

LESSON ESSENTIALS

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 4: MANAGING FAMILY AS A SPIRITUAL LEADER

With the overwhelming responsibility of pastoring God's people, it is no wonder that many spiritual leaders get overwhelmed and find themselves worn out and weary during ministry. What are the priorities for spiritual leaders and how can they ensure that they manage all the pieces well?

The Apostle John writes that he has no greater joy than seeing his children walking in the faith. Obviously, this refers to fellow believers and disciples. But for a spiritual leader, it needs to also refer to his own family first.

The demands of ministry are great, and, driven by guilt or by devotion to the Lord, one may feel compelled to give the ministry everything and to jump at each request from church members, staff, or the board of elders. Doing so may seem to be serving the church well, but it can leave the pastor burnt out and exhausted with nothing left for his family, or for the church in the long run.

Have you heard of the shoemaker's children who had no shoes? Have you heard of the plumber with the leaky pipes? Or the carpenter with broken cupboards? There is a tendency within every occupation to spend your time and abilities on your customers first and then on your family later – if you can find the time. Whatever your job is the likelihood of you being careful to apply those same gifts to your family and to bless them is small. By the end of a work day, any one of us is likely too tired to continue doing the same work, this time without pay.

A pastor or ministry leader is no different. After a day of counselling church members, visiting the sick and showing them empathy, teaching new believers the way of the Lord, and planning the spiritual direction of the church, a spiritual leader may come home with little left to give to spouse and children. The demands of ministry are great, and, driven by guilt or by devotion to the Lord, one may feel compelled to give the ministry everything and to jump at each request from church members, staff, or the board of elders. Doing so may seem to be serving the church well, but it can leave the pastor burnt out and exhausted with nothing left for his family, or for the church in the long run.

Caring for one's family and managing the relationships at home is of utmost importance. 1 Timothy 5:8 gives the stern warning that someone who does not provide for his own family is worse than an unbeliever! These are harsh and sobering words. While this verse obviously has material and financial implications, simply providing daily physical needs for your family is not enough. This verse can also speak to the emotional, spiritual, and relational needs of your family. While this may be your heart's desire and intention, if you are primarily pouring out your life for the sake of your congregation, will you have anything left over for your family? Will you have the energy to pray with them, lead them, instruct them, and shepherd them the way you want to?

Strict boundaries in your schedule need to be drawn so that the call to sacrificially love your church does not rob from the call to provide for one's family. While it may seem counterintuitive, it is actually a great benefit to a church to have ministry leaders who intentionally lead and disciple their family first. Not only will you be setting a great example for your members to follow, you will also be recharged and energized through your obedience to the Lord.

When the Lord Jesus instructed His people to 'go forth and make disciples of all nations,' it should be understood that the commission needs to be applied to home life first. You are your family's first contact to the Lord. Don't fail to evangelise or to shepherd your family because you are busy witnessing to everyone else.

If that feels contrary to what 'seems' correct, let's consider what the Bible says a ministry leader must be like. 1 Timothy 3:4-5 asks how someone could care for God's church if they are unable to manage their

own household. There is a Biblical principle functioning here: Faithful in little; trusted in much. Before someone can be entrusted with the spiritual headship of a congregation, they must prove themselves faithful in the family. Additionally, the qualifications for church leaders listed in Titus 2 include the need to have children who are believers. Obviously, only the Lord can change a heart and can make our children believers. There are many faithful parents who have wayward children. However, we ought to be sure that we are being diligent to manage our families well, not neglecting our responsibilities in the hopes that the Lord will save our children without our influence and diligence.

Practically speaking, what does it look like to manage family while being the spiritual leader in your church? First, you need help. Even Moses heard and took the advice of his father-in-law to find other godly men to judge the problems of the people alongside of him. You need to find men and women to volunteer to serve the church in ways that are appropriate and helpful. In a small congregation this may seem challenging! Or if you have many new believers in your church you may not feel like they are ready to take on greater responsibilities. However, giving members a chance to serve the Lord is a great way for them to mature in the faith and to discover what gifts the Lord has given them. Do not deny them this opportunity by feeling like all the duties are your responsibility.

Secondly, if there truly are not enough people to help lighten your load, reconsider how many activities you are pursuing and organizing. Maybe this is not the season for a mid-week Bible study, a ministry to students, or a youth program. If you are engaging in so many ministries that you need to be away from your family most nights every week, then something is wrong. Discuss this with your board of elders or deacons and express your desire to cut back on extra programs at the church so that you can invest in your family.

Thirdly, start small with your family. Again, out of guilt and devotion many leaders try to overdo their spiritual leadership at church and at home. Family devotions do not need to be hours long with much time spent in preparations. Building relationships with your children does not need to be constant conversation and expensive outings. Start small and be genuine. The Lord will reward even the smallest of beginnings.

Overall, remember: it is the Lord's church and the Lord's family. He may have called you to be the steward over them, but He will not abandon you in the process. Look to Him. Trust Him. Rest in Him. He will give you peace as you obey to care for His people –starting with your family.

“ 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 Timothy 3:4-5

IN REVIEW

- The temptation to overwork at church can be fueled by whole-hearted devotion to the Lord, but it can also be fueled by guilt. Be careful to weigh your motives for serving in the church as much as you do.
- You need help! Seek godly men and women to join you in serving the church, both to lighten your load and to increase their skill and gifts.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- If you are a ministry leader with a family, ask your spouse and your children how they feel you are spending your time and energy. Are they feeling neglected? Are they feeling like they are getting your 'second best' while your church gets your strength? Confess and repent of this to them and to the Lord, asking Him to straighten out your priorities as you serve.

- How is your family-work life balance? Sit down with your church leadership or a mentor and ask them to help you to discern what and how much you should be doing in ministry so that you do not leave your family behind. Take steps to apply Biblical principles to finding the necessary balance in your ministry and family life.

- If you are feeling weary and exhausted now in your service, and if you are not seeing any practical way out in this season, take heart. Your Lord and Saviour beckons you to come to Him when you are weary; to come to Him when you are heavy-laden; to come to Him to find His light yoke and easy burden; to come to Him and to receive the rest you so desperately need. Write out your thoughts and pray them to God.

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