

YOUR FAMILY

Do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. – *Ephesians 6:4*

God does not require pastors to be married, though most are. If you don't have a family of your own, I hope this chapter will help you understand and support those who do.

Your Spouse

When I talked about managing your time I added up 168 hours per week of potential church work, leaving no time for family or anything else. You might have laughed when you read it, but I bet your spouse and children wouldn't. It's not good when your family feels like they have to compete with the church for your time and attention. Your priorities are God first, then your spouse, then your children, then your church. **Some pastors make the mistake of confusing the church with God. That's called idolatry.**

Some pastor's spouses see their position in the church as a ministry to which they feel a strong call. They may even serve as co-pastors. Other spouses, especially if they have their own career, see the church as strictly the pastor's job. Some knew they were marrying a pastor from the beginning.

Others, like my wife, had to adjust to a call in mid-life that suddenly thrust them into something they never expected. Some have young children at home who require all their time and attention. Others have older children, or none. These differences can lead to large variations in how much the pastor's spouse is involved in the church.

Contrary to what some churches seem to think, when someone marries a pastor they don't miraculously learn to play the piano and lead a ministry. Never let your spouse feel obligated to meet the expectations of the church people. **No one should be made to feel that they have to do something they're not comfortable with, or act in a way that seems unnatural to them, just because they happened to be married to a pastor.** The lesson about Jesus and Lazarus applies to your spouse as much as you. One of the best things pastors can do for their spouses is to let them know that they will support their priorities and protect them from unrealistic expectations.

Your Children

In America, pastors' children have a bad reputation. The stereotype of a pastor's child is a rebellious troublemaker. When they grow up, many pastor's kids won't have anything to do with the ministry, or even the church. How does this sad situation happen?

Some pastors too often allow church business to take them away from doing things with and for their children. Some pastors too often tell their children they have to behave in certain ways or participate in certain events "because you're the pastor's child." Either of these can cause a child to resent the church – and by extension, resent God. Acting rebellious is a natural reaction.

God does not condone child sacrifice. That includes sacrificing your children on the altar of your church work.

My wife Paula and I have been blessed with five children. They are all grown now, and they are all strong and active Christian believers. Besides God's grace and our constant prayers, I'm convinced that one of the main reasons none of them rebelled against the church is that I always put my

family first, and they knew it. Any of them will tell you I spent plenty of time on church work. They will also tell you that I made a point to give each child plenty of one-on-one attention. And I never told them they had to do a certain thing or act a certain way because of my job. I just tried to be as much like Jesus as I could, and they saw that.

Does that mean some church things didn't get done? Certainly. Did that hinder the advancement of God's kingdom? Perhaps a little. But in the long run, **I'm convinced the kingdom of God will advance much more through the ministries of my children than it would have if I had worked so hard and long in the church that it drove my children away.**

Your Example

Your family knows you better than anyone else. If they hear you preach about love and forgiveness, but at home you are harsh and demanding, or too exhausted from church work to give them the attention they need, what are they going to think about this God you serve? **Your Christian example starts at home.**

There's also a ministry side to how you treat your family. The people in your church are going to be watching you carefully to see what a Christian family should look like. Jesus said people will know we are Christians by how we love one another (John 13:5). What better place to demonstrate that than in your family?

Love shows itself in affection, protection, provision and respect. Let your people see (in an appropriate way, of course) that you are affectionate toward your wife and children. Let them see that you will protect your family from harm and intrusion, including the intrusion of too much church work. Let them see that you recognize the importance of providing for your family's needs. And let them see that you respect your wife and your children.

Notice I said, "let them see," not, "let them hear in your sermons." **Never use members of your family as sermon illustrations unless you get their permission first.** You don't want your family reluctant to come to church for fear you might embarrass them.

A Letter from My Wife

A young pastor's wife, who had moved with her husband to another city, wrote a letter to my wife asking some advice. With their permission, I'm including an edited version of that exchange.

Dear Mrs. Wentz,

How are you? I was just thinking about you this week and wishing we got to see you more. I am always telling people how lucky and thankful I am to know you.

We've been having a lot of drama here lately. Actually, I'm sure there's always been drama, it's just that when you are the pastors you hear ALL of it. Sometimes it just seems like so much to deal with, plus it's hard seeing everyone all the time when you know stuff you wish you didn't. I know Pastor Wentz has been doing this for about 30 years, which means you've been right there with him. How do you deal with all the drama happening all the time? Does he tell most of it to you, or do you ask to not know everything? Is it hard for you to interact with people when you know stuff about their lives, sometimes things they don't know you know, sometimes things that they know you know, but that upset you?

And also, how did you get spiritually filled up when your kids were really small? At just about every meeting we go to I'm babysitting the kids or trying to keep them quiet so they don't distract people. Even at the women's meetings I have the baby and have to nurse him during the meetings and stuff. And sometimes it's just as hard to enter into God's presence at home where there's always so much noise and activity. So I was wondering what you did to get filled back up when you're always giving all the time.

I'd really appreciate it if you have any helpful tips.

Here's Paula's answer:

It is awfully hard sometimes to be married to a pastor. Sometimes it's better than others, sometimes it's VERY difficult, and sometimes, it's great. Like where we are right now, I'm loving it; I think maybe God gave us a nice place for a breather after the last one, but I'm also very cognizant that there are no guarantees, that anything could change at any time. I think the key is in, is it Philippians 4, where

it talks about being content in any circumstance? I remember Rick Joyner referring to times of being abased and times of abundance, and being content in any of them. But that's not really what you're asking.

*It varies according to the circumstances, as to what David tells me about people in the church. At one previous church, I was aware of EVERYTHING, mostly because David really needed to be able to talk to someone he trusted. Of course, he didn't tell me anything said in confidence in counseling situations, but pretty much everything else. That was hard on me, but I think it was better than if I had not known anything. We were able to help each other grow through the circumstances, and help each other stay focused on God. The biggest thing that helped me when I knew things about people that indicated they were not living up to the fullness of what they should be in Christ, was two things, actually. The first was to **keep my eyes on Jesus**. The second was, when I was tempted to look at someone else's sin, to turn instead and look at myself and how far I am/was from what I should be, and to begin to ask God's forgiveness for myself. It takes a lot of will power, and sometimes I could only begin to do this after I had allowed myself the freedom to express my own human responses to David (but never anyone else in the church). **I think a lot of the circumstances we encounter in life are really mostly irrelevant in the big picture, but HOW we respond to them is vitally important.** And we have to be constantly seeking to see Jesus, and to love others as He does.*

*I have to admit, that I find this much easier now than ten or fifteen years ago. Many of the things you ask don't have hard and fast rules. A lot you'll just learn as you go through it and are able to say, "God, WHAT do I do now?" And **it may be different in different times**. At another church, I checked David's email for him to alert him to urgent things (this was before he spent a lot of time on email) - it was an important help for him, but it also brought me more stress. Now, he takes care of it all, and I am so much happier not to know things. So basically, I let him determine how much I need to know. If he seems to need to unload and share things with someone he knows won't talk to anyone else, then that's where I am. Otherwise, I'm happier not knowing things - UNLESS it is something that would impact the safety of myself, or the kids when they were home. For instance, someone he was counseling who might come to the house - I would need to know any possible safety related issues. Or, and this is a sticky one, because you never*

really know, if someone thinks that because they told David something, they think I know also. Then, if I see them, I would need to know to ask after them, but that can get really sticky because you don't always know what people's expectations are. So I generally don't let on that I might know something specific that is going on in their life, but try to ask open ended questions after their health or whatever, that gives them an opportunity to share if they want, and they know that I care about them. It's really tough, and again, something that you just have to ask God about in each situation, because they all vary. But generally, if you are guided by love and seeking to love others, you do the right thing.

It's really important to practice separating yourself and the family from the church. And especially, **continuing to maintain the atmosphere of a sanctuary in your house.** There are so many negative spiritual influences that will try and destroy your peace, as well as just the everyday stresses. One of the very biggest things that God showed us was to cleanse off those things before entering the house. I'm sure you've heard us talk about this - to command things that are not of God to be gone from any influence around us, to speak death to germs and bacteria and viruses, and to invite the Holy Spirit to cleanse us and surround our home with his presence. We did this whenever we came home from being anywhere (you pick up things even at church...). We do this even now, recognizing when one of us forgets, usually by a sense of a negative spiritual presence. This just helps in general in keeping everyone at peace at home, but also giving you that foundational base at home where you can regenerate and rest your spirit.

You know, you ask about how hard it is to interact with people when you know things that upset you. Yes it is. Again, I think the answer is love. (More and more, I'm hearing from God that it's all about love. And there is so much that I don't know about it, but at least I know this: God is Love. And that is so central to everything in the Christian life.) It applies even within our own families. Sometimes I have to forgive, again recognizing my own falling short of where I should be as a Christian, and love as Christ loves. As I begin to feel that kind of love, which is different from my love as a wife or mother or sister or daughter, I feel the pain and my heart aches for the other person, in love. **To see through the eyes of Christ brings it to a different plane,** a different reality, one which I think connects with the heart of God.

So yeah, if you need to vent about some of these people, do so to your husband, but probably not other people, and then I would suggest that you pray together for them. A good rule that usually does apply to every situation is that **if you talk about someone or some situation, ALWAYS end it with prayer for that person**, along with a cleansing for yourself and asking God to keep you close to Him even in having to deal with those things, and asking Him to help you see them with His love.

You ask about the kids, and that's a tough one, too. When you have more than one child they can be a handful. When our kids were little, I purposefully did not do many things at the churches because I saw the kids as my primary responsibility. **The things at church might or might not get done, but I felt like I was the one who was there to meet the needs of the kids.** During those years, it was extremely difficult to get anything out of church for myself. Because you're always trying to keep track of the kids. So I basically decided that **it was more important for me to make the kids' experience at church one where they could connect with God.** I didn't try so much for myself, but instead tried to hold them, and let them develop that sense of peace in the Lord's presence through the comfort of sitting peaceably with me. Rather than fighting with them, I tried to provide them with things that would enable them to sit and enjoy (a lot of food!!!!), and then, if they were beyond their capabilities, I would go in another room with them and play, or sit while they played. A lot of times I got very frustrated. I couldn't see how I was possibly growing or being of any help. And I thought it would last forever. But I think that God blessed that time - first, with the kids, I think they developed a fairly healthy desire to know God because they knew him in peace and love in their experience in church. But I think God also blessed me through it in ways that I'm still not aware of, but in other ways that I am now beginning to recognize.

From what I've seen, you and your husband seem like great parents. You both have a very patient attitude towards the kids. The biggest encouragement I can give you is that **even though it is really hard right now, it won't last forever.** You two have such a desire to seek God and follow him, and I know that as you continue to do that, he will guide you in the specifics of how to get through all these frustrations. In another six months, you'll find it completely different. But it can be very difficult - as I said, there were a LOT of times I was extremely frustrated, and

when we added the stresses of the church to the stresses of raising little kids, well, there was a reason we discovered the importance of spiritual cleansing before coming into the house - because it was all coming out as anger and negative behaviors.

If you ever get a chance to get away to a women's conference or something, I encourage you to do it – times like that can be lifesavers. Make sure your husband knows how important that is to you.

*One of the things that had the biggest impact on my own ability to spend some time with God was when David began getting up with the kids and taking care of them in the mornings while I had some alone time in the bedroom. I'm not saying this will work for everyone, but for our schedules, it worked. He got up with the kids. I think they could pretty much get their own cereal. Then, everyone understood that Mom was not to be disturbed. So I could sit there in my bedroom, with the door closed, and even though I might hear some yelling or crashing of dishes, I wasn't responsible for it. It was exactly what I needed in order to cope at that time. I ate in peace, I had a little time with God, and then I could come out and take over with the kids. Then, David went off to have his quiet time, and went off to the church. So **maybe there is some time where your husband could be with the kids while you have some time alone at the house.***

*You know, I think the biggest thing that helped me come through those years was the fact that David prayed for me, and sought God so deeply. At the time I might not have understood it as well, but now, looking back, I KNOW that anything good that has come out of us has been due to his prayers. So, I encourage you to **ask your husband to pray for you and your ability to cope with these demands.** God will honor those prayers. And, for the same reason, I encourage you to **pray for him.** Because your connection with God is deep, and God will honor your prayers.*

We'll continue praying for all of you, for God's blessings and love to surround you.

I hope this was helpful - it was nice just sitting here and answering it - almost like a visit.

*Love,
Paula*

Points to Remember

- Your responsibility is to God, your spouse, your children, and your church, in that order.
- God does not want you to sacrifice your family on the altar of your church work.
- The most effective way of teaching your people how to treat each other is letting them see how you treat your family.
- Never use your family as sermon illustrations without asking them first.
- Try to understand the pressures your ministry puts on your spouse and children, help where you can, and let them know how much you appreciate it.