as well. Maybe the wife is not a “public” person and would feel uncomfortable in such a role even though in point of commitment to Christ she may feel “obligated” to endorse your interest in doing the Lord’s work full time. Frankly she and the children may have behavior immaturities that would not make them positive complements to ministry. It would be better to have one less minister in the kingdom than to have one who brings into ministry a counterproductive influence.

I. General

The main difficulty in ministry is time because there is no way to know when you are done. In such open-ended situations you especially need to schedule time for yourself, your spouse, and your children, since you cannot count on using leftover time for family matters—there are no “after hours” in ministry. Scheduled time does not mean it is not heartfelt time. Structure does not destroy spontaneity or sincerity. It implies the opposite rather: it implies that you value being with your wife and kids enough to plan for it. When you are laying out your time budget, you simply need to include a healthy portion for wife and family along with home chores and different parts of your job.

Once in a while spend some money frivolously on the rest of the family. You may not have enough money buy a season ticket for the local professional football games, but you might “splurge” sometime and take the kids to a game; they will never forget it! Part of what you are doing is “making memories” for the wife, for the kids, for the family as a whole. The idea here is similar to Jesus’ praise of “wasteful love” when the woman poured expensive ointment on him not long before his death. Being overly tight with your money and time may cause the rest of the family to resent your work, especially if they see you using these things for other people or for yourself (buying books, for example). Little

surprises once in a while are fun too, and they can mean a lot particularly because they were not expected.

II. Wife

Marriage is first of all an interpersonal experience. Beyond the general characteristics of interpersonal relationship lie the distinctives of married relationship, and beyond that lies married relationship in the context of ministry. Activity together is one of the main factors that defines a group and gives it identity. A husband and wife's distinctive activity together is necessary for defining them as a "group" and giving them identity.

Give the wife some time away from the responsibility of caring for the kids, particularly when they are young and rather dependent on her. Take her out to eat or go somewhere and do something together as a couple. Spend a night away from home together once in a while. Provide ways for her to get away from the routine once in a while. You might do something with the kids while she goes and does something she enjoys with other ladies.

Involve your wife in your ministry to some reasonable extent. You can talk with her about your plans, hopes, concerns, and the like so she has a feel for what you are doing. While it is important not to "take it home with you," she nevertheless needs to have a sense of what you are doing. She may enjoy going calling with you once in a while; in fact, in some cases it is rather critical that you protect yourself and your reputation by having her accompany you.

Do your part in disciplining the kids and thereby protect the wife against the constant pressure they may be putting on her to make decisions about the many things they may be demanding.

III. Children

Parenting is first of all an interpersonal experience. Beyond the general characteristics of interpersonal relationship lie the distinctives of parent-child relationship, and beyond that lies parental relationship in the context of ministry. Again, activity defines you and the children as belonging together. Doing things together creates the healthy bonding that provides them security and a healthy self-image. One simple thing to do with the kids is take each one out individually to eat someplace and let him pick where the two of you will go.

Be careful about overly divulging family experiences, especially those that might reflect negatively on family members or make them feel laughed at. This restraint includes anything that might be interpreted as bragging on them because it might make them feel uncomfortable. Do not tell stories on the kids in Sunday school, in sermons, or in other public settings. It is a big temptation to use home life experiences to illustrate ideas, because those experiences are so vivid to you. But telling such episodes can make the kids feel to "looked at." It betrays the privacy and safety of the home and may show disrespect as well. Children neither want to be on a pedestal or in a glass house. The concern here depends on the sense of rapport they kids and wife have with the church people.

Ministry calls for quite a number of evening commitments—calling, committee meetings, Bible studies, and other services. Perhaps you can go home and do some things with them a couple hours before supper. There ought to be at least one time during the day when the family does something together. As children get older and school activities multiply, the evening meal may be harder to make into a family experience. You may need to use breakfast for your common meal!

Keep the amount of TV time to some reasonable, agree-on maximum and monitor the types of programs the kids are watching. Not only are you concerned about what they are watching, but you are concerned about the entertainment mentality that overindulgence causes. Besides, the more time they spend watching TV the less time you have for relating to them meaningfully and for doing things together as a family unit.

Show interest in your children's activities: their sports events, musical presentations, hobbies, homework, projects. Make youth group and other church programs a natural part of their whole picture. Make sure not to use their place as minister's kids as a club over their heads to make them behave. They will not only resent it but resent the ministry as well.

IV. Family

As with the wife and with the children, so also with the family unit activity together establishes the unit as an identifiable group. Depending on circumstances you may be able to do something together like music, fishing or hunting, sports, or just taking a hike.