

# **The Pastor's Family**

**Dr. Richard Gregory**

**The local church is very special to the Lord. He created her to be the instrument through which he would demonstrate his love for man, announce His message of redemption to a sinful world and provide communion and spiritual growth for the saints. A very important part of this objective is the Christian family with its biblical structure, responsibilities and relationships. The church's pastor and his family have the opportunity of modeling what God intends in this ministry.**

**A pastor's family can be a blessing or a curse in this process. Resentment and bitterness are often manifested in the lives of ministers' wives and children. Some have almost come to expect rebellion among the sons and daughters of ministers and when it doesn't occur it is considered unusual. There are several steps that a young pastor and his wife can take to help to mold a family that has a common vision and a unity of purpose.**

**A pastor's family must have a shared philosophy of ministry.**

**It cannot be imposed, it must be developed. The following steps may be employed in this pursuit of unity of purpose.**

## *Understanding the call of God in a family ministry*

**Central to the concept of ministry is one's understanding of the call of God to that ministry. There are various views concerning God's call. These views extend from a kind of evangelical deism that frees man from God's specific will to a fatalism that makes him a robot. This article is presuppositional concerning why a man is in ministry. It assumes that the Lord is a participant in one's choice to pursue a ministry. It also assumes that the Lord is involved in designing the lives of those that choice includes. A pastor's family is not accidentally involved in his ministry because they happen to be his wife or children. His wife and children should understand that they also have a call from God to serve the Lord as a part of a his ministry. They are intricately involved in God's design of a particular ministry at a particular time in a particular place. It is therefore important for a pastor to develop a philosophy of team ministry for his family.**

## *Recognizing the hand of God in a family's design*

**There are often fixed expectations in the minds of church members concerning how and why a pastor's family should be involved in ministry. When these expectations do not 'fit a person's personality or spiritual gifts it often frustrates a pastor's wife or children. A pastor's family should develop a 'ministry game plan' that seeks to use the gifts, talents and personalities of each of its members. Each member's participation should be developed according to his talents and gifts. In my own family, it started with our children taking on the project of making sure the pencils in the back of the pews were sharpened. We emphasized that this was not a chore or a job but a part of our family's ministry in which they could each participate. Later, as they grew, they became involved in a ministry to the elderly ladies in our church. Each Sunday morning, they would make it a point to go and speak to a group of ladies that would sit in the narthex prior to the service. We discussed this ministry over Sunday dinner each week. When I was approached concerning a pastoral move, it became a family matter. We prayed together about it. We discussed how it would impact our lives. We studied together in our family devotions how to determine the will of the Lord in such a circumstance. When we made the move, we all recognized the design of the Lord in using us as a family in this new ministry.**

### *Importance of stressing the privileges of leadership*

Although there are responsibilities in being a part of leadership, there are abundant privileges also. A pastor and his wife should go out of the way to place emphasis upon these privileges. Our family received special loving attention from the people of God at Christmas. Gifts of money and food were abundant. People respond to faithfulness with kind attention when that faithfulness has been pursued in the spirit of and after the character of Christ. We shared these gifts with our children and offered together prayers of thanksgiving for the people of God that we as the pastor's family were privileged to serve. Such prayers should be a regular part of a pastor's family devotions.

### *Developing family loyalty and respect*

Just before my father died, he took my son aside and talked to him about his family name. He reminded my son that he had been given this name without tarnish and that it was his responsibility to pass it on to his son as a name representing honor, integrity and loyalty. This had a profound effect upon all of us. Being a ministering team enables a family to pay attention to protecting the character of the family name by mutual accountability before the Lord.

### *Determining the roll in ministry of individual family members*

#### **The father's role**

*Trailblazer* - In responsibility in ministry.

It is the role of the father of a family to take the leadership in making each member of the family accountable to be involved in a part of the family's ministry. He must creatively work with each member to help him understand how he fits into the family's goals.

*Example* - In discerning right and wrong.

It is important that a pastor's family not be confused by uncertainty in a family's standards. When these standards are shared you conclude together "Others may, we cannot." However, it is important that all members understand that a family's standards are determined by a commitment to pursue excellence and not just to avoid criticism.

*Achiever* - In reaching ministry goals.

A ministry should have direction. Ministry goals are a way to set that direction. A father should lead the way in helping each member of the family to set goals and then assist them in achieving them. This can be accomplished during the family discussion time at family devotions. These ministry goals include relationships, personal devotions, prayer requests and a variety of other involvements.

*Motivator* - In bringing out the best in family members.

Positive reinforcement is extremely important. Catching people doing something right and then reinforcing it with proper praise is a great motivator.

#### **A Mother's role**

*Teaching godly relationships.*

**A mother models and communicates proper attitudes in a family. She has both the responsibility and opportunity to mold her children's attitude toward ministry. When a wife resents the responsibilities and privileges of ministry, she will communicate that to the children. Attitudes are caught not taught!**

*Encouraging of respect.*

**Respect for the work of the Lord and for the Lord's workers finds its source in a mother's ministry. If she constantly complains about the hardships of the ministry or its demands, then children learn to resent the ministry and it becomes almost impossible to include them in a team ministry.**

*Affectionate understanding of individual needs.*

**Knowing the individual personalities, talents and needs of each child is the privilege of a mother. Understanding of these unique characteristics is her challenge. A mother's gentle counsel provides the atmosphere in which a team ministry comes together and flourishes.**

*Mothering in the home.*

**A pastor's wife must guard against allowing the priority of ministry to rob her of the God-given responsibility of being a good mother. Children must never be given the occasion to justifiably resent a mother's involvement in ministry. A proper team concept recognizes that the age of children dictates the degree of ministry responsibility of the family's mother.**

**The children's role**

*Time and respect for the elderly in the church.*

**The pastor's children should learn to take time for the elderly in the church. It is a great blessing for those along in years when the pastor's family makes an effort to spend time with them.**

*Ernest to learn.*

**When a pastor takes time to instruct his children in various opportunities available to them in which they can participate in the family's ministry, it is part of the child's development as a believer to eagerly learn. A team ministry cannot exist unless the children of a ministering team are both given the opportunity to learn and put in practice what they have learned. Taking a child along on visitation when appropriate is a good start.**

*Allowing God to mold their futures.*

**"I being the way, the Lord lead me" were the words of Abraham's servant. Learning to pray with their parents about such things as the college they will attend and the course of study they will pursue is all a part of the family's ministry one to another.**

*Ministering to their peers.*

**When a pastor's children are willing to look for ways they can encourage their peers in serving the Lord they provide leadership by example. They also reinforce the quality of their father's pastoral ministry. Following their father's spiritual leadership is one of the characteristics that validates their father's scriptural qualification to lead the church (1 Timothy 3:4-5).**

## **Delineating the blessings**

### *A family oneness*

**When Paul wrote to Timothy sharing the characteristics of the men that were to be held up before the church at Ephesus as examples of a man of God, he laid out for all men a biblical model. It should be evident in every pastor's life that he is striving to be all that God expects him to be in fleshing out this model. Included in this is a family unity of purpose and direction with a strong marriage, a supportive wife, children that share his heart for the Lord and a family ministry that provides an example for every family in the church. A family that is fractured in purpose and direction frustrates a pastor's ability to effectively shepherd the Lord's flock. What a blessing it is to the whole body of Christ when a pastor's family models what a Christian family ought to be in devotion to the Lord, His work and to each other.**

### *Mutual dependence*

**Family unity is not possible unless each member is devoted to the other's success in the role designed for them by the Lord. A pastor depends upon his wife for encouragement and sensitive criticism. A wife depends upon her husband for attention, conversation, encouragement and spiritual leadership. Children depend upon their parents for a proper example in consistency, integrity, honesty, an observable heart for the Lord and a respect for authority. Unless each esteems the other better than himself the blessing of mutual dependence will rather manifest itself in the selfish pursuit of one's own interests and rights.**

### *Training for future ministry*

**John said that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth (3 John 4). I have heard it said that parents are not truly successful in raising their children to walk with the Lord until they see their grandchildren walking in the truth (Proverbs 17:6). What a blessing it is to be involved in training the next generation to serve the Lord. It is therefore incumbent upon a pastor that he finish well. Far too often have I seen men begin well only to finish in the flesh. When a pastor's family is involved in ministry together, the next generation is afforded hands on training both in concept and reality. A ministering team is a laboratory of theology in motion. It is the source of encouragement to the church and fulfillment to the pastor.**

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# **Why Start a Parenting Ministry in your Church?**

**Gary Ezzo**

**God ordained two institutions for the express purpose of communicating to each subsequent generation the knowledge of the Holy One: the Family and the Church. In the family, the process is called parenting; in the church, it is called discipleship. Have you ever thought about starting a discipleship-based parenting ministry in your church? You should. Consider these five reasons.**

## **Desperate parents tend to look in all the wrong places for help**

**Today, we live in a society that is fundamentally hostile toward Christian values and the Christian family. Concerned parents who want to raise good children are virtually at war with their community. They must fight against television, pornography, drugs, premarital sex, crude public advertising, values-less education, degrading schools, and negative peer pressures.**

**Today, parents are groping for guidance. They no longer trust themselves to parent effectively; and as a result, they parent without conviction. This is partly due to the fact that varying textbook theories have replaced the Titus 2 fathers and mothers in the church. If the church offers no alternative to the secular community, then desperate parents seeking relief will turn to all the wrong places for help.**

**Can we expect secular minds to teach our children the values that reflect the holiness of God? Will they better teach our children how to honor their fathers and mother (Deut. 6:4-9; cf., Ex. 20:12), or to love their neighbors as themselves?**

**Indeed, not. The families are the nurseries of both the church and the State.**

**Whose hand is rocking the cradle? It best be the dad and mom who are members of the community of faith.**

## **It is the church's responsibility to make every parent a good theologian**

**One of the primary duties of the church is to feed the flock of God with the whole counsel of God. Theology works best when all Christians, not just professional theologians, are involved in it.**

**A theologically-based parenting ministry is important to the church because the most significant group of theologians in the world are moms and dads who have the inexpressible privilege of teaching great truths about God to their children.**

**Every Christian parent is a theologian because every child of God entered the kingdom on the basis of certain truths he understood about God. If you think about it, in a very unique and important sense, Christian parents not only have a theology because they are God's children, they teach theology every day because they have children.**

**It was not enough for the men and women of Israel to know that "the Lord is God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4). Moses commanded them to instruct "their children diligently" about God so they too, would grow to love the Lord their God with all of their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5).**

**But good theology must lead to practice. After all, good theology, if it is not fleshed out into everyday, rubber-meets-the-road stuff, is just that - good theology and nothing more. At some point our theology must express itself in practice. Without sound practice, we become hearers of the Word, not doers and only deceive ourselves (James 1:22).**

**I heard a pastor say recently: "Parenting is not all that difficult. When your kids do something wrong, beat them." Parenting is not a matter of beating up on children. Parenting is theology in practice. Consider how these biblical doctrines work out in the family: Grace, justice, mercy, authority, submission, obedience, forgiveness, restoration, repentance, restitution, respect, honor, kindness, long-suffering, honesty, integrity, discernment, wisdom, and foolishness, to name a few. The fact is you cannot teach parenting without teaching theology. Who better to direct these truths to moms and dads than the church?**

### **A church-based parenting ministry is more than a bandage**

**We live in a quick-fix society. Unfortunately, couples too often want a quick fix to their long-term parenting problems. We, in church leadership, do a disservice to our people if all we offer are short-term solutions for long-term problems. Without a program of comprehensive parent/discipleship that is exactly what we do. We are only offering a bandage to mask the problem, not to fix it.**

**I think we have all been part of church services highlighting the importance of the family. Maybe it was a weekend parenting conference, or a month's worth of marriage enrichment videos. Most congregations appreciate the teachings received. But that is where it stops. Church members appreciate what they heard, but they do not appropriate it. Appropriation comes through ongoing discipleship, conducted in small groups (six to eight couples). Without discipleship, there is no back pressure to learn. Why? Because there is no one holding the individual accountable for change. Any serious change in lives must come the old fashioned way "the way that Jesus did it" through discipleship.**

### **Biblical parenting is a remedy to spiritual apostasy**

**In Genesis 12:1-3 God called out a people to Himself through whom He would bless the world. God's kingdom ebbs and flows as God's children trust Him and live in obedience to his laws. Though the economy of God's redemptive plan has changed with the establishment of the church, God is still raising up a people who will love Him supremely. In Psalm 78 we find that parenting is a key to trust in and be in obedience to God: "He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands" (vv. 5-7).**

**Trust and obedience increase and apostasy declines as fathers tell "the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done" (Ps. 78:4). Where God-centered parenting fails, rebellion in the coming generations is certain.**

*Kingdom-building churches should be, indeed must be, parenting-building churches.*

### **A needy world is still watching**

**When God's values dwell richly in your church families, the world takes notice. A desperate society will still be viewing the Christian message long after it stops listening to our message.**

**Can you see why this is true? In a society where natural family relationships are being destroyed, we, the church, have the great opportunity to offer hope by our good behavior (Matthew 5:16b). When we keep our behavior pure, when we let our indwelling light shine forth - washing over our marriages, our children, our families, and our relationships with others when we let the excellencies of Christ be seen in our members, our conduct will not go unnoticed.**

**The compelling testimony of our faith has borne out by our actions and the reality of the gospel, will stand in dramatic contrast to the negative consequences of other's poor choices (1 Peter 2:12). As a result, some of those in our midst will glorify God by accepting the gospel that we live before them. Jesus said if He be lifted up, the whole world will be drawn to him (John 12:32). That should be the final conclusion of any discipleship-based parenting ministry. If the world will not come to the church, then let's bring the church to the world through our families and show forth the excellencies of Christ.**

**As a pastor, I am committed to building a family of God borne out of Pentecost, by helping strengthen the natural family borne out of Eden.**

**At Growing Families International, we have put together a small packet of information, including audiotapes, to help churches start a parenting ministry. If you'd like to receive this free packet, call our toll free number at 1-800-474-6264 and tell our receptionist you're with IFCA International. Or feel free to write us at: Growing Families International, 9259 Eton Avenue, Chatsworth, CA 91311. You can also fax your request to us at 818-885-7011.**

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